



Robert Adams  
Salt Lake City, Utah

**Interviewer**

Robert, we're glad to have you're here. Give us the correct spelling of your name.

**Robert Adams**

R-o-b-e-r-t A-d-a-m-s.

**Interviewer**

And the years that you served in Vietnam?

**Robert Adams**

Well, I served in the military from July 1968 until '72. I was in Vietnam 1970, basically.

**Interviewer**

What was your rank when you left the service?

**Robert Adams**

E5.

**Interviewer**

You were in the Army?

**Robert Adams**

Air Force.

**Interviewer**

And hometown?

**Robert Adams**

Salt Lake City.

**Interviewer**

What I'd like to do is take you back when you were signed up or drafted, how you got into the service, and tell us about that.

**Robert Adams**

Okay. Well, I was born and raised in Salt Lake City. I went to Granite High – or the former Granite High – and I graduated in '67. A friend and I were going to join the Navy, but then we were kind of holding off, but I didn't want to start college because I knew the draft was on, and I was ready to go into the military. I joined the Air Force, which was a four year commitment because I thought that'd be a good way to go to Europe. And then, rather than go to Europe, I went to the island of Guam and then Vietnam, and then I served a short while after Vietnam in California. I was not drafted. I had a draft number in the Selective Service, but I came from, I guess, a bit of a patriotic family, and at the time I felt a commitment that I wanted to pursue and handle it. I think it did me some good, some growing up. I kind of wanted to get out from all of the mountains. I love the mountains but get out of the valley, and I was able to see different parts of the world that I would've never possibly at that time been able to see – came from a very conservative family where there wasn't a lot of travel. So I joined in July of '68 and went to San Antonio, Texas in July for basic training, and that's when I started learning a little bit more about geography and weather other than Salt Lake City. I don't know if you've been to San Antonio in July, but that's an awakening.

## **Interviewer**

Did you have any thoughts about going to Vietnam or the Vietnam War itself at that time?

### **Robert Adams**

Oh, yes, I did. I mean it wasn't like I was ready to say, "Oh, here. I volunteer for Vietnam," but I knew that the Vietnam Conflict was on. I know that again, I think as a young person I felt the commitment; this is what we're into, and I was prepared to serve. I wanted to go in the Air Force, too, because I wanted to receive some training, and it felt like at the time it appeared to be the best opportunity. I'll jump ahead to that first day. I was in a temporary billet just, you know, sleeping that first night, and then you get assigned to where you're going, and I thought back as I could hear mortars, gunfire, a lot of action going on, I thought back being in high school, and you studied what went on in Vietnam; you heard of somebody getting injured, and then once I heard it, I said, "Gee, it really is real," and sometimes that's the difficulty. When you're in high school, it's real only through fourth period, but I guess it was a stark reality at that point. But I saw a lot about – obviously, I think maybe I saw a lot about Vietnam being on Guam because being in the Air Force, and then I was a load master and handled what they called the medevac.

And I would say the most vivid, difficult memory is C141s or 130s will leave Vietnam taking injured soldiers, and they will go either to stop at Guam and be offloaded and then travel on to Hawaii, ultimately to get to Scott Air Force Base in Chicago, and it just depended upon the severity of their injury. But I remember one time, a guy about my age, about 19, 20, he said, "Would you check the foot of my bed for my diddy bag?" Your diddy bag is you carry all of your personal items, and I said, "I don't want to lift that sheet." But I helped him, and his legs were missing, and to this day I wonder. I don't know who he was; I don't know his name; I wouldn't recognize him, but that's when it hit me again. This is real, and I think that was difficult for a young person to face.

## **Interviewer**

This is when you were on Guam?

### **Robert Adams**

That's when I was on Guam before I went to Vietnam. I was stationed on Guam for 18 months and then went directly to Vietnam from Guam. Not exactly Europe.

## **Interviewer**

Tell us a little about Guam in the late '60s.

