

**David E. Lovett  
Veteran**

**Mike Russert  
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Interviewers**

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NYS Military Museum  
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**Q:** Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

**DL:** I'm David Edward Lovett. I was born in Niagara Falls, NY on August 5, 1940. I have a lot of fun with people asking where I'm from or where I was born and I like to say I'm living proof that people are actually born in Niagara Falls, not just conceived there.

**Q:** Okay, what was your educational background prior to entering service?

**DL:** Well, I went to city schools in Niagara Falls, several different [unclear 1:15] schools both for elementary school. Interestingly, my sister and I--she's a year older than I--we were in the same class together because the school had first and second grade combined so when I was in first grade, Kathleen was in second grade and we were in the same class. Then, Niagara Street School, Niagara District 3 School, Brevet Lt. Colonel Charles B. Gaskell Jr. High School named after a Civil War veteran--which I think maybe is the beginning of my military experience in Niagara Falls High School. Graduated from there in 1958 and I've been happy to attend several reunions of the class - 25th, 30th, and 40th reunions and in three more years hopefully I'll be at the 50th reunion. Then, I went to Syracuse University and again, in part, because of my sister. She went to Syracuse a year ahead of me on a General Motors college scholarship. When I was applying for colleges, I applied to Syracuse and applied for the General Motors college scholarship and received it, following in my sister's footsteps as it were. I attended there four years and joined ROTC and that led to my military career.

**Q:** Now you mentioned when I talked to you in the past, your father was in the military?

**DL:** My father joined the National Guard in 1936, as best as I can remember. He was 18 or 19 and he was a member of Company L of the 174th Infantry Regiment of the 27th Division. He joined as a private and advanced through the ranks to first sergeant and was a commissioned second lieutenant I think in 1945. He left the National Guard on the end of his three year enlistment, and went then from there into the State Guard where he was a member of Company A of the 74th

Regiment and served with them through World War 2. He was exempt from the draft because of Kathleen and me -married with children, you were exempt from the draft- so he served in the State Guard throughout World War 2.

When we went to Syracuse when they took me for my freshman orientation, I was walking with my father across the campus and out in the middle of the quadrangle there's a booth set up for the ROTC. We were walking past it and my father said "Have you ever thought about going in the army?" Frankly I hadn't, and he said "Well, you ought to think about it." So we stopped at the ROTC recruiting booth and talked to, I guess it was a sergeant who was manning the booth, and I knew it would please my dad greatly, and also it would exempt me from [unclear 5:24] physical education. I've always had a thing about [unclear 5:30] physical education and throughout school I didn't like it. So I joined the ROTC, primarily to please my dad I guess, but I inherited from him an interest in the military and I decided to give it a try. I tried it and I liked it especially my junior and senior years [because] cadets were paid twenty-seven dollars a month, and I was definitely attending college on a shoestring and twenty-seven dollars a month for doing nothing involved other than going to class was very attractive and very useful. It wasn't the scholarship programs that they have now. I had to make a decision in my junior year of whether I would pursue a reserve commission or a regular army commission. I decided by then that I knew enough about the military that I was probably going to make a career out of it. So, I applied for the regular army commissioning program and my grades and so on were good enough that I was considered a distinguished military graduate and was commissioned in the regular army on my graduation from Syracuse, June 2nd, 1962. One of the interesting things about that was - we had to select branch of service for commissioning and we had to make three choices. They had a matrix guide of branch of service and college degree program and they had masters in the matrix A, B, and C of what majors were suitable to what branches of service. My degree was in physics (I got a bachelor's of science in physics) and the A matches for physics were artillery (because of the ballistic trajectory of weapons), ordinance and signal. Because I was in the regular army commissioning program though, I had to pick all combat arms-I would be commissioned in a combat arm-and at that time there was infantry, armor, artillery, signal and engineering. Well, artillery and signal were A matches for my degree and engineering was a B match so my choices artillery, signal, engineering. It turned out to be a problem with my commissioning as to whether I was physically qualified for a regular army commissioning because of my eyesight- I have lazy eye syndrome in the right eye and my left eye is perfect 20/20, my right eye runs about 20/40 and basically still today I see everything with my left eye, my right eye just kind of tags along. So, because there was a question about the regular army commissioning I had to make a fourth choice in case I was commissioned in the reserve so I picked ordinance because that was an A match in the matrix. Well, the upshot of it was I was initially commissioned as

a 2nd Lieutenant in the Ordinance Corp-my fourth choice-U.S. Army Reserve. A day later, my regular army commission came in with my third choice-I was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant Corp of Engineers. That was kind of the story of my military service - I always got my last choice. My initial choice of duty station was Germany- I think my fourth choice somewhere down the line was Fort Campbell, Kentucky so I entered active duty at Fort Campbell, Kentucky June 5th, 1962. With the regular army commission, I was considered on active duty the day that I raised my hand and took the oath of office June 2nd-my graduation. I graduated in uniform and I still have a picture. Unfortunately, I couldn't find it or I would have brought it along - I have a picture of me in the tan uniform-that was the summer uniform at the time- standing next to my father in his tan uniform and that is among the things that I have brought to donate to the museum (his tan uniform). I need to find that picture- I'm very proud of it-the fact that my father administered the oath of office when I was sworn in as a 2nd Lieutenant-my father was allowed to administer the oath of office.

