

2007

Mulder, Don

James Van Wyk

Northwestern College - Orange City

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Narrator's name: Don Mulder

Length of interview: 80:53

Date of interview: 4/14/2007

Place of interview: Ireton, IA

Interviewer's name: James Van Wyk

For: Northwestern College, History 351: America and the Vietnam War

JVW: I'm James Van Wyk, I'm interviewing Don Mulder, it's about 10 o'clock on Saturday, the 14th. We are at Don's home in Ireton so if you want to start telling me...

DM: Pleased to meet you.

JVW: You as well. If you'd like to tell me a little bit about growing up...

DM: Okay, I was born and raised here in the Ireton area. I have two older brothers, five sisters, and I'm the only one in the Ireton area anymore. I do have a sister that lives in Maurice but otherwise the rest of them all have moved to different parts of the United States. I really enjoy the Ireton area and I guess I've done a lot of things, I've seen a lot of things and I've had a lot of different experiences and everything. I guess I just really enjoy the Midwest here, good place to live.

JVW: So, does your family have any military experience when you were growing up or...?

DM: I was the only one that ever went to service of the family. I joined the 185th in 1965 and anyhow I went to basic training in Laughlin Air Force Base and then came back and did my training in Sioux City, OJT¹ in Sioux City. I worked with munitions, in other words, learned how to load bombs on F-100s². We, the guard, had F-100 fighter planes. They would hold 4, they had 4 bombs or bomb racks that you could load bombs on. And generally, they had two, what they call, tip tanks or fuel tanks that would go on the wings. We formed what they call load teams and I was on a load team. What we did, we loaded bombs and also took care of the guns. You had four guns in there. They were 50 caliber, or 20 mm guns, four guns which would all fire at the same time and they would fire, each one of them would fire, I think it was two to five hundred rounds per minute. So it had quite a bit of fire power on that.

When the *Pueblo* was seized in 1968³, the Air National Guard, the 185th, out of Sioux City, was activated in January. We took more training again; we trained at

¹ On-the-job training.

² Also known as the Super Sabre, the F-100 was used extensively in Vietnam as a ground attack and reconnaissance plane (Boyne 21).

³ The USS *Pueblo* was captured by North Korea on January 23, 1968. One crew member was killed and several were wounded. The crew was held captive by North Korea until December 1968 (Stevens 593).

every guard drill that we went to every weekend to prepare ourselves if we ever did get called up. Then we went to Cannon Air Force Base for 3 weeks to receive more intensive training. Then we had two weeks to get everything in order. We knew we were going overseas. We didn't know exactly where we were going.

Anyhow, then on the 10th of May in 1968 we left Sioux City for Phuket, Vietnam. We spent one year at Phuket Air Force Base there in Vietnam. It's very close to the DMZ⁴. It was a little bit difficult to leave because of my wife and our oldest daughter was 10 ½ months old. So I can relate somewhat to some of the people going away now with the Iraq war, leaving families and everything. It is very, very difficult to go into a war zone with family behind.

But anyhow, we spent a year over there. While we were over there we needed to reconfigure wiring on our airplanes so that they could fire either the upper guns or the lower guns on C model. We did that and then of course we loaded bombs all the time. Our load team basically worked with bombs. I had other teams that worked with loading the guns; they would put 250 rounds per gun. They would load 250 rounds per gun. The reason you did that, because otherwise if you fired more than that, then the barrel would start melting down. So it was interesting, the guns themselves weighed 179 lbs.

JVW: Wow! [Laughs]

DM: They had what they call a charging table to charge it to rotate the drum. That took 90 pounds of pull, just charge the guns. Then you would be on an arming or a de-arming crew at the end of the runway. You always took your turns doing that because you never put a round in the barrel or you never pulled any of the safeties out on the bombs before they took off. That was always the last thing they did before the plane took off. You'd have to charge the guns at the end of the runway and pull the safety pins out of the fuses on the bombs and everything. They told us that we had one of the oldest fighting planes-the oldest fighting planes that were used at the time were F-100Cs.

JVW: Were they still using the A1s at that time, do you know?

DM: A1s? Yes, I'm sure they were using A1s then. I know that they had- when we were ready to leave- they were looking at the F16s because they were building bunkers for those.

We were an Air National Guard unit and when we got there of course the regulars said that we wouldn't be flying anything inside of 6 weeks because the Air National Guard, all they did was play cards on weekends during drills and that kind of stuff. They knew very little about what actually did happen on our drills, our weekends. At the end of 6 months, they said that 6 weeks we wouldn't be

⁴ DMZ, or Demilitarized Zone, was a 6-mile zone that was intended to be absent of military forces and that served as the border between North and South Vietnam (Gendzel 156).

flying anymore because our planes would be broke down, and at 6 months they put the base on max alert. That means that you had to have every plane ready to take off, loaded and ready to take off as soon as they got the call, as many planes as possible. Anyhow, during that full week - we had a full week of max alert - and during that full week, we flew 16 (inaudible 08:40) a day or 16 planes went out a day. That was the highest number off the base. The other guard unit that was from New York, they flew 12 or 13 a day and the regulars flew 3 a day between the 2 squadrons that they had. So I mean, we did do very well down there.

