Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone and I’m conducting an Oral

History Interview with Mr. Charles ‘Ty’ Dodge. Today is July 18, 2003. It is

approximately 9:47 AM Central Standard Time. I am in Lubbock, Texas on the campus

of Texas Tech University in the Special Collections Library Interview Room. Mr.

Dodge, you are in Birmingham, Alabama. Why don’t we start with some biographical

information on yourself, sir? Tell me when and where you were born and a little bit

about growing up.

Charles Dodge: Born in Temple, Texas on April 28, 1945, which my mom

always reminded me was false VE Day, Victory in Europe Day. We lived there about 18

months. My dad was in Europe and after about 18 months we headed over to Germany

right after the war actually to Austria. Being an Army brat spent most of my life

traveling around. I’d been in 12 schools by the time I was in high school. We spent

about six years in Europe, two different tours with dad over there.

RV: How did the traveling affect you? Was that hard on you as a child growing

up?

CD: You know it’s interesting. I tend to be sort of not an extrovert, more of an

introvert. Yet, I think traveling and meeting new people kind of forced me out of my

shell. I really liked it. It was probably hardest during the early high school years. I think

that’s when kids get attached to friends and home and what have you. I guess we just got
used to it after a while. Looking back it was a great experience, although I’m glad to have some roots now.

RV: How long were you in Temple?
CD: Only 18 months. Other than one of my duty stations in the Army was at Ft. Hood so I was there about six months.

RV: When you think about your childhood, where do you see? Do you see a particular place?
CD: I guess the places that I remember most would be Germany experiences, a lot of time in Virginia and the Washington D.C. area.

RV: Tell me about Germany, when were you over there? How old were you?
CD: The first time I was 18 months to four years. We were in Austria most of that time in Vienna. Of course being young, I remember a German maid who kind of took care of me. I had an older sister who was five years older. I can kind of remember things that we did. In fact, my wife and I went back to Germany in 1991 and visited those places and they came back to me. Stories that my mom would tell me, dad was involved in sort of the reconstruction of government aspects of Germany. We lived in German housing just on the economy. We would often get threats against our various lives. My mom would tell me about Ia, my maid, taking me out on walks and there would be CID guys dressed as plumbers and electricians and what have you all along the way kind of keeping watch. That was my very early time. We were again in Germany in the mid-50s in Baumholder and Stuttgart. A lot of fond memories of that as well.

RV: You said you had a sister, any other siblings?
CD: No, just one.

RV: Tell me about your parents. Tell me about your dad, his job and what he did.
CD: Dad grew up in the northeast, born in New Jersey and kind of raised in Vermont. He was a 1930 graduate of the United States Military Academy. Chose cavalry as his combat arm. Kind of started his career at Ft. Riley at the Cavalry School. He was a die hard, in the wool, saber-swinging cavalryman until the end. In fact he retired a lieutenant general. In the early ‘60s he commanded the First Cavalry Division in Korea. I recall that he required that all of his officers put whatever their branch insignia
was on top of crossed sabers. Kind of non-reg, but he was a kind of non-reg guy I think. Very interesting guy though, but loved the combat arms. Always thought of himself as a soldier in the foxhole. Fairly demanding as you might expect, a great guy.

RV: How about your mother?

CD: My mom was San Franciscan. Kind of had the pioneer spirit. Her dad was an Australian Episcopal minister. He was killed when she was about ten maybe. They had gotten a new automotive fire engine in Oakland. Several people from around, dignitaries and whatever were invited to ride on it. He and several others were riding on it on one of those first rides. It slipped off the side of the road and pinned him against a tree. He eventually died. My mom and her two sisters grew up in an all female household in Palo Alto. Mom I think kind of assumed the role of dad in the family. She was the middle daughter. She had a very adventurous spirit. Was a great storyteller. I can remember going on trips with her, for example, battlefields around the east and she could make a Civil War battlefield absolutely come alive.

RV: Really? That’s neat.

CD: In fact it drove her crazy in Germany. My sister would always sleep when we went on vacation. It drove my mom nuts.

RV: I can imagine that your father was a great influence on you joining the military. Was that so?

CD: Well, he was and yet never in the way that he expected it. Didn’t expect me to go to West Point. Didn’t expect me to go into the military. He kind of told me the positives and the negatives about military life. As I grew up I just kind of assumed that I would do what dad did. I planned on a military career.

RV: You did?

CD: Yes.

RV: From how young did you plan this? Do you remember?

CD: In terms of actual planning probably not until late high school. Though I can’t ever really remember myself thinking about being in any other kind of an occupation. Military was so ingrained I just assumed that’s what everybody did.

RV: Well, you grew up around it and in it.
CD: Interestingly enough we lived very infrequently on the military post. All but one of the six years in Germany. Well, for five years we lived on the economy. Even in the States we tended not to live on the post. So we were around a lot of civilians but had military influence as well.

RV: Tell me about your jobs you had as a youth. What did you do? Did you work a lot or were you not?

CD: A fair amount. In the middle of high school I started working in an Esso station, back when they had Esso stations. In my senior year of high school I was at a boarding school and didn’t have the opportunity to work. My first year at Virginia I was schooled summer and winter and everything. As I mentioned with all the knowledge of a 19 year old eloped, my second year in Virginia. Then I had to find a co-ed school. This was my first wife; we ended up at Furman. Mom and dad agreed to pay my college expense, but everything else was my problem now. So I worked at the post office and in the summers did construction work.

RV: What kind of student were you growing up?

CD: I was an awful student. Until my senior year in high school when mom and dad sent me to The Bullis School in Silver Spring, Maryland, which was an all-male boarding school. Kind of an Annapolis prep school. The regimen there I did pretty well there. Got to Virginia and I was in the civil engineering program in Virginia. I really don’t have, a background is not the right word; I don’t have a mathematical bone in my body. Yet, mom and dad had always told me I was good at fixing things and making things and what have you. So I assumed I needed to be an engineer. Really didn’t like that. I ended up with sociology major at Furman.

RV: What do you remember as your favorite subjects then if you weren’t good or didn’t like math?

CD: I tended not to like subjects that I had to memorize. For example history was always hard for me. I liked geometry because I could figure out geometry. I didn’t have to memorize anything. I tended to like English. But I liked sociology courses; psychology courses that sort of thing.

RV: You said you went to the University of Virginia, was that by choice? Was it expected that you would go into college? Did you have a desire to go in?
CD: I don’t think that I ever thought anything else. It was just one of those what
you did sort of things. We happened to be residents of Virginia the time. So, that was
kind of a natural match.

RV: What year did you graduate high school?

CD: I graduated in ’63.

RV: You entered in the fall of ’63 to UVA?

CD: Yes.

RV: You lasted one year is that right?

CD: Yes, a year and a half.

RV: Why just a year and a half there at UVA?

CD: I eloped right at the end of the first semester of my second year. Then found
myself being married in an all-male school. My wife was going to Radford at the time
down in the Southwestern corner of Virginia. We had to find a school that would
accommodate both of us. Plus the fact that frankly my grades were awful in the
engineering program at Virginia.

RV: What was the influence of your father upon your grades and your schooling?

CD: It’s interesting. I would put him in the workaholic category. We never
really had a lot of time together growing up. We did more in his later years than when I
was young. He was sort of a stern taskmaster but he wasn’t around much. I think mom
was maybe a greater influence on my life in that way. As I think about motivation and
the two of them I would jump over a tall building for dad because I was afraid not to. I
would jump over a tall building for mom because she made me want to. They were
totally different in the way they motivated.

RV: So when you went down to Furman, you ended up graduating is that right?

CD: Right.

RV: What year did you graduate?

CD: Graduated in ’68.

RV: Tell me between ’63 and ’68 this is when the United States was really
heavily getting involved in Southeast Asia what did you know about that involvement?
CD: It was interesting in Virginia. I don’t think I was too in tune to that even though I was in the ROTC program. At Furman being married and spending more time at home watching television occasionally not in a dorm room, we of course began watching Vietnam unfold on the TV. So I would watch that but I’m not sure that I was that in tune with the big picture. I kind of saw what was happening on the ground. Other than the fact that my dad always impressed on me that whether we were obligated to go to Vietnam, he couldn’t answer that question. He thought that our cause was just. There was a people being overtaken by Communism and losing their freedom. He felt it was a good cause. That I think bled over to me.

RV: Were you at this point in your career, thinking ok, I’m definitely going to be in a war very shortly? So were you thinking I might be able to not get involved in that?

CD: Well having my eyes set on a military career as it turned out when I got to Furman and being married I kind of settled down. My grades got pretty good. I ended up being a Distinguished Military Graduate and I could pick my branch and my first duty assignment.

RV: You did ROTC at Furman?

CD: I ended up picking armor as my branch. We were able to select duty assignments and I picked Germany. This was about a year before I graduated, a little less. As I got to thinking about that it seemed that if I were to make a career of it, Germany wasn’t the place to start. Vietnam was the place to start. So I had my orders changed. So it was purely voluntary which may have a lot to do with attitudes. You know a lot of guys struggled with Vietnam because they were pulled over there on a chain. They didn’t really want to go and yet that was my career. My outlook is probably different than some.

RV: You changed from going to Germany to actually wanting to go to Southeast Asia?

CD: Yes.

RV: Can you tell me about how that happened inside you? You’re going ok I can be safe pretty much in Central Europe versus go right in to a war zone.

CD: I guess part of the good news is I was 22 years old and nobody dies when you're 22. We’re all bullet proof. Obviously, I saw the risk and some people that I knew
had been killed that wasn’t going to happen to me. I did have a career that I had to consider. That was from a career standpoint the best way to get real experience for what the Army needed.

RV: Tell me about your ROTC training. What was that like?

CD: I kind of enjoyed it. It was sort of natural just because I’d been in the military family. The regimen and all that hoopla I really liked that. I enjoyed the subjects we studied. Oddly enough some of the military customs I found a little strange. But I think they’re necessary to keep a family that big sort of cohesive as they move around from place to place, some of that regimen.

RV: Can you give me an example?

CD: Yes, things like when you go to a new post visiting your commanding officer. I can’t remember the exact thing. You know leaving two business cards in the silver tray. All that stuff seemed kind of weird to me. I guess it was the regimen that kind of made you feel a fit because you knew what was going to happen no matter where you were. I enjoyed the ROTC program.

RV: You adapted to that military discipline and military lifestyle ok?

CD: Yes, I did.

RV: Was that mainly because you’d grown up around it and in it?

CD: I think so.

RV: When you finished at Furman where did you go? What happened?

CD: First duty stationed right out of Furman I went to Fort Jackson South Carolina as a training officer. Sort of a, ‘You’ve got to put this guy some place before we can get him into school,’ deal. I was the training officer and the mess officer. All the duties that a new second lieutenant has. An interesting experience though. I learned a lot from the NCOs that were on staff there. They really taught me a lot. I had one interesting experience that I didn’t really know how it was going to play out. We had one guy that really was a troublemaker. I, for some reason, decided to take him under my wing and see if I could turn him around. We eventually got him through basic training. A couple years later I was commanding a convoy in Vietnam and we stopped along the road and met another convoy coming south. The lieutenant with that convoy said, ‘Hey, you’re Lieutenant Dodge’. I said, ‘Yes’. It turned out to be that guy.
RV: Really?
CD: Yes. He commented that he'd appreciated the kind of discipline in basic training and my interest in him.
RV: Tell me what your duties were as training officer.
CD: You know it's interesting being a new second lieutenant with some good NCOs around. They were the guys that really ran the show. Even though I was supposed to look like I was doing something. I would do things like be the duty officer on the grenade range. We would do a lot of things with the training company. Marches and training exercises; one thing and another. I did have a responsibility for the NCOs in my training company. Though again they really were the ones that ran the ship. Then I had a lot of miscellaneous duties like mess officer and I can't even remember. I probably had five or six of those other odd jobs that the lieutenant gets. I remember one real interesting experience because I thought I was pretty put together and I was. I was pretty polished and buttoned up and starched and all that stuff. I arrived on my first day with the training company there at Ft. Jackson.

RV: This is again in 1968 or '69?
CD: '68 yes. Summer of '68. A buck sergeant who was one of the NCOs there walked up to me and said, ‘Lieutenant Dodge, you look pretty good’. I thought yes I do. I was starched and polished and all that. ‘Your boots look good’. Said, ‘Yes I spent a lot of time shinning them last night’. He looked down at them he said, ‘But sir, did you shine the tongue?’ I had to confess I had not shined the tongue. That got my attention. Attention to detail that’s what keeps people alive in the Army.

RV: Let’s back up just a minute to Furman. Did you go one summer to kind of a basic training?
CD: I did. We went to Ft. Bragg.
RV: Tell me what that experience was like for you?
CD: I mentioned before I’m sort of an introvert. I tended to wrestle with feeling good about myself and having a lot of confidence. I played a lot of sports, but I was not a jock by any means. I played Lacrosse and some other stuff like that. I always had a fear and maybe it was because my dad expected a lot. I always had a fear that I wasn't going to be successful.
RV: Really? In general in life or just at certain?

