Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins at the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University initiating an oral history interview with Dana Mansfield. Today’s date is the fifteenth of March 2005. I am in the interview room in the Special Collections building on the campus of Texas Tech in Lubbock and Dana is speaking to me by telephone from New Jersey. Good morning, Dana.

Dana Mansfield: Good morning.

LC: Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Oral History Project. I’d like to start if I could by asking just some general biographical data. Where were you born, Dana, and when, and if you could tell me a little bit about growing up?

DM: Well, I was born in Neptune City, New Jersey, a small town on the coast on May the 6th, 1947. I had a nice—it was a small town at the time. It’s still fairly small. It was near the ocean. I spent a lot of time involved in fishing, swimming and playing on the playground, which just happened to be next door to my home.

LC: Good setup, it sounds like.

DM: It looks better and better as I look back on it.

LC: Did you have brothers and sisters?

DM: I had one older brother. He was two years older than I.

LC: Okay. Tell me about your folks. What did your dad do?

DM: My father was a milk deliveryman for Borden’s Dairies.

LC: Had he always done that?
DM: He did that before he went in the Army and he did it again when he got out of the Army and he did it up until he was I guess in his early fifties when they did away with milk delivery. You know, there used to be people that came to your house with milk and bread in the morning.

LC: That’s right. What happened when that went away? How did he transition? Did he simply retire, or did he try something else?

DM: Well, he went on to kind of a bunch of little menial jobs around town. Spent most of his time I guess working in a storm window factory.

LC: He was in the Army, you mentioned.

DM: Yes, he was. He was in during World War II.

LC: Where was he? Was he stateside or did he go overseas?

DM: He was in Europe.

LC: Do you know much about his service?

DM: Well, he was in the quartermaster corps. I don’t think he got involved in anything too serious.

LC: Did he talk to you about his experience in the Army at all?

DM: Very little. He had a lot of pictures I could always look at, though.

LC: Tell me about your own entrance into military service, Dana. How did that come about?

DM: Well, I was having a fairly nice time working as the night crew manager at a supermarket. I was making pretty good money at the time. I was guaranteed overtime so I had a brand-new corvette that I was tooling around town in. One day I bumped into the superintendent of the Neptune City Schools, who also happened to be the head of the local draft board. I asked him what the possibility of my being drafted was in the near future. He told me that I had at least a year before I’d be seeing a draft notice. Two months later, I got one. I thought about that for a little while and I went to work. My brother was in the Army at the time. He had learned how to operate this heavy equipment and whatnot. I thought that if I got to go into the Army, maybe I could at least pick what I’m going to do in there.

LC: Get some kind of a skill?
DT: Yeah. Maybe just learn something. I didn’t want to be a truck driver or a telephone operator or anything like that, even though I didn’t really know what I wanted to do, but I went down to the post office, and it was a big old building. I walked up to the second floor and there was a Marine recruiter there and an Army recruiter and I guess there was a Navy guy. Everybody was there. The Army guy just happened to stick his head out of the door and ask me if he could help me, and that’s how I ended up at his desk.

LC: Do you remember your interview with him?

DM: Very, very vaguely. I remember the building more because it was so old with marble floors and that frosted kind of glass on the doors. But I don’t remember how we transitioned to being an MP (Military Police), but I often had thoughts of being a policeman, and it just kind of set off a little bell and I enlisted.

LC: Did you talk to him then, did you think about the possibility of becoming an MP during that first recruiting talk?

DM: Oh, yeah, as soon as he brought it up, I thought that sounded like a real good idea. I’m not sure why.

LC: Yeah. Thinking back, hmm.

DM: Well, thinking back, you know I was working in the supermarket and there was some promotional opportunities there, but somehow I just didn’t think I wanted to do that for the rest of my life. I did have that thought about the state police.

LC: Do you know where that came from?

DM: I think it came from sitting in the back of a car when I was a little kid and seeing the state policeman out there in the middle of the street with his motorcycle parked on the side of the road, knee-high black boots and a pair of pants tucked into them with a big wide yellow stripe down. I thought he looked pretty darn cool. I said, “That might be something I’d like to do someday.”

