



## **Danny Greathouse**

E4 Specialist

Army

Helicopter Crew Chief

St. George, Utah

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Danny L. Greathouse.

**Interviewer**

Where are you from originally?

## **Danny Greathouse**

I'm originally from San Diego, California.

**Interviewer**

Did you grow up there?

## **Danny Greathouse**

I grew up all over the United States, but San Diego is my hometown. I always went back there.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about your life before you went into the army.

## **Danny Greathouse**

My mom divorced my dad when I was like seven years old. I ended up living with my stepdad who was very abusive. We traveled all over the United States. I went to 55 different schools. Like I said, I ended up being back in San Diego. I joined the Army in Texas, though. That was one of my last stops.

**Interviewer**

How old were you when you joined the Army?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Eighteen.

**Interviewer**

What year was that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

1968.

**Interviewer**

Why did you join the Army?

**Danny Greathouse**

To get away from my stepdad. Uncle Sam kept sending me letters, you know, I'd like to see you. And I didn't want to be in combat so I joined.

**Interviewer**

You did not want to be in combat?

**Danny Greathouse**

I did not want to be in combat. I know it's funny I ended up in combat, but I did not. I went in as a helicopter mechanic.

**Interviewer**

Did you get to choose your profession?

**Danny Greathouse**

Yes, by joining you could. If you qualified and did good on their test, you could choose your profession.

**Interviewer**

So why did you want to be a helicopter mechanic?

**Danny Greathouse**

Because I could stay in the background if I went to Vietnam and I could stay safe. That lasted about three months.

Interviewer

Where did you take your mechanic training?

**Danny Greathouse**

Fort Eustis, Virginia.

**Interviewer**

You were aware what was going on in Vietnam at that time?

**Danny Greathouse**

Oh yes, oh yes. I knew that's where I was going as soon as we were done.

**Interviewer**

1968 was a hot year in the United States.

**Danny Greathouse**

It was. It was time to get out and -- it was a hot year in Vietnam, too, '68.

**Interviewer**

Presidential elections, all those things going on. You were fully aware of those?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Oh yeah. Yes, I was.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about how you arrived at Vietnam.

## **Danny Greathouse**

We left out of San Francisco, Oakland. Actually it was a chartered airline, it wasn't military. I was one of the lucky ones. I got to go on a chartered airline with stewardess and all that. Landed in Saigon at two o'clock in the morning, stepped off the aircraft, it was like 110 degrees and we all just about fainted when we got there.

### **Interviewer**

So it was all dark?

## **Danny Greathouse**

No, it was actually pretty lit up when we got to the compound. It was like daylight there, except it was nighttime and it was two o'clock in the morning.

### **Interviewer**

Why was it lit up?

## **Danny Greathouse**

'Cause of all the lights that were on the compound, so everybody could see where they were going. There was, like, hundreds and hundreds of troops coming in and out all day and all night long. So we didn't want to stumble over each other, so that's why they had it lit up.

So, my name fell right where it was always KP or guard duty, so my first two hours in Vietnam was pulling KP. That was a story in itself because, you know, I'm used to the States KP, you know, we got dishwashers and stuff over there. There you got trashcans with burners in them and that was your sink. And after about two hours he said, "Okay, go lay down." And I'm the type of person then, and still am, afraid if I go to sleep— I'm gonna miss something. So I just laid down and my name was called to get in the truck and go to my unit.

I was assigned to the 101st airborne. I'm not airborne, never jumped out of a perfectly good aircraft, but they were forming an aviation battalion up in Hue in Phu Bai. So the first two weeks in the 101st airborne they put you through what they call P training. They put you in the jungle for two weeks. And you stay in the jungle for two weeks doing their training, so you won't trip over, you know, booby traps and all that.

### **Interviewer**

(inaudible) some of that training?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yeah. Well, they just sent you to the jungle. All I can remember is it rained every day; we ate wet food. They took us through a bunch of courses. It was in a safe sort of safe area. They had it all, you know, a specific area where they trained us.

About every third night we could go back to the barracks and get cleaned up and then we'd go back out again. But I kept telling the sergeant, "I'm not infantry. I'm not airborne, I'm a mechanic. I'm never gonna be in the jungle. Why do I have to do this?" They said, "Because you're in the 101st airborne now, son." So you do what they say.

So after that then they took me up to my unit. No helicopters because it's a fresh unit. There's only like five helicopters and like 30 crew chiefs.

### **Interviewer**

How did you get there, by truck?

## **Danny Greathouse**

We flew from Saigon up to Hue, Phu Bai in a C-130 and then they took us from there to their base in a truck. And then I built barracks for the first two months I was there because we had nowhere to sleep. So they took 30 of us - because they didn't have nothing for us to do. And we worked with the Seabees and built barracks for three months so we wouldn't have to sleep in tents, which was a good deal; I didn't have to do anything, I built barracks all day long. So finally the barracks got done and they got some more ships in and they put me to my assignment, which is the prop shop.

On a CH-47 the props are like 33 feet long. It's one of the worst areas in mechanics that you want to be in because not only do you have to put the props on, but once you put the props on, you have to align them. And the only way to align those things is with the ship running, with a stick with a tape on it and you hold the stick up until it touches the blades and it goes tick, tick, tick, bring it down and see where it hit, and you get up there and realign the blades and do it again. This takes about 3 hours.

A new company come from the States, the C-Company come in. They wanted door gunners. Of course my hand automatically went right up, you know? I'm gung-ho, I want to get out, I'm bored, I want to do something. So I worked my way up from door gunner to crew chief for the rest of the time I was there.

### **Interviewer**

And you joined the Army to --

## **Danny Greathouse**

I know, it's stupid. Yep. I wasn't very smart sometimes. Anyway, if there was a mission to go on, I went on the mission, you know? I wanted the most - well, I showed you the photos of me being a stinger on the rear ramp. If

there was that kind of action, I wanted to be there.

