David O. Chung

Air Force

Cedar City, Utah

"Escalation"

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

David O. Chung

My name is David O. Chung.

Interviewer

And where are you from originally?

David O. Chung

I am from the south side of Chicago.

Interviewer

And you grew up there?

David O. Chung

I grew up there until I left and joined the military and then I actually started coming back and forth, traveling across country to this area here, Cedar City, St. George. The southwest Utah area has always been a place where I knew I was going to live and settle down since I was in my late teens, early 20's.

Interviewer

So you're ethnic Chinese?

David O. Chung

I'm Chinese, but I have some mixture of stuff. I know I'm mostly Chinese, but my father has some mixtures of other things going on. I'm not quite sure what they are, but mostly Chinese. I know there's other nationalities or races mixed in there, though.

Interviewer

So tell us about your life just before you go into the military. How did you end up in the military?

David O. Chung

I was born on the south side of Chicago and I went to a Catholic grade school, Catholic high school and then transferred to a public high school, Glenbrook North High School in Norfolk, Illinois. I graduated in 1969. But I was just your typical kid who hung around in the streets, smoked cigarettes, partied a little bit. I was kind of mischievous. I was kind of like the person that my mother and father always worried about because I was always the one experimenting and being a daredevil. I always watched the John Wayne movies and I never really thought

of myself as being anything else but just your typical American kid.

When I was in Glenbrook North High School as I started becoming more aware of the war in Vietnam, I thought to myself, well what is Vietnam? Because no one really talked about it. Everybody was too busy partying, going to homecoming, proms, just your typical high school stuff until I found out that a couple of people that I went to high school with in the city were killed in Vietnam or served in Vietnam and they were really, really good buddies. But it was a different culture in the city as compared to suburban high school. In the city it was very blue collar, hard working parents and a lot of people couldn't afford to go to college or had the money to really do something other than go into the military. I had a good friend, Frank Lopez, let's see, who else? Jerry Trezek, they went to Vietnam. Jerry was killed. Frank Farina came back from Vietnam and was murdered in the streets of Chicago. I had a friend John Kenning, he went to Vietnam and he committed suicide. So as I was learning what was happening to my buddies that I left behind in the city, I was looking at what was going on while I was in the suburbs and Glenbrook North High School was on the North Shore and they were protesting the war.

Interviewer

You had the Chicago riots as well, right?

David O. Chung

Yes. But I was already at Glenbrook North High School at that time living in the suburbs.

Interviewer

But still those riots were paralyzing that whole area.

David O. Chung

But we were still very, very patriotic because a lot of the parents were still World War II and Depression Era. They supported the military.

Interviewer

So they were still very patriotic?

David O. Chung

Very patriotic. But the kids were growing up in an era where the culture was changing. People were protesting the war. It was a popular thing with the music. Songs were coming out against the war and when you're young you want to be part of what's popular. So being against the war was popular. Supporting the war wasn't. So I supported the war because I had friends, but it was still mixed emotions because I was going to a school where it wasn't just blue collar workers. There were a few students there that I hung around with because I could socialize with them a lot better. They weren't the jocks or the cheerleaders or the rich kids driving their daddy's GTOs or Olds 442 cars. So there was a real culture barrier between what we were growing up within the city of Chicago as opposed to what I was experiencing going to a high school where the average income--I mean these were lawyers, doctors, rich businessmen who were sending their kids to a North Shore high school called Glenbrook North.

So I became a renegade because I hung around with the group of kids--if you ever go to a basketball game there's

always that dark group of kids that hung in the hallways that smoked cigarettes, wore their black leather jackets, but they were just a small minority. It's almost like the old TV series "Happy Days" while everybody's super rah-rah cheering on the team, there's always the motorcycle guys and the guys with their hot rods. Although small as a group, they were always on the sidelines. People knew they were there. They were kind of invisible but they knew they were there. That was the group that I hung around with.

Interviewer

So what did you think you were going to do?

