

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ALLEN SALTZMAN

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

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

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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MORGANVILLE, NEW JERSEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Allen Saltzman on November 7th, 2011 in Morganville, New Jersey with Shaun Illingworth and Jason Eberight. Mr. Saltzman, thank you very much for having us here today. Thank you also to your wife for your hospitality.

Allen Saltzman: ... My pleasure.

SI: To begin, could you tell us where and when you were born?

AS: I was born December 14th, 1945 in New York.

SI: What were your parents' names?

AS: My father's name was Simon, and my mother's name was Esther.

SI: Were both your parents immigrants from Poland?

AS: No, my father was born in the United States, in New York. My mother was born in Poland, but she left at an early age to the States.

SI: Was your father's family from Eastern Europe?

AS: Both, yes--Polish descent.

SI: Now, beginning with your father's side, what do you know about the family history? Do you know why they came to this country?

AS: As far as I know, like I say, he was born in the United States. When they came here, I'm not too sure. I really don't know, aside from the fact, like I say, he was born in New York. As far as my mother's side, like I said, she was born in Poland, and I believe ... during the war, or after the war, obviously, she came to the United

States with her parents, with them. She had three other sisters, and, you know, that's how it started, as much as I can remember.

SI: When you say after the war, do you mean World War I or World War II?

AS: World War I.

SI: Did she ever talk about the impact of the war?

AS: She was too young; she was really too young. Like I say, she left about maybe when she was three, four years old, so she has no recollection as far as that. I mean her whole life has been living in the States pretty much, so. ... She was born 1912, my father was born 1904, so I'm not too sure as far as, you know, the history as far as that is concerned.

SI: Did your parents ever tell you any stories about what it was like to grow up in New York?

AS: Well, I mean, as far as my father is concerned, you know, he's more or less like a blue-collar type of guy. ... We lived in the Bronx, South Bronx, growing up. He was a film technician where they would take film and reprocess it. ... Whenever you see scratches on the film and all that, they reprocess that. He worked there for years and years, and to make ends meet, he was also a musician. So, on the weekends he would play piano at different affairs, and accordion, and, you know, whatever couple of bucks he could make on that, ... usually only on the weekends, and even before he was married, he used to play on the cruise ships down in South America. ... That's how he got started with, you know, doing that stuff, and like I said, my mother was pretty much a civil service worker, working for the city, so.

SI: What did she do?

AS: She was basically, you know, clerical stuff. I'm not too sure exactly, but she worked in one department in, you know, one of the many departments in the city agency.

SI: Was that while you were growing up or before?

AS: While I was growing up, when we lived in the South Bronx. We moved away from the South Bronx in 1958, I believe. Yes, because I was a Brooklyn Dodger fan in the Bronx, and my father was a Yankee fan, and when we finally moved away from the South Bronx, we moved to Brooklyn, and of course that's when the Brooklyn Dodgers moved away, [laughter] a year later, but, yes, so from then on, we lived in various places in Brooklyn.

SI: Do you remember the name of the company your father worked for?

AS: God, I should know, film technician, oh God. I should know this, but now my mind is blank. It was in Manhattan all the way on the West Side. I can't remember the name. I used to remember. When I was a little boy, he used to take me up there every so often. ... I guess I can find out, but right now, it's just a total blank on my mind.

SI: It is such an interesting job.

AS: Well, the thing is also he dealt a lot with carbon tetrachloride. That's how they used to clean the film, which is kind of, you know, a heavy duty chemical. ... He used to have like, by his fingernails, he used to be like all, you know, from working with that stuff, it was not the greatest thing to work with obviously, but it was a job, and then, you know, years ago when we lived in the Bronx, what was it,

it was something like thirty dollars a month rent, we lived in three rooms. I had a sister also. ...

SI: Were you the oldest or the youngest?

AS: No, my sister was three years older than I.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Tell us a little bit about some of the neighborhoods that you grew up before you moved out of the Bronx.

AS: ... Well, like I say, living in the South Bronx was interesting because years ago, that's when I was brought up, that's when you have the large migration of the Puerto Ricans moving into the South Bronx, so I was brought up with a lot of that. Most of my friends were Spanish, all right. I went to public school down there, yes. I had a lot of friends. I had a normal life, you know. I didn't know, as far as, you know, I always had food on the table and the whole nine yards. ... I always had clothes and stuff like that, so I had a pretty much, you know, a normal life. My parents eventually got separated years later. ... It just didn't work out, and then, well, my father moved out, and actually he moved in with his sister who wasn't married which was basically six blocks away from where I lived, and he was kind of, you know, this is what happens when you have either a divorce or a separation, where I didn't see my father for about six years, and yet he was six blocks away from me. ... It caused a strain, and he had some heart attacks and that actually is kind of ironic, because that's what brought us close together. When he had the heart attack, I had gone to the hospital and like everything was opened up, and we started forming a relationship again. ...

SI: About how old were you at that time?

AS: I was still young. I must have been--let me see--about fifteen years old, I guess, somewhere in that neighborhood of thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old, like that. Yes, so, after the South Bronx, we moved to Brooklyn and same thing, you know. I had a lot of friends growing up there, went to public school in the area there.

SI: Did that neighborhood in Brooklyn have a particular character in terms of ethnicity or religion?

AS: Well, it was different because now, it was the first--it sounds funny--but now I wasn't dealing with Puerto Ricans because in the South Bronx, there were no blacks. So now, it was almost like a whole different world. Now, I was the dealing with blacks, which was a whole different environment for me, you know, growing up and, after a while like, you know, all I heard was Spanish, you know, and now, I'm, you know, with a whole different ethnic group but, yes, I got along fine. I went to PS 167 which was on Eastern Parkway. ... We first lived on President Street at Schenectady Avenue in Brooklyn, and then we moved to East Eighth Street in the Midwood section, still in Brooklyn. I went to Wingate High School, you know, had a lot of friends. I was the captain of the fencing team. ... I was also, in gym, a senior leader in that respect. I enjoyed sports. I used to play a lot of baseball and stuff like that, so, you know, pretty much a normal life. ... The only difference was not having two parents together, and that was the worst part of it, you know, but you got, you know, to live with the hands that you're dealt with, and that's what it was. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: While you were growing up, you and your sister were with your mother after the split up. Was she still working for the city?

AS: She was working for the city still, right.

SI: Did you have to take on a lot of responsibility at home?

AS: Well, pretty much, you know, I was my own person in that respect. I really never was forced by my mother to go to college, but I went anyway, you know. I wanted to go to college obviously. ... I went to Brooklyn College. ... I still wanted to do work. I didn't know what I wanted to do at that age, so I was going at that time in the evening, and I was working during the daytime to make some money. So, at that age, when you're seventeen, and I was making money, plus I was getting the GI Bill to go to college, so it gave me independence where I was able to have money, and I think I was the first one of my friends to have a car. ... I was able to move around and have that ability to, you know, do what I wanted to do, but like I say, pretty much normal.

SI: I do not quite understand. How were you seventeen and getting the GI Bill?

AS: I was going to college, and I was eligible, because I was going to Brooklyn College. ... They were giving me the GI Bill to pay for my credits, and at the same time I was also working ... days. ... I had some money to play around with plus go to college without having to pay for the credits, because I was under the GI Bill when I got out of the service.

SI: You had to be older than seventeen though.

AS: You know, you're right, because Brooklyn College, you're right, Brooklyn College I did have to pay for it, it's when I got out. I'm glad you reminded me on that, right. I went to Brooklyn College, right. When I went to Brooklyn College I was going at night, because I still wanted to work, so I wasn't getting the GI, but I still, you know, was working. So I did have some money in my pocket.

SI: Did you start going to college before you went into the service?

AS: Yes, definitely. I was going to Brooklyn College then.

Jason Eberight: What did you study when you were going?

AS: You know, it's funny, I had no idea what I wanted to be, and I had a close friend that was with me, and when I look back now, I laugh about it. I was going to major in geology. I thought it was interesting, but as far as doing that for the rest of my life, I didn't know, and I really had no direction. So I was taking the liberal arts courses and so forth, and I was taking some of the geology courses. ... It was at that time, you know, that's when I was ... brought into the service. ... It stopped everything as far as, you know, deciding what I wanted to do, as far as what I wanted to major in. ... Most of my friends were in the Reserves. They kept on saying, "Allen, why don't you go into the Reserves?" and all that stuff, and I just said, you know, "I have no intention. If they call me, they call me."

SI: How competitive was Brooklyn College at that time?

AS: It was very competitive. I remember some of my friends, you needed like a ninety-seven average to get into it. It was extremely difficult to get into Brooklyn College, the city universities. ... I was an average student, and like I say, it didn't bother me the fact that I was going at night. It was tough, because I would get home eleven o'clock at night at times until I found a parking a spot on the alternate side, you know, do a full day of work, and then go ... to work during the day, so it kept me pretty busy as far as between, you know, school work and, you know, regular work.

SI: What kind of jobs did you hold during this time?

AS: I started to work for a title company, Real Estate Title Insurance Company. My mother had gotten the job once before, and she went to a personnel company, and she mentioned my name as far as that I was looking for a job, and I went to this personnel division, and they sent me to this title company, Chicago Title. ... I got the job apparently, and I start doing part-time work, you know, working in the title company.

SI: Is that still what you do now?

AS: I'm doing it now, but now I have my own business, so. [laughter]

SI: You must have enjoyed the work.

AS: Well, I always considered it temporary permanency. I was always waiting for my ship to come in. I mean I never expected to do this for forty some odd years. It's just that I fell into it, and I tried other things. I mean I've applied once, while I was going to school, for another job, and they were very strict, and I had to take a large exam. They said they only hire one out of every hundred people and all the rest of the stuff, and I took a test, and apparently, they wanted to hire me, but now I was a little spoiled because, you know, starting from ground one, where I was already making money for this company. I didn't know what to do, and I remember they called me up. They said, "Look, we don't normally call people up to offer jobs. Either you take it" or, you know, and I said, "I'll think about it. I'll call you by the end of the week," and I thought about it, and I said, you know, and obviously I didn't do it. So, that one decision could change your life, and that's exactly what it did. I stayed with the title company and never bothered after that, you know, to try anything else.

SI: Before you got into college, in your high school years or maybe even earlier, did you have to do any part-time jobs or after school work?

AS: Yes, I worked in the summer time. I worked in a pocketbook store, I remember, around my area. I used to sell, and I had no idea what I was doing, but the owner ... put a lot of faith in me, because I was the person that would repair pocketbooks--never had a day's learning of how to fix one--but women would bring in their pocketbooks with broken handles, and I would go down to the basement and try to fix it, put it, you know, those tacks in there and all the rest of the stuff. ... Eventually I learned how to do it, you know, as far as that's concerned in the summer, you know, worked in the summer doing that. ...

SI: During this whole period, the Cold War is going on and it is having an effect on people around the United States. Do you remember things concerning the Cold War, such as civil defense drills in school?

AS: Definitely. I mean, now I laugh about it, the fact that they used to say, "Go under your desk, and that's going to save you from an atomic bomb," or something, you know. Yes, we used to have drills every so often where we have to go under our desks and, yes, when I still see it on TV, when they show pictures of that, I have to laugh about it, but at that time, or different bomb shelters, go down to the subway, and, you know, have different things planned out like that. So, yes, I do remember it very well as far, you know, during the Cold War, and I remember also when Russia also invaded, Czechoslovakia was it, or Yugoslavia? ...

SI: Czechoslovakia.

AS: Yes, there was a lot of ... immigrants, young kids, I remember in my class that came over. ...

SI: Or was it Hungary?

AS: Hungary--definitely Hungary, right. ... I remember we had some kids from Hungary coming over in public school. ... I definitely remember that time.

SI: Do you remember thinking of Russia as a serious threat?

AS: Oh, yes, I mean war propaganda, as far as, you know, "Russia is our enemy." Yes, definitely putting the fear of Russia [in us] as one day, you know, doing something drastic.

SI: You were born in 1945.

AS: Yes.

SI: You would have been around seventeen or so during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. You were still in high school or maybe you were in college. What was that like?

AS: Yes, right. Everybody was tense because I remember when Kennedy gave the ultimatum as far as getting out, you know, and everyone was on edge as far as, you know, what's going to happen, if Russia was going to back down. ... Was it going to be world war or something like that? I remember, you know, in the newspapers and everything and around the whole, you know, world about, well, you know, when we gave the ultimatum of getting out of Cuba. ... At that time, I remember there was a lot of tension going around.

SI: Was there ever a point where you thought about going somewhere? I know some people would go into shelters at its peak.

AS: No, I never went to that extreme, never, no. I figure if it, you know, what will be, will be--it's out of my hands. I was just hoping everything would be okay, and, you know. Apparently thank God, they backed down, and there were no conflicts in that respect.

SI: Your first two years in Brooklyn College would be around 1963 to 1964.

AS: Yes, I graduated high school in '63, right, and I went to Brooklyn College, took some courses. Like I said again, I really wasn't really with the program. I was an average student, and like I said, after the one or two years I was there, that's when I got the draft notice.

SI: In that period, we were sending advisers to Vietnam. Were you aware of what was happening in that area at all?

AS: Yes, I had a friend, actually an associate, a friend at work who was in, well, he was in Vietnam in '57, when they so-called had the ... advisers and so-called coming in there. ... Then it was still under the rug, so to speak, no one really, you know. We had a couple of guys over there, but there was rumblings going on. So, it wasn't that, you know, prevalent as far as what eventually happened, but, yes, I mean as far as knowing what was starting to happen, and actually, maybe I'm jumping the gun, but I was more hawkish then than I am now, I'm almost one hundred eighty degrees the opposite, so, you know, it was like "God and Country," and let's go, so to speak.

SI: How would that manifest itself? Was it just sort of personal feeling or would you get involved in causes?

AS: ... I'm mentioning this, and I said I don't know if I was going to mention it. At one point in college I joined the Young Republicans, and when I saw the

personalities of these people, I said this is not for me. I mean, it just, they were totally, I mean, I thought it was an extension of the John Birch Society. [Editor's Note: The John Birch Society is a political advocacy group that is in support of anti-communism, limited government, a constitutional republic, and personal freedom. This group often advocates certain conspiracy theories--such as the idea that water fluoridation was a communist plot to poison Americans--and thus is often seen as controversial or radical.] I mean I just said this is not for me, and I must have gone to maybe two meetings, and ... it wasn't for me. So I backed out of that as fast as possible. I just realized it was a mistake, but I was still, you know, strong in my conservative beliefs then, and, you know, I followed through with it.

SI: Growing up, had politics been something your family discussed or that you were interested in?

AS: My father and mother were pretty much simple people. ... As I put on that survey, I mean, it could have been Mickey Mouse running under the Democratic Party. ... Every time my mother said, "I'm voting straight Democratic."

"Republicans are for the," you know, the old line, "the Republicans are for the rich, Democrats are for the poor," or for the, you know, working class, and the same thing with my father. They never really were that, you know, into politics, but they did vote, and it was pretty much straight Democratic regardless of who the candidate was.

SI: I was just curious because your mother was in the civil service and sometimes you had to be tied in with the political machine to work for the government.

AS: I don't think she was really, no, I don't think she was really into that, I honestly don't. No, as far as any sort of activity that I can remember, or anything like that,

no, absolutely not. As long as the person was a Democrat, that was fine for her. It could have been Hitler that was a Democrat, she would have voted for him.

SI: Both your parents came from immigrant backgrounds, and your mother actually emigrated from Poland. Were there any old world traditions that were kept up in your family?

AS: Yes, actually when I grew up, we used to have the separate silverware for, you know, meat and dairy. We actually had two different, you know, silverware, whether it was a hypocritical thing or not, because I mean as far as, I mean we would go for High Holy Days, I would go with my father to an Orthodox temple, all right. My mother not as much, but my father still was, well more religious than my mother was. ... I would go with him to temple to, you know, the High Holy Days--Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur--and stay with him when I was a little boy, and like I said we had separate dishes that we had for milk and meat, so we did have some, you know, family traditions of, you know, growing up from the old school, so to speak.

JE: Did your mother speak Polish or English?

AS: Actually, they both spoke Yiddish, they both were able to, yes, they could speak Yiddish even though my father was born here, because his parents obviously spoke Yiddish, and my mother could speak Yiddish. I just knew a couple of words, nothing major, but we pretty much only spoke English in our home, but when she spoke with her other friends, or her, you know, sisters, they would speak in Yiddish, but yes, I only spoke English, so.

SI: You mentioned your first neighborhood was transitioning to mostly Spanish speaking Puerto Ricans. Before that transition, had it been primarily one group or was it a melting pot?

AS: ... When I went to public school, it was a melting pot, ... but as the years progressed, I'm talking from kindergarten all the way up, you know, this was up from the sixth grade. I mean, you could see, like I said, you could see the large migration of Puerto Ricans, after a while I didn't, you know, at one point you knew everybody on the block; everybody knew everybody, but eventually with the large migration, when La Guardia allowed, you know, Puerto Ricans to come in ... being automatic citizens, you had a large migration in the South Bronx. So, it changed, and the neighborhood became not as friendly as they say, you know. I mean I had my fights and stuff like that, but that's part of growing up, you know. Even today, South Bronx is not considered, you know, it's a very tough neighborhood, and in some respects, you know, it makes you hardened, it's good, you know. It does have its plusses as far as, you know, growing up and not having a silver spoon in my mouth, you know, playing on the streets, and stick ball and all the rest of the stuff, and, you know, I look back on that, and good times.