Interviewer

Tell us about your first mission as a door gunner.

**Danny Greathouse**

Well, it was kind of exciting. Kind of scary, because I didn't know where we were going because I didn't know the territory because all the time I'd been there I'd been on the ground. But the most beautiful country you'd ever want to be in, except when they were shooting at you. And that happened quite often, you know. Big Chinook, CH-47, big target. Big target.

**Interviewer**

So describe where you were at in this helicopter.

**Danny Greathouse**

Up in front on the left side there's nothing but windows, but you pop out one and you just set a machine gun on it, and on the right front is a door where you come in and out and we'd mount another there. I would either fly the left or the right door, or what we call the cargo hole. They wanted us all three to know how to do everything.

So we'd lay on our belly in the cargo hole as we were coming up to hook up loads, and guide the pilots in and tell them how far we were. Hook the load up and away we go. Same thing when we come in and drop the loads, we would tell the pilot, "You know, you're so far off the ground," and then we'd tell him he's on the ground and release the loads and we'd go. I'd much rather fly door gun, though. And once in a while we got to fly because if anything would happen to the pilot or co-pilot we would need to know how to fly that ship.

**Interviewer**

Was your first mission fairly uneventful? What's the first time you really came under fire as a door gunner?

**Danny Greathouse**

It was February 6, 1969. In Vietnam and North Vietnam in February and March was really foggy and rainy and cold, believe it or not. It got cold up there. And we were asked to take a load of water up to a firebase that hasn't seen any food or water for two weeks; because it was so foggy nobody could get to them. But they were actually sitting on top of the fog, clear as a bell. But we had to go up through the jungle, up through the fog, and get there. And we were almost to the top and we started receiving fire so we backed back down. It took us three hours to go two miles. That's how bad the fog was.

**Interviewer**

So you're down in the fog?

**Danny Greathouse**

We're in the fog, hanging out the door, leaning out, hanging onto a machine gun, watching for trees.

## **Interviewer**

And you're helping the pilot --

## **Danny Greathouse**

Helping the pilot get up to the top of the hill. About that time we almost got up to the top, like I said, we started receiving fire, so we had to back off and come back up, and take another approach on the other side of the hill. We finally made it up there and dumped that off. And I believe I gave your director the paper. I'm kinda reading it and going by it, but this all happened in the same day.

We got a call to go into a banana field to pick up a bunch of Marines that were under heavy fire, and pick up the wounded and get them out, 'cause they were under heavy fire and they had no other way to get out.

Now, take in mind, a CH-47 is a pretty good-sized helicopter, okay? I always thought it would be easier to send a Huey in to get these guys because it's smaller, but they sent us instead. Well, once we got there I figured out why. Because the banana trees are so tall, a Huey couldn't get in there. But a Chinook, being where the blades sit higher, we could actually get in there. We took out a few banana trees going in, so we landed and we got those. And I got off and I helped the Marines and I brought these, at the time I didn't know what they were because we were in such a hurry, and set these bags on the floor and make sure all the Marines got water and food and all that, and cigarettes and beer if they wanted. I always carried beer. And we took off.

We were still under fire and trying to shoot and, you know, and make sure everybody's okay and we got up and got back where we were safe and I turned around and looked at the floor because I was kind of curious what the bags were and then I seen what they were. They were two body bags and they had two dead Marines in them. And, of course, the body bags always leaked so I had the privilege of cleaning the floor up when we got back. So, that was one of my most scariest days of my life. That one.

## **Interviewer**

Describe the whole scene when you're a door gunner; what you're doing individually.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Well, what you're hearing all the time is the rotors, even though you have a helmet on, you hear the roar of the turbine and the rotors and all that. And like I said, it's beautiful country over there when you're in the air. I wouldn't have traded places with the ground pounders for the world. Because up there it's cooler, it's quieter and you don't see nothing. Until you get down lower and you're going over a river or something, then you hear pop, pop, pop, pop, pop, then you know exactly what that is; it's somebody shooting at you. So you shoot back.

## **Interviewer**

Tell us what you immediately do when you hear that pop.

## **Danny Greathouse**

You just start firing. You look for the tracer as it's coming up to you. Even the enemy, every fifth round is a tracer. You can see that red tracer coming at ya, so you immediately turn around where that tracer's come from and just lay on it until you're out of sight. And you wait for that all day long. Wait for that, wait for that.

Sometimes the pilots, you know, they'd say, "Come up here and fly Greathouse. We're going to take it out over the water." So we'd go out over the water so they could shoot. So we'd be flying as the pilots are back there shooting. So, everyone wanted to shoot. It was an adrenaline rush, you know? I was 18, you know, I didn't have a fear in the world.

### **Interviewer**

How long were you in Vietnam?

## **Danny Greathouse**

I was there 11 and a half months, September 19 to the middle of August.

### **Interviewer**

So after this baptism of fire, tell us about the days that followed.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Heavy drinking. Heavy drinking followed. Still not afraid to go, I wanted to go more. I wanted to shoot more. Like I said, you're 18, 19 years old, you don't have a fear in the world. If they're gonna shoot ya they're gonna shoot ya. You're there to do your duty and I wasn't going to change anything about it. But I just drank more. Heavy drinking.

Interviewer

Was it beer or alcohol?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Beer. Being part of the flight crew, we could get alcohol real easy. Every time we'd go down to Da Nang or somewhere where we could pick up alcohol, we always traded for that.

### **Interviewer**

So you're flying a lot of places?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yep.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about some of the interesting or odd things you were seeing.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Well, we'd come into some villages and stuff, you know, very poor villages. And some of the times we'd have to move a village from one spot to the other. And when we come into the village, nothing but grass huts and stuff, and

the pilot would ask, what are we going to do with the hooches and he says flare out. When he says flare out, I don't know if you've been in a helicopter when it comes down, there's an awful lot of prop wash that comes out of it, so we would come down, flare out and the hooches would go away.