David O. Chung

Well, I graduated from high school and I went to a small school in Chicago called Aerospace Institute and I was going--well I was majoring in aeronautical engineering but we had some family problems and I was having some personal problems myself. I had just broken up with my girlfriend and it was during summertime so I took off with a bunch of friends to Cape Code and I finagled my way into a job at Barnstable Municipal Airport and worked as an aircraft refueler and an apprentice aircraft mechanic. While I was working there I found out, quite by accident, that I had been mailed a draft notice, but I didn't pay any attention to it. When I came back, then I paid attention because the date was coming up to where I had to report. So I though well, I'll go talk to them. And they said you can either go and take the two year draft in the army or you have a choice of joining the Air Force, the Marines, the Navy or the Coast Guard on a four year enlistment with a two year reserve status. So I thought, well I'll just join the Air Force because I thought it might be safer because you didn't really know what the Air Force was doing while they were over there in Vietnam. You heard there were bombing missions. You always heard about Navy fliers that got shot down. You always heard about Army guys who were being killed, Marines were being killed, but you never heard too much about Air Force whether it be by me not paying attention or maybe because the media didn't cover the Air Force that much. So I chose the U.S. Air Force thinking that I would be okay. And it was okay until I went to Vietnam. The first year and a half I was in the Air Force, two years, it was pretty good assignments. I was at Holloman Air Force Base, went TDY to Germany, worked on aircraft and traveled all over the place and then all of the sudden they said you're going to Vietnam as a replacement. So I went to Vietnam as a replacement.

Interviewer

How did you get there? Did you fly?

David O. Chung

I took a C-130 all the way to Vietnam because there was a group of us. We were with the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing and they needed an advanced party to go to Vietnam. This was in November of '71 and when I got to Vietnam they assigned me to Tan Son Nhut then to Bien Hoa and I stayed at Bien Hoa and then when the Easter Offensive broke out they broke us up into small detachments and we started to go back and forth between Bien Hoa and An Loc. They broke us up and they said all right, your particular transportation unit of trucks and aircraft and airmen are going to be with this unit over here. It's an Army unit, it's called the 11th Armored Cav but both the Air Force and the

Army is underneath MACV which is controlled by the United States Marine Corps. The Marines were there. Bill Turley was the MACV commander at that time.

Interviewer

Explain what you're doing at this point.

David O. Chung

They had nowhere to put me in Vietnam because Nixon had already started Vietnamization and he was pulling people out of Vietnam. I was already slated as a replacement to go to Vietnam to do a one year tour of duty. When I got there they didn't know whether to keep me there or send me to Thailand. So they decided to send some of my buddies to Thailand, Robert Madrid, Randy Sojot. They were all there at the same time that I was and they said they were going to keep me at Tan Son Nhut Air Base and then they're going to create a small detachment called Detachment 1, 377th Combat Support, Air Base Wing but they didn't know when they were going to do that. So I was supposed to be loading aircraft, working with people who did the rigging with the pallets, but they decided to put me with the transportation unit where I would be running equipment and supplies to Bien Hoa Air Base between Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa driving deuce and a half's or trucks. So they gave me an M-16, a .45 and they started running me back and forth to Bien Hoa. When the time came where they said I was going to be permanently assigned to Bien Hoa they put me in the transportation unit there and what they did was send me as a courier back and forth, mostly at night by myself, to bring classified documents from Bien Hoa Air Base to Tan Son Nhut. Basically we all knew it was information on what the manpower and planning would be in case the peace talks would fall apart in Paris and what Bien Hoa Air Base and Tan Son Nhut Air Base's contingency plans were going to be if we did pull out of Vietnam or if we had to stay. So I was driving back and forth, but when I got to Tan Son Nhut Air Base waiting for documents to be written up to go back to Bien Hoa, there was nothing for me to do. So they assigned me to the Vietnamese Air Force Unit that was there in Tan Son Nhut and because we were part of MACV, what I did is I was teaching Vietnamese air crews how to work C-7 Caribou operations. That's where we have those pictures. We took a lot of pictures because we were transitioning C-7 Caribous over to the Vietnamese Air Force. I would come back after doing runs over An Loc during the battle. We'd be kicking pallets out the back door, picking up wounded, dropping off supplies and we'd come back to Tan Son Nhut. I'd go to 7th Air Force Headquarters, pick up the courier packet - the documentation, it's all in a briefcase, climb in a Jeep and drive back to Bien Hoa.
I hated it. I hated every bit of it because I was basically on my own and I hated driving at night. I hated it because there were a couple times we were attacked. I would tag along with convoys going back and forth Highway 1 and Highway 13 and I got wounded on one convoy and I was wounded in a few rocket attacks at Bien Hoa. I just hated working for Master Sergeant Fultz and Colonel Taylor because you're by yourself. They give you an M-16, a .45, a vehicle and you're on your own.