SI: You said you were really into sports. Were there any other activities that you were into to?

AS: Well, like I said, well, in high school I was the captain of the fencing team, so I was, you know, I was doing that. I loved baseball I used to go after school with my baseball mitt, and we always used to go to ... a park and play softball. I enjoyed that tremendously. ... We used to go, as far as not playing, but we used to go to Yankee stadium a lot, my father and I, because we lived in the Bronx. It was kind of funny because I look back now, and I say what a difference between my

son and what I went through, because my father would only go to a double header on a Sunday when the temperature was a hundred ten degrees, sitting in the bleachers for seventy-five cents, roasting like, and this was the old Yankee stadium where if you look at home plate, they looked like ants. This is before they, you know, pushed it in. This is the old Yankee Stadium, and he would bring his thermos and all his food. I still remember those days. ... I laugh about it ... because I consider now, like now my son would go to, you know, first row, and ... I'm saying, you know, it's amazing. When I was growing up, we sat as far into the bleachers as possible, and we had to stay for that second game, and I was roasting, but, you know, it was all part of growing up. ... He wasn't so much into football, I got into that later on, but he was primarily baseball. ... My idol growing up was Pee Wee Reese, I used to love Pee Wee Reese. There's always a "Duke" Snider fan or something like that, Campanella, Jackie Robinson, but I used to love Pee Wee Reese. ... I played shortstop, you know, I'm not a big guy, so Pee Wee was, you know, the captain of the team, and I respected him as far as, you know, what he did.

SI: You mentioned you moved to Brooklyn just at the time the Dodgers were moving out?

AS: Well, yes, they were moving out. ... I moved in '58, I think they moved in, what, '59. I just saw the tail end. I went to Ebbets Field just a couple of times actually. ... My father took me to Ebbets Field; I vaguely remember it, but ... we didn't go as much, because as I said, we mostly went to Yankee stadium, and I, you know, I was a Brooklyn Dodger fan. So I remember it like it was yesterday when they won the World Series in '57. I remember I was upstairs in my room, and I was by myself, I was watching the game, and ... I opened up the window, and I start yelling out, "The Dodgers won the World Series," and here I am in the Bronx, you

know, but I was extremely happy about that. I was a true Brooklyn Dodger fan and when they moved it was, you know, very upsetting to say the least.

SI: Some people told me there was a lot of anger in the neighborhood.

AS: ... The thought of moving to LA was, you know, not a happy occasion.

SI: Going back to the diversity of these neighborhoods, was there ever any conflict? Did you experience any anti-Semitism?

AS: Not really. There were like I say, a mixture of Jews and, you know, Christians. Like I said, there were blacks, which I didn't see before. In the South Bronx, it was Puerto Rican. ... At that time when I first moved into Brooklyn, I mean, it was, you know, it was a mixture. We had a, you know, a diversity of all types of people, you know, ethnic groups, nothing that I can remember. I was friends with, you know, whites, I was friends with blacks. I was friends with, you know, anyone that I got along with obviously.

SI: This was during the growth of the African-American Civil Rights Movement. Was there any manifestation of that in the area or awareness of it at least?

AS: There might have been, you know, the awareness as far as, you know, Martin Luther King and stuff like that constantly being, you know, shown on TV. Being a Northerner, you know, I definitely wanted integration. I wasn't against it, you know. I mean, we would watch on TV the, you know, down south, the KKK and stuff like that, I mean, it disturbed me, you know. I was brought up to really, you know, care about the person and not, you know, what color or, you know, ethnic group they belong to or what religion or whatever the case is, you know, but obviously I was aware of what was going on with all the riots and everything in

Chicago, and New York, and all the rest. ... It was constantly shown on TV, and, you know, and it was upsetting, definitely upsetting.

SI: Before you went into the military, were there any riots in your area? I am trying to remember where they were and when they happened and if you would have been gone or not.

AS: There were no riots in my area. There was no riots; if anything, it's funny because when I was in the Bronx, there used to be even then like the Bloods and the two gangs, what is it, the Bloods and the Crips. ... I remember one time--this was actually a true thing--I couldn't believe it, they were supposed to take over the school, and it was actually, the Army came in to surround it--this was in South Bronx--because they expected something was going to happen. I don't know if anything ever happened, but if anything that was the most violence as far as there was still those gangs. Especially now, with the large migration coming in and the clearing their property or their terrain, going into my, you know, my area, so you know the gangs were ... definitely out there, but as far as, you know, anything else, I don't remember any, you know, anything in my particular area where there was any sort of revolt or protest or anything like that.

SI: Was the school they were going to take over your high school?

AS: It was public school. It was public school, but I remember ... there were some ... cars, I think there was a tank. I couldn't believe it, but I guess ... the school wanted to be careful of what was going on, and that was rumored, but I remember that happening years ago, and it was kind of freaky to say the least, especially when you're going to public school. [laughter]

SI: Before we move on, can you tell us a little bit about your high school years?

AS: You know, I went to Wingate High School. ... A lot of my friends were way smarter than I was. ... One friend went to Stuyvesant, another went to Brooklyn Tech, art and design, you know, and I had another friend that could have gone to any school, but he went to Wingate also. I had, you know, some close friends. ... To this day I'm still friends with them, actually, some of these guys. I was an average student. I was never a great, you know, studier. I did what I had to do to get out. I was in the band. It was at that time I became very close friends with a friend of mine, that while everybody was into folk music in those years, I was into jazz. I loved jazz with a passion. ... I used to buy a jazz album almost every day, and even before I was of age, I used to go down to the jazz clubs with my friend on the weekends, like the Village Vanguard and the old Birdland, and it was kind of weird because no one was really into jazz, and I played trumpet, I was in the band. ... I played trumpet, even though my father played piano. I enjoyed music, and I took private lessons when I was in high school through my friend's father who was a trumpet player. I used to go to his house on the weekends, and I went for years playing trumpet, you know, and I really enjoyed it. I loved it. ... I always said one day I would love to become a jazz musician. I mean that was my true, true love. I just loved jazz, not the commercial jazz, but, you know, the jazz as it is, the, you know, bop era and stuff like that, so I was very close with my friend. He played drums, and we would hangout a lot together, you know, and like I say, had the car, so we were able to go to jazz clubs, and, you know, school was a sidebar for me. [laughter] I mean I got my degree, my high school degree. ... I enjoyed the fencing.

SI: Would you fence with other schools?

AS: Yes, I would fence with other schools. ... I was eligible to make All-City. ... I really loved it. The coach really wasn't that fantastic where he really didn't look

over the players, so I pretty much controlled the whole team, and a close friend of mine, he was the assistant captain, and we would go to different schools and compete, and they would come to Wingate High School and the same thing. ... As a matter-of-fact, he continued on, my friend. I think he went to the Olympics, he might have gone, he's gone to a lot of different, he's my age, and he still fences. He eventually became the coach of NYU, I believe, or Columbia, so he was still ... major, you know, into fencing. I gave it up, the old legs weren't able to do the lunges anymore, but I still loved it, and then, you know, well I also with the trumpet, I also, you know, once I went into the Army, I stopped playing that. ... I look back and still enjoyed those times. It was a lot of fun, playing, you know, especially in those days, playing stickball on the street and punch ball and all that other stuff and going to school was, I guess compulsory, then. [laughter]

SI: What is interesting about the jazz clubs in the city, which I have heard from other people, is that these clubs were rediscovering the jazz greats who had been big in the 1930s and now were late in their career. Do you remember this?

AS: Well, right behind you--I don't know have you ever heard of Charlie Parker?))? That's his Grammy up in the left hand corner, ... see the Grammy, the old Grammy. When I tell people that I have Charlie Parker's Grammy, they can't believe it. I mean, that's how adamant I am as far as jazz. When I got back, they had an auction several years ago in Lincoln Center of all jazz memorabilia, and I was looking through the book to see what they were selling, and some things I said it's crazy. ... They're selling Charlie Parker's saxophone for a quarter of a million dollars, starting bid, and all the rest of the stuff, John Coltrane's stuff and all the rest of the stuff, but I remember looking at the Grammy, and my son said, "Dad you're never going to get it. You're going to be outbid," and this was in Lincoln Center so it was a, you know, pretty important auction. My wife was with me, and

I'll always remember that. It was one of the greatest days in my life. I mean the bids start coming up, there was about, oh God, six, seven hundred items up for bid, and when it finally came up my heart was beating fast, and someone said that, I don't know if it's true or not, Bill Cosby and Clint Eastwood was on the phone bidding, and they could have blown me away with the bids. For some reason, the man upstairs wanted me to have it because I bid, and I kept on bidding, and finally I was waiting for the auctioneer to take the hammer, and, you know, now my heart was like coming out of my throat, and he finally put the hammer down, and I won, and I just couldn't believe it. As a matter-of-fact after we won--we were kidding around--we went to dinner after that. My wife and my son came and my wife's friend, and we were saying when we go to the restaurant, we're going to leave an empty seat just for the Grammy, so when they say, "How many people?" We would say, "Six," and leave the Grammy right over there. So, for me, I was in seventh heaven. I mean that's still one of my greatest, you know, things that I ever received, and I really love it, the fact that I will never get rid of it, and I'd pass it down to my son, and when I speak to other guys that play, like I was at a wedding the other day and I told the musicians, you know, we were just talking back and forth, and I said, you know, I got Charlie Parker's Grammy and they said, "Wow." ... I feel proud of the fact that I do have it, and like I said, I used to go constantly with the, between playing trumpet and stuff like that, I used to live it around the clock. I just, you know, loved it, and I still do to this day.

SI: It sounds like you had a lot of freedom to go around the city to wherever you wanted.

AS: Yes, I had pretty much the freedom, like I said I had the car and stuff like that. I'd go down to the Village. ... It wasn't like it was today, years ago when you used to go to the jazz clubs, you could stay for three sets, you know. Now, after the first

set, they right away give you the check, and they say, "Okay, you got to pay for the next," you know, so I would stay from the first set to the end. I would just love it and a funny story, I was once with my friend, I just was telling this to somebody the other day, another musician, you've heard of John Coltrane right? ... He's like also one of the gods of jazz, and I was down in Birdland, I believe, I was watching Dizzy Gillespie at that time, and the tables there, they're very, very small, very small, and I'm with my friend, another friend, it wasn't the one that I normally would go with, and all of a sudden, a couple of people come down, and they're sitting at my table, and they're closer to me than you guys are, and who's sitting down there? John Coltrane and his wife, at my table, and I'm like, as if someone was sitting next to Frank Sinatra. I mean, I couldn't talk. I was totally flabbergasted, so I'm kicking my friend under the table who's not that much into jazz. I'm saying "John Coltrane, John Coltrane." "Where is John Coltrane?" ... I'm like, I can't believe it. I mean, I'm sitting next to John, "the King of the Sax." I mean, it's amazing, so finally, I had enough courage, I wanted to talk to him, but I couldn't get a word out of my mouth. I finally said, "Could I have your autograph?" and they used to have, Birdland used to have the old postcards which were really nice. It was a very colorful postcard of the interior of Birdland with the red velvet and everything, and I said, you know, "Thank you." He said, "No, thank you," and it went back and forth. Well, he got the last word, he put down, "John Coltrane, thank you," on my card, and I was like, forget about it, after that I was like in seventh heaven. ... The fact that Coltrane sat next to me, and I actually spoke with him, so it was one of my days of my life which I'll always remember. It was really fantastic, so, you know, and then, actually there was another time which is, they had an auction for Dizzy Gillespie when he died, and I was determined to get Dizzy's Grammy to make two bookends. I mean, to have Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie's Grammy, and I put the bid in and all that, and I was on the phone, and

they had other stuff also, and just before his Grammy came up, they called me up, and they said, "We're taking it off the auction because the family wanted to take it off for whatever reason." Well, I was floored. I was so annoyed, because I said, "I could have bought another thing of Dizzy Gillespie." ... I held my money, I said, "There's no one that's going to outbid me for this one. I definitely am going to get Dizzy's Grammy." Well, PS I, you know, they held onto it, and I never was able to get it, so, but, you know, it was an interesting thing as far as that's concerned. I wasn't able to get it, but such is life. At least I got ... the "Yardbird," there you go.

JE: Walking into the jazz clubs, did you and your friend look out the place being two white kids?

AS: Not really, you know, the funny thing about it, and to this day, the majority of people that go to jazz clubs are white. I'm a member of NJPAC, all right, the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, and I usually take the "jazz package." ... I always have to laugh at myself, not laugh, it's kind of sad, because the majority of the people that go to the clubs are white. It's sad to say that, you know, I mean, it's just very, very sad, the majority I would say, ... eighty percent, if not more, are usually white. If I go to Birdland with my wife, you know, nowadays it's not like it used to be, you pay five dollars cover charge, and you sit there. Now, you know, it's at least, you know, a hundred and some odd dollars to go to a club, you know, and it's sad, but no, I mean if anything, sometimes I was underage, I mean, that's when I started drinking Jack Daniels. I used to go to, you know, I had to prove to myself, you know, like yes, I'm a jazz guy, you got to, you know, don't have a little sissy drink, and my friend used to get Jack Daniels, and actually it was the originally I.W. Harper but then we switched to Jack, and I used to just sit and even on Sundays they used to be small little clubs in the village, like there's the Five Spot, the Half Note. ... There was one place, it was like, you would sit down, the

chairs were like from movie theaters or folding chairs, and it would be a complete jam session from like twelve o'clock in the afternoon till late at night, and you paid like two bucks to get in. It was like heaven. So, you know, I would do that stuff, but I never found it to be, you know, I never felt awkward on it. The only thing, like I said, when people start talking to you about folk music and stuff like that, and how dare I not like, you know, Judy Collins or whatever it is. I wasn't into that. I just was, you know, into my jazz, and I had someone at least that was into it with me, my friend, so we pretty much stuck together on that. We used to do what they called ... the "blind fold test." We used to buy albums and play it, and we used to review it, and we wouldn't tell each other who the artist was, and we would try to say who the artist is, and we would actually critique the album just like they would do in Downbeat magazine, and that was a lot of fun, you know. At one point, ... I could hear a couple of notes, and I would know who it was and all that, so it was a, you know, I really enjoyed it a lot. It was a lot of fun.

SI: Let us talk a little bit about going into the military. Was it a surprise? How did it come about?

AS: Not really, when I was going at night, people said, you know, "You're going to eventually." Like I said, my friends were going to Reserves. A lot of my friends that had 98 ... averages with the high scores on the SATs and all that, they all became teachers, to this day. I mean, they're retired now, but it's amazing. I had friends that blew me out of the water, as far as scholastically, and they all saved themselves, became school teachers, so they would be, you know, excused from the service. I pretty much was sitting on the fence. I said, "You know, if it happens, it happens," because, like I said, I was going then to Brooklyn College, and I really wasn't with the program, and my mind was, ... it's the old story, one day the mailman comes, and says, you know, "Congratulations, here's a one way token.

Meet us at Whitehall Street at five in the morning. You're drafted," and I said, you know, "If that's the way it is, fine." I wasn't going to, you know, go on my own. I figured let them see if they draft me. They draft me, and apparently, you know, I was drafted and I'm going down to Whitehall Street and going through the whole routine, the whole day, getting checked out, the whole thing, and I said, "If I have to go, I definitely want to go."

SI: Tell us about your day in Whitehall and what that was like.

AS: It was very confusing. ... You're dealing with a whole part of your life now, a whole new chapter, all of a sudden, you know. You're not playing "Cowboys and Indians" where your mother is saying, "Okay, come on back. It's lunchtime," you know. This is the real stuff, and I remember we had all, one guy that was going to college, well, when I got out, he had the exact next number of me, the next number of my service number. It was not like your social security number, years ago they used to have, you know, you had your own number as far as your service number, and I remember they put you on in a large room. I remember the line was long to get into Whitehall Street and, you know, it takes forever. You sit in a room, and, you know, it's the typical army, "Hurry up and wait," and they finally bring you in, and they check you out and the whole nine yards, and as long as, you know, you're not walking in with a pocketbook, which some guys did, you know. They wanted to be out of it, you know, you played whatever game you can, but I said, you know, I went with flow. I said, "I'm here," and apparently they said, "Okay, you're government issue," and I was in the Army.

SI: You were drafted at the end of 1965. Was it a foregone conclusion that you would be going to Vietnam?

