Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I’m conducting an interview with Mr. Don Timmer. It is January 6, 2003. I’m located at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, Texas at the Special Collections Library in the interview room, and Mr. Timmer, you’re in Plano, Texas, and before we get into the meat of our discussion sir, could you give us some basic biographical information on yourself. When and where were you born?

Don Timmer: I was born in Troy, Ohio in 1936, August 1936.

RV: Okay, did you grow up in Troy?

DT: Actually in Tipp City, which is a little town about six miles from Troy, yes I grew up there and graduated from high school.

RV: Tipp City. Okay. And where is that located in Ohio?

DT: It’s about fifteen miles north of Dayton.

RV: What was life like you in Tipp City?

DT: Oh it was just a small three thousand people town where everybody knew everybody, and it was life like we would like it to be today.

RV: And how was that?

DT: Well, like I said everybody knew everybody, you had a good time, you didn’t feel the pressures of the world.

RV: So you were kind of insulated from what else was?
DT: Pretty much, yes, pretty much.
RV: How many siblings did you have?
DT: I had one sister.
RV: Okay, was she older or younger than you?
DT: Younger.
RV: And what do you remember most about your childhood?
DT: I had an excellent childhood, just grew up playing sports, very active all the way through school, and had a lot of friends and it just seemed like we always had a good time.
RV: Did you work any jobs while you were young?
DT: I had a paper route, worked in a grocery store, and my dad owned a tomato cannery and I worked there every year.
RV: So he ran a factory, canning tomatoes?
DT: Yes, he had a tomato cannery, he canned tomatoes and during this tomato season [for commercial sale].
RV: Did your mother work?
DT: She only worked at the cannery during the season.
RV: You were born in 1936 so I guess; do you have some memories of World War II?
DT: Well, yes. I guess my biggest memory was, I was only seven or eight when that [WWII] broke out but my uncle had given me seven or paper customers, and we had a big extra to put out the day that that happened or the next day, and I remember that, and remember some of the film clips as we used to go to the movies. You always used to have the news come on first before the movies, and you’d always see all the war happenings and I remember parts of that.
RV: Did you have any of your relatives that served in the war?
DT: I had an uncle in the Navy.
RV: And did you get to talk to him after the war? Did he survive?
DT: Afterwards, yes. He actually went in after [the war started]. It was about ’43 when he went in, came out in about ’46 so he missed the Pearl Harbor, that part of it, but he spent most of his time at sea in the Pacific.
RV: And when he returned you were able to talk to him about his experiences?
DT: Oh, he talked about it a little bit. He was not one to really say a whole lot. I think he was just a young seaman aboard ship, and I don’t think they saw much action according to what he said.

RV: Was he any kind of influence upon you, you going into the military?
DT: No, not really.
RV: So, were you a good student growing up?
DT: A pretty good student. We only had a small class, forty or fifty people and I was probably in the top ten percent.

RV: Okay, what were your favorite subjects in high school?
DT: Always math.
RV: Really.
DT: Always math, yes.
RV: Did you have a natural inclination toward math?
DT: Pretty much; it came pretty easy.
RV: And your grades, were they fair, were they pretty good?
DT: Yes, I probably graduated at that time [4th in the class]. They didn’t do the four-point system, but I’d have probably been about a 3.7 or something like that.
RV: How would, would you describe your childhood there in Tipp City as ordinary or after the war did it change?
DT: No, I don’t think we saw much change after the war other than I remember the ration stamps and those kinds of things that were more available, that you heard your parents talk about. But other than that, no, I’d say thing pretty much--I started school in ‘42, which was during the war, and I don’t think I remember much change as we went through school.
RV: Was education emphasized in the household?
DT: Yes.
RV: Okay. Was there any kind of expectation for you to go to college after you finished high school?
DT: Oh yes I think that was expected.
RV: Okay, what did your parents tell you about education? How did they influence you to do it?

DT: Well they just pretty much said, “Do the best that you possibly can, and get everything out of school that you can because it will help you later in life.”

RV: Okay, and did you want to go to college after you graduated?

DT: Yes. Yes, I looked forward to going to college.

RV: What year did you graduate high school?

DT: 1954.

RV: Do you have memories of the Korean War, that had to be while you were in high school?

DT: Yes, I remember probably again, going to the movies. They used to have the newscast, and that was just the beginning of TV, and I remember very vividly when McArthur got fired and came back, that part.

RV: Do you remember what your parents’ opinion was of the Korean War?

DT: I don’t think it was ever discussed very much at that time. We lived in, I guess we lived in a small town that really wasn’t affected very much, and it just, that just didn’t seem to be a big topic like it probably is nowadays.

RV: Okay, so 1954 when you graduated high school, how did you decide, I know you went to the Naval Academy, but how did you decide to go?

DT: Well I actually had applied to the local Congressman and taken his test, which he used to give, just the civil service exam at that time, and I was designated as the third alternate, and I passed all through his tests and went on up to Great Lakes, took the physical, and I found out that I had a hernia that I’d had since birth I guess that nobody ever knew I had. So that disqualified me. So I came back and asked if I could be considered for the next year. I was going to have the hernia repaired, which I did, and oh, the first part of June I got a telegram says if you pass the physical report to Anapolis three weeks after the starting time, as we didn’t fill all of our quotas, and we’re taking the alternates. And that’s the story. I got in on a shoestring, other than that I was all set up to go to the University of Kentucky.

RV: Okay, what year did you enter the Naval Academy?

DT: 1954.
RV: So how did your parents feel about you going to a military academy, versus a
college?

DT: Oh, I think they were really very proud. It was probably the best scholarship
around you could get, so I think they were happy.

RV: Now why did you choose the Naval Academy versus something else?

DT: No, I just said any one of the academies, and of course there was only two,
that and West Point, and that’s the one I happened to get in, be selected for.

RV: And did you have aspirations to go on into the Navy particularly?

DT: No, not really. I was just a young kid from Ohio that didn’t really know what
I was getting into.

RV: Looking back do you feel like you made a good decision at that time?

DT: Oh yes it was excellent; I’d do it all over again.

RV: Okay, well tell me about going to Annapolis, and what that was like for you.

DT: Well it was very different, although I didn’t find it totally that tough because
I can pretty well listen. I brought up in a pretty disciplined household, so discipline really
wasn’t that big of a problem, and I found the studies a little tougher than I’d been used to,
because I got through high school without doing much extra studying, but I found I had
to really study harder at the academy than I’d ever studied. Although it wasn’t hard
because you weren’t allowed out [off campus], you weren’t allowed to go out drinking or
do anything at night. You were there, so everybody else was doing the same thing, so it
wasn’t like I wish I could do what he was doing.

RV: What do you remember about your plebe year?

DT: Plebe year was very different. They had a lot of discipline; you had lots of
things to do. And again, I found out very quickly if you kept your mouth shut and did
what you were told that they didn’t pick on you. They were looking for people that were
resistive and trying to shape those kind of people up so, my plebe year was really not that
bad.

RV: So you were able to fit in with that military discipline without much
problem?

DT: Yes.

RV: Okay. Did math continue to be one of your strong subjects?
DT: Yes, I did better in math. Well, I did fairly well because most of the
curriculum at that time was engineering oriented. Everybody did the same thing except
you had a choice of language. Now they give a lot of choices on even degrees, but at that
time everybody did the same thing.

RV: Which language did you chose?
DT: Spanish.
RV: Why Spanish?
DT: I’d had two years of Spanish in high school, so I figured that would be easier
going that route, because language even in high school wasn’t my cup of tea.
RV: Right. What about history and political science?
DT: I did pretty well in history. I liked history. Of course we got a lot of military
history and that was very interesting to me.
RV: And what about the other years; after your first year, what do you remember
most about those years?
DT: Well, you know, you had the football, the sports. We were there during the,
some pretty good football years. You had your summer cruises. We went to Spain one
year. We went to South America another year. We got to go off on a carrier cruise one
summer; fly off a carrier in an airplane so they give you a pretty good smattering of what
the military life was going to be. We went down to Virginia Beach one year and played
Marine for six weeks, and that pretty well told you what you were going to do if you
went into the Marine Corps. That plus just the studies, time went by very quickly. You
didn’t have much; there was very little leisure time.
RV: Did you feel after going on these summer cruises that the Navy was
something that you would want to pursue doing that sort of thing or something else?
DT: No, I didn’t really think that the surface Navy is what I really wanted to do. I
wanted to fly, but I had a background of asthma that I knew was probably going to be
disqualifying. So I thought that either the Civil Engineering Corps in the Navy or
something similar was where I wanted to go. It got down to, they drew numbers for your
selection [first duty]. I take that back, we did it by class standing, and I was about six
hundred out of nine hundred. So I didn’t get the top choices, so that’s the reason I
decided to go in the Air Force and possibly end up going into, being able to fly there.
RV: Now had you always wanted to fly?

DT: No, but it just seemed that the more you learned about the military, that flying was the way to do more; achieve more. Get farther in where you’re trying to go.

RV: Were you certain that you were going to make the military your career or did you want to serve your active and then?

DT: No, I thought, at that time we had three years obligation, and I’d felt that I’d give the three years a go, and see what everything was like at time, see how it was. If I liked it as well as I had the military up to that time.

RV: How would you rate the training you received there in Annapolis?

DT: Oh, A-1, top notch.

RV: And so when you, when you graduated, where did you get to go? How were you chosen?

DT: I selected the Air Force. Then they selected that I was going to go to supply school, be a supply officer, which I felt was an interim route until I can become qualified to fly, because they had disqualified me to fly. So I went to Amarillo, the first three months for supply training, and then on to Mac Dill Air Force Base in Florida.

RV: Okay, let me ask you about the physical training that you received in Annapolis, how was that for you?

DT: Everybody had to do physical education. Everybody had to participate in sports whether it be intramural or what level, you had to do that. So there was a lot of physical training although we didn’t have any regular PT as such after plebe year, plebe summer. We didn’t do that. You had enough other, because you had to pass a swimming test, you had to pass a wrestling test, you had to pass a boxing test, you had to participate in all these different things, and then you were graded on them too. So, they kept you in pretty good shape.

RV: Had you participated in sports in high school?

DT: Yes.

RV: What did you do?

DT: I was pretty much basketball and baseball.

