

**Nicholas Deutsch  
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on June 10, 2009  
New York State Military Museum  
Whitehall, New York**

**WC:** Today is the 10th of June, 2009. We are at the Isaac C. Griswold Public Library in Whitehall, New York. My name is Wayne Clark. I'm with the New York State Military Museum out of Saratoga Springs, New York. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth?

**ND:** Nicholas F. Deutsche. Born September 26, 1949 in Aurora, Illinois.

**WC:** And did you attend school in Aurora?

**ND:** No, my Dad was in the service when I was born. We moved every three, four years. Aurora, I grew up maybe the first three years. California was at that, and I don't even remember California. And then to Georgia, Fort Benning, Georgia. I remember Fort Benning, Georgia, back to Illinois. We moved around a lot. I went to several high schools, had a stint in Germany from 1960 to 1964, he was stationed over in Germany, so we lived over there with him. That was interesting. I like Germany, but I grew up in the service so we always moved around. When he retired, he was thirty years in the service. When he retired, that was back in Illinois again, Park Forest, just south of Chicago.

**WC:** Okay, did you graduate from high school?

**ND:** Graduated from high school.

**WC:** What year did you graduate?

**ND:** 1967.

**WC:** All right, and when you graduated from high school, did you go right into the service or did you work or go on to school?

**ND:** No, I didn't go into the service then. My brother, he was in the service at the time, my older brother, both of them actually were. I went to one year of art school. I was good at art, so I wanted to pursue that without thinking of going into service. So, I went to one year of school in Chicago at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. After that, I think my Dad more or less talked me into going, why don't you go into service? If you don't go in, they'll draft you. You don't know what you'll be doing then because this was during the time of the Vietnam war. This was 1968. Now I went for one year of school and the next

year I didn't go back to school. Part time job or working at a job. He says, why don't you join the service? I wasn't against it, so that's what I did. I joined the service probably March 1969.

**WC:** And whereabouts did you go for your basic training on Fort Bragg?

**ND:** Well, I didn't have a hard time at all because I was used to it. I was in shape, I was athletic. Basic training wasn't hard to me, Marching wasn't hard. Taking orders was like having Dad there, so it wasn't hard at all [Laughing]. Basic training was pretty easy. I got through basic training. They actually put me in charge of the platoon, for a while, teaching who we call Zero how to march, that was actually pretty easy. And then I had orders and went to, after that, Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and that's where I did my MOS.

**WC:** For artillery?

**ND:** Yeah, artillery surveyor. I think it's 82 Charlie, 83 Charlie, but I'm not sure.

**WC:** How long was that school?

**ND:** Eight, ten weeks, a couple months? I really don't know. Not that long.

**WC:** Was that a school that you picked, or did the army pick that for you?

**ND:** The army picked it for me. In terms of what I was good at. I was good at numbers. They didn't have anything in the army for drawing or for artwork. I was good at numbers and passed the highest, I would say, the aptitude test with the numbers. And they thought, well, the best thing for him would be artillery. Something that has a lot to do with numbers and actually did come pretty easy to me.

**WC:** All right. Once you graduated from artillery surveying school, were you assigned any place stateside or were you shipped right to Vietnam?

**ND:** Right to Vietnam. I had two weeks off before I left. I got my orders papers to go to Vietnam, and that was it. I don't know the month, but it had to be the end of the year, close to the end of 1969. I'm shipped over to Vietnam.

**WC:** Did you fly over to Vietnam?

**ND:** Flew over to Vietnam.

**WC:** And whereabouts did you leave from in the States?

**ND:** San Francisco, I believe, although I'm not sure, Wayne.

**WC:** All right. And when you landed in Vietnam, what was your impression of the country when you stepped off the plane?

**ND:** It was a muggy day. The impression I got was it was stagnant and dirty. It was not clean. Because if you're used to the United States or something, where I was, it wasn't as clean. I can't remember where we landed, not too far from where we were stationed. Which was Xuân Lộc, which is south of Saigon, southern part.