### **Robert Adams**

Guam was an island about 30 miles long and four to eight miles wide, depending on which area you were in but at the very widest eight miles. The very tip of Guam is Anderson Air Force Base, and the end of the island is the runway. B52s would take off fully loaded from Guam going to Vietnam. F4 Phantoms would be stationed on Guam, so without really being there we saw – and I was working on the flight line, so saw a lot – saw a couple B52s. They can't abort. Once they take off, they'd go in the ocean, so it was very active. We were working 12 hours a day, seven days a week because in '68 it was a very active period, but you didn't really discuss what was going on, things like that. But on the island, there's an Air Force base, two Navy bases and a Marine base, so it was quite active with just military. Very hot, very humid, and it's about 50 miles from the equator.

## **Interviewer**

Did you have air conditioning where you slept?

### **Robert Adams**

Not really, no. They were trying to install air conditioning when we were there, and that took some time, so there was a brief period where we did but not really.

## **Interviewer**

How long is the flight from Guam to Vietnam?

### **Robert Adams**

About four hours, if I remember correctly. It's a straight flight over the ocean.

## **Interviewer**

What did you do for liberty? Did you have any time off there?

### **Robert Adams**

Well, there were a couple beaches. I did some snorkeling, and I actually took some university classes that were extension classes. I played some golf; there was a golf course on the base, but working seven days a week, 12 hours a day. I was able to go over to a couple other – I visited some islands, Yap. We flew the second DC6 to ever land on Yap, and it was still very, very primitive. There were people living in homes that were up on stilts for the ocean, and part of their, I guess the side of their building, would be old World War II Japanese and American planes, wings, things like that. Now, today, 35 years later, I understand it's a tourist attraction, but at that time, there was no currency. We took the first lumber in so they could build an infirmary there. Navy Seabees did that. So I visited quite a few islands when I was able to take a day off here and there because being in flight, cargo, I could get on different planes.

**Interviewer**

Tell us when you got your orders to go to Vietnam, and did you have any time off in between? Did you stay right in Guam and then go over?

**Robert Adams**

No, I had 30 days leave, well, about 20 days leave and about seven to ten days at Travis for orientation and some more training, things like that, but I went back to Salt Lake. I had a girlfriend in Salt Lake, but it's kind of difficult. When you go on leave, everybody is pretty much involved in their own activities, and you have time off. They're going to school, they're working. And you get a few comments, "Oh, that's too bad you had to go in the military," where in a way I was kind of proud of it, so you almost feel like you're interrupting other people's flow. But yeah, I had about 20 days in Salt Lake and then about ten days in Travis where I was supposed to train.

**Interviewer**

Did you go from Travis directly to Vietnam, or did you stop at Guam on the way?

**Robert Adams**

You have to make a couple stops. Yeah, we stopped in Hawaii briefly and stopped on Guam, and I remember you take things lightly so that it can be handled. When we were on Guam, we used to have a little inside – I don't want to say joke because I don't want to say lightly – but we would count passengers getting off the plane, and about every tenth one isn't going to come back, and so I remember yelling down to them, "Don't count me," because I knew the guys on Guam when I was going over. But yeah, I stopped on Guam long enough to refuel, and we didn't stay over or anything and then went directly from Guam to Da Nang, and then from Da Nang I was flown over to Phu Cat Air Base.

**Interviewer**

Tell us, when you had your orders, you knew you were going into Phu Cat Air Base right then or? What specifically did you do?

**Robert Adams**

I was – it's kind of funny because when you go in at that time they ask what different things you want to do, and I listed quite a few different ones, but, you know, with the war they say, "That's fine. Here's what you're going to do," and the actual term was Military Airlift Command – which I think they've changed that – and I handled cargo aboard C130s, C141s. I did some work as a load master where I'd fly on the planes, basically responsible for the cargo, so we basically would transport everything that needed to be transported, and I wasn't directly involved in this part, but there was passenger service, too, so we'd be in charge of handling the passengers. As a load master, I'd fly on the planes and go different places, but that was just a short while, and once I got to Guam they didn't have as much need for load masters. And truth be told, I was a little bit color weak, and so I had to pull back from that. But in Vietnam, I had no idea what I'd be doing. I mean, I knew that it would be involving cargo planes, but I wasn't sure, and actually I was originally stationed at Da Nang, and as soon as I got to Da Nang, they said, "We need you at Phu Cat Air Base," which truth to be told is like going from a slum saying, "We'd rather you work at the country club," so it was a good base.