That's how flimsy they were built and we'd get the people - and we'd have to frisk them as they come on because a lot of them would carry hand grenades and stuff and something to blow us up - so we'd have to frisk them. And those who carried those were not allowed on, period. So we'd take the rest of the families and take them where we had to go and drop them off and then go on about the next duty. That was just some of the things. Our main mission was just to haul cargo up underneath a net or haul troops where they needed to go. We could haul 33 fully loaded troops and two jeeps inside the Chinook, plus a load underneath us. It was just day after day after day, there was five or six missions every day.

**Interviewer**

Five or six missions?

**Danny Greathouse**

Yeah, we flew 14 hours a day. Yep. Five o'clock in the morning to sometimes seven o'clock at night. But one of the perks was flying the volunteer missions, we got to fly around the USO shows.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about that.

**Danny Greathouse**

They were nothing major. We didn't get to haul around Bob Hope or anything like that, but there was always a lot of showgirls and, of course, all the show girls wanted to sit next to me so they could see out there.

One story I always tell the kids - we go to schools and teach a little about Vietnam - and this girl wanted to sit next to me so I asked the pilot if he'd fly it out over the ocean. He said, "What for, Dan?" I said, "Please, sir, just fly it out over the ocean." He goes okay. We got out over the ocean, I let loose on my M-60.

Well, this girl didn't tell me she had to go to the bathroom. All over me and everybody else. I pulled KP for two days after that. So I didn't do that again. But that was one of the perks we got for volunteering for the heavy stuff. It was fun.

**Interviewer**

So you're seeing everything from sad, heartbreaking stuff to...

**Danny Greathouse**

...to the fun stuff, yeah. It wasn't a dull moment over there for me.



## **Interviewer**

So you were there for the rainy season?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yes, rain. Cold. Actually we had to look for jackets because it got so cold.

Interviewer

Go into some detail about the rain for someone who's never been in a monsoon.

## **Danny Greathouse**

It would rain so hard you could not see five feet in front of you. In those days we were grounded. Any other time it wasn't raining too hard, we would fly. But sometimes that was nice because it would rain so hard we didn't have to fly. We really didn't have to go anywhere and we could actually sit down and do repairs on the ship that we needed to do or just sit and relax for three or four days before we had to get back at it again. 'Cause, you know, five o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night, those are long days. But in the air, it was nice. On the ground, it was terrible. I hated the ground. Hated the ground.

## **Interviewer**

What were you guys talking about?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Not about the war. We'd talk about family. We'd play cards. The war was the furthest thing. When we got back it's just like going home at night. The job stayed there, but we were at home. Like I said, we talked about family and what we were going to do after the Army and, you know, who would we see. What did you do in Hong Kong on R and R, stuff like that.

## **Interviewer**

Were you aware of the protests back home?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yes. All the time.

## **Interviewer**

Were you guys talking about that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

We tried not to, because we knew what we were going to come back to. We knew we were going to come back to that. But exactly what we were going to come back to, we did not know. You know, were they going to throw stuff at us -- which they did. They spit on us, they threw crap at us and everything else when we came home. But I'd proudly wear my uniform at the airport. I didn't care.

## **Interviewer**

But over there, there were riots going on. You got there in '69?

## **Danny Greathouse**

'68.

### **Interviewer**

So that's the Democrat National Convention going on, riots in the street, Chicago was burning. All these things are going on.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yeah. We didn't really care about that, because we were there to do what we were told to do. If we worried about home so much, we would lose concentration on what we were supposed to be doing and it could cost us our life, you know? So if you weren't on your toes all the time on the ground or in the air, you weren't coming home.

### **Interviewer**

So you were there for Tet?

## **Danny Greathouse**

After Tet. I got there after Tet.

### **Interviewer**

But you were there for Hamburger Hill?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yes.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about Hamburger Hill.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Well, like I said, I was in the air, but I met a couple guys here just recently who actually live in the St. George area that were actually on Hamburger Hill. They were actually infantry on Hamburger Hill. It was chaos from the time we got there until the time we left. There were so many fighters going in and out - the jet fighters dropping Napalm and stuff like that, and so many aircraft that we just barely missed each other all the time in the air.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about the battles that you know and tell us about how critical it was.

## **Danny Greathouse**

You know I don't think anybody actually figured out what Hamburger Hill was all about other than they'd had high ground, we needed it and there was a big company of regulars on top of that and for some reason they wanted that hill. We never could figure out why they wanted that hill. All I know is we lost 56 men and over 200 and some wounded in 14 days.

### **Interviewer**

Whose unit was that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

It was just the 101st. I don't actually know the unit itself, because we were separate from the infantry. The air was completely different. Aviation was completely different than the ground but we had to support each other.

### **Interviewer**

But it was still your unit?

## **Danny Greathouse**

It was still our battalion, yeah. But we never knew anybody personal so that's why it helped us. Like I said, we weren't like the guys on the ground actually seeing your buddy die. I had a few friends of mine die that were in my unit that were actually my bunkmates while we were there. And that hurt.

So I can imagine what they were going through. Because like I said, when we went back we were family. We were all family. And to see our family die, that was hard on us. So I can imagine what the guys on the ground were going through.

### **Interviewer**

You mentioned another big battle...

## **Danny Greathouse**

That was the only big battle. The rest of them were just small stuff, like the banana fields and just going from firebase to fire base in A Shau Valley. There's a lot of fire bases in the A Shau Valley. Anytime you went to any -- whether in the A Shau Valley or Khe Sanh, which was the Marine up there in the area, was always under attack once or twice a day. There was never any peace in that area.