LC: Now about what time, just to frame this for people who would listen to this, was your interview with the recruiting person from the Army?

DM: Well, it would’ve been May of 1966.

LC: Were you paying any attention at that point to U.S. involvement in Vietnam?
DM: Well, we’d had some people in town that had gone over there and not come back. Of course it was on the news most nights, but because I lived a reverse life, I didn’t really look forward to six o’clock news. That’s usually when I was waking up.

LC: Because you were doing night shift.

DM: Right. So yeah, I knew it was going on, but was it forefront of my mind?

No. Not at all.

LC: Did your family members react at all to your deciding to enlist rather than waiting to be drafted?

DM: Well, I did have my draft notice.

LC: Yeah.

DM: In fact, I still have it.

LC: Really?

DM: Yeah.

LC: Wow.

DM: My parents didn’t seem to have much of a reaction at all. I mean, my brother was already in. He was over in Germany. So there wasn’t much trauma or anything associated with it that I remember.

LC: Tell me, if you can, a little bit about your training. Where did you go to basic?

DM: I went to basic at Fort Dix, New Jersey.

LC: Okay.

DM: That’s only about thirty miles from where I am right now.

LC: What was your impression of it? Do you remember first arriving there?

DM: Yeah, I do. What was my impression of the post or the people around me?

LC: Yeah. Well, any of those, really. It’s a huge post.

DM: Well, I had been to Fort Dix once or twice because that’s where my brother took basic. So I had gone down there on little trips to visit him on the weekends. I remember they greeted us at this reception center. Of course we got there in the middle of the night, as most people always seem to. I just remember, I just kind of felt like a cattle going through the chutes.
LC: Were people, drill instructors and others kind of—did they get right up in your face right away?

DM: Well, you didn’t see them until you got to your basic training company. First you spent three days at this thing that they called the reception station. I always thought that was a very pleasant name for a very unpleasant place.

LC: Did they give you any duties while you were there?

DM: Well, one of the funniest things I ever saw in the Army happened when I was there that concerned a duty. You know, they did a lot of testing there, and they had to test all the guys who were drafted so they’d decide what to do with them. One day, it was late in the afternoon and we just finished taking a bunch of tests. A sergeant stood up to this group of maybe a hundred men and said, “Can anybody in here handle a floor shift?” Of course everybody in the Army at that time had a hot car, or at least they said they did. They all had floor shifts. They all made $10,000 a year before they got drafted. But the sergeant said, “Can anybody handle a floor shift?” A couple hands went up, and he picked a couple guys and he said, “Okay, you two, get up here. Get the broom. Start sweeping up. The rest of you can leave.”

LC: (Laughs) Were you one of the guys whose hands went up?

DM: No. But that taught me a lesson. I never volunteered for anything again. Never.

LC: How did the testing go for you? Did you find it strange or rough or a walkthrough?

DM: No, it was just personality inventories. You needed—I think the Army called their IQ a GT (general technical) test. I think I needed 90 to be an MP. I got a 118 or 120 or something like that.

LC: So you cleared that one with no problem?

DM: Yeah. Yeah. You didn’t have to be very smart, really.

LC: Where did you then go for the training?

DM: I went to Ft. Gordon, Georgia.

LC: Okay. Tell me about that base. Tell me about arriving there, if you remember.
DM: Well, I remember arriving there and really being the first time I’d ever been in the South. Of course it wasn’t really the South, it was just another Army post. I was really kind of hoping that it would be a little bit more friendly and less basic training-ish, meaning they treated you more like a human being.

LC: But you didn’t find that?

DM: Well, they sort of did, but they were still very, very petty. I mean, I showed up with a very short haircut, and the first thing I was told to do was to get another one.

LC: Really?

DM: Yeah. I didn’t get my hair cut for a long time after I got out of the Army.

LC: I believe it. Do you remember what time of year this was that you arrived?

DM: Well, I remember that it was—

LC: Was it late summer?

DM: It was two weeks about mid-July, mid-August.

LC: So it was probably good and hot down there?