JVW: It sounds like the Air National Guard was taking the brunt of the missions then?

DM: Well, they had been flying a long time, the other D models that they had there too, and the Air National Guard didn't maybe follow the rules to the letter of the law, like the regulars. The regulars, if a plane broke down they would order the part and that plane wouldn't fly until they got the part. Sometimes that took a week or so. If we had a plane break down and if we had a plane that was going through periodic maintenance, they have to pull the plane all the way down, put it back together, check everything out. If there was a part on that plane that was good, we would pull it off and just order the part in. When we were done with the periodic maintenance that plane flew again and that's how a lot of times we kept on flying. I know that wasn't the policy of the military, and not saying that was all wrong either, but I think that sometimes they could do things a little bit different, a little more, what do you call it... Thinking ahead or whatever, because actually that plane wasn't going to be flying for a couple of weeks anyhow, going through all the maintenance. It pulled the engine and re-do the engine and everything during that time, the plane is going to be setting there anyhow. So why not take the part off of there and keep more efficient and that kind of thing? There's more things, I think, sometimes that are very inefficient about how things run. That's not just the military or anything, that's all over in industry and everything.

JVW: Did you kind of feel that way about the way the war was fought on the whole? That there was a lot more that could have been done to, I don't know what your experience was with...

DM: I know that there was a lot of politics. One of the frustrating things for us, and especially for the pilots was they would come back and when they were in the air they could see truck convoys coming out of Hanoi and yet they couldn't bomb the bridges to blow up the bridges so these convoys couldn't get through. They sometimes felt that their hands were so tied and it was not effective war.

I think that there was a lot more behind the war than what most people know and I think that today the same thing is true. You think it's a lot of politics, and there's politics in everything anymore. I think that, being down there and learning what you do, learn while you are in service and everything down there, there's so much more behind there than what the public ever knows. I guess that's one of the

things that really disappoint me today is how the media tries to impress upon the people of this nation what's going on and what's not going on. I pray that the news media never does find out absolutely everything that's going on because they do far more damage than what they do good most of the time, as far as I'm concerned. Dealing with this war especially also.

I think it's so very important to support our troops. Our troops are willing to give their lives so that we can have the freedoms that we do have. I really think that everybody should have the opportunity to serve in military, especially overseas. We have so many blessings in this country because of our forefathers that fought for independence for us. They have kept those freedoms alive, willing to give their lives so that we can enjoy the freedoms that we have. I think it's so important to keep these freedoms, the freedom to worship and the freedom to be able to speak out and this kind of thing. If you see some of these countries-we tend to take everything for granted in this country because we have so many blessings.

I belonged to the Protestant Men of the Chapel while I was over there and we went out and did kind of mission projects on Sundays. We built a school while we were there and a village. As you are going down there in the buses, or in the trucks, you would see little kids, I would say anywhere from 4, 5 years old up to teenagers, going through garbage cans that are black with flies for a scrap of food. Then we complain about how bad we have it. That was one of the things that really got to me. I know I maybe made a few enemies back at the base too because whenever I heard somebody complaining about the food that we had in the chow hall I would say, "Well I tell you what, you go to the garbage can, dig through it, while it's black with flies and I'll take your food which you aren't satisfied with and I'll gladly bring it out to these kids out here. I'm sure they'd be very tickled pink to have that and you just go dig through the garbage can with flies because that's what they're doing and you're complaining." I know there was a few people that got pretty upset with me but I'm sorry that's how I feel. We have to be thankful for the many, many, many blessings that we have.

JVW: So when you went over there, how did you feel about going over there? Were you for it, or were you kind of...?

DM: Well, I am not for any type of war. I mean, I don't like war. War is another outcome of sin, because we should love one another and because of sin we are prone to hate one another and God. That's why we have war, jealousy, 'I'm better than you are,' that type of thing. That's why we have wars, because we can't get along. Like I said, I'm never for war but yet I truly believe in the freedoms that we have in this country. I'm willing to fight for those freedoms and go all the way to give my life for those freedoms because they are so precious here. We don't have to live in fear of walking down the street and somebody driving up in a car and "boom", which is going on today. It's going on in many parts of the country, and it can happen here. That's why we are fighting it over

there so that we do not have as much possibility of that here in the United States. I fear that if the news media keeps going the way they are, and some of our politicians are really “we got to get out of war, we got to get out of war.” I guess the thing that really bothers me- there’s more life lost in Washington, D.C. to murder and crime every year to as many people we’ve lost in this war. Losing over 3,000 people in this war is very, very bad, but murder and crime and people killing people that way is bad too. They want us to get out of Iraq because so many people have lost lives. Maybe we should get out of Washington DC because there’s more people that lose their lives there than what we do.