RV: I guess you couldn’t escape basketball there in Kentucky could, it was so very popular at that time, in the ‘50s.
DT: Yes.
RV: So did you participate in sports beyond what was required for you at Annapolis?
DT: I tried out for the varsity baseball but I didn’t make that, so I played junior varsity baseball, and I played just on your company sports. They made your company that you were in, competed against all the other companies, and sports was a very big thing. So it was almost, well, it was probably more competitive than it was at the high school level.
RV: Now were you--What position did you play in baseball?
DT: I usually played infield, and I did a little pitching.
RV: Okay, so when you left Annapolis you went to Amarillo. Tell me what happened in Amarillo.
DT: It was just a short, three-month course that we went through. Learned the basics of how to be a supply officer. Nothing really outstanding happened there, just looked forward to moving on someplace else.
RV: How much in touch were you with your family?
DT: I was married. I’d gotten married after we graduated, and my wife was with me and of course we stayed in touch with family back at home just by phone, but there was no family in the area, and there was no family in Florida.
RV: Okay, so after Amarillo tell me where you went.
DT: Went to Mac Dill Air Force Base in Florida.
RV: What was it like there at Mac Dill?
DT: Well it was a, I thought it was hot and sultry. We didn’t really care for the area. It turned out we were not really beach type people, so we rarely [went to the beach], actually ended up only being there about nine months.
RV: What did you do there, what were you trained for?
DT: I was a supply officer. I ran a couple different stores, sales stores, and I had a mirage of different odd jobs that they give second lieutenants, I guess the one that was the farthest out was I was the base mortuary officer.
RV: Oh wow, what was that like?
DT: Well, you just had to, if you had an active duty death, you had to be the base representative to determine how the body would be disposed of, get it to a funeral home, be in touch in the family of course in conjunction with the chaplains, and you just handled the whole funeral part from the military part [aspect], whether it was the honors or whatever you had to do, and then you had the duty of making sure that the body was, as they call it “properly taken care of.” So I spent a lot of time, we actually, I had about nine in the nine months, so I spent a good deal of time at the local mortuary there in town.

RV: Did you volunteer for that or?

DT: No. No, they volunteered me.

RV: Were you paid for that separate from your?

DT: No, no that just all part of your $221 a month.

RV: Okay. What other jobs did you do besides supply officer?

DT: That was basically it there, between the mortuary and clothing sales, and that was pretty much full time.

RV: And this was considered your active duty. So after the three months in Amarillo and nine months at Mac Dill, you still had a couple of years to go?

DT: Yes, well what I’d done while I was at Amarillo, or at Mac Dill I guess, I got myself qualified to go to flight training or navigator training.

RV: How did you do that?

DT: Well, I just, I took another physical. Through my mortuary dealings, I got to know a couple of the doctors at the base fairly well, and I talked to them about my situation, they said “Well, come on in for another physical, we’ll see if you’re qualified” and after I did that, they made me qualified and I went through the application process, and left there in August of ’59.

RV: Okay, so where did you go for flight training?

DT: I went to Harlingen, Texas.

RV: Okay, tell me about that, what was that like?

DT: Well, that was, again navigator training came fairly easy, because it was based a lot on math and had a lot of navigation principles that we’d learned in the Navy to navigate. So the school was fairly easy. We had just thirteen people in my class, and
we became a pretty cohesive group. I think about nine of the thirteen were married, so the
wives formed a little group, and we just went through training had a pretty good time. I
took advantage of the valley, and got over to Mexico a few times, and down to Padre
Island, and basically it was a fairly easy year.

RV: How much actually flying did you do?
DT: Oh, we must have flown, I would say forty-five to fifty missions, training
missions, and they all were four, five, six hours apiece. So we flew quite a bit.

RV: What aircraft were you flying in?
DT: The old T-29.

RV: Okay, and you were the navigator so where your hands?
DT: We were all going through navigator training at that time. So it was a
navigator training school there at Harlingen.

RV: So did you actually ever fly an airplane?
DT: Well, I’ve been in the seat a couple times after I got out of the navigator
training where the pilots say, “Ah, come up here,” Just so you had a feel, in case you ever
needed to do something. Then back at the academy we flew a little bit also. We had the
little single engine bi-planes that they--Just to give you a little feel for flying.

RV: Right, right. How did you feel the first time you went up in the air actually?
DT: It was, again it was not like driving a car. I never, I guess the reason I never
really thought that I needed to be a pilot was, it didn’t really do anything great for me.

Flying--You hear some people say that’s just what they always had to do. I wasn't that
way. I felt that I could sit in the back and tell the pilot where to go, and be just as happy.

RV: Okay, okay. After you went through your navigator training, how long did
that last again?
DT: That lasted a year.

RV: For one year, okay, and where were you assigned after this year?
DT: I was assigned to Lockbourne Air Force Base in Columbus, Ohio. It was a
SAC base.

RV: What were your duties there?
DT: I was a navigator in a SAC [KC-97] squadron, tanker squadron. That was a
refueling aircraft.
RV: Okay, can you describe kind of what you did?

DT: Well we just, we practiced refueling bomber and fighter aircraft, just for that
day that you may have to go to war, and we stood alert about one week out of every three
on a rotational basis as a support for the standing force when SAC was so dominant at
that time. It got to be pretty much of a routine that you had a week on alert, five or six
days off afterwards, and then you come in and flew two or three missions and then you
started the whole process over again.

RV: What aircraft were you flying, the re-fueling aircraft?

DT: Started out in KC-97s, and we went to KC-135s right about the time of the
Cuban crisis.

RV: Okay, which of those two planes did you like the best?

DT: Oh, I liked the jet much better.

RV: Okay, the 135?

DT: Yes.

RV: Now where, we’re looking at the plane, where were you actually sitting?

DT: It was just behind the pilots to their right. You actually faced [a console];
you were perpendicular to them. You didn’t look at them, you looked at all your gauges
and dials and everything you had back at your station.

RV: And how long were you there at Lockbourne?

DT: Six years.

RV: For six years, okay. Tell me about being on alert there at SAC, what was that
like, especially with the time and the Cuban crisis and everything like that.

DT: Well actually we’d spent a lot of time reflexing to other places. Spent a lot of
time in Goose Bay, Labrador, and actually that’s what happened during the Cuban crisis.

We got sent to Goose Bay, Labrador. Learned our mission of what we would do if things
escalated, and just sit there and waited. So it gave you a chance to play a lot of
racquetball, play poker, if you were so inclined or cards of any kind. You just had a lot
of time on your hand, and you got so you spent as much time with your crew as you did
with your family almost.

RV: What was your favorite destination?
DT: My favorite destination. Well, I’d say ninety-nine percent of the time when we took off at Lockbourne we landed back at Lockbourne, except when we were going to Goose Bay. We didn’t get many good trips until we got into the 135s. I made a couple trips overseas to. We stopped through Hawaii and on to Guam and back, and that was probably one of the best trips.

RV: And you were gone, well were you able to come home every night?
DT: Oh, no you went on alert for a week; you were gone for a week.
RV: Okay, but those other three weeks for the month?
DT: The other two weeks you were home. You may fly at night, you may go in, take off at seven, and fly until two in the morning and then you’d be off during the day, so your hours were not very consistent, they bounced around pretty much.

RV: Now at somewhere in this process you chose to stay in past your active duty requirement. How did you make that decision?
DT: Well, let’s see. That must have been in about ’62, ’63. My father, who had the canning business had asked me in ’61 if I wanted to get out, come back and join them, and I decided I didn’t want to do that. He was in business with this brother, and I said, “No, I don’t think that’s what I want to do.” I guess I had gotten out of the small town and seen that there was more to the world than just around there, and so we decided we’d give it a couple three more years. The economy wasn’t as great back then as I can remember, and we were doing pretty good, we seemed to like the friends we’d made and I liked what I was doing.

RV: Okay, so you signed up. How many more years did you sign up?
DT: Well, you just, once you stayed past your commitment as an officer, you just were there till as long as you wanted to be or until you didn’t get promoted, and they asked you to leave, or you got to the point where you asked to leave.
RV: What was your rank there at Lockbourne?
DT: I started out as a 1st Lieutenant, and I guess I went through senior Captain.
RV: How did you feel in leadership roles? Did you feel like you were competent and comfortable doing that?
DT: Well, you know I worked for the aircraft commander who was actually the leader. I didn’t have that much chance to use my leadership abilities. I felt that it was
something I could do very well, as I actually proved later on as I got into different jobs,
but being a navigator pretty much was an individual abilities type of thing, more than a
leadership type.

RV: How much did you keep up with what was happening with U.S. foreign
policy and international diplomacy and things like that?

DT: Well, we stayed pretty close to it, because every time we went on alert, which
was every three weeks, we got an extensive briefing in what was going on and what our
potential was for our mission, et cetera. So we stayed pretty close to what was going on
in the world.

RV: Okay, tell me about the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. You said you went up
to Labrador; you were in Labrador?

DT: Well we were in the process from changing from KC-97s to 135s, and we
actually didn’t have the 135s yet, so they sent us some 97s up to Labrador since we
didn’t, actually we had lost our mission there since we were transferring aircraft. We
went up there, picked up a new mission, and stayed in Labrador for about three weeks. I
guess that’s about as far away from the Cuban thing as you could get. Of course nothing
ever came of that, we were just there as a deterrent force.

RV: Okay, during your time at Lockbourne, the Vietnam situation was heating up.
Tell me what you followed on Vietnam and what was happening there.

DT: Well you know we didn’t--Other than what we got briefed on during our alert
briefings, and every month or so we’d lose, another person would get a Vietnam
assignment. So we followed it through the friends that we had that went to Vietnam to
fly or do whatever they were chosen to do. So we were pretty much aware of what was
going on over there. It seemed like it had turned out the be a training ground, the way we
looked at it, like you said it started in ’62 and went on for so long that we all had the
discussion that it looked like it was something that could have ended a lot quicker if
somebody would have made the right decisions.

RV: Did you understand why the United States was engaged in Vietnam?

DT: Yes, we understood why they were over there. We understood what
prompted us to go over there, yes.

RV: Okay, what was your understanding at the time?
DT: Well it was the Tonkin crisis there, and we felt that that was a place, I guess you could compare it in today’s Iraq. It was just some place in the world we had to stop the aggression of communism.

RV: Did you feel like the United States was justified in doing that there in Vietnam at that time?

DT: Yes, I did.

RV: Up to this point sir, what kind of weapons training had you had?

DT: Just small arms training is pretty much all we had, rifles and handguns. We all had access to hand guns for our missions, and then we had rifle training, and we went out to the range once a year to do our qualifications.

RV: And while you were flying and refueling, tell me about how that happened, how do you actually go about refueling the aircraft?

DT: Well, the tankers, you take off, you go to a designated point and you go into an orbit and you’re supposed to meet an aircraft, a bomber or whatever at a certain time, and you start looking for him on the radar or pick him up by radio, and then once you make the contact then you had a procedure where you flew towards him until you got so close, and then you made the turn and then he closed in behind you until he had a visual and then you made the contact. So, up until the visual was made it was pretty much the navigator’s job to get the aircraft to the orbit point, find the bomber and make the connection between the two to set up for the refueling.

RV: How many were on your crew there?

DT: We had a crew of four, two pilots, navigator, [and boom operator]. Actually five [crewmembers] in the KC-97, we an had engineer and a boom operator and in the 135 you didn’t have an engineer [in addition to the pilot and navigator].