DM: It was kind of hot when we got there. I’m thinking it was like early September.

LC: Tell me about the training. What do you remember about the routine?

DM: Well, the training was all anxiety-based.

LC: How do you mean?

DM: Well, if you made the least little mistake at anything that you did, you still got yelled at so much that you didn’t want to even try anything. In fact, I remember sitting in the back of the jeep with a guy sitting next to me had been a Maryland State Trooper. We were going over these radio procedures. We got a call and somebody had to talk on this radio that was sitting there next to him. He didn’t want to pick it up. I mean, here’s a guy who had been a Maryland State Trooper who had spent years talking on the radio, and he didn’t want to talk on that radio because he knew if he made the least little mistake, he was going to get screamed at. So I ended up doing it.

LC: Wow.

DM: Yeah. That’s what I mean when they put this fear in you, you don’t even want to try it because you might screw up and get yelled at. In fact—?

LC: That’s fairly—I mean, that’s pretty intimidating.
DM: Well—

LC: Was that the whole idea, do you think?

DM: Well, I don’t know. I just figured that was the way they did it in the Army.

LC: How did that settle with you? I mean, certainly some guys would not respond well to that at all. Other guys would be like, “Well, okay. This is the game I got to play, I’m going to go ahead and play it.” Were you kind of in the middle, or—?

DM: Yeah, I just got—I thought it was kind of petty and stupid. I didn’t think it was the right way to do it, but I wasn’t going to be a crusader.

LC: Dana, when did you find out that your orders were going to be for Vietnam, and how did you find out?

DM: It was the last week of MP school. For some reason, there had been rumors around our little area where there’s maybe three or four different training companies, that all of our company was going to Vietnam. But there was always rumors about everything in the Army. I mean, they started before you got on the bus. We had a formation one night. We all stood there waiting for our orders. They called out six guys. The first six guys they called out went to Bangkok. We thought that was a horrible place to go back then. We didn’t know what a wonderful place that was. Then they called out another guy and he was actually in the National Guard. We didn’t even know that. He never told us. He was going home. Everybody else went to Vietnam.

LC: How many guys would that have been? Could you guess?

DM: That would have been at least 130, 135.

LC: No kidding. Wow. What was the reaction? Did you guys talk about it? If so, if you remember, what was kind of the buzz about getting sent to Vietnam?

DM: Well, everybody was—nobody really seemed to mind all that much because if you’re going to Vietnam, you got a two-week leave. If you were going any place else, you had to go there directly. So everybody was going home for two weeks and they were kind of happy.

LC: So that sort of took the edge off?

DM: Yeah.

LC: Did it work for you? Did it—?

DM: Worked for me. Worked real good.
LC: Wow. Okay. Do you remember going over to Vietnam?
DM: I remember it very clearly, yeah.
LC: Can you tell what your route was?
DM: Well, I left Newark, New Jersey. This was the second time in my life I had flown somewhere. The first time was going to Ft. Gordon. So this was the second time. I landed in Chicago and I met two guys that I knew from MP school. They were from Michigan. We were on the same plane going to Oakland, California. We were going to leave from the Oakland Army terminal. When we landed in Oakland, I don’t remember where it was, Oakland or San Francisco, wherever that airport was out there, we met some other guys. We didn’t have to report in till the next day, so we got a room in what turned out to be nothing more than a flop house. Had a couple bottles of cheap wine, and the next morning I think I experienced the first hangover of my life. Then we reported into this Oakland Army terminal, which was really kind of an assemblage of buildings with chain link fence around it. Didn’t really look like an Army post. This is where we were introduced to having these two or three times a day formations where they would either call your name and you would then proceed to Vietnam, or if you were left there, then you’d get picked to go out and do little odd jobs around the post that nobody wanted to do.
LC: Like?
DM: I remember at the end of my very first formation, I had the honor of cleaning bathrooms for the rest of the day.
LC: Very nice.
DM: I was good at bathrooms. After about three days, they finally called my name. They moved us, a planeload of guys to this incredibly huge warehouse. It looked like a blimp hanger. In there was just bunk beds up and down. There was a snack bar and there was a bank of telephones. You could have played football in there and that’s where you waited for your plane. I don’t really remember how long I was there, maybe twenty-four hours. Then we got on the plane and the first stop was Hawaii. I always wanted to go to Hawaii.
LC: Did they let you off the plane?
DM: They did. We’re walking around the airport and everything’s very colorful and these people are wearing those Hawaiian shirts. We’re, you know me and Mayberry and McCleese, we don’t even have a PFC (private first class) stripe. I mean, we’re just a bunch of Army zeroes. We really felt good for a while. Then we got back on the plane and it went to Japan. They wouldn’t let us off the plane there. Then they did some island hopping for fuel. Then it landed somewhere in the area around Saigon. I suspect it was Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. Then we were transferred to Camp Alpha. I never heard anything about Camp Alpha again, but Camp Alpha was a very small place. Later when people landed there, they took them directly to Long Binh for processing.