### **Interviewer**

Any really close calls?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Just when we went into Hamburger Hill with our own aircraft almost running into us. We got shot at a few times, put some holes in us, but other than that. Another ship that was up there with us - and I'd always tease the flight engineer about not sitting on anything. I said, "You're gonna get shot in the butt some day," and he did. But we were coming into a friendly area and a mama-san in a rice field peeled out an AK-47 shot up their ship and shot him in the butt and shot it down. The friendlies weren't friendly.

### **Interviewer**

Did you ever watch another ship go down?

## **Danny Greathouse**

No. No. I always was there after or before it did. In fact, two weeks before I was to come home I told them I didn't want to fly anymore because I made it. I was safe. So this other ship was going down south to do something for a couple days, and they wanted to know if I wanted to go. I said, "Sure, let me go get a pack of cigarettes," you know,

get my cigarettes and my beer and I'll be right out. By the time I got out - they didn't want to wait for me, so they left.

An hour later we got a call that they were all killed. An Air Force jet run up through the back of them and killed everybody on board. And I often wonder if I'd have been on that ship, would we have crashed or would I be one of them. So that's what I brought home.

**Interviewer**

So what would the average GI talk about?

**Danny Greathouse**

Girls. Parties. What you did before. How'd you party before, what are you going to do when you go home, how are you going to party when you go home? It was all party. Are you going to get a job when you get home? Are you going to stay in? Are you going to get married? Are you married? How many kids you going to have? Where you going to live? Like I said, when we got back it was just friendly. And it's been so long ago I don't remember half the stuff.

**Interviewer**

You went to some of the big cities in Vietnam?

**Danny Greathouse**

Yes.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about Saigon.

**Danny Greathouse**

Saigon was only on a truck from the airport and I didn't go out.

**Interviewer**

You went to Da Nang?

**Danny Greathouse**

I went to Da Nang and I got to go out and drive around in a jeep in Da Nang and it was just like you see in the movies, you know, the motor scooters and everything like that and all the people running around in their black dresses, the white dresses, you know mama-sans, kids, you know, all that. And they were all friendly during the day, but at night it was a different story. The same mama-san that would come up and give you a hug would kill you at night, you know?

One day we got off and we had mama-sans and papa-sans that would clean our hooches, clean up around the area. And we were walking back to our barracks one night after flying all day and there was an old papa-san between the barracks and we thought he was sick so we reached down to pick him up and he was drawing a map

of our compound. So we took him and we arrested him and took him up to the office and turned him in. He was going to give us a rocket attack that night.

**Interviewer**

So how did you think of the Vietnamese people in general?

**Danny Greathouse**

For the most part, they were nice people. You never knew who you could trust during the day. You never know. I mean they cut our hair, they came in our barracks, they cooked our food.

**Interviewer**

Did your base ever come under fire?

**Danny Greathouse**

All the time. All the time.

**Interviewer**

What's that like?

**Danny Greathouse**

One particular time I was on guard duty guarding where the helicopters sit and I was watching the jets fly over above and all the sudden I thought this one came awful low and I noticed as it went past me it was a rocket. It hit right over by a movie theater. Luckily it missed everybody. You can hear them come in. It's just a whoosh and then a big explosion. You knew right then to take cover. Do something. Don't stand there and watch them like I did.

**Interviewer**

So there's a lot of tension there?

**Danny Greathouse**

Always. Always something going on. Always. Always.

**Interviewer**

How do you live with that tension?

**Danny Greathouse**

I drank a lot. I'm serious. I did. You know, not all of us did, but a lot of us did. 99 percent of us did. Or just went and wrote letters or played pool or went swimming; anything to take our mind off the war.

**Interviewer**

When you hear helicopter blades today, what do you think?

**Danny Greathouse**

Right back to Vietnam. Right back to Vietnam. I can tell one helicopter from another one. When the Chinooks come in here I do my best to get up to the airport. By the time I'm up there, they're gone. They're a unit out of Reno and they come in here once in a while. But I can tell. I automatically go right back to Vietnam. Especially when they come in with their blades a slappin', and I just go automatically back to Vietnam.

## **Interviewer**

How do you feel inside when you hear that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

You know, I don't know how I really feel. Excited? Sad? Don't know, it's just mixed feelings.

## **Interviewer**

I know you didn't talk about the war for a long time.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Not until ten years ago.

## **Interviewer**

Why was that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

I had no reason to talk about it. My wife and I got married as soon as I got back from Vietnam and then the last year and a half I spent at Fort Benning. She knew I was in the Army, obviously. She knew I had something to do with helicopters. But until ten years ago she had no idea what I did in Vietnam. I sat down and finally told her. She respects me now. A little more. She's always respected me and it's always sad to talk about it.

## **Interviewer**

Tell us about being short. Tell us what that means.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Short? You're getting excited to go home. You wonder if you're going to make it. That's why I quit flying two weeks - I still didn't quit flying because I couldn't. I was bored, but I'd just walk around, went to the PX, went swimming. You're just excited to go home and see your parents, your brothers and your sister, your friends. Of course, all my friends were gone by the time I got home. They were either in Vietnam or they got killed in Vietnam or went to Canada. So I didn't have any friends so to speak, but I had family and I went to see my wife-to-be for the first time in 18 years. I hadn't seen her in 18 years, so I went and seen her. Spent most of my time when I got home with her then got married three months later.

## **Interviewer**

Tell us about coming home. How did you arrive home?

## **Danny Greathouse**

We come by commercial airliner again with a stewardess and all that. We stopped in Hawaii.

## **Interviewer**

When you got out of that plane, what happened?