**WC:** Okay. So you probably either flew into Tan Sonute or Camaron Bay.

**ND:** Yeah. Couldn't tell you which one. I'm not keen on the specifics of where we lived. I

do remember hot, muggy, just looked dirty. Automatically go into the army barracks. You don't go out in the village and the cities at all and everything. They just stayed there for orientation for a day or two, and then we went to—

**WC:** Then you were sent to your unit?

**ND:** Yep. Sent to our unit.

**WC:** All right, and what was your unit like? It was an artillery unit?

**ND:** It was a compound. It was called husky compound. Basically an artillery unit plus whatever they need to keep a compound running. The cooks, the chefs, the bookkeepers, some grunts, the artillery that were there. I settled in pretty easy. It was already established. It wasn't a new place.

**WC:** Now, did you have to travel or did any of the artillery units or batteries where they moved any place off that base, or did you stay on the base the entire time you were there?

**ND:** The entire time? No, most of the time we stayed there. We did a lot of guard duty, filling sandbags, learning more about the schooling that we had. I'd say once a week, maybe sometimes more, we'd go out and set up a site for the artillery. That was something that, well, you get in full gear and you go out. There was our crew, plus we had several other people with us, a couple officers that I didn't know all the time. Not just our crew, a couple officers. We'd go out and mostly we would do day trips. We would travel probably about three, four hours, take a couple hours to set up. That's mostly everything. We would be told where to go, and then we'd come back before night. Then three or four days later do the same thing again.

**WC:** Were you ever under fire by the enemy when you were doing that?

**ND:** Twice [hold up two fingers], twice we were under fire, but I never saw him. We'd get shot at. I mean, we'd be sitting there in our group and we'd be doing our thing and you'd hear a crack, so we would shoot back. We never saw who we were shooting at. Never engaged in hand to hand combat. It was mostly you just get in and get out.

**WC:** Now in your base camp, were you ever under rocket attack or mortar attack?

**ND:** Actually, we did. Part of my job—when we weren't going out—was night watch, and my buddy and I, Jerry Hogart, we'd have night watch up in the thirty foot tower and we had the night scope with us. What we would do is we'd take turns. Three, four hours, we'd look at the perimeter with the night scope. Then I would do it for three, four hours. We'd stay up all night on his watch. Actually I was up because we were talking—we played cards most of the time on his watch—he was just scouting the perimeter and he saw two flashes, boom, boom, boom. Or three, two or three. And within ten seconds, boom. You know, landing two outside and one inside the compound. We saw exactly where it came from, which put us in a good spot. Did you see where it came from? Yes, we did. We gave him the coordinates exactly where it was, probably about ten, fifteen minutes later. Blew the hell out of that place. It wasn't that far out. Probably no less than a mile. Less than half a mile or somewhere out there. We had a perimeter, probably—I can't show you from here—but I'd say a quarter of a mile. Open fields, brush, but open

fields, then it would get wooded. It was in the wooded area, so it was a ways back. We saw exactly where it came from. Nothing got hurt. I mean, it landed in some empty space in the compound. The other time, we didn't see it. What was scary is that the shell comes right by the compound going in, and it's almost like it was whistling. You could hear it, but it was a dud. And it landed forty, fifty feet from where the tower was. But it didn't go off. The other two went off, but they were outside the compound. Other than that, we never got shot at the compound. We were never under heavy artillery fire at the base. It was pretty safe there. There was a large offensive at Xuân Lộc, probably less than thirty days before we got there, which a lot of Vietnamese got killed and a few American soldiers, hundreds of them. From what I hear, they tried to overtake the compound, but they got wiped out. They left us alone after that, The North Vietnamese, we didn't get bothered too much there.