LC: Yes.

DM: But Camp Alpha, I often thought of that as a figment of my imagination, it was so unbelievable. It was just this, again, a small area and they told us just to go find a bunk, that we’d be moving again in the morning. That was when we were sitting on these bunk beds, only they had bunk beds, it was your standard Army inter spring bunk bed, only it didn’t have a mattress. Mayberry and McCleese were sitting in this one bunk, so the spring was only a few inches off the floor.

LC: Right.

DM: This rat ran underneath them, and it was the biggest rat I’d ever seen in my life. In fact, it might’ve been the first rat I ever saw in my life. When he ran underneath Mayberry and McCleese’s butt, they each popped up in the air like Laurel and Hardy. It was kind of funny. About that time, McCleese turned to Mayberry and said, “You know, I don’t think I can take a year of this.” Mayberry said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, McCleese, I think you’re gonna have to.”

LC: Were you sort of settling into that idea too? That you were going to be there and that’s all there was to it? I mean, did this experience with those guys talking about it kind of gel your own—?

DM: Well, everybody I think they accepted the inevitable. It’s going to be a year from the day you got there and you didn’t really want it to be shorter, you know?

LC: Right.

DM: You didn’t want to get hurt, didn’t want to get killed, so. Yeah.
LC: Dana, where were you assigned? I know you’ve spoken about some of the
details of your time there in the memoir that you’ve written, but where exactly were you
assigned?
DM: I was assigned to the 272nd MP Company, located in Nha Trang. It’s about
250 miles north of Saigon in the Central Highlands and right out on the coast of the South
China Sea.
LC: Can you describe Nha Trang as you remember it? Was it a busy port city,
what we might think of for the third world, generally, or was it a little sleepier? Can you
describe it?
DM: Yeah, it took a while to figure that out. I mean as usual, we got there in the
middle of the night. I had no idea where we were. The first place that we stopped, it was
the Air Force base there. But the town itself, it was actually a province capital. It took a
long time to figure that one out, too.
LC: How did you figure it out?
DM: I think I read it after I got back.
LC: Okay.
DM: Yeah. I mean before Vietnam, it was a pretty good sized, medium-sized
city, and it wasn’t the worst place to be there. It was on the water, so one side was
protected. The main function was deflecting anything that was heading south towards
Cam Ranh Bay, because that was the one place they wanted to keep safe for everything.
It had a lot of mountains around us there. We lived right on an area that was just like
beach sand. We lived in these GP (general purpose) medium Army tents that were built
to hold about eight guys, and most of them had twelve in it.
LC: Did you, Dana, make friends with the other guys in the company? Did you
kind of settle in, or was there a lot of—obviously there would be a lot of turnover, did
that disrupt things?
DM: Well, twelve of us got there all at the same time. Then we got split up,
maybe three or four to each platoon. So I mean, they were basically the guys you hung
out with. I ended up hanging around after I had been there a month or so, maybe more so
with guys that had been there for five or six months, but most of the old-timers kind of
kept to themselves or they were out in the field. They weren’t even in Nha Trang because the company was kind of spread out.

LC: Am I right in thinking that your primary mission was to oversee American, essentially interference with black market activities?