## **Danny Greathouse**

There was complete silence. I mean, nobody spoke a word, nobody. Until that jet hit the end of that runway and we was up in the air and then it was just like party time. I mean everybody cheered and all that and just relieved and

we had a good time all the way home. Talked and talked and talked and talked. But it was complete silence when you get on it. Same thing when you go to land, it's complete silence until you get off.

### **Interviewer**

So tell us about arriving in the United States; what happened?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Well, they made sure at that time, because of all the incidents that were happening, that we didn't arrive in Oakland until late at night. It was always dark. They put us on a bus. All the windows were covered up and they took us over to where we departed. We got our uniforms, got cleaned up, got all our shots and make sure we're not sick or brought back any diseases with us. And then we're free to go. Any way you choose to go. So I took a cab from Oakland to San Francisco airport. It was like two o'clock in the morning. There was a few new recruits going out and very few older guys, 19 years old, coming back. And so I sat in the airport until seven o'clock in the morning. Nobody talked to me, nobody bothered me. I sat all by myself. Very quiet.

### **Interviewer**

Were you in uniform?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Full uniform. I wasn't ashamed of my uniform. I didn't care what anybody said. I never have been. So I got off the airport in Burbank I think it was. My stepdad picked me up. Got a six pack of beer, went home and got drunk. See my mom. My mom didn't know I was coming home. I just talked to my stepdad so it was quite a shock for her. It was fun to see her. Fun to get out of the house again. About two days with my stepdad and it was time to leave again.

### **Interviewer**

You just went right back to civilian life?

### **Danny Greathouse**

No. I had 30 days leave and I went back to Fort Benning. And that was my destination. The 101st was in Fort Benning at the time. It's in Fort Bragg now I think. Anyway, so the aviation command was here in Fort Benning. I got there and there was one helicopter for 300 mechanics. So I drove a deuce and a half for the first three or four months. Then, like I said, I went home and got married then I come back and they needed a driver for the commander of the aviation battalion which was Colonel Rice. I said I'll do that for my last year so I drove for the Colonel in my last year.

Interviewer

It's 1975 and we're watching the fall of Saigon on TV.

### **Danny Greathouse**

It pissed me off.

## **Interviewer**

Tell us about what happened? Tell us about that day and what you felt.

## **Danny Greathouse**

It just pissed me off that we spent all that time over there and we just give up and come home. Wasting our helicopters, throwing them in the ocean, that was just pure bullshit. It really made me mad. And then when they brought all the Vietnamese back over here, when they brought them over a year later or something, that really made me mad.

## **Interviewer**

Why?

## **Danny Greathouse**

We went over there and fought for them and they didn't care. And now they want to come over to our country. But you know what? I met a lot of those people and they're the nicest people you'll ever want to meet. But that made me mad. 'Cause see we were done in '73 and then all of the sudden in '75 we pulled everybody out. And just to give up like that after 58,489 men and women died in Vietnam and 6,000 still missing. There's only like 1,400 still missing now. But all that waste of men and women. To see it just, ah, the hell with it, let's just go home. You know?

Interviewer

When you were there, did you think it would end up like that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

No. No. I figured we'd kick their butt, be done and get out of there. I watched too many war movies when I was a kid. I wanted to be Audie Murphy. I don't think anybody knew it was gonna end like that. We knew it was a long war, it was going to be a long war, but we didn't think it was going to end like that. And I know it pissed everybody off.

You can talk to any Vietnam vet and that pissed them off. Especially after we come home to the way we were treated. No respect. No parades. Baby killer. I never killed any babies while I was there. Drug addicts. I wasn't a drug addict. An alcoholic maybe, but I wasn't a drug addict. The people protesting the war were the drug addicts. I wonder if anybody ever thought about that, all the hippies and everybody. My brother was one of them protesting against us, until I got home and beat the hell out of him.

## **Interviewer**

Were you aware he was doing that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yeah. Yeah. Yep.

## **Interviewer**

Did you have any communication with him?



## **Danny Greathouse**

No. Not until I got home. And he was bigger than me.

### **Interviewer**

Did he say something to you?

## **Danny Greathouse**

He said, "Hi Dan, how you doing?" That was the end of it because I knew what he was doing when I was over there. But he respected me after that.

### **Interviewer**

How did the other guys feel about the protestors?

## **Danny Greathouse**

They were mad at them. They were afraid to come home because of them. But the majority of us would go home, do what we can, take off our uniform and hide.

### **Interviewer**

So you were there in '69?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yeah, came home in August of '69.

### **Interviewer**

July of '69 there was a movement.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yep.

### **Interviewer**

Were you guys aware of that?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yeah, heard that on the radio - the Armed Forces Radio. Yep. We got to see it when we came home, obviously, because they kept playing it over and over again, but yeah, we were aware of it. Anything big like that we were aware of. We were aware of the protests at home, but we kind of ignored the protests. Nothing we could do about it. We couldn't just pack up and go home. We were there to do our duty. The draftees didn't like it, but...

### **Interviewer**

You volunteered?

## **Danny Greathouse**

I volunteered and everybody thought I was nuts. A lot of the draftees at the time that were going through basic training didn't like me, didn't like us that volunteered; but after they figured out why we did it, well, maybe we should have joined too, because most of the draftees were ground pounders. And they were the ones that got killed the most, not the volunteers.

Of course a lot of volunteers volunteered for Green Berets and stuff like that. But a lot of draftees didn't like the volunteers, because they thought we were better than them because we volunteered. But hey, I was a letter away from being a draftee, because they kept sending me letters, "What are you doing Mr. Greathouse? Would you like to come see us?" "No, I don't want to come see you." But finally I did, I went and joined. Because like I said, I didn't want to be in combat. That's why I joined. Plus my stepdad.