**WC:** Did you get into Saigon at all?

**ND:** Yes, we did. We got into Saigon several times. Weekends, sometimes. Not for R and R. It wasn't that far away. We'd stay overnight once in a while, just for a good time, and come back. We were right next to a strip, I guess you'd call it, the Houses, the bar houses. It was right close to the compound. It was hard not to go out and visit them once in a while.

**WC:** What did you do on your time off?

**ND:** Played cards a lot. They didn't have a swimming pool there. I'd go out and visit the village. I liked the local people. They had never seen anybody with blonde hair before. I was blonde, a towhead. They were amazed. You'd have kids following you. I'd walk down the streets and it wasn't against regulation but we weren't supposed to go off, just the main rows. We'd become friends with some of the people because their daughters would clean our bunks and do all this stuff for us. We'd go and visit them. Nice to meet you, Mrs. Siam and we would go off the Strip. In my spare time, I kind of fraternized with the locals there. Visit the families, have dinner with them sometimes, and enjoy the company. And I like that. It was the first time for me, other than being in Germany when I was with my family, that I get a different culture.

**WC:** Did you ever run across any people that you remembered or knew from growing up, being on military bases?

**ND:** I did. Funny you mentioned that, I met my uncle in one of the stores right on the Strip in Xuân Lộc one time. He was a chaplain, a Father Bernard. He's my uncle from my mother's side. We're going down the Strip, visiting the local bars or something on our day off or something. And I walked into one place, and it was Mama Siam. It was somebody we knew. And there's my uncle sitting there having a beer. Father Bernard, what are you doing here? Nick, is that you? There he is right there. I said, yeah. We got to know each other, but he was only there for a couple days and doing something, and he was transferred out doing something else. I met my uncle there.

**WC:** Small world.

**ND:** Yes, real small world. My father, when he was in Germany in World War II, had the

same experience with his brother. They were all sent over separately, but they were doing some offensive. Whatever they were doing over in Germany at the time. Kind of like what Joe was talking about. There's his brother. He goes into some village and there's his brother right there at some place and says, hey, Bill, how you doing? Nick?—My Dad's name is Nick—How you doing? He met his brother over there one time. But that was about the only time.

**WC:** Now, did you take an R and R when you were over in Vietnam?

**ND:** I extended duty, so I did have two rs. I went to Sydney, Australia the first time. Love Sydney, Australia. I like that very much. They think Americans have an accent over there. That was interesting. We talked with the accent. And the second time, Singapore. Both of them were good experiences. Nice to get away, nice to have the time to do it. I took it with my buddy Jerry both times. We were pretty much inseparable. You always have—I don't know always but—there's always somebody that we got close to. Jerry and I were in the same unit, and we always hung out together. We had our R and R's together.

**WC:** Did you see any USO shows when you were in Vietnam or—

**ND:** No USO shows. I don't think we had down in that area that I can remember. No, didn't see a USO show.

**WC:** And where you were based, did you have a mess hall or did you eat C rations?

**ND:** We had a mess hall. We had pretty much basic amenities. No swimming pools, but we had the mess hall. We had a game room. Officers had their place, enlisted men had their place. It was pretty easy. It was hot, it was rainy. When we'd go out on maneuvers, sometimes it would be for three, four days. There was one time we went out, it was almost like a week long, but it was a maneuver that we set it up. And then with the Australians—I don't know how they got involved in it—but the Australians were there, and probably the second day they all came in. We had from that post, we went out and did other surveying units to set up for other battalions and we'd always come back to that base. It rained, it got muddy. We all got stuck in the mud. Tractors with big tanks getting stuck in the mud. That was nasty. Of course you get muddy. You just, you almost live with the mud for a couple days at a time. Feet never dry out.