DM: Well, that’s what I did. I mean, the primary function of the 272nd MP Company in Nha Trang was to provide security for 1st Field Force headquarters. First Field Force was the headquarters that directed the operations for the 4th Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division, the 1st Cavalry Division, and the 25th Infantry Division. I’m thinking the 25th. They had a major general, a lieutenant general stationed there in Nha Trang. So the function there of the men stationed there were to provide security for that headquarters and for the general himself. Now we also had platoons that were out in the field with the 101st and the Cav, but that’s what you did in Nha Trang. Now what I got into there after I’d been there about six months was the black market activity, where we worked with a Vietnamese policeman and a Korean MP. There was a lot of stuff—I mean, this was kind of on the South China Sea. There was a lot of docks there. There wasn’t a lot of cargo, but there was quite a bit. Anything that wasn’t nailed down got stolen. If you didn’t find it for sale downtown, the chances were that the enemy had it. Be it ammunition or tents or clothing or food. So our whole purpose was to somehow interdict these products as they were being transported from wherever they were stolen from to wherever they were going.

LC: What was your impression of the South Vietnamese officials’ commitment to this kind of work?

DM: Well, I didn’t obviously know anybody with any real rank. All I knew was the Vietnamese policemen that I worked with. I think they all had a pretty good attitude about what it was they were trying to do. Even though I think some of them felt bad sometimes, when you had to confiscate contraband goods that really weren’t making anybody rich, it was just some Vietnamese guy trying to help his family out a little bit. They were very aggressive. The two that I worked with the most, I often wondered what happened to them when that place fell apart over there.

LC: Do you remember their names?
DM: Well, the one that I remember the best, his name was Hai. H-A-I. I don’t remember a last name.

LC: You wrote about him quite a bit in the memoir.

DM: Yes. Yeah. He’s the one, I went out and met his wife. I met his child. The other guy that I worked with a lot was Chau, and he’s the one that got killed by the Army truck.

LC: Do you want to say just a little bit here about that incident?

DM: Which one?

LC: About the Army truck?

DM: Well, I really didn’t witness that.

LC: How did you hear about it? How did you learn of it?

DM: I heard about it from the other Canh Sats. It’s just a—you know, he was missing. When I asked about him, they said he was—the Vietnamese used to ride their motorcycles like crazy people. They used to call them cowboys. I mean, they used to ride—well, they used to ride like you ride through Schuylkill Expressway in Philadelphia. I mean, it was just hell-bent for election.

LC: Right.

DM: Chau, he had a motorcycle. Did he ride like that? I don’t know. All I knew was there was a lot of accidents over there. One day he got hit by an Army truck and he got killed. I really never did know any of the details and I never tried to find out.

LC: Was it kind of tough on you?

DM: I liked the guy, yeah. It didn’t keep me awake at night, but you know.

LC: But still.

DM: I can still see his face very clearly. He was a good man. He deserved better.

LC: Dana, let me ask you a little bit about the scope of the black market activities that you came across. Was it mostly the smaller stuff, or were there larger operations maybe that you didn’t personally get involved with but knew were going on?

DM: Well, you know at the time I didn’t really know it, but looking back, we were just kind of some token resistance out there. I think the people that were really on the American side—and there was obviously Americans involved in dealing with these
goods. They were mostly in the higher ranks. They were pretty well protected and there
was no way that someone on our level was going to get anywhere as near those people. I
can remember where it was—I hadn’t been back long and there was quite a scandal
where the sergeant major of the Army himself had been brought up on charges for some
kind of hanky-panky at the enlisted men clubs worldwide. So I mean, you weren’t really
going to get to the bottom of anything. I mean, we were just basically there to intercept
what we could and make it look like we were doing something to stop it.

LC: Was that kind of dispiriting?
DM: I didn’t really know that at the time. I thought I was doing something.

LC: How would you say your morale was over the time you were there?
DM: It was good.

LC: It was?
DM: It was good. Yeah. I never really got down about too much of anything.