### **Danny Greathouse**

I didn't actually see my buddy die. I was supposed to go with him on the aircraft, because I was just going to go down south and play for a couple days, and an hour after they left was when we got the call back at the company that all the crew had been killed. In fact, the door gunner, his name was Danny also. They couldn't find him for two days. He actually crawled off into the jungle and died. They figured he was alive for at least two days, which really amazed me why they didn't go look for him?

I realize the ship was a pile of rubble, burnt, but they found the pilots. They were still in their seats and they found the other two-crew members. And why they couldn't find Danny - his name is Danny Ireland. Why they couldn't find him. Why didn't they search further? He was only 100 feet away from the aircraft. Why didn't they find him? Why didn't I go?

Stacy, who was the flight engineer, I always told him, quit going to sleep in the back of the ship, you're going to get killed some day, because he didn't pay attention. Whether he was paying attention that day or not -- the Air Force pilot, he was at error as far as I know. He flew right through the back of the helicopter, but it could have been avoided if Stacy would have been awake and watching. Because that was one of our jobs to make sure the pilots knew where the jets were and where the air traffic was at the time. So we were safe. Because the pilots are too busy listening to the radios.

### **Interviewer**

There have been a lot of movies based on Vietnam. Tell us what you think about those.

### **Danny Greathouse**

Some of them are okay, but a lot of them put a lot of stuff in them that's not really true. "Hamburger Hill" is almost there, but they put a lot of extra stuff in, but "Hamburger Hill" is probably about the best movie they made about Vietnam as far as I'm concerned.

### **Interviewer**

When you see films like "Apocalypse Now", what do you think?

### **Danny Greathouse**

You know what, there were some crazy people over there in the beginning of the war. I think a lot of that was

dramatic and a lot of it was added to it. As far as going up river like that, yeah, it probably was like that at the river. Because like I said, you don't know who your friends were and as far as getting off those boats in "Apocalypse Now", going in the jungle, there were a lot of tigers and stuff that would eat guys. You're going to meet a guy tomorrow who's going to tell you about the tigers and the stuff that's in the jungle because he was in tanks. He was right down there, so he'll tell you about that.

### **Interviewer**

Is there something we haven't talked about that you want to make sure we covered?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Just don't forget about the guys who were in Vietnam. We were over there to do a job, we weren't potheads, we weren't baby killers. We did our job. We come home to an ungrateful country and still to this day there are a lot of people that don't like Vietnam veterans because of what everybody said about us; we're potheads, we're baby killers, it was a dumb war, we did stupid stuff. We did, as soldiers, what we were told to do.

### **Interviewer**

If you could take some of those people and show them one thing, what would you show them?

### **Danny Greathouse**

That day that I picked up the Marine patrol out of the jungle. Put them in that jungle. Put them in their shoes. Put them through that every day what we went through over there and then come home to what we come home to. And still today there's still a few out there. You get confronted once in a while, even here in St. George.

### **Interviewer**

What do they say?

### **Danny Greathouse**

You guys are full of crap. What do you want recognition now for? What about us, and World War II? I say what about you in World War II? You're the greatest generation as far as I'm concerned. You're my heroes. You guys don't need the recognition you got now. I say why not? I say you guys came home to a hero's welcome, we came home to crap. There's a few still out there. Even some of the younger generation are that way, too. They just don't understand Vietnam. That's why we try to go and educate them.

### **Interviewer**

Do you think you're having an effect by telling your stories?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Yes. Yes. We go to a lot of elementary and middle schools. Yes. And just by talking to the older generation and the people who still complain about us, I think they get a better light after they talk to one of us.

### **Interview**

It's amazing some of those hold grudges?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yes. They're still hanging on, yes. Yes. I can't believe they're still hanging onto them. Give me a break. I'm 62 years old. I don't do that no more. I don't even drink anymore. So give me a break. Respect me for what I did for your country, not for what the country did to us. I just want respect. I'm sure that's all Vietnam vets want is respect. I respect them, the Korean, World War II. I respect all those guys. I know what they went through, I've been there. So give me the same respect.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about your helicopter because people don't understand.

## **Danny Greathouse**

Well, Hamburger Hill, it rained about every day. But it was still clear visibility and I could actually see the hill, but at the time I didn't know what was going on on the hill other than it was a fierce battle and every day that we were there we'd come in. Like I said, there was an awful lot of air traffic coming in and out, bringing supplies in, bringing troops in, bringing troops out. It was every hour on the hour until six, seven o'clock at night. It got dark and it would all settle down and then start all over again five, six o'clock again the next morning. But it was intense air traffic, intense landings, bringing stuff in.

They're bringing the body bags out, bringing the troops, the wounded out, the bringing the troops back in. After about the fourth day I felt bad hauling the troops in there because I was going to come back a couple days later hauling them out in body bags. How do I look these guys in the face that are getting off my ship knowing where I'm going to be that night and I'm going to be safe, if I don't get shot down on the way back. I'm going to be safe back in the rear.

How do I tell these guys, "Hey I'm sorry, it's my job?" When I pick them up, it's a different story because I'm taking them back, unless they're dead. But how do you tell these guys when you're hauling them into an area like this, "Hey it's my job, dude. I've got to do it, I've got to take you there. Sorry. I'll keep you supplied with ammo the best I can, and food." But that was my thought every time I took troops in.

How do they feel about me taking them in? Going back to a nice safe area at night? But I took just as much chance as they did on the ground. Chinook's a big target. One well-placed shot and we're down. We're gone, we're history. We've blew up, you know? That other aircraft that's in front of us could run into us and we're done. We're dead. But it's kind of hard to tell them that when they're down in the midst of it facing the enemy all the time. I see them up in the air, I don't actually see their faces like they did.