The other thing that really bothers me is the people that are so against this war seem to be so for abortion and everything. That’s one of the things-that I know is freedoms and everything-but we have to remember who is in charge of this world. It is the Lord, and we have to do what he says. They want to take the 10 commandments out of everyplace, they want to take prayer out of schools, they want to take prayer out of everything, they want to take God out of everything. It is the Lord that gives us everything and we have to put God into everything, not take Him out. I can see why they want to get rid of the 10 commandments, because then they won’t feel guilty about abortion and killing and not keeping the Sabbath day holy and all this. That’s why they want to get rid of them, so they can live the way they want to. The Lord is in charge of everything and I fear that if we do not look at that also and pull together as a country that was founded on God- like it says on our money, “In God We Trust.” We have to trust in the Lord because he is the provider of everything. We have true freedoms in Him, but we also have the freedoms that were derived in this country because our forefathers believed that God was important. That’s why they left their countries because they were told they could do this, they couldn’t do that.

I guess I just fear for the country right now-what’s going on-because in a way we are at war in the United States right now too. It hasn’t come to guns and bombs and that kind of stuff. Looking at it-what they talk about with this war over in Iraq and everything- it’s getting to be more and more of a verbal war and some of the things. Some of the things that are going on with our freedoms and stuff, some of the people that founded our country, their freedoms are being tried to be taken away. I fear that if this country continues the way that it’s going, we will see a revolution in the United States again. I pray the Lord, this never happens and I pray that the Lord will show people the light. I said those freedoms are very, very important to me and I feel that we are fighting a war in the United States that way too. We all have to be ready to step forward and help fight that war. Don’t just sit back and wait until it happens, let’s eliminate it before it happens.

JVW: Is that kind how you felt going into Vietnam too? That there was something that needed- there was a freedom being infringed on?

DM: Yes, and with the seizing of the *Pueblo*, in a way it was different because it wasn’t a part of the Vietnam War but over against that like I said there was a lot

of things in the background that were going on at that time. I think that the government felt that they needed a presence in Vietnam, to be able to react to this other situation that was building-that could possibly erupt and put the world in jeopardy. Why the United States has to be the big brother and all the time and everything, you kind of wonder. But, we as a nation that do believe in God, we want to help people because that's what Christians are supposed to do, they want to help people. I think that our president truly wants to help people, to give them some of the freedoms, to get them under away from this dictatorship which they were experiencing, and with no regard for life or anything. That's one of the things that are going on right now with the terrorists. They have no regard to human life. It's meaningless to them; they become saints if they blow themselves up. To me that's very, very evident of the way the world believes...the dark side of life shows, it comes through very strongly that way.

JVW: So being up on the DMZ, was there a lot of engagements going on around your air base?

DM: There were a lot of things going on around there. We were mortared once and we had rockets come in twice, into the airbase. Like I said, it was very well protected. I did go along with the army chaplain a couple Sundays to give special music. I love to sing, and I went along with the army chaplain a couple times to bases. One particular Sunday I was wondering why in the world I was there because we took off and we were flying long and we got to this one place. Then we took off from there and all of the sudden we dropped down to what they call treetop level. When they talk about treetop level that means you are right across the treetops. Sometimes I swear that the wheels of the helicopter hit the treetops.

JVW: [Laughs]

DM: Seeing the gunners just going back and forth watching the ground real close. The reason we had to drop down to treetop level is there was artillery fire overhead that were shooting over us at targets. Then we landed at another air base and when we landed there was another chopper that had landed right behind us. The pilot had been shot. That was a medical chopper. It picked up some wounded and also when they were leaving, the pilot himself had gotten shot. Like I said, you aren't used to that when you are on an air base because you didn't see that right up front. Seeing these big guns-they had one going off there-it was a big gun. They were shooting 500 pound projectiles. I forget how far they said they were shooting them. A 500 pound projectile is one huge projectile.

JVW: Probably a 105mm howitzer gun⁵.

⁵ The M102 towed 105-mm howitzer was used often in Vietnam. It was considerably lighter than its predecessor, the M101A1, and more ammunition could accompany the gun in helicopters. It fired faster and could traverse 360 degrees (Zabecki 45).

