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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF RICHARD KEISER

February 7, 2003

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**ORIGINAL**

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2 (The interview commenced at 8:28  
3 a.m.)

4 THE INTERVIEWER: This is an  
5 interview with Richard Keiser, the Hampton Inn,  
6 Tarrytown, New York, February 7th, 2003  
7 approximately eight twenty a.m. The interviewer  
8 are Michael Russert and Wayne Clark.

9 BY MR. RUSSERT:

10 Q. Could you give me your full name,  
11 date of birth and place of birth, please?

12 A. **Sure. Richard R. Keiser,**  
13 **K-E-I-S-E-R and I was born in Brooklyn, New York.**

14 Q. The place of birth and date of  
15 birth.

16 A. **Date of birth is August 30th,**  
17 **1949.**

18 Q. Okay. Prior to military service  
19 what was your -- was your educational background?

20 A. **I graduated from high school.**  
21 **Twelve years.**

22 Q. Okay. When did you enter  
23 service?

24 A. **I entered service in September of**

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2 **1960.**

3 Q. And were you drafted or enlisted?

4 **A. I volunteered for the draft.**

5 Q. Volunteered. Okay. What branch  
6 of service did you go into?

7 **A. I went into the United States**  
8 **Army.**

9 Q. Now, did -- why did you select  
10 the army then if you --?

11 **A. I volunteered for the draft, but**  
12 **there was no longer a draft --**

13 Q. Oh, okay. That's why.

14 **A. -- well, and the guy next to me**  
15 **went into the Marines.**

16 Q. Where did you receive your basic  
17 training and could you tell us --

18 **A. Sure.**

19 Q. -- about the basic training you  
20 received?

21 **A. I went to -- from White Hall**  
22 **street New York City where I was inducted I went by**  
23 **train to Ft. Jackson, South Carolina for**  
24 **in-processing and then from there I went to Ft.**

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2 **Gordon, Georgia for my basic training.**

3 **While I was in basic I**  
4 **volunteered to go airborne and went to A.I.P. in**  
5 **Ft. Gordon, Georgia, the same place because it was**  
6 **an airborne A.I.P. post and it also was a military**  
7 **police post.**

8 **Q. Uh-huh.**

9 **A. From there I went to Ft. Benning**  
10 **jump school. I was the last -- one of the last**  
11 **classes of draftees to go airborne after that you**  
12 **had to be regular army or re-up for another year.**  
13 **So, from jump school in Ft. Benning I came home on**  
14 **leave and went directly into the Republic of**  
15 **Vietnam.**

16 **Q. Okay. How many jumps did you --?**

17 **A. Five jumps.**

18 **Q. Okay.**

19 **A. In the military.**

20 **Q. What was your unit that you were**  
21 **assigned of 101st Airborne?**

22 **A. The First -- the First Battalion**  
23 **506 Infantry. In fact a band of brothers from**  
24 **World War II, the same unit, but I was in delta**

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2 **company.**

3 Q. Okay.

4 A. I only realized that by  
5 reading -- watching a movie.

6 Q. How would you rate your training?  
7 Do you think it prepared you for what you --

8 A. My --.

9 Q. -- did in Vietnam?

10 A. In the states was pretty basic.

11 It was probably the same training that most guys  
12 received after Korea. My most intense training was  
13 when I got to Vietnam when I was -- went to a  
14 processing in Cam-ranh Bay and I went and was  
15 assigned to 101st and they sent me to a training  
16 camp Ray which was in training in Vietnam where you  
17 sight in your rifle, like taught you about booby  
18 traps. They had actual combat situations, mock  
19 situations --

20 Q. Uh-huh.

21 A. -- life fire situations.

22 Q. Was that at Buon Ma.

23 A. Right outside of Buon Ma. Right.

24 I was in Cam-ranh Bay. I went to Buon Ma. Camp

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2       **Ray was outside of Buon Ma and from there of course**  
3       **the 101st at that time, late '68, was up north. We**  
4       **were originally down south. They were up north in**  
5       **the Central Highlands.**

6                                   Q.    Would you tell us about your  
7       combat experiences and your role and the conflict  
8       in chronological order then?

9                                   A.    **Chronological order? Best of my**  
10       **recollection some of this stuff sticks out a little**  
11       **better than the other stuff, but actually when I**  
12       **was assigned I was assigned prior to getting to**  
13       **delta company, first at the 506th battalion, I was**  
14       **trained as a sniper. I also went to a recon**  
15       **company. I did some long range patrol,**  
16       **approximately two months time. At that time I**  
17       **asked for reassignment and I was reassigned to**  
18       **delta company, first at the 506th Airborne, then**  
19       **101st Airborne Division. And we were only the**  
20       **action force for the rest of the battalion. By**  
21       **that I mean we slept by our helicopters and any**  
22       **other company in my battalion encountered any kind**  
23       **of fire fight or hostile activity we went in to**  
24       **help them out. And that was our job.**

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2                                   So, not only that, we also  
3 secured areas for -- they were building fire bases  
4 in Hintsu Valley (phonetic spelling) at that time.  
5 The Hintsu Valley was -- the North Vietnamese  
6 infiltrated the course. As we gave up -- our job  
7 was as an infantry company, we went in, we secured  
8 the area and the -- and the combat engineers would  
9 come in and they would -- what were out there they  
10 would bring in the artillery and build bunkers and  
11 we would move on. As we moved into the Hintsu  
12 Valley, of course our ultimate objective of course  
13 was of May of '69 was Hamburger Hill, one of the  
14 better known battles of Vietnam. I --.

15                                  Q. Were you based out of Camp Eagle  
16 or --?

17                                  A. Camp Evans. I was first in  
18 the -- first in the 506 was in Camp Evans, second  
19 506 was in Camp Eagle. And of course those bases  
20 were originally the first cav and we had taken them  
21 over after the first calvary was sent back down  
22 south -- first calvary.