**Q:** What rank was your father at that point?

**DL:** My father was a major of infantry then.

**Q:** Now your father went in service in '36 you said, when did he leave the service?

**DL:** I'm sorry to say I'm a little vague about the details of the end of his service. He was commissioned in 1945 in company A of the 74th Regiment, and I have numerous photographs of orders, records of service and so on up until 1948. Then there's a big gap in the written records I have. I know that his last service was with what was called then the 51st Internal Security Battalion. He was the Battalion executive officer with the rank of major. He was made major in the late '60's (early 1961) and I remember particularly because I was in college in ROTC. I went to summer camp between my junior and senior years of college in Fort Devens, Massachusetts in the summer of 1961, and dad asked, when I was in Fort Devens, if I could get him the army green flying saucer hat with the scrambled eggs on the brim for field grade officer. So I bought his field grade officer hat at Fort Devens in 1961. I think his service ended around '62 or '63. I'm sorry I don't have the details on the end of his service career, or for that matter much of anything after the 1940's. I don't know when the 74th regiment was disbanded as it were, I have a recollection that, in 1954, there was a major change in the New York State Guard, and I think that was essentially when his service ended with the 74th and began with the 51st Internal Security Battalion. I think I have some of those papers, I searched diligently for them, I couldn't find them.

**Q:** Where did you go from your last post that you mentioned, you were in Kentucky I believe you said.

**DL:** My initial entry on active duty was at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, which by the way is mostly in Tennessee. But the post office is just north of the state border in Kentucky, and that's why it's Fort Campbell, Kentucky but 90% of the post is in

Tennessee. I was there for two years and near the end of the two years sometime in the spring of 1964, we had a briefing from a colonel from the officer personnel director about the Army in general and particularly what was then the growing involvement in Vietnam. One of the questions from the floor was "Should I go to Vietnam?" it wasn't me but "Should I go to Vietnam?" "Does that look good on record?". I remember the colonel's remark he said "Well, combat experience always looks good on the record. Vietnam isn't much of a war but it's the only war we have right now." I really disliked Fort Campbell, it was a terrible post for bachelors. For married officers, OK but for a bachelor, there was just absolutely nothing to do. I say without fudging too much, I volunteered for Vietnam to get out Fort Campbell. I went to military assistance training adviser class at Fort Bragg for six weeks in the summer of '64. We had language instruction in Vietnamese, interestingly enough turned out later that our language instructor was a North Vietnamese at Fort Bragg, and when I got to Vietnam my accent gave me away. People were reluctant to talk to me or respond to my Vietnamese. I finally figured out it was because I spoke with the accent of the enemy, and I'm really surprised that the Army didn't figure that out. With some difficulty, I re-schooled my accent to conform to the South Vietnamese. We had airborne refresher training, I've gone to jump school in '62 at Fort Benning and what was interesting was that was only twenty years after the airborne school was established. People think nowadays, I guess, that the Airborne has always part of the Army, it was only established in 1942. I was in class twenty of the airborne school in the 20th year of their existence. Well in preparation for going to Vietnam, I knew that I would be assigned as an advisor to the Vietnamese military and didn't know exactly what unit, so everyone who was on orders to Vietnam who was Airborne qualified went to Airborne refresher training, including one jump. So I jumped out of a CH-54 helicopter from a sixth parachute jump - I had five with basic training. Then there was the culture and the history of the country and the things an advisor might be expected to know.

**Q:** Can I ask you in retrospect when you went into Vietnam, how practical was this training and the learning of the culture - you already mentioned how the language was a problem?

**DL:** Well other than that it was very good preparation. I learned a lot, things I had no idea of eastern culture and customs and I learned a lot and I was glad that I had that six weeks of instruction, it prepared me I thought very well for my role as an advisor to the Vietnamese military. So I got into Saigon the day after my 24th birthday. My 24th birthday is a blur. We flew out of San Francisco on a military early charter and stopped in Anchorage, Alaska. There had been a major earthquake in Alaska in March or April of 1964. The airport had only just reopened. When I went through there, there was still a lot of temporary plywood coverings over the windows and you can see the cracks in the flooring. The main runway had been severely damaged by the earthquake and the runway had only just been put back into service. We landed there about 6 o'clock in the evening of

August 4th. Six hours later, just after midnight, we took off on August 5th, that was my birthday. An hour and a half later, crossed the international dateline, it was August 6th. So my 24th birthday was an hour and a half, between Anchorage and the international dateline on an airplane. I don't know if I'm older than I am or if I'm younger than I am, but I didn't have much of a birthday. I went into Saigon and, among other things, General Westmoreland was the Commanding General of the US Military Assistance Command Vietnam then and he personally greeted all incoming officer and enlisted personnel. We had about a three day in-country indoctrination of what was going on and that was when I finally found where I was going to go - the Vietnamese Southern Division area which was basically the delta. The Mekong River forks into three major branches about a hundred miles from the South China Sea and the fan of the delta from the Mekong Northern branch to the Southern Branch is the Kiến Hòa province and the town of Mỹ Tho was the capital of the province. Then I was further assigned to a town that had three names: Bến Tre, Truc Giang, and I can't remember the third name. It later became famous in the context of the quotation that "we had to destroy the town to save it". That was the town of Bến Tre or Truc Giang . It had been long after I was there, several years after I was there, it had been thoroughly infiltrated with Viet Cong, and in order to drive out the Viet Cong, the US military basically leveled the city. They said we had to destroy the city to save it. That was the province town of Kiến Hòa province. I was stationed there for 7 months as an advisor to the militia. There were three types of army units, there was the Vietnamese regular army, the regional force which was comparable to our National Guard, then the Popular Force which would be comparable to our State Guard. I was an advisor, branch material advisor, to the regional force in the province town for seven months, and then I was transferred the last five months down to a district town Ba Tri. We lived in a little mud fort, little [unclear 24:23] company of 150-200 Vietnamese officers and enlisted under the command of a Captain and he was the district chief, administrative chief of the district as well as the military head of the forces in that district. I say a mud fort, they build up a wall, a berm, around the containment area of mud, with a pillbox in each corner looking out over rice paddies.