**Interviewer**

Da Nang was a slum?

**Robert Adams**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

Phu Cat was the country club?

**Robert Adams**

A bit, yeah.

**Interviewer**

Where was Phu Cat Air Base?

**Robert Adams**

It would be just south of Da Nang near Pleiku. I could show you on the map. It was rather close to the coast not too far from Hue Phu Bai. I'm trying to think of the other base that was right there on the coast.

**Interviewer**

Tell us when you got to Phu Cat what your duties were and what it was like.

**Robert Adams**

When I got to Phu Cat, they would assign you either to work on the flight line, loading, unloading, and as it turned out – I would say this was rather fortunate – they said, "Can you type?" and in the ninth grade I took a type class to meet girls, and I said, "Yes, I can." But they had me actually handling what they called traffic analysis for about seven – oh, I did work on planes, but then about seven months – so it was a small base. I was right on the flight line, but I would be similar to ground traffic control, but I'd keep track of what planes came in and what planes left

and what were on the planes, so I was still doing work on a lot of C130s.

**Interviewer**

They were carrying cargo, ammunition, supplies?

**Robert Adams**

Cargo, jeeps, bodies – dead and alive – everything that you needed to get in and out.

**Interviewer**

And did you ever have any contact at that air base with the Vietnamese Army or the South Vietnamese that were the Viet Kong?

**Robert Adams**

Yeah, over there we'd have a lot of rocket attacks, and it seemed primitive how they would do it, but they were fairly accurate. The main area they'd want to shoot for is the flight line because if you can take out the flight line, you've taken out a major artery, and I've worked right on the flight line, but I'd have to go to Qui Nhon – that's the name I was thinking of – An Khe, by jeep, and I'm not going to say that I was personally involved in firepower, but, yeah, I saw some things there that's a little difficult. We had a lot of snipers right on the base, so your base is here. Your perimeter's right there. But we were fortunate. We had, at that time, a South Korean division on our base, and Vietnamese were very afraid of the South Koreans at that time because they knew that they took on wars not lightly. I mean, we did, too, but the Koreans, they wouldn't take prisoners, let's put it that way. So they were hesitant to attack anything that had the Koreans because they knew that there would be retribution.

**Interviewer**

Did you have any life-threatening or dangerous situations while you were at that air base?

**Robert Adams**

Yeah, I went to Hue Phu Bai to visit a friend that we knew each other on Guam, Andy Simon, and I'd been in quite a few rocket attacks, but over there mortar attacks – rockets, they'll shoot from afar. But mortars, you're basically lobbing them in, and so there I was just visiting him, and we were involved in about a 24-hour rocket attack. I remember saying, "That's the last time I'll come visit you," but that one was a little bit nerve-racking.

**Interviewer**

Tell us what it's like when you hear a rocket coming in versus a mortar.

**Robert Adams**

It's kind of hard to remember, but a rocket, they'll shoot one or two, and then you know it's about over. But mortars, it's difficult to explain. It's not as loud of a sound, but it's much more constant.

**Interviewer**

And you can tell whether you've got mortars coming or rockets coming?

**Robert Adams**

Oh, yeah.

**Interviewer**

What was their accuracy like? Did they shoot at random so they may hit a barracks, or did they know what they were going for?

**Robert Adams**

They knew what they were going for. You'd basically set up a rocket, you know, like almost a V with a couple of – for the lack of a better term I'll say sticks, but – and they would shoot that, and it had pretty good accuracy. Mortars are basically lobbing them in. I'm going to go back and say something. When I said the South Koreans were very effective, I wasn't saying anything disparaging about the 173rd Airborne Army. They were there, too, and they were very effective. But it was just kind of interesting the way they had a fear factor with the South Koreans – that's what I meant. So, and then you'd hear a lot of – and I wasn't directly involved in gunfire – but just right outside the base there'd be a lot of gunfire. And we would take it lightly. They'd go by, "Take cover." We'd go, "Yeah, we're good."