CD: Still to this day it still kind of haunts me. I got into training programs like summer camp at Ft. Bragg where there’s a lot of harassment. My greatest fear was not being able to cut it. It turned out ok. I was able to do ok. I remember things like the bayonet course. I loved the bayonet course. We did the 34 foot tower, the jump tower and stuff like that.

RV: Were you motivated by this fear or did it more paralyze you at times?

CD: I think I was motivated by it.

RV: Did you share this with your father or your mother?

CD: Never did.

RV: You say you still have that today?

CD: To a point.

RV: Where do you think that comes from?

DC: I think it may come from the fact and I’m speculating here. Dad was the kind of guy that expected you to jump before he told you to jump. Get it right the first time and never make a mistake kind of thing. We make mistakes. Guess I was always trying to live up to that expectation of my dad realizing that I could never be perfect. He wanted perfect. It’s really kind of funny. Because he was a loving guy. When you really messed up he didn’t rub it in because he knew that you’d rub it in yourself. On the other hand he was very rigid about a lot of things. I think that’s where I got it. Other than that just general personality traits.

RV: Back at Ft. Jackson how did you relate to the younger men that you were training and overseeing?

CD: Probably more compassionately than my NCOs did because again that’s kind of my nature. I thought some of the things we did we over did it. We would send the disciplinary guy problems down near a river and they’d carry big logs through the sand. You know do all that stuff which accomplished the purpose. It seemed like over doing it to me. I could see now what they were trying to accomplish and how it actually did work in some cases. I felt a real compassion for the Puerto Ricans that were in the training. A lot of them didn’t speak great English. Man, the NCOs would get all over them about that. Really, they’d give them a hard time. Of course my Training NCOs
thought they were putting on so that they could shirk their duties or slack off. I didn’t believe that. I kind of had a compassionate view toward them. Even at that though I think I pushed them pretty hard, realizing that we were in the middle of a war and that’s where you started learning how to survive it.

RV: Did any of the people above you, had they had experience in Southeast Asia?

CD: It’s funny I don’t remember anybody above me at all at Ft. Jackson other than one major who chewed me out for something. I can’t remember what it was he chewed me out for. I don’t think he was in my immediate chain of command.

RV: The men that you were training did they know they were going to Southeast Asia?

CD: Yes, I think they had pretty good idea.

RV: How about yourself? Did you have an idea that you would be over there shortly or did you have a choice of not to go over?

CD: In fact I already had orders. Having requested them at Furman. I actually had I guess they weren’t specific date at that point but I was on the list to go as soon as I got through my training.

RV: What training was that?

CD: Most of the stuff that I did, I did Ranger School in fall of ’68. I did Armor Officer Basic in the fall of ’68 at Ft. Knox. The spring or late winter I guess or early part of ’69 I went to Jungle School in Panama. That was actually during my last duty station before going to Vietnam. I was stationed at Ft. Hood for about six months. I went to Panama during that time.

RV: Let’s go back tell me about Ranger training what was that like?

CD: Scared me to death.

RV: Yes?

CD: Yes. Learned a lot. Learned a lot about myself. Kind of interesting. You know Rangers are all about teamwork. Everything’s done with a buddy. You never leave your buddy behind. The first day, of course, Rangers spent a lot of time in the water. The first day they double-timed the 3rd Ranger Company over to one of the pools at Ft. Benning for our swimming test. We had on our fatigues and boots and stuff. Lined
us up in front of the high dive. Of course we weren’t supposed to say anything, look at anywhere but straight ahead, all that Ranger stuff. One of the Ranger instructors got up
and read us the rules. He said, ‘What we’re going to do is put a 45 pound pack on you
and give you an M-1 rifle, blindfold you, walk you up to the top of the ladder, walk you
out to the end of the board and then tell you to step off. The rules are when you get in the
water you can drop your pack, but you may never, ever leave your rifle. Number two if
you have to be fished out of the pool you fail and if you drown you fail. That’s a big
confidence builder. I’m about eight or nine guys back from the ladder I guess. Standing
next to me was a young black lieutenant named Reginald White. First time I’d ever seen
him. Reggie turned to me. Of course, we weren’t supposed to be talking. He said, ‘Ty, I
can’t swim’. I said, ‘Man, Reggie, you’ve got to get out of this line’. He said, ‘No way
man, I’m going to get the tab’. We were really there for two reasons. One was to get the
Ranger tab and the other was to learn how to survive. I’m not sure which was more
important. Probably the tab. Anyway Reggie stayed in line. I figured well, it’s his call.
He got to the ladder and they blindfolded him did all the stuff. Took him to the top and
he walked out to the end of the board and walked off. Somehow he made it to the side.
The thing that impressed me about Reggie was that during our Ranger training Reggie
taught us how to work as a team. I guess maybe that’s the biggest thing I got. Other than
just a lot of self-confidence.

RV: How did he teach you to work as a team?

CD: I don’t know. He was one of those guys that was always positive. When
one guy was down he would figure out a way to get them up. If one guy couldn’t carry
his pack anymore somebody else carried it. Maybe Reggie encouraged you to do that.
He was just one of those great team builders.

RV: Anything else at your Ranger training? Did you say you went to jump
school as well?

CD: No, I didn’t do jump school.

RV: What other kind of training did you have besides the Jungle School?

CD: I had Armor Officer Basic training.

RV: What was that like?
CD: It was at Ft. Knox and we packed an awful lot in on weapons, vehicles, tactics. One thing and another. It was so much you spent so little time on any topic. I'm not sure we ever learned any of it very well. One thing that we didn’t really train on was cavalry tactics. Of course that’s what I ended up in Vietnam.

RV: Why not?

CD: I don’t know. I think they just didn’t have time to pack it in. I think the cavalry tactics we had in Vietnam were so different than typical cavalry anyway that it wouldn’t have made a lot of difference.

RV: The training that you received at Armor Officer Basic was that focused on what you would be doing in Southeast Asia or was it just general?

CD: I’m not sure I could say it was 50/50 but it was both. A lot of it just dealt with equipment and tactics you would use anywhere. On the other hand a lot of the guys there had some Vietnam experience. So that was sort of their focus was to get you ready for Vietnam.

RV: What were they telling you? Do you remember what they were telling you about Vietnam?

CD: You know I don’t other than I can recall for example learning about booby traps and anti tank mines and stuff. The NCOs really impressing on you that it could be you that could go down with one of these and being very rigid about that.

RV: How did you feel about the fact that you knew you were going over there?

CD: Actually scared but excited at the same time. I anticipated it in a positive way.

RV: How about your wife?

CD: We had a small child at the time. A young son who was born in ’68 or ’69 rather. She grew up as an Air Force brat. So she understood where I was coming from. She was not at all excited about my going. As I look back upon that now I can appreciate that a lot better. I didn’t appreciate it very well then.

RV: How about your parents?

CD: Mom and dad were ok with it. They were both kind of realists. Realized this was part of the military. If you were going to be in the military you had to expect to do that. Becky’s mom and dad, they were probably about as excited about it as my mom
and dad were. They were very supportive of it. In fact I talked to her dad about it at
some length before I made the decision to have my orders changed. He pretty much said,
‘You’ve got to do what you’ve go to do. You’re making a career of it’.
RV: So he was pro-you going over to Southeast Asia?
CD: Yes, at least positive.
RV: Tell me about Jungle School in Panama. What was that like?
CD: It was two weeks as I recall; two or three weeks, most of which we spent in
the jungle. Pretty good prep for Vietnam I think. I was in the Central Highlands in
Vietnam, which is a little bit hilly. In the jungle of Panama where we were was all
mountains so it was all up and down and a lot of rain. Kind of learning to make do in an
adverse environment. I don’t recall that I learned an awful lot about tactics. It was an
awful long time ago, I probably did. Did some fun things. We had a slide for life that
they built across the Chagris River from a cliff on the other side. We had to wrap all of
our gear in a poncho to make a raft and swim it across the river. Then we would climb
up this cliff, I don’t know how high we were maybe 80 feet. There was a tower up there
on a little ledge. The last thing they would do before they put you on the slide for life
was they made you dip your pulley in oil. I don’t know if that really made it go faster,
but in your mind it seemed like it was going to. Then we’d take the zip line across the
Chagris River. That was one of my big memories and rappelling off a waterfall. I
thought that was kind of fun.
RV: What kind of weapons training did you have?
CD: We trained a little bit on the M-16 but not very much. That was at Ft. Knox.
Most of what we carried were M-1’s. Really didn’t have a lot of training per se on those.
At Ft. Knox we did a lot of machine gun training, M-60 and .50 caliber and then tanks.
Of course, they didn’t really have army personnel carriers configured as an ACAV the
way we did in Vietnam with the three machine guns. We did some of that sort of thing as
well.
RV: Did you feel prepared to go over to war?
DC: Yes, I felt as prepared as I could be. Yes, I really did.
RV: Did you have some leave time before you went over?
CD: Very little as I recall. I finished up my Jungle School training, was in the middle of my Ft. Knox assignment. I came back and finished out Ft. Knox, I probably had a week or so maybe before I left.

RV: Where did you leave from; from the west coast?

CD: I left from Birmingham and then went to Oakland. Well, Travis airport. Is that Travis out there I think?

RV: Yes. Did you fly civilian air or military?

CD: Flew Pan Am jet with movies and good-looking stewardesses. I found it interesting that each refueling stop the stewardesses would get older. I think that’s because they had more time in grade and they got combat pay when they got closer to Vietnam. They were great though. The odd thing about it was flying into Saigon, the pilot kind of banked around. I’m expecting rockets, tracers to be coming up by the windows. The pilot comes on the intercom and says, ‘If you’ll look out the window you’ll see whatever river was down there’. He said, ‘We hope you had a pleasant flight. Fly with us again soon’.

RV: Right. What was the mood on the airplane do you remember?

CD: I really don’t. I remember more the mood on the plane going, where were we going? Maybe flying out to Travis. It was probably flying out to Travis. I was one of the few officers on that flight. A lot of enlisted guys were probably draftees, just petrified of going over there.

RV: Were you in uniform?

CD: Yes.

RV: Do you remember them looking up to you or being standoffish?

CD: Probably neither. Just kind of neither one.

RV: You’re going over there as an officer. You’re going to lead a platoon. How did you see yourself? Were you prepared to be a leader in that capacity?

CD: I think having been through the training that I’ve been through and having been through my dad’s training over the years, yes I felt pretty prepared.

RV: What would you say were your best qualities as a leader at that point?

CD: I had gotten to the point in life where I would go to the max to get it done. Whether that was physically or whatever. I had a strong inclination that as far as my
superiors were concerned I would share with them my opinion, as strongly as I needed to,  
but when they told me to take the hill, we’d go take the hill. I think I had an awful lot of  
compassion for my men, which I think a lot of the platoon leaders and NCOs over there  
did have. Maybe because it was an unpopular war and we were there for 13 months. Part  
of the deal was to survive 13 months and get home. We took care of each other.  
Someone made the comment we weren’t fighting the war for America, we were fighting  
it for each other. There was lot of truth in that I think.  

RV: At that point, the anti-war movement at home is in full swing?  
CD: Yes, it really kind of is.  
RV: How did that affect you?  
CD: I think it irritated me because I couldn’t understand. I was so pro- what we  
were doing. If America was doing it, it had to be right. I couldn’t understand why  
anybody would protest against that. Pretty parochial view. It did irritate me.  

RV: Did you guys talk about it in country?  
CD: I don’t recall. We spent so much time just grinding out operations we had  
very little time to just hang out. I don’t remember talking about it. The other thing that  
irritated me and I think it irritated my guys a lot too was the press. The press would  
swoop in after a battle, take the pictures, do the interviews, which we thought were just to  
record the blood and gore so they got a good story. Which I know now is not true. Then  
they’d fly away. It really irked a lot of guys.  

RV: Really? Was that almost constant? Was that after every firefight, every  
battle?  
CD: We didn’t see them very often. Occasionally, we had one big deal after a  
firefight in September. A rather large battle that they came out with camera crews.  
Somebody, I can’t remember who it was but it was a pretty famous correspondent came  
out and stayed an hour and left.  

RV: Those were you said overall kind of negative experiences?  
CD: Yes for the most part.  
RV: What month did you go over in 1969?  
CD: Went over in June.  
RV: You were there for a 13-month tour?
CD: No I was wounded in November so I was medevaced out of country.

RV: So in June ’69 you go. Why don’t we take a break just for a moment? Tell me about when you first flew into Saigon. What was your first impression?