**Q:** Was the village in the center of the Fort or was it outside of it?

**DL:** There was a village outside of the Fort. The Fort was probably half a kilometer from the village. We lived in a simple building with a metal roof in the middle of the compound, and ate with the district chief and his family. I like to say the diet was fish heads and rice twice a day and really it was, we subsisted on fish and fish sauce and rice almost exclusively.

**Q:** So rather than rations, sea rations or k-rations or whatever, you ate the local food?

**DL:** We ate the local food. One day a month, the district chief had American. I think it was water buffalo but I'm not perfectly sure, and diced and stewed and home fried potatoes once a month.

**Q:** How many other Americans were in that compound?

**DL:** There were five of us. The district advisor was a Captain, and the assistant district advisor, me, was a Lieutenant. I was 1st Lieutenant by that time and then three sergeants: there was a medical NCO, a communications NCO, and a weapons NCO.

**Q:** Were any of them special forces?

**DL:** No, not exactly. We were constituted and did essentially what is the role of a special forces unit, but we weren't considered special forces. We were just a military assistance advisory team. Besides the diet of fish heads and rice twice a day, what did we have for breakfast? We had French coffee. Coffee in that context was made in a glass, kind of like an ice tea glass. They had a brimmed basket that sat on top of the glass with a strainer on top. They put the grounds of the coffee into the strainer basket and poured boiling water over the grounds and steeped down, and dripped down, into the cup/glass [above that much in a glass this tall]. Then they put in about an equal amount of, in Vietnamese they call it kem sữa ngot, sweetened the cream - supersaturated condensed milk with sugar about the same amount as the coffee. Then filled the remaining volume of the glass with hot water, stir to dissolve the sweetened cream, and that was breakfast. I didn't realize it until near the end of my tour, I lost thirty pounds while I was in Vietnam. I went over weighing about 155 and I came back weighing 125. We didn't have a scale and I didn't keep track of my weight and I wasn't aware of the weight loss. One of the dumbest things I ever did, about a month before the end of my tour, I took my R&R in Hong Kong and went on a spending spree. I had six dress shirts tailor made and army green (what we called an undress uniform) and a dress white uniform and a Harris tweed sport coat and a very nice civilian suit made - not realizing that I was shrunken from my former self. When I got back to the States and started eating American, I put the weight back on and the first thing to go was the six dress shirts - I didn't fit them anymore. And then the civilian suit went - I couldn't get into that. And then the Harris tween jacket and then the green uniform - I grew out of. But I managed to fit into the dress white uniform that I had made in Hong Kong for my wedding in 1967. I still have that uniform but I don't fit into it anymore. I really, one of these "how can you be so dumb to buy all of these tailor made clothing when you are thirty pounds below your normal fighting weight?" One of the dumbest things that I ever did - not realizing in the slightest that what I was doing at the time....But I also bought this watch in Hong Kong (it's a Rolex) and I paid \$55 for it and I've been told that this watch now sells (this is a very basic simple model) - sells for about \$1200 or \$1300 dollars but I bought it for

\$55 in Hong Kong in 1965 and I've worn it virtually everyday since, except for it had an occasional repair need for forty years.

**Q:** Now your compound - was it ever under attack at all?

**DL:** Occasionally. One incident that I remember, the Viet Cong would set up a border in a cemetery about two or three kilometers away from the fort and would randomly lob shells. They didn't have an exact ranging system so their main interest was to fire quickly and get out of there before retaliation could occur. So what they would do is setup, they could align on the fort pretty well but the distance was the inaccurate part. So what they would do is set the initial sighting short of the fort and they'd drop a round in the tube, turn the elevation down a little bit, drop another round, turn the elevation down, drop another round, turn the elevation down, drop another round in about maybe a minute or a minute and a half time as long as it takes to drop the rounds into a mortar and then pack everything up and get going. One night I was there, a first round hit forward fort, the second round hit and strangely and sadly it hit inside the fort but what it hit was a building where we were detaining Viet Cong suspects and the second round went through the roof and exploded in the midst of the 35 people, Viet Cong suspects, killed seventeen and the other eighteen were all wounded to varying degrees. Then with the change of range, the next round landed beyond the fort and the only damage that was done from that attack was to the prisoner compound and it was a frightening sight. One of the worst things I've ever seen. We figured out a counter tactic - the district town had two bona fide howitzers - a section of artillery. We knew the place that they setup was bordered, we knew where it was being set and we had exact ranging for it so after that attack that killed the prisoners, we laid one of the howitzers on align for the cemetery and had a round with a timed fused cut in it for the exact distance to the cemetery. At night, when everything closed down we loaded that round into the 105 and one of the Vietnamese artillery sergeants slept by the gun and the Viet Cong came back (unusual for them to be repetitive) but we figured out that this was a repeated pattern. They came back to the cemetery and I heard the action. I was sleeping lightly - we normally went to bed 2 or 2:30 in the morning except for one American who was the duty officer for the night who stayed up all night. I was in bed that night, we had gone to bed around 2:30, about 3:00 I heard the characteristic <descriptive sound> of the mortar from a distance and then a few seconds pause then another <descriptive sound> of another mortar round being launched. The Vietnamese sergeant was wakened by the first <descriptive sound> of the first mortar round fired, woke up, grabbed the lanyard of the howitzer and pulled. So the third time I heard the 105 going off then another <descriptive sound> from the cemetery. The first mortar round landing outside the fort, the second mortar round landing also outside the fort, then the artillery round traveled its 2 kilometers, <descriptive sound>, the third mortar round which has been launched landing and that was final. We went out the next day to the cemetery and found miscellaneous body parts and the base plate of an 81mm

mortar seriously dented. That was the last mortar attack that we had on the little fort in Ba Tri. We did something right.