AS: That, it's always in your mind, I mean at that time they were sending, ... around that time Johnson was sending another four hundred thousand troops or whatever it was. He was really escalating it tremendously. ... When I was in basic training I had was at Fort Dix, ... you never knew where you were going to go and all that stuff. After the basic training, actually it's kind of a weird story, but it happens, and what am I going to do? You know, I was in during the tough time when the drill sergeants were, they put guys in the hospital. I mean we are talking they used to beat the crap out of these guys. I mean if you're just standing at attention your eye should move one inch, these guys would just love [it], and I remember, we were doing some sort of, you know, drill or something, and I had my rifle and my pack on me, and this young corporal--they used to use the word "flare." Whenever there was a flare, you just had to drop down completely down on the ground, all right, just drop down flat, and he yelled "flare" to me, and there was a bunch of rocks, well, need I say, where I landed, smack dab full speed ahead. I was in pain beyond [belief]. It was a week before final PT tests to get out of basic, and I'm trying in my bunk to do pushups and stuff like that. I am in pain. I mean, need I say it swelled up to a point that it was beyond all right, you know, so I finally had to go to the hospital, and this is in Fort Dix. They put me in the hospital, you know, and they did what they had to do. They bound my feet up and all the rest of stuff and gave me whatever they had to give me and all that other stuff, and at the same time I had URI, Upper Respiratory Infection, that's right. I had basic like in February, so when we were out in the fields, firing, and I have URI, with the constant firing also, I start to get ringing in my ears, all right, and eventually you figure it goes away. So, here I am in the hospital, I'm at a nadir, I'm at the lowest point. ... All the guys are going to be graduating, they're going to leave, I'm in the hospital, all right, bound up here. Finally I get out, they let me out. I don't know how long I was in the hospital. My whole unit in basic training--

they're gone already. They're already given orders, okay. I walk into the commanding office, my commanding officer, I'm still wearing my woolen GI outfit, you know, this is during the winter, you know, like, "Who the hell are you?" I said, "I'm coming from the last group." So, what they did was I stayed with the new group, but not as a, you know, recruit. I was like, I helped around, but I still had to go out, you know, out to the fields and help around and all the other stuff. I was waiting for my orders to come in. This is where it's amazing how the difference of destiny if one thing can change. My orders finally came in, I couldn't wait to get out of there already. I wanted to finally, this is ridiculous, I wanted to get out of Fort Dix already and not have basic training with these guys, it's a whole new group. They gave me orders, light infantry, Vietnam, which is the worst you could possibly get. I said, "Ho--." I mean it didn't matter if I went to college. I mean, you could be getting the highest grades on the test, they'll make you a cook, they'll make you whatever they needed, and the orders were for me to go for light infantry, and I said, "Holy crap." ... It turned out the orders were cancelled because I still had the ringing in my ears, it was meant to be. The man upstairs, I'm telling you, I still say to this day, if I had gone to light infantry you wouldn't be talking to me. Somebody up there said you still have more years to go. All right, so, I get a second set of orders. Now, they're sending me to armor--tanks--typical Army. Believe it or not, I got out of it. So, now I'm frustrated already, I said I got to get out of basic. They finally, from light infantry, to armor which is louder, where do they send me, artillery, 175, eight inch guns, the biggest guns on land. At this point, I said, "I don't give a crap. I got to get out of here." I said, "I'm going." So, I got my orders, I went to Fort ... [Sill], Oklahoma, which is the home of artillery. My advanced training was as a clerk. I became the battalion clerk for headquarters battery in Fort Sill. What was good about it, when the orders came in, I mean some guys, need I say, let me go back a step, some guys were sent to Germany after, you

know, Fort Dix, and other guys were sent, you know, all over. They were calling your names out of where you're going to go, and when they called my name out, you know, they said Vietnam, but in Fort Sill, the one big plus is they took us off the shelf, the First Battalion, 83rd Artillery, so instead of being a replacement, I went with my entire battalion. We all knew each other, so that was a big plus, you know. It's not like I'm going on a plane or whatever it is and I'm replacing a guy. All of our equipment, everything, we had people going in advance with the guns, and everything. The only problem is we went by ship. This was a ship the USS Patrick, which they just disassembled for scrap. This was an old World War II transport ship that maybe now, let's say for argument's sake, the capacity was for two thousand troops. We had like five thousand troops on that ship. It was a nightmare. It was so packed. Now, I'm at the end of the line, as I'm boarding the ship. We flew to Oakland, that's where they used to go, Oakland. I get on at the end of the line, for whatever reason, I don't know why, there's no more room in the cots, so where do they put me to sleep, in my place. I'm sleeping in the brig, that's the room they gave me, in front, in the aft of the boat, this old ship, dungeon, ... dark, five watt bulbs. ... That's my room with another guy, so when we take off, I mean, need I say, the guy that was with me was throwing up all over the place, because the waves, when you're sitting in the front, all the way in ... the brig, they had no room for me, finally after several days, they somehow had an extra bunk. Now, the bunks were like four tiers high. ... They gave me the bottom bunk. ... Being it was an old ship, the thing was ready for mothball when I got on the damn thing, my cot, if I was lying down straight up, the cot above me, the springs were hitting my nose, I couldn't roll over because it was so tight, and oh, that if you're on the bottom, you just barely had to grease yourself to get into the bottom bunk, but it was better than being in the brig. This was like my suite, all right. I actually had a bed now. [laughter] The other thing also since being the battalion clerk, I was in

with the officers, so I was in charge of being on the bridge where I would be on the PA system, and I would say, "Attention in the troop area. Attention in the troop area," you know. I would give out messages, and I had that privilege, so that made it a little better. I had a little bit of pull. Out of all the guys on the ship, I was the one that was in the office there with the officers, so that was pretty cool in that respect.

SI: Did you get access to better food?

AS: Not really, no, just that I didn't have to stay in my cot all day. I was able to stay in an office, and having the power to be over the PA system and having the whole ship hearing me and all that, you know. It's like being the disc jockey on the radio. I was the guy that was [people heard], you know, which was cool. The only problem was going there, we hit a major storm, and again this is something I'll always remember because most people flew, you know, they flew to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, or, you know, Bien Hoa, and it was one of the worst days of my life because everybody on the ship, including the sailors that were part of the crew, were all dying. You couldn't walk around the ship, I had to step over bodies. I don't get seasick. People's heads were in the toilet; their bile was coming up; they couldn't throw up anymore. I thought people were dying. I mean, the ship was just rolling all over the place, people were just completely [sick]. ... What I did was I also was authorized to give out the seasick pills to people, all right, but it was such a bad experience going there, I remember, I said I got to get out of here, because everyone was throwing up all over the place. It was just disgusting the ship, everybody, like I said, even the sailors that were part of the crew. So, I went up on top of the deck outside. ... I still remember this, it's funny. I laugh about it, but I wasn't laughing then. Since everyone was throwing up, and people were out on the deck, when they were throwing up, the wind was blowing, so their vomit was

flying all over the place. There was no place to hide, [laughter] so, I mean, eventually, you know, after the storm and everything got back together again, I mean people were really totally out of it, but it was an experience. It felt like it was forever going there by ship, you know, so it takes a long time.

SI: How long was it?

AS: It felt like forever. I forgot. I think they said it took seventeen days or something. It must of felt like seventeen months. ... It was hot, humid on that ship. ... We stopped off in Okinawa for refueling, and I remember they told us, "You're off for a couple of hours. Just stay cool. Don't run to the bars. Don't get drunk," but when you're cooped up in a ship with a bunch of guys, no one listens. So, everybody as soon as they got off that ship, everybody was just--I went to the bar, we were drinking, me and my buddy, and it's funny, because when it was time to get back to the ship, there were two ships, one going to Vietnam and one was coming home, and I'm barely walking down the gangplank, [laughter] and I am walking up the wrong ship, [which was] going back to the States. I should have gone that way, and then, finally someone said, "You don't belong on this ship," and I went, that's how bombed I was. I was totally soused. So, I finally went back to the right ship. I remember lying down on my bunk, I don't think I woke until we were in the middle of the sea somewhere. I mean everyone was totally out of it, you know. I mean, it was also the expectancy of going to Vietnam, and everything, so you know, release your tension and that was it. So, you know, we did stop at Okinawa. ... Then we finally headed towards 'Nam.

SI: When were you shipped overseas? Was it October of 1966?

AS: ... Yes, '66, ... in October, right.

SI: How long did you have with the unit before it was shipped over to Vietnam?

AS: Well, like I said, we were practicing. ... I was in Fort Sill for a couple of months, I think it was. It was a couple of months before we got the orders to go. I mean they knew, the officers knew already that we were going to Vietnam, but then they told us, you know, when they gave the orders that the entire 83rd Artillery was all going to Vietnam, you know, so I was there for ... several months, I remember.

SI: You had a lot of time to get integrated into the unit.

AS: Yes, I mean, we were separated, yes. I was with a bunch of guys, and, you know, we got to know each other and everything like that, you know, on the weekends. One weekend I went out to Oklahoma City, this is in Lawton, Oklahoma. There was really nothing there, basically the Indians and on the Fort Sill post, that's basically it, ... just getting prepared, meeting your officers, what you had to do. ... First they put me in S2 which is I think supply as a clerk, but then they put me into battalion clerk. I was working with the adjutant for logistics and stuff like that. ... There were new guys coming in, you know, until we filled up the entire battalion, and then like I said, we all went by plane ... from Oklahoma to Oakland and then we took the ship to Vietnam.

SI: I do not know how far you traveled before going into the service, but probably you had never been to Oklahoma before. What were your impressions of these places?

AS: ... It was the first time I was ever on a plane. It was weird, I was never on a plane before, so everything was just a new experience. I mean, you know, the fact that I'm in the service, I'm going to Vietnam, I'm going on a plane to Oakland,

California. ... You have to follow, everyone is just a number now, you know, they shave the head. ... The world was moving fast now. Everything is moving fast, and, you know, you try to acclimate yourself. There are certain guys that couldn't do it, you know. If you get a general discharge, you're just not equipped for the Army. Years ago they didn't, it was either dishonorable or honorable. ... When I said I was in the hospital, when I came back, I never had to go for my final physical fitness test, because all the other tests that I had gone through, I passed with no problem, so it wasn't worth it for me to just go out there. ... I got expert on rifle, in that respect, I got the expert pin for that. So, they said, "No, considering the fact that you passed everything before." You know, that was fantastic. ... That was pretty cool, you know. I didn't have to go for the final physical, because that was you had to pass the physical fitness to go on further. ...

SI: What were your impressions of going to these new areas?

AS: ... It was a whole new chapter of my life. I mean everything was moving fast. I was curious. In a way I wasn't against the fact, all right. It was like, you know, curiosity killed the cat, and a lot of cats were killed with the curiosity, but it was something I wanted to see. It was weird. I had this thing in me, I didn't mind going to Vietnam. I really honestly didn't mind going there. I was very curious to see, you know, and prove to myself that I can do it. ... Again, repeating the fact that I went with the whole battalion, made it that much easier, because I had my buddies with me. ... You never knew what was going to happen from day to day, but, you know, it wasn't until we arrived there on the ship. ... I still remember very well like it was yesterday, when the ship finally pulled into, outside the port, you could hear a pin drop on the ship. Everyone was just staring. ... It was like not real. ... It's just very weird. You can't believe that you're in Vietnam. Sort of surreal, it was surreal. ... Now I'm here, this is a dream, you know. I mean, I wanted to go, now I'm here.

I want to go home. [laughter] ... Everyone was looking, it's like it was amazing. Everyone was starry-eyed. ... It was just kind of a wild thing. The first time, here we are, actually in Vietnam, and I remember we had the duffle bags and all the rest of the crap, you know. ... There was a group of ours that went ahead of time to check out the area where we're going to go be stationed, but we stayed in Bien Hoa which is a large airport down there. We stayed there for I forgot how many weeks we stayed there before we finally moved out to a permanent location. ...

SI: Was there any kind of indoctrination course when you got there of what to expect?

AS: Yes, they said, "Forget about basic training. If anyone, if Viet Cong or anyone comes over to you, one of the greatest tools is your entrenchment tool." ... When you go to basic, they tell you to move your left foot, and then your right foot, then do this. When it comes to survival, you do whatever you have to do to live. All right, that's what the sergeant said, "Forget about everything in basic. You want to survive, you take that shovel, and you smack him across the damn head, and do whatever you have to do to survive. That's the name of the game, and that's really what you have to do." You do crazy things when you're over there. It's like I say, surreal. The first couple of days in Bien Hoa, there was incoming, all right. I had brought a tape recorder with me with a small little tape recorder with prerecorded jazz, all right, so I could listen to it in my tent. ... What made me do this as the rounds were coming in, and everyone was under their cots and all, I went out of the tent, I'm taking my microphone, and I'm recording the sounds. What made me do that? I said, "Oh, I got to get these sounds. This is dynamite." You don't realize what you're going to do when you're there. It's just a very weird thing. ... I'll say later on, but the fact of the matter is you could be the toughest guy and be the head of a gang, and you could be a meek guy, and you never know who's going to

[break down]. I've seen the toughest son of bitches shaking their asses off with their heads in the sand, you know, but when they're home and they have their boys with them everything is cool. ... You really begin to see who you are, so to speak. Why I went out there with a microphone and recorded, I still have it somewhere in the basement, I don't know. I just said, "Wow, this is dynamite." I thought it was fantastic. I thought ... no was going to hurt me. ... That was the first incoming that we had, and then, you know like I say we finally were given orders to a place called Nuydat, N-U-Y-D-A-T, which is not even on the map actually. It was in the middle of the jungle, and it was up to us to clear the area out and make, you know, the post for our artillery. Do you want to ask me any questions, as far as anything in the interim? ...

SI: Is this a few weeks after you arrived?

AS: After, I was in Bien Hoa, Long Binh, Bien Hoa, whatever it is, yes, ... then we moved out by convoy to a permanent place which is at Nuydat.

SI: It was just jungle there?

AS: It was just jungle there. There was a hamlet down the road called (Ba Ria?) all right, a poor little hamlet, but when we got there it was all pure jungle. We had to clear the area away. They had a lot of guys that cleared the area away. We had our tents setup with everything. ... The guns were set up in place and all that. ... With my hearing, I happened to sleep not too far from the ammo dump, and where the guns would go off, eight-inch howitzers where the whole ground would shake, and when they connected the 175 guns on it, like I say constantly, I was just reading the other day, because I have a site, 1st Battalion, 83rd. It's amazing, every day I get information from all the guys. They have reunions. I was just reading the other day, altogether they did ... over 357,000 rounds of ammunition, you know, and

each of these canisters weigh, I mean, we're talking heavy]. ... We stayed in our tents acclimating ourselves to this area. I remember more, aside from the enemy, I had to get accustomed sleeping in the jungle, because I remember one time at night, we were eating potato chips they had and all that stuff, and it was like three in the morning, and I'm hearing a bunch of noise in my tent. I said, "Who the hell is having a party at three in the morning?" and it turns out there was a pack of rats running around me all over the place. ... I remember one time I picked up the board underneath my cot, and there was a krait, which is one of the most poisonous snakes in the world if you don't get the anti-venom in you, and it right under there. So now, ... I can either stay up for 365 days and not go to sleep, you know. I'm not sleeping in Brooklyn or Jersey, right, you know. You have all these weird insects you never saw before, and like I said, I had a krait underneath my bed and with the rats running around, and whenever it rained, completely under my tent, all the scorpions would be underneath the tent, totally. We used to play games with them, we used to take scorpions and mix them with the army ants, and see them fight each other out of boredom. I mean, you would see insects you never saw before, but the scorpions would be all over the place, especially with it rained they would be under the tent. So, aside from the enemy you had to worry about all the, you know, the rest of the environment around there, and eventually, I said, "Look," you know, "I'm going to have to eventually go to sleep one day," and eventually, you know, you get used to it, you know. It's an eerie feeling, but, you know, like when people see a spider here or something like that, ... compared to what I saw over there with so many scorpions all over the place, and then, other animals and insects that you don't even know what the hell they are, but you get used to it, you know, it's like anything else.

SI: How long did it take to build the camp?

AS: They were building it, we were staying in cots for several months, you know, in tents, we were in tents for several months. ... There was a hill in the distance in Nuydat, where we constantly were firing, going on constantly with the firing there. I went on patrols. You do things that you normally say you would never do in your life before, I mean it's like, life is, it doesn't have the weight, you know. It's like I would volunteer to go on patrols, you know. I would go out there, and some days ... they put a radio pack on me and all that stuff, and we would go out and check out the perimeter. ... It was almost like surreal, it's like you don't think, you just do. ... I would even volunteer to go out on stuff like that. ... Even though I was the battalion clerk, everyone was still responsible for doing different things. I mean, I still had to go on patrol. ... We were self-contained, so I still had to do what I had to do, you know. If it was my day to do whatever it was, it was my job period. Although I did get along, as I said, with my adjutant, the lieutenant would. ... I was occupied during the day with the logistics that they did and all the other stuff that they had to do.

SI: Since you worked so closely with the officers, what was your opinion of them and what was your working relationship like?

AS: Some of them, it's funny. I mean, some of the officers, you know, the "lifers," I mean we had one guy who was a ranger. I mean, he had three testicles, I mean the guy was really tough, you know, a green beret. We had a couple of second lieutenants who were green. This one second lieutenant was like really, I mean to be honest with you, I don't think he deserved even to be a PF, a private, but he was in ROTC, and he became a second lieutenant. There was a mixture of all [kinds]. ... You had to show your respect and the whole nine yards to the commander and any officer with the saluting and all the rest of the stuff, but they got to know me, the officers. I mean, we were still separated between the Officer's Club and, you

know, the NCO Club. There's always that separation, and they don't want you to get too friendly, because, you know, but by being with the adjutant, and I was with the sergeant major a lot, who was the highest ranking non-commissioned officer. I was with him a lot. ... They all knew me, the officers. I got along with them fine, and I did what I had to do, you know. There were, you know, good days, and there were bad days. ... There were a lot of night time tracers going on. I don't know how far you want me to talk about different experiences. ...