DM: I don't know. But anyhow, it was a big gun. We left there and went to another one. Then we were going real high and all of the sudden -- I never knew that a helicopter could go up one side but he just did a spiral right down, didn't have time to grab our M16s or anything, they were laying on the floor, but they never moved. I just turned my head and took a picture and it was right straight down, just circled down and then we landed. They were taking fire at the time. We did service in a couple different bunkers that they had dug in and stuff. It was quite an experience and everything. But I said, a lot of people said it was a worthless war. Some aspects of it, yes, I think that could have been handled way different. I think that it could have been stopped very, very rapidly. I think that there were aspects that the majority of people will never know what was all going on there, and have no right to know what is all going on there. Like I said, it was very, very difficult to leave your family, your daughter, everything. When we came home, of course our daughter was 1 year and 10 1/2 months old, and she was scared to death of her daddy. She knew who he's supposed to be, but didn't want to have anything to do with me for awhile. And that's the thing, especially with these military fathers coming home now too, they're going to experience that now too, especially with smaller children it's very difficult. The war that's going on right now, a lot of people think that it's a useless war and everything, there is always mixed emotions. I do not like war at all. But, we have to support our president and the choices that he makes. We have to support our troops. If there is anything that's very, very disheartening for troops, it's when people at home are so negative against the war and everything. It really does not make you feel very good. It makes you feel that you're doing something wrong, because you're serving your country. While this shouldn't be going on- I have a tremendous problem with our Congress right now, as far as setting dates that they absolutely have to be gone. We aren't going to give them any more money, well then they got to get out. That isn't supporting the troops, that is the most...

JVW: Demoralizing?

DM: Demoralizing thing that you can do to your own troops. You want to have an enemy build up and everything, keep doing what they're doing. Right now the enemy is gloating because of the way our government is going on right now. I don't know why people in this country can't see that, but it's their personal agenda. They aren't thinking of the whole nation. I really feel it's their agenda and that's all.

JVW: Do you think part of that comes from your experience in Vietnam and seeing that happen?

DM: I think that's maybe why I really feel that way, far more so than what some people would that have never been in the military or anything. I really feel that everybody that's in Congress right now should spend two weeks over there-a minimum of two weeks over there-and do what the military is doing over there, and see once what's going on over there and experience that. I really feel that a

lot of these people, I don't think, have ever been in service. Some of them maybe have. I really feel that should be a requirement of being in any...

JVW: Leadership?

DM: Leadership position. They have had to spend at least a month overseas in some related service. I really do. That they get out into the country and see once what's going on, not sit behind a desk. That's not a military experience, that's to get out there and experience the military, front lines, so to speak.

JVW: So, going back a ways here, what made you join the National Guard in the first place, back then?

DM: Well, I was going with my wife at the time, and they were drafting. They had a draft at the time. I guess I just felt that I wanted to have a choice into which department I went in, rather than just get drafted. I felt very strongly about Air Force. I could've volunteered for regular (inaudible) but beings they had Air National Guard there, I felt that I could serve my country there. When I joined, I knew full well that there's always a possibility that you get activated. If you get activated, so be it. I'm still joining military so that if my country needs me, I'm ready to go. That's what did happen. You could continue with your normal life and you had to be ready to go at any time if the need arose. Like I said, I think that a lot of people do not understand what our Army Guard, Air Guard, all these Guards are about. They are preparing to serve the country at any time and going on with their life, and just to drop everything and go. We basically found out a month before, that we more than likely would be going someplace. We had to have 3 weeks of training, when we got back from training, they told us we had 1 week to get everything in order. Such as our attorney and all that kind of stuff, make sure we had a will and all that kind of stuff. Get ready to say our goodbyes to all our loved ones and that kind of stuff. That's not much time. But, you do that because you were willing to join to help protect this country. I would do it again today. If they would need me, I would be willing to go again today. I don't think they would want me...

JVW: [Laughs]

DM: But I would be willing to do it again, because we have so many freedoms here that we have to protect. Not for us, but for our children and grandchildren. That's why I feel it's very, very important that we protect our freedoms and everything that we have here. It's for everyone; it's not just for me. It's for other people, that they might have the freedoms that we have.

JVW: Did you feel any distance from the actual fighting that was going on since you were on an air base and kind of isolated?

DM: Yes, you did feel in a way that you weren't in the deep of things or anything like that. I felt a lot more secure because I was on an Air Force base. We had some Army guys come through on and off –we had four Army guys come through one weekend, and they asked-we were on water rationing at the time-they came in and asked if they could take a shower because they hadn't had a shower for a month. Their clothes literally would stand up in a corner. They turned the water on in our barracks so that they could have a shower and they were given new uniforms. I know friends of mine that were in the Army and the Marines; they saw a whole different side of the war than what I saw. I was in a barrack, protected from the war, even though we were closer to the DMZ and everything.

JVW: I'm actually kind of surprised you didn't have more Vietcong staffers try and break in...