CD: You know a lot of people have the first impression of the smell, the heat, all that stuff. My first impression was the pilot with his casual comment, ‘I hope you fly with us again. Fly the friendly skies’. I don’t remember much about that first week there other than kind of getting processed through. Then going and being sent out to Camp Blackhorse. I do remember this. Being trained in armor I wanted to be in armor. They put me in cavalry and I thought oh my goodness I don’t have any clue what I’m going to be doing. That worried me a little bit. At any rate they sent me to Xuan Loc, which was where the Blackhorse base camp was. 11th Armored Cav, where we did a very short orientation. Kind of patrols around the firebase.

RV: Tell me about that. How do they prepare you for Vietnamese culture, for the actual fighting? How did they want to acclimate you? How much preparation did you have?

CD: In country? Overall?

RV: Overall in general and specifically in country when you arrived.

CD: I think I got a lot better orientation to that from Ranger and Jungle School; some from Armor Officer Basic. A lot of those guys had been to Vietnam. They related kind of what it was like. So I got a lot of good feeling there about what it was really going to be like. When we got in country the few patrols we must have gone out on were so inconsequential that I don’t even remember them. There was very little that I recall in country getting us prepared.

RV: Were you in charge of these patrols?

CD: No, I was just going along for the ride.

RV: Were they, here’s how you do this. Here’s what you can expect?

CD: I guess. But I really can’t remember.

RV: What were those first few days like when you got in country? You processed in at Saigon and where did you go from there?

CD: Processed through Saigon, went to Xuan Loc where Blackhorse base camp was. Spent a couple of days there doing that patrolling deal. I remember meeting I guess
he was a second lieutenant. He was a Cobra pilot who I kind of became friends with in those two or three days that we were there. He ended up being killed about a month later. He plowed his Cobra into the airstrip one night. It was just kind of a waiting, anxious to get out feeling, to get going kind of deal. In fact, one of my vivid memories of just before going out I was really ready to get out of base camp and get on with the show being 24 years old, being trained by all the best the army had to train. I was bullet proof, ready to get on with it. The regimental sergeant major came out one day and said, ‘Lieutenant Dodge I’ve got your orders for you’. I said, ‘That’s great Sergeant Major, tell me where I’m going. I’m anxious to get on out there’. He said, ‘I’ll get you out there soon enough. First, I want you to attend that memorial service over there.’ I looked over about 100 yards away and in this puddle the chaplain’s got some c-ration boxes piled up, a poncho liner on it and a cross sitting on top. There are a bunch of guys standing around. I said, ‘Sure, I’d be glad to go to that. But why me and why that memorial service?’ He looked me in the eye and in the way only a regimental sergeant major can do, he said, ‘Lieutenant, that service is for Lieutenant Pierce. He was your platoon’s platoon leader until two days ago. Got hit in the chest with an RPG and we only brought half of him home’. He said, ‘Don’t you ever forget that’. So I went to the memorial service and suddenly all this invincibility I had just kind of crumbled down around my feet. I realized I was getting in something deep here. After the memorial service he said, ‘Take your gear and put it on that Loach over there’. It was late in the afternoon, kind of pouring down rain. I went over and stuck my gear on the Loach. Pilot took off. I was starting to get real nervous now. He began flying toward Cambodia. The troop was out about two kilometers from Cambodia’s border. We flew out a million thundering heartbeats getting out there. Finally, driving down rain, he pulled the map out and poked his finger down on the map and he said, ‘Your troop’s right about there’. It was like right on the Cambodian border. I thought, man that’s Indian country out there. So we went a little further and looked out the front of the aircraft. He said, ‘See that clearing down there’? I looked and there was an armored cavalry troop NDP’d in this clearing. ‘That’s where I’m taking you’. We went and set down outside the NDP. I dragged my gear off the Loach. As I was running across the field to get the NDP I saw my first funny thing in Vietnam. Pouring down rain, there’s a buck-naked tanker standing on top of an M-60
tank lathering up in the pouring rain (laughs). I thought that is weird. The first night my platoon sergeant was a guy named Sergeant Tomsinski who was Polish, a great guy. Somehow he had a cot that he had gotten from someplace. He set it up next to my track. He put a poncho liner lean to. I though gosh that’s really nice of him to do that for me. I think he did it on purpose. The poncho leaked all night long onto my cot. I never slept on a cot the rest of the time I was there. He was just getting me broken in.

RV: How did the men react to you when you first arrived?

CD: I guess as I expected. They were cordial. They obviously knew I was green as a gourd around the ears. What I didn’t know and what I didn’t intend for them to know that my dad was a lieutenant general. I figured that didn’t hold any water for me.

RV: Where was he stationed at this point?

CD: He was actually retired. He was the Executive Vice President of the AUSA at that time. I think it’s funny. Meeting my guys over the years, and I’ve met a number of them recently, we’ve kind of reconnected. One guy in particular told me, Mark Prenderest, who is now an editor in the New York Times, I asked him what did you guys think when this new lieutenant came out? He said, ‘Frankly we knew your dad was a lieutenant general. They were a little wary of you. It really took until the first good firefight to see how you were going to act before we were going to buy into your program’. They were cordial and treated me with respect.

RV: What would you say was the morale?

CD: Morale was really good. You know if I contrast an armored cav outfit to an infantry outfit and I may be being a little unfair to the infantry here. We stayed in the field literally all the time unless we had to go into a firebase at night to secure it for the artillery. We were always in the field. Where as the infantry would go out on an operation and then come back. I think during that period of time they were experiencing problems, some racial particularly. When they would get back to their firebase they had drugs and they had racial problems; one thing and another. I think they tightened up again once they got out in the field. But still some of that was left. With us, we were always out there always thinking about the next mine we were going to run over. Just looking out for each other. So it was pretty tight organization.

RV: Did that remain constant your few months there?
CD: It really did.

RV: Let me ask you this, overall big picture, at the point when you arrived in country what did you understand about why the United States was even in South Vietnam? Did you understand that bigger picture or what did you think about it?

CD: I think my concept then was that South Vietnam was a country that had been taken over against their will by North Vietnam. That they were being forced into a way of life that they didn’t really like, didn’t want. And that we were the saviors to get them out, that the French couldn’t do it. So certainly we could. I think that’s about my whole big picture at that time.

RV: Did you see that as a worthy cause? Did you have a problem with kind of helping these people defend their country or doing it for them?

CD: I thought it was a great cause, frankly. To be apart of it. We didn’t work with South Vietnamese troops other than maybe a week while I was there. I didn’t really get a lot of contact with them. Though I heard a lot of stories about how they were sort of 9 to 5. They didn’t really take the war seriously which I don’t think was true with all of them. That’s kind of what you heard. That was irritating in the sense that here we are risking our lives and you guys aren’t pulling your share. Which again was somewhat of a misconception. The other aspect of it that I found from the compassionate side was that the people we met out in the country seemed they were for the VC at night and they were for the Americans in the daytime. They were caught in the middle. What they really wanted to do was let the war go away and let me keep growing my rice. Get out of my hair here. So that was a real tender issue for me.

RV: You said you worked with the South Vietnamese military just for about a week. Was this the ARVN?

CD: Yes, the ARVN. I had an ARVN infantry platoon riding with my platoon.

RV: What was your impression of them?

CD: They seemed to be pretty good. We didn’t do much during that week. In terms of no action at all. I did have one kind of interesting experience. The platoon leader, he and I couldn’t communicate very well but he spoke some English. He was riding on my track. We set up and NDP in sort of a swamp as I recall. He invited me to dinner. Of course invited me on my one track to dinner but, hey, eat for free, indigenous
stuff. Their C- rations were different from ours. They were really indigenous. He sent
these guys out in the woods to cut young fresh bamboo shoots and stuff like that. I had a
good meal. Had a little soy sauce. Fortunately he didn’t put any nucmum sauce on it. It
was a cordial relationship. They did what they needed to do but we were only with them
for maybe five days.

RV: Tell me what kind of equipment your platoon was equipped with when you
arrived and what you guys worked with while you were there.

CD: When I first got there, and interestingly enough I don’t know if it’s still true
today but an armored cavalry platoon in Vietnam was the most heavily armed ground
force in the world. It was amazing what we carried with us. When I first got there I had
9 ACAVS in my platoon. Which were basically armored personnel carriers, which had
been fitted where the .50 caliber machine gun was in the cupula. We fitted a gun shield
on it. Then we had an M-60 machine gun on either side of the big hatch on the back.
Those had a gun shield. We carried a basic load of around 15,000 rounds of machine gun
ammunition along with a lot of miscellaneous stuff. Maybe a Law or two. Just all kind
of stuff that we had on the tracks. So we were incredibly well armed.

RV: What did you carry personally?

CD: I carried a .45. I had an M-16 or had access to one but I really just carried a
.45.

RV: Was that your weapon of choice?

CD: Yes, really my concept was, and I got a lot of this from dad and probably
from my training too; the platoon leader that was there to lead and not to be the main bulk
of the firepower. I did have one go on with my equipment thing and then I’ll get to this
story. After I’d been there a couple months we turned in three of our ACAVS and got
Sheridan’s. Trained on those for about a week or so and then went back out in the field.
The Sheridan drivers had grease guns. I thought that was cool to have grease gun. So I
decided I would take a grease gun on a dismounted ambush patrol one night. Of course
they fired .40-caliber ammunition. I remember stuffing my jungle fatigue pockets with
big clips of this grease gun ammunition. That stuff weighed so much. We got out there
and I vowed never to touch a grease gun again in my life.
RV: How did your equipment function overall? Did you ever have any major problems?

CD: The only real problem we had, we rarely used our M-16s. We took them on dismounts and used them there, but they stayed pretty clean because they were on our tracks all the time. The machine guns were great. The major problems we had were with the Sheridan’s. They were so electrical. I remember the first big firefight we got into after we got our Sheridan’s. My platoon leader’s turret power got stuck on and he couldn’t make the turret stop from going around. The thought flashed through my mind that if he’d just hold down the trigger on that .50 caliber machine gun this thing would be all over. We also had a little problem because we carried caseless ammunition for the main gun on the Sheridan, which meant that it was a powder bag rather than a shell casing. They would sometimes get damp in the wetness and give you a little bit of trouble. The bigger problem was if you got hit by an RPG in a turret and it got into that caseless ammunition it was just a powder keg. The Sheridan guys kind of feared that a bit.

RV: Did that ever happen when you were there?

CD: Never did with us. Not in my troop.

RV: Is there any weapon that you wish you had, but did not have in the field?

DC: No, I think we really had everything that we wanted.

RV: How about other supplies? Were you always well supplied?

CD: We really were. Of course we could carry just a lot of stuff. I rarely got any of it out. I had a duffle bag full of stuff that stayed closed all the time. In fact I remember we all had a gas mask, which remained at the bottom of our duffle bags. I remember we just dropped off a convoy and we were coming back down some highway up in the Central Highlands for our next rendezvous where we were going. I got a call from a scout helicopter that told me there was an ambush up ahead of us a few kilometers and that the NVA had gas. Man, I remember guys pulling stuff out of the duffle bags looking for those gas masks. As it turned out we never ran into the ambush, so it was kind of a non-event. We could carry tape recorders with us if we wanted to tape record messages home.

RV: Did you?
CD: Occasionally, not very often. We would operate typically up to about 8:00 or 9:00 or 10:00 at night and then do ambush patrols after that. We didn’t have much time to do them. Cameras, I carried a camera with me.

RV: Did you? Did you take a lot of photos?

CD: I took quite a few. It was little bitty. It was a 16 mm Minolta. Like one of those little spy camera deals that I could keep in my pocket. So I took quite a few photos.

RV: Can you describe what the typical day was like for you out in the field?

CD: Yes, typically we would be coming in off of an ambush or pulling security for an NDP. About 6:00 sometime around first light we’d pull in the security devices, claymores, flares or whatever else we had out. I had chow, which was usually C- rations. Though about once a month we would get a hot breakfast. From there we’d go out on some variety of operations, whether that was road security or running with a convoy or what we call busting jungle looking for the enemy. Things like that we would typically operate until late afternoon, early evening. Again have C- rations or a hot meal but not very often.

RV: When you said you would basically just search for the enemy or run out there in the field, what would you do? Just simply drive down roads, paths?

CD: Yes, it was typically in the jungle. We called it busting jungle. In fact that's what they were doing when I first got to the troop and I thought, ‘What are these guys doing?’ Basically they’d have an objective somewhere out in the distance where there might be a suspected base camp or something like that. We just put our tracks in line, put the heaviest one in front and run over everything that was in front of us. Trees, anthills, you name it. Of course we never sneaked up on anybody.

RV: That wasn’t very quiet was it?

CD: Although surprisingly once or twice we would get very close and find hot fires, food still cooking kind of stuff. Or they would be waiting for you, because they always did it on their terms. The enemy would so they wouldn't ambush us on the way in. Busting jungle was kind of interesting.