23                                  Basically when -- after securing  
24 the fire bases and we were doing reconnaissance in

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2   force, of course clearing -- we kept reconning the  
3   perimeters of the fire bases. We encountered  
4   skirmishes, nothing major. We -- we would take --  
5   we took minor injuries, minor -- minor kills.  
6   During -- during that course it was sporadic of  
7   course until we got into Hintsu Valley. Our job was  
8   as soon as the monsoons came, after they left we  
9   worked our way into the valley building fire bases  
10   as we went. My best recollection was before  
11   Hamburger Hill was that -- that as we built the  
12   fire base and we secured it and they -- and they  
13   brought in the artillery and it became a full  
14   fledged fire base then we moved on.

15                   As we moved up to secure another  
16   area we -- I remember at night sometimes watching  
17   the fire base that we had just been building being  
18   overrun and we could see the sappers and -- and  
19   the -- oh, at night it was -- it was kind of eerie  
20   and we were like one step ahead of them all the way  
21   going in. Basically that was what I did until we  
22   hit Hamburger Hill. I was there eight months. At  
23   which time my -- I didn't -- we weren't the initial  
24   battalion to go in. We got there I think after the



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2   second or third day that -- I think May 10th it  
3   started we got there on the 12th.

4                   Of course we had the longest walk  
5   up the hill and we took many, many casualties. I  
6   was wounded. After the ten or twelve days that we  
7   were there, on the way down and I was wounded. We  
8   hit a -- a straggled of North Vietnamese patrol  
9   that was also leaving the hill. On that hill it  
10   was the twenty -- the twenty-ninth M.V.A. Division  
11   which was Ho Chi Minh pride. It was like his Red  
12   Guard is to present day Saddam Hussien to Iraq, but  
13   they were built in and they had concrete bunkers,  
14   tunnel systems, underground garages, underground  
15   hospitals. It was just -- it was a -- it was  
16   General Vaous -- Norman Vaous was the general --  
17   the commanding officer of the 101st Airborne and of  
18   course at that time Congress wanted to know why we  
19   were so involved with that hill and we took so many  
20   casualties.

21                   It was almost -- that was  
22   probably the turning point of the war is when  
23   Senator Kennedy from Massachusetts and General  
24   Vaous, the commander that had the little conflict

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2    about how to fight this war. I -- I think General  
3    Vaous -- you know, the commander said to the  
4    president, he says "My job here is to find the  
5    enemy and -- and that's what we did." And we took  
6    heavy casualties. I even went up -- my company  
7    probably I think a hundred and seventeen. We  
8    weren't in full strength. Coming down with  
9    probably sixty-eight guys. And I believe all  
10   total, fifty-eight were killed. Not all -- I mean  
11   total of not only my battalion, but there was --  
12   there was other battalions. About the same as the  
13   101st it was three -- four battalions in the 101st.  
14   And some of ARVN South Vietnamese troops that  
15   really weren't that involved in the taking of the  
16   hill.

17                   But as I said, after getting up  
18   the hill the monsoons came. You couldn't get the  
19   wounded out. That was a mess. It was raining and  
20   the total bombing and devastation was so -- they  
21   made the movie about some of it. The -- the guys  
22   groaning and holding on in the mud trying to get up  
23   to the top. That was kind of realistic.

24                   Q. Just may I ask you your opinion

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2 of the --.

3 A. Yeah, that was -- the movie of  
4 plus it was Hollywood. A lot of things -- there  
5 was clever advice -- the advisor of the movie was a  
6 lot of those things, you know, about learning how  
7 to brush your teeth and things like that. And that  
8 was kind of true because you know, they weren't  
9 guys that were in the service that didn't know how  
10 to brush their teeth and things like that, the sad  
11 sack conditions, of course. That's what they tried  
12 to impress somebody with. The actual lay of the  
13 land, the mud, the -- the total destruction, it was  
14 quiet real. The -- the feel was it was the -- the  
15 bunkers, they were in concrete bunkers and the  
16 bombs weren't penetrating the bunkers and that's  
17 why we had so much resistance.

18 Q. Did you get to see any of the  
19 bunker complexes?

20 A. Oh yes. Oh yes. After it as  
21 over with we had -- we had swept all the bunkers,  
22 so I was quiet impressed with them. We -- we -- we  
23 recovered numerous small arms, large artillery  
24 pieces. It was amazing what they had, all the

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2 Chinese -- Chichom (phonetic spelling) stuff and  
3 Russian made stuff. It was incredible. It was --  
4 see, for me it was -- it -- it was more like a  
5 conventional type because they were uniformed. My  
6 experience with the Viet Cong, I never -- we never  
7 had that situation. Booby traps weren't a big  
8 thing up in the Central Highlands because it was  
9 mainly the -- the jungle was so thick we weren't in  
10 triple canopy. By that I mean three layers of  
11 jungle. If it rained, you know, you didn't get  
12 wet, but if you banged up against something you got  
13 soaked because of the whole -- well, it was almost  
14 like a rain forest type of conditions. I guess you  
15 could compare that to them.

16                   The environment, you know, the --  
17 the bugs, you know, the snakes, there was just a  
18 thing that, you know, forget -- forgetting the  
19 enemy it was just trying to survive in the tropical  
20 whatever it was. Not my kind of weather. Still  
21 today I'm not a hot weather fan when it comes to  
22 the humidity -- humidity I think is the word. But  
23 I -- to keep myself busy sometimes I used to kind  
24 of try to identify a different bug every day which

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2 was easy to do. And -- and they had quite a array.

3 It was very fierce fighting. It  
4 was myself, my company and my -- my squad. I was  
5 the squad leader at that time through attrition.  
6 You -- you became a squad leader very fast if  
7 you -- if your company saw a lot of -- a lot of  
8 action, a lot of fire fights. You just move up.  
9 You went from ammo bearer to a machine gunner to  
10 radio operator to the next thing where the sergeant  
11 is. And then you moved up to sergeant squad leader  
12 and it was just through attrition because the guy's  
13 being wounded, being killed.