**Interviewer**

You didn't duck under decks or?

**Robert Adams**

For mortars you would.

**Interviewer**

Sandbags or anything like that, huh?

**Robert Adams**

There was an old term that I asked somebody when I first got to Da Nang. "Well, if we get a mortar attack, what should I do?" And he said, "Well, how long do you have to go?" And I said, "Well, I just got here," and he said, "Do nothing." He said, "When you have less than six months, take cover."

**Interviewer**

Did you have any friends that got injured or killed?

**Robert Adams**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

I guess that was pretty hard for you.

**Robert Adams**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

After you left that air base – you were there for seven months?

**Robert Adams**

I was there for a year.

**Interviewer**

A year?

**Robert Adams**

Mm-hmm, full year.

**Interviewer**

And so you did your entire time at that base?

**Robert Adams**

At Phu Cat, yeah. I did move around temporarily to a few little bases just doing a little bit of work but mainly at Phu Cat, yes.

**Interviewer**

What were your accommodations like there?

**Robert Adams**

They would have barracks that were basically just a long row of barracks, and then you would commandeer plywood from different areas, and you'd section off the certain area. When I got there, somebody had just left. This guy said, "Hey, do you want to bunk here?" And, again, I was fortunate. He turned out to be a bit of a carpenter, and where some of them had just maybe put up sheets, he had, like, a little room almost set up. So he had a locker and a bunk, but he'd taken a lot of time and would get salvage wood and made quite a little room out of it. But there'd be a couple of showers and restroom, one for every barracks.

**Interviewer**

Was there air conditioning there?

**Robert Adams**

There'd be fans, yeah. The food was good. I was fortunate. Being in the Air Force on Guam, the food was lousy, but in Vietnam the food was good. It's like they were trying to take the time to take care of you.

**Interviewer**

Was it safe to go into town on liberty?

**Robert Adams**

No, you didn't, no.

**Interviewer**

You stayed right there?

**Robert Adams**

Yeah. In Saigon – I went to town when I would go to Saigon. At Da Nang I went into town, but at Phu Cat, no, you'd have to stay on the base, unless you'd be in a jeep and you were going with a group to a different base for military purposes. But to just go somewhere like that, no, you couldn't leave the base.

**Interviewer**

What was your most interesting experience and also your most dangerous experience?

**Robert Adams**

I got to remember which one I can tell. I took a civilian one time by helicopter, and I would say that that was his scariest experience. I wasn't the pilot. I got a pilot, but I got him out of the NCO club, and we had to fly him to Cam Rahn Bay. He was a civilian doing some academic work, and I had to escort him to Cam Rahn Bay. But that was a bit of a scary trip, and I'm not a gunner, but I had to kind of jump in and assist on some things. One incident, on the South China Sea, this captain got permission from the mother superior. The nuns had a little area, and I said, "Why do they call this the leper colony? How did it ever get the name?" and they said, "Because they're taking care of lepers," and I thought, "Oh, great. Here I am looking over a beach where it was actual people with –" and I'm not

making light of it, but, "with leprosy," but I thought, "Oh, wouldn't that be something? I go all through Vietnam, and then I get something like that." But there were areas of Vietnam that were absolutely beautiful, yet it was marred. Like Saigon had a lot of beautiful French restaurants surrounded by barbed wire, so you could see a lot of history there. I don't know, probably at Hue Phu Bai was the scariest experience with the mortar attack. It's kind of interesting how you remember good things and kind of draw a blank on the bad things.

**Interviewer**

Hue Phu Bai, that was the incident you spoke of earlier?

**Robert Adams**

Mm-hmm.

**Interviewer**

Did you get discharged right from there?