RV: Was that a mistake to have, looking back at it now. I guess did you ever think this when you were there. Was it a mistake to be so loud? The tactics were they sound or did you say, ‘We need to be doing something different here’?
CD: I think in our case it was probably good. We had infantry out operating a
different way, more quietly. Basically actually George Patton Jr. was the regimental
commander just before I got there. He had painted in yellow all of our hatch covers,
‘Find the bastards, then pile on.’ So he invented the pile on technique. The deal was that
he would send out a platoon or a small unit, find the enemy. Once we found them it was
our job to hang on to them like a little bulldog until we could get reinforcements in to
wipe them out if we hadn’t already done so. It occasionally worked. Like I say we didn’t
sneak up on very many people.

RV: Tell me about the relationship you had with the men in the field as that
developed over time.

CD: I think it was good. I think they certainly indicated that they respected me.
They for the most part did what I asked them to do. It was kind of a two-way deal. I
looked out for them, they looked out for me. I had some discipline problems that we
dealt with.

RV: How did you deal with them and what kind of problems were they?

CD: Mostly minor. I would have an occasional someone who didn’t want to go
out on an ambush patrol or something. We worked through that to get it done. The only
real mutiny I had one day; I had been in country for maybe a month because we lived on
the tracks you lived with three or four other guys all the time in about a 15 square foot
area. Sometimes tension would get a little tight. I decided in all of my first lieutenant
wisdom that I would assign guys to different tracks, give them a new home. I assigned
my platoon medic to my track. When he found out about it, he marched up to me and
said, ‘Sir I ain’t riding on your track’. I said, ‘Really? Why not’? He said, ‘Two
antennas.’ I came to find out that’s what the enemy looked for when engaged in combat.
Two antennas, take out the leader. He and I worked that out as well. The only other big
problem I had in fact I guess it was the most scared that I ever was in Vietnam. I was
providing security for a convoy. I had another ACAV right in front of mine. The big deal
was staying in uniform at least in the sense of having your flak jacket and steel helmet;
that protective gear on. There was one guy on the track in front of me who kept taking
off his flak jacket and steel pot. I would radio up to the track commander and tell him to
get his guy back in uniform and he would. This guy had gotten into some beer because
we could carry a lot of beer with us. He was kind of drunk.

RV: He was kind of drunk?
CD: Yes. I did this about three times. Finally after the third time the guy took
his flak jacket off again and I radioed the track commander and I told him I was going to
court martial the guy. With that, the guy turned him M-60 machine gun on me. Scared
me to death.

RV: Really?
CD: So I stopped the convoy, got the guy off his track, put him on my track
where I could keep better watch over him. Interesting thing that happened was that not a
couple of days later we got in a huge firefight. It was in a regimental, NVA regimental
base camp a lot of bunkers and stuff. This guy was down on the ground checking
bunkers. He was working out like a champ. After that I called him aside and said, ‘Look
let’s forget everything that happened on the convoy. You did a great job. Just keep your
nose clean’. I understand that he did keep his nose clean until after I was wounded. Then
he pulled a similar stunt on the next platoon leader. I heard that the new platoon sergeant
took him out behind the barn, did whatever platoon sergeants do to you back there, which
was probably better than court martial. But for the most part, great relationship with the
guys.

RV: You said this guy was drunk and he was out on patrol?
CD: Well we were actually on a convoy so he was riding on a track. When we
got Sheridans, they came with a search light. The thing we liked the most about the
Sheridans was that the search light came packed in a Styrofoam box, which became a
cooler. One of the things that we did get a lot of, we got a lot of ice, a lot of soft drinks.
Occasionally we got beer. This guy had gotten in the beer and he was just kind of drunk.

RV: Was alcohol a problem?
CD: Wasn’t really a problem. No. Drugs were not at all a problem.
RV: Never saw it in your platoon?
CD: I understand from talking to some of my guys that it was done occasionally.
We were out away from anywhere where you couldn’t get it so much. Just didn’t have
access to it.
RV: What about any discussion or as an officer I’m guessing that maybe this
crossed your mind at some point, maybe it did not. Discussions or any incidents of
fragging?

CD: Never occurred to my knowledge in our unit. Of course I heard about it
from other places. Where I would typically hear about it was in a base camp where
somebody rolled a grenade into a tent or whatever. You’d occasionally hear about it in a
firefight because it’d be pretty hard to prove who shot you in a firefight so that was
probably done. I don’t think we ever really had that problem.

RV: Was it on your mind at all?

CD: No, it really wasn’t.

RV: How about any tension between draftees and enlisted men?

CD: None beyond the typical sorries that my NCOs had and their need to be
somewhat regimented. Beyond that really not a lot.

RV: How about tensions between personnel in the field like yourself and your
men and those in the rear?

CD: I would say maybe unfounded animosity. The rear echelon guys didn’t do
anything for living. As I look back on them now I understand that’s not true. Yes, we
felt like we were carrying the brunt.

RV: Tell me what your impression was of Vietnam itself, the country.

CD: I might do that in a two-piece note. Actually two parts. My wife and I went
back in 1995. It is an incredibly beautiful country. We found not only before but when
we went back in ’95 the Vietnamese are maybe the friendliest people of any country that
I’ve ever been in. Extraordinarily welcoming. I think that was true in’69. What few of
those we ran into, you know we would do MedCAPs in the village or something, and
they were always very cordial to us. Seemed like a nice place. Awfully hot and rainy
though.

RV: So the civilians treated you well in ’95. You talked about the compassion
you had or the emotions you had dealing with the civilians and witnessing what they
were going through. Can you expand on that? How much contact did you have with
them?
CD: We didn’t really have a lot. I think we did have a distrust because we heard shortly before I got there a cav platoon was going down the road and went by a bunch of kids and they all waved and one kid threw a grenade into one of the tracks. We had that fear because we never knew who the enemy was. The guy that worked at the barbershop on the base camp was the VC leader. All he was doing was making a map of your installation. So we had a distrust in a way. But to see what those people went through particularly because we were in the field and we saw mostly villages and the agrarian kind of people. To see the rice paddies getting torn up, villages getting torn up. Just difficulty they went through night after night; day after day broke my heart.

RV: You felt that way then?

CD: Yes.

RV: How about the other men in your platoon?

CD: Kind of mixed. Some of them, I hate to use the term but they were gooks. They were Vietnamese they were just gooks all the way. Others had some compassion.

RV: How about any kind of race issues in your platoon?

CD: I really didn’t have any. I had several blacks. I don’t think I had any Hispanics. I had several blacks in my platoon. They fit right in. Just one of the guys.

RV: So no problems at all?

CD: None.

RV: You talked about some civic action that you performed in the villages, what kind of things did you do?

CD: The main thing we would do would be the med caps where we’d go in with our medics, provide some medical support to the villagers. Beyond that, that was pretty much all that our platoon did.

RV: Was that voluntary or were you told to go into certain villages and just see if anybody needed medical attention?

CD: We were told to. It was part of the win hearts and minds philosophy.

RV: Did you feel like that was happening? Were hearts and minds being won?

CD: They seemed to be very appreciative when we were there. On the other hand we could really see that they were caught in the middle. They sympathized with the enemies at night and with us in the daytime. Whoever’s turf they were operating on they
were kind of their friends. I think they were appreciative of what we did when we could
do those things.

RV: Were you able to take any R&Rs? Were you in country long enough?
CD: I was planning on an R&R to Hawaii to meet my wife but I never made it
that long.

RV: What would you all do for entertainment?
CD: Didn’t have time for it.
RV: I don’t know what you would do in the field for entertainment.
CD: We really didn’t. After chow at night we would go out on either a
dismounted or mounted ambush patrol or set up security at a fire support base for the
artillery. Then pull watch a couple times at night. In fact one of the big problems that I
had. This may be my major problem; was we stayed going 24 hours a day 7 days a week
my guys were so tired that when they were pulling a watch at night they would frequently
fall asleep. My platoon sergeant and I would have to get up two or three times a night and
go around and check the watch to make sure they were awake.

RV: Would you find them asleep sometimes?
CD: Yes.

RV: What would you do?
CD: A variety of things. I never court marshaled anybody because I suffered
through the same thing they did. Reprimand them. But that was one of those areas
where maybe stupidly I felt enough compassion for what they were going through that I
knew they knew the danger. They were just at a point of exhaustion. I probably actually
should have taken more severe action in some cases, but didn’t do it.

RV: Did you ever use canine units?
CD: Never did.

RV: Did you have any snipers with you?
CD: Never had a sniper with me. Had a lot of snipers shoot at me. Never with
me.

RV: Did you ever work with troops from other countries? Australia, New
Zealand the Koreans?
CD: Actually when I first got to the troop, we had some CIDGs, Civilians Irregular Defense Group forces that were from Cambodia working with us. They stayed with us for a week or two. We were operating in the same area as some of the Republic of Korea forces, but never got in contact with them. Heard a lot about the Australians but never really saw them.

RV: What’d you hear about the Australians?

CD: Good guys, good fighters. Liked to have a good time.

RV: What were your experiences with dust off, the medevac units?

CD: Incredible guys. They were among the heroes of Vietnam. We had a couple that come to mind. In the big firefight we were in, in September where we’d gotten into this regimental base camp, which was in a rubber plantation oddly enough. It’s kind of hard to hide in a rubber plantation. They were in there, a whole regimental base camp. We got into that. We knew that actually one of our sister troops had been ambushed in that area. Literally wiped out about a week earlier so we knew that they were operating in that area. We went into it with two cav platoons from my troop coming in one way and M-company which was our tank company coming in the other way. It wasn’t a large force, maybe 60 or 70 people all told. Not having any idea that this was a regimental base camp. But as we got into it we got into a really big firefight. I can recall we broke into sort of a clearing in this rubber plantation. We’d taken quite a number of wounded. I looked across the clearing and there was a medevac ship coming down. He had a Red Cross painted on the front of it. I could see the pilot and co-pilots faces. To my left the NVA soldier fired an RPG that hit the medevac ship, took it down and killed everybody on board. That was a guy that knew what he was coming into. Knew it was a hot LZ and did it anyway. Interesting in a different way experience about two nights later, we were still taking some casualties and we were in the middle of this rubber. About 10:00 there was a pretty hard rain and I had to get these guys out. There was no clearing around. So I instructed some of my guys to get their tracks and basically break down a landing zone for a dust off. So they broke down a bunch of rubber trees. We thought we had a big enough hole for this guy. We called him in and I can recall standing at the bottom of this rubber tree chimney with a strobe light in my hand directing the medevac ship down into it. It turned out we hadn’t made the hole quite big enough. His rotar tips were literally
whacking leaves off the trees as he came down. I thought there’s no way he’s going to
make it. Yet, he came down and got the guys out. They were amazing. They would do
absolutely anything.

RV: I guess that instilled a lot of confidence in you guys when you were in a
firefight.

CD: We knew we were going to get out.

RV: Yes, they would come after you.

CD: The American fighting man basically says, ‘We’re not going to leave you
behind. No matter what it takes’. Felt pretty comfortable.

RV: All your men knew that?

CD: Yes.

RV: Mr. Dodge, why don’t we take break just for a moment? [comes back from
break]. Mr. Dodge, let’s talk a little bit about your impressions of the enemy. What can
you tell me about general impressions of the NVA and the VC?

CD: The first thing I would say is they were much more resilient and better
fighters than I thought they would be when I went over.

RV: Both the VC and the NVA?

CD: Yes, we didn’t really encounter the VC very much. We really did more with
the NVA. They were very good at preparing the battlefield before a fight. You know
having their stuff there and being ready. They seemed to have good intelligence certainly
in terms of our base camps because they would have their people working there and
mapping them out one thing and another. Masters of ambush and concealment. Of
course being a cav platoon they could move much more easily in the terrain than we
could. So it could be a hit and run if that’s what they wanted it to be.

RV: What would you say their weaknesses were?

CD: I think one of their main weaknesses was they became maybe a bit
rudderless when they lost their leaders. They tended to operate in cells. They kind of did
what the head guy said. When the head guy wasn’t there anymore, they were without
instruction. So that was a problem for them. Clearly they were not equipped in anyway
near what we were. That was problem for them in a sense and yet not problem because
they were a lot more mobile because of it. Medical resources I think were a huge problem for them.

RV: How would you describe their tactics? What did they usually use the NVA?

CD: I guess the two areas where we typically encountered them one would have been on a convoy where they were in ambush along the road. They would normally initiate the ambush with a command-detonated mine that would take out a lead vehicle or RPGs. RPGs and mines were really our two biggest problems.

RV: Sounds like they still are in Iraq right now.

CD: That’s right. It’s funny how that what same old RPG is just cranking along. Haven’t changed it any. Great weapon. Those were our two big problems.

RV: How did you deal with that? Did you draw straws and see who would be the lead vehicle?