DM: Actually I think it was South Koreans that were protecting us around there. The bases they had no flying in, if they got somebody that started punching mortars or rockets or something they were right on top of them and it wasn't good for them. They had n I think we had South Koreans protecting us, it was all part I think, of the UN forces that were protecting the bases. There was a lot of other protection around there plus our own military police on all the posts, so we felt pretty secure.

JVW: Were most of the bombing missions into North Vietnam? Or were they a mix of North Vietnam and supportive roles?

DM: We don't know where they went. All we did was, we were loading them up and we had to go according to specifications: what kind of bombs we loaded and that type of thing. There were some missions that they had to go on that they had to clean underbrush and they would put anywhere from 2-4 foot extenders on the fuses on the bombs. That was so when they dropped the bomb, when it hit, the fuse would activate it and by the time the thing exploded the bomb would still be above the ground so it would clean everything off the ground. There were different missions; they had different targets and stuff that we didn't know specifically about where they were going or anything like that.

JVW: You came back in '69 then?

DM: Yes, May 10, 1969. I had been there exactly one year.

JVW: I should've asked this awhile ago, but how old were you when you went?

DM: I was 23, 22 I guess, when I left.

JVW: Was that about the same age as most of the people in your guard unit then?

DM: Yes, most of them were 20 to 40. Some of them had been in there for quite awhile.

JVW: When you came back, did you come back straight to northwest Iowa?

DM: When we came back we left Phuket and then they changed crew in Guam, then we stopped in Anchorage, Alaska. That's where we went through customs, in Anchorage, Alaska. And then they flew us right back to Sioux City. We didn't have any debriefing type of things or anything like that. There was nothing about, no big groups other than the night we came home was when quite a few of the other ones came home. So there was quite a few loved ones there that were waiting at the airport. But they didn't have anything special when we came home, no absolutely not. That was one of the things-not until they put up the Wall⁶ and everything later on. It's been quite a few years that they gave the Vietnam veterans any recognition for what they have done.

JVW: Did you experience any ill will coming back or anything like that? I know northwest Iowa probably isn't a place that that would happen.

DM: No, It wasn't that you saw any ill will towards us or anything because like you said, we were received very well by the community and we are church people and stuff like that. That makes a tremendous difference. Whereas I know that some places they didn't. That is very sad when our country doesn't support its military. It's almost like a slap in the face. That you went there, why didn't you go to Canada or someplace like that? I really feel that if you aren't willing to serve this country then you shouldn't be in this country.

I've always felt that way about desecrating the flag. The flag is a symbol of the United States and anybody that hangs it upside down, anybody that burns it in demonstrations, as far as I'm concerned, is a traitor and should be tried as a traitor. That is the symbol of our country. If you hate the country that much, then you should not be in this country. I'm sorry, my personal feelings and I've felt that way before but since I have served in the military, I feel very strongly about that. As far as I'm concerned, if you do not like the United States that much that you burn their flag or anything like that, hang somebody else's flag up or anything, as far as I'm concerned, that's treason. They have two choices: one is to leave this country and never come back, or number two, that you will be tried for treason. That's just plain simple, if you want to live in the United States, support the United States, become a part of the United States, learn the language, go according to their rules and everything instead of your agenda. I will never back up and I'm one that isn't afraid to speak his piece on that. I will tell anybody that. This summer we have our sesquicentennial, 125 years, and we will be going through the process of burning the American flag the right way. When they are damaged, there is a proper way of disposing of them. We will have that during our celebration this year again because we are proud to be a part of America and

⁶ The Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. is commonly referred to as the Wall (Evans-Pfeifer 614).

we feel that is how you have to do that. If you have to dispose of flags it's the only time that it's proper to burn a flag.

JVW: How do you feel about your experience now? It's been almost 40 years, is there still a lot that you think about, that is...?

DM: I don't think that I'll ever get the picture of these kids, when you're going there to build a school and stuff, they dig into garbage cans black with flies just to get something to eat. Little kids would take a piece of stiff wire and poke it through two pop cans and bend it so one pop can was on top of another. These kids would push that around all over the place because they would have a toy that they could do it with. Here, we are so spoiled and everything, if our kids and grandkids don't have 20-30 toys, they think they got it bad. And there, if they just had one little piece of wire that stuck through two pop cans, that was the greatest thing that you could ever give them. You look at your blessings, that's why I say that people should experience this and maybe we would have a little more of a sense of compassion, rather than thinking only of ourselves and our agenda.

JVW: Do you think there should have been more humanitarian efforts made while we were over there?

DM: I think there was a lot of humanitarian efforts made there and I know there has been a lot of rebuilding and everything after we left there too. Speaking with different people that have gone back, I know that there's a lot of things that are going on that are positive in Iraq today, but we don't hear any of that through the media.