**WC:** And how are your officers and NCOs?

**ND:** Never a problem. Never a problem. They treated us pretty good. If we didn't raise any ruckus, they were not down on us or did anything. They gave us pretty much leeway. You get beer pretty cheap, so we always had that available. But we never caused any problems. No drinking after hours, none of this stuff there. We'd have night duty. Pretty much like a camp. But they were good. It was Sergeant Westcott, he was our leader. He was a sergeant, big guy. He'd always go out with us.

**WC:** Now, you also mentioned that you extended. Was there any reason you extended?

**ND:** I wasn't in danger. I didn't not like the duty. The duty actually was extra pay. You get combat pay. And enjoyable at times, because like I said, we didn't always go out and we stayed home. And it was easy duty, I thought. I extended and thought, well, combat

pay, it's extra pay. I couldn't do it for another six months and it was only another six months then.

**WC:** I know some guys extended to get an early out, primarily.

**ND:** Yeah, we could have. My time wasn't ready yet. It was only my year and a half there or two years. So I'd have to have extended twice again to have the early outs. But I still got early outs. When I did come back From Vietnam, I went to Fort Lewis, Washington.

**WC:** When did you come back from Vietnam? Sometime in 1970?

**ND:** Yeah, December '71? December '70? Somewhere around there. Because I think I got out in December of '71 with ninety days early out from doing that.

**WC:** And when you came back to the States, did you go home on leave?

**ND:** No, I went to San Francisco, because that wasn't that far. I went to San Francisco for a couple days, like three, four days.

**WC:** Did you run into any problems at the airport with any anti war demonstrations?

**ND:** It never happened to me. I did not see the anti war demonstrations, people not liking the military. Either I was spared or it never happened.

**WC:** All right. So you were stationed at Fort Lewis?

**ND:** Yeah, Fort Lewis, I think for the last six months. So it had to have been around June or so when I came back.

**WC:** What was life like for Fort Lewis?

**ND:** Boring. Pretty much boring. We didn't have much to do. I'd go down to town every weekend or something like that there. I remember mostly guard duty and classes, so there wasn't a lot there. I don't remember too much of Fort Lewis, Washington. I do remember that I'd write to Mom and Dad, saying that I'm bored. I'm not going to stay in. They want you to stay in. But I wasn't military oriented by then. I just kind of wanted to get out. So I just waited my time to get out.

**WC:** Once you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

**ND:** A little bit. I went back to two years of school and they helped me with that there. But that was after three or four years. I got my dental work done within the first year after I got out and that was great for me. The GI Bill took care of that. I didn't have to pay a thing for that there. Doctor in Denver, Colorado. I hitchhiked from Fort Lewis to Denver, Colorado. Well, I went back to San Francisco and then I went to Denver, Colorado and the doctor did just about everything I needed. And then once I hitchhiked back, I went and met with Jerry again. Jerry Hogard, my buddy. He lived in Norfolk, Virginia and we hung around together, worked for about six months together, went down to Florida, had some fun together and I ended up in Boston. And that's when I used my GI Bill for another two years of school.

**WC:** Okay. Did you join any veterans organizations at all?

**ND:** Not then, I didn't join the American league until about ten years ago. Until I was

here in Whitehall, New York. I didn't join, no. Once I was out, I kind of just left it, let it go.

**WC:** Okay. How do you think your time in the service changed or affected your life?

**ND:** It's hard to say, everything you do is going to take you on a different road. If I hadn't gone into service, I don't know what I'd done. What I do know this, once I was in the service, it wasn't Mom and Dad around all the time. I had the freedom to kind of do whatever I wanted. So, with good upbringing, keep your ethics in, you know, don't do this, you should do this. It was different. It was basically getting away from home because I really hadn't been away from home until I went in service. That was my first time I was totally away from Mom, Dad. When I went to college a year after I got out of high school, I commuted from Chicago to where we lived. Rockford I think it was. So I really wasn't away from Mom and Dad then. Basic thing, when I went in the service, I could do whatever I wanted. Didn't have to go to church on Sunday, didn't have to, but would I? Sure [Laughs]. That's where the good upbringing or whatever you do, that came into a lot of play. That's biggest thing that I noticed. After that it was pretty much the same because I grew up in the military, like I said.