LC: How about—Dana, when you arrived back in the States? In the spring of
1968, certainly U.S. military involvement was escalating, the number of troops being sent
over there growing, and I just wonder, how did your adjustment go down? Were you
okay coming back?
DM: Yeah. I had originally come back in December of ’67. I noticed then that it
wasn’t too difficult to notice that the war wasn’t quite as popular as it had been thirteen
months earlier.

LC: Exactly, yeah.
DM: Then I went back in January of ’68 and I got there just two or three days
before the Tet Offensive. Now the next time I came back was in April.

LC: Of ’68?
DM: Yeah. When I came back the second time, you could really sense a tide of
unpopularity. I mean, that Tet Offensive changed a lot of minds.

LC: Absolutely, yeah. Did you see much in the way—I assume you went back
home to New Jersey, is that right?
DM: Yes, I did. Yeah.

LC: Did you see much in the way of either organized anti-war activity or just
kind of comments that you would hear?
DM: The second time, in April of ’68?
LC: Yeah, during the rest of ’68.
DM: No. I just noticed that everybody looked different. Their hair was a little longer. Everybody wore bell-bottom pants. I wasn’t too concerned with them because I still had another fourteen months to go in the Army.
LC: Right. Where were you posted during the rest of that time?
DM: Well, I was supposed to go to Ft. Lewis, Washington, for reassignment, but I went down to the Pentagon instead and got myself reassigned to Ft. Monmouth, New Jersey. That was a small miracle.
LC: How did it come about?
DM: You mean, how did I get it?
LC: Yeah, how did the miracle happen, or don’t you know?
DM: Well, I—
LC: You asked for it and it—?
DM: Well, I was supposed to go all the way back to Ft. Lewis to get reassigned to heaven knows where. I went up to Ft. Monmouth while I was home on leave and said, “How can I get reassigned here?” They said, “You can’t. The only way to do it is to go to the Pentagon.” So I jumped in the car with a friend of mine and I drove down to the Pentagon. I parked in that huge lot.
LC: Right.
DM: I went in that building. My friend, he stayed in the car. He was smart. He was in the Army too. He didn’t want any part of it. But I started wandering the halls of the Pentagon, really not having any idea who or what I was looking for. Every time I saw somebody that looked friendly, I’d ask them. I’d just keep going from office to office to office. Eventually, I walked into an office and there was a fellow sitting behind a desk. He didn’t have a jacket on. I had no idea who or what his rank was. I explained my story to him. He said, “Well, where do you want to go? Ft. Dix?” I said, “Well, that’s not bad, but I was really hoping for Ft. Monmouth.” He picked up the phone and he made a phone call and he said, “Ft. Monmouth it is.”
LC: No kidding.
DM: It was just like that. Then all I had to do was find my way back to the car.
LC: Right.
DM: Which I did. Then of course I reported in at Ft. Monmouth and they had no idea I was coming, but they were real short of people, so they were happy to have me.
LC: What kind of duty did you pull there?
DM: I was a stockade guard.
LC: Were there people in the stockade?
DM: Oh, yeah.
LC: For what kinds of offenses? Do you remember?
DM: Oh, mostly things like assault. A lot of AWOL (absent without leave), some drug abuse, some possession of marijuana. A lot of assaults were in there and a lot of AWOLs. They weren’t hardened criminals, but they thought they were. Some of them thought they were political prisoners back then.
LC: Right. How did you know that? Did they talk to you? Did they have some—?
DM: Oh, they were unbelievable.
LC: They had some chatter going in front of the guards?
DM: Oh my gosh. Every one of them was being persecuted. Not a one of them deserved to be there. Didn’t matter what they did, and they just, for always they had nothing to do but sit in those cells. It was really a—most stockades are a collection of barracks with a fence around it, but this was a real jail cell, just like you see in the movies. When you close those heavy iron doors, you get a headache from them banging. But anyway, these guys sat in them cells most of the day, although they could go out on work details. But they had absolutely nothing to do, but sit there and scheme against us twenty-four hours a day. Sometimes they won.
LC: How did you handle that? That’s pretty intense. I mean—
DM: What do you—you just kept them under control, that’s all.
LC: By doing what? Did you talk back to them? Did you have your own attitude back? Did you—?
DM: Well, as long as you didn’t take any guff from them and you didn’t let them intimidate you, then they’d pretty much do what you told them to do, because none of
them were interested in spending any more time there than they had to. We could take
good time away from them.