SI: We can jump around. It does not have to stay chronological. In this period where you are setting up the base, what were your everyday activities as the battalion clerk?

AS: Well, I had to type up reports in the tent, whatever the adjutant would give me, to be sent over to higher up, headquarters or whatever it is, you know, what was happening. ... I don't even remember specifically. After a while it becomes like, you know, you're just doing it. ... Like I say, battalion clerk, doing what you have to do, and, you know, I wasn't on the guns. ... Eventually, one of the batteries was transferred away from us. They moved to another area, so I think Battery C was gone. ... I don't know if Battery B was with us after a while, because eventually we split up. Down the road, right down the road from us, from a dirt road, was the Aussies--Australians--and they were the wildest bunch of guys possible. They were great. We were stationed with the Kiwis [New Zealanders] and the Aussies. We supported them with the heavy artillery, and it was a lot of fun. I mean, I remember one time going over there. We used to exchange our--as a matter-of-fact if you ever see in Vietnam, instead of the baseball cap, they had the floppy hats, those things. We were the first unit to ever have that in all of Vietnam, because we switched our hats, and the colonel asked if we could do that, and after a while they start giving out those floppy hats, but we used to exchange them. As a matter of

fact, I have a Kiwi jacket that I switched over with another guy, but the Aussies were wild guys. ... Aside from the two hands, they had the extra extremity of a beer in the hand. They had to have a beer in hand, and if you didn't have a beer, they would actually get, ... I remember it was like the Barbary Coast. There was kind of a major fight. I don't know what. Everyone was going crazy; everyone was drunk, and everyone had a can of beer in the hand, ... but they were a bunch of really good guys, and the Kiwis, the aborigines were still, it's funny, like with the blacks, there's still that caste system with the aborigines, and they were great bunch of guys. The aborigines compared to the regular Aussies, all right, and I got along with them fine also. They were really nice guys, the aborigines, so they were down the road from us, you know. We were supporting them, so that was cool. My colonel was one of the few guys around that would not allow a Vietnamese into our compound. He did not trust them. He would not allow anyone, an officer or anyone, come into our compound and look and see. It was weird. ... We would never have a Vietnamese, even an ARVN, or anything like that, come in. It had to be an American soldier or an Aussie, he didn't trust any of the Vietnamese to come into our compound. The thing is also, during the day, when I was in the other place, Bien Hoa, I think it was, you really don't know, you know, who the enemy is, because in the day, your, the famous, "You're number one GI!" ... At night, they can be, you know, Vietcong. You never knew. They would smile, you know, as long as you took care of them, give them whatever they wanted, but you never knew who the enemy was, and you always had to be leery of that jazz. Eventually, like I say, I remember, when I was sleeping in my tent once, there was firing, and surprisingly, thank God--again, somebody up there must like me. I was on guard duty that night, right. I was manning the front of the compound on a PC carrier, and the ammo dump blew up, plus the incoming, and my cot, if I would have been sleeping there, would have been destroyed. There were holes in there all over the

place, and it was that one day I was on. It's just fate, it's amazing. I happened to be on guard duty that night, so it was a lucky thing. It was my turn that, you know, that I wasn't around when part of the ammo blew up, and the incoming came in, so that was, you know, like I say, you live from day to day. ...

SI: How often would you have to go on guard duty?

AS: They would pick it, I'm trying to think. I was on guard duty various times. I used to bitch to ... my captain, say, "Hey, you know I'm the battalion clerk. You don't put me on guard duty," but, you know, sometimes they had to, and I didn't mind it really. I mean it's uncomfortable. The worst part of our duty is at nighttime, because you're walking along the perimeter of your battalion, of the unit, in your compound. It's pitch dark, you're walking along the barbed wire, and your job is to go into the bunkers and be sure that the guys are still up and not sleeping. There were different bunkers, obviously strategically set, so it was a weird feeling when you're walking by yourself at nighttime with a rifle, walking along the perimeter, you know, any little bit of noise or anything, you don't know, you know. You're out there, you know, if anyone wants to do anything. So, it was uncomfortable, but you do it, you know, it's your job. You have to go along the perimeter, and see that all the guys are still up, and, you know, you're on let's say, two hours or whatever, three hours. Then, you're off three hours, and you're allowed sleep. Then, you're on two. ... You have different duties to do, and that was part of it, the same like when I said when I had to go out on patrol, even though I'm battalion clerk, with a self-contained unit, every guy has his job to do. They also had--you know, I was sometimes on ... shit-burning detail. [laughter] You had to take it, and, you know, it has to go somewhere, you take the kerosene, you got to, you know, clean it up and do the whole nine yards, it's part of the job. You got to do it, and that's it, you know. You're not going to have the conveniences of home. You're out in the jungle

and this is what you have to do to survive. ... I kept on plugging along, but I remember one time, remember I had the tape recorder I was saying, and like a little kid, I remember in the middle of the night, my major walked in, and he's a black guy ... and like a little kid, "Do you mind if I borrow your tape recorder, so I can listen to your jazz?" ... "Yes, you can take it." ... I gave him the tape recorder. He appreciated it. The next day, he said, "Oh, thanks a lot. I really appreciated it," but, you know, when you're that close, and everyone was all together. I mean, you get guys that also can't handle it. We had a guy that came out one day with his rifle pointing at everybody, and he was going to blow everybody away. Guys do snap.

SI: How far into your year in Vietnam did that occur?

AS: I was in there for several months. There was one guy that was, well, kind of wacky to begin with to be honest with you. ... One day I remember I came out of my tent, and he was out there with his rifle pointing it, and I give this guy credit, the staff sergeant said, "You aren't doing nothing." He says, "Give me that damn rifle right now," and who knows, you know, thank God, he pulled it away from him, but there are guys that, you know, just like when we got attacked, as I said before, they were "lifers," tough sergeants, that were shaking in their boots. ... A lot of guys that were regular quiet guys, those are the ones that survived. I mean, you never know. I mean, it was like I said. There were tough guys, you know, that were the head of gangs that were scared out of their mind, you know, they just couldn't handle it, and then there were other guys that, ... you never know how it's going to be until it happens. I mean, that's the bottom line; you never know until-- you know, you're not going to hear your mother say, "Come on home. It's time for dinner. ... Stop playing cowboys and Indians." This is the real stuff. The tracers are going by, the firing and all the rest of the stuff, so it's, you know, it's tough, and you always have a short-term calendar. You would mark it off every day, when

you were getting the heck out of there. ... You just hope that every day is the next day, and, you know, you're surviving. ... The part that always drove me wild was if anyone should die. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

AS: ... It's tough, nineteen-year old guys. ... It's just the reality. The day I got wounded, I was on guard duty at nighttime, it was my turn to stay up. I did my thing, it was over. They put us all the way down by the motorcade, away from the whole unit, in a tent. I remember I was with another buddy of mine. His name is Rich (Magen?), who I still contact with on the internet, and I'm a heavy sleeper, and I was allowed to sleep, you know, you have your clothes on, ... be prepared. All of a sudden, I wake up, and I hear firing all over the place right behind me, mortars going off. I'm the only one in the tent, everyone is gone. I'm all by myself. I tell myself, "Whatever you do," you actually talk to yourself out loud. I said, "Don't panic. Just don't panic. Whatever you do, don't stand up, lay down low. It's nighttime. It's eleven o'clock, full moon." Now, I start crawling on my belly to try to find some sort of safe place to go. While the mortars are coming down, I just got up, and I didn't have my helmet on because I had been sleeping. I just got up on my knee like an on-deck player, you know, on my knee. All of a sudden, I feel something hot going into my head. It's dark, what the hell is going on here? I put my hand to my head, I feel the blood is coming down. It's all on my rifle, it's all over my fatigues, and I tell myself, "Don't give up." I was crawling to safety. We had trenches, where guys who we had built for safety. I finally was able to crawl into a hole. It was crowded already. There were three or four guys in there. There was no room for me. I got blood on one of the guys, and he starts panicking. He thought it was his. I had to calm him down. He says, "I'm bleeding. I'm wounded." [Editor's Note: Mr. Saltzman is speaking with a stutter] It was me. He just

completely freaked out, but I couldn't stay there, because it was all crowded, so again I start crawling at nighttime to try to find some sort of safety. I didn't know what was going to happen. We had an old van that was converted to communications. Eventually, I saw that van. ... I pounded on the door. The guys in there are all scared. I saw them looking at me, they thought I was going to die. I just didn't know what was going on. I was bleeding, and after that, I don't know what happened. Eventually, I guess, it subsided, you know. I woke up the next day, thank God, but the metal was still in my head. ... My head got the size of a grapefruit. It got infected. My right eye was totally closed from the infection, and it was spreading to my left eye, so I knew that metal was still in my head, the shrapnel. I was transported by convoy to Vung Tau where they have a hospital there, and they put me on, you knew, the gurney, and it was one right after the other. ... Guys, ... way worse than I was, and I just saw the scalpel coming down. They took the shrapnel out of my head, and they put me in a ward, and I saw some guys with no faces, burned out from napalm. ... That's when you see a war, say it isn't worth it. ... I was being fed intravenously during the infection, and after that for a couple of days, it was funny. The nurse had the needle not in my vein, it was going into my tissue, and my right arm was on fire. I kept on saying, "It's killing me," and they told me, "No, it's okay," and finally one nurse realized after three days it wasn't going to my veins, it was going to my tissue, so now when they took out the needle my arm was still on fire. ... My head my bandaged up. I was next to another guy that was also wounded. It's kind of sad to see all these guys. It's heart wrenching, and after I stayed there for I don't know how long, in the hospital, I wanted to go back to my unit, I didn't want to go home. I wanted to go back with my guys and finish off my tour. It was my responsibility to go back. I had to go back. My mother wrote a letter to the congressman that this was her only son. ... When you first go into the Army, you sign a letter if you want, if you ever get

wounded, if you want your parents to know, and most guys said, "No, I didn't want my parents to know," but it wasn't until three months later, I wrote that I was wounded, "I'm okay, you know." ... My mother couldn't accept it, she just couldn't accept it, she never really, you know, but I went back to my unit, and I wanted to finish off the rest of the year, and I felt good about it. ... It was an experience, that when it was time to get out of there, I remember, when it was my short-term, all of a sudden in a matter of--my commander called me into his office and said, you know, "There's a chopper coming down to pick you up." ... It was just like all of a sudden, I had no idea. I just threw everything together, because they'd ship home the stuff for you, and I just gave all my fatigues to some of the Vietnamese and everything, my green underwear that I dyed and everything, and I went by chopper, you know, and I left that place, but like I say. ... A lot of times also when I was in the middle of the night, you feel like I was on a PC carrier outside, also on guard duty, and so when it's a full moon, and on the side of the Army's PC carrier, you have that big white star, it's like a bull's-eye, and sometimes the Viet Cong would tease me, and they would catapult rocks in the jungle. You can't see, and they would just constantly, just teasing. They would use a catapult, you know, just throw it into the canopy, and you never knew when the real stuff was coming, thank God, you know. It's like I say it's surreal, so many other experiences that happened, you know, you do and you see, and, you know, especially what goes on now, it's definitely, you know, a burn in your brain that never goes away. It stays with you and, you know, I have post-traumatic stress. It was March 12th, 1966, and I still have it up there, my thing up there. ... I have my Purple Heart in the other room. You know, in many respects I feel proud, you know, of serving my country, and I would do it again. If I had to do it I would do it again tomorrow. ... I had, what was it, two weeks R&R [Rest & Recuperation], I went to Japan with my buddy. ... You head down, and you go crazy. I remember they give you an

orientation when you first get off there, and they give you a whole thing of where not to go to. "Don't go to this bar, don't go there. They'll rip you off and that."

When you're leaving Vietnam, I had my luggage with me. After they gave me the whole orientation, I went with my luggage and I'm in a bar, I'm not even in a hotel with my buddy. ... We were already drinking, and the girls are there, and

everything, you know, they wait for the GIs to come, and, you know, Japan, especially in Tokyo, man, it was great. So, you know, you can put your hair down, and like I say, it's been many years. I was exposed to Agent Orange which did a number on me. It's given me four heart attacks. They said my arteries were like a seventy year old when I came out. It's amazing what Agent Orange could do. ...

The dioxin is one of the most dangerous, you know, chemicals to man. They would spray it on the jungle, and what it would do with plants, and when you think that you're breathing that crap in, and it would completely disintegrate, and I'm breathing that stuff in. With the firing of the guns, my tinnitus got worse, it got very maddening. When I first arrived there, I was getting also ear aches that felt like someone was putting a drill in my ear. It was really painful with the tinnitus, so between the tinnitus that I had, the Agent Orange, being wounded, and the post-traumatic stress, war is hell, war is hell, but like I said I'm not sorry what I did, but I've changed a hundred-eighty degrees as far as my opinion of what goes on now, totally--totally. I see it as a total waste when I see that fifty thousand guys, or whatever it is, nineteen, twenty years old, they'll never come back. It's tough, it's not worth it, not worth it at all. Especially now, we can take cruises, cruises to Vietnam, not in my lifetime, if anyone has a right to go back it's me. But when I hear people saying, "Oh, we went to Vietnam, everything is fine. We're trading with them and everything." ... It's almost like all these guys died in vain. They died in vain, and like I say, getting back to the first part about if I would have been light infantry, somebody up there likes me, because getting out of light infantry--I

know I wouldn't have been around. So, I appreciate life that much more now. I told myself when I got out, I'm going to make something out of myself, and, you know, I worked my ass off, got my college degree. I decided to go daytime, I switched over to Baruch College. I majored in marketing. I said life is too short after seeing what I went through, and thank God I didn't get screwed up like some of these other guys, you know. I go to the VA [Veteran's Affairs] hospital, I see these guys it's sad, they have no other recourse but to go to these places. I mean, really, thank God I'm able to afford and go to the private doctor, I'm getting one hundred percent after forty-seven years I'm finally getting one hundred percent disability from the government, because they finally gave ischemic heart disease, all right, from Agent Orange. I also believe, I had a full colostomy last year, they took out my whole colon which I still believe is part of the Agent Orange. I'm still having problems. I'm going to a psychiatrist now, which she hypnotizes me, and tries to ... reduce it. It's a burn on your brain. Like I say, war is hell, and the funny thing about it, like I tell people over and over again, it's a funny thing. The mind is a funny thing, because it's sort of like a fly or an insect that's attracted to light. ... I have to watch when I see a war movie, I don't want to watch it, but I'm forced to watch it, and they said that's a common thing for post-traumatics. I have to watch. I sit at the edge of my chair if I'm seeing a war movie or something like that. I get very tense, but I have to watch it. It's my responsibility to watch it. We went to see "War Horse," about a couple of months ago, the Broadway show "War Horse," and there was one scene in there which brought back my memories of hiding behind a berm while they were firing, and I saw myself as that guy, and I was almost going to get up from my seat, but I couldn't. ... I had to watch it, I had to watch it. So, it's kind of a weird, funny thing, I've heard that, you know, that's a common thing, and you also have the sense of guilt, you know. You feel like, "Why me? Why did I survive?" You know, that's why I wanted to go back to my unit after I was

wounded, "Why did I survive?" So many guys, nineteen, twenty years old, had a whole life to live, for what? So, we can take a cruise to Vietnam now, and, you know, bringing it up the present time. I've changed dramatically with Afghanistan. I watch the Lehrer Report and this is the part that's tough to talk, but at the end of the show, when they show the pictures--today twelve guys died--and they show pictures, it kills me, so it's tough. I'm sorry I'm breaking down, ... I guess sometimes when you talk about it, it comes back, and even though it's, you know, over forty some odd years, what for? I mean, I look at Afghanistan, and it's a waste. I want these guys home immediately. It's never going to be a democracy. They don't want a democracy. It's controlled by warlords. I mean, that's the funny thing, it's a third world country. There's nothing there. I look at that guy, Karzai. [Editor's Note: Hamid Karzai is the current President of Afghanistan. He took office in December of 2004, the first dominant political figure after the removal of the Taliban.] I can't stand him with the smile on his face. He comes to the United States with a smile on his face, with his hand out, the most corrupt son of a bitch around, and we're throwing money to this guy. My wife called up the Mayo Clinic, they have an Agent Orange study. She wanted to bring me there. I can't be accepted. There's too much of a long waiting list, they wouldn't take me. My only consolation, I kid around with my son. I said, ... "I can be buried in Arlington ... because I have a Purple Heart," and because, it sounds weird, I joke around with them, because they have combat wounded place. I have Giants season tickets and Mets season tickets, so whenever I go to the games, when all the cars go one way, they see my combat wounded plate, and as crowded as it is, I park right in front of the stadium. So, I always tell my son, "See what happens when you get wounded? All the benefits you can get in life? I park right in front of the stadium in Citi Field, and I park right in front, see." So, you know, I mean, it's obviously sarcastic, but I laugh about it, you have to. You have to laugh about it as far as this is concerned.