CD: Yes, I was the guy that drew the straw and somebody else was the lead vehicle. The issue of mines wherever we went that was always a problem. We always did what we called tracking. Where the first guy would take the risk and everybody else would stay in his tracks, with the theory that if he didn’t hit one, you didn’t hit one either. Which worked most of the time. We never got mine plates for any of the vehicles in my platoon. It was a large steel plate that bolted on the bottom of the vehicle.

RV: Did you request them?

CD: We did. It was just starting to come into the 11th Cav while I was there. Other units got it, we never did get it. We would try to protect the driver for example with sandbags underneath him. The rest of the crew rode on top of the vehicle rather than in the vehicle. You got blown off, but you didn’t get blown up hopefully. So convoys was one. The other place we typically engaged the enemy was on ambush patrols at night out in the jungle.

RV: Can you tell me what they were like?

CD: Yes we would do them two ways. Sometimes they were mounted. We’d actually take either the platoon or part of the platoon to a trail or trail junction and set up there. The other way would be a dismounted patrol where we left the platoon and went on foot. Taking whatever you needed.

RV: Which were more effective?
CD: Dismounted. They could typically sense when you were there or with the platoon or with your vehicles. In those cases they generally attacked you rather than falling into your ambush. The real workable ambushes were the dismounted one.

RV: How often would you set the ambushes was this nightly?
CD: Pretty much every night unless we were in a fire support base doing security for the artillery.

RV: How often were you doing that?
CD: We maybe did that a night a week. So most of the time we were out on ambush patrol.

RV: Can you describe how you would set up an ambush, how you would direct you men to do that?
CD: That kind of depended on the lay of the land. We would typically maybe do an L shaped ambush where part of us would be down a side of the trail. Then the foot of the L would go across the trail. Normally we were in fairly wooded terrain on those. Though some times we were just out in open areas, tall grass. But nothing else. The mounted ambush patrols were almost always in a wooded area. Just never out in the open.

RV: You mean just straight in the jungle, in the wooded area?
CD: In the jungle or in a rubber plantation. Being in the open we were too visible even at night with tracks. You could tell we were there.

RV: Let’s talk about your combat experiences. What was your first experience in combat?
CD: First one was I guess in June, not too long after I’d gotten there. We were ambushed on Highway 13, which we called Thunder Road, by an NVA force. I remember that was the first time I’d ever seen a dead enemy soldier just laying there on the ground. Kind of a weird feeling.

RV: Really? What was that like?
CD: Strange. I almost can’t even describe it. I’m not sure how I could describe it. Just strange to see a guy there totally lifeless. Well, I’ve never seen. I’ve seen some people lifeless, but not very many. Certainly not under those circumstances.

RV: What happened in that ambush?
CD: We were going south on Highway 13. They had set up an ambush just off the side of the road. Highway 13 had a lot of vegetation that grew in close to the road and over a period of time we got our engineers with their Rome plows to come in and widen the buffer on either side of the road. But at that time it was not wide. They had set an ambush with several mines just off the side of the road. Then enemy beyond the mines with the hope that first of all we would turn into them and hit the mines. But fortunately I was new enough so I wasn’t really directing operations. My guys knew what to do anyway. They immediately went into a herringbone formation where one track turned right and the next one turned left. Then we opened up. If you can imagine we had gosh at that time, 18, M-60 machine guns and nine .50 caliber machine-guns all going at the same time. It was pretty devastating. The enemy didn’t often attack an armored cavalry platoon unless they were really ready for you because of the firepower. The fight didn’t last long. We had no injured at all.

RV: How long did it last would you guess?

CD: Seven or eight minutes maybe. Real short.

RV: That was your first taste of combat in Vietnam?

CD: Yes the feeling that I had; the real memory that fits with me, at the time I was the fifth guy on my track. I had a driver, I had a track commander and the cupola. Then I had a man on each M-60 machine gun on either side of the hatch on the top of the vehicle. I was standing in the middle and basically my job was to direct the platoon. I had my CVC helmet on that had radio earphones in it and three machine guns around me. When everything opened up it was the most noise I think I’ve ever heard in my life. Even with that CVC helmet. Rather exhilarating.

RV: Was it what you had expected or was it completely different or what?

CD: It was a lot faster than I expected. I thought when you got in a fight man you just fought for a long time. It was over so fast.

RV: Was that typical?

CD: Yes, most of the time it was. You know they might last 30 minutes, but 30 minutes was long. Most of them were short, five or ten minutes and it was over. What they would normally do is they’d hit you. When they knew that their advantage was gone, they were out of there, heading back to Cambodia. That was a frustration for us.
We operated most of the time near Cambodia. Of course, that was sanctuary to them. We couldn’t go in there and it was very frustrating.

RV: Tell me about that. Did you discuss this with your men?
CD: Yes, a common topic of conversation.
RV: Did you ever make any requests to cross the border and go in after them?
CD: We did. That and to fire artillery across the line. Never was granted.
RV: Did you know exactly where that line was?
CD: Pretty close. It’s kind of hard to tell sometimes when you’re in the jungle and you’re looking at that map. I think we probably crossed it a few times. For the most part we stayed on our side. Actually they may have called it a demilitarized zone. If you look at the map there was the borderline between the countries and then there literally was a buffer zone that we weren’t supposed to go into that was several hundred meters I guess on either side of the boundary line of the countries.

RV: Tell me about your other combat experiences. I guess you were there for five months before you were wounded and evacuated. Tell me what else. You mentioned one at a rubber plantation.
CD: One of the big ones that I was in was on September 7, was when it started in the rubber plantation. We had our E Troop which was with another squadron had been literally annihilated in that area. We didn’t know what was there. We just thought it was a huge ambush. We went in with our two platoons from I Troop. Then the platoon from M Company. We started out it was kind of interesting. Captain Tutt was my troop commander. We had my platoon on the left and a fellow named Jack Andrews on the right. Was it Jack or Randy? Maybe it was Randy Crane on the right. Captain Tutt’s vehicle was in the middle. So we were stretched out on line moving up across the field into this rubber plantation. Tutt was a great guy, but he was a fiery guy. When he wanted it to be done, he wanted it to be done right kind of guy. As we moved just into the edge of the rubber we began taking RPGs, small arms even some .51 caliber anti-aircraft machine gun fire. We knew there was something big in there. Rubber plantations were kind of odd in that communication was always difficult in Vietnam. In a rubber plantation for some reason you could see the guy 50 yards away you were trying to talk to on the radio and they wouldn’t communicate. Yes, I don’t know what it was.
As we moved into this rubber plantation communication between the other platoon leader and Captain Tutt went out. It was driving Tutt nuts because he couldn’t talk to this guy. But he could still talk to me. He was relaying all the commands and what have you for the other platoon leader through me. That was fine as long as he could talk to somebody. We continued to move into this rubber plantation. The fire built and it got hotter and hotter. All of a sudden, my communications went out. I could see Captain Tutt probably 50 yards away from me. He couldn’t talk to anybody. He was going absolutely berserk. I became more afraid of what he was going to do to me, than what the NVA was going to do to me if I didn’t get my radios working. I get down the track and I’m turning dials and trying to get the thing up. Nothing works. So I stood back up and I looked down and we had what we called a spaghetti cord. It was a stretchy like telephone cord that went from the headset down to the radio. I looked down and right in the middle of my chest actually through the spaghetti cord there was a fleshette from a main gun round from either one of my Sheridans or from the tank coming in the other way. It had knocked the communications out. I replaced the spaghetti cord and we were back in business. Tutt settled down again. That was going to be my one big war trophy when I came home. When I got medevaced they threw it away. We got into that regimental base camp and found a lot of very heavily defended bunkers and tunnels. That was the area where the guy that had almost blown me away on the convoy really worked out like a champ checking bunkers and doing stuff on the ground. My dad had always taught me, in preparation I guess, he said, ‘Never expect your men to do some thing you haven’t already done or wouldn’t do yourself’. So I took the first turn going into a tunnel. I remember I had my .45 and a flashlight. I stared crawling into this tunnel. I was scared to death. I had never been in a tunnel before in my life. As I was going in I met an NVA soldier coming out who had a grenade in his hand.

RV: Really?
CD: We were maybe four feet away from each other, three feet, really close. I can remember it’s amazing how much stuff you can think about in an instant of time. I thought this guy’s probably got a family at home with kids and he’s doing his job just like I’m doing my job. Now it became a matter really of who could pull the trigger first
and that’s it. The .45 blew him back in to the tunnel and I never saw him again. It really shook me up.

RV: Was that the first time you had to done something like that?

CD: That was the only close time. So many times when you’re in combat certainly in Vietnam you didn’t see the enemy. It was just all in jungle. You never saw anybody. So to have a face-to-face confrontation like that made it very personal. Brought a whole different kind of look to the war for me.

RV: Did anybody see this happen?

CD: Yes, in fact I got a Bronze Star for it.

RV: Did you really?

CD: Funny about the reports they write up for valor. The original report I was able to read several years after I left Vietnam. It didn’t sound anything like the one that actually went on the medal. That firefight lasted two or three days running. Interestingly enough the first day we were checking bunkers and we began finding enemy soldiers that looked a little unusual. They were bigger than we expected. They turned out to be Chinese advisors. In fact on the stuff that I sent you in know there was a question about did you ever meet any foreign enemy troops? I said no, but I had forgotten about that. There were about six of them that had been killed. They were larger, looked a little different.

RV: Did this surprise you?

CD: Yes, it really did.

RV: Let me go back quickly. You said that your men really wanted to see how you would react in the first firefight. In the first one that you described afterward did you sense a change in attitude toward you? Were you kind of proven to them at that point?

CD: I think that they were so respectful anyway just the way they acted that I didn’t really notice a change that I recall. Although in talking to them they say they noticed a change.

RV: In you?

CD: In their perception of me.

RV: Besides the firefight you just described at the rubber plantation what other incidents come to mind when you think about those five months in country?
CD: The last one when I was medevaced. Another one in August I had gone into Saigon for a friend of my dad’s (connection cuts out) and he was having a change of command ceremony.

RV: I’m sorry Mr. Dodge you just cut out just for a second.

CD: A friend of my dad’s was the commander of the Big Red One. There was change of command ceremony so I flew in for the ceremony. On the way back out I helicoptered into Quan Loi, which was then the Blackhorse base camp out in the area we operated. Spent one night there and was basically on my own. My unit was out in the field. I was just hanging out there. We had a pretty big attack that night. I was just sort of a loose cannon with a .45 trying to figure out what I was doing. They hit us pretty hard. In fact an interesting thing happened. They actually captured or had a Chieu Hoi one of the sappers that came in through the wire Chieu Hoied. The next day he put on a demonstration of how they got through the wire. It was just amazing.

RV: What did they do?

CD: He stripped down to just sort of black shorts, so no clothing on at all. He got on the outside of the wire and basically slipped through it without cutting anything. Got all the way through it without setting off a flare or anything. It was amazing that they could do that. I think a lot of times they actually cut the wire when they could. They would scope you out. They’d know where a lot of your flares and claymores and things were in advance.

RV: Did you feel like the Americans were winning the war when you were there? Did you have that sense?

CD: I did. Although I felt the frustration of the home front turning away from the war. I felt like as far as we were concerned there we were winning the war except that you fought for the same ground over and over again. We kept asking ourselves what are we doing here? What are we trying to accomplish? It was pure body count. That’s all we were doing was trying to get a body count.

RV: Tell me about that policy. What did you think about it?