**Q:** How did you feel about the friendliness of the Vietnamese and Thai people - how did you feel about living and being with the Vietnamese people?

**DL:** I was very comfortable. They were simple people (and I don't want to apply stupid) but uneducated. They had a very simple agrarian life but they were so pleasant. The children were as serious and as happy as children are and Americans incited great interest whenever a helicopter landed. It would be immediately surrounded by children and they weren't begging - they were just curious. We frequently had candy or little gifts we handed out and they loved us. We were a novelty, we were interesting, we were a change from their ordinary kind-of homegrown life, I guess. But both in Vietnam and two years later in Thailand, I had the same experience - the people were very friendly, very happy to see the Americans, very curious about what Americans were like and what they did. I don't know that I met any Viet Cong. There may have been an Asian in disguise of people that I ran across. I met a lot of native Vietnamese and Thai and there were all uniformly friendly, curious, and courteous.

**Q:** How did you feel about the military forces that you worked with? Did you rely on them? Obviously you must have with only five Americans there.

**DL:** Well, there was an American force. I was there during what was called the advisory camp. The Americans fighting units were only coming into the country as I was leaving in the summer of 65 (late July I guess I departed Vietnam). As I was going through Saigon on the way out of the country, the 173rd Airborne brigade was coming into the country and I passed their trucks in convoy coming in from Tan Son Nhut airport and I waved passed them "welcome aboard guys - better you than me, I'm outta here". The Vietnamese military stuck me basically as competent. The main difference between the American trained South Vietnamese force and the Communist North Vietnamese force was the logistics and the support structure. The American army has a very heavy tail, I think what they call the tooth-to-tail ratio is about 1:7 (there is 7 support soldiers for every 1 that's out in front fighting) at that time anyway. The tooth-to-tail ratio was considered [unclear 42:03]. We made the South Vietnamese army in the same mold although maybe 1:4 - they were logistically heavy as we were. The Viet Cong tooth-to-tail was about 1:1 - they were very light, fast traveling, get in, get out and not a whole lot of logistics burden and that proved to be the superior organization tactic in Vietnam. It wasn't that the South Vietnamese forces were poorly led or incompetent or unmotivated, they were logistically tied down to bases where the Viet Cong were extremely mobile, went anywhere they wanted to and went in and got out, at will, and we basically couldn't catch them. We chased them, we couldn't catch them. We setup bases to establish temporary control of an area but we controlled the base and the Viet Cong controlled everything outside the base. We tried to chase them, they were a lot more mobile than we were.



**Q:** Now you mentioned here that you had no respect for most officers, why?

**DL:** I had a hard time with that question and what I wrote. I enjoyed all of my time in the military service. I met a lot of very good men that I admire and respect to this day, some of them I'm still in touch with. My first company commander, John Teague, later retired as a lieutenant colonel and I ran into him when he was working in the city engineer's office in Wilmington, North Carolina. Very kind man, several other company commanders...one of my brigade commanders at Fort Belvoir...but when I was reading that and responding to it, I thought I also ran into a lot of turkeys. I can't paint with a broad brush and say that this was characteristic of all them but I met a lot of martinets whose primary interest was their own career and maybe I flatter myself but I never had personal ambition for myself. I expected that I would advance with education and experience and that I would eventually be a senior officer but I met a lot of men whose primary interest was their own advancement. It really didn't matter what impact this had on the people around them or under them.

**Q:** So you are critical of ticket punching, you know like you mentioned the officer told you in combat duty?

**DL:** One captain that I worked for a few months in Vietnam, I almost remember his name and I'm glad I don't because I don't want to name him, was a pure martinet, strictly regulation, when he flew into the country, he came to the province town Mỹ Tho and I was assigned the duty of going to pick him up and we went out to the jeep, Vietnamese driver and met the captain in Mỹ Tho. As a lieutenant, my assigned weapon was the M1A1 carbine but my Vietnamese counterpart, it was not proper for an officer to be armed with a rifle (officers were supposed to wear sidearms by the Vietnamese army custom) and he obtained and issued to me a 45-caliber pistol. We always brought our firearms everywhere we went in country. Even in civilian clothes, I had a 38 special derringer that I wore concealed on my clothes but we always went armed. So I wore the 45 pistol that my counterpart had issued to me. I met this captain in Mỹ Tho and he was carrying his issued carbine and remarked on the fact that I was wearing a pistol and it wasn't fitting that the lieutenant should be carrying a pistol while a captain was carrying a rifle. And I thought really this is knocked up. Things went pretty well because I stayed out of his range mostly while he was in the district, in the province town. By evil chance, I ended up being assigned to his district for the last three months that I was in country and he insisted on my turning in the pistol and carrying the U.S. regulation carbine instead. Because it was regulation, everything to him was regulation - it didn't matter, local customs and ordinary practices of the unit he was with and what the Vietnamese had been doing for the past twenty years - if it wasn't important to U.S. Army regulation, it wouldn't happen. My official title was assistant district advisor. This captain when I was first assigned to his command told me you are the assistant to the advisor. You are not the assistant advisor. You are the assistant to the advisor and you will do