**Robert Adams**

No, I went back to Travis Air Force Base for a short while, and then I served overseas. I still had about six months to serve, but I got married about a couple months after getting out of Vietnam, and she stayed here in Salt Lake. I was at Travis, but I was just basically using up time. I didn't have enough time, so she wrote a letter to Senator Moss, and Shauna was very effective. She wrote a letter to Senator Moss saying, "Why can't he just get out of the service?" and within 48 hours I was honorably discharged because, I mean, I'd put in pretty good service, few, you know, Air Force commendations, things like that. I got out on basically a Friday and started at the University of Utah on Monday, and that was probably the roughest experience of the whole Vietnam tour.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about it.

**Robert Adams**

It was probably the roughest experience of the whole Vietnam tour because I was like a pinned-up hunting dog. I was working midnights on the railroad, married, starting at the University, and a lot of people were against Vietnam at that time, but that wasn't my fault. I felt like I was doing a commitment, and it's kind of interesting to be in Vietnam and then see somebody wrap themselves in a flag and then stomp on it. I was pretty upset. I can say I was spit on on the campus because somebody would find out. I would keep it as much a secret as I could that I was a veteran. It's not like you have to go announce, but somebody'd mention something. So I'd say that was the most difficult part.

We were not well-received. I'll have to go back – I knew different guys in Vietnam who would say, "Getting killed is not the worry to me right now. The worry is getting killed and having people think that I agree with what's going on here. I don't agree, but I was called to do this." So that was the difficult part, but I pursued. Dr. J. D. Williams took me under his wing. I was an intern for the veterans at the legislature, so I would have to say it turned to a good experience. But you kind of look at World War II or something like that, and you're thinking you have this perception that you're going to be well-received, and people are basically saying, "So you weren't smart enough to get out of the draft? That's too bad." "No, I wasn't drafted. I joined." But it turned into a good experience. It was just that initial trying to get through it.

**Interviewer**

We hadn't heard of a lot of anti-Vietnam War demonstrations here at the University of Utah, but you actually had on-campus somebody spit on you, and you had a couple of other instances where they treated you negatively?

**Robert Adams**

Yeah, there was a bit of a rally, and I didn't like the way the flag was being treated. And I mentioned to somebody that I'm a Vietnam veteran, and I don't appreciate that, and I was told how they felt about that. But it wasn't all the time. I don't want to give the wrong impression. But it wasn't a welcome, let's put it that way. But later on it was. It wasn't everywhere. There was a good feeling once I got into it.

**Interviewer**

How about in later years? Are you proud to say now that you're a Vietnam veteran?

**Robert Adams**

There was a time where I wouldn't admit it, but I'm still proud to say it, yes. I actually got involved in a lot of veteran activities to help other veterans. I spoke with Governor Matheson and, as a volunteer, helped put together the Governor's Commission on Veterans' Issues, which was the first channel of communication, really. I worked with some of the veteran organizations. But I have to give Governor Matheson credit – he said, "Yes, let's do this." It was a volunteer position from the Hinckley Institute through Dr. J. D. Williams. I mentioned this before, but I was selected for university credit – an intern. I was a legislative intern, and then I was actually an intern to work for the Utah Military Affairs Council handling veterans' issues. Started working on the veterans' home, veterans' preference, things like that, so yeah, I did a lot of work for veterans because I was still very proud of it.

**Interviewer**

When you returned, your world was pretty much academic. What were the discussions on-campus about the war?