CD: I guess if you’re trying to fight a war of attrition if both sides have the same mindset it might work. But we didn’t have the same mindset they did. They were going to throw as many people at us as it took for as long as it took. So we killed 90 of theirs,
we’d lose one. We think we were winning, but we really weren’t. We didn’t understand
that. We really thought man if we killed 90 guys to one of ours, we’re winning the war.
RV: What about the one-year rotation? Did you think that was a good idea or
should men have been left to fight the war to it’s finish, say like World War II?
CD: I think it was actually worse for officers. Because typically we only spent
six months in the field before we rotated to XO or something else. The theory being, get
your ticket punched and get as many officers with experience as possible. I don’t think it
was very workable. You tended to lack cohesion in that there were always new guys
coming in. Other than the boat people who went over originally nobody went over in the
unit. You were just sort of a conglomeration of people. I think that the NCO corps and
the enlisted guys really took a dim view of the fact that officers spent six months in the
field and they were gone. That was kind of a problem.
RV: I guess you didn’t have that problem did you?
CD: No.
RV: Do you want to tell me about that incident when you were medevaced?
CD: Yes, Song Be actually Fire Support Base Buttons was right near the
provincial capital of Song Be province, which was up by the Cambodian border. It was a
First Cavalry Division, fire support base. Colonel Shy Meyer, who eventually, became
Chief of Staff of the Army was the battalion commander there. Nixon was about to make
a speech. This was in early November. The NVA knew that he was going to and they
wanted to do all that they could to draw attention away from him. So they contemplated
a series of attacks on a fairly wide area. But mainly up in that area where we were. So
the First Cav had gotten intelligence that Fire Support Base Buttons was going to be hit
by a large enemy force. So they brought in I troop from the 11th Cav which was my troop
to provide a little additional security. We were there for maybe three days, each night
thinking that would be the night of the attack. Oddly enough, my platoon- this is really
weird and my guys struggle about this to this day- but Fire Support Base Buttons had the
typical six-foot high earth berm all the way around it with bunkers dotted all along and
three rows of Concertina wire outside the berm. Shy Meyer commanded my platoon to
go out and set up outside the berm in between two rows of Concertina wire. Which
meant that (A) we didn’t have the protection of the berm and (B) we were stuck in
between the wires. Cav platoons like to be mobile. My troop commander objected, we all objected. Anyway that was the deal. We went out and set up. At the time I think I had six vehicles operating. About 23 guys. We set up outside the berm. What I have learned later, in fact I talked to General Meyer a few years ago. He said that we were hit by an enemy force of about 3,000 or 4,000. It was a huge enemy force. When they came in, as it turned out just by our luck my platoon was on one side of the berm. We came up to one corner and there was a tower on that corner. The main thrust of the NVA attack came up a draw to that tower because they could see the tower. That was something for them to guide on. So basically they were coming right into my platoon. As it turned out, it was kind of funny. I was sitting on a lawn chair on top of the track pulling guard about 1:00 at night. I don’t know where I go the lawn chair. The first rockets and mortars and all that started coming in. We knew it was about to happen. I threw that lawn chair, I don’t know where it went. As soon as the barrage was over, the ground attack started. Of course they were hitting Buttons from all sides. We had a huge volume of fire coming from our front, which was kind of coming across an open field with a lot of high grass. At some point, maybe 20 minutes in to the battle, the NVA actually broke through the perimeter on the other side of the fire support base, got inside and fought their way across the fire support base. They got in the bunkers behind my platoon because there was no infantry behind us since we were out there. We didn’t know that they were out there. As it turned out I had one track on the right, which was down by the tower. Mine was next and then the others went off to my left. At some point that track on the right got hit, actually by four RPGs. I lost one guy and all the rest were wounded. The track caught on fire. The guys on that track came up toward my track and went on by me. At that point we still didn’t know the enemy was behind us. So I had three guys on my track that night. Mike Czajkowski was on the .50 caliber in the copula. I was manning one of the M-60 machine guns and the radios. A guy named Bob Harvey was on the right M-60. We were basically fighting to our front. For some reason we had the back ramp of the ACAV down. I can’t remember if we had hydraulic problems or whatever it was. Harvey ran out of ammunition, ducked down into the track to get another box of ammo. The first RPG came into my track from the right rear and it blew him out the back. Went through my right leg. I didn’t feel any pain, but I knew I’d been hit. Even though we had
flares up it was pretty dark on the battlefield. So I reached down to check out the damage and I remember my leg feeling like warm jello. My first thought was, ‘Hey, I’m going home’. But I had this more immediate problem. So I called my troop commander to tell him that we were being hit pretty hard. Not knowing that RPG had also gone through my radios. I continued to fire the machine gun. About the time I ran out of machine gun ammunition another RPG came through the track. I decided that was an invitation for me to leave. I’d forgotten the back ramp was down. So I crawled out of the hatch and I got up on top of the ACAV, they’re maybe six feet high. I remember falling off the edge and landing in a big puddle. I was lying on my back in this puddle. I reached down to check out my leg and it was gone. I thought that guy’s blown my leg off. I later found out that I had really gotten shrapnel from head to toe. Blew away most of my right thigh. About three inches of the femur. Without the femur it was kind of a wet noodle. It had folded up underneath me. Eventually I figured out what happened and I got myself turned over. I crawled around behind the track thinking there’s safety back there, not knowing still that the NVA were in the bunkers behind us. I don’t know how long I was here before some guys from another track came. The vivid memory I have right then if you recall in comic books when somebody gets punched out and they see stars. When they lifted me up I had lost a lot of blood by then. The remaining blood just rushed out of my head. It looked like the 4th of July. It was the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen.

RV: Really? You remember that to this day?
CD: Yes, it’s incredible.
RV: You said you were experiencing very little pain?
CD: Not much that I remember. I think the shock at that point blocked it out.

They got me back to a more secure area. Shot me up with some morphine. My next kind of big memory was they took me into a little aid station and there was an operating room down there or some kind of thing. They had some metal tables. They tore my jungle fatigues off and put me on this metal table. The memory I have there was that it was so cold my chest muscles contracted and I felt like I couldn’t breathe. I was afraid I was going to smother. They got me in some sort of a splint. This was maybe 1:30 in the morning. Finally by about I guess around 5:00 the battle had died down enough to get some medevac choppers in and I was airlifted out.
RV: You must have lost a lot of blood.

CD: Yes, I think by the time they got me to the aid station I’d probably lost an awful lot of blood. Because literally the whole right side of my thigh was gone.

RV: How close to death do you think you were?

CD: In Korea, I guess I would have been dead. Any other war might have died. Gosh, our medical support was so good in Vietnam.

RV: Looking back at that how do you feel about that today? That’s obviously a highly traumatic event and physically affected you. The war ended for you there I guess?

CD: One of the most significant experiences of my life. I guess everybody that goes into combat goes in with the thought can I cut the mustard? What am I going to do if I get shot? You never know unless you do. I just think back on those as positive experiences.

RV: Do you really?

CD: Yes.

RV: Did you think that at the time?

CD: I think I did.

RV: How is that possible? I’m not doubting you at all. Can you explain to people who might be listening to this or reading this interview in the future, how can you see that as a positive thing for you?

CD: I was not a Christian then. I would have a different view of it now. My mom was very much a fatalist. She said, ‘What’s going to happen to you is going to happen to you. Just go make the best of it’. That’s the way she observed everything in life. That was just her outlook. I figured if it was my time to get shot that was just part of the deal. You go make the best of it. I remember an odd thing happened. My last memory of the battlefield was being carried on a stretcher to a chopper. There were four guys carrying the stretcher. The only one I remembered over the years was that one of them was a 1st cav chaplain. I didn’t know who he was but I knew he was a chaplain. I got loaded on board and I was gone. I’m not much of a reunion guy. But finally in ’91 or early ’90s my wife and I went to a reunion in San Antonio. We went into this huge room where it was kind of the general meeting room. Everybody had brought their memorabilia and scrapbooks and all that. They had them on tables around the edge of the
room. When I walked in, my wife had gone off to look at some stuff on some tables. A
guy walked up to me and he looked at me and he said, ‘Are you Lieutenant Dodge’? I
said, ‘Yes’. He said, ‘I’m Bob Walker and I was one of the guys that carried your
stretcher to the helicopter’. I said, ‘Man this has made the reunion’. Then my wife
comes over. She said, ‘Ty you’ve got to come see something on this table over here’. So
I went over. In fact I’ve still got the piece of paper. There’s a piece of spiral notebook
paper ripped out of a notebook and on it is written, ‘My name is Chaplain Gene Allen. I
helped the 11th Cav when they were attacked outside the berm of Buttons. If you
remember me call’. I thought man that’s got to be the chaplain. So I called. He was just
going ready to go out of town. He didn’t even know the 11th Cav was in town except
that he was a hospital chaplain and he had been at a seminar in our hotel and saw our
banners. So he rips this note out of his notebook and sticks it on the table in there. So we
went and had a reunion. So now I’ve met two of my stretcher bearers, which has been
pretty cool.

RV: I can imagine so. Did your experience in country affect your religious
beliefs at all?

CD: I don’t think it did at the time. As I look back on it now it did. I mean it
does now. Having a different view of eternity and how you get there. From my point of
view I can see how foolish it is going into combat without some assurance of eternity. I
really didn’t have that perception back then. One interesting thing though that did
happen, we were out in the absolute middle of nowhere on some road. I don’t even know
where we were. I stopped my platoon for a maintenance break on the road. We were all
kind of stretched out on this dirt road. Way down at the other end of my platoon I see a
little white car drive up and it stopped next to the last track. The guy got out and he’s
talking to the guys in the track. Then he moves up the next track. I wonder what’s this
guy doing? It turned out to be a Korean who was selling white, leather covered Bibles.
They were going like hotcakes.

RV: Really? He was a civilian?

CD: Yes. Out there riding around in the war zone.

RV: He’s doing some serious work for God out there.

CD: That’s right absolutely.
RV: What’s the shape of your leg today I might ask?
CD: I run on it, backpack on it. The right side of my thigh is still gone. I’ve just

got a thin covering of scar tissue over the bone.
RV: But you’re fully mobile?
CD: Yes.
RV: That’s great.
CD: Well, I’ve actually lost some flexibility in it, but it works pretty well. Thank
goodness to America’s military medicine.
RV: Let me ask you some other questions about life in the field. What kind of
wild animals did you run into?
CD: Heard a lot of stories about wild animals. The only things we ran into, I did
have one trooper we were out busting jungle and a scorpion dropped out of a tree and
snagged him. We had to medevac him. I lost a few to Malaria. I guess the worst ones
were as we were busting jungle these voracious red ants would build nests in trees.
When you shook their perch they dropped down on you. They ate armored cavalrymen
for lunch. They were awful. They’d get down your clothes and all. Other than that
really didn’t see much. We did have one sort of a disheartening experience. We broke
out into a (technical difficulties).
RV: I’m sorry you cut off again. Broke out in to what?
CD: Let this call beep through. We broke out into a clearing. Still there?
RV: Yes, I am. You broke out into a clearing?
CD: Yes, broke out into a clearing. About I don’t know, 50 yards away there was
a peacock standing over there in full array. All of a sudden I guess nine M-60 machine
guns opened up on that peacock. That sucker just walked off the battlefield. I thought
man!
RV: Everyone missed?
CD: Everybody missed (laughs).
RV: That’s interesting. Did your unit have any pets? I know that might be an odd
question.
CD: We did, no we did. We had a little dog. Kind of a mutt named Tanker that
rode around. He had a little buddy that was a real mutt. Totally indescribable mutt that
we called Uncle Ho. You might think that we called him Uncle Ho playing off Ho Chi Minh.

RV: Yes, sir.

CD: But the name Ho was actually a contraction of the initials H-O, which stood for hood ornament. He liked to ride right under the .50 caliber machine guns on one of the tracks. It’s funny when I do Vietnam testimony to youth groups and stuff like that I tell them about that and they all look at me because they’ve never seen a hood ornament before.

RV: That’s true. That’s very true. So you say you had Tanker and Uncle Ho.

CD: Yes.

RV: Did they last with you the whole time you were there?

CD: Yes. It was interesting because Ho in a firefight he was typically the first one to arrive being on the front of the track. He’d stand up underneath that .50 caliber machine gun and just give the enemy fits. Bullets snapping around him. I thought that old guy’s crazy. I did notice that he and Tanker both lasted longer than all the platoon leaders in our platoon. In a period of about six months, in our troop we had three platoons. So each one had a platoon leader. Just before I got there, the platoon leader in my platoon was killed. On November 4, two of us were RPGed and medevaced. The next month the other platoon leader was killed. Then shortly after that another one. So we lost platoon leaders like crazy. The mascots seemed to do ok. We should have listened to them more.

RV: Tell me what you think was the bravest action you witnessed in Vietnam?

CD: In Vietnam I would have to say the dust off guys, and one thing that comes to my mind I had a great track commander and guy named Gary Pinon. He was a story all into himself. We were in this rubber plantation late one July afternoon. I moved our platoon into a new area. It had been swept by the engineers for mines so we didn’t expect any mines. He was down on the ground guiding this track into position. The track ran over a rather large mine. He was standing about three feet from it. It shredded him. It blew his face off. Just really shredded him. Standing in the middle of this mine field I guess six or seven other guys immediately jumped off their tracks at dead run picking their way through whatever they didn’t know was down there to get to him.
Which it’s kind of that look after each other thing, but an awful lot of bravery. Saw a lot of bravery after Vietnam in the hospital as well.

RV: Did you really?
CD: Yes.
RV: Can you describe that?
CD: Yes. When I was at Camp Zama the guy next to me had been shot in the hand, which I think is probably one of the most complicated bone structures in the body. It was very infected. A lot of crushed bone and stuff. Several times a day they would come inject saline solution into the wound and then they would have to massage the hand to squeeze the infection out. The color would just drain out of his face. Yet he set an example for us. Had another interesting experience. I guess it was before I had actually got out of the country. I was in a body cast and it was my shipping container initially with a large broken bone and it started just under my armpits and went down both legs. So I was kind of like a stranded turtle. I had been there a couple of weeks and one day my attitude just checked out on me. I became a huge pain in the neck to the hospital staff around me.