nothing without first clearing it through me and then on my fitness had the audacity to criticize me for lack of initiative. I really disliked that man and I'm glad that I can't remember his name. The province advisor, the second one under whom I served, was cut pretty much from the same mold. His duties were largely in the province town but he wanted combat experience on his record and he had a helicopter pretty much at his disposal. Normally, it was used for resupply of the district forces - we had seven districts in Kiến Hòa province and the helicopter was used for resupply of the Americans in the Southern district but the helicopter was at the major's disposal. Whenever there developed some kind of military action, a firefight or something, the major would commandeer the helicopter and fly down to wherever he could land near the action. He would look around, talk to the Vietnamese officer in charge (whoever it was) for an hour or two and then fly off. We found out later, the requirements for the combat infantry badge was thirty days of contact with the enemy, as it were. This major kept a log of his helicopter of when his helicopter dropped in near the scene of action and he logged that as one day of combat experience and over a space of five or six months, he accumulated thirty of these days and put himself in for the combat infantryman's badge and it was awarded. At least the man had the shame not to wear it while he was in country amidst the people who knew how he had earned it. He was very much disrespected and disliked. I don't like to dwell on that - I met and served with a lot of officers that I had absolutely no respect for, maybe half of the officers that I knew in Vietnam were there for self-serving career advancement purposes, getting their ticket punched, getting something on their record, and with very little concern of how their actions impacted on Vietnamese or other Americans.

**Q:** What was your opinion of Westmoreland?

**DL:** I liked him. I was impressed from the first time when he gave the orientation speech when I got in country. I saw him several times later when we were evolving operations especially heliborne operations out of our province town. Westmoreland came down, some knowing internationally, we called the airport dirt strip - it would handle small fixed wing aircraft, it was mostly helicopters. Westmoreland came down and he made a point of talking individually to the soldiers on the ground. Many years later, in 1973 (I left Vietnam in '65), Westmoreland retired from his position of Chief of Staff of the Army and one of the perks given to a retiring chief of staff was an office and a military aide for a period of a year to basically demobilize and settle your affairs and sort your records. Westmoreland chose a Charleston army veteran from South Carolina where I was then assigned as the director of administration of services for the army depot. General Westmoreland had the office right next to mine where his warrant officer who was his private military secretary was there all the time and Westmoreland came in at least once a week. Invariably, he passed right or leaned in "Good Morning Captain". "Ah Good Morning General". Very friendly, very personable, took me to lunch a few times. We went to a couple

of marine corp birthday balls out of the navy weapons station. He kind of employed me as an aide - he didn't have an aide as it were. When we went to the marine corp balls, I was his, in effect, his aide. I had great respect for him.

**Q:** Now you were wounded. Tell us about that?

**DL:** I would say it was an accident. When I was in the province town Kiến Hòa, late August of 1964, they had a benefit performance for the widows and orphans of soldiers of Popular Force who had been killed in action. I was an advisor to the Popular Forces and was expected to be at this benefit performance (it was a theatrical stage production of eleven or twelve acts). The province chief, a Vietnamese lieutenant colonel, Tran Ngoc Châu was the honored guest and last minute he was called away (he was out in the province for something or the other). He and his wife were designated two seats, the tickets were given to an older Vietnamese woman and her two grandchildren - the two kids sat in one seat because they were small enough. The Viet Cong had booby trapped the place obviously before anybody got there. As best we could figure out, they had placed a hand grenade under those two seats with a wire running out to the aisle what was the next tier up above me in the balcony. Midway through the sixth act of the performance, as best we could figure, the perpetrator leaned down and pulled the wire which pulled the pin on the grenade and then he stood up and walked out. The normal delay, three and half seconds I think it was, the grenade went off. It was really a shock. It must have been about fifteen feet to my left and the noise was huge and I was just stunned. Just frozen, stunned by the noise and then I saw the cloud of smoke going up on my left and started hearing screams and I became aware of myself and I realized that both of my legs were displaced to the right of where I had last set them. I reached down and felt a leg and my hand was bloody when it came up and my first thought was 'the bastard's got me' and I was mad. "What had I done to them?" and "What had they done to me?" I was mad. It turned out I had about two hundred shrapnel wounds on the left side of both legs. I wasn't in particular pain or disabled. I helped to carry out the injured and I took several of the injured to the Vietnamese hospital in an army jeep. After we had taken care of the Vietnamese and carried them off to the local hospital, there were about three or four Americans injured. One of the majors who was actually sitting to my right got the most prized in injury of all - his ear drum was broken and he was medevaced out of the country and given credit for a full normal tour and not required to return. That was the prized injury that you were medically evacuated and given credit for the full tour. I was taken to a local soccer field in the province town and eventually medevaced by helicopter. The helicopter landed about the same time that the province chief Colonel Châu got back from wherever he had been and heard about the disaster. I was sitting on the tailgate of a 3/4 ton truck waiting for the helicopter. I kept bleeding slowly. It wasn't really serious. The helicopter landed and I eased myself off from the tailgate of the truck like this and dropped to the ground and almost fell because the shock had set in. My ankle joints had stiffened and my muscles had stiffened and I could barely stand

up. Colonel Châu arrived just in time, he picked me up and I don't think he weighed as much as I did. He was a normal build Vietnamese and he picked me up in a fireman's carry and he carried me from the truck over to the medevac helicopter. Colonel Châu, I had [a lot of] respect for before that, but he cared about his American advisors. It was kind of a point of honor among the Vietnamese to take care of their American advisors - the worst thing that could happen to a Vietnamese officer was to lose his advisor through anything that might be attributed to his fault. It was partly that [reason] and partly Colonel Châu was a wonderful human being and he cared. He carried me way more than he did, he literally carried me to the medevac helicopter. Colonel Châu was later elected to the Vietnamese legislative assembly, I can't remember exactly the name of it and sometime before the collapse of Saigon (maybe '72 or '73) was assassinated by the Viet Cong. I mourned him. [Further research showed that Colonel Châu was imprisoned by the Viet Cong but after several years he escaped to America].