### **Interviewer**

Could you see the fighting?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Yes. We couldn't tell who was who but we could see the fighting. We could see the troops going up, we see the troops going down. We see the smoke and the explosions and stuff. But as fast as we get in there, we gotta get out. Get in and get out so the next ship behind us can get in and get out. Get in and get out. Because even though they're shooting at our troops, they're going to take a shot at us. Get in and get out, that was our thing. Unload that load. Hook that load. Get the troops in. At the most we only had two minutes to do all this. That was the most we ever had. But it was getting in and out, getting in and out.

### **Interviewer**

Tell me about being scared. Do you shoot more when you're scared or do you freeze up?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Well, a lot of guys will sit there, you know? But like I said, I was an adrenaline junkie. Anytime I could get to shoot -- if I heard a pop my finger was always on the trigger. I'd let loose. I think the more I was scared the more I'd shoot. Yeah. Yep. Especially when I flew in the back of the ship as a stinger, because I could shoot back there all the time, and I'd just unload. I had six cans of ammo and I unloaded all six cans. So yes, you're scared. My triggers went harder and stayed there until the can was empty.

### **Interviewer**

When you pick up wounded people, what's that like?

## **Danny Greathouse**

I want to help them as much as I can even though they have their own guys here to help them. How much more can I do for him than I've already done by being there and taking him out of there? Do I watch him or do I watch what I'm supposed to be doing? It's just, you want to do more than you do just by picking him up and taking him out. You just want to do more, but you can't. You can only do so much. You have a job to do. Like the pilot has a job to fly the aircraft, you've got a job to protect that pilot from getting run over or getting shot down. You have to do what you have to do, but you still think about him at the same time and thank God it's not you.

### **Interviewer**

I guess the wounded ran the gamut.

## **Danny Greathouse**

It would go, yeah, slightly wounded to heavily wounded or dead. Every day was a different day and every day was a different story. Every day over there was a different experience. There was no two days alike as far as I'm concerned. There was no two days alike.

### **Interviewer**

What did you think of the medics?

## **Danny Greathouse**

My heroes. I've got a couple in my unit here that were medics and they were my heroes. I respect them highly the stuff that they went through. No thought for themselves, just get out there and get them.

### **Interviewer**

Did you ever see any of these medics?

## **Danny Greathouse**

No, only after they got them back on the ship. When the wounded, dead -- they usually would come with them, some of them would.

### **Interviewer**

What would the medics be doing?

## **Danny Greathouse**

Trying to save a man's life. Trying to keep him going.

### **Interviewer**

While you're flying around.

## **Danny Greathouse**

While we're trying to get out of there and get him back to medevac somewhere to where he could get proper help. Not that the medics didn't give proper help, but they needed doctors. As best we could, as fast as we could.

### **Interviewer**

Did the medics have the proper supplies?

## **Danny Greathouse**

They had what they needed at the time. They had more than the medics in World War II because they learned as the years go along. There was a lot of times they didn't have enough morphine and stuff and would run out of bandages. Depends on how heavy a fight the medics were in that day or that week or whatever before you could get the supplies back to them. But as far as I know they had as much as they could have.

### **Interviewer**

I was a soldier too and I know that soldiers complain.

## **Danny Greathouse**

All the time.

### **Interviewer**

What did you complain about? What did your buddies complain about?

## **Danny Greathouse**

The crappy food. The beer was always hot. I'm sorry, that's all I complained about. I didn't have much to complain about. I loved doing what I was doing over there. You know, people thought I was nuts because I loved doing what I did. But I wouldn't trade it for anything else over there. I complained about the food. It was terrible. I ate C-rations

most of the time because I thought they were great. I slept on the ship most of the time. Beer was warm; terrible. And it was hot.

**Interviewer**

Tell us how hot it got.

**Danny Greathouse**

It got 90, 100. Humidity is about the same. Like I said, during the monsoon it got so dang cold, you couldn't stand it. We were looking for jackets. In 60 degree weather, you don't go for jackets. 70 degree weather you were cold, you were freezing to death.

**Interviewer**

Were you listening to music?

**Danny Greathouse**

Oh, all the time. Listening to radios when we were flying. We had our own communication system in the back of the helicopter. The pilots couldn't hear us and we couldn't hear them. We would turn them off or turn them on. A lot of guys listened to music. I did that a couple times but it kind of distracted me from doing what I really needed to do, pay attention to what was going on. Because not only did I have to watch outside, I also had to watch the gauges because sometimes the pilots were too busy, especially when we were coming in somewhere, we had to make sure that the helicopter was running right. So sometimes we'd have to reach up, tap them on the shoulder and say hey, look at the gauges, dude. Low on fuel, dude. You think we should go get some fuel? But I very seldom listen to the radio today. Too noisy.

**Interviewer**

When you were off the plane, what was the kind of music you liked?

**Danny Greathouse**

'50s. '40s and '50s. My mom sang with the big bands and I'd always go watch her sing. She'd always sing with the big band orchestras and stuff. So that's how I grew up, watching her as a little kid. So that was my music.

**Interviewer**

So did you have your own record player?

**Danny Greathouse**

No, I didn't. Everybody else did. I didn't have time for that stuff. I didn't have time to carry it around and stuff. I wasn't back in the barracks that much. I was always flying. By the time I come back I wanted to go to sleep or drink.

**Interviewer**

Tell us about some of your friends and what they meant to you.

**Danny Greathouse**

Well, as a flight crew you're a real close family. You have your flight engineer, your crew chief and your gunner. I

moved from gunner to crew chief. My flight engineer, I called him goody two shoes. He was very religious. He didn't like it because I smoked, I drank, I cussed. But we were very close. Our gunner was the same way. Of course, he drank with me so the flight engineer, he didn't like that, but as far as doing anything for us, oh, absolutely.

The flight crew was in one barracks and then the mechanics were in another barracks. We were a very close-knit barracks. All the ships were very close. That's why it hurt when one of us would die or get hurt or something. We'd have a good time together. We'd joke around at night. I was 5'6, I weighed 110 pounds in Vietnam. My flight engineer, he was a big buff dude always doing chin-ups and stuff.