RV: Okay, did you feel like this type of mission you were doing was dangerous, I mean all of its dangerous but.

DT: No, we didn’t.

RV: You felt relatively safe.

DT: Well, it was your job. It was what you went out to do and you didn’t, you didn’t--You know it was one of the things you didn’t have but very, very few incidences so it, danger wasn’t anything you thought about.
RV: Do you think that that was your attitude throughout your military career or was there at some point that change?

DT: Well, I think in Vietnam we realized there was some danger when they were shooting at you, but no other than that, I think we all pretty much felt that it’s the job and I think, did you see interviews now with a lot of the military that’s there, that’s the way they come across now. Look this is our job, if we’re asked to do it we go do it.

RV: How much talk about going to Vietnam was there, say in ’64 or ‘65 while you’re there at Lockbourne?

DT: Well, everybody talked about it. You know they wondered when their turn would come or where they would go. They didn’t, what would we fly over there because they didn’t have tankers in country, and then as it turned out most of the people that I knew in SAC ended up going over there to Guam or some place in a supporting role where they refueled aircraft over Vietnam, and they actually never got into country.

RV: Right, okay. And so in 1967 you received your orders to go?

DT: Yes, in ’66, I had applied for graduate school, ’66 I went to graduate school for a year and after graduating from graduate school that was our reward; we got to go to Vietnam.

RV: Where did you go to grad school?


RV: Okay, and what did you study?

DT: It was Engineering Management was the curriculum.

RV: And why did you choose that?

DT: Well, I felt that I needed to further the, do something besides navigator training or be a navigator, and I thought that if I could get into the engineering field, either through getting into technology or some other field that had, would just enhance the career, and to have a Master’s Degree was only career enhancing.

RV: Of course. Did you feel like that was the case later?

DT: Yes, I felt that that was something that always helped, plus it probably helped me more after I got out than it did while I was in the service.

RV: How did you like being up there in New York?
DT: Well, it was cold. We had twenty-five inches of snow on Christmas Eve, but other than that, again it was nice area. We did have some free time on the weekends where we could go into Vermont, to different areas. They had a lot of things that we hadn’t seen. That was the good thing about the military, you got to travel a lot of places, see a lot of things that most people don’t ever get to see.

RV: How did your wife feel about all the traveling?

DT: She enjoyed it. She thought that that was a good family environment.

RV: Now, did you have any children at this point?

DT: Yes, we, see when we were in New York, let me think, I guess we had all three of them by the time we were in New York?

RV: Did they adapt well to your travels?

DT: Oh yes, they enjoyed, they really enjoyed it.

RV: So after the year in graduate school, how soon after that did your orders to go to Vietnam?

DT: Well, let’s see we got out, we graduated in June. I had a six week school in Hurlburt Field in Florida, which took us to the, I had to be down there middle of July, or first of July, took us to the middle of August, and I left about the third week in August for Vietnam.

RV: Okay, did you know when you went down to Hurlburt that you’d be going to Vietnam?

DT: Oh, yes that was, the assignment was to Vietnam in Ranch Hand with training at Hurlburt.

RV: Okay, tell me about your training at Hurlburt, what was that like?

DT: Well again, it was just five days a week of going out and flying every day, learning the techniques of what the Ranch Hand mission was, which was basically spraying herbicide, and it was just the techniques of getting the aircraft on target and that was primarily it from a navigator standpoint. It was probably a lot more training for the pilot because they did their spray run at a hundred feet, so it was a lot harder for them than it was for the navigator because you just found the point, put them on that point and from then on it was their mission.

RV: What aircraft were you flying in?
RV: How did you like the 123s compared to the 135?
DT: It was just like flying a 707 compared to a C-47.

RV: What did the military tell you about Ranch Hand? What was your understanding of what they were trying to do in Vietnam?
DT: Well, they just pretty much made it as a--This is a support mission to help the war effort. That you’re Ranch Hand or the Ranch Hand mission was to support the troops in the field.

RV: What did they tell you about the herbicides, defoliants that you were going to be spraying?
DT: They didn’t say much about it other than it was just a herbicide. I learned more about that after I got to Vietnam, got to talking to the chemical people, the civilian providers that it actually, the way I understood it and still understand it today, it was nothing more than 2-4-D, which is a, actually when you look at it, its not a poison, but it makes things grow so fast that they can’t sustain life is what actually, killed the vegetation. So, but none of the chemical people that I talked to, and I was pretty close to a couple of them felt that there was any personal danger of using this stuff. It was toxic, we all knew that, and we knew take the precautions if you got it in your eyes or [your body] things you do, flush [with water] just like you would with any other kind of a toxic substance, but other than that, I don’t think anybody was really concerned about being around the herbicide.

RV: How did you feel, were you concerned about it?
DT: No, not at all.

RV: Has your opinion changed since then?
DT: Not at all because we’ve been part of, you’re probably familiar with, I don't know, Ranch Hand did a study or actually the government did a study on Agent Orange, and I’ve been part of that study group for the last twenty years. And I think its pretty well shown that it didn’t have any major effects.

RV: How much exposure did you actually have to Agent Orange? I mean, I know, we’ll get to the Vietnam, but there at Hurlburt, how much?
DT: We actually didn’t spray that much live at Hurlburt. We didn’t, I guess there was probably very little exposure other than the mists that would come back in the few times that we did spray actual Agent Orange.

RV: So the government didn’t give you any kind of warnings about that, besides this is basically toxic.

DT: If they did, I sure don’t remember it.

RV: How long were you there at Hurlburt training?

DT: About six weeks.

RV: And how did you feel about going to Vietnam?

DT: I just felt that was another step in the military life. It was something that was expected. We knew that we were going to have a couple tours of separation from the family, and since Vietnam was going on, we all pretty much expected to spend a year in Vietnam.

RV: So there was no apprehension of going into a war zone?

DT: No, that’s what we trained for.

RV: Right, right, exactly. How about from the men that you were serving with, where they at all apprehensive about this, do you remember?

DT: There was a few, there was a few that couldn’t handle it, but they were in the minority.

RV: So how did you get over to Vietnam, how did you fly over?

DT: Let’s see. Well they actually flew us to Guam. I think, I’m just trying to think, I think we flew commercial, commercial into Guam.

RV: Were you with other?

DT: We flew out of Travis Field commercial. Yes, there was other people because they took you to Guam first, you were supposed to have three weeks of survival training, but that just happened during the time that we got there that they were having these tremendous rains and mudslides that they cancelled our training. We had the ground part of training, what you do, but we didn’t actually have any field training.

RV: Okay, did you feel like that was okay at that time or did you think?

DT: Pretty much I’d had, I’d been through the other survival trainings that the Air Force had offered, the Arctic training and at, when they used to have the training at Stead
Air Force Base, which was three weeks, that was pretty comprehensive so that was in the back of your mind.

RV: So you felt when you went in country that you were adequately prepared.
DT: Pretty, pretty well prepared yes.
RV: Do you remember the mood on the flight over?
DT: I think, not really, I don’t think it was any different than any other flight I don’t think there was any apprehension or anything, pretty much everybody knew where they were going and what they were supposed to be doing.

RV: And where did you go into Vietnam when you first came in?
DT: To Saigon.
RV: Okay. Describe what that was like when you first got off the plane in Saigon.
DT: Oh it was just, just a big airport, it was hot and sultry, and we were, there was only two or three of us that were going in, supposed to go on to Bien Hoa, into the Ranch Hand squadron, and we pretty much were just looking around, just like going into any other airport. We got off on the ramp, we didn’t enter into an airport, we got off and then we were escorted in, and we found advisors that picked us up and we got our stuff and we were out of Saigon probably within ten or twelve hours.

RV: And then on to Bien Hoa?
DT: On to Bien Hoa.
RV: Okay, and so what was it like at Bien Hoa when you first arrived there? What were your impressions?
DT: Well, they took you to where you were going to stay. Our particular squadron had about three, they called hooches at that time, which were housed maybe thirty people, and they were just cots lined up and you had your little area with a locker and you looked at that, that was going to be your home for the next year. So it was different than anything we’d, I’d experienced up until that time other than through some different training things that you sort of did the same thing, but you knew that this is what it was going to be and you just wanted to make the most of it.

RV: The other thirty men, who were there with you, were they all new or did you kind of integrate in?
DT: No, no some of them were close to going home to new ones. They were pretty well spread out so whoever had just left, that’s whose bed you got.

RV: What was the reception like for you?

DT: Oh they all--Of course welcomed you to the Ranch Hand and told you it was going to be an experience you’d never forget, and that you just needed to make the most of it.

RV: How did you feel? Were you at all apprehensive or were you?

DT: Oh, no that was something you looked forward to. I looked forward to it as putting to use the training that we’d learned clear back to the Academy days when they--they groomed us at the Academy to do this type of thing. This is what you’re actually doing you’re training for, is that someday you might have to go to war. So it was just, actually a chance to put your training to use is they way I looked at it.

RV: Were you still a captain at this point?

DT: Yes.

RV: Could you describe what your typical day was like there at Bien Hoa? I know you were there for only two months, is that correct?

DT: Right.

RV: What was your day like there?

DT: Well, when I first got there of course they, we went out, I went out on a flight once a day at that time until I got oriented, got through your orientation, and then they, then you flew alone, but up until that time they usually took you on two or three training missions, and after about ten days the turned you loose to fly as a lead navigator.

RV: What were your impressions, I’m sorry go ahead.

DT: It was a very early morning because we were wind-restricted. If it was too windy you couldn’t spray. So we had very early morning missions, it was up around four, take off at daylight, and be on target shortly thereafter.

RV: What were your impressions of the country itself?

DT: Well in South Vietnam I thought it was very flat and sort of desolate. There just wasn’t much there. I really wondered what we were really spraying, because it didn’t seem to be that much vegetation to what I was later would see in the northern part of South Vietnam.
RV: So, what were you actually spraying there?

DT: Well, they actually had, they did have vegetation in the south, places along the rivers, the riverbanks, we probably sprayed a lot of crop at that time, where they were trying to get rid of the crop in the area that the Vietcong could take over. That was, most of it. Actually I didn’t fly that many missions in the south. I spent ten to eight days I guess, taking an aircraft back for rehab, which I went to Taiwan, and we were, the trip over and the trip back, waiting for the airplane over there took about eight days so. I actually probably only ended up flying maybe three or four weeks total in the south.

RV: Okay, how many missions do you think you flew out of Bien Hoa?

DT: Out of Bien Hoa, I probably flew maybe forty, forty or fifty because sometimes we’d fly twice a day.

RV: Can you describe what your typical mission was like?