... There are two things in my life that I will remember which drives me crazy, and these were both of them. I was once at a shower, and I was sitting with this guy at a table, who I don't know, one of our friends, and he was in Vietnam also, and he asked me what year was I in Vietnam. I said, "Well '66." "I was in '65 to '67," and he came out with a line that if I saw him again I think I'd kill him. He said to me, "Oh, it wasn't that bad that year." If I wasn't in shock, I think I would have punched him. How dare, this is a fellow Vietnam [veteran], this guy must have been sitting somewhere on his fat ass never saw anything, you know, and he's telling me, "Oh, it wasn't that bad." Why? Because maybe only twelve thousand guys died and maybe fifteen thousand guys got wounded, because the following year was the Tet Offensive when I was home, but it doesn't matter, if a bullet is coming towards you, I don't give a shit what year it is, all right. The audacity of a fellow Vietnam vet telling me it wasn't that bad, that was number one. The second one which just happened recently, it's funny how people are. My close friend who I was brought up with, he was stationed in Thailand I think the year before me. I mean, he was behind a desk, he was in the signal corps. He didn't really see anything, you know, no combat or anything like that, and I called him up and in the midst of talking, I said, you know, "I just got a one hundred percent disability." He said to me, "Aren't you embarrassed taking it?" and I just, unless I came home with a prosthetic leg, you know, where people could see it, or no arm, whatever it is, paraplegic. I mean, I told my wife, "I never want to talk to him again and we were so close," but she said, well I should clear the air. "Aren't I embarrassed taking it?" ... In that respect no, I am not embarrassed taking it. I did my duty, the waste is, you know, the government does. It's sort of like there's a jealousy involved, you know. It just drives me crazy. "Aren't you embarrassed taking it?" You know how many doctors I had to see in VA, psychologists, heart doctors. I wear hearing aids. I'm supposed to get new hearing aids next week. I go to an outpatient clinic, it's never ending. I

still get pains. I'm taking Vicodin and stuff like for the colon, when they took out my entire, you know, colostomy, which I still say is from Agent Orange, you know. My arteries, I had angioplasty, stents put in, like I said, all from the Agent Orange, and then, when they finally decided to, you know, compensate for that so, I don't know. That's my story.

SI: You mentioned that you went from being very conservative to one hundred and eighty degrees out. At the end of your year in Vietnam though, what was your opinion of the war itself?

AS: Well, there was a lot going on then with the burning of draft cards, and then, looking down at the Vietnam vet, and we were "baby killers" and, you know, the whole nine yards, like that. I kept a low profile all right. It bothered me, you know. It bothered me with the fact that, you know, as if we were the enemy, all right. We were the enemy. We fought for our country, but yet we were the enemy, you know. It's like the thing with ... Jane Fonda type of thing. [Editor's Note: Jane Fonda is an American actress that was involved in controversial opposition to the Vietnam War.] It was a very awkward feeling. ... I had to acclimate myself first of all. I had to come back to reality. I mean, you know, everything, I was like a new kid, like, "Oh, wow, you can actually flush the toilet when you go to the bathroom," or ... if I'm sitting at the dinner table, and, you know, I could tell my mother, "Could you pass the fucking salt?" you know. I mean, you have to realize that, you know, you're coming back to the real world, but I changed, you know. Like I said, little by little, I realized what was going on and being there and from being a hawk, ... I started to say, "Is it worth it? Is it worth it?" ... We're going to be training with Vietnam soon, everything will be hunky dory, and it was a freaking waste. It's a waste, but yet there's that side of my brain that said, "I'd do it again," and that's the funny thing about it, and they said that's very common with people that, you know,

"I'd do it again." That's the funny thing about it, it's a total waste, but, you know, I'd be with my brothers, and I eventually changed. I said this is, I'm looking at the stuff with Iraq and Iran, I mean, in Afghanistan, as I said. I said, "What are we dying for? For what reason?" Every day, it's just a total waste. Like I said, they don't want democracy. The warlords are controlling everything, and the money that's being spent, that's secondary, and I also feel a little. ... I don't mean to sound harsh, but the next of kin from 9/11, Americans had guilt from that, so they couldn't give them enough, college educations, tax stuff, the breaks. Everything left, ... if it was up to them, they would have a whole southern part of Manhattan as one large memorial. ... I was down there during 9/11, worked down there, I lost my car. Thank God, I just lost my car, but I also have people that died down there, right, and it wasn't, definitely a tough time, but it's sort of like the American guilt, of like they couldn't give enough, and they still want more, and I always said, "But what about the Vietnam vet with Agent Orange? Why are you holding forty years of this?" Like there was one guy, Warner from North Carolina, South, I forgot, and he was a Marine, and I was watching the proceedings on my computer when they were doing the thing about, and he's saying, "How come? Why should we give it for ischemic heart disease? How did we know a guy my age now is not drinking a six pack of beer and smoking three packs of cigarettes a day and that's why he has heart disease?" Well, god damn it, I had this when I left. I had heart attacks when I was in my early forties, all right, my arteries dried up to nothing. I have arteries that are one hundred percent blocked. Where did this come from? From freaking Agent Orange, when they sprayed that crap over there, you know, so, you know, finally, and this Marine was against it, and I couldn't believe it. I just couldn't believe it, how dare he say that, you know, but finally that new guy from the VA, you know, finally fought for it, and all the rest of the stuff and surprisingly Obama also bought it back up ... on the table, and they finally, after forty-seven years,

they finally said, "Okay, ischemic heart disease, we'll give it to you." So, it was a victory, ... when they called me up, I'm a member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, and they're great, they are fantastic. ... When they called me that one morning, and they put me on the phone. Actually, my wife got the phone call first, and they said, "We got good news for you. You finally got the one hundred percent." I wasn't even excited, you know. It's sort of like running a marathon, and you just crossed the tape, and, you know, you're so exhausted. ... That's pretty much it. ... Your original question was about changing. I see it as a total waste, total waste, bring us home immediately, bring us home yesterday. ... Why do we have to wipe the asses of the rest of the world? I'm almost an isolationist, you know. We have to bail everybody out, and use our young guys to go and fight. It's just totally, you see those guys with the prosthetic legs and their heads blown off, and it's just not worth it, not worth it. ... They all say, you know, "they'd do it again," and I can understand that. So, that's it.

SI: Was the one-year rotation system already in place when you got to Vietnam?

AS: In Vietnam?

SI: Yes.

AS: Well no, I'm saying that there was nothing there when we arrived.

SI: It was already a policy that after one year you would leave Vietnam.

AS: Oh, yes, it was one year, right, one year stay. It's a one year stay.

SI: Did they stagger that so that the entire unit was not leaving all at once?

AS: Exactly, there was always replacements coming in. They were starting to get the replacements coming in. Actually, I got an early out. I got out in October rather

than December, but since it was like sixty days to go, it wasn't ... worth for the Army to reassign me which was good, so I was able to get out, ... which is fine with me, fine with me.

SI: Did you see an impact of replacements on your unit's effectiveness?

AS: Well, I mean, when everyone has a short-term calendar, and everyone is ... dying to get the hell out of there, you know, everyone is looking at their short-time calendar saying, "Boy, okay, you know," and then you see the new replacements coming in, the new guys that are coming in to replace, it was stagnated, you know, new officers were coming in. I remember going in to my commanding officer's office, because by rule they have to say, would you [like], you know, to re-up. He knew with me. I said, "Thank you, but no thank you," and I walked out. ... That's when I went back to college and everything like that. I said, "I want to make something of myself," and every day, I say, "Thank God, I'm truly blessed, truly blessed," you know, so in that respect I paid my dues. ... I tell people now, if they call me, it's women and children first, ... but if I had to I would do it again, that's the funny thing about it. ... Why, I don't know.

SI: Were you able to maintain contact with your family back at home?

AS: Well, my personal family you're talking about?

SI: Family and friends.

AS: Yes, as I say, my friend from South Carolina, I was friends with, ... I sent them a tape. They sent me a tape of a recording. I like it. It's the same guy that was in Thailand, his famous remark. I remember putting on my tape recorder, you never hear the round that kills you. ... They were all home, deferred, and going to school, so I was the only one that actually, you know, went to Vietnam so, yes, I

kept in contact with these guys. I still have friends with them now, you know, a couple of my buddies that I still have. The site that I have now, First Battalion Eighty-Third Artillery. Every day there's something on there with news and they had a reunion. I was going to go to the reunion, but I wasn't really up to it, maybe next year I'll go to the reunion. So, yes, I keep in touch with, you know, between the internet, and my friends that I have normally, I still have, you know, things like that. They're trying to ... lead a normal life.

SI: When you were in Vietnam, was it important to get outside news through letters or through tapes to keep your morale up?

AS: Yes. ... My cousin was a school teacher, and she had all the kids send me letters, which was really nice. Everyone waits, I mean, when the mail guy came, you know. Our guy, I still remember, his name was (Scatafassa?), we called him (Scaz?). Well, as soon as he came, and he started handing out the mail. Oh yes, I mean, you live for the mail, that was it. You live for the mail, to have correspondence. A lot of the married guys--I wasn't married, I didn't know my wife--they went to Hawaii for their R&R because they could meet their wives there. The single guys went to, like I say, all over the place, whatever was the option. I went to, you know, Tokyo. I went to Japan, but the married guys, yes, they would hook up in Hawaii as far that's concerned. ... I keep on saying I have to go to the reunions to see some of these guys. ... You take a look at these guys, I see pictures, and we were all like nineteen, twenty years old, and now I take a look at these pictures, I'm saying these guys could be my grandfather, but that's me. It's funny how time, decades go by, and I can't believe we're all young kids, and now, you know, you see these guys with like gray hair, or like with the beard and all that, I'm saying, "Wow, where has it gone?" ... It goes by fast, but it is a chapter of your life that you'll never forget, you know.

JE: When you were in Vietnam, were you concerned about the spread of communism throughout the world if American forces were defeated?

AS: ... The underlying thing is you really fight for yourself basically, you know. ... We didn't get that political over there, all right. We really didn't get that political over there of who's right, who's wrong, you know, we shouldn't be here, we should be there. It wasn't that case. It was like having a job to do, you're with these guys for a year, all right and it wasn't, I honestly can't remember anything that we spoke politically on anything about the right or like the bombing of Cambodia, and stuff like that. ... If anything, you know, when you're there, you're more gung ho. You say, "We should bomb the crap out of these people, you know, once and for all, you know, just annihilate them totally, you know." I mean look at what happened to the My Lai incident, you know, these guys went bananas and they just completely said, you know--they killed innocent women and children, so do I see that? To some degree I can understand, but you just snapped, you know, and you just, you can, you just snap. [Editor's Note: On March 16, 1968, hundreds of unarmed civilians were murdered by US Army soldiers in the Americal Division, an event that, when made public over one year later, turned public opinion against the war.] It's just an impulsive type of thing, and, you know, you want to survive, and, you know, it's you against them. So, as far as the political side, as far as, you know, supporting certain things, you just look after your own ass. I mean the bottom line is when you're attacked, as much as you learn of all different things, you're really, it's every man for himself. That's the bottom line, and when it's incoming, it's every man for himself. You have to look after yourself and save yourself, and it's just that simple, all right. You know, I mean if you could help a guy out, fine. I would definitely, without a doubt I would help somebody, if I saw somebody in distress, I would do something. I feel guilty at times, you know.

I get guilt trips, saying, you know, like I say, "Why me?" or "If I would have done this different or that different." Of course, it always passes your mind; you always have that in your mind, you know. ... It's instinctive of what you do, but you do it, and you just hope you get home. I remember one time I was in a helicopter, and we got lost in the clouds, and we all had to lay low over the trees, and we had, the guy didn't know where he was, the helicopter guy. Another time I remember we were going up the Saigon River. This is a funny story though. [laughter] We landed in Saigon. I was in Saigon for a couple of days with some officers. They had to do some work up there, and I was in the truck, and I had my camera with me and my towels and all the other stuff, and I was all by myself in the truck, and it's funny because all of a sudden, you know, little kids, they come run up here, and they're like little, I don't know, ants, they completely flood around you, and before I knew it, they left, totally wipe me out, took my camera, everything. The next morning I see a little old lady walking down the street early in the morning with my towel over her shoulder. I said, "Take it." ... People were friendly and all that stuff, but you never know at nighttime how they change. ... You never know who the enemy is really. You really never knew, and that's why as I said, my commander of the whole unit, of the whole battalion, would never allow, he never trusted the Vietnamese to come into the--as a matter-of-fact the ARVNs [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] were not that great either, because I remember one time when we arrived there, we had the ARVNs on one side, you know, the South Vietnamese soldiers, we had us on the other side. The Viet Cong comes in the middle, they fire into the ARVN group. Then they fire into our group, they leave, and the ARVNs start to fire and they weren't the greatest of soldiers. They start firing into our compound. They had no idea that, you know, so they weren't the greatest of soldiers.

SI: Can you give us a sense of how big the compound was?

AS: Eventually, yes, eventually, ... from tents they start make it into almost like we were a city. They start building actual buildings in the middle of everything. The compound was named after one of my sergeants who I originally worked with, (Clarence Everett?) who died. His head got chopped off by a helicopter. He was almost ready to retire also, he had a year to go. Nice guy, really great guy. ... We named the compound after him and eventually, I have a disc that shows how it looks, totally different. When I left, it was like a city. They built individual like huts that we stayed in, we didn't have to stay in tents anymore, and it was pretty large. I mean, you know, between all the guns, and the ... motor pool and all the other stuff that we had, it was like almost like a city within itself as compared to when we first arrived there, you know, it was all jungle. So, it was amazing what they did, and of course, you know, once we left, I have the whole history of the entire battalion. I think they stayed there. ... 1970, they went to Germany, so they left Vietnam, the First Battalion Eighty-Third Artillery. ... We were taken off the shelf, when I arrived originally the First Battalion Eighty-Third Artillery was not active. They activated it solely for the purpose of going to Vietnam, so you know.

SI: Would you say it is like maybe a mile on each side?

AS: A little less than a mile. I have ... pictures that, you know, it shows how, it was a little less than a mile, you know, it was four to five by. ... They had ... a lot of little huts that, you know, we lived in. ... I mean, it wasn't a major, like a Bien Hoa or a Saigon type of place, you know. It was a self-contained artillery unit, you know. Even though it was artillery, we still had to do our own, like I said, our own things of patrolling the area and everything else, so, you know, it was like, its own little hamlet, so to speak, we had. So, by the time we left, it was like transformed

totally from how we first arrived, and when I left, it was like, you know, and I guess eventually gave it to the Vietnamese. I don't know what they did with it, but if it's still there I don't even know.

SI: You said you were supporting the Australians.

AS: Yes, right.

SI: Their infantry would go out and they would call in for your support?

AS: Right to support, right, the Aussies were right down the road from us, so the largest contingency of Australians were with us, and like I said, the Kiwis also from New Zealand and stuff like that, so they were with us as a support, so we worked hand and hand with them obviously, you know.

SI: Did you support any other units?

AS: No, it was basically the Aussies and us. ... Every so often we would go to this place called Vung Tau which was like the in-country R&R. We would go by convoy, and of course, they have the New York Bar, the Florida Bar, you know. They wait for the soldiers, they would give, they have a beer called .33 Beer. It's funny because, they still have it out here, but it's different. Supposedly, it contained embalming fluid, formaldehyde, so when you had a couple of beers, you were out, and you would pay the girls in the bar, you'd be buying them stuff, and they'd be, you know, have a (holly leg?), and you just let your hair down, you know. It was a way of escaping, getting away, and then you eventually had to go back to your unit again, but every so often they had that in-country R&R where you would just, it was a wild place, definitely a wild place, bar after bar after bar.

SI: You said that there was a lot of drinking with the Aussies. Was there alcohol in your compound?

AS: There was alcohol. Yes, we had stuff like that. ... There was alcohol and stuff like that. I mean, you know, you didn't want to get too, I mean, if in case rounds came in you wanted to, you know, know what the hell was going on, you don't want to be walking in a daze, so most of my guys were pretty cool, you know, most of my guys were pretty cool, you knew, you never know when it's going to happen especially in the evening time, a lot of times they would fire, you know, maybe tracers, and all night constantly firing, constantly firing back and forth. So, there's always something going on as far as that's concerned.

SI: When you would go on these patrols, what would be the purpose of the patrol?

AS: Well, we just scour the area. We'd go out past the barbed wire. Walk around in the jungles, just find out, you know, like one time we found some guys up in a tree. We brought them down and interrogated them, all right. ... I didn't interrogate them. The officers did, but, you know, we would just go out. I mean, there were land mines also. ... They said it was mine, I actually have the tail end of the mortar that I got hit with, as a paperweight in the other room, actually. They gave it to me, and actually they gave the shrapnel when I was in the hospital, but I lost it. They gave it to me in a vial. I wanted to keep it as a souvenir, but I lost that, but I do have the tail end of the mortar that went off in front of me. ...

SI: Were the patrols to clear the area or was it because you heard some activity in the area?

AS: Well, just the searching and looking for anyone, any Viet Cong or Vietnamese soldiers that were, you know, by our compound, period. You know, we would go

out into the area, you know. I remember it used to be so, I mean there's two seasons there--hot and monsoon. When it rained, and the humidity, everything was just so hot, and you just don't feel like even eating. ... When the rains come down, forget about it, it was torrential. ... When I was on guard duty, ... you just stay outside, it's an eerie feeling when you're sitting alone with a machinegun on top of a PC carrier, just waiting for the next shift to come, and hoping everything is cool, [laughter] but, yes, we just go out to check the perimeter, see if everything is all alright, the barbed wire, nothing has been cut through, and if there were land mines out there, you know. See that everything is contained, you know. You have to check the area obviously aside from the fact that Agent Orange killed a lot of stuff around the area anyways.