**WC:** And how did you end up in Whitehall?

**ND:** I was married at the time, twenty years ago, 1987 is when I got to Whitehall, New York. She wanted to be a farmer. In Whitehall, there was a farm available right next to Carol Senical [unclear]. It was the Christensens, leased with the option to buy a lot cheaper than it was over in Vermont, which is where we were living at the time. So we sold the house over in Vermont. She wanted to be a farmer. She wanted to milk cows. And I said, well, okay, if that's what you want to do. Again, she pretty much says, well, if you don't do it, we'll never know. You're right. So we tried it. I'm not a farmer. It didn't work out for me. Six months later she split. She took off and I stayed around. I stayed on the farm that the Christensens had at the time. They went back to milk and cows for another few years with other hired hands and I stayed there. I got odd jobs and I've been at that farm ever since. Eventually, they moved to Las Vegas and sold the farm to me.

**WC:** Oh, so you own a farm?

**ND:** So in that I bought the farm [laughs].

**WC:** Now how did you get in the antique business?

**ND:** The antique business just came as something to do. I liked it because when I was living over in Vermont, we needed stuff. I was low income, she worked a part time job and auctions were a place you could go. You could buy a whole table. I just wanted a toaster. But you'd have to buy everything off the table to get the toaster. So I'd have a yard sale at the weekend to get rid of the stuff. Heck, I was making more money at the yard sales than I was at my job. So I'd have weekend yard sales on Route 5, which is where we lived. Nice trafficked road. Well, trafficked road for tourism over in Vermont, right along the Connecticut River. So we had a nice place there. It was a good location for yard sales. And eventually I was doing good at the yard sales, buying the stuff, going to auctions. And it's habit forming. It fit in with what I like doing. And when I lost the

wife and the kids over here and they moved away, looking for something to do. I like auctions. Maybe I'll become an auctioneer. And there was a class in Springfield. Douglas Auctions, has a class twice a year that you could become an auctioneer. So I went down there. It was a ten day thing. And actually I didn't have to because in New York you don't need a license to be an auctioneer, just become an auctioneer. You can stand up on a podium, anybody can sell if they want. So that's what started it. I started that, the first one was 1990, January 6th or something like that. And the Christensens were wonderful to me because I wasn't doing too well at the time. And I don't think I could pay them too much at the time. They said, it's okay, when you start doing better, you'll be able to pay us. So I am very fortunate. They were like my second parents to me. So I stayed here ever since. And the business has done pretty well so far.

**WC:** Good.

**ND:** But it's because. Good upbringing. Dad and all, being a military man, I kind of knew there are certain things you just have to do, take orders. So the army was easy after that. Life's been pretty good. Ups and downs.

**WC:** Okay. Anything else you'd like to touch on that maybe we missed?

**ND:** No, I brought some pictures. I brought a photo album. Hold on, let me see. [Shows Photos] That's the husky pom pom. That's the compound. It's not much, but. That's Jerry, my best buddy. Jerry ended up committing suicide after he got out of the service. He couldn't handle civilian life. In the army you could get away with a lot. Over in Vietnam, you could do things. They wouldn't say anything. It was easy. So he was a pretty wild guy. He was wild, which is why I liked him. I was real tame, so I could go with him and do wild things. We hung around together. He was my—.

**WC:** And that's you?

**ND:** That's me. Yeah, that's me. And that's the compound that we did real well with. That's my sergeant. That's Sergeant Westcott. That's our crew. I don't remember most of the names of the people there. Basically where we live. That's Ray Okamoto. I remember Ray. We went to Saigon a lot together.