LC: Wow, and was that something that you guys had some discretion over or
input into?

DM: Yeah, we would write—

LC: File reports and stuff on them?

DM: Yeah, we’d write up a report. We’d call it writing them up.

LC: They didn’t want that.

DM: No. No, they didn’t.

LC: Right.

DM: It was kind of a—it was an interesting place, except we were almost always
on twelve-hour shifts there. That wasn’t much fun.

LC: Were you thinking during this time period about staying with the Army as a
career?

DM: Never occurred to me.

LC: Why is that?

DM: I don’t know. I didn’t even get a re-up till like at the end. That was kind of
disappointing.

LC: Yeah, I thought that was mandatory.

DM: Yeah, I did too. I must be the only one that never got one. It’s not because
I had a bad attitude or anything. I mean, I ended up making E-5. But I never planned on
staying in the Army. It’s not that I’m a great individualist or anything like that, but I
really don’t like being one of the sheep, everybody dressed the same. I don’t like having
a lot of people telling me what to do, be it sergeants or officers. I did it in the Army and I
didn’t mind being in the Army that much, but I knew I was never going to stay in.

LC: It wasn’t going to work for the rest of your working life?

DM: No.

LC: When did you actually separate then from active duty?

DM: June of 1969.

LC: Dana, if you can, tell me a little bit about your own views as the war
continued on and you’re out of the service. For example, I don’t know whether you
might remember the incursion into Cambodia and then the shootings at Kent State and that whole spring of 1970. Do you remember that? How did you feel?

DM: Well, I remember that, and I remember the Vietnam moratorium in 1969 because that’s when I started college.

LC: Where did you go?

DM: I went to Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky.

LC: Why did you go there?

DM: Well, there was—the last year I was in the Army, I was working at the stockade. I had about three months to go and we had a real influx of new men come into the company as guards. They were all right out of MP school and almost to the man they were college graduates. Talking to these guys and listening to the jobs that they had before they got drafted was very eye-opening. It had a lot of appeal for me, because I didn’t really want to go back to work in the grocery store, either. I said, “College, huh?” It was something I’d never really thought much about because it just wasn’t something—I wasn’t inclined to do after high school.

LC: Right. It wasn’t on your map.

DM: No.

LC: Right.

DM: Then there was the GI Bill back then. Of course it paid the same thing that they paid to Korean vets, but that’s another story. But I went back to high school, my high school to see my old high school guidance counselor to find out how to get into college, because I didn’t have a clue. I told them I wanted to go to Morehead State, because that’s where one of these guys went. He said, “Why Morehead?” I said, “Why not?” He goes, “Well, how about Murray State?” I said, “Well, yeah, I’ve heard of that.” Because a lot of people from our town went there for some reason. Sure enough, so did he. That’s how I ended up at Murray State.

LC: How many years were you there?

DM: Four.

LC: Did you start then in the fall of ’69? Does that sound right?

DM: Yup, September ’69, I started from scratch.
LC: Was there any—well, what was the mood on that campus with regard to the war?

DM: Well, that’s a pretty conservative campus.

LC: Yes.

DM: I mean, if there was any liberals there, they kept pretty much to themselves. I remember I did have a philosophy professor once who admitted being an atheist. We thought that was a pretty brave thing to do.

LC: That’s pretty radical.

DM: But I mean, it was a—back then, there was about seven thousand students there. The art students and the music students, they looked a little hippie-ish, but I mean, there wasn’t—

LC: That was about it?

DM: Yeah. There wasn’t a lot of bell-bottom pants there then. Of course, that showed up later. ROTC (reserve officer training corps) was still mandatory then. So all the freshmen had haircuts, except for me.

LC: Right, because you’d already done your service. You must’ve been kind of an odd fish there, having already served in Vietnam and been in the military for, what, three and a half years?

DM: Three years, yeah.

LC: Three years? Did you fit in okay? Did you find a way to fit in?