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

AS: Yes, but most of the time, like I say, the big guns did the work, the big guns did the work. The artillery was kind of, like I said, when I saw it the other day I couldn't believe it, over three hundred thousand, and each round cost like about five thousand dollars a round. It's amazing. They weighed like, ... it takes two guys to lift up one of the, you know, rounds to put into the eight inch howitzer. The whole ground would shake. ...

SI: As a clerk, were you still involved in logistics?

AS: Yes, well, S-1, right.

SI: Was it a pretty regular operation or did you ever have to like work deals to get what you needed to keep the unit going or anything like that?

AS: ... Whatever orders I was given by the adjutant, basically, you know, whatever missions or whatever we had to do, you know, that was given, I mean, I

was just a lousy, you know, specialist. It was given, you know, from the commander, I guess to the adjutant or whatever the case it is, and that would be forwarded as far as that's concerned. I remember the time--like I said, we had some officers--the general that came, I think that time when the ammo dump blew up and my cot ... totally had holes in it, they took pictures and everything and all that, but as far as, I mean I had secret clearance on stuff. You have the confidential secret, top secret, and crypto. ... The intelligence was top secret, but from the stuff that I had, I mean after a while you just do the stuff and you submit it, and that's it. I really wasn't, you know, every day whatever the adjutant would give me. I would, you know, it was part of my job, I would just do it, but you also have other jobs also to do just because like I say whether you're firing a gun or being a clerk or being a cook you still had to, you know, being when you're self-contained, you still got to, when you're in the middle of the jungle, and you're all by yourself, you got to do what you got to do, as far as, you know, keep on going, so to speak. So, that's what we did.

JE: Did you ever see or encounter the tunnel systems of the Viet Cong?

AS: ... There was one area, like I said a hamlet called (Borea?) which was a small town, small little hamlet that would have, you know, areas that we'd check out. There were areas that were, you know, like I said, the people were super nice when you passed by, but you didn't trust them. We also had underground areas, like I said for protection, you know, in case we would be in incoming rounds. ... Everything moves fast, ... everything happens, you know, the next day. Like I said, you know, the sun goes down, sun comes back up; it's another day, and you just hope that, you know, everything is cool, and you make it. ... There were guys that had it so much worse than I had, so much worse. There were guys that saw so much more combat, and you really have to endure it, I mean, what you see in, you

know, Hollywood, the way they make it, you know, it's nothing like that. You know, you see John Wayne taking his grenade and pulling it out with his teeth, and throwing it. There's no way in this world you could take a pin out with your teeth and throw it, all right. I mean, you know, the way they dramatize it, you know. Some movies are, like Born on the Fourth of July (1989), ... I thought was one of the worst movies in the world. It was an insult to me, I just thought it was ridiculous, but there are other movies, ... the one with Robert De Niro?

SI: The Deer Hunter (1978)?

AS: Yes, that blew me out of the water. That really is, you know, gets right, you know, that was a tough movie to watch, and Full Metal Jacket (1987), where the guy goes bananas and blows away the sergeant. ... Like I said, I watch it, it makes me tense, but I have to watch it. It's required of me to see it, as tense as I feel. ... I can sit at the edge of a chair and I say, "Wow," like I want to get out, but I'm glued to having to watch the thing, it's compulsory for me to watch it. ... As I said, they said that's common, it's a very common thing to have that.

SI: Were you able to talk about the war when you came back or did time elapse before you could talk about it?

AS: Yes. I remember the first time was the Fourth of July, and people were doing fireworks. I was under my bed in my house. I was scared. You wake up, and I heard the rounds, because you never forget that, the smell, the certain smells, I still have it in my brain, you know, the firing, and all the rest of the stuff, the noise. When I hear a helicopter overhead, to this day, you know, you always have that in your mind, the helicopters, you know. There are certain things that just stay with you obviously, but when I got home, like I said, you have to acclimate yourself back to the real world, and it's a transition, you know. It's just not an overnight

thing. You spent the year away in the jungle, in a war, and, you know, I guess the best people to tell you, you know, are the people that you're with, if you've changed. I mean it's the old story also, you go as a boy, you come back as a man. I mean that's the bottom line, really. You're a nineteen year old kid and you come back as a man. You see things you don't want to see, but it's all part of the, you know, the whole thing, but it took time, to get back into the groove of things, and you try to forget, you know, you try to get back, and as I told myself, some guys just couldn't do it. I hear a lot of guys that just completely freaked out on drugs, on stuff like that, and if anything, I went the other way, thank God. I said, when I left Brooklyn College, I came back, I said, "I'm going to Baruch." ... Someone mentioned to me about marketing and stuff like that, I said, you know, "That's not a bad idea. I'll going to go for marketing, you know, marketing research, marketing degree." I said, "Enough of this garbage and working after going at night." I said, "Let me ... go there already." I went to Baruch College daytime. ... I finished off that. I got my degree. As I said, I was working in the title business. This might have caused me to be my worst enemy because after seeing everything, I'm my worst enemy, I run after my own tail. I was working around the clock, I formed my own business, you know. Thank God I became successful to the point of, you know, I look on the other side, and I say, "Wow, it's so easy." It's just so that one little difference it could go either way, you know, really, but I told myself I'm blessed, and, you know, knowing that how from day to day. Like I said, one guy cannot be around the next day, you look at it as a whole different situation, your life has changed. You say, "Wow, every day is a blessing." Every day is a blessing to be, you know, around and I appreciate that. I really do. I thank God, and I say the difference of me being going to light infantry, somebody up there must have loved me, because I still say. I mean, the fact that I got the Agent Orange and wounded, that's nothing; it was meant to be, it was meant to be. I'm alive; I'm

married, have children, you know, so I'll try to make something of myself, and, you know, I did my bit. What more can I say?

JE: Aside from the drinking, was there widespread drug use in Vietnam?

AS: There was drug use there, ... definitely marijuana, that's for sure. The thing is also a lot of guys in like in Saigon, and larger areas Vung Tau, they have the accessibility. When you're separated, I mean, we would have to go by convoy to go to any major area, so we were self-contained, so it's really hard, you know, when you're in the middle of nowhere, so to speak, you know, to get the stuff. I mean, there was, there's no two ways about it, but again as I say, a lot of these guys had the accessibility. If you're in Saigon, you could get it in one, two, three, you know. You get drugs like that, and stuff like that, so there were drugs around, but there's mostly drinking. I mean, that was the biggest thing, you know, drinking was the major way of breaking up and losing a little bit of the tension, so to speak.

SI: Did anyone go AWOL or not come back from R&R?

AS: Well, in Vietnam, it's hard to. Where are you going to go? But the fact of the matter, ... the one guy that once took the gun and you know. There were guys that I'm sure had to be shipped home that couldn't take it. Like I say, you never know how you're going to react, you never know. There are guys that just couldn't handle it, you know. I mean, gambling was a big thing. Guys would gamble, you know, card playing, anything. As a matter of fact, I loaned this guy a whole bunch of money because he lied to me. He said his father was in a car accident, and I gave him all my money, and it turns out he was playing cards with it, I never got a penny back on it. ... There are good guys and there are bad guys there, you build up relationships and, you know, so forth, the good old Southern boys, and I have to say also, like I was about the only Jew in my battalion, right, there may be one

other guy, and you have some guys down from the South who never met a Jew in their life before, and there were guys literally, I mean literally, they kept on saying, "Let me see your horns." They actually wanted to see, they actually believed, they never met a Jew. They wanted to see my horns. ... It was weird, but they never put me down, because I wouldn't let them put me down, you know. I mean, I was one of the guys, and ... they wouldn't mess with me, so to speak, so they did respect me, but, yes, ... there might have been one other Jew in another battalion somewhere, another battery I should say, so I never had any sort of anti-Semitic situation in that respect. They might have said things kidding around, you know, in that respect. If anything I stayed a lot with the black guys, because I had my jazz thing, and then, we would hang together and listen to our jazz together, but I didn't really feel any anti-Semitic, whether they said it under their breath or some of these good old Southern boys, you know, but no one, I never had a fight or anything like that, because someone said something to me that was anti-Semitic, or the fact that I was, you know, Jewish and whatever else is the case, and, you know, I never hid it; that's for sure. I didn't care. Take me for what I was and if you didn't like it, you know, screw you. It's that simple.

SI: Did you ever get a chance to, or did you want to go to religious services while you were in Vietnam?

AS: They didn't really have in Vietnam. I mean it would be pretty much, I'd be the whole, the Rabbi and the guy reading, ... there was no one out there. ... There was for the Christians and stuff, they would have services, but there really wasn't anything on my side in Vietnam that I could, you know, that I can remember that they had anything, because there were so few. I was like the token Jew that, you know, that went to Vietnam. [laughter] I'm the token Jew that went to Vietnam that was wounded. ... I never had any sort of services as far as that. I might have

prayed a lot on my own, you know, but as far as the formal part of services, no, I never had that situation.

SI: Was going to the chaplain and spirituality important?

AS: Yes, I mean a lot of the times, like I said, when I was wounded, I was actually talking to myself, and the man upstairs, you know, I mean, it's amazing how close you get to God when you're up against the wall. You become very religious all of a sudden, you know, and apparently yes, I mean, I did constantly tell myself, you know, spiritually, it keeps you going. I mean, you have to have faith, you have to have something there, you know, something to live for and spirituality as far as you know believing in something, and like I said, I wasn't married. I didn't know my wife; I had no children. I was pretty much a single guy, but it's the strength of these, you know, within yourself to survive, and that's the basic thing. Survival is the most important thing and the spirituality of knowing, you know, that there is somebody up there watching you, you know. I believe that, I definitely believe it, and it's amazing how many people became spiritual when they were in danger. [laughter] All of a sudden, it's "Please, God. Help me," you know. When you need him, then all of a sudden, you know, you want him, but, yes, there's that feeling, definitely that feeling.

SI: You mentioned your commanding officer was African-American.

AS: No, one of the XO's, yes, he was, Major Andrews. He was a nice guy. Then, we had a Major (Ennis?), yes, but the major was a nice guy, he was nice. I had no problem with him.

SI: In general, how integrated was the unit?

AS: Yes, well most of the, a lot of the NCOs, the sergeants, were ... black. There were a lot of black guys there, but, you know, I had no problem. My sergeant was fine. ... The head of our battery was a white guy, the master sergeant. The sergeant major, I couldn't stand. ... I wrote a poem once about him. He was one of my most hated men in my life. He was an arrogant son of a bitch, the sergeant major. All he would walk around is with a "swagger stick," you know, looked like Patton out there, and I don't know. ... When you're a sergeant major, not even a captain is going to say something to a sergeant major, you know, it's like how dare you talk to me that way even though he's a non-commissioned officer. I didn't care for my sergeant major so much, but the other guys I was dealing with, like I said, this lieutenant they promoted to captain at the end. I got along with him, you know, we weren't "buddy-buddy," but, you know, like I said, the officers knew me because I was battalion clerk, so for that reason alone, you know, I never really had any problems when they had to discipline me or anything like that, you know. I had no problem whatsoever on that. I got along pretty much with all the officers regardless, white, black or indifferent or any other type of thing, you know, I had no problem.

SI: Do you recall any racial tension in the unit as a whole?

AS: Well, you know, it's always separation, you know. There is that separation I have to say, you know, the blacks would go out and stay with themselves a lot. I mean, you get the good old Southern boys, they're not going to integrate. All right, so there was, you know, a lot of the black guys from Detroit and Philly and New York, they would stick together, and then you would get a lot of Southern boys, ... they would be also together, you know, and then, I'm in the middle. [laughter] So, I would be with both of them. I was friends with a lot of the guys down there, no

problem, you know, but there is still that segregation while I was there, you know. Blacks would stay with the blacks, and the whites would stay with the whites.

JE: Besides the spirituality, were there any good luck rituals?

AS: Well, like I said, the short-time calendar was one of the main things, you know. You had that short-time calendar, ... you cross off each month ... and you're that much closer to going home as far as that's concerned, as far as good luck, I mean, every day you don't think about that, you try not to think about, "It's going to be you." I mean, you just try to, you know, do your thing, and you can't really worry because you're going to freak out, you can't really. I mean, you know, you just have to, you know, you really can't constantly be, I mean you have to be on your toes and everything. You never know what's going to happen, but as far as, you know, luck or a good charm or anything like that, a talisman or whatever it might be. I personally had, you know, nothing. What it was, was pictures from home and stuff like that, because that brings back the feeling of, you know, that closeness, that, you know, "Eventually, we'll be home." You have pictures of the family. There were guys that had young kids there, you know, babies or wives, they just got married, you know. That was their incentive for, you know, getting the hell out of there, obviously, but as far as anything else, no, I mean, we didn't have any, you know, good luck charm or whatever it is. We had a dog, we had a bird. [laughter]

SI: They were mascots?

AS: Yes, we'd keep them around, you know, like the wild dogs that come around, and we had one dog that we had, you know, people, some of the guys would adopt the dogs that, you know, the stray dogs that come around, so that we had, but we had fun also. I mean, look, I remember one time I had my truck, and my close

friend that I went to Japan with, he was the colonel's driver, and we one time put a chain on his jeep, and I put a chain on mine, and we had a tug of war, and if the colonel ever would have saw that, you know, [laughter] but I mean we had a lot of fun. You know, there were times there was fun. ... I mean, you're not going to look each at other seriously, constantly, you know. We're all a bunch of brothers together, we went over as one unit, so you get to know the idiosyncrasies, and the, you know, who you're going to stay with, and who you're not going to stay with, you know, the guys are that going to be friendly, the guys that are not going to bother with you. I mean, there were fights, of course, but whenever you put a bunch of people together, you know, it's bound to be some friction. ... That's normal, you know, and you're not in the greatest environment, you're not ... on a beach somewhere. I mean, once in a while we'd go to Vung Tau, and go to the beach, which was great, you know, let our hair down.

SI: Was there ever the opportunity to see a USO show? Did they come around?

AS: Yes, yes, they had the Bob Hope thing, and they had the, you know, but usually, I mean, I didn't go. I went once to one of them, I think. There were like eighty thousand people. I mean, you know, you have to get there, like, I mean, it was almost impossible. It was so crowded when someone as well-known as Bob Hope [was there]. ... Also, if we could get there, because sometimes they would go to Saigon, we weren't allowed to, you know, it wasn't around the block, but yes, I saw a couple of shows that were out there, yes. I don't even remember who they were. They might have been unknown, you know. They have girls dancing, the guys go crazy, and everyone screams, you know. They try break up the monotony as far as the shows are concerned but, yes, they had, I think we had movies, I have the feeling we had a movie projector. I don't even remember, surprisingly, ... we might have. ... There were shows, but I didn't really [go], you know. Like I said

the big shows were usually like in the larger areas, and it was too far away to go, so, you know. The farthest I did, ... when I went on the Mekong Delta to Saigon, and that was interesting. That was very, very interesting. ... I took motion pictures also. ... That was another thing. I had my eight-millimeter camera, and when I went on patrols, I used to take pictures, you know. ... You do crazy things. ... Like I said, the time I had the microphone out, I'm listening to the firing the first time, so, you know, you do things you think, like I say, why you volunteer. I look back now and I say, "What was I, an idiot? What the hell, am I crazy? Why would I volunteer to do patrol?" but you do things. It's like your body, you're out of body, you know, it's not real. ... The whole situation is surreal. ... It's out there, and then, it hit you sometimes. Some days it does hit you, and say, "Wow, I got a month to go. Let's hope everything," you know, but then, I had a guy I used to work with. He was in Vietnam for a year, came home. He was in a canoe, canoe tipped over and he drowned. ... It just shows you, you know, you never know. ... When it's your time, it's your time.

SI: You told us one story about being in the helicopter. ... Was that just to travel from one place to another, or was that part of a patrol?

AS: We had to go someplace, I'm trying to remember. I had to go on the helicopter. We had to go to another place, oh I think to Battery C, and I was in the helicopter, and it was very foggy that day, and it had the gunners on both sides. It's also weird, because when you're in a helicopter, in one of those helicopters, you know, you're not strapped in, and the doors are wide open, and when they tip, you know, you feel like you're going to come out, but it's the centrifugal force that keeps you in there, but it's a wild feeling, because you're just at the edge of your seat, and you're in, you know, but then he got lost in the clouds, and they couldn't find out, they didn't want to fly too low along the trees, because they were afraid, and they were

stuck on the top. ... Finally, the pilot of the helicopter was able to finally, he found a clearing, and we're able to land safely at that battery, but it was hairy at the beginning, because he said, "I don't want to." We were flying low at one point, below the clouds, and we were on the lookout, but thank God nothing, you know, nothing happened, so that was fine. That was fine with me.

JE: You were with the artillery and you were in support of the infantry?

AS: Right.

JE: Did you ever operate in conjunction with the Air Force or other branches?