Interviewer

So this was the collapse of Vietnam, right?

David O. Chung

Everything was just falling apart. It was just total chaos. The Vietnamese people would come up to me and they would look at my uniform and they wouldn't know who I was. I had this one Vietnamese papa-san come up to me and he goes, he touches my skin and he says, "You same-same, but you wear American uniform, who are you?" Because they're not used to looking at Americans who look like them. They're used to looking at Vietnamese Army, ARVN; Vietnamese Air Force, VNAF; Viet Cong, North Vietnamese. But you see some Airman First Class walking around or driving in a Jeep--I had this one mama-san tell me she's so sad. She says you get to go back to America. If you're not killed, you get to go back to America. If we lose our country, I'm stuck here.

David O. Chung

A few of the guys I was stationed with had animosity towards me because for the first time in my life I realized that I'm in a situation where Asians are the majority here. Not the whites, blacks or Hispanics, but the Asians are and we're in their country. And here I look like those people, but I can't speak their language. I know nothing about their culture. So I forced myself to learn more about the Vietnamese people. I learned more about the Montagnards, the Hmong people, I asked questions about the Vietnamese people when they were living underneath French rule. I learned a lot of information from the Vietnamese people, especially the older Vietnamese people about what the French did to the Vietnamese people. I learned about something that the young Vietnamese people today and Americans don't really study about is the war to gain their independence when they were fighting the French. And in the early days, in the 1700, 1800s the Vietnamese had an army called the Army of the Black Flag and they were fighting the Europeans. And then the French finally colonized Vietnam and then World War II broke out and the French left French Indochina and Ho Chi Minh, who was the head of Viet Cong--well the communists in Vietnam during World War II at one time was America's ally against the Japanese. We were actually flying missions off the USS Enterprise during World War II bombing Saigon and Ha Noi because it was underneath Japanese occupation. So the World War II veterans who fought in Southeast Asia, like Merrill's Marauders, they are basically the original Vietnam veterans because they were there before we, and our generation, got there.

Interviewer

So as you're watching the chaos of Vietnam unfold, tell us how you are progressing and how this all ends up for you.

David O. Chung

It was tragic. As I'm traveling back and forth between Tan Son Nhut Air Base and Bien Hoa, you get to meet Vietnamese people because you stop and take a little break. Sometimes when you're under fire, there's Viet Cong snipers on Highway 1, and you tend to huddle very closely to the next human being you can find in a ditch on the side of the road when you're under fire. And other situations, talking to other people in traffic, you get to know the Vietnamese people, their habits and their ways and they felt pretty comfortable because they are interested in who I am because I wear an American uniform and I'm asking questions. I'm very inquisitive about their culture. I'm finding out that the Vietnamese people are basically descendants of Chinese, mostly Chinese. A lot of them knew

that the end was coming, but they all had this hope that the United States would still stand behind them. They really had no problem as long as they were left alone to take care of their small shops, their businesses, their farms, the rice paddies, they just wanted to be left alone and just live in peace. They were smart enough to know that politics would destroy their country. They just wanted to be left alone, but they also knew that if America left because they were South Vietnamese that the Communists would come and probably change their lives.

When Saigon fell, eventually it did change their lives because the Communists created these re-education camps. Everybody lost everything and were told that they had to believe in certain things that they may have disagreed on. So part of the freedoms they knew would disappear and they didn't want that to happen. They always had this faith that the United States would always stand behind them as a people, not necessarily South Vietnam, but them as a people. They could care less about North Vietnam. They don't know who those people were in North Vietnam. All they were concerned about was their lives there in South Vietnam, in Saigon, An Loc, Xuan Loc, Pleiku, Hue, that's South Vietnam. That was their country. That's their people. As far as they were concerned, North Vietnam was the aggressor, but if North Vietnam left them alone that would be all right. But their mindset was still that we hope the United States would stand behind us as South Vietnamese people, not necessarily as South Vietnamese government, so we can continue on with our lives. But that never happened because North Vietnam broke all the treaties and they overran Saigon and changed everyone's lives.