14 By that time after we had -- most  
15 of our company was seasoned guys. We had very few  
16 new guys at that time. During the conflict we  
17 started to get a lot of new guys they called  
18 cherries of course.

19 BY MR. RUSSERT:

20 Q. What was the morale like?

21 A. Well, the morale -- the reason --  
22 the moral was -- the moral was good up to the point  
23 where the monsoons came and we couldn't get our men  
24 out. We didn't -- we couldn't get supplies. We

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2 didn't have ammunition, we didn't have -- food was  
3 a big thing. I mean I remember we went -- we went  
4 about three days without getting resupplied. I had  
5 one can of turkey and noodles. I remember it was a  
6 'C' ration can and I had -- I had saved that and we  
7 hadn't eaten like in three days. And I said well,  
8 I'll -- I'll eat this tonight when nobody's  
9 watching. And I was -- and I had -- was heating it  
10 up with some four other stacks made out of pine and  
11 well, I forget, you know how the lid was hot and I  
12 grabbed the lid and I dropped it on the ground.  
13 And I wound up eating it anyway because I was that  
14 hungry. You know, I remember that.

15 And being -- my experience of  
16 being wounded was quite another deal. I think  
17 that, you know, made -- made my experience on the  
18 hill itself and getting to the cob -- kind of  
19 mental because on the way down, as I said, we had a  
20 lot of new guys. We drew straws to see who was  
21 going to walk the point back down the hill, my  
22 squad and there was four squads in our -- in our  
23 company. I drew the short straw and I had five new  
24 guys and only three of us were seasoned guys. And

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2   **so I chose to walk -- walk the point.**

3                   **You know, sometimes that was not**  
4   **the worst job to have because especially if you**  
5   **were to hit a booby trap or something or walk**  
6   **through an ambush. They always let the point guy**  
7   **walk through first, feeling that they would get the**  
8   **second which was a slack -- they called a slack man**  
9   **and then after the slack man was usually your**  
10   **officer, your N.C.O., your lieutenant or whatever**  
11   **and your radio operator. That's how it usually**  
12   **works, so I chose to walk the point only because**  
13   **I -- I was concerned about my men and concerned you**  
14   **know, with myself and after what we had just been**  
15   **through. And we were going to China Beach, Eagle**  
16   **Beach. We had our own -- 101st Airborne had their**  
17   **own compound on China Beach, what they call Eagle**  
18   **Beach. Of course we had been there once -- I had**  
19   **been there personally once before for three days.**

20                   **Q. For someone that doesn't know**  
21   **what that was, what was that, China Beach?**

22                   **A. China Beach was the coast in**  
23   **Vietnam and it was probably one of the most**  
24   **beautiful beaches in the world as far as I could**

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2       see.   And I've been to the Bahamas and nothing  
3       compares to that beach.   And we had a compound.   It  
4       was an R & R, Rest and Recuperation Center and we  
5       marched in there as a -- as a company, you know,  
6       for three days of R & R.   And it was quite a  
7       feeling.   Well, on the way down from Hamburger Hill  
8       our assignment was to be security for the beach  
9       approximately for the next ninety days.   So, that  
10      would have sent me right home with a nice suntan.

11                              And -- and there -- so, naturally  
12      that didn't happen.   Coming down the hill, as I  
13      say, through the -- chopping through the jungle  
14      with a machete and of course the jungle being that  
15      thick and the hill -- the top of the hill of course  
16      was devastating and coming down we hit the lower  
17      level of course we still vegetation.   And  
18      walking -- I was walking alongside the trail, I  
19      wasn't walking on the trail, because we didn't like  
20      to walk on the trails because of, you know, booby  
21      traps or -- am -- ambushes mainly was the big thing  
22      with we hit.

23                              So, as I was coming around almost  
24      the turn I had a Kitt Carson scout who was a



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2       Vietnamese what they call a Chu Loi somebody that  
3       was a North Vietnamese and was captured and became  
4       morality I supposedly and he was walking behind me  
5       and we call it the Kitt Carson scout and he yelled  
6       and he would say, and as I turned I saw that what  
7       happened was his -- it was just like we -- I was  
8       walking this way, the M.V. were coming this way  
9       (indicating) and we met head to head, probably  
10      not -- maybe a couple of feet farther than you are  
11      right now (indicating). And we both were like  
12      Marshall Dillion and -- and Wyatt Earp and we both  
13      felt the -- and the next thing you know the whole  
14      side of Nam was blown up. It was incredible, you  
15      know. We were on our way down. It was all over,  
16      you know.

17                              So, I was hit and my -- my radio  
18      operator was hit. I had four guys down right off  
19      initially my squad and out of the four it was me  
20      and the three new guys. We tried for cover. There  
21      wasn't much. There was a lot of the paper tree  
22      type tree. It was like a flat -- if you put your  
23      hands, like both, but the covering, you know, it  
24      was nothing we could hide -- there was something to

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2   hide behind, but there wasn't much. I got to hide  
3   behind balsam type tree. I remember it being that  
4   way because I reached out my hand and I actually  
5   put my hand through the tree. And I -- I said  
6   well, this isn't going to stop much, you know,  
7   and -- and I saw the rest of my squad had come up  
8   along side of us and the rest of the company.

9                   We walk in a single file and the  
10   rest of the company started coming up to help us  
11   out and I remember guys laying and being hit and  
12   being hit on the left side and most of the fire was  
13   coming this way (indicating). So, immediately  
14   knowing that there was a sniper or as I looked up I  
15   saw a muzzle -- muzzle flash. The initial shot --  
16   I was shot in the stomach initially. The muzzle  
17   flash I saw and I was shot. I was laying down. Of  
18   course I was shot in the back by a sniper. I  
19   radioed back saying that there was sniper fire  
20   coming from the left. They came in and the sniper  
21   was taken out. By that time we had an air strike  
22   come in. The air strike came in, it was all short,  
23   and landed almost on top of us, but to the right.  
24   We -- we took casualties, but nobody had -- that I

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2 knew up there died that was killed from that part.