DT: Well usually you had anywhere from three to six airplanes in a formation. The lead airplane had a navigator, and if it was over three aircraft, four, five or six, then they put a navigator in the last airplane in case something happened to the lead airplane then all of them didn’t have to come back, that they still had a navigator that knew what the mission was. So, you would have at least one navigator, sometimes two navigators on each mission. You’d take, you knew where, you’d pre-planned it the day before, you knew where you were going. It was all pretty much visual navigation. You didn’t go that far to the targets. They were all within forty-five minutes to an hour, and you did visual navigation getting to the targets and put them on target, did the four minutes, four to five minutes spray run and then back home.

RV: Okay, how were the targets selected?

DT: The targets were selected by a targeting officer, who was a navigator that picked the targets for all the different, they may have, out of Bien Hoa they may have four, five or six different targets with that many aircraft flying a day. It was different in the--when we went North. We usually only had one or two targets up there.

RV: Okay, did you have any say so in the targeting?

DT: Not in the South.

RV: Okay, but you did that up at Da Nang?
DT: But I was the targeting officer in the North, so I had pretty much [determined
the targets] in conjunction with the squadron commander and the requests from the--We
would get requests in from various groups through the headquarters there in Saigon that
we needed to work on these areas because they knew that the Army or somebody had
planned missions into the area, and they wanted it defoliated before they got there.

RV: How long would the defoliation take place?

DT: It would, it would start to show after about a week, you could see it getting
brown and thin.

RV: So you were either in the lead plane or in the rear plane, right.

DT: Right.

RV: So you go out and you said four to five minutes of spraying?

DT: That’s all the time you were on target was four to five minutes.

RV: How many gallons of spray would you carry?

DT: Each aircraft had ten thousand gallons.

RV: What, how was the, was it in one tank or was it in two?

DT: One tank, one big tank in the middle of cargo bay.

RV: Okay, and you were still sitting in your navigator’s seat?

DT: Well the navigator there sat actually just outside of the cockpit, but during--
that’s where the navigator station was, but for the missions we flew with Ranch Hand we
put a box over the controls and sat up between the pilots.

RV: Now, how much exposure did you have to the toxin that you were spraying?

DT: Well, if you had any backwinds or anything, that stuff could spray in and
you’d get some mist. Probably the biggest problem we had is if the spray line broke,
which was right over the navigator station, so I got soaked a couple times.

RV: Did you really? Okay, so during these.

DT: It was, you always had the film that was all over the aircraft; it was pretty
much every place. It wasn't, there was always a residue.

RV: Did they give you any instructions on how to deal with that, if you came in
contact with it?

DT: Just make sure you, if you got it in your eyes you flushed your eyes,
otherwise you just take a good shower.
RV: So no other warnings besides basically just clean off?

DT: No, not that I could remember ever. I don’t think it was a major concern.

RV: Did you find that amongst your other men you were serving with, was it a major concern with them at all?

DT: No, I don’t know that I knew anybody that had any concerns about the herbicide.

RV: So, tell me about, in the South you were shot at a few times, did this happen more in the South or when you went up to Da Nang?

DT: Probably we were shot at more in Da Nang.

RV: So, you were there for approximately two months in Bien Hoa and how did you get transferred up tot Da Nang?

DT: The targeting officer, they had a full time navigator at our satellite place in Da Nang. They used to keep six to twelve aircraft in Da Nang. It varied, and the crews rotated out of the South up there, but they had a full time pilot and a full time navigator that stayed there all the time, and they sort of ran the place, coordinated the place and made sure the crews got in and out, taken care of.

RV: And what did you actually do as the targeting officer? Did you have your own office where you would sit and do this?

DT: We just again, it was sort of a hooch, I think maybe the commander had an office there but you just had a big table that you worked on, you spread your charts out, and I must, I had a selection of 150 targets that could have chosen from, but you had been given, we had been given a priority list of priority one, twos and threes and we tried to work the priorities as best we could.

RV: Who came up with those lists?

DT: I don’t know who came up with the list, I’m sure it came out of Saigon.

RV: And these areas that were basically jungle areas?

DT: Pretty much jungle areas in the North.

RV: And how was it different flying your missions in the North, did you go, I mean as the targeting officer, you stayed behind more?

DT: No, no I actually flew twice a day there also.

RV: Okay, so you served both roles as part of your?
DT: Both roles, like I say we usually had two groups flying, so I went with one
group and the navigator went with the other, and you flew twice a day and so you had a
busy, it was seven days a week, so you kept busy all the time. I did especially because as
soon as I got down from the missions then I had to make sure, I usually had the targets
two or three days in advance, but it was always keeping them ahead.

RV: Did the men with whom you were flying at any time, you were the one who
picking the targets and if you were going into an area where you knew you’d probably
get some ground fire. Did they ever tell you why don’t we not fly there, why don’t we,
you know?

DT: I don’t, well.

RV: You know what I’m asking, as the target officer.

DT: Yes, when I first got there, the guy that I relieved didn't really have what I
call much imagination about doing the targets. He’d go in, he may fly the same target two
or three or four days in a row, and I think that’s one reason they were picking up a lot of
ground fire. But I tried to spread mine out and try not to go to the same target more than
once a week, so that you sort of keep them guessing when you were coming, and they
weren’t there waiting for you. So we cut down the ground fire a lot. It’s just that during
the time I was there, ’68, was a very heavy time in Vietnam, and there was a lot of
Vietcong in the area, so we did pick up a lot of ground fire.

RV: What was that like for you, experiencing being fired upon up there?

DT: Well, you sort of expected it. Some targets we knew would be worse than
others, but we always had fighter cover with us, and they would come in and try to
suppress it so we could continue on the mission.

RV: So you would radio in and say we’re taking fire.

DT: Well, they would be right overhead, yes, and you’d have what they called,
the FAC was there, he was the O-1 or O-2 pilot that actually helped you a lot of times,
h’d go in and mark your target for you with smoke so that you knew exactly where they
wanted you to be. The target, you’d have the area and we knew pretty much we were
going to run, but the FAC who was the local guy, had that area, and also controlled the
fighters, a lot of time he knew exact spot where he wanted you to spray, so we always did
accommodate those requests.
RV: How much protection did you have flying?
DT: We flew with a flak vest and a helmet.
RV: Okay, was the 123, was it armored at all underneath where you were sitting?
DT: It had some armor underneath, yes, some underneath armor.
RV: Do you remember any missions where the ground fire got particularly heavy?
DT: Now, there was one mission just south of Da Nang where they were trying to
get rid of all the buffalo grass, the high stuff that they thought the Vietcong were hiding
in. I think the six airplanes that we flew in there; we came back with over six hundred
holes in the airplanes, total. That particular day we took six rounds through the
windshield. Fortunately the co-pilot was hit in the arm, but other than that they all
missed the rest of us.
RV: Was there, was that your closest call as far as?
DT: That was the closest call.
RV: Did you actually get to complete the mission?
DT: Yes, we did complete the mission.
RV: Did you ever have to abort any missions?
DT: Oh, we did for engine problems or weather sometimes. Sometimes we had a
mission that the weather would close in after we got out there, and since there were so
many hills and mountains you couldn’t feel safe going down through those and we’d
abort and come back. Or the wind would get too high, but I’d say that probably was less
than ten percent.
RV: Did you feel, or you said you could see some of the defoliation taking place?
DT: Oh, yes you could, and by planning your missions a week apart, you could
almost go back in and line up on the previous week’s spray run and spray right next to it.
RV: Kind of like mowing the grass?
DT: Yes.
RV: Okay, back at base, what kind of ground support did you have as far as
mechanical support for the airplanes?
DT: Oh we had just regular crew chiefs and a full maintenance squadron there
that took care of the airplanes.
RV: And how did you feel about how they did their job?
DT: Well we felt they were very good. The planes--We never really had any, or I
never had any major complaints on the planes. I don’t know how the pilots felt but I
always felt safe because I knew most of the guys that worked in the maintenance
squadron, and they were all top notch.

RV: Did you ever come in contact with the enemy per se besides receiving ground
fire?

DT: No.

RV: So you, could you judge their quality besides that fact that they could hit an
airplane with ground fire?

DT: Well, it was pretty hard, you didn’t know whether it was actual Vietcong
soldiers or irate farmers or actually who it was that was shooting at you, but well, when it
was multiple shots, you know that they, and if it got heavier than just rifle fire, which we
took some heavier fire, we knew we were in an area where they were pretty well fortified.

RV: Did you ever fly any missions at night or dusk?

DT: No.

RV: And I know that would be odd, I didn’t think you probably would because
you couldn’t see what you were spraying.

DT: No, I couldn’t find the place where we were going since it was all visual.

RV: How efficient do you think was the leadership above you in Vietnam as far
as getting the target lists and things like that?

DT: Well from the standpoint of our mission, I thought it was pretty good. We
didn’t seem to get a whole lot of direction or misdirection from anybody. We were, we
had a mission that we were supporting what they wanted done, and I guess the big thing
that we always questioned at the bar at night was why things were escalating on into the
North and we weren’t winning this thing. Like they finally did at the end, that could have
been done at the very beginning.

RV: Describe that conversation and the attitude of those with whom you served
there. Was there a lot of discussion about?

DT: Well, you get into more of the discussion with the F-4 pilots. I guess a lot of
the guys just felt like we were fighting a war with one arm tied behind us; that they
weren’t letting the military run the war. If we’d have done this like they did the last one
we had, what was its name?

RV: Persian Gulf War?

DT: Persian Gulf. If they’d have let the military run that like they did
Schwarzkopf and his group, we’d have been out of Vietnam in six months. That’s my
opinion. I think we had the know-how, the firepower; everything that, but it just took on
to me, and this is just a personal opinion, that they were just using it as a political thing
and a test round for new weapons. We had heard from the fighter pilots a lot of new
things that they were trying out, testing, and it just seemed like that that’s what they were,
it was a test ground. We weren’t really there trying to win the war.

RV: Did you, you felt that way at that time?

DT: Yes.

RV: And has your opinion changed since?

DT: Oh, I don’t think we tried to win it at the time, I think we they set their mind
to it in ’69 and ’70, they ended it just like they could have at any time, with the B-52s and
all the firepower they had that they finally took North.

RV: What do you think could have been done differently to prosecute the war in a
more efficient way?

DT: Get the politicians out of it. Let Westmoreland and his bunch actually run it.
I think that he was probably, I can’t confirm this, but I’m sure he was told “No" so many
times that he finally become frustrated. But you know, they just, I don’t know whether
they thought that going North was going to escalate into something bigger or what, but its
probably the same feeling that you’re seeing now with Iraq with the vision of people that
don’t think we ought to do that, versus those that think that that’s the thing to do. And I
think that at that time the politicians ruled. I don’t think that, when it got clear back to the
President that he was getting really good advice.

RV: What did you think of the political leadership, as far as say McNamara and
Johnson and that group?

DT: I don’t know.