So I was sitting there drinking, smoking cigarettes, and they were all doing their exercises and stuff. One guy bet my flight engineer that I couldn't do any pull ups or sit ups like that, and I outdid them all. I walked away with 50 bucks that night. I don't know if it's because I was half drunk or just because I was wiry for what I was doing. But we were all real close and we had a good time when we were down and weren't flying. And when we were flying we always watched each other's backs and we tried to protect each other.

### **Danny Greathouse**

As a crew chief mechanic you had to maintain your ship even though you relied on your ground crew to do it. Your ground crew didn't go with you everywhere. I remember this one particular time we were at Khe Sanh, in fact, and the one turbine was running a little rough and the only way to adjust a turbine is to have it running. So we have to lie on top of the ship while it's running with the blades started and tune it in. And I did that a couple times. I had to make sure, don't stand up, wait until the turbines quit and the blades stop because you'd get your head cut off.

So anyway that was a few times. The only thing I regret is that I wasn't a better soldier. Do more, drink less. I wish I had been just a little bit better soldier. I wish I would have went back, to be honest with you, instead of staying in the States here. I should have went back and done another tour. Now people will really think I'm nuts when I say that. But the Stateside duty was terrible. I regret not staying in the Army, but hindsight, you know.

### **Interviewer**

How is your hearing?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Ask my wife. She says I got selective hearing. I do have a little loss of hearing in my left ear more than my right and it's always been like that since I got back. It hasn't really changed that much. But like I said you wear helmets and stuff like that except when you're on the ground and you're trying to do the tune ups and stuff and you're listening for stuff, you sometimes have to take off your helmet to listen to your ship to know what's going on. So I've lost a little, but not much.



## **Interviewer**

What about the smell?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Oh, when an aircraft goes by or I'm up at the airport or something like that, you can smell that JP-4 fuel and it'll bring back memories of refueling the ship. You know, when the turbines start up because you're in the back of the ship if you're flying flight engineer that day, you have to be in the back of the ship when the turbines start up. That smell, that certain smell, and you know exactly what it is when you smell it. It takes me right back to the rear of that ship starting the ship up. It just always stays with you.

And the certain diesel fuel in a truck will bring back my basic training days or riding in the back of the duce and a half because all the exhaust would come right back in your face as you were driving down the road. But there's that certain smell a deuce and a half puts off that no other diesel truck will put off and sometimes I'll smell that and it'll take me right back to basic training. So the smells do stay with you. The sounds stay with you. It all stays with you. It will all trigger something back as you're going through life.

## **Interviewer**

Why such a long silence in talking about your experience in Vietnam?

### **Danny Greathouse**

It's just that I had no reason to talk about Vietnam. I didn't want to talk about Vietnam. If people asked me if I was in Vietnam, I'd say yeah, I was in Vietnam and that was the end of the conversation. I have no idea why I waited so long to talk about it. I lived in San Diego and it's a big military town and everything was about what was going on then, not about what went on before. So I figured okay, I'll just keep my mouth shut, I don't want to stir up any crap from yesteryears or whatever.

But when I came here and 9/11 happened, that brought back everything from Vietnam for me. And I figure well, you know what, maybe it's about time. Maybe it's about time I talk about Vietnam. And it wasn't a week later, I get a call from a guy that's putting on a reunion for the 159th aviation battalion, 101st airborne. I went and that's when I started opening up. But that's the first time in over 30 years that I talked about Vietnam to anybody. I didn't even know where my medals were or anything like that. I got them out; as you can see, I proudly wear them now. I'm proud of what I did. I'm not ashamed of what I did in Vietnam.

## **Interviewer**

Tell us about the reality of when you came home and saw what was on TV versus what you saw there?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Well, I never seen any press the whole time I was there, but when I come home I was watching about how we were killing innocent civilians, and stuff and they were still talking about baby killing. People die in wars; women, children, everybody dies in wars. As far as us killing innocent women and children it's not true; because what they don't show

you is at night when the women and children come in with explosives on them and come walking into your barracks and blow themselves up and kill you and your buddies. They don't show you that in wars. They only show you their side that they want to tell and as far as I'm concerned, they need to tell both sides and let people decide how they feel about a war. But men, women and children die in wars. There's just no getting around it.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about that famous photo you were telling us about.

### **Danny Greathouse**

There's one famous photo that's been around forever about the little girl that got Napalm dropped on her. Everybody knows that pilot didn't drop that Napalm on that village just to kill that little girl or innocent people down there. He had a job to do. He was told what to do and he dropped his load and he went home. It's not something that he probably wants to live with every day and probably something that he has a hard time living with every day. But, once again, women and children die in wars, there's no way to get around it.

### **Interviewer**

So from what you saw in the press versus reality, was it close?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Somewhat, but they need to tell both sides. They need to tell the soldier's side, not just what they want to tell or what they want to show you. You need to talk to the soldiers and let them tell their story and put it on the TV. Put it on air. Put it in the papers. Tell the truth, both sides. Quit fantasizing war. War's not to be fanaticized.

### **Interviewer**

Did it make you angry?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Yes, because they didn't tell our side. How do they know what we went through? I never seen anybody on my helicopter flying with me. Whether they were on the ground or not, I don't know. But I never seen anybody with me.

### **Interviewer**

Meaning the press?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Press. Never sat down beside me and fly in my ship. I never seen anybody. Never seen anybody the whole time I was there. They need to be on the soldier's side.

### **Interviewer**

Do you think they had an influence on that war?

### **Danny Greathouse**

Yes, very much. If politicians had stayed out, we might have won that thing. As it is we didn't lose it. The military didn't lose that war, the politicians did. The U.S. Military has never lost a war. That's history.