3 But the chopper -- there was no  
4 time to cut an L.Z., a landing zone, for the -- for  
5 the dust off choppers to come in, so what they did  
6 was being that Hamburger -- being the hill had been  
7 bombed so good the five hundred pound bomb cradle  
8 holes, we used that as a landing zone. So, about  
9 in forty -- it was approximately forty-five minutes  
10 later after being hit the second time and I got hit  
11 this time, I kind of said, well, I better play dead  
12 here because I think, you know, I'm not going to  
13 make it out of here. And because it was just mass  
14 confusion of course like anything else. And -- and  
15 the North Vietnamese running in between us, us  
16 running in between them and it was just mass  
17 confusion. Because like I say, it was all over,  
18 everybody was coming down, everybody was at ease  
19 and it was a relaxing type of situation. Then the  
20 next thing you know we're involved in probably  
21 the -- the fiercest part of my experience on  
22 Hamburger Hill and it was all over, you know, well,  
23 for me because I was shot twice.

24 I -- I -- I took three rounds

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2       twice. I didn't realize it at the time. I was hit  
3       twice the first time and then once the second time.  
4       As I -- as the medics came up -- approximately  
5       forty-five minutes later the first medic came up  
6       and he looked at me, he says we've got to get you  
7       out of here. And -- and they gave me a shot of  
8       morphine. At that time morphine came like airplane  
9       glue and it was like in a little tube with a needle  
10      on it and they stuck it in your arm and they  
11      squeezed it. They would pin it on your collar to  
12      let you know you had morphine.

13                   So, that's the true couple things  
14      that, you know, they soon forget about it. I go  
15      and I'm saying this, I said I've got a got a lot of  
16      worse guys and they said my God if there's more  
17      worse guys than this then --.

18                   And -- and you know, like I'm saying,  
19      well, what -- and the next thing I knew guys had  
20      come up -- another medic had come up right after  
21      that with guys to pull me down to the bomb crater  
22      hole because the chopper -- the dust off chopper,  
23      the medical chopper was coming in.

24                   So, this medic comes up -- well,

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2 I guess during the confusion, a little side note,  
3 this morphine thing fell off and the other guy says  
4 oh, you didn't get morphine. And he hit me with  
5 another one, you know, so needless to say I'm  
6 feeling pretty good by this time and not  
7 experienced of ever having morphine before and they  
8 drug me down to the bomb crater. Well, across the  
9 bottom of the bomb crater hole there's -- there's  
10 water, it's muddy, the chopper had come in and I  
11 had -- I -- I heard what I thought was the blades  
12 of the chopper hitting the tops of the trees, but  
13 it was machine gun fire. And they -- they shot the  
14 dust off chopper down and -- and they crashed and  
15 when they crashed it caught fire. Crashed and  
16 burned is exactly what happened.

17 I'm like -- and I could feel it  
18 effect my arm. I wasn't burnt, but I could feel  
19 the intense heat from the -- from the dust off  
20 chopper and right behind him came another one, but  
21 he didn't come down that low. What they did was  
22 they dropped the cable down and they hooked up me  
23 and another guy. Now, of course being under the  
24 influence of this morphine here I am swinging on

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2    this cable being yanked up in the chopper.  Not --  
3    not only is he pulling us up, he's also flying away  
4    from the crater.  They had a -- you know, it was  
5    something out of Apocalypse Now, you know.  And --  
6    and then I remember by the time they got me to the  
7    skidder of the chopper the -- the medic had reached  
8    down and he had grabbed me and he grabbed me by the  
9    back of the shirt and I remember that's, you know,  
10   where I had been wounded and you know, the -- the  
11   pain, the intense pain.  Even though I was -- had  
12   that morphine it was still painful.  I didn't  
13   realize it at the time, but the bullet had -- you  
14   know, being under the morphine, the bullet had hit  
15   my rib cage and followed over to my spinal cord and  
16   had shocked my spine and I was paralyzed, but I  
17   didn't realize it at the time.

18                   When I got to the medivac in Phu  
19    Bai, the 85th FAC I think it was.  The 95th was in  
20    Da Nang where I went later on.  I get to Phu Bai  
21    and then they had me blow up hospital -- the blow  
22    up hospital units, which were air conditioned.  And  
23    I remember trying to get off the chopper and the  
24    guy says stay right there, don't move.  Well, I

1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2    didn't realize it, but I -- I couldn't actually  
3    stand up if I wanted to. But they threw me on  
4    the -- the stretcher and they ran me in to the --  
5    the field hospital. And the last thing I remember  
6    was lying on the -- they threw me on the table, the  
7    operating table and I remember the guy saying to me  
8    this is going to hurt a little bit. And it was the  
9    catheter. They were going to put the catheter in.  
10   After that I -- I think it was the next thing I  
11   remember maybe was two days later that I had  
12   come -- come around. And of course, you know, I  
13   had no feeling from approximately my rib cage down,  
14   you know, so needless to say I was quite upset  
15   about that.