JVW: Yes, I was just going to make the comment that you don't hear a whole lot about humanitarian stuff in Vietnam, all you hear about are the failures and the fighting and the combat.

DM: And, like I said, somewhat because of the news media, and yet in a way you can't blame the news media in a way because it seems like our society creates this negative, gruesomeness and everything and they don't like hearing the positive things. That doesn't make news. But if something bad has happened, basically you can see that very easily because all you have to do is listen to the news or read the newspaper. Ninety percent of it is bad stuff that's been going on and the good stuff doesn't make news. I guess that's part of human nature that they like to see other people more miserable than what they are.

JVW: Have you kept in touch with any of the people that you were with over there?

DM: Oh yes, I have very good friends that we see all the time.

JVW: Have you ever thought about going back at all?

DM: No, I don't have any desire to go back but there's a lot of things that I don't, I'm very comfortable here, I enjoy it here, most of my family's here. I fully plan on retiring here and living here the rest of my life. I don't have to go away for winters or anything like that. I enjoy it here and I'm just thankful that I've been this richly blessed.

JVW: When you came back you were still in the Guard then?

DM: Yes, we had a couple meetings that we had to go to and then we had the option of getting out beings we had served our thing. So actually, it was a six month commitment, the Guard was. When we got out we could have a year and half of what they call "inactive" that means we didn't have to go to Guard meetings or anything, we were basically done. That's the option that I chose.

JVW: They could still call you if they needed you?

DM: Yes, anytime. We were inactive we were not obligated to finish the summer camps and weekend meetings or the monthly meeting weekends to the extent of our time.

JVW: I know Professor Carlson got into a reserve unit so that he wouldn't have to go to Vietnam. Do you have an opinion on people who did...?

DM: No, I do not have a problem with any of them that joined reserves or anything. That was one of things at that time, if you joined a reserve, a lot of people called you chicken. I know that my family-there were members of even my family-that really didn't think too much that I joined the Guard rather than going into regulars. They thought I was chickening out. I never felt that way. It didn't bother me that people felt that way because I wanted to serve my country, which I could do as a Guard unit to be ready in case something came up. Like I said, when we got the call, we went. You didn't second guess it, you didn't do nothing. It was just fine, that's the choice we made. I'm sure that if your professor-if that Guard unit would've got called up-he would've gone, no questions asked. I think that at the time- lot of us that joined the Guard- that was the reason that they joined the Guard units, there was a possibility that they wouldn't have to go to Vietnam. Part of the 185th, I know that some of the guys from the 185th ended up in Korea, some of them ended up in Florida, some of them ended up in California. Depending on what part of the Guard they were in, they went to all different places. It wasn't all the ones that went over to-the whole thing didn't go over to Vietnam either and that's fine. I have no problem with anybody in the Guard because I know that anybody that joins the Guard unit, joins it so that they can serve the country and that they can prepare themselves so that if a need comes, they're willing to go.

We have a guy from our church that is in the Guard. His unit was activated, he went there, and he is going back to volunteer to go back again. He said there is so

much good going on there that he wanted to help with that again, and discussed it with his family; he has a wife and three daughters. They discussed it and everything and he just felt so strongly that it was so important to go back again.

Like I said before that I wanted to go back if they really needed me. This is a way different type of war than what I served, but I'm willing to serve my country anytime. I'm very proud to have served in Vietnam because I still feel that there was a reason we were there. I've said there are an awful lot of people that don't know. I don't know for sure but we heard things when we were over there that you didn't know what was going on at all, the news media or anything. The news media, as far as I'm concerned, are way too involved in the wars today. They should not be there and it's really terrible if newsperson gets killed. That's worse than a soldier getting killed, but as far as I'm concerned, if the news media wants to be there, that's their prerogative. If you want to be there, you take the chance of getting killed too. It shouldn't be any different than a military person getting killed.

JVW: Do you think Vietnam has had an impact on the way that wars are fought and the way that America perceives how wars are fought?

DM: I think so because basically people were very, very vocal about that war and the demonstrations and everything and that's why we're seeing more and more demonstrations against every war since then. You can demonstrate against everything. I pray for this one lady – I can't think of her name right now off the top of my head – the one lady that's really been leading this thing to get rid of the war...

JVW: Cindy Sheehan?

DM: Because her son was killed in it. I pray for her that she might find a comfort, the true comfort, and that only comes through the Lord. That's not taking vengeance against the government or anything because he was serving there. I'm quite sure that her son, from what I've heard about him, he very much loved the service. Doing those kinds of things are not going to bring your son back. I've said, I've lost a son too and I know that it doesn't, doing those kind of things doesn't do anything to help ease the pain. In fact I think it almost would make it worse. My thoughts because of what I've been through and everything.