RV: Because you were there right when he announces he’s not going to run for
president in March ’68. You were there in Vietnam.
DT: Right. I guess we were, he pretty well supported the, he wasn’t a Clinton
type non-supporter of the military, but I think that we just felt that, and I can’t really put
my finger on who we thought was the problem there. It was just that we weren’t getting
the go ahead. It was just a routine we were going through, sort of like treading water.
RV: What did you think of the leadership in Vietnam, the military leadership?
DT: Well from my standpoint I thought for the most part it was pretty good. We
sort of had a, of course in our squadron there was nobody that could come out of a spray
squadron in the U.S., so it was a mishmash of people that had done various and sundry
things. We used to get a lot of people out of the Pentagon that hadn’t flown in a while,
and we had a variance of age from people flying from probably twenty-three to fifty-five.
So it was a very different group of people that they put together in our squadron. But for
the most part, we had a couple of commanders that I didn’t particularly care for, but that
was one reason I went up North because it was a chance to, the guy that was up there I
liked real well.
RV: How much contact did you have with those leaders?
DT: Well, within the squadron you pretty much had daily contact.
RV: How about the base commander?
DT: No we didn’t really. We did up North a couple of times when the base
commander when we had a few people get in a little bit of trouble, but we used to have to
go in and see the base commander about what we were going to do to take care of that.
We had a couple of parties at the club where we got a little rambunctious and did a little
damage, the base commander got a little upset about that, but I think that was just venting
of frustrations and being able to go out the next day.
RV: Right. Tell me about that, what kind of entertainment did you guys create for
yourselves there?
DT: Well, we had the Officers’ Club was the primary thing, and you could go
over there, you could get a good meal if you didn’t want to eat in the dining hall. You
could, they had steaks that you could cook out, they had a barbecue, so food really wasn't
a problem over there. Then they had the normal card games or of course. The bar which
probably attracted most of the people, and I’d say ninety percent of the people over there
probably drank too much. It was just an out, it was just, but that’s what got them into the
next day. Especially, we had a lot of fighter pilots over there. We had a couple F-4, three, four F-4 squadrons in Da Nang, and they had pretty tough missions, and it wasn’t unusual for them to lose a plane every two or three days and lose a pilot, so it was a tougher mission for them than it was for us.

RV: Did you see a lot of excessive alcohol use?
DT: Did I see what?
RV: A lot of excessive alcohol use.
DT: Accepted?
RV: Excessive.
DT: Excessive, yes.
RV: Okay, was that common with the enlisted men or was it with the range all men?
DT: Well we didn’t, I didn’t really see the enlisted men that much. It was with a lot of the officers.
RV: Do you think it impaired their judgment the next day or was it a problem?
DT: I really don’t know. I didn’t see it within our squadron where it did. I think that thing was pretty well policed. You could tell when a pilot wasn’t ready to go, and I think they sat them down for the day if it was the case.
RV: How about drug use, did you see any of that?
DT: I didn’t see any drugs.
RV: Okay. How much contact did you have with home, were you writing your wife regularly?
DT: Just letters. That’s the only thing. Just the letters that would go back and forth, it would take a couple weeks to get a letter once it was put in the mail.
RV: Did you keep in touch with your parents?
DT: Yes, I did that by letter also. Of course at that time my dad had already passed away so it was just my mother.
RV: Were you able to make any of the MARS phone calls?
DT: I think I might have made two. They were just was really a big hassle and you’d get, a lot of times you’d get cut off and the lines were long, so it was just easier to communicate by mail.
RV: Were these to your wife, phone calls?

DT: Yes.

RV: Were you able to keep up with news from home, what was happening back in the States?

DT: Not really. We didn’t ever have much newspapers or anything, other than articles my wife would send about the area, which I couldn’t figure out where they got the information, because I’d say fifty percent of the stuff she sent over there I found was untrue.

RV: Okay, such as what?

DT: Oh that this had been blown up in Da Nang or that had been blown up or the city had been partially overrun or whatever. The base had been overrun. This stuff, things that seem to make exciting news articles that I couldn’t find any basis for the truth at all.

RV: Was she living in New York or had she gone?

DT: No, she went back to Ohio. We kept the house in Ohio.

RV: Were you able to take any R & Rs?

DT: Yes, I did one R & R to Australia.

RV: Okay, what was that like?

DT: Oh it was, actually it was within a month of when I was going home, to get Australia you had to almost be there ten or eleven months but it was great. I’d never been to Australia, and we went with a pretty big group of guys from there. So we went down and had a good time, just let your hair down for three or four days. No pressures.

RV: Right, right. How about USO shows, were you able to see any of those?

DT: Yes, they had two or three of the USO shows. Bob Hope of course came through one time. That was the biggest one and then they had other shows that, there was usually something about every two months.

RV: Did you get to see Bob Hope?

DT: Yes.

RV: Tell me how much did you go into Da Nang itself, the city?

DT: Oh, the Navy had a nice Officers’ Club in town, but I’d say maybe we didn’t go in there more than once every six to eight weeks. It just was more hassle and with the
early morning flights and that was seven days a week, you just didn’t really feel like
staying out very late at night. As a squadron we, every two or three weeks though we’d
have a big, the beaches in Da Nang were really pretty, very nice, we’d have a big beach
party for the guys and do a barbecue cookout where we could have all the enlisted guys.
They’d play volleyball and swim and do those kinds of things, and we’d pick up a
Sunday, try to schedule a real early morning mission where they get back and have the
rest of the day.

RV: How often would you be able to do that?
DT: Oh we usually did that about once a month.
RV: Okay, and so you guys would hang on the beach and?
DT: Just hang out there and they’d play football and volleyball and just the
regular beach things without the girls.
RV: Right, I was going to say how much contact did you have with women there?
DT: The only that contact I had was just the nurses there at Da Nang.
RV: Did you ever see any of the Doughnut Dollies, the Red Cross volunteers?
DT: No, I don’t think that well they may have had a Red Cross person there but I
never had any contact with the Red Cross.
RV: Okay. Going back to your experience in Da Nang itself, what did you think
of the Vietnamese civilians?
DT: The only ones we really had much contact was, was the girls or women that
were in as our maids. We had to, they came in, would take care of keeping your room
clean and you know fix, they’d actually come in and cook for us two or three times a
month maybe with their specialty if you’d give them some extra money and they’d go
buy some of their local food and fix that and that was about as big a contact as we had.
We had contact with a few of the Vietnamese military people but very little.
RV: What was your impression of them?
DT: Of course the women were very subservient type. I guess the money we gave
them must have been more than they ever had, so they were very, very, very kind. The
guys, just seemed like it was a take it or leave it type of thing with the war. It didn’t
seem to really matter too much to them, one way or the other.
RV: Is this the civilians or the military?
DT: The military.

RV: Okay.

DT: You never got much opinion out of the civilians. And it was, it was a very poor culture, from what we could see.

RV: Now what, what kind of reaction did you get when you went into Da Nang itself from the civilians there

DT: Actually we didn’t see that many. We pretty much went right from the base at Da Nang into the Navy Officers’ Club and that was pretty much it. Just didn’t do any socializing at all in the city itself.

RV: Was that by choice or were you guys told to kind of keep away?

DT: No, it was. Well, we were told to play pretty low-key, and again like I saw with our mission schedule it just didn’t really. Nobody really wanted to go in and stay out late at night to get up at four in the morning to go fly.

RV: Right, right, of course.

DT: So it was more like, most of the activity was you’d go the clubs, eight or nine o’clock at the latest and go home.

RV: What would you do at the clubs, besides drink?

DT: I wasn’t that much of a drinker myself, so I’d usually end up playing cards for my activity. I liked to play poker and they usually had a poker game there every night.

RV: Were you able to see movies and listen to music?

DT: Oh, yes they did have movies. You could see movies, had a movie house, they had a movie every night. They got a little repetitious until they changed them, but yes, you could see movies.

RV: Do you remember listening to a lot of music over there?

DT: Well, they had music in the club, I didn’t, in the room I had a radio but other, but the music there was not that great, no I didn’t. Once I got to the room it was time to get some sleep for the next day.

RV: Right. You said you didn’t have a lot of contact with the enlisted men?

DT: Other than the ones in the squadron, ones we flew with, and the maintenance guys on the airplanes, but other than that we didn’t. You’d see them in the chow hall when you ate there in the lines, but you didn’t really socialize that much with them.
RV: Did you ever witness any tension between the draftees and the lifers per se?

DT: No, not really. You could tell the guys that were just there in as draftees, but seems like most of the ones we got. The Air Force didn’t get very many draftees I don’t think. Most of theirs were, they had already, had enlisted and were in there. If you got into the aircraft field, you’d done pretty well in your different schools so they were there, most of them by choice. It was the Army guys I think that had the big difference between the two, from what—I had a couple Army officers that I knew, and they talked about that, that some guys all they talked about was going home and getting out of there. Then of course they had their dedicated crews too.

RV: Right. Did you ever hear any discussion of fragging?

DT: Bragging?

RV: Fragging, yes sir.

DT: Not really. No, I can’t say that I did.

RV: Okay. Did you feel like you had enough supplies while you were there?

DT: Well, yes we had herbicide and fuel for the planes and that was. We had plenty of both so we didn’t have any problem there.

RV: Okay. And you said down in the South, Bien Hoa, you saw the country as kind of flat and desolate, how did that change when you went up north to Da Nang?

DT: Well it was pretty much, the difference between West Texas and the Hill Country.

RV: Okay. That’s a pretty big difference.

DT: Yes, it was a big difference. There were a lot of mountains, a lot of hills. It was a pretty heavily forested, so it was a pretty big change from the South to the North.

The south was a big farming, agriculture, that type of, a lot of rice grown in the big open fields with the water. So, you didn’t see much of that up North.

RV: Did you have any experience with the Medevac/Dustoff teams?

DT: No, I really didn’t have any. They came in once a week, twice a week, whatever the needed to. The Army and Marines filtered their wounded, a lot of those in through there and they were Medevaced out, but you could just see the planes coming and going, you didn’t have any personal contact.
RV: Right. Tell me your experiences with death over there in Vietnam. Did you ever, did you experience anything like that or just see it for instance?

DT: With what?

RV: With death?

DT: I didn’t understand.

RV: With death, with someone dying.

DT: Oh, death, oh yes. We didn’t have anybody in the squadron. They lost an airplane just before I got there, but we went through our year without any deaths within the squadron, but I had a couple of friends that came through that I’d had dinner with that were in other Airborne, a couple Army people, one Air Force pilot that ended up getting killed later in the war. But its just, we saw a lot of body bags come back through, but it was just something that again, our discussions pretty much centered around that being somewhat of a waste, knowing that we felt that this whole thing could have been concluded a lot sooner. We were doing a lot more sacrificing than was necessary.

RV: Tell me about your relationships with the men with whom you served and those that you met back at the Officers’ Club.