Interviewer

So tell us what the GIs are doing. Tell us what you're hearing.

David O. Chung

No one wanted to be the last one to die in Vietnam. They knew the end was coming. They knew that there weren't that many of us left in Vietnam. There were not that many Air Force, Army, Marines, a few Coast Guard, or Navy people. You could see it thinning down. You could see everybody was paranoid. I had a couple of staff sergeants who were so paranoid that one situation where there was a rocket attack, they open fired on me because they thought I was a gook. They wouldn't let me into the bunker and had it not been for this one Marine, Mark Jasper, he grabbed me by the neck and another Air Force Sergeant Danny Gummels and threw me into the air bunker, I would have been killed by friendly fire. Because of paranoia of being the last ones in Vietnam, a lot of the guys began to really treat the Vietnamese people horribly because they were just apprehensive. They didn't want to be the last ones to die. They knew that the numbers of Americans were very small compared to the numbers of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong that were amassing along the Cambodian border and the northern sectors of the DMZ and because of what was going on with the Easter Offensive.

The Easter Offensive was a major battle that I don't think Americans realized how bad that battle was. We won that battle, but it was at a great cost to the Vietnamese and the United States. I was at An Loc one day and actually shot down a whole group of C-130s trying to re-supply An Loc.

Interviewer

Tell us about that.

David O. Chung

We landed in a Caribou and C-130s were sent in to re-supply. A Caribou was a small aircraft we could get in and out, it was a VNAF Caribou and we were there on the ground --

Interviewer

VNAF means?

David O. Chung

Vietnamese Air Force. An artillery barrage started hitting the base and then there was a lull and three C-130s from Tan Son Nhut--they were originally from CCK, from Taiwan--but they were deployed to Tan Son Nhut. They were ordered to re-supply An Loc and we actually saw all three of them get shot up. One crashed into the jungle, another one cart wheeled into the soccer field and a third one made it back to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, but from what we heard it crashed and I don't think there were any survivors. All they were trying to do was re-supply An Loc.

Interviewer

Now at this point the North Vietnamese were getting so bold there were all sorts of --

David O. Chung

Yes. Well, we heard that there were tanks coming out of Cambodia. They started deploying Army helicopters, gunships, to help An Loc and then a lot of Huey Slicks were doing re-supply because if you couldn't get into an air strip with fixed wing -- the Army 1st Aviation Brigade was at Bien Hoa and so was elements of the 101st Airborne, their helicopter aviation unit. They were re-supplying most of Tay Ninh Province while this battle was going on. We had a helicopter come in and re-supply and we got to know that crew because they would come in every other day because they would rotate crews. I got to know this one gentleman, his name was Sergeant Jimmy Jensen. He unloaded, we got to know him. He came to An Loc a few times while we were there on the ground with VNAF aircraft. One day he came in with ammunition, food, and he was taking off and he caught a rocket propelled grenade, an RPG, and the slick just exploded. The crew was killed. That was May 10, 1972. Moving forward many, many, many years when I retired from Washington, D.C. with the Department of Veterans Affairs I moved here to Utah. I ran into his daughter, Jennifer. She wasn't even born yet when he was killed. She is the bureau chief for "The Spectrum" newspaper up in Cedar City. We just found out quite by accident by just putting two and two together that I knew her father.

Interviewer

Did you tell her?

David O. Chung

Oh yeah, I told her. I explained to her what had happened because she never met her father. So I told her what happened. She calls me her surrogate father now because she never met him. And a lot of other things happened

when I moved here to Cedar City, too. My next-door neighbor down the road, Bob Madrid, he served with me in Vietnam. I had no idea where he went after he got out of the service. And years, years later I find out he lives a mile and a half down the road from me. So it was a blessing that I came back here to Utah.