DM: About a month, a couple weeks before I was getting ready to go, I was on the beach. We lived right by the ocean. I was walking along the beach and a guy called my name. He was the younger brother of a girl I used to date in high school. He asked me if I was going to Murray State in the fall, and I said, “Yeah, I’m thinking about it.” He goes, “Well, if you go, can I go with you?” because he was going to be a second semester freshman. So right away, I had somebody there that I knew.

LC: Well, that was good.

DM: Yeah. Then the guy across the hall, he was a graduate student. He was from New Jersey. He ended up being the best man at my wedding.

LC: Oh, yeah?
DM: And I was his. I only lasted one semester in the dorm, because it was too much like an Army barracks. I ended up graduating in four years with a degree in business and a 2.9999999 grade point average. I would’ve got a 3.0, but I got a C in freshman orientation. I already knew how to brush my teeth.

LC: Yeah, that really wasn’t designed for someone in your situation, I’m sure. Dana, let me ask you just a couple more questions. First of all, do you recall anything about the fall of Saigon and the end of the war in 1975?

DM: Yeah, I do. I remember seeing it on TV and thinking that it was almost like fiction or something that wasn’t real. It made me think about where I’d been and made me think about that policeman that we left there, the Canh Sat named Hai. The whole thing just didn’t seem believable. I couldn’t believe it ended that way.

LC: Did you give—I’m sorry. Go ahead, Dana.

DM: I was going to end up saying, not that it surprised me, because I guess the whole thing was never really done right to begin with at times.

LC: Yeah, that’s what I was going to ask you. What do you mean by that, that it wasn’t really done right? Should—?

DM: They just had misplaced priorities, and there’s still a lot of that today in a lot of things that I see.

LC: In American policy?

DM: American politics, American society, political correctness. They’re more concerned with saying the right thing than doing the right thing.

LC: Were there mistakes then in carrying out what—by the United States in carrying out what was in effect to your mind, a pretty good idea supporting the South Vietnamese government, but it just wasn’t done well?

DM: Well, it’s even a lot of—I’ve read a lot about Vietnam. Going back even to, you know not that I had any influence on anything that happened over there, but a lot of the advisors that went over there and they worked with the Vietnamese. Obviously they come across with this, “Well, we’re guests here,” and you know, “We can’t really tell them what to do.” I can certainly see that, and I certainly understand politics, but it just looked to me like there was too many games and politeness.

LC: Really?
DM: Being paid when we had young guys dying over there. I’m almost bitter
about that at times. I don’t know if you’ve read the next to the last page of my memoir.
LC: I’ve got it right here. Go ahead.
DM: It was about—his real name was Paul Ganun.
LC: Paul.
DM: I can still see that casket against the wall, and I can still see his mother.
LC: In some ways it didn’t seem to add up to a good reason, the United States’
involvement?
DM: There was too many people making money off it. There was just too much
corruption there. It wasn’t all just the Vietnamese corruption. It’s just a shame that
somebody didn’t realize it sooner. I mean, it was a bold effort that was never really done
right to begin with.
LC: Dana, let me ask one more question, and that involves the memoir, which
we’ll have here in the collection at the Vietnam Archive. Can I ask why you decided to
write it?
DM: Well, everybody talks about doing something like that, I think. In fact my
wife said to me, “I know a lot of people that talked about writing a book, but you’re the
only one I ever knew that really tried.” I was just sitting here at my desk one day and I
just started typing it out on this computer. I couldn’t stop until I got done. It just kept
coming out.
LC: How long did it take you?
DM: Well, off and on, maybe two months.
LC: Do you feel better, having written it?
DM: Well, it was something that I’d never really planned on doing, but do I feel
better about it? I don’t know. At least it’s all there. It answered a lot of questions for my
wife, even though you know, I didn’t have a lot of problems when I came back or
anything like that. She always wondered what it was like over there, and now she knows.
My youngest daughter, she read it. They’re the only people that have read it. Just kind
of set the record straight, you know?
LC: Absolutely. Absolutely, and that’s what we’re trying to do too. Dana, let’s
take a break there.