DT: Well, you sort of form your little groups. Of course our people from Ranch Hand were only in there for a week at a time or two weeks, and then they would rotate back to Bien Hoa. So, and usually the group that would come up, there would be two or three or four new ones that you’d have to meet and get to know, and you had your old friends that you flew with down there that you looked forward to. So I guess probably the squadron commander up there was the one that I got to know the most, although we didn’t really fraternize that much at the club. I had a group of three or four other guys that were in other outfits, a couple fighter pilots, we used to play cards together pretty much and that was the group. I think people, or at least I did, I try not to get close to too many people, because seems like if you did than something would happen, and it would just be that much more of a loss that you would normally experience.

RV: Was that relatively normal?

DT: I think so. I think most people tried not to get too close.

RV: So there was like a general understanding that your relationships would only go so deep?
DT: That’s right. You were there; we knew we were there for a job. I guess its sort of like how close do you get to the people you work with, even in the civilian life how close do you get? And I think we pretty much kept at a professional, business like thing, just didn’t get too involved.

RV: Did you have any contact with troops from other countries, the Australians, or the New Zealanders or the South Koreans?

DT: Oh, no. The only time that we saw, they had some Australians at the base for a while, but really didn’t have any contact with them, no.

RV: Did your squadron have any pets?

DT: Pets, no.

RV: Any contact with wild animals or anything like that?

DT: No, we hear the tales about the wild animals, the tigers and the thing, from the 123s that were hauling cargo; they’d get into a lot of outlying places. They talk about seeing monkeys and tigers and different things, but no we never did see anything at the base.

RV: Did you guys have a rat problem there?

DT: Never saw a rat that I can remember.

RV: Really? Describe to me, go ahead.

DT: No. That was talked about at some of the outlying places, but Da Nang was a big base and we were pretty much in the middle of it, so they might have had some there, but I never did see any.

RV: Describe to me what your hooch was like there at Da Nang.

DT: Well it was a, not a hooch, it was actually a concrete building. It was a three story, actually built to be a [dormitory]. We all had individual rooms there so it was very accommodating.

RV: Was it air-conditioned?

DT: Yes, had individual air conditioners.

RV: Wow, that’s nice. How many men were in this building?

DT: Might have been a couple hundred. We had a couple fighter squadrons in there, and it was a, it was a pretty good-sized building, it was built as a BOQ.

RV: Okay.
RV: Sir, if you could, let’s talk about Da Nang, the base there. How many times besides Tet of 1968 were you guys attacked, rocket attacks at night, et cetera?

DT: At Da Nang, oh, when I was there we were probably--We had rocket attacks maybe ten to twelve times.

RV: What were those like?

DT: Well the biggest thing was the sirens. Sirens on the base would go off indicating that there was incoming mortars. I was never very close to any place where anything hit. We were aware that there was something, or some reason for concern. Most always it was at night. I think the only daytime time I remember was once when we were eating at the dining hall at noon, and they had the alert and everybody evacuated, but other than that I think they were all at night, and a lot of times you were asleep. If you were really concerned, I did a couple of times, you just sort of got under your bed, but it was a pretty secure building we were in. It was all concrete, and we all felt pretty good about out security in that building.

RV: Okay, how about at Bien Hoa?

DT: Bien Hoa, I only think there was one or two while I was there. They had more than that there, but when I was there that’s all that they had, because I could remember after I left there, I think a couple of hooches were hit where some of the guys lived, nobody got hurt, but they were hurt, they had evacuated them. Bien Hoa you had to be a little, you had to find a little more shelter. They had some other shelters you could go to. So, but there was only two down there, I think where they had incoming. There was some dissidents on the perimeter one time, and I think they had some incoming rockets one time.

RV: Okay. Let’s talk about the Tet Offensive, 1968. You were in Da Nang?

DT: Right.

RV: What was that like?

DT: Well, we actually, one of the times I was there that we actually didn’t fly missions defoliating. They were concerned about getting ammunition into Khe Sanh and a couple other places there that were not too far from us, and the weather was bad in the early spring, and we actually converted a couple of the aircraft. They had a test program where they were going to salt the clouds, actually dispense salt into the clouds to see if
they would dissipate enough where you could get aircraft in, and we tested the program for about three or four days and actually could see that it had some merit and they felt there was enough merit that we actually then flew ahead of the supply aircraft, the 130s, into Khe Sanh on a couple different occasions, salting the clouds, opening things up enough where they could actually get in, land, and re-supply Khe Sanh. Now that was exciting because we were actually flying in pretty heavy clouds, which we normally didn’t do, and the tracers and the fire in front of you was just like the Fourth of July at night. Fortunately we never took any hits, and they did get the supply planes in, so I guess that was successful. And that lasted for about two weeks, then we went back to our normal mission. But we were very well aware of what was going on at Khe Sanh. I flew over Khe Sanh after that time, it looked just like a total junkyard disaster with all the stuff that was just sitting around, laying around that had been shot up, hit, and it was sort of a barren mountain top is what Khe Sanh was.

RV: So your Tet Offensive experience was mainly in the air flying the supplies in?

DT: Well we were in an aircraft salting the clouds ahead of the supply planes, yes.

RV: Okay, so you didn’t really experience any attacks on base at Da Nang?

DT: No, all we knew about was what we heard about on--Of course we had daily briefings on the Khe Sanh, what was going on there, and that was the biggest attack and overrun that I knew about.

RV: What did you think of the overall Tet Offensive; do you think it was a successful maneuver by the other side?

DT: Well, evidently it wasn't, they didn’t win. I think we knew it was coming, and I think it cost a lot of lives, again I don’t think it was what they could claim as a victory because they didn’t take over Khe Sanh. They never took over the area. They had a lot of infiltration into the northern part of South Vietnam, but it may have been, the good thing that I could see coming out of it, is it may have got the attention of enough people that we sort of escalated the war from there, and that’s when things--we started getting more serious about winning the thing.

RV: What would you say was the bravest action you witnessed while in Vietnam?
DT: Well, there’s two things that I thought that really stood out. One was the F-4 pilots that supported us, and I don’t know whether, you really, to me it had to be very, we flew at a hundred feet and that was brave enough, for the pilots to fly a whole supply plane at a hundred feet over the tree tops but the fighters got down at or below us to support us, so they were really on the tree tops with gunfire and everything. So, from what I personally witnessed, that would probably have to be the bravest thing.

RV: Okay, you said there were two, is there another one?

DT: Well, our pilots, just on their daily flights, just flying at a hundred feet in a plane that didn’t have a whole lot of protection, that takes a little bravery there.

RV: Absolutely, yes sir. How about humorous events, what do you remember about those type of events in Vietnam?

DT: Well, the funniest thing I think of, Ranch Hand had a pretty good, probably a pretty good reputation in Da Nang for its cohesiveness and things that we did. There’s two things, one we had a symbol that indicated trees and then we had the red line through it, like no trees, that was part our Ranch Hand symbol, and some of the guys got a little too much to drink one night and they had a stencil and they stenciled these symbols over the streets of the base in Da Nang. The funniest part of it was the base commander called my commander and myself in, and this was the day before I guess they were supposed to leave, we usually had a little party, going away party every two weeks, and he called us in and said “What are you going to do about these guys?” And with a very straight face, the commander looked at him and he said, “I’m going to send them home tomorrow.” Of course they were going to go home anyway. Well just as we started walking out, and it hit the base commander what he’d said. He just, my boss’s name was Pennington, he said, “Pennington,” he says, “Get out of here.” I thought that was quite humorous, and then everybody on the base, of course they knew we were around. The other, I don’t know whether it was funny or, I guess it was a funny. Every two weeks like I said we had a going away party, we had a reputation for our going away party for the troops going back to Bien Hoa. And they looked forward, it was in the form of a dining in format, and we always had a guest speaker, and it was people from the base that we had invited, and we never let them know that the, we never let the speaker know that he wasn’t actually going to get to speak, we just cheered him down, made him sit down
without talking. That was just one of the things, they just never got to speak. Well we decided to ask one of the nurses, and we always had our flight suits and that’s what we wore, and we asked one of the nurses to be our guest speaker. And evidently she got the word of what we did, or that she wasn’t going to be able to speak, and she came in her flight suit and she got up to speak, and just about the time we were starting to get on her, she just reached up and unzipped that flight suit from top to bottom. Of course she had slacks or something underneath, it didn’t make any difference, but it just caught everybody by surprise. She actually got to say a few words before she had to sit down. So that was one of the humorous situations. She was known as the only person that got to say anything.

RV: Okay, tell me about Christmas 1967, what did you guys do for that?

DT: We had a down day on Christmas, and that was probably the biggest party at the club on Christmas Eve, because they knew they didn’t have to fly Christmas and they just, the drinking just went on and went into different squadrons having challenge races to the bar, taking a drink, back to the, next the relay races with the broom, where you stick it in the ceiling, make a 360 degree turn, have a drink and go back. That went on for hours at the club. Got pretty bad towards the end and I think it ended up with quite a bit of damage in the club, not major damage, but that was one of those we had to answer to the base commander on. Everybody really let their hair down on Christmas Eve, knowing that Christmas was a down day and nobody was going to be home. We didn’t, they had a little Christmas tree in the club, but other than that it didn’t have many signs of Christmas.

RV: Did you have access to chapels or religious services?

DT: Yes, chapels there, you could have you read--your access to religious things, and we always got back in time on Sunday that everybody could go to the chapel if they wanted to.

RV: Okay, did you feel like your religious perspective per se changed at all while you were in Vietnam?

DT: No, I don’t think they did.

RV: Okay. Sir, what do you think of the media coverage of the war, at the time and then reflecting back on it since?
DT: Well, like I say we didn’t see much. Most of what I got or saw was what people sent in or my wife wanted to know, is this really going on type of thing and at the time what she sent in, I thought it was terrible then. Of course we knew about the riots and the things going on and we’d heard about how the GIs were being treated as they went back, that word filtered in. I’d say it was poor at best. I think it was, I don’t know I guess that we didn’t have enough Walter Cronkites around that reported the war instead of really trying to figure out what was going on. And then after I got back, you heard more about that than we actually did while we were over there, and I saw the last couple of years. I’d see things almost weekly in the papers that I knew absolutely couldn’t be true.

RV: Such as what, do you remember?

DT: Well, the things that they reported on Da Nang, locations of different things, you know just what I call sloppy reporting. They looked like they had a story and they went with it without checking anything out. And I think that’s gotten worse over the years.

RV: Okay, okay. Did you ever have any direct contact with reporters on base?

DT: None, none, I never saw a reporter on the base. I’m not sure they were allowed on the base, but maybe they were.

RV: So, when you became short, when you knew you were going back to the States, did you change your activities or were you able to change your activities to kind of minimize?

DT: No, really wasn't able to change. I flew two missions right up to the day I got on the plane to go back to Bien Hoa.

RV: Wow. Now, did you know the exact date on which you were leaving?