16                   As I look back at it in fact I  
17   was more than upset, you know, I think this was it,  
18   I'm going to be like this and you know, as many  
19   other guys were. And the doctor had come in and I  
20   remember he was a little short guy. He was  
21   probably young as I was, nineteen years old. And  
22   maybe -- he probably was older, but he looked like  
23   he was my age. And he said to me, he said you're  
24   going to be all right. He says -- you know, he

1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2       says a couple of weeks you'll regain the feeling in  
3       your legs. And you know, I had tubes in my -- I  
4       had a tube in my nose going into my stomach. I had  
5       a catheter, I had an I.V. here and I had the whole  
6       blood coming in here (indicating), you know, as  
7       he's telling me this I'm listening and -- and for  
8       some reason I'm hearing poof, poof, poof. And --  
9       and I said -- I said, Doc, I says this -- we were  
10      taking incoming orders and we have these blow up --  
11      we're in these blow up units, blow up -- they're  
12      like big tents and they're air conditioned. In  
13      fact the company that makes them was -- was from  
14      New York. They just went out of business not too  
15      long ago.

16                   And what they were doing was I  
17      saw that all of a sudden the doctors and nurses  
18      running around with skull pots and flap jackets on  
19      and what they did was they had a slider went down  
20      into a bunker underneath and they were sliding the  
21      mattress and all, was sliding these guys down, you  
22      know, because the mortar -- they were mortaring the  
23      hospital, the field hospital. Well, the airport  
24      and the hospital was -- the airport and hospital



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2       was right next to each other.

3                                   And of course we -- my negativity  
4       at that time was like here I am paralyzed and  
5       they're just running by me and you know, I was the  
6       last guy to go down the chute. It was probably my  
7       attitude because my attitude was very -- very poor.  
8       I was mad at the world, you know. And we went  
9       down -- you know, they slid me down and you know, I  
10      laughed at that. We came back up, but after --  
11      they had actually had mortared and it deflated the  
12      unit that I was in, the whole thing. So, they had  
13      reconstructed it and -- and they brought us back  
14      up.

15                                  And then two weeks --  
16      approximately two weeks later what that doctor said  
17      came true. I started getting feeling back. What  
18      happened was the bullet had shocked the spine. It  
19      was just the trauma. And it was a cause you know.  
20      He -- he described it to me like you know, when you  
21      have a concussion in the head, it's the same type  
22      of thing. I didn't really care what he was talking  
23      about at that time. So, the feeling started coming  
24      back.

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2 They had to get me to Japan.

3 Well, after -- they brought me -- I had an -- the  
4 emergency operations there by Phu Bai eight  
5 fifty-five. They sent me from there -- they flew  
6 me to Da Nang which wasn't that far. It was  
7 probably a fifteen minute chopper ride there to the  
8 95th E-Vac which is in Da Nang which is -- and  
9 there I had another operation on my back and my  
10 stomach. They had to -- according to him they had  
11 taken my -- of course they take your intestines out  
12 to make sure that you're still hole or whatever and  
13 put everything back in. I'm sure they don't put it  
14 in the same way it comes out, but I was -- you  
15 know, because I had problems later on afterward.

16 But I get to 95th E-vac and had  
17 another operation. Of course all this time they're  
18 giving you all kinds of pain medications and just  
19 to keep you quiet because I was not the best  
20 patient in the world. But from there they sent me  
21 to Japan for another operation because it was -- it  
22 was a intricate operation. They couldn't do it in  
23 Vietnam, so they sent me to Japan, where in Japan I  
24 was -- I don't know how to pronounce it. I know it

1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2   was something like Knagquan (phonetic spelling) or  
3   something, but it was Camp Zama (phonetic spelling)  
4   Japan. It was -- it was a beautiful hospital. It  
5   was a regular -- I remember there was a cinder  
6   block because it was painted typical Army type, you  
7   know, painted with epoxy paint on the inside of the  
8   cinder block.

9                   And then I remember waking up  
10   there after the operation and as I looked up in the  
11   ward and they had this typhoon -- it said for  
12   typhoons emergencies only. I'm going typhoons. No  
13   idea where I was, but that's how I got to Japan.  
14   Okay. I stayed there, well, I guess it's  
15   approximately two months. But from there I went  
16   before the board. They said, oh, we're going to  
17   send you home. And what happened was, like I say,  
18   I was there eight months, I missed -- I was looking  
19   to get my early out. If you had spent -- if you  
20   had less than six months to go when you came home  
21   from Vietnam I think it was around five months  
22   they -- they released you from the service if you  
23   were a draftee or Infantry.

24                   So, what happened was they sent

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2   me to a placed called The Ponderosa which was in  
3   Maryland. It was a halfway house type hospital for  
4   guys that were seriously wounded, that were -- had  
5   a lot of combat -- had seen a lot of combat. It  
6   was like a deprogram. They deprogrammed you out of  
7   the that, you know, when you got home. And they  
8   also talked to your family over the phone and they  
9   had my -- I think my family -- it was mainly on  
10  phone conversations, but I stayed there  
11  approximately, oh, three weeks and from there they  
12  sent me to -- they tried to get you as close to  
13  home as you -- as you can be and they sent -- I put  
14  in -- they asked me where I wanted to go because  
15  you know, at that time the Army, if you were done,  
16  you wanted to go to South Carolina, they sent you  
17  to Ft. Dix because that's the way they operated in  
18  those days.

19                   And I put down the closest  
20  hospital I remembered was West Point because it was  
21  right across the river from where I lived. So I  
22  put West Point. They sent me to Ft. Douglas,  
23  Massachusetts, which wasn't that bad. It was a  
24  four-hour ride. And from there that's where I

1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2   recuperated. I was there approximately three more  
3   months. I was allowed to come home on weekends  
4   which were -- well, on weekends. We were allowed  
5   to go Friday morning and we had to be back by  
6   Monday night. So, that for me was easy to hop on  
7   287, get right across -- what is the other one, It  
8   was Massachusetts. So, I was home in four and a  
9   half hours.