## **Robert Adams**

Yes, there were. Again, there were discussions where I had some first-hand knowledge, but it was discussions on how disgusting this war is, and I agree it was disgusting, but I was still proud that I made a commitment – that I served. Before we started this interview, I complimented you on having actual Vietnam veterans to come in and speak. And, again, I'm going to say, I was fortunate. I was not like some of the other soldiers that were in foxholes or out on maneuver. I was on a base, but one time I had to attend a lecture at Orson Spencer Hall, and older students kind of gravitate to each other. There was another student who was a Navy Seal, and we were talking. There may be 200 students in there. We had to attend a lecture that somebody had written a book on something about Vietnam. I refused to even read it, but we asked him, "Well, where in Vietnam were you?" And he said, "Well, I interviewed soldiers in Hawaii. I interviewed soldiers in America," and we said, "But where were you in Vietnam?" and the other veteran asked. He had never been to Vietnam, but he was trying to write this authoritative book on what it's like to be in Vietnam. I'll have to say the Navy Seal became extremely agitated, but things calmed down. That was just wrong. So there'd be discussions, and I don't remember all of them. It wasn't like an ongoing thing, but I was kind of also, I guess, maybe it was my fault. I graduated in communications, but I was taking a lot of political science classes, so obviously that would come up. But I wouldn't offer my opinion on every – I was a freshman at 22, so sometimes, "Well, did you go on a Mormon mission?" "No, I was in the military." It's like, "Why are you just now going to school?" So that's one of the reasons it would come up.

## **Interviewer**

What are your thoughts today on the Vietnam War, and would you do it all again?

## **Robert Adams**

Well, there again, probably. It was at the time I was young. It was a commitment that I thought was right. I'd have to say that I have met Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara's son, and I have a high, high regard for President Kennedy and President Kennedy's entire cabinet, which included McNamara. But for him to write a book, which I have not read, but I know the passage where in the book he was saying, "Vietnam was wrong, and we shouldn't have done that –" there's a lot of soldiers on their name on the Vietnam wall whose family didn't like that idea. "Oh, what you did was wrong." That sort of thing still bothers me. People who mistreat the American flag still bothers me, so yeah, I guess I have a, I don't know, patriotic bend. It was a thing that probably helped me, at the time, grow up.

## **Interviewer**

You mentioned that your family was patriotic. Did your father serve?

## **Robert Adams**

My father served in the Navy during World War II. There, again, he was probably one of the older – he was a cook in the Navy, and I had uncles. My brother served in the Navy many years prior to me, so at the time it was just what you did.

## **Interviewer**

Was there some kind of communication stream about what was happening beyond the base?

## **Robert Adams**

Sure, because we would take food, supplies, again, bodies. When I say country club, it's that we had shelter over our head. We had a building where we could eat. I don't want it to sound like it was exotic by any means, but it was a lot better than what they had in Da Nang – let me put it that way. I'm sorry, and I'll answer your question. Somebody, I'm sure, has talked about the tunnels, that they found all types of tunnels where the Vietnamese were coming in at night and stealing tires and stealing all kinds of stuff. There was a very elaborate tunnel system that went from, basically, town, under our base, so you had no idea who was coming in and out. I guess when I say no, I didn't have any guilt feelings at all, we did what we could when different Marines would come in to fly in and out. We understood the conditions they were under, and I guess we felt we were doing a service because we were providing all of the supplies necessary for the effort.

## **Interviewer**

Explain what life was like at Granite High and when you caught wind of the war.

## **Robert Adams**

Well, as a teenager you would – as when I made that reference – I mean, when I was saying in fourth period in social studies you would study it, and then as a senior in high school I remember a couple of older classmates who you'd hear about were injured. But it was a type of thing, "Oh, yeah, but that's not real." I mean you're dealing with what there is in life right now. No, as a family we didn't talk about it, but you'd watch Walter Cronkite, and you'd get reports from there, or you'd read things in the paper, but again it was, "Well, that's way over here, and I'm over here." So I guess I didn't really build a foundation, but I guess I knew it was coming.

## **Interviewer**

And what were you doing in high school? Girlfriend, athletics – what was life like for you?

## **Robert Adams**

Yeah, I had a couple girlfriends in high school. I was on the wrestling team. I think I actually won a match one time. I mean, I was quite small. I wrestled 112. I did a lot of growing physically in the military. I guess that was when my growth spurt. I guess a few political activities but not in a lot of different clubs – I guess just basically have a good time, getting through school. Academic study was not a priority. I started working at a railroad when I was 18-years-old, and I said, "Oh, I'm making good money," and I did that from August '67 until I went into the military, so I was signed up to go to school, but I said, "I'll just work," because I knew it would be interrupted. And I'm the first college graduate in my immediate family, so it wasn't like that, "Okay, that's the priority." I don't know if that answered your question, but...