**Q:** How did you get your Air Medal?

**DL:** The Air Medal was a booking keeping exercise. You had to have a varied combination of aerial missions. You needed fifty aerial missions to qualify for the Air Medal and normal administrative supply duties was counted as one aerial mission. An aerial mission in support of a ground operation - you got two for one credit. An aerial assault combat action launch by helicopter - you got four for one credit. So, you kept a book on the number of aerial missions that you had participated in. In my case, it was strictly unglamorous. One of my duties when I was with the district town was I was the load master for the resupply of all these isolated outposts in the southern district towns. We got a daily helicopter from an aviation company in Can Tho about 60 miles from the west of us I guess. Helicopter came in, a Huey UH-1B came in everyday. I was in charge of the aerial resupply. I load mastered whatever was getting onto the helicopter, and then directed the helicopter to whichever towns were due for a visit for whatever resupply. Advised the pilot on local conditions: approach Ba Tri from the North because there's known Viet Cong activity to the West. For all that, we were frequently fired at. In fact the only times that I heard bullets whizzing past was in the helicopter. When I was on ground missions, I never came that close to military action. But the helicopter that I was in was fired at regularly. And the first time I heard a sound, it was kind of like an angry buzz like an insect or a wasp or something [makes a bzz sound]. I kind of jumped, the door gunner sitting next to me I tapped him and said "What was that?" and he said "Oh probably 30 caliber." [laughter]. Well, I said there is a big difference in sound between the 30 caliber and the 50 caliber. The 50 caliber is a lot louder sound when it passes near you. [unclear 01:08:33]. I guess I kinda got that way too, they say you never hear the one that gets you. So, I heard a number of angry buzzes on these various helicopter supply missions. I think I eventually had about 73 or 74 of these daily flight resupply missions primarily, and after the 50th qualified for

the air medal, the citation says for Heroism in Aerial Support of Ground Combat or something like that, it was strictly unglamorous.

**Q:** Now you left Vietnam in '65? Where did you go after that?

**DL:** From there I went back to Fort Belvoir and I was assigned to the Demolition Mine Warfare branch of the Engineer School Combat Engineer division. That was the first time that I drew hazardous duty pay. The demolitions instructors drew hazardous duty pay the same as parachute duty pay would have been. I really found out why. We had a bad lot of blasting caps supplied to us one year from Tooele Army Depot in Utah. About half of them turned out statistically were defective. We found out when one of the classes we ran, there was 100 people in the class, and about 53 or 54 of the charges that they primed and set didn't go off. We cleared the range and me and four other instructors went out and placed [trails off]. The way the students were managed, they got a small block of explosives, quarter pound of TNT, or a half a stick of dynamite, or a small wad of plastic explosives, C4, and they individually primed those charges, put the blasting cap in, and connected it to the time fuse, and connected the igniter to the fuse, and then on command, pulled the igniter, and then walk slowly [unclear 01:11:21] off of the range, back to a sheltered area. Then you count the number of explosions. When there were a hundred explosions, you waited 30 minutes, and then went down range and made sure that everything was [exploded]. Well there were only 47 explosions that day. So we had all these primed charges, 53 primed charges sitting on the ground, we didn't know when or whether they were going to detonate. Four of the enlisted instructors and myself, went down range and placed another explosive charge next to the unexploded charge, rigged with an electric detonating cap, made the ring main went back up, detonated the ring main and exploded all of the unexploded charges, wait 30 minutes, went back down, assured that everything was indeed exploded, there were no more live munitions there. Went back and filled out the after-action report and informed Tooele that we had a suspect lot. They asked us to please confirm that it was the blasting caps that were bad. We took another hundred blasting caps out to the range, without putting in the charges, just set the blasting caps into the sand. They were all time fused [unclear 01:13:04] and about I guess ten of us that time, popping these hundred igniters. Went back, listened and forty nine exploded out of a hundred. Then we went back and next to each unexploded non-electric cap, we had to place an electric cap, wire them into the main, detonate them to dispose of the unexploded non-electric cap. I earned my hazardous duty pay from over the space of about two to three days. We finally ended up sending the whole lot of blasting caps back to Tooele. They were replaced, but we had to modify our instruction for about two weeks, we couldn't put on normal course of instruction. That was probably the most exciting thing that happened to me at Fort Belvoir. Although I did get into the acoustic effect of explosions. We had some complaints from the surrounding area about loud explosions, and the strange thing is they weren't from immediately around the Fort Belvoir post, they weren't within a

mile of Fort Belvoir. The complaints came uniformly from a ring about three to four miles away. I was involved with an extensive research effort. We were finally able to identify the atmospheric conditions. It was a temperature inversion that caused a reflection effect. The blast went off into the air, and in certain sky conditions, it was reflected back down to the ground many miles away. So we learned to identify the weather patterns that would cause the strange acoustic effect and we didn't do our blasting of the main test charges that we did, some kind of cratering charges, and so on. We avoided doing them on days where the weather was creating that diversion effect. Very interesting.

**Q:** Now you went to Thailand from '67 to '68 what did you do there?

**DL:** I was primarily with the Construction Engineering Battalion. I was the Battalion operations officer. It's normally a major's position. They had a strange, personnel situation when I was there. One of the Engineer battalions, the 538, that I was assigned to, the officer commanding was removed from command for cause. I can't even remember what the cause was but his replacement was a major, and he wasn't all that senior of a major. So that affected everything under him. They had to find an executive officer for the battalion, who was junior to the major commanding, and he was so junior, that normally the operations officer would have been a major, but there was no major, junior to the executive officer available. I was the senior engineer captain at the time. I was like four years time-in-grade. Four years? No, I made captain in 65' and this was the summer of 67'. I was a little over two years in-grade. I was the senior engineer captain in Thailand, so I ended up being assigned as the Battalion operations officer. Our job the whole time I was there, was building Route 23, the Korat-Kabinburi road. It was a supply road which started on the Gulf of Thailand in a cantonment area that the Americans built, in an airport that the Americans built, and then a roadway connection bypassing Bangkok. In fact the lower section of the road was called the Bangkok Bypass. It was to take military supplies from the Port of Sattahip, around Bangkok up into the Northeast of the country. NKP Airport (there were 3 major air force bases up in the northeast part of Thailand that were supporting combat actions in Vietnam). Those 3 airbases, their land supply was through this road from Port Sattahip. The 538th Engineer Battalion built the mountain section of Route 23 between Korat and Kabinburi. It was good work, it was a lot of fun building something. My wife said that she really enjoyed being with me a lot more when I was in the construction business than when I was in the demolition business.