10                   And from there I came back and I  
11   was ready to be reassigned. They -- they  
12   reassigned me and I was an infantry man, eleven  
13   bravo, which was my M.O.S., military occupational  
14   skill. When I came back they sent me to be an  
15   instructor down in Ft. Benning Georgia to train  
16   O.C.S. candidates on mortars. I knew absolutely  
17   nothing about mortars except for when they came in  
18   and exploded. The other part that I did know was  
19   that, you know, we did have a mortar company, you  
20   know, assigned to us. And I -- I knew what a base  
21   plate was, I knew most of the -- I knew what an 81  
22   was, I knew what a 4.2 was, but I knew absolutely  
23   nothing else about how to fire one. And I mean I  
24   know you'd have to drop the head but I didn't know

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2   how to set up the aiming circle. And that's what I  
3   did. And it was kind of boring. And you know, me  
4   being the -- coming back to the states I was  
5   probably the only -- the only few combat veterans  
6   over there except for the regular cadre. You know,  
7   they had done tours in Vietnam.

8                   And at that time the -- the  
9   states I guess was kind of getting overcrowded with  
10  guys like us coming home and they didn't know what  
11  to do with us. So, they had a thing if you had --  
12  if you had more than six months to go you could go  
13  to Germany. And so I volunteered -- well, just  
14  before that they asked me if I wanted to become  
15  the -- at Ft. McPherson, Georgia the driver's --  
16  the general's driver, chauffeur, was -- was shipped  
17  over to Vietnam and they asked me if -- if I wanted  
18  to go get interviewed for that, you know, because  
19  they didn't know what to do with me. So, I went  
20  from Ft. Benning to Ft. McPherson. They flew me  
21  over on the general's plane. I felt like a real  
22  big shot, you know. And the general accepted me as  
23  his driver, but I had orders to go to Germany, so I  
24  missed out on that.

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2 But it worked out pretty good. I  
3 went to Germany. I was probably the only one when  
4 I went to Germany, outside Neurenburg the Lyons.  
5 When I got to the reception area they assigned me  
6 to this infantry company. Well, there wasn't much  
7 I could do. I had a profile of certain things I  
8 couldn't do because of my injuries. That was  
9 another problem that they had. I was -- like I  
10 say, I was -- there I had -- I had C.I.P., you  
11 know, I was -- I was probably the only Vietnam  
12 veteran in that whole battalion. And I remember  
13 the colonel saying, jeez, you know, and we really  
14 don't know what to do with you. And he says, you  
15 know, we can't give you some mediocre job. He  
16 says, you know, you're a combat veteran, now you're  
17 over here. And most of the troops in Germany at  
18 that time were young because they were guys that  
19 weren't old enough to go to Vietnam or they had  
20 brothers or they had some type of thing.

21 And so he says, but -- so I --  
22 he -- he -- as he was flipping through my 201 file  
23 he says, oh, he says I see you were accepted to be  
24 a chauffeur for the general in Ft. McPherson. I go

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2   yes, sir. He goes, well, jeez, he says, you know,  
3   our general needs an aide and he says you're not a  
4   lieutenant and he says -- but he said you'd  
5   probably do -- be -- do the -- I was very, you  
6   know, being in airborne I was very attractive. I  
7   always had my stuff -- my shoes spit shined, I was  
8   always well -- well dressed in uniform and I think  
9   that impressed him.

10                   So, I went and I met the  
11   commander of the Fourth Armored Division who was --  
12   and I met him and was a Korean veteran. He had  
13   wounds about the face and we were talking -- we  
14   started talking. I said oh yeah, I got shot in the  
15   ear. Well, I got wounded in the ear. You know, it  
16   wasn't my experience with an officer at all, I  
17   mean, you know, he was friendly one to one, all he  
18   had was this and that. And he says well, if you  
19   want the job you've got it, you know. I said well,  
20   what does it entail sir. And he goes well, he says  
21   you'll have a staff car, you'll have a jeep. He  
22   says you can live off post. He said when I have a  
23   party you can be my -- you'll be my bartender and I  
24   said no problem, sir.



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2 **And I spent five -- I came home**  
3 **for thirty days leave, I went to Germany. Prior to**  
4 **that I spent five months in Germany. I got to see**  
5 **some of my relatives. I saw most of Germany. That**  
6 **was one of the better experiences I had in the**  
7 **service. And I -- I got out a month early to go to**  
8 **college on the G.I. bill. And after graduating**  
9 **college I went on to the police department and here**  
10 **I am.**

11 **BY MR. CLARK:**

12 Q. I'm going to ask you a couple of  
13 questions if you don't mind now.

14 A. Sure.

15 Q. What were your relationships with  
16 the Vietnamese population?

17 A. I really didn't have that much  
18 time that I was probably with the Montararis.

19 Q. Uh-huh.

20 A. Where the people had been sent to  
21 Cho Liu.

22 Q. How about your relationships with  
23 them then?

24 A. Very well. They were great

1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2   people.  In fact every Memorial Day we go down -- I  
3   go down to North Carolina and four of the tribes --  
4   Montararis tribes are -- were brought over here  
5   because ethic cleansing after the communist took  
6   over Vietnam they tried to get rid of most of the  
7   Montararis.  And of course they arranged for the  
8   children and they have a -- we have a picnic for  
9   them, mainly a lot of the special forces guys  
10  because they worked with them.  They trained them  
11  really in my opinion the last couple of years.  
12  It's been quite an experience.  They brought them  
13  all over there.  They were playing instruments and  
14  they brought out the ceremonial dress.  It's quite  
15  the sight.

16                   So, I do that on Memorial Day.  I  
17  go down there and -- and I played and there's  
18  four -- I think the fifth tribe is in Florida, but  
19  four of them are in North Carolina.  They were  
20  originally brought over here inadvertently by a  
21  bunch of veterans that got them into the country  
22  because we had -- we had kind of -- they were  
23  our -- probably our -- our best ally in Vietnam and  
24  when we left we just deserted them, you know, and

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2   **they were there just to -- if they didn't go into**  
3   **Laos and regroup and come back they were ethnic**  
4   **cleansed.**

5                                   Q.   How about race -- race  
6   relationships within your unit, did you have many  
7   blacks and what were --?