RV: What were you doing?
CD: Just complaining, whining. Why aren’t you paying more attention to me? I could see a lot of other guys that were in a lot worse shape than I was in. They weren’t paying attention to me and I did think that was fair. I was laying there in my stranded turtle grand funk one day. A guy came into our ward; the door was about 20 beds away. The door opens, this guy walks in and his head is completely wrapped in bandages. You couldn’t see any part of his head or his face. He was sort of shuffling along, kind of navigating by Braille. Every now and then he’d stop at a bed and he’d lean over. Looked like he’d say something to the guy in the bed. Then they’d shuffle on to the next one. Frankly I watched him with self-pity in my heart. At least that guy can get out of bed. I had what my wife, who was a kindergarten teacher would call a DRA. Dirty Rotten Attitude. Eventually he got to my bed. Actually ran into it, bumped into it. When he did he reached out with his hand and it brushed across my cast. He thumped on my cast and he leaned over in kind of a muffled gruffly voice he said, ‘Man what happened to you? They’ve got you wrapped in concrete. You going to be ok? You going to get to go home
anytime soon’? Just as I was about to answer him the guy in the bed next to me leaned over and said, ‘Don’t need to answer him’. I said, ‘Really why not’? Said, ‘He lost his hearing and most of his face to a mortar round. He can’t hear you’. I looked back at the guy and when I did he leaned over and in that low gruffly voice he said, ‘Hang tough dude. I’m praying for you’. Then he just shuffled away. I couldn’t see through the tears. Here was a guy looking out for other people in his own misery.

RV: Wow! You were in the hospital there for a couple weeks, then were you taken out of country?

CD: Yes. I was in the hospital Saigon for about two weeks while they stabilized me. Interesting thing that happened there in the body cast, in fact, two things. I was lying there one day kind of asleep. You know how you can sometimes tell that there are people around you. Can sense that there are people. I opened my eyes and there were colonels and captains and majors. I thought what’s going on? Standing at the foot of my bed was George Wallace. I couldn’t remember his name. I knew he was the governor of Alabama but I couldn’t remember his name. That was one experience. Then they shipped me to another hospital near Bien Hoa. They were trying to get the hematocrit count of my blood up. They had gotten it fairly stabilized. So the last night before I was supposed to go out, they said we need to get you up just a little higher. The nurse came by and said, ‘Would you like anything to drink’? I had been on just IVs up until then. I thought oh, man I’d love a Coke. She brings me this Coke and simultaneously they start giving me injections of blood. To do it, they hang a blood bag up and they put a blood pressure cuff on it and squeeze it tight to pump it in faster. With the carbonation of the Coke and the blood getting pumped in to me I began to swell into this body cast. I felt like a tick. I felt like I was going to bust out of that thing. Anyway from there they sent me to Camp Zama in Japan. I stayed there about two months. Then in early January they shipped me to Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery. I remained there from January thru June. Interestingly enough my daughter was born while I was in the hospital there. She had been conceived unknown to us just before I went over. She was born while I was in the hospital.

RV: Wow! What did your wife hear about your injury? How did she hear this?
CD: She was home. She had an apartment in Tuscaloosa and her parents lived not too far away. She kind of knew the military routine. Two guys show up at the door sort of thing when you’re husband’s dead. A cab pulled up to the door and came and knocked on it. Said he had a telegram for her. She said I’m not going to read it. I can’t read it. So she called her dad. He came over and read it. It said basically described that I’d been wounded and what my condition was and what have you. The Army was really good about keeping her informed. Very good about regular updates and what have you. Some of that may have been the fact that dad had some influence on that I guess though I never knew that. She was very well informed.

RV: When were you able to see her for the first time?

CD: January because I was wounded 4 November. I actually got back in country about the 10th of January.

RV: How much did you write home? How much contact did you have with them while you were there in Vietnam?

CD: A fair amount. In fact I’ve got a number of several people saved the letters so I’ve still got them. I would write every few days anyway. I got a fair amount of mail back.

RV: How important was the mail to you?

CD: Pretty important. Interesting because they’re now all real muddy. They look like Vietnam.

RV: How would you describe the leadership in Vietnam?

CD: The leadership; I really didn’t have much contact with the upper leadership, the guys that were making the strategic decisions. The leadership from regimental level down I was pretty close to. I was very impressed with it. They didn’t take risks just for the sake of taking risks but they were aggressive. Tried to get the job done and listen to you. I was impressed.

RV: When you arrived back in the States what kind of reception did you get? What are your memories of that?

CD: It was kind of funny I guess because I came back through the medevac system. So everybody I met was sympathetic to me. I didn’t experience any of that
getting spit on at the airport and all that stuff because I was in the medical system. It was
basically good, very positive.

RV: How long were you in the hospital there at Ft. Maxwell?
CD: From January until June. Almost five months.
RV: Did you go back to active duty?
CD: Yes. I went back to convalescent duty there for about six months there in
Tuscaloosa with a National Guard unit as an advisor. Then in the fall went out to Ft.
Carson Colorado. It was that point my wife and I both having grown up military family
and having moved as much as we did during the short time we were in were really getting
tired of being rootless. So I was going through a process then of deciding whether I
really wanted to stay in or not. Really the military was different during Vietnam than the
military we had been used to during our growing up years. A huge infusion of people.
Different atmosphere and everything. We decided that after my three years, I had a
regular army commission. After three years I would get out so I finished out my tour at
Ft. Carson.

RV: How did your father feel about that?
CD: You know, he was a guy that always supported me in stuff like that. That
was one of the hardest things I ever had to tell him, ‘I’m getting out of the military’. I
was afraid of what his reaction would be, but it was great. He said, ‘You’ve got to do
what you’ve got to do’.

RV: I bet that meant a lot to you.
CD: It really did. It really did.

RV: How much did you talk about your Vietnam experiences once you were
back in the States permanently and then after Ft. Carson, after ’71?
CD: I think my experience may be similar to an awful lot of Vietnam vets. We
came back from an experience that was kind of like going to the Grand Canyon with a
three dollar throw away camera, taking a picture and trying to describe to somebody what
the Grand Canyon’s like. You can’t do it.

RV: That’s a good analogy.
CD: While people were cordial and they were polite they couldn’t relate. They
really wanted to talk about other stuff. So basically I stuffed it.
RV: Did you keep it off your job applications?
CD: No it was on there. I was proud of it but I just didn’t push it on anybody because I didn’t think they wanted to hear about it. I think when I really started to open up was maybe in the early ’90s when I went to that first reunion. I began just voraciously reading Vietnam books and meeting other veterans and talking about it. Still I think most people are polite but they can’t really relate to it. I’m kind of closet writer. After one of my reunions I wrote for Thunder Run our regimental newspaper sort of a thanks to the wives that come to the reunions. Because their coming and trying to understand us and what our experience was all about is very cathartic.

RV: Go ahead I’m sorry.
CD: Not that they ever really can understand it, but they really make a good shot at it.

RV: Did the war affect your marriage?
CD: I don’t think it did. I was divorced in the early ‘80s but I don’t really think that had anything to do with it. I think if anything, I tend to think of myself all along as being more on the compassionate side as a person. I think that may have solidified it going through the war and seeing what other people go through and being glad I don’t have to walk in their shoes. I’m thankful for them. It probably strengthened our marriage as much as anything.

RV: Did you have difficulty transitioning to civilian life?
CD: Only in the sense that I came from such a regimented background. Even though in civilian life I worked with South Central Bell which being a big company, fairly regimented. Nothing like the military. I didn’t know whether to call people mister or what to call my co-workers. I worked through that pretty quickly.

RV: Let’s talk about your reflections on the war in general. Let’s start with the United States policy in Vietnam. What did you think about that?
CD: I think at the time, I was too far removed from real policy other than the feeling that I really felt like we were doing the right thing. So I was very supportive of it. As I look back on it, I’m not sure whether I could tell you whether going there was the right thing to do or the wrong thing to do. I do think the cause was just. I guess the
biggest problem that I’ve got is after 10 years we basically caught the last helicopter out
of Saigon and left the Vietnamese on their own. We didn’t do our job. That bothers me.

RV: How did you feel in April ’75 when Saigon fell?

CD: Man, watching that on TV tore me up. I just can’t believe we’re doing this.
Not only that we’ve expended all we’ve expended over there. We’ve left these people
with not much hope. That was a bad feeling.

RV: How about now? How do you feel about it?

CD: I feel the same way. When Florence and I went back, my second wife, went
back in 1995, we started in Hanoi and worked our way all the way through the country.
Spent about 18 days. One of the things that I wanted to do was find as many former
enemy soldiers as I could and tell war stories. What I found was that number one, they’re
extraordinarily friendly, everybody from Hanoi all the way through the country. I think
what their typical reaction was and this kind of blew me away when they saw a
Caucasian they thought they were either Russian of French and they didn’t like either one
of them. When they found out you were an American, total strangers would invite you
into their house, give you hot tea. Do all this stuff. As I would talk to former enemy
soldiers, they didn’t mind talking about the war, but they really wanted to look to the
future. Let’s do a joint venture, let’s get this country going. America still 30 years later,
we’re still fighting Vietnam, they’re past it. They’re just way past it, which I thought was
interesting. The other thing I would ask them I would say why don’t you have any
animosity toward the Americans? I mean we tore your country up for 10 years. To a
man, they would say we never had a problem with the American people. It was the
American government we were fighting. How they separated me shooting bullets at them
from that I guess is maybe the Oriental mindset. They have a much better attitude than
we do. I’m not sure I answered your question.

RV: You did. You answered a few questions I was going to ask you about your
perception of the country today. When I’ve traveled there I have experienced the exact
same thing actually.

CD: Have you?

RV: A future, forward looking people versus a reverse or backward looking
people.
CD: You know I found it very interesting how knowledgeable they are about our Civil War. The ones I talked to would bring it up sometimes. I thought how do you know about that? It occurred to me, that their situation not in the war but after the war was much like our Civil War. In the civil war, our technology far outpaced the tactics. We were still walking four abreast into being canon fodder. I think their society and you probably saw it too is trying to get ahead of where they’re able to be, but it’s out-pacing them. So they were struggling when I was there in ’95 trying to figure that out. Capitalism reigned even though it was still a Communist country. In fact a funny thing we went through the Ho Chi Minh Museum in Hanoi. Did you go through that by chance?

RV: Yes, sir.

CD: Two things struck me. One was, if you recall they had several rooms or areas set up for all the various wars they had been in. The one for the American war was not very big. Kind of a blip on the radar screen. The other thing was the room where they had contrasting capitalism and communism and they had two symbols. I don’t recall but the Communists symbol was but the capitalist symbol was the mock up of an Edsel. It was weird. Where’d they get an Edsel?

RV: The Vietnamese are industrious people. Tell me what your thoughts were on the media coverage of the war, overall looking back on it now.

CD: I’ve got quite a different view looking back. In fact I’m still not a big Peter Arnet fan, but I understand him much more now. He has a book called and I can’t remember it. But it’s about his combat experiences. It’s given me a much different view. When I was in country I really saw the media as a pain in the neck that basically gave information to the enemy and they weren’t on our side. That was my whole total focus. As I look on it now, I see they have a much more (connection cuts out) in terms of the information they put out.

RV: I’m sorry you cut out again.

CD: It’s going to beep again. Hang on just a second. You know I see now that the media has a role beyond just supporting the country. That is reporting what’s going on, on the ground. My viewpoint now while I still feel a little of that frustration to sort of fly in, get a good story and beat it. I’m much more sympathetic I think to what they do.
and how they do it. I find too that the embedded journalism thing in Iraq has been very interesting. Although I think that’s tainted them somewhat in some cases because they get awfully close to the troops.

RV: What are your thoughts today on the anti-war movement looking back?

CD: On Vietnam?

RV: Yes, sir.

CD: I go back to that I don’t know if it was our job to be in Vietnam or not. But once we were there I think the cause was just. I guess the anti-war movement clearly got us out earlier. I’m afraid it also hamstrung us in terms of getting the job done. They may have had some measure of control over the fact that we didn’t do the job over there, what we were called to do. We lost an awful lot of American lives for really not much. So in a sense, since I was the guy getting shot at while they were burning the flag it irritated me. But on the other hand I think the overriding thing is that’s why soldiers go to fight is so that some other guy can burn the flag in downtown Birmingham if that’s what they want to do. That’s what makes our country great.

RV: Have you suffered any PTSD incidents that you’re aware of?

CD: Personally no not that I know of. Every now and then, very infrequently I’ll have a dream where I’m running and the NVA are involved. For some reason I can’t run fast enough. I don’t ever know what happens, the dream never ends.

RV: Really?

CD: It’s not bad dream necessarily. Just kind of a weird dream.

RV: You said you read a lot of books on Vietnam.