DT: Yes, I knew the date that I was leaving Bien Hoa, and I went back there just two days before to take care of all the paperwork and check out.

RV: And I assume they had a going away party for you?

DT: I’m just trying to think. I think we ran that in conjunction with one of our every two weeks because like I say other than the commander, he was the only one that I was there with at the time, and actually I had three different commanders during that year as they went home, so going away parties weren’t a big thing because you always had so
many people going all the time. People were coming and going. You know, you give
people certain mementos when they go. I did have a small get-together, and I got two or
three mementos from the people for job well done, that type of thing but I think it was
done in conjunction with one of the two-week parties.

RV: Okay, how did you feel when you knew your time was getting short and you
were getting ready to leave?

DT: Well, to see the family and that part, you really look forward to it, but I can
honestly say that it was a year that I felt that really amplified all the training and
everything we had, that you can go out and do the job they’ve been training you to do.
It’s a chance to use your skills. I mean it wasn’t a good situation but it was something
that we knew that we might have to do someday, and we actually got to do it. You run
training missions, they get pretty old after awhile, but I had not seen the family and get
home to get things back to normal, you really look forward to that.

RV: How long had you been in since, since when you returned in 1968?

DT: About twelve years, that’s not right, it’s be about ten years.

RV: And had you made the decision to continue with the military?

DT: Yes, I had. When I went back I was on the list for Major, so yes I made the
decision that probably was going to go ahead and make the military at least twenty years.
Well actually my decision was I was going to stay as long as I got promoted.

RV: Okay, all right, well that makes sense. Tell me about leaving Vietnam; did
you fly directly out of Da Nang?

DT: No, I flew, went back with one of our groups when they went back to Bien
Hoa and I was back there. We actually had to do the paperwork, personnel move out of
Bien Hoa, so I was back there two days, and then caught a flight out of Bien Hoa,
actually it was a TWA flight.

RV: Okay, so it was a civilian flight?

DT: Civilian.

RV: Do you remember, how did you feel leaving, were you?

DT: Well, you know it was sort of a relief. You knew that there was a lot of
people didn’t leave. So you felt fortunate from that standpoint. Again, you were looking
forward to going home.
RV: Do you remember the mood on the flight?

DT: That was another sort of a humorous situation, most of the guys on the flight, or I’d say 70% were the just young Army guys, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, and they were looking forward to getting on the flight with the stewardesses and be heard to talk about boy, have stewardesses all the way home. Well it was a TWA flight, and of course they run their flights by seniority and the people who were flying the Vietnam runs, you only had to make two flights a month to make all your pay commitments for the airline, so the youngest flight stewardess on the plane was forty-eight, was the youngest, and they went from forty-eight to sixty-four. There were seven of them as I recall, but you could almost see the disappointment on the guys’ faces as they, as the plane proceeded.

RV: What was the mood do you remember it being more joyous, or was it somber?

DT: Oh yes it was a festive mood like you were, you’ve won something or you’d made your year. You got through the year, especially with the young Army guys that had been out in the field.

RV: Were you able to talk to anybody else from the other services?

DT: Well, you talked to the people around you and, but there wasn't much talk of, there was more talk about what we’re going to do when we get home, rather than what we’d been doing. I think everybody on the plane pretty much knew what we’d been doing, so there wasn’t much, it wasn’t like rehashing a basketball game or something that had just taken place. It was more of a, what are we going to do when we get home, that type of thing.

RV: Mr. Timmer, how do you feel about the one-year service, the one-year rotation as opposed to something like we had in World War II where you simply served until the conflict was over?

DT: Well, you know a lot of people went back for more years just because they wanted to, they felt that’s what they really wanted to do. I think the one-year probably was good because it got a lot of people war experience or that type of experience. I don’t know if it would have been any, since it got in to sort of a ho hum type of thing, it wasn’t like World War II where they were advancing and doing things and making progress.
Just didn’t seem like this, it was almost like it was another training situation over there. They were just training people in war. If they could, it wouldn’t have been any more in a year in my opinion if they’d have let the military run it.

RV: Were you able to bring anything home with you, any souvenirs?

DT: Oh, I think I brought home a jungle machete that they used to cut heavy jungle that I got from an Army guy, but other than that I think that’s about all I really brought, other than the memento they gave me, they gave me two fifty caliber shell casings that had been made into flower vases, they were brass and that was sort of a customary thing to give.

RV: Okay, do you still have those?

DT: Yes.

RV: Now, when you flew back, where did you fly into the United States?

DT: We flew into, I think Travis Air Force Base.

RV: And from there you were able to go back to Ohio?

DT: Let me get my thoughts together here. No. I ‘m trying to think where we were transferred to. We went from there to, we were going to Laredo, yes so I went back to Ohio to pick family up.

RV: Okay, did you have any adverse reactions from anybody at the airports or any of the civilians you came in contact with?

DT: No, we landed at the base at Travis, so there really wasn't any, and then I put on civilian clothes, traveled civilian attire, so it really wasn’t any, I didn’t see anything.

RV: Did they tell you to put on civilian attire?

DT: No, no I just did.

RV: Okay, did you have any difficulty kind of transitioning back to the United States personally?

DT: No, I don’t think so.

RV: Okay. Did people ask about you Vietnam experience?

DT: Oh, some of the military people did. We were, we went to Laredo from there, and I think Laredo was sort of out of touch with everything. Just didn’t seem to talk about the war much down there. A lot of the, when you’d go to the club or someplace, it
was a training base and a lot of the young pilots, trainees, would ask you about your
experiences there, but other than that nothing from the civilian populace.

RV: Why do you think that was?

DT: Well, like I say I think Laredo was sort of out of touch with everything. I
don’t know if you’ve spent any time in Laredo.

RV: I haven’t, but I’ve heard certain things.

DT: But it’s sort of down away from everything, and its probably grown since we
were there in ’68, but it just, I just think that those people were not that aware of the war.

RV: Have you found that true throughout the rest of your life, people were not
that knowledgeable about Vietnam?

DT: That’s true. Other than, of course, I don’t think I noticed it as much because
I’d say a majority of the people I’ve always been around have always been military or ex-
military. Even in civilian life as I hired people, I hired a lot of military and ex-military,
and they were pretty much all aware of Vietnam. But its true, a lot of the younger
generation like you talk about it, are not aware, but I think its not just Vietnam. I think
our younger generation is not aware of hardly anything outside the confines of the two
hundred foot circle that they’re in. They just, geography is a thing of the past, history
about anything outside of the United States is almost unheard of., I don’t know, I guess
its just a way of life nowadays.

RV: When you returned in 1968, how much did you keep up with what was going
on in Vietnam?

DT: We kept up pretty much, you know I have a lot, say I have a lot of friends
that were there, still heard from a lot of people, and we kept track of a lot of, and we still,
I still keep track of two or three people today that were over there that we knew. So yes,
we, we’re interested to see if they’ve run into things. And it was a subject usually of
staff meetings and that kind of thing as the base of what was going on. We’d get, still get
briefings of what was happening over there, and of course it was in the news too.

RV: What were your opinions at the time and since then on the anti-war
movement?
DT: Oh I thought that was a terrible idea, you know just showed total lack of
loyalty to the country in my opinion. I just can’t see, people that are like that, they just
need to move out, they just don’t need to be in the United States.
RV: Is that what you felt then?
DT: Yes, and today. We got all these people, especially all of our people in
Hollywood that just are really dissident against that type of thing, and if they feel that
terrible about it they just ought to move someplace else.
RV: Did you follow, when you returned, did you think the United States was
going down the right path. You had mentioned that we had kind of changed tactics after
1968. What did you think of U.S. policy overall?
DT: Well, up to that time, we didn’t seem like we were very aggressive. Well just
that there were so many rules. I never saw a war or heard of a war or read about a war
that was fought with so many rules. You couldn’t do this, you couldn’t do that, well our
fighters over there were just so hamstrung that they just, they’d come back just seething
mad some of them, just they had opportunities to do things, and the rules wouldn’t let the
do that.
RV: Can you give me an example?
DT: Well, you weren’t allowed to fly above a certain parallel, you weren’t
allowed to engage certain areas, you weren’t, even though you knew something was
there, you couldn’t do anything outwardly with Laos or Cambodia. That was just, total
rules that were set down for the military or just prohibitive of really trying to go out and
aggressively win, and I think most of those restrictions or all of them in the Gulf War
were not there was the reason it took place so quickly.
RV: What did you think of United States Vietnamization policy, turning the war
over to the Vietnamese to fight?
DT: I never really was aware that we had turned it over to them.
RV: Based on what you witnessed do you think they were capable of prosecuting
the war?
DT: No, they would have been defeated very quickly. We did, there again the
rules. We weren’t supposed to fly and destroy crops or anything, but the Vietnamese
were supposed to do it. Well, we put Vietnamese symbols on the airplane and put a
Vietnamese military guy in the airplane and we proceeded on. That got around the rules,
but these are the types of things that you fought just all the time over there.

RV: How did you feel in January of ’73 when the United States had withdrawn,
finally from Vietnam?

DT: Well, I felt like its about time. You know we get out of there, and it just--

What was it, ten, twelve years we were over there doing something that should have been
done in a year? Just drug on and on and on.

RV: What did you think of President Nixon’s policy toward Vietnam?

DT: Well, I really don’t have, didn’t have an opinion on it. I sort of, after the early
’70s, I sort of just left Vietnam go out of my mind, got on about my other business at
hand.

RV: Okay. Did you think the United States achieved peace with honor as what
was said at the time, by Kissinger and Nixon?

DT: Well, we’d achieved peace. I don’t know, until you win, I’m not sure its ever
with honor. Again, it was a politician’s war and a politician’s end.

RV: Do you think they achieved their ends?

DT: Well, I don't know, I don’t know if they ever had any stated missions goals,
you know. Like Persian Gulf, they said we’re going to go in there, we’re going to free
Kuwait and run the Iraqis out, and that’s what they did. When they got to that point, they
quit, but I don’t know that I ever saw a mission goal in Vietnam, or heard of one.

RV: Why do you think that they didn’t do that?

DT: Well, I think that’s, that was the only way or prolonging it. I think if they’d
have had the goals and let the military do what they’d done, it would have got over too
quick. Now, whatever the politicians felt that the country needed this, but it really divided
the country.

RV: So you feel like the politicians wanted to drag the war out?

DT: Well it had to be. They were running the whole thing because I’m pretty
certain the military didn’t get their way.

RV: Do you remember how you felt in April 1975 when Saigon fell and South
Vietnam fell?
DT: Well, again I just felt if we’d have done our job when we were over there and
won the war like we should have, those things wouldn’t have happened but it was
something that was inevitable as long as the North Vietnamese hadn’t been beaten that
that was going to take place.