8                                   A.   We had -- we had -- we had -- I  
9   had -- I had I think in my squad one black guy, one  
10   Mexican guy. We had -- we had no race problems  
11   within my unit. Of course we were in airborne. In  
12   fact at that time we had -- the 101st was going  
13   right after Hamburger Hill and they started  
14   withdrawing some troops. The 101st became air  
15   mobile they started bringing guys in that weren't  
16   airborne qualified and that's when a lot of the --  
17   the leg soldiers, we call legs that weren't  
18   airborne qualified started coming. That's when the  
19   problems started. That started after I was -- I  
20   was gone. But we -- we all worked together. We  
21   never had a racial thing, but when I went to  
22   Germany it was really -- it was a real bad  
23   situation. The race thing was a big thing in  
24   Germany when I was there.

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2 **BY MR. RUSSERT:**

3 Q. What was your reaction to the  
4 replacement of Westmoreland?

5 A. I really at that time I wasn't  
6 involved in the politics of it as I am today.

7 Q. Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

8 A. And as I look back, you know, and  
9 it had been my three challenges what is it about  
10 MacArthur and you know, and politics and the  
11 president and I think today if -- if -- if you  
12 leave -- my -- my feeling is if -- if -- if the  
13 general's there and you know, if he's the commander  
14 or chief like Schwarzkopf did. If his job is to do  
15 that, let him do it and don't let the politics get  
16 involved in it. I think maybe Westmoreland was too  
17 political by being that type of rank. I think you  
18 have to be political. You don't make a four-star  
19 general unless you have some type of political  
20 backing and support. He's -- he's sort of like  
21 Eisenhower or Patton.

22 Q. How did you feel about the  
23 election and Nixon? I know you --.

24 A. Oh, I was a Nixon guy. When

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2 Nixon was elected we were -- we had a big party.  
3 The war's over. And the war's over; right? You  
4 know, because if -- what he wanted to do was just  
5 go and put as many guys in as he could and go from  
6 the south and work his way right upon through.

7 Q. How do you feel about the  
8 rotation system?

9 A. That -- that was a problem. That  
10 was a problem. I think that's what separated --  
11 that's what gave World War II -- that's what  
12 defined what Korea was going to look like. But  
13 that's what separated the -- the veteran  
14 generation. If we had gone over there together, if  
15 the 101st -- you know, which they did but if we had  
16 gone together as a unit and as a company, as a  
17 battalion and went home the same way, there would  
18 have been more camaraderie. There would have been  
19 a moral issue rather than, you know, a hero one  
20 day -- I'll give you an example. I'm having  
21 Thanksgiving dinner here at home and that following  
22 Monday on to Vietnam. And I get thrown into this  
23 company of guys, me and two other guys, and we  
24 don't know anybody. And all they're worried

1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2    about -- they don't care about us because we're  
3    new guys and they know that we're going to screw up  
4    and they want to stay away from us until we get  
5    some time in. And they're worried about getting  
6    home, you know, and then it's not -- it's not like  
7    it was -- that was my feeling. It was very  
8    uncomfortable in the beginning.

9                   Q. How do you feel about the peace  
10 movement?

11                  A. I -- to be honest with you a  
12 friend of mine, a girlfriend that I had prior to  
13 going over there, she went to New Paltz which was a  
14 teachers college a very liberal college at that  
15 time. It still is and she was very much involved  
16 in the peace movement. You know, I was -- I -- I  
17 think of it today as like the Forest Gump thing,  
18 you know, and -- and I really, you know, wasn't  
19 paying that much attention to it. Over there we  
20 really of course didn't know much about it. When I  
21 came home, of course I came home in the early  
22 1970s -- no, sorry, October -- September of '70  
23 when I started college and that's when I felt it  
24 because the -- the college that I went to it was

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2   **really very bad Kent state and --.**

3                   Q.   How were you treated as a Vietnam  
4   vet by the --?

5                   A.   Oh, it was -- it was rough.   One  
6   example, I came home, I went to Grand Central  
7   Station, I was in uniform and coming home from the  
8   army hospital for the first time, I got back and I  
9   had to be escorted on the Twenty Bus which comes  
10   from the George Washington Bridge up to Rockland  
11   County.   I had to be escorted on the bus by the  
12   police.   And after that I learned my lesson.   Even  
13   when I came from Ft. Devens (phonetic spelling)  
14   when I was in the army hospital there, coming home  
15   I always wear civilian clothes.   As soon as I got  
16   off the bus I changed into -- into civilian  
17   clothes.   That was a little rough.

18                   See, because when I grew up, you  
19   know, it was still like '49, I mean that country  
20   was still on the patriotic high from World War II  
21   and -- and everything was soldier this -- I used to  
22   play soldier.   I mean I lived by Camp Shanks.   Camp  
23   Shanks was a debarkation for World War II.   That's  
24   where a million guys left from Camp Shanks Rockland

1                   **Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003**

2   **county. I just -- I was surrounded by it, you**  
3   **know, it was like part of -- that was your job, you**  
4   **know. You'd grow up, you were going to go in the**  
5   **service, you come home. So, this was a whole new**  
6   **thing to me. And I know the kids today are**  
7   **different. And my kids are the same way, they**  
8   **wouldn't -- that feeling of -- well, that feeling**  
9   **of patriotism is -- you know, wasn't as high as it**  
10   **was in those days I don't think. And even today**  
11   **with the Iraq situations.**

12                   **Q. How do you feel about the -- do**  
13   **you think America was justified in being in**  
14   **Vietnam?**

15                   **A. Very much so in the beginning.**  
16   **Very much so. I think -- like I say, I think just**  
17   **about after I was leaving I think that's when my**  
18   **opinion started -- of course they went about and**  
19   **just do what we were supposed to. Like my**  
20   **commanding general or Vaous called Senator Kennedy,**  
21   **I'm here to fight the enemy and that's what I did.**

22                   **Q. Do you think the rules of**  
23   **engagement were detrimental?**

24                   **A. Oh, no doubt about it. The only**



1                   Richard Keiser - 2-7-2003  
2    thing that, you know, I impress upon people that,  
3    you know, say well, you know, well, you lost the  
4    war, I say but you know, we won every major battle.  
5    I mean we won -- Tet -- but Tet -- what Tet was  
6    away from the country saying hey, this is a real  
7    problem here. These people were in -- they're in  
8    general by -- you know, I -- I watch him now on  
9    P.B.S., I guess he stated how he said he would  
10   suffer ten -- ten to one every day, he says,  
11   because we're going to wear the Americans down.  
12   And he says they'll lose it happened and he was  
13   right, you know --.