**ND:** That's Sergeant Westcott. And that's our crew. That's where we're learning the theodolite. That's Ray Akamoto. Basically, that's where we stayed most of the time. We built bunkers. They had the perimeter around Husky Compound. We had bunkers, and when we had incoming we'd all go there and we shoot M61s out. Those are the girls, that was one of the girls that we had clean the rooms. Not too much. Those are the girls. I took a lot of pictures, they were cute. Vietnamese were real cute girls. But those were all the other girls that were cleaning her. But you can see I had blonde hair. And they had never seen it before. It's kind of like Bill Cosby when they were in that movie. Those are more of the girls. That was the compound. Those are the guys. That's the guns we had. That's Ray. That's one of the bunkers that we were in. That was Swanlock there, and that was the villages. I loved going to the villages outside the villages and just looking around the countryside. And we'd get in a jeep and just travel sometimes. But they were

wonderful people. Nice people there. We were sent out sometimes to set up a battalion or set up a surveying unit for the artillery to come in. We'd always go to the village afterwards. This is probably one of the ladies back then. We'd just go and visit the village, basically, what their villages were like. They weren't much, like little shanty houses. That's the shop. That's the owner of the shop where I met my uncle. I don't remember her name. But my uncle was in that, just sitting in that chair, right where he was. And that's where I saw him one day. She was real wonderful. We were out. There's one story. We were out visiting her place, and it was in the evening. We weren't supposed to be out that late, but the North Vietnamese were coming around. In other words, there was trouble brewing. We didn't know. She hid us under the floor while they came in her shop looking for Americans. So there was a floorboard. So we hid under the floor for about a couple hours. They left because they knew that she would always have Americans in the store. So, two hours under the floor. I was happy to get out and went back to the compound. Money [Shows money], anyway. Most of these are just people, places that I would always go and see. Just lots of places. There's me and Jerry again, not the best officials [Laughs]. We had a long convoy. As they all came by, this guy was doing a short time left, a couple days left. But every time the chain came by, we'd take a picture of them. I don't remember half these guys. I don't know whatever happened to them. More of the same thing. Compounds, shooting the guns. Well, that you can kind of see. That was just about how muddy it would get sometimes. That was one of those times where it just rained all night. You could see it coming and it would just pour for hours, and then it would stop. But in that pour, you'd have three, four inches of rain, it seemed like. And everything would just get muddy. I don't know if these are some of the them, but just. That was one of the places that we went. That's where we stayed for about that week that one time, with the Australians. Bombed the place that we went over on our way there. Don't remember half of these.

**WC:** See that Chinook helicopter there? That's what I was on.

**ND:** You were the on the banana helicopters, we called them. You a pilot?

**WC:** No, flight engineer.

**ND:** Oh, okay. Where's that picture? I might have it. There, you're probably in that one right there, Wayne [Shows picture of Chinook helicopter]. There you are. See? [Shows picture of person]

**WC:** Oh, Captain America helmet.

**ND:** Yeah, yeah. Dexter, Dexter. I remember Dexter.

**ND:** It's funny, I haven't looked at this other than, like, today and before I came over here for fifteen years. I don't remember this year. Oh, that's my trip to Australia, but that's getting personal. Sydney, Australia, that was a good place there. I've always liked traveling in that sense. I've always enjoyed the travel. I like the experience of Vietnam just for the culture alone, it did not seem dangerous to me. Getting shot at was just part of the, you know, what you did, and we didn't get shot at. Like I said, a couple times. Scares the bejesus out of you when it happens but the adrenaline catches you and then you get over it after a while. Then the next day it's all the same again and then it gets boring

because nothing happens, and you want something to happen in a way just because it's hot, there's nothing to do. Fill more sandbags, go to the same house you were the day before.

**WC:** Now, what rank were you when you were discharged? Do you recall?

**ND:** Spec 4. I went up to Spec 5, but I lost that and I went back down to Spec 4.

**WC:** Okay, well, thank you so much for your interview.

**ND:** Pleasure. Pleasure. Thank you, Wayne.