AS: Not really. Like I say, I have a history of the whole battalion and everything. No, not really. It was basically, like I say, the only ones that we supported were the, there was another artillery unit also, the Second or the Ninety-Fourth I think it was called. I'm not too sure, but since we're dug in so to speak, you know, and we weren't mobile, we would pretty much patrol that particular area, and there was a large hill, you know, called Nuydat, which is that big mountain where they would come from that side, so that's why we constantly bombarded that area and go out on patrols to that area, to keep that whole area, you know, secured. As far as I know, as far as the Air Force, no, no, I don't think, nothing that I can remember of dealing with the Air Force or for that matter the Navy or, you know, anything like that. It was the Aussies we were very close with, and I mean, we dealt with the ARVNs also, you know, as far as certain things, but it was basically, like I say, self-contained. We did everything on our own, the patrols, artillery, you name it, going out on whatever we had to do, and we were dug in. So, no, the Air Force, no, nothing to do with any of the other, you know, divisions, so to speak.

SI: You mentioned a few times that you did not feel you could trust the Vietnamese or you would pass by them. Did you ever have more direct contact with civilians?

AS: Yes, before I went to Nuydat, we were in a place, I said Bien Hoa, I think it was, and there was a nice family there. They did the laundry, dry cleaning and stuff like that, and they had, you know, the whole family, and the daughter was really very pretty, very nice girl, and she liked me, and I liked her and all that stuff, and, you know, I used to kid around with them, and you know. They spoke English, broken-up English, and all that stuff, so I used to associate with them, you know, kidding around, go over whenever they saw me, they liked me and all like that. I mean, they were nice, they were really sweet people, as far as, you know, what I know of, so, you know, I dealt with them. Whenever I went to Vung Tau, I had this little girlfriend named (Dao Dung?), and if I ever went to another bar, she would catch me, and bring me back over, because she was annoyed that I was cheating on her, [laughter] but, yes, her name was (Dao Dung?), cute girl, cute girl. She was one of the, you know, barmaids, but I would just have to hide. Whenever I went down to Vung Tau, I had to go into that bar. She was waiting for me, so I would deal with her, but basically, you know, once I was inside the compound, no. I never dealt with any, aside from going on convoys and passing through all the hamlets and areas like that, or going into Vung Tau, which was the in-country R&R. No, and as I said, with that one couple that was doing the dry cleaning when I was in the other place, when I used to bring my clothes there, I was dealing with them, but no one else. I haven't dealt with none of the ARVN groups or, you know, any of the other Vietnamese.

SI: You left Vietnam in October of '67. Other Vietnam veterans I've talked to in this period said that they could tell that the enemy was building up their forces for the Tet Offensive. Was there any indication of this buildup in your area?

AS: There was talk about the fact, all right, because, you know, obviously that's when Johnson brought in the 400,000 additional, whatever it is, the troops, the year before, when I was, you know, due to go over, so it was building up then. It was definitely, you know, it was the high tide, we had a lot of Americans over there and nothing was letting up. I mean, we had, you know, Viet Cong were all over the place. They were infiltrating with the tunnels and all the rest of the stuff, and, you know, it definitely was not on the downside. There's no two ways about it. It wasn't until the following year, like I said, I mean, whenever was the Tet. I mean, people forget every year was Tet, so we were always on high alert on Tet. There's always something going on Tet, firing or something going on, you know, but of course, the following year was the major one, the Tet Offensive, when they really tried to take over, you know, but every year I remember when I was there, during the Tet thing, we were on high alert, and, you know, it was during the middle of everything, it was very tense during that time. It was a buildup, there were guys constantly being killed and replaced by other guys, you know. I mean, it was the old conveyor belt.

SI: When you were in the hospital, after being wounded, how long were you there for?

AS: You know, it's funny, I don't remember. I don't remember; I just remember being in the hospital in the bed, wrapped up, my head, you know, with the bandages, and my head being the size of a watermelon, and, you know, I just was out of it. I just, you know, I just don't remember. I just don't remember how long I

was there. It could have been a week, it could have been a month; I don't remember. I just remember I went back to my unit, but I can't remember, you know. I was just lying in bed pretty much, and the other guys that were wounded, obviously, but that's one part I don't remember. Just like when I was wounded, and after a while I blacked out, I don't remember what the story was. All I just saw was a bunch of three or four guys staring down at me and looking at me in a dark room in the communication van, but after that, nothing. It wasn't until the next day, where my head was on fire.

SI: Did you have any lasting effects from that wound, or did that heal pretty much?

AS: Yes, it healed, but I was getting headaches and stuff like that, you know. It's a cracked skull, you know, cracked, you know, a little lower it could have gone into my eye. I was very lucky, extremely lucky. I mean, that's why I always say, stay low when a mortar goes off because it spreads, and the lower you are to the ground, the safer you are. ... It mushrooms out, so to speak, so between recoilless firing and especially with mortars, you know, that part I remembered. I said, "You got to stay low. You can't get up. If you stand up, you're going to be dead." You're going to be dead because all the shrapnel comes at you at such fast speeds, it's like a bullet, and it's all, you know, like a razor blade, you know, it just comes right at you, and like I say, when it hit me in the head, it took time for my brain to realize that I was hit, so, you know, I didn't realize that when you get hit in the head, you usually bleed more profusely, you know, it starts to come down, and against a full moon, it's a weird, it was an eerie type of feeling, you know, full moon, and I see like that dark red from the moon. It's a weird kind of, you know, feeling, but no, I mean as far as, you know, just laying low, I just kept on talking to myself and saying, "Whatever you do" especially when you're by yourself, and I was all by myself. I didn't have anyone with me, and I was just crawling on the ground. I was

just, you know, with my rifle. ... When I see things on TV like that, you know, it brings back memories. You put yourself in that place. I say I know how it is, because I did that, I was crawling on the dirt, trying to find safety, you know, and get out of it, and the concentration of the firing from the Viet Cong was right where I was. They were hitting the motor pool area. The tent was where the guard was stationed, so everything was coming around right around me, and I just saw explosions going all around, you know, so the reality of it was, I was waiting for the director to say, "Cut," [laughter] but it doesn't go that way, yes, but thank God, you know. Like I say, thank God, everything, I woke up the next morning, and thank God I was able to see the sun.

SI: How often would you come under attack like that?

AS: It varies, it really does. It could be days and nothing happens. ... You never know. You always have to be on guard, obviously. ... Pretty much the evening times were the times when they would, you know, start firing, and you see the tracers in the skies, and it looked like, you know, Fourth of July. You hear the firing and the guns going off and everything, you know. I mean, it was pretty much the evening time when they sneak up on you. ... The daytime, once in a while, they would, you know, come in there, but it was mostly in the evening time when they would make their move, because during the daytime they could be in their hamlet right down the road, you know. They could be doing whatever they have to do, and at night, they're, you know, Viet Cong. You just don't know, you know. They could be the nicest people in the world in the day, and at night they could be the enemy. There's no front line, there was no front line to fight, you know, just like with, you know, what goes on now. You don't know who's your friend and who's not. I mean, they're wearing clothes, and they weren't dressed in the, you know, Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong. Yes, just wore black pajamas or whatever it

was, and you couldn't tell. You couldn't tell who's on first and, who's on second. ... They say, "You're number one. You're number one." That was the ... line, "You're number one. You're number one GI." That was during the daytime. At nighttime, you might not be number one, so you never know. [laughter] That's why, as I said again, my colonel wouldn't allow anybody in that compound to check out the, you know, the area and see how it looked, to see where the guns were located, or where things were concentrated, or whatever it might be.

JE: Did you receive any awards or decorations?

AS: I was supposed to get a Bronze Star. ... They gave me the Army Commendation Medal. ... I got the Purple Heart and, of course, the Vietnam Service Medal, and stuff like that, but that's pretty much it. ... My captain said they were supposed to be a Bronze Star, but I got the Army Commendation instead.

SI: Was that for a specific action or a meritorious medal?

AS: Meritorious, yes, for being a good boy, good soldier in time of need, the Army Commendation.

SI: How did you make your way back to the States?

AS: Then, we flew, yes, it's funny, ... not by boat, thank God. Yes, we flew to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, got on a Pan Am flight. It was weird, because there was regular ... stewardesses. It was weird, you know, ... and all the guys coming home, and it's funny, because even though it's your last day in the service, now they're fitting you with dress greens just to go home. You have to be dressed in your dress formal greens, so, you know, they fit with you the greens, and it was a long flight. It felt like forever. I mean, you know, from Vietnam all the way to California. Then, when you arrive in California, in Oakland, you sit in a large, like

an armory, which felt like days, and they call you in by groups, and I remember it took me forever. I was in the smallest group. They give you a steak meal when you first get back. You know, you get the steak meal, but I was there like, it felt like two days. I don't know how long until they called me. I didn't want the steak anymore. I wanted to just go home. So, after flying from Vietnam all the way to Oakland, which was like, forget about it. Then, once I'm in California, now I had to book a flight from California back to New York. So, it was a long, long flight, but at least it was by plane. It wasn't, you know, it took a long time. I remember, I got out of the plane, and I had no idea where the hell I was. I took the subway, I got off at the wrong stop. Then, I took a cab. ... Also, my mother--I stopped off at the hospital first--I think she was having a hysterectomy, so she saw me, and she was so excited, and, you know, she hasn't seen me in a year and everything. So she was showing me to all the nurses and everything. ... I went home.

JE: What was the food like in Vietnam?

AS: Well, we had the rations at first, with the cans and all that crap. Oh God, everything tastes the same of course, you know. Eventually, we had a cook, and they start cooking, but, you know, a lot of times when it's a hundred degrees out and hundred percent humidity, you're really not that hungry. ... I have pictures of me, I weighed maybe I had like a, oh, I don't know, twenty-eight inch waist or something. I was skinny like all hell. I never really ate that much over there honestly. I mean, I would eat. I couldn't take, if they made S-O-S, "Shit On a Shingle," I couldn't eat that. The Southern boys loved that, they would say, "Dish it onto me. Just give it to me." They loved that stuff. I couldn't eat that stuff if you paid me, but I mean, some of the stuff was the same crap that I just couldn't eat. I mean, I would eat the spaghetti and the tomato sauce, I would eat that stuff, but like I say sometimes it was so hot and all that stuff, that you just don't feel like

eating. ... It was the humidity and, you know, that's the farthest thing from your mind. Even if you're hungry, you just don't feel like eating, so, but at the beginning we had the rations, and then eventually we were able to have, you know, a cook prepare the meals or whatever it was so, you know, and then, of course they always had chips or something you can buy, I guess, you know, potato chips and crap like that, they had. So, you'd munch on that crap, and of course, you could fill your belly up with beer ... to kill time.

SI: Were you able to have regular hours sleeping when you are over there?

AS: ... In the beginning I said, when I had all the rats and all the scorpions and the snakes and all that, I couldn't sleep. I was in my cot and every noise, every movement, I said, "Oh shit." I said, "Who the hell? Oh, man," I said, "Is there going to be a rat looking right at my face or is there going to be a scorpion coming right towards me?" So, at the beginning, it was just a weird feeling to sleep, but after a while, I mean, you have to wake up early, that's the old Army, regardless, you're waking up early. I mean, there are times, like I said, when you're on guard duty you got to be up during the night. I mean, it's never really a fantastic sleep, you know. You're not really, you know, that comfortable when you're sleeping on a cot or sleeping on a weird type of bed type of thing. ... I don't remember having the greatest sleeps at all, you know. You wake up in the middle of the night, there are guys maybe playing cards in the middle of the night. There's always movement. You're not the only one around, you know. There are people, you know, around you that you are with, you know, the privacy is not a word to be reckoned with, you know. I mean, everybody is, yes, privacy is not the thing. Everything is open, everything, there's no such thing as privacy when you're there, and after a while you say, "To hell with it. That's it. What are you going to do?" That's the name of the game.

JE: Did routines ever become relaxed while you were in Vietnam, such as saluting officers?

AS: It depends on the officer. I mean, you know, you're walking by an officer-- some officers were really nice, you know. I mean, let's face it. You're all together, every time, even they didn't want it, because you would have to salute every damn time an NCO would pass you by, so, you know, but there were some officers who would say, "Hey, come back here. How come you didn't salute?" or something like that, but, you know, I mean, did I salute my adjutant? I don't think I saluted him, and he was a real tough, you know. He was like a real Napoleon type of guy, my officer, but once you're in the compound, it wasn't really, you know, I never saw anyone reprimanded. I saw maybe a couple. Like I said, there's always a couple of second lieutenants, you know, would be, you know, would bitch off at the fact that you didn't salute them, but once you're in that state of, you know, combat, ... it's almost secondary, so to speak, you know. I mean, the protocol as far as everyone, you know, doing their thing, and once we were established and everything was all set up, it was working pretty smooth, I have to say. It was working pretty smooth. Everything was working pretty good, and we all wanted to get the hell out of there. [laughter]

SI: Did you take any time off when you came out of the service or did you get right back into college?

AS: I took some time off. I'm trying to think if I went back to Brooklyn College, because I remember, I think I did before, and then I switched to Baruch, because when I went back to Brooklyn College, I couldn't concentrate. ... I just couldn't do it. I couldn't study, I couldn't do anything, and I remember talking to my professor, and I said, you know, "I just can't do this. I just came back from Vietnam, and my

mind is just not with it," and surprisingly he was compassionate, and he said, "If you want to drop the course, I'll let you drop the course," and I dropped it, because I just couldn't concentrate. It wasn't the best time of my life to, you know, to acclimate myself into studies and all that, so I did take, I think, a semester off. ... I was working also. I did go back to work. I had that job, you know, in the title industry, and then I said, "This is bullshit." I said, "I got to get out of here. I can't keep on going at night," and I applied for Baruch, and that's when they said, "Okay, fine." I went daytime, and I got out at like twelve o'clock. I took early courses, and then, I went to work after that instead so, you know, and then, I, you know, finished it off, but when I got back, I really wasn't in the mood for, I didn't have it in me to do my studies. I just didn't have it in me. I needed to like chill out a little bit before I started to get back, and if anything, you know, writing reports and all the rest of the stuff, so, you know, at least, and Brooklyn College wasn't for me. ... I didn't know what I wanted to do, I didn't know what to major in, and one guy in the Army was also in college, and he says, you know, "You ought to go like for marketing and stuff like that. That's the thing of the future," and I said, "You know, you've got a point there," and at that time Baruch was Baruch. It was, you know, it was strictly two people. They either had marketing or the accountants, and you could always tell the difference between the two, all right. The accountants had the glasses on, you know. So, finally I said, you know, "I'll major in marketing research." ... I mean, not that I use it, and I'm definitely not sorry I didn't go for my degree, but I already had this thing that I was working on already, and was building up and up and up, and eventually my reputation got to be where I almost had an exclusive, working in all of, I do Manhattan real estate, so, title searching. So, from starting out as a young kid, you know, doing work on the side, while I was working for this company. I eventually left the company, and like I said, I had no intention of staying with it, but it got so big, that I actually got spoiled that, like I said

before, I couldn't get a job which was going to make it better for me, and it got so busy with me, that I couldn't even handle it. I was dealing with hundreds of titles, I mean, I've done Rockefeller Center, Empire State Building, you name it. There's not one building in Manhattan I haven't done, you know, complicated buildings, and I have been doing it now for, you know, so many years now, you know. I slackened off, because it was just too much. I was driving in everyday to the city. I was waking up at 3:30 every morning to do work. I was doing work before I went to work, and then, I would drive into the city, work around the clock, never eat, smoke like a chimney, which I gave up years ago, come home, eat dinner, and go into my office at home, and do more work, so I was working around the clock, and not for me anymore. I couldn't do it if I wanted to. There's no way, but like I said, I paid my dues all the way, you know, and as I said before, I wanted to make something of myself. I said after seeing what happens, you know, how easy life could be, how quick and, you know, it could be over with, you got to make, and I don't want to sound, you know, like "cutsie" type, but you really got to make the best you can out of it, and that's what I tried to do.

SI: What year did you start your own firm?

AS: I worked for a company starting in '63 as soon as I got out of high school working for ... Chicago Title. ... I was drafted in '65. I'm trying to think now, when I got out of the service in '67, I went back to Chicago, and I was just more or less like a clerk. I wasn't doing full-time examination, just like running names, ... money judgments and all that, and I was working out of Brooklyn, down by Willoughby Street, in the Supreme Court over there, and they told me, "Well, we have an opening for you. Could you examine in New York?" and I lied. I didn't know how to examine. I just knew how to do the basic stuff. So, they sent me to New York, and all the examiners at that time were all attorneys. A lot of them also

were from Cuba, it was during that time that a lot of judges and all that from, you know, Castro. They all came to, you know, to New York, so they went into the title industry, so I learned from all these attorneys. I was about the only non-attorney, and I picked it up, and as I did it, I used to run for other examiners. I used to run name searches at a dime a name, all right, and little by little, picking it up on my own, I start, you know, picking it up with other guys and learning on my own and asking questions, and as I said before, companies start to say, "Okay." Then, I start to do cooperative searches which became very big in the '60s and '70s. I worked for this one company as a freelance examiner doing co-op searches, and I was making good money, comparatively, you know, and then they start to give me their titles, and then, from there, you know, you have title companies and there's abstract companies. The abstract companies are the small companies that insure for the title companies. So, little by little, I eventually had a monopoly on mostly every company in Manhattan. I couldn't even handle it, I had people working for me and all that stuff, so it built up to a point, you know, everything is your reputation, and some companies thought that I was the only one that can do New York titles. Now, it's a whole different ballgame, the whole industry has changed. So, I stayed with it, and like I said, it was a temporary permanency. It started to build up where I was just doing everything on all the titles I was doing, and the co-ops I was doing and the biggest buildings in Manhattan, you know. Only in Manhattan I do, with all the fancy condos and all that, and it just, you know, snowballed to a situation where I've been doing it now for, you know, over forty-five years already. It's funny, if it wasn't for the fact, like I said, that one instance of your life changes everything. If it wasn't for the fact that ... my mother told me to go to this personnel company, and they sent me to Chicago Title. I mean, this was just going to be temporarily while I was, you know, going to school, and who knows? That one difference means the difference of ... where I am today, and it turned out to be

a plus in that respect. It materialized, and it got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger, and, you know, I stayed with it all these years, and now it's time to close up shop pretty much. ... I hate to go to New York now as far as that's concerned. I'm also getting one hundred percent disability. I'm up for my social security now starting in December at sixty-six, so I'll be getting that. I'm not looking to rule the world anymore. When I was twenty-five, I was looking to rule the world, not anymore. I paid my dues, I did what I had to do, and I'm not sorry in anything about that. ...