JVW: Part of our class, we watched movies about Vietnam. Have you watched Vietnam movies or do you avoid them?

DM: I try and watch them. I really wanted to go to this thing that they had in Dordt on Vietnam. I just couldn't make it that night, something came up and I could not make it. I was very disappointed about that. Some of the war things that they have on Vietnam have been very good from what I've seen. Some of them, I don't think it was quite that way, and any picture they have isn't quite...you

know. But it's really hard to depict the true emotions and everything to feel it's equal to what we went through at that time.

JVW: One movie that we watched that a lot of people didn't like was *Coming Home*. Have you seen that one? With Jane Fonda in it?

DM: No.

JVW: I'm sure you have an opinion on Jane Fonda⁷ as well. [Laughs]

DM: [Laughs] The things that I've heard and I've read on her, I don't have a very high opinion of her myself.

I know of things that have, I've heard of different homecomings that were not, they were very rude to people coming home from Vietnam. We did not experience that because we came home as a group. I know people that have come home with only one or two of them on a plane, and boy I tell you, they were about like outcasts. It makes me sick that people... Maybe I shouldn't do that, but I have a lot of blame for the news media. I find a lot of fault with the news media today. I'm sorry but I don't agree with a lot of the way that they're thinking and it seems to me that they feel that nobody knows anything but them. I guess that's some of what goes on, and at that time; it was really blown up big on the news media. My family, when I'd joined the Guard, a couple sisters-in-law of mine really thought that I was chicken and –“all you're doing is trying to get out of going to war” and everything like that and “draft dodger”. Once we were activated and absolutely didn't, went willingly and leave my wife and daughter, never said a thing about that. Their opinion really changed on that. I was thankful that my whole family got behind me and supported me. That really helps but if, when you come home, and you're only one or two on a plane, nobody will talk to you. That would've had to have been very bad. The only people we had on our plane were members of the 185th. Our homecoming was way different than the majority of them. That's what I'm thankful for. They didn't have the debriefing and everything that they have today, I don't think, for the military. There are a lot of problems with people that came back from Vietnam yet today, as far as mental problems, and it all comes back to not getting the proper debriefing.

My wife's cousin, her husband came home from there and they visited over here. He had just been back for 6 months, and the kids started playing with cap guns and the first cap gun that went off, he was up and ...you know. Him and I went outside and visited awhile. He had gone there, he was in the Marines. They left with a squadron or platoon of 660 and came back with 62. That's out in the brush and everything, any twig that snapped or anything, they were on edge. Where,

⁷ An American actor, Jane Fonda was vocal about her opposition to the Vietnam War. While she spoke out against the war in America throughout the late 1960s, she did not visit Vietnam until 1972. She traveled to Hanoi and broadcasted anti-war statements over Radio Hanoi (Welsh 215-216).

like I said, it was so much different for them than what it was for me. My opinions of the war are far different from like Calvin right down there in the house over there. He was in Vietnam too, he was in the Army. He was injured there and has a way different viewpoint than what I have. We had other members here in Ireton that have way different viewpoints of what I have because they were injured and stuff. Lot of the guys do not talk much about Vietnam, what they went through. Just like my uncle, my uncle was wounded in Korea. He has a Purple Heart⁸. He does not talk much about it at all.

JVW: The same thing with my uncle, he was in the army in Vietnam and I've heard maybe two or three things from him.

DM: You do not hear because, I think that they went through the horror side of the war, and killing or seeing dead people at any time is really traumatic. Having to shoot somebody, that would be very traumatic. That's why I say I myself was richly blessed because of the fact that I was in Air Base. I admit it; as far as I was concerned I had it very good in Vietnam. Every aspect of it, where you're stationed and everything makes a lot of different. Those are things that we look at.

JVW: Was everybody on the base pretty friendly with each other or were there split groups?

DM: I thought as a whole it was pretty good. The regulars, they didn't like the Air National Guard but the groups of Air National Guard that were there –we had New Jersey and New York Guard that was there, and we were there. We got along very good. We tried to convey to them what the Guard was all about. I think that towards the end of the year, they realized how important Guards were and everything too.

There's always certain amount of people that have some antagonism towards others and stuff. You're always going to have that as long as you got people. I thought as a whole it was a very good thing over there. There was only one incident where we had some problems. That was because of New Years, Old Years. You start drinking too much and people get kind of carried away. That was the only incident that we ever had on the base that caused any problems as far as I know of.

JVW: Was it mostly white, or were there black people there as well?