### **Interviewer**

How about USO shows on your base?

## **Robert Adams**

I met Bob Hope twice. Actually, he'd come through on Guam. I highly, highly commend what Bob Hope. There were some people who would say, "Oh, he's doing it for the money." Bob Hope didn't need the money, but – actually I can't remember her name...I went on the plane. I don't know if I was exactly supposed to, but I let them know that I was. I met a woman from Bountiful, Utah who was with the USO show. They had this girl a few years back – the Gold Diggers – but Bob Hope, they had firepower going in at Camp Eagle. Bob Hope would go into places where he knew there was danger, but he said, "No, I want to go in." That was probably the best thing the USO ever did was the Bob Hope Show. Because you try to forget Christmas, you know. I was bothered by Christmas songs for years because for four Christmases I was out of town, and you didn't want to, you know, you didn't want to be bringing that up. You kind of make light of things, but that was a good experience.

### **Interviewer**

Can you give me more info on the woman from the Gold Diggers?

## **Robert Adams**

I have no idea. No, she wasn't with the Gold Diggers. She was with – I can't remember her name now...I'll say Linda – and you'd always say, "Hey, anyone from Salt Lake," or something like that. She said, "Hey, I'm from Bountiful." I can't remember what she was doing. Yeah, she was singing with a group, but there was a group – it was the old Dean Martin Show days and the Gold Diggers, they were just kind of a singing, dancing group that was very attractive to young military guys. I'm a general standing down on the flight line, but I was saying, "Hey, I'm in charge up here. I've got to get on the airplane," so I went on a few of the planes, too, when they would take off.

### **Interviewer**

Is there anything else about these demonstrations at the university campus that you could tell us about?

## **Robert Adams**

I don't want to overplay that. There were a couple. And it's not like I would go pursue it to cause a problem, but there may be a comment made in class or different. But I'm going to attribute it to students were very young, and maybe some would say I still haven't reached a maturity level, but students were very young, and they were just saying it was wrong. I'm not saying it was right, but I can only think of a couple, but there were a couple times where it bothered me.

### **Interviewer**

You actually saw someone wrap themselves in the American flag and then take it off and stomp on the flag?

## **Robert Adams**

Yeah.

### **Interviewer**

Here at the University of Utah?

## **Robert Adams**

Yeah, and I gave him my opinion of that.

### **Interviewer**

Anything else you want to say that we haven't asked, something that's important to you?

## **Robert Adams**

No, it is kind of interesting, though. Sometimes, I mean, in a way this was a little bit refreshing in some respects. I've had to deal with some issues, but it's kind of odd how it can be 35 years later, and then all of a sudden things start to bother you. I wouldn't talk about anything like that, but sometimes maybe it is good to talk about it. There were a couple of occasions where I wasn't going to come in, and now I feel good about it. I don't know if you need to tape that.

### **Interviewer**

We're glad that you did come in. A lot of Vietnam veterans don't like to talk about things still.



## **Robert Adams**

Well, it was a different type of war. Okay, I'll give one more – just as an incident to that. We had sniper attacks on our base, and we could tell it was a lone person shooting in, and then we had, you know, the military police. It's always an ongoing joke that I had a weapon at one time, but I lost it, so they wouldn't give me another one, so that's just kind of a joke I make about it. But we had somebody go out and capture this sniper, and it was an 11-year-old boy, and that makes it difficult.

So you never really knew who you were fighting. And you don't know what that poor kid was thinking, but he was out there for two and a half days firing on the base like he was in the military, and he wasn't doing it as a joke. He was shooting at people. So that's a different type of war to have to battle. I meet a lot of people from Vietnam now, and I ask where they're from and what's their experience, and there are some Vietnamese and Cambodians and Thai, Laotians who had some very, very difficult experiences. Us in America, we're not the only ones who had difficult experiences. I would say there's people from Laos and different areas, Vietnam and Cambodia, who if you want to talk PTSD or something, I don't know how they're dealing with it. That's all I have.