**Q:** Now was she in Thailand with you?

**DL:** As a matter of fact she was. It was technically an unaccompanied tour but, I went in (let's see) September of '67, three months after we were married. She went back to Tennessee teaching school, she was teaching music at Austin P. State University there. The end of the school year (in the end of May), she flew with the battalion surgeon's wife through Tokyo, Hong Kong, into Bangkok, and

made it in time for our first anniversary (we were married June 2nd, June 3rd, I have a problem with that because...) [laughter]

Interviewer: You shouldn't put that on tape, you know...[laughter]

**DL:** I was commissioned on June 2nd, and that was my initial active duty service date and basic pay entry date, and my graduation from college, a lot of things happened on June 2nd, and five years later I got married on June 3rd. I have a little bit of a problem keeping those dates straight. Anyway, she got into Thailand on June 2nd, and June 3rd we had our first anniversary dinner at the Three Vikings restaurant in Bangkok. She went to work for the 501st Field Depot in Korat, as a secretary, she could only have a 30 day tourist visa, but when she was employed, then she got a indefinite length of employment visa. So she got this job with the army as a secretary, GS4, GS3, I can't remember, and was very highly prized by the way, the inspector general came to visit while she was there from Hawaii and she was assigned to the IG, and they didn't want any Thai type of assigned, this was important enough that they wanted their best gal and that was my wife, Jenny. Word got out that she was an accomplished pianist, and one day the Chief of Staff of the U.S, Army support Thailand, colonel called me down to the Engineer office, and said "Could you, Captain Lovett, could you come up to my office?" Why am I being summoned to the Chief of Staff's office? I got in, "Good morning captain, please, this is informal, relax, sit down." Just as nice as he could be. "I understand your wife is a pianist of some accomplishment?" I said, "As a matter of fact she is, she's very good, she has a master's of music degree and studied in Austria." "Great," he said. "Now, this is strictly non-military, and this is a personal issue and feel free to say no, but, the British Ambassador to Thailand is being entertained at a party this evening at the Officer's Club, and the entertainment that we had planned has fallen through, and we wondered if possibly you could prevail on your wife to play incidental music for the ambassador's reception?" "I can ask her." "Please! There's the phone. Can you call her". I called her up "You want to play for a British ambassador tonight?" or something to that effect. She said "Well yes, but I need to get the music together, and see the instrument, and practice a little bit, and you know I'm working until 5." I said to the colonel, "She's working and she needs time to prepare." "Whose she work for?" "Major Kerachak" and he said "Tell your wife to get Major Kerachak on the phone." She got Major Kerachak on the phone. The colonel picked up and said, "Mrs Lovett is excused from duty the rest of the day with pay". "Ok." So I went and picked her up and she went back to the hotel where we were staying and changed clothes, and took her over to the Officer's Club and she put some music together and played for the ambassador's reception. General Black was very appreciative. We were included in the rest of the itinerary for the ambassador's visit. Next day, we went by helicopter up to the old Imperial Capitol, Ayutthaya, and toured the ruins there and had this bodacious picnic. [unclear 01:24:14] flown in by helicopter. That night the Chief of Staff had a pig roast over at his house, we were invited to that. Next morning

there was a tour of the Air Force base, we were part of the official party and hobnobbed with the British ambassador to Thailand. So that was a fun tour. I wanted to mention, you didn't ask particularly, but the thing that struck me the most about both Vietnam and Thailand was the color. That's the farthest south I've ever been and for a large part of the time that I was there, the sun was directly overhead or even to the North of us. That really did something to the color enhancement. The greens were the most verdant and beautiful greens that I have ever seen. But everything stood out in really sharp color. That is the lasting impression I have of both places was the beautiful color of the countryside and the surroundings.

**Q:** After Thailand?

**D:** After Thailand, back to the engineer school and I was in charge of engineer student troops. I was Battalion Commander and Brigade operations officer for the Engineer Center Brigade. Managing the extra heavy load of engineer students, we were running the school in 2 shifts. We had what was called the day companies and the night companies. I initially commanded one of the night companies. Our students went to school from five in the afternoon until two in the morning because they were doubling up and didn't have enough classrooms and training areas, we were running night and day operations with the training center. I was initially Company Commander, then Brigade Operations Officer, then the last year I was there, a Battalion Commander as a Captain. I was a Battalion commander, everybody was short handed, everybody was under-strengthened in their grade. Company commanders were mostly first lieutenants, some second lieutenants. Let's see by 68', I had little over 3 years in grade. I was the senior among the various captains available and ended up as a Battalion commander, which the training for Battalion commander [trails off]. But at one point I had command of a thirty-five hundred man battalion as, what I considered, not really a junior captain, but not a senior captain by any means. It was kind of humdrum routine. While I was there, I took the Engineer officer advance course non-resident program. There was resident and non-resident, and I took two weeks one summer, two weeks the next summer, two weeks the following summer. I was given time off from my normally assigned duties to do the resident phase of the Engineer officer's advance course. In 1971, I guess it was, I finished the advanced course, and called up the assignment office and said "You know I've been here almost three years, what's next?" They had an urgent requirement, for the most senior engineer that could be spared to be the post engineer for the Charleston army depot in South Carolina. I don't know what kind of bill of goods Colonel Hasty sold to the assignment branch. There was no desperation for a post engineer - he just wanted somebody as soon as he could get them, and he wasn't above stretching the truth and the urgency of the need. So I was assigned as a post engineer for the Charleston army depot, May of 71'. We moved from government quarters on Fort Belvoir directly to government quarters at the Charleston army depot. I ended up a little over three years during