SI: When did you come to New Jersey?

AS: We moved here, I got married in--my wife will kill me if I don't know--'73, was it? We lived in Brooklyn, and then we, when I was starting to do okay, I remember we moved, we were looking out to Jersey. I didn't want to move to Long Island. We had been out to Jersey, and I remember a lot of people said, "You sure you know what you're doing, buying a house now?" ... I was twenty-seven, whatever the hell I was, and I said, "Look," you know, "If you don't try it, you're never going to know. You're never going to go anywhere," so they were building a new development down in Freehold, and we lived there for what, seventeen, eighteen years in Freehold, and it worked out perfect. I mean it got to a point, not to brag, but you know, when I was thirty-four or something, I bought my Porsche 911 Targa. I mean, life was great, you know. I was doing very well, and my wife is far from being a materialistic person. I was the one that wanted it, you know, I was running after my own tail to see, and then eventually, like I said, we bought the property here years ago, and we didn't build until six years later, and then, when the market was all the way down, I told my wife, "If we don't do it now we're never going to do it." I always wanted to have a custom home and things worked out

great. We got the home, and, you know, the rest is history so to speak, so, you know, between Freehold and here, and as I said, I wanted to get away from it. ...

SI: How did you meet your wife?

AS: It was on a blind date. My cousin actually was going out with this one girl, and this girl had a best friend, which happened to be my wife, so I wanted to go out with the one that he was seeing. I didn't even see my wife then, because it was a blind date, until we walked in the door, but it turns out that I went with my wife, and we just, you know, hit it off. I think she liked it when I was in the elevator going out back, and I said, "Just to be informal, could you tell me what your first name is?" So, I think she liked that. So, you know, one thing led to the next, and, you know, eventually we got married. We've been married now almost forty years. This May will be forty years, a long time.

SI: Congratulations.

AS: You know, a son and a daughter, so I've completed, now that I'm a grandpa, I've completed the cycle. [laughter]

SI: You mentioned you were in Manhattan on 9/11. Did that bring back a lot of memories? Can you share some other memories from that day?

AS: Ah, yes, that was amazing, yes. That was also very surreal. ... It was amazing, because I'm walking, leaving the Supreme Court doing research, I'm going back to the city register, I mean, there was word that the plane hit. We thought it was a small plane and ... the whole story, and I'm right walking down. I'm looking up, I still see that image. I'm looking up, and I'm looking at the fires and everything coming out of the World Trade Center. I mean, everybody is, you could see their faces, they're like in shock, and, you know, no one could use the cell phones,

everything was dead, and I just couldn't believe it. It was just amazing, and I got back from the city register's office. Everyone was like in a state of, you know, panic, and then, I remember calming a woman who was freaking out, this black woman was freaking out. I tried to calm her down in the lobby, and then, all of a sudden, I was out like in the vestibule in the building, and I see everyone running down the street. I thought it was another plane coming, it was the other tower coming down, and it was causing a, like a tsunami. It was causing a, you know, all that, it was coming on the street, all that stuff, so people were running to get out of the way, because people that got stuck were all turning with that white ash that they had and all that, so I went back into the building. Most of the people I think had left at this point. I stayed with my friend because there was no way for me to get back. I lived in Jersey. How am I going to go home? So, we waited some time. I remember it was weird, because this was like nighttime, when the cloud of smoke, everything turned dark, there was no sunlight. It was really wild, I mean, you looked out, totally dark. So, finally we stayed there for a couple of hours. We left. We walked down the street. We were the only ones. Everything was all gray, it was like what they show in the pictures. It was just so, again, surreal. It was just like a movie, and he lived in Staten Island, so we figured how are we going to get, you know, how are we going to get back to his house. He said, "Stay over my house," because I had no way of getting back home. I couldn't get to my car, that's for damn sure. I parked on the Westside, and we got a ride. There was one train that went to a certain point which we got off. We were in the middle of somewhere in Brooklyn, and there was a nice guy, actually he was, I think he was a Muslim actually. He had a car, and he offered us a ride to the Verrazano. ... We got into his car. We drove to the Verrazano, we got off. There were people waiting for a bus, which never would come. There was a guy with a pickup truck, and we jumped on the pickup truck. He drove us over to the Verrazano, and then we walked from the

Verrazano to his house. So, I stayed there for a couple of days, because all the bridges were closed and everything like that and all the rest of the stuff, and finally, when it was opened up, my wife came. ... She picked me up when they opened up the Verrazano, but now I wanted to know about my car, so I couldn't find out. ... It was a hot zone over there, the headquarters was right where I parked my car on (West?) Street. I parked on an outside parking lot for years, I parked there, it was self-parking, and I couldn't get down there, as a matter-of-fact you couldn't even get from where I was, I remember I had to walk all the way around from to Chinatown to come back again because everything was cordoned off, the entire area, so it wasn't until weeks later, because I couldn't tell, I could never go down to that area, every block was closed off. So, finally, which helped me when I went to each corner, there was a guy from the Reserve or from the, you know, and I showed him my Purple Heart card alright, and that was like my key to open up. I said, "Look, I got to come down. I want to see if my car is still down here," you know, "I just want to go to next block," and when they saw that card, the Vietnam card and the Purple Heart card, they let me go. So, after every block, I had to show, and eventually I got down to the main center where there was a tent there or something, you know, and I said, "I want to see if my car is, you know," and I showed, and the sergeant came over and, you know, because I showed him the card, and I went to the parking lot and my car wasn't there anymore, it was completely gone. I don't know what happened to it, and I had everything in there. ... The funny thing about it, it was almost a year to the day, we got a phone call, my wife got a phone call, and it was one of the investigators or whatever it was from ... the federal government, and he said, "We have all your belongings from your car." I couldn't believe it, because I had my Porsche glasses in there, I had my CDs and everything. I never thought I'd ever see it, and he wanted to meet my wife, and my wife was kind of leery, so he lived out here in Jersey, in Matawan,

and she met him in A&P over here, and I couldn't believe it, a year later, I got all the stuff, but the car was, you know, but the insurance companies at that time felt guilty they had to give, you know, they gave me, we got another car for, you know, from insurance obviously, so they gave us another car, but walking across, I'll always remember looking back and we had to cross over the Manhattan bridge, and you saw all of New York City, the skyline, down in lower Manhattan. I mean, you could see it on TV but to see it live was just totally amazing, totally amazing. It was like a movie that you really thought they're going to say, "Cut." You saw all the smoke across the whole thing, and we were like the, you know, the immigrants leaving, we're all walking over the Manhattan Bridge. They had us all, like a large formation of people leaving Manhattan, but every time you turned their head over around and looked at New York City, it was just amazing. I mean, it was really totally freaking out, I mean totally, so, but thank God, I had a person that worked with me, her husband was a fireman, and I know whom, and there was the guy, the Chaplain [Mychal] Judge I think his name was, yes, he was the one that fell on this guy and killed him. ... It's sad, and a couple of people I know, you know, it was some day, that was another part of my life which was totally interesting.

SI: Do you have any other questions?

JE: Going back to when you came back to the United States, considering that the Tet Offensive happened relatively soon after you left the service, did you follow what was happening in Vietnam on the news?

AS: Well, watching the people burning their, you know, draft cards, it bothered me. Even though I was less hawkish, it bothered me the fact that, you know, they were blaming, like I said, looking at the Vietnam vet as, you know, baby killers and look at what we're doing and, you know, that type of situation. So, yes, I kept

up with it, definitely. Yes, like I said, even to this day, like, you know, I have to watch things in Afghanistan or Iraq or all that. I have to watch it because it's my obligation. It's my homework, I have to see it, you know, so, yes, I was watching it. I was annoyed, but I was also very confused. I couldn't figure everything out, I couldn't put the things in the right places, because, you know, after coming back and seeing what happened and seeing what was going on in the United States, ... it confused me. In one respect, I said I understand what they're saying, "Let's get the hell out of this damn place," you know and on the other side I'm saying, "But wait a second, you know, don't take it out on the Vietnam vet, you know." I mean, it was kind of a weird feeling, but no, I definitely, you know, I wanted out, even then I started to say, "This is totally ludicrous. Guys are dying for no reason." They're dying in vain, and there's no purpose at all in this whole situation, because one day we're going to be taking cruises there, and PS--we're taking cruises there. It always happens that way, you know, it always happens that way. It's going to happen to all the other places also, you know, so who knows, and especially now with Iraq. As soon as we get out of there, they're going to be killing each other again and all that. They're going to be fighting, you know. I see no purpose in the fact that we have to wipe their ass. It's not going to work, ... especially with Afghanistan, you know. It's just a third world country and they don't want democracy. They live by whatever their warlords say, the warlords say this, and this is what they want. They don't want democracy, and ... were giving billions of dollars and guys are dying every day for no freaking reason, and that's the part that kills me. That's the part that rips my heart out. For no reason guys are dying, absolutely none, so I've changed in that respect from being hawkish to the point of saying, "Let's go in there and blow them away," to the point of saying, "Let's get the hell out of here, and let some of the other countries worry about it." ...

SI: Have you gone to the National Vietnam Memorial or the one here in New Jersey?

AS: Yes, it's funny. I've never gone to one in New Jersey. I've gone to one in DC. I saw the new one also, the World War II Memorial, which is an amazing thing. ... I feel proud of the fact that up in New Windsor, the Purple Heart Museum, I have my name up in there on the honor roll for people that have, you know, the Purple Heart, so I'm up there. I'd like to go up there and visit that museum up in, I think it's in New Windsor, upstate New York, some place up there. I would love to visit that place, but yes, it's a very trying time when you look at the wall and everything else, and, you know, it's very moving, very, very moving. As a matter-of-fact, the other day when I went to see my daughter in the hospital when she had the baby, I had my baseball cap on, my Purple Heart hat on, all right, and when you have to go into that ward, you know, the ward where the babies are or whatever, and you have to sign in, there was a guy behind the glass, and then, they open up the door, and I sign in, and I went in, and the guy got up, the officer got up. I didn't know what he wanted, I was already in the door, and he put out his hand. He said, you know, "Thank you very much," and I still get very emotional with that, when people still say, "Welcome home." I still, forty some odd years later when they say, "Welcome home," and "Thank you," it blows me. I break down. He shook my hand. ... He said, "Thank you for serving," ... and "Welcome home." I just lose it. ... On the back of my bumper sticker on my car, it says, I have a sticker that says, "It's never too late to thank a Vietnam vet," and someone wrote, I had one of those little things on the back about supporting, it's all worn away, the ribbon, someone wrote down recently, I was at Wegmans, they wrote down, you know, "Thank you," on it with a pen, which was very nice. I said, "Aww," but when someone says, you know, "Welcome home," and it sounds kind of weird, you know, forty some odd

years later, and they say, "Welcome home," it still hits me. It's the greatest feeling in the world when they say "Welcome home," and "Thank you for, you know, for ... supporting of our country." It's very emotional for me, extremely emotional to me, no matter who says it, so. I don't want to tear up again.

SI: Is there anything that you would like to add for the record that we may have skipped over?

AS: Well, I told my life history with the Vietnam thing. I just, like I said, I'm tired of the fact that the United States has to be the forefront of everyone, and the other countries just move back, and I just don't see the purpose of it, what's going on now. My wife is way more liberal than I am. I mean, I was hoping that we'd be out of there, and now we still have to wait, and we're going to eventually, you know, send our boys home, but there will always be a contingency there. ... It just drives me crazy, you know. I mean, there are certain things that just, you know, I just can't see the logic of it. I just want this all to end, and of course, it's so easy to say, "No more war," but it doesn't prove anything. ... World War II, I can understand. I can't understand these last couple of wars. It doesn't make any sense to me, too many guys died, too many young guys died--nineteen, twenty. Like I say, when I see the Lehrer Report, it just drives me up the wall, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, all these guys with families, and it just, there's no purpose, no purpose. ... I've changed dramatically on it. I am more of a "peacenik" than anything else. That's basically where I stand now.

JE: How does it make you feel, years later, when it was revealed that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was at least a little fabricated in order to get involved in Vietnam?

AS: Well, sometimes, you know, we look to go into things, you know, as far as, so we have a chance to, you know, to go in there. There's reasons to retaliate, and

there's reasons not to, like with the Cole incident, you know, there was a reason to retaliate. ... They blow a hole in there and they killed some guys. You go in there and finish these guys off, all right. Some of the other things, you know, like with the bombing of Cambodia and all that other stuff, no, absolutely not, you know. I mean, where's it leading to? It's not suppressing the situation. It's putting more, you know, fuel on the fire. ... Some of that stuff it's almost like, you know, we're looking for that in, so we can get in there. I don't know, maybe it's because of the generals, ... they want to try their new toys out, you know. They always say that, they build the new things, and they say, you know, "Well, we tried it. It's great, but we're never going to know until we're actually in combat, so let's start a war, and this way you could see exactly," you know. [laughter] I mean, the amount of money that's spent on defense now and all that bullshit that they're buying, jet planes that don't work, and all the rest of the crap. Like I say, I don't see the purpose of it. I don't see the purpose, I know we have to, you know, put a large amount in our budget for defense, there's no two ways about it, but I don't know. ... I'm becoming an isolationist now. I'm saying, "Screw the rest of the world. Let them fight their own war." I'm tired of bringing the Americans in there to fight and support and die for whatever reason. ... It's almost not worth it.

JE: You said on your pre-interview survey that your uncle was a World War II veteran.

AS: Yes, he was a tail gunner apparently in World War II. The funny thing about it, he always said, "You got to serve your country. You got to serve your country." He used to tell my mother, "You got to serve your country, and if you're called, you've got to serve your country." Well, I went. When his son [was called] he didn't want his son to go. So it's was funny what real life brings, all right. You know, "One for the gipper, you've got to go and fight." Next door neighbor--

Johnny Got His Gun (1938), that famous book, ever heard that? I loved that. I couldn't put it down. It was a very famous book that was banned years ago where the politicians talk, "You've got to fight for your country. You've got to go," and blah, blah, blah, except that one guy loses his left arm, his right arm, and his right leg, and he's blind, he's deaf, all from the war. ... I read it years ago, and it just shows you how bad the war is about all right, I mean, you know. It's not the politicians, it's the next door neighbor that has to fight the war. It's "Joe Blow" that has to fight the war, all right. So, I mean, really thank God my son, I mean thank God my son didn't have to go. I really mean that, had to make the point of saying if he had to go to Canada, as much as I love this country more than anything else, I would say, because after seeing what it's all about, it's not worth it, it's not worth it. ... Well, that's my own opinion. I see these things, I just don't see the purpose of it. I don't know what the other veterans say to you when you. I mean, a lot of them are gung ho, and I understand the fact, ... people against the thing of, you know, Iraq and you'll see the veterans, you know, saying on the other side, but there are more and more veterans now, you know, on the side of what I'm thinking like, you know, after seeing, especially this type of thing, you know, I just can't see, you know. I just can't see the purpose of it. I just cannot see the purpose. War is--I don't know, too many good people die. If they had politicians--I always say they should have politicians in a ring, with either boxing gloves or no boxing gloves, and let them fight and see if they want, let the world work it that way. ... Let the diplomats fight the fight. ... For some reason, they always seem to get, you know, their children get excused from it, always, very rarely do you find somewhere where, you know. It's always the guy next door that has to fight. It's sad to say, it's also the underprivileged, because, you know, a lot of the people, you know, don't have the opportunity, they're not going to school, they're not educated, so they go to the Army, and they say it's always the, a lot of the minorities, you know, that

fight our wars. ... I give them all the respect in the world on that. Every veteran, I give him, you know, all the respect in the world and all that jazz.

SI: Well, unless you would like to add anything else, we appreciate all your time, and thank you for your service.

AS: I appreciate your concern about something like this. I hope I did it right.

SI: Yes, I think people will benefit from your memories, thank you.

AS: Thank you.

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Reviewed by Alexandra McKinnon 10/21/12

Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 10/25/12

Reviewed by Tracey Vegvari 7/1/26