RV: One of the reasons given to go to Vietnam was the domino theory, that if you
didn’t stop communism, communist aggression or however you want to say it, there, then
it would simply spread like a row of dominos falling, did you but into that?

DT: Well, to a certain degree, to the premise that it had to be stopped at
someplace because it could still grow, because it was evident that it was growing as it
was going to different countries. So I wasn't sure that Vietnam was the place or they
picked the right place to stop it.

RV: Looking back at your Vietnam experience, are there any songs or musical
groups that you hear today that take you back to that time?

DT: Well we had a, the Ranch Hand had the words to, I can’t even remember the
name of the song that we used every two weeks at our meeting, and when I hear that tune
it sort of takes me back to the times we had over there.

RV: You don’t remember the tune though?

DT: I can’t remember the name of it, because we never used the name.

RV: Was it a real popular song at the time?

DT: It was a popular song at the time that we had just made up our, and I don’t
have them here, I’ve got them someplace in the house, I got the words to the song the
way we sang it, but most of the Ranch Hand guys would know what it was if they saw it
or heard it.

RV: Okay. Are there any good books on Vietnam that you would recommend or
that you’ve read?

DT: No.

RV: Or bad books I guess for that matter?

DT: No, actually I haven’t read very much on Vietnam, just I don’t know--I just
didn’t feel comfortable reading about what I personally knew what went on so I just
didn’t want to read anybody else’s accounts, didn’t have any desire to.

RV: Okay, how about movies on Vietnam, do you see those?
DT: Oh, I saw *Hamburger Hill*, only because it was filmed in parts of the area that we sprayed, and only somebody from Ranch Hand would probably have known that. We knew at the time what we were spraying was going to be a big operation by the Army, and that was one of our tougher missions that we flew because there were so many turns and twists around the river bends and things that we sprayed. But in the movie you could see the results of some of the spraying.

RV: Any others?

DT: No, I can’t remember anything that was Vietnam related, no.

RV: Looking back at your Ranch Hand mission, do you think you guys successfully completed that mission or that you did make a difference in the war?

DT: Absolutely.

RV: What do you think about Vietnam today? Do you follow the country or at all?

DT: Oh, not, to some degree. I’ve read some of the clips that McCain has had. I followed his career pretty close because he was a classmate.

RV: Oh really.

DT: Yes. And so.

RV: Did you know him?

DT: Yes, I knew John pretty well. And so I followed, and in fact he just went back over there this Christmas with his family to visit. So from that standpoint I followed what goes on. I’ve had some Vietnamese people work for me that have sort of filled me in on how things, going on over there, and how the country’s starting to restabilize somewhat, but you know its sort of like Korea. I’m not sure that the North and the South will ever blend together. Its going to take a long time if it does.

RV: Would you ever want to go back to visit Vietnam?

DT: Yes, I’ve thought about going back over and visiting some of the areas, you know especially up around the Da Nang area. I can pretty well visualize that to this day, just all the areas we flew over and just everything that was there.

RV: You said you had some contact with Vietnamese here in the United States, the ones who work for you, how did they feel about the war; do you ever talk about it with them?
DT: Well, they felt that the Americans sort of gave them some freedom, of course
once they ended up over here, they were part of the good time. So they still felt bad
about the people that were there, although they said things were starting to get better.
Most of them would go back once every couple of years to visit.

RV: Looking back at your service in Vietnam, how do you feel about it today?
DT: Well, I feel good; I feel it was a year well spent. Again, I felt that we were
cheated a little bit by you know, be like a basketball team going out and being told that
you can shoot but don’t make very many baskets. I felt we could have had the win while
we were there, because we sure had the firepower and the people that were willing to go
do the job, but just didn’t have the go ahead. I just felt that the whole hierarchy of
military had their hands tied. Westmoreland must have been a very disgruntled
gentleman.

RV: If you could change anything about your experience in Vietnam, what would
it be?
DT: My personal experience, see I don't know. I had two or three, like I said, two
or three friends that ended up being killed over there, but you always wish you could
change that. But from my year personally other than being separated from the family for
a year I think, it went pretty well.

RV: How did your family react to you when you did get back?
DT: Oh, you know they were glad to see me. Of course they had the letters, we
sent some tapes back and forth, but it was a good reunion.

RV: What do you think was the most significant thing that you learned in
Vietnam, while you were there?
DT: It gave me a lot of faith in the training we had, and it gave me a lot of trust in
the people I was working with.

RV: Did that continue with you the rest of your life?
DT: Yes.

RV: How has the war most affected your life?
DT: I don’t know, I can’t say that it, it really hasn’t affected. It may have given
me a lot of reassurances on capabilities. Let me know that I was capable of doing pretty
much anything that set out to do, that given a job I could go get it done. So, it probably
boosted my confidence in myself a lot. Whereas I saw some people, not a lot, but some
that had just totally tore down all those things in them. They just totally became
unconfident, anything they were doing. Part of it was through the fear factor and that
just, all the wanted was out of there.

RV: Did you notice, looking back at your military career, Vietnam was one year
in a twenty-one year military career. Do you see a difference in yourself and then after
when you came back, those things that you just spoke of?

DT: Oh, I think confidence was a lot higher and being a team, really made you a
team player, gave you the insights that you can’t do things by yourself. Those proved to
be pretty good things later in life, as I got more responsibilities, more leadership things,
that you looked to people to really do their jobs and give them the wherewithal to do the
job.

RV: What do you think were the lessons that the United States learned from the
war, or didn’t learn from the war?

DT: Well, I think some people learned that you can’t let the politicians run a war,
and I think that was evident at the Gulf War that George Bush Sr. knew that, and he very
much turned it over to the military to go get their jobs done. Although, all the time
retaining control of the situation. So, I mean you can be a politician and do your job
without having to totally control all the moves or hamper all them, what’s going on. So I
think that’s one of the big things that I thought that politicians learned from that
experience.

RV: Is there anything else that you can look at the United States, post-war foreign
policy?

DT: Well, I’m sure there was but I’m not a big foreign policy type. I don’t really
delve into that. That’s not one of my things, so I’m not really--I don’t really have any
comments on foreign policy. I’m sure it did, it helped shape a lot of foreign policies that
we’ve used since then, but I’m not really aware or could say what they are.

RV: Do you think the United States government has taken care of its Vietnam
veterans?

DT: After a fashion I think they have. There’s some that will say they weren’t
taken care of, but you know, you got to, some things you just have to help yourself a little
bit to get help. There’s some people that I think were beyond help. They would have
been that way whether they came out, no matter what they come out of, come out of the
military or whatever they come out of, they would have ended up the way they are.
There is enough government help out there, if you want to help yourself a little bit. I
mean they’re not going to, they didn’t come out and just absolutely take care of
everybody like some people wanted to be taken care of, but I’m not in favor of that
anyway.
RV: Did you yourself experience any Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or anything
like that?
DT: No, nothing.
RV: Do you see that as a legitimate claim by some Vietnam veterans?
DT: Like I say, I’m sure there are some that had those problems, and whether they
were addressed or not I don’t really know, probably in some cases they aren’t. I just, I
guess it’s like any other cross-section of a group you take. You’re going to find a little
bit of everything within that group, and you’re, just like Vietnam veterans, you found
some that had the disorders, some that wanted to get better, some didn’t want to get
better, just the total group. We’re just not all the same, so, but I believe that anybody that
really wanted to help himself and wanted to better himself had the opportunity.
RV: For the younger generation today, what would you teach them or tell them
about Vietnam?
DT: Well first you’ve got to tell them where it is.
RV: That’s true.
DT: You know just make them aware that this was another piece of history that
shouldn’t be forgotten. It wasn’t the most glorious peace because we didn’t win outright
and stop what we supposedly aimed to stop, but it was still another part of history where
it actually probably had some effect in slowing down communism. It made people more
aware of communism, and I think in that way it deterred its growth and I think that the
younger people need to be aware of it. That really what Vietnam was all about.
RV: Have you ever been to the Wall in Washington?
DT: No I have not.
RV: Would you like to go?
DT: Yes, sometime. I just have never been in Washington since then, is the reason
I never, since the memorial’s been put up. In a way I’d like to go, and on the other there’s
probably too many names on there I don’t want to be reminded of, but I understand its
really a wonderful sight.

RV: Have you ever seen one of the traveling walls that go around the country?
DT: No, I was in Reno just a day or two after it left, just missed it in Reno here
last year, but people just really spoke very highly of it there. I talked to one lady that went
three times while it was there, and she didn’t really have any Vietnam ties, it just. But,
she was the age that she remembered the riots and the bad feelings and everything and
she was sort of on the other side of the fence.

RV: While you were there in Vietnam, one thing I neglected to ask you earlier is,
did you seen any of the racial tensions at all?
DT: Not really. I didn’t, if there was any of that going on I think it might have
been more in the Army because they probably had more of the blacks that didn’t want to
be there. In Vietnam race was just primarily black and white at that time, but no, not
within our group at all was there any problems.

RV: Okay, okay. Now, when you returned in 1968 you said you went to Laredo,
how long did you stay down there?
DT: Two years.

RV: Okay, and what were your duties there?
DT: I was the base civil engineer. I got that job based on my degree that I’d
gotten. They figured that civil engineering was the place for me to be.

RV: How did you like that?
DT: I loved it. I stayed in that until I retired.

RV: Oh, did you really?
DT: In that career field, yes.

RV: Where did you go after Laredo?
DT: I went from Laredo to Alaska for four years. One year out on the Aleutian
chain, about a year by myself at Shemya, I don’t if you ever head of Shemya.

RV: I sure have.
DT: I spent a year on Shemya. And then let’s see, came back to San Antonio for two years, and then to Scott Air Force Base for three years and that’s where I retired.

RV: What made you retire, get out of the?

DT: Didn’t get promoted.

RV: Oh, okay. Where you thought you would or should have, the time was right?

DT: And everybody else did. The fact they were ready to send me to Germany, but you had to be a full Colonel to go and the list came out and I wasn't on it. So I went up, the day the list came out, that was the day I went up and retired, like I always said I would.

RV: Right, and what kind of career did you get into after the military?

DT: With all the base engineer experience I had, I got into the facilities work. Actually went to Texas Instruments as a facilities manager, and then ended up going to Compaq computer in their heyday in growth and did all their construction, construction management and facility management.

RV: Okay, well sir is there anything else that you’d like to add or talk about that we have not discussed today?

DT: I think we’ve pretty well covered everything. I got a name of a fellow that is a good friend that I’m not totally sure what his Vietnam tour was, but I know that since he had gotten out, or he’s in the reserves, he has had a lot of Vietnam ties as far as trying to find those people reported missing, and he’s got come contacts in Vietnam and I think he’d be an interesting person to talk to, to add that aspect of who’s missing over there. His name’s Richard English, you may already have his name.

RV: Sir, let me sign off real quick from our interview. This will conclude our interview with Don Timmer.