the time that the depot was being phased out. My last official act as the officer in charge, by then all of the other officers had been reassigned, I was the last one left, as officer in charge of the Charleston army depot activity, I wrote the report of excess to dispose of the property. Through a strange change of circumstances, I ended up as a civilian employee of the navy weapons station, immediately adjacent, next door, to the army depot. I resigned my active duty regular army commission and was reassigned to the army reserve and went to work as a civilian for the navy weapons station. The first thing I did at the navy weapons station was write the justification for acquiring the former Charleston army depot property. My boss said it seemed kind of incestuous to him, that I had been on both sides of that transaction. The navy ended up acquiring the former Army depot property, so I was associated with the management of that property for a total of ten years all together until I finally left Charleston, went to the naval submarine base at Kings Bay. I went into the army reserve in 1974, did not do much of anything while I was in Charleston. I completed the commanding general staff college by correspondence and non-resident training and also the National Defense management course by correspondence. That was virtually the whole time I was a major. Near the end of that, I was assigned as the mobilization augmentee to the Bloomington district of the core of engineers. In case of general mobilization, expansion of military activities, military construction, and so on. I would be called up to the Wilmington office to help to manage their construction load. I spent just four years with basically two weeks active duty and correspondence courses.

**Q:** So you retired in 1990?

**DL:** Well, continuing the reserve duty, in 1983, by this time we moved to South Georgia. I was drilling for points only, they called it, with an army reserve school in Jacksonville, Florida. In late '82, early '83, the school [unclear 01:32:54] called me and said he had a call from the commander of the transportation brigade and they were looking for a commander for one of their subordinate units and he had recommended me. I said, "What kind of unit?" "Well, it's a military and intelligence detachment." It turns out that this was the military intelligence arm of the 20th Special Forces group which was composed of Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Maryland National Guard units but their military intelligence detachment, at that time, was an army reserve unit because the government would not assign intelligence assets to the control of a state government. It was considered too sensitive an area to be given to a politician. That policy later changed. In any case, this detachment authorized strength of about forty-nine or fifty people and was authorized a lieutenant colonel position commanding. They had done a search, for when the former commander and it was a three year tenured job and his tenure expired, they had done a search for any major or lieutenant colonel, military intelligence or airborne qualified, within a hundred and fifty miles radius of Jacksonville, Florida and they came up with three. There was a military intelligence major who was not airborne qualified and said that

wild horses couldn't drag him to the door of an airplane, there was a military intelligence lieutenant colonel who was on the verge of retirement and declined the appointment, and there was me - an engineer lieutenant colonel, airborne qualified, who had been to (strangely enough) an intelligence officer's basic course early in my career. I was interviewed and selected for the position. Best job I ever had with the military. I was three-and-a-half years, it was converted from a detachment into a company, the 356th Military Intelligence Company Special Forces Group Airborne. We did a lot of sneaky stuff, we did a lot of fun stuff, we did a lot of interesting stuff (most of which I can't even talk about). Yet today, I saw some marvelous aerial photography of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the Ukraine, I got to see a lot of the aerial photography that we had done of the plant and the fire trucks responding and so on. I really shouldn't say too much about that. I had travel restrictions placed on me for five years after retirement, very high-level security clearance but mostly it was fun. I had a lot of fun. It wasn't two weeks in the summer and one weekend a month. Over the three-and-a-half years that I spent with that reserve unit, I got paid for three hundred and fifty days of active duty. I was holding down a civilian job at the same time. Needless to say, my family didn't see much of me. So, I finished that in '87 and then I was an individual ready reservist on the staff of the 1st Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg. I did periodic active duty up at Fort Bragg and jumped out of an airplane two or three more times at Fort Bragg. Last time I jumped was in, I think, 1989 and when I hit the ground I knew it was my last parachute jump. I landed hard and I limped for about three days afterwards. The next time I was up at Fort Bragg, they said "Do you want to go to the airborne parachute training?" I said, "I respectfully decline." I made my last jump. So, I retired in 1990 because of the twenty-eight year rule, twenty-eight years active commissioned service is the limit unless you make O-6 colonel, I was not selected for colonel so after twenty-eight years I was excused from further participation. Retired in 1990 and praise God managed to survive until age sixty and started drawing a military retirement pay which is essentially why I retired from the navy civil service in 1960 because between the navy civil service retired pay and the army reserve retired pay, I was making as much as I was working. I said, "Why [unclear 1:39:00]?" I retired and have been perfectly delighted retired - I stay busy and active. I'm very busy with boy scouts, I'm district chairman for the two-county area down where I live. My younger son was made eagle scout last year - I consider that one of my greatest accomplishments, he wouldn't have done it without my support and encouragement quite literally. Very active with my church both in the local and dioceses level. My wife says that she really enjoys having me around. She's still working, she's a musician part-time, plays various engagements like weddings, dinner music, and so on and so on. Organist and choir director for the church and she has about a half a dozen private piano students. She's perfectly delighted because I do all the shopping and incidental errand running and so on and so forth.

**Q:** Ok, well, thank you very much for your interview.

**DL:** Glad to be able to do it.