CD: Yes.

RV: Any of them stand out in your mind?

CD: Into Cambodia. Maybe I liked that one because the 11th Cav spearheaded the assault. The thing that frustrates me maybe is there are an awful lot of books written on infantry, LRRPs, seals Rangers, Air Force but almost nothing on cavalry and armor. There’s not much to relate to. There are a couple of them and I’m terrible at remembering the names of books. Fields of Fire was a good one. I’ve got bookshelves full of them.

RV: So you’ve done a lot of reading. How about movies on Vietnam?
CD: The first one I saw was *Platoon*. My impression was it starts out with that guy sitting on an ambush in his poncho and the rain pouring down on him. I thought man that is Vietnam. Other than kind of what seemed to me unrealistic personality issues that were in the movie, I thought that the combat scenes and that kind of stuff were pretty real. I watched *Full Metal Jacket* and that to me was so off the wall I finally stopped watching it mid-way through. *Apocalypse Now* was so far off the wall I could barely get into that one. Other than that I haven’t really watched too many Vietnam movies.

RV: Do you try to avoid them?

CD: No, I’m just not much of a movie person. I did have a friend who was in the Battle of the Ia Drang Valley. I went to see *We Were Soldiers*, which I thought was good.

RV: Did you go see it with him?

CD: No I went with a bunch of guys from my Sunday school class. Actually I did go with him. Then we went to a barbeque place afterwards and let him tell the real deal, which was really interesting to hear his point of view.

RV: How do you feel about your service in Vietnam today, looking back at it?

CD: In what way?

RV: Just in general, what are your thoughts about it?

CD: As I look at it from a personal standpoint, I feel pride is the wrong word; thankful that I was able to go and do what I think my job was. Do it to the best of my ability. I definitely see myself as having come out a better person for it.

RV: In what ways?

CD: Stronger mentally knowing that I can do things physically that I didn’t think I could do before. Understanding that other people have it a lot worse than you do. Being part of that camaraderie of combat soldiers is pretty amazing. Even today, Vietnam vets who don’t even know each other you’ve just got a brotherhood. I don’t know how I could possibly describe it. I have a Blackhorse patch on the back of my car. Partly to show off I guess but partly to be a flag to any other Blackhorse veterans who are out there. My wife and I several years ago were in a little mountainous area in Alabama going up this windy mountain road and there was sort of a panel truck behind me. The guy got right up on my tail and he was blowing the horn. I thought, man this reminds me
of Deliverance or something. I kept going, didn’t pay attention to him. He kept blowing
the horn, blowing the horn. Finally we got to the top of the mountain and I was going to
let him by. I pulled off to the side of the road and he pulled up next to me. It turned out
to be another 11th Cav guy. Out in the middle of nowhere we hug and do all this stuff.

RV: Is there anything that you would change about your Vietnam experience if
you could?
CD: No.
RV: Nothing at all?
CD: No.
RV: How do you feel like the war itself in general has most affected your life?
You just described some of the character traits you took away from it, things you learned.
But in general, how has it most affected you?
CD: If I look at it from a broader perspective I think Vietnam gave our whole
country a different perspective on what we’re all about as a country and how we ought to
go about it. Not only terms of when we go to war. To go to war, do war. But also
whether we ought to be there or not. To be more thoughtful about when we get into it. I
don’t know how thoughtful we were on Iraq. I can’t call that one. Again I think we
certainly did a good deed over there.

RV: What lessons do you think the United States took from Vietnam?
CD: From a military standpoint I think a lesson of commitment, total
commitment to your cause. We kind of fought a war of attrition in Vietnam. Only put
the same pressure on them that they’re putting on you. That’s no way to fight a war.
Again certainly if you’re going to get involved in it, get involved to accomplish your
mission. Not that we always have. Certainly Mogadishu is a good example of that. At
least go in with that mindset.

RV: If you walked into a classroom today of young people, high school age,
junior high, college, what would you tell them about Vietnam?
CD: That in fact is something I love to do. In fact I do it occasionally at
Samford. There’s Vietnam class there and do it to youth groups and what have you. The
two things I do, depending on the group. Depending on whether it’s a Christian group or
not a Christian group. The message is a little different. One thing I do is share my
experience. Share why I thought we were there, what we were trying to accomplish whether we were right or wrong being there that I thought the cause was just. The final message that I give them or if it’s a non-Christian group is two fold. One part of the message is that war is not everything it’s cracked up to be. I relate to them the picture you’ve seen on the wall with the skull on it. War isn’t really the glamorous thing we think it is. The other thing I relate to them is there are an awful lot of people who have sacrificed an awful lot so that I personally can enjoy the freedoms that we have in this country. That’s what America’s all about. It takes a lot of sacrifice to do that, to have what we’ve got. That’s what Vietnam says to me.

RV: What do you tell Christian groups that’s different than that?

CD: The third thing that I add relates specifically to John Brady who was the guy whose name was on the wall that the skull was over, super-imposed on. I make the comment and I don’t know if Brady was a Christian then or not when he died. Based on my understanding, if he wasn’t a Christian then, he’ll never have another opportunity. So you shouldn’t wait until it’s too late to make your commitment.

RV: We should note for the record that this photo that you took of the wall, we have here in your collection at the Vietnam Archive. So if people are interested they can view this online. At some point they will be able to do that. Actually it will be here, physically in your collection. Let me ask you about what you think the myths, and/or misconceptions about the Vietnam veteran, the American Vietnam soldier is in this country?

CD: I think one of the big ones is that Vietnam veterans are a bunch of drugged out addicts that ride motorcycles and have long hair. Some of them do and that’s fine. I don’t think that’s typical. Certainly even the ones that have long hair and ride motorcycles, a lot of them are great guys. I think that maybe the media through movies has sort of portrayed that. An awful lot of the movies tend to focus on that drug culture aspect of it. That’s the myth I’d like to see go away the most I guess.

RV: Do you think the U.S. government’s taken care of its Vietnam veterans?

CD: You really hear a lot of controversy. I can only speak to my personal experience and the experience of those that I know. In my case, I couldn’t have imagined that it would have been any better. I know Gary Pinon the guy that I said had his face
blown off. I had an interesting reunion with him just a few years ago. In fact if you don’t mind, can I share that with you?

RV: Absolutely, absolutely.

CD: When he was hit, my platoon medic gave him an emergency tracheotomy and put him back together as best he could. I called for a dust off. It literally had peeled his face off. He had shrapnel all over him. Dust off came, we loaded him on board and he was gone. Sometimes over there you never knew what happened to the guys that were medevaced. You just never heard what happened to hem. That was the case with Gary. We didn’t know if he lived or died or what happened to him. I was really afraid given the severity of his wounds that he probably wouldn’t even make the helicopter ride to the hospital. Over the years I thought about him. I thought that if by any miracle he was still alive, I would love to talk to him again. But I didn’t have a very good way of tracking him down until about two and a half years ago. I thought I’m going to do a people search on the internet. I knew he was from Ohio so I started my search there. I found a Gary Pinon in Akron. So I jotted down the phone number, and picked up the phone and dialed it. The phone rang a couple times and I really hoped nobody would answer because I didn’t have a clue what I was going to say. On the fourth ring this voice answers and says, ‘Hello’. I said, ‘Is this Gary Pinon’? The voice said, ‘Yes it is’. I said, ‘Are you the Gary Pinon who served in Vietnam’? The voice said, ‘Yes, I am’. I said, ‘Gary, I don’t know if you’ll remember me but my name is Ty Dodge and I think I was your platoon leader’. With no hesitation he said, ‘I remember you LT’. I can’t even begin to describe the flood of emotion that drained out of me over the next hour as we reunited after more than 30 years. I know for me it kind of wrapped up a loose end. One of those combat veterans, emotional loose ends. I think it wrapped up a loose end, one of those combat veteran emotional loose ends. I think it wrapped up a loose end for Gary too. The force of the blast that day left him with no memory of what happened. The medical staff at the first hospital he got to they didn’t know what happened either. Nor did the ones and the next hospital or the next. I mean he’s been going to hospitals for 25 years putting his body and his life back together and nobody knew what happened. I was able to tell him the rest of the story. The thing that I find interesting about him, he’s blind and disabled now.
RV: He is?
CD: Yes lives by himself not too far from his mom and a daughter and several
grandkids. But the thing that struck me about him was that he had a voice just filled with
love and hope. Thinking about the hope issue he called me about two summers ago. He
said, ‘Ty, I just fulfilled a dream’. I said, ‘Really what did you do’? He said, ‘I bought
something I’ve wanted all my adult life’. I said, ‘That’s cool what did you buy’? He
said, ‘I bought myself a brand new black Corvette’. I thought Man, Pinon you’re blind!
He doesn’t drive it, but he sure does like to ride around in it. So I still hadn’t met him at
that point. So I talked him into going to an 11th Cav reunion last August. In fact, it was
interesting we have a patriotic rally at my church every year which was in July. I was
asked to do a testimony so I told about Gary Pinon. I asked if they would pray for my
reunion with Gary. So Florence and I went to the reunion and met with Gary. Gary and I
had a couple of hours, just the two of us to talk over old times, look to the future and
what have you. He said something that was so poignant to me. About mid-way through
our conversation he turned to me and he said, ‘Ty there’s something I’ve got to know’.
He said, ‘It’s been eating me up for more than 30 years and I know what you tell me
might be painful but I’ve got to know the answer’. I said, ‘Sure Gary what is it’? He
said, ‘What did I do wrong and how many other guys were hurt’? All I could do was just
throw a big bear hug on the guy. I said, ‘Gary because you did everything right nobody
else was hurt’. Having that reunion and seeing a guy that’s gone through what he’s gone
through makes my life look pretty good.

RV: Can you tell me about your experiences at the Wall in Washington?
CD: Yes. I think one thing that stands out to me is that I guess it’s the most
visited monument in Washington. So many people, many of them have no direct
connection they were not born when the war was going on or whatever just that senses of
reverence that people have. That was the first thing that struck me. I tend to feel the
same thing when I see names of guys that I knew and what their lives could have been.
I’ve only been maybe four times or something like that. Four or five times. I think the
time that I took the picture was may be my second or third time, something like that. It’s
always been a good experience for me.
RV: Do you think back to your time when you’re there or do you think to the future? How do you feel?

CD: I tend to think back to the past. Which I think in a way is a little self-serving. I say that in this way. Vietnam I think for the guys that were there, who were in any combat situation, it was a pretty incredible experience that other people really can’t understand. So maybe we find some of our significance by looking back and being with other people who can understand. I mean being at the Wall is one of those experiences that affirms the significance of what we’ve done.

RV: Do you talk to other veterans when you’re there or have you?

CD: Oddly enough I don’t think I ever have. I’m usually there with family. So we talk.

RV: How does your family feel about your experience in Vietnam?

CD: Interesting, the wife to whom I’m married now has been great about listening to my Blackhorse stories and then going back to Vietnam with me to try to capture that experience so she can understand it better. She’s very supportive of that. The only living close relative that I have now is my sister. She and her husband are retired military. They’ve kind of been through that same deal and they’re very supportive. Basically positive all the way around.

RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States?

CD: A few. One that I found when Florence and I came back from Vietnam I had a few Vietnamese phrases and things that I couldn’t translate. It turned out there was a young Vietnamese guy in our church so I went to him. He said, ‘You know I can’t do it’, although he was born there and (connection cuts out). I’m beeping through. Let it beep through again. Anyway he was born there, but never really knew the country. He said, ‘But my dad can translate it’. So he took the stuff to his dad. So I’ve had that experience here. I had one incident about a month ago when I was driving by Lubbock. We were driving up to Colorado. We were in the Black Canyon at Gunnison standing there over looking at the canyon. The two young guys who were obviously in school out there came up. One was Vietnamese and asked if they could take our picture. So I struck up a conversation with him. But really haven’t had much Vietnamese contact other than that. Now my sister who lives in the Washington area, they do a ton of Vietnamese stuff,
primarily through their church. Primarily to boat people, I guess they’re not boat people anymore. A lot of that population that lives in the Washington area, helping them out.

RV: Mr. Dodge is there anything else that you’d like to talk about today or discuss that we have not covered?

CD: Let me see. We’ve covered a lot of stuff. I will have to say that being able to do something like this is a cathartic experience for me. Just to be able to share with obviously somebody who’s pretty deeply involved in it like you are.

RV: Yes, sir.

CD: I think that’s good for vets. I think having a resource like yours at Texas Tech maybe it will help us to keep from repeating some of the mistakes that we’ve made in the past. I always think that the experience of the French in Vietnam should have kept us from repeating some of those mistakes but it didn’t do a very good job. I think pretty much we’ve covered the waterfront.

RV: Very good. We’ll go ahead and officially end the interview with Ty Dodge.

Thank you very much sir for your time.

CD: Thank you, I appreciate it.