14                   Q. You -- you mentioned you used the  
15   G.I. bill?

16                   A. Yes, I did, to the fullest. I  
17   used everything. I went to college, I graduated  
18   college. I got on-the-job training and I used the  
19   V.A., not for everything, but I used it for what I  
20   needed to.

21                   Q. And I know, you know, what you  
22   said when you came in, veterans organizations, you  
23   joined --?

24                   A. Yeah, I -- I did that later on.

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2       **I didn't do it right away. In fact when I -- when**  
3       **I came on the police department I went up to my**  
4       **sergeant and said -- he was a Korean vet, and he**  
5       **said, oh, you've got to join this, you've got to**  
6       **join the legion because we had a legion post. I**  
7       **go, ah I don't want to join. You know, I wasn't --**  
8       **I don't care a lot of Vietnam veterans weren't**  
9       **getting involved.**

10                                **Q. Uh-huh.**

11                                **A. That's mainly why they started**  
12       **their own, you know, because they felt -- and**  
13       **justly so, they felt that the -- all the generation**  
14       **veterans kind of shunned us, you know, and the fact**  
15       **was it took a while to be one of the major**  
16       **organizations that accepted Vietnam veterans.**  
17       **That -- that was a problem.**

18                                **Q. Do you belong to any veteran --**  
19       **Vietnam veteran organizations?**

20                                **A. Oh yeah. I'm a charter member of**  
21       **the one in Rockland County.**

22                                **Q. You kind of think a little**  
23       **bit --. What -- what do you think about the**  
24       **Vietnam movies? Are there any that you think are a**

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2 little more realistic than others or --?

3 A. Parts of -- parts of them are --  
4 are realistic. I wasn't in the Marine Corps, but I  
5 remember the Full Metal Jacket. Of course that  
6 part where they're in the basic training, that was  
7 very real, I mean to me, because there wasn't much  
8 difference to my -- my experience. And what I saw  
9 there today is a whole new different thing. I mean  
10 but that was real. As far as the combat  
11 situations, the movie Hamburger Hill, other --  
12 parts of it were -- were real. Whoever advised it  
13 was -- was right on the money. But we're not in  
14 Hollywood, of course I mean you can't make a movie.

15 Q. What about the movie Platoon, any  
16 of that --?

17 A. Platoon, no, I wasn't -- I wasn't  
18 overly enthused with, but that's how we -- when  
19 that movie came out is when we started organizing  
20 our Vietnam veterans organizations. We're standing  
21 out handing out flyers and that's how we started  
22 our chapter in Rockland County. But I wasn't  
23 impressed with it.

24 Q. How do you think your military

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2 experience either changed or affected your life?

3 A. Well, it definitely affected my  
4 life. I mean I -- I was -- my -- I was going to  
5 college after graduating high school. My father  
6 had died in an automobile accident when I was a  
7 junior and there was no money to go to college.  
8 That's the only reason why I was to go in the  
9 service, I went. But of course many of my friends  
10 had graduated college and got drafted after they  
11 got out of college, so -- but think the -- you  
12 know, the trauma and a lot of stuff, you know, some  
13 of these psychological things that you carry around  
14 after, you know, after they keep welling up you're  
15 in a safe environment, the next thing you know  
16 you're -- you're next to people, you know, being  
17 killed, blown up and you suffer more stress.

18 I would say I think every --  
19 every -- everybody that was in Vietnam, whether it  
20 was -- of course I was, you know, an infantryman,  
21 you know, a combat guy, but I mean I think  
22 everybody that was there, whether it was -- I know  
23 a guy that drove a truck, he saw a hospital get  
24 bombed up and babies burning. That was stressful

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2   **for him. I mean he had a real problem with that.**  
3   **I think anybody that was there just, it was some**  
4   **type of traumatic experience. Not everybody**  
5   **fought. You know, I think it's nine and ten guys**  
6   **and you keep one infantry man in the field. I**  
7   **think a lot of, you know, guys that were here get**  
8   **problems. You know, I had problems and people over**  
9   **there had -- a lot of our soldiers had problems**  
10   **when they were there and the drug thing, you know.**

11                   **Q. Okay. Thank you very much.**

12                   **A. Yeah, I think most guys, you**  
13   **know, suffered some -- some degree, whether it was**  
14   **one percent of ninety percent. Some guys really**  
15   **took it bad.**

16                   **MR. CLARK: Okay. Thank you very**  
17   **much.**

18                   **MR. KESIER: Thank you.**

19                   **MR. RUSSERT: Good to hear from**  
20   **you.**

21                   **(The interview concluded.)**

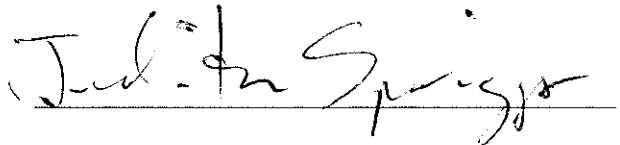
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2 This is a transcription of the audio  
3 provided to us. It is completed to the best of our  
4 skill and ability. The transcript consists of  
5 pages 1 through 45 inclusive.

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