## **Interviewer**

Are you in touch with South Vietnamese refugees?

## **Robert Adams**

Not really, no. I was involved with an orphanage when I was over there, but I have not had direct – I have met in Seattle with a woman who's putting together a fundraiser to go, and she has supervised trips to go back over and dig up old bombs, old shells that will still go off, you know, farmers or something. I mean, since it is Salt Lake City, I did have one incident where – and I am going back – but they called the barracks to attention, and if a field grade officer or above comes into a building you call it to attention – and field grade would be major or above – and a major and a colonel came into the barracks, and they said, "No, at ease. This isn't official. We're looking for Sergeant Adams." Well, soon as I heard that I started running through my mind, "Oh, what did I do?" Not what did I do, "What I'm getting caught with? What happened?" And they said, "Could we talk to you privately?" And I said, "Sure. Yes, Sir." And they said, "No, no. This is unofficial," and so we sat down, and they said, "We're your home teachers," and I almost said, "No F-way," but I'm glad I didn't, you know. It's like, "Are you serious?" And they would come by once a month.

## **Interviewer**

Serviceman?

## **Robert Adams**

He was the vice wing commander. The base commander called me into the office to want to know, "What's going on? Why are they coming to see you?" and yeah. So everybody would ask me, "What's going on? What happened?" You wouldn't understand. It's a Salt Lake – but going into the military I wasn't an active Mormon, but I think that's the first time I saw it in Salt Lake. You know, I was able to see diversity and going to the military and see what else is out there in the world, but that was just one incident that I recalled, to have a full-bird colonel come into your little bunk, "So, how are you doing?" "Oh, just great. Couldn't be better." Anyway...

## **Interviewer**

He was a full-bird colonel?

## **Robert Adams**

Oh, yeah.

## **Interviewer**

Would you mind giving us a little more detail on some of the buddies that you lost?

## **Robert Adams**

Well, I knew of people. I didn't have, like, a, "This is my close friend right here," but I knew of people who were injured, and I saw it. I knew of people. I had some very close friends. I still talk to one friend every once in a while now. They're all doing well, but I knew of people. But I'll let it go at that. No, it's kind of difficult to recall in a way.

## **Interviewer**

Did you create relationships with any of the South Vietnamese?

## **Robert Adams**

No, but I've talked to many here. Yeah, I made friends with Vietnamese, with the, you know, they would refer to the papa-san or mama-san. I don't know their actual names. But it's not like I could recall them now, but I have spoken – once they know I was in Vietnam I have spoken with different individuals who came here and went through some pretty rough conditions as a refugee, as a boat person or something like that. I think it might've been with my son-in-law, and I'm sorry I go back, but when Senator John Kerry was running for president – I was in California at the time – I was asked, I don't know how – maybe it's because, one, as a Vietnam veteran; two, I owned a suit – but I was asked to give the Pledge of Allegiance before he spoke at San Jose State University.

I was on the podium with Lee Iacocca, who was endorsing the first Democrat he'd ever endorsed. That was quite an honor, but when Senator Kerry came out, he turned around, and he said, "Thanks for serving in Vietnam." Then

he went back to his speech, and when he got through speaking I said, "That's the first time anyone's ever said that," and it's not because he was a senator, a Vietnam veteran. He just openly said, "Hey, thank you." I don't expect everybody walking down the street to say, "Hey, thanks; hey, thanks," but I just remember that. I thought, "Isn't that interesting? That's the first time anyone's ever said that." I don't mean to keep rambling on. It's kind of like things remind you as you go. No, I haven't done specific work with refugees, but I have spoken with many, and I've heard quite a few stories, and I can sort out the stories.

**Interviewer**

Well, thanks, Robert, for coming in. We really appreciate it.