DM: Oh yeah, we had black and everything there too. As a whole they got along very well. I did not see much of this racism going on or anything. I do know that the Negro population that was in the regulars did not like the Air National Guard and I heard that was because it was pretty hard for them to get in the Guard. So

⁸ The Purple Heart is an award given to soldiers in of the U.S. Armed Forces who are wounded or killed in action or die of wounds received in action. It is a combat decoration.

whether there was discrimination at the time when they were coming in or not, I do not know. The New York and New Jersey Guard had quite a few black in there. And I'll tell you what, you couldn't find better people. Like I said, the only problem that we ran into was one night when a bunch of Negroes got together- or African American, I don't care what you want to call them, there's no difference, they're the dark skin-they got drunk one night. Some of them, they got a little carried away with what they were talking about and everything. I'll never forget this, there was a tech sergeant, actually there's different housing that you're supposed to be in, and this tech sergeant was from New Jersey. This guy, I've never seen a guy like that, he could bench press 600 pounds. He had no neck, just huge.

JVW: [Laughs]

DM: Such a fantastic guy, he said "I work with my men, I sleep with my men, I party with my men, I'm with my men all the time." He wasn't supposed to be in the barracks, but he had great respect in their units. Anyhow, that night, it was kind of funny, this was about 1 o'clock in the morning. All of the sudden we heard "Okay all you fangs." We were called "fangs". The first word's not a good word...

JVW: "F...ing new guys."

DM: Yes. Anyhow, "They want to talk to us," he says. "There's a group of people that want to talk to us." "I could care less," he says. "All I want to see is elbows and assholes coming out of these barracks. On the count of three," and he just bellowed out, "One...Two...Three..." and there is 80 guys to a barracks, and we had 10 barracks just empty out.

JVW: [Laughs] Wow!

DM: Right there. Most of us- all we had on was our shorts, our underwear, because we had been sleeping. He woke us up! When he bellowed you could hear it. I'd say there's maybe 100 black people that were just bombed out of their mind and they were going to beat us up. All of these barracks emptied out and they're sitting in the middle. But he is right out front and he's just picking up these guys right like this. [Gestures] "You want to fight? Let's fight. You want to fight? Let's fight," and these guys were like (inaudible) through the crowd. That's the only problem we had. He had tremendous respect and everything, and we never held it against anybody or anything like that. You try and work with everybody and we had no prejudice against anybody. As a whole we all got along very well. Sure, there's always things that came up and stuff, like it always does, I don't care.

JVW: Were there a lot of planes that didn't make it back?

DM: We lost two planes while we were over there. One of them didn't get here because it didn't make it across when we were flying there. They got him, they picked up that pilot. We had another one that, when they redo these airplanes, they got to take them off what they call test op. A pilot took off and the engine quit. He couldn't get it started so he had to bail out. So they got him picked up too. We lost one Guardsman while we were there. He was riding on a bomb trailer and fell off and hit his head on the concrete or on the cement pad. Other than that we never lost anybody, we were very thankful for that. We had a couple planes that were hit by the aircraft fire. We had a lot of them with bullet holes in them, 50mm. But we had come through very good.

JVW: That sounds pretty darn good!

DM: It was, the Lord richly blessed us while we were there, He was very good to us.

JVW: I think I'm out of questions, so unless you have anything else you'd like to talk about...

DM: No, like I said I just feel that we as a country have to unite and support our military because it's through our military-it's the people that are willing to serve, to fight for our freedoms, that we have these freedoms and that we should not fight amongst ourselves. We have to support our government. I feel that we have to work together and that's whether we're Republican, Democrat, when we get in we support the people that are leaders. That we have to work together to do what is best for the entire country, not just for a particular agenda that one or the other might have. We have to remember to keep this country in mind. I think that we have to listen to the military leaders, because they know far more as far as what's going on and what's behind it all than some of our elected officials; our Congressmen and our Senators. Some of them, when they get elected they get a little bit big-headed and they think that they know everything. If they would follow the majority of people instead of the minority, this country would be far better off than what it is today. I have great concern over this country and it's because of the falling away from God. When we start killing more babies a day than what we have lost in Vietnam or than what we have lost in Iraq, that should be a big concern for us rather than the people that we are losing in Iraq fighting for freedom. When we're killing these innocent children, they have no means of defending themselves or anything. They're doing that because of me, myself and I and my agenda and nobody else's agenda. We have to look at God's agenda, not ours. That's very important, that we put His agenda first, that His will be done, not mine.

JVW: Exactly.

DM: I very strongly believe that, and I'm willing and it doesn't bother who I talk to, I'll talk to anybody. It's just the way I feel. It's the real thing. He is the center of everything. We never know what tomorrow holds, for this country or for the

world. We have to live each day for Him because we do not know if we have a tomorrow. I feel very strongly about that, partly due to losing our son too. He loved the Lord and we're very thankful for that.

JVW: Well, that's all I've got so...

DM: OK.

JVW: All right, so thank you very much for your story and for talking with me.

DM: Thank you. Hope that it will help you in your class and your paper that you got to write.

Works Cited