Interviewer

So tell us what your commanding officers are telling you.

David O. Chung

Total chaos. They're trying to figure out what to do because -- a good example, Colonel Taylor ran Bien Hoa Air Base. It was part of Detachment 1 377th. The 377th ran transportation, logistics, and special ops. They had a small squadron of attack aircraft. It was a turnaround point for A-7 Corsairs, F-4s that were coming in, the Easter Offensive is going on and there was an enormous amount of paperwork and logistics for a skeleton crew. Bien Hoa was basically a skeleton crew of Americans of all branches of the service. It was so bad that we didn't even know until years and years later that Captain Danny Blassie, who was shot down during Easter Offensive in an A-37 Dragonfly, was the one that they pulled out of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier for Vietnam. He was with us, he was stationed with us. He was lost doing an attack supporting An Loc and they never found his--they couldn't get to him and it wasn't until years later that we found out that it was him that was in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Interviewer

So are you hearing what's going on back home?

David O. Chung

We're not getting any news other than there's negotiations going on in Paris. I'll tell you what, we were concentrating on just surviving over there. I had no idea that the Israeli Olympic team had been massacred in Germany until I got home. We were just too busy just trying to survive. I was too busy trying to survive going back and forth trying to bring these documents to 7th Air Force Headquarters and then flying with the VNAF aircrews on a C-7 Caribou going back and forth, just trying to stay alive. And Vietnamese people either loved me or hated me. Most of them I got along with. Then you go back to a base with a whole bunch of paranoid GIs who sometimes wouldn't even let me on base because it would be night and they would ask me stupid questions like who's the President of the United States or who won some years' World Series and everybody was just paranoid because we were the last ones there. No one wanted to be the last one to die before they signed the Peace Accords in Paris. Everybody just wanted to go home and in order to survive, we remained professional, that I will say. The Marines we were with, the airmen, and the Army people that were with us at Bien Hoa and at An Loc remained professional. They weren't trigger happy, but they sure were scared as hell and they wouldn't think twice if they had to pull that trigger at anybody that might compromise their life. That's just the way it was.

Interviewer

Tell us about the enemy activity going on around you? Did you sense it escalating?

David O. Chung

We could feel that it was escalating because rumors would come out of Bien Hoa Air Base, especially Colonel Taylor's office. He would send his logistics people out or lieutenants and captains. They would have their staff briefings and you could just sense that everybody was really, really worried that if the Paris peace talks fell through and with only a skeleton crew of Americans throughout Vietnam from Da Nang all the way down to the Me Kong Delta, the possibility of us being sacrificed was there. Because there is absolutely no way, if they launched another invasion on top of what was going on with the Easter Offensive, there's absolutely no way the United States--unless they had the political will. Because we knew, especially those of us who were serving there in Vietnam at that point in time, what was going on with the culture back in the United States. The American people, in our minds, would just say screw the people who are there, forget the war, let the North Vietnamese take Vietnam, just get out of there. And all of us knew that and we're all thinking we don't want to be sacrificed, we don't want to be the last ones there especially if the political will isn't going to be to help get us out. At that point in time there were almost 3,000 POWs who never came home. So if you look at the political will of the United States politics at that time, and what was going on in Vietnam, and you were a GI in Vietnam--I mean we had enough sense to realize that there's a possibility here that all of us could get pretty well screwed.

Interviewer

You had a Jane Fonda story. Tell us about that.

David O. Chung

I don't know why she did it. As an Asian-American--actually I really should say Asian-American because I am an American of Asian descent.

David O. Chung

People have different ideas why Jane Fonda did it. Personally I don't --

Interviewer

Did what exactly?

David O. Chung

Did what she did as far as joining in the political move to protest the Vietnam War and then supporting the North Vietnamese. Whatever the reasons were I couldn't care less. Her actions are what bother me.

Interviewer

Tell us about that, because a lot of people don't know.

David O. Chung

If you talk to the Vietnam veterans, they're pretty upset about what she did, but you need to talk to the veterans that she did it to. You need to talk to the POWs that she did it to. The POWs up at Ha Noi when she went there as a guest of the North Vietnamese communists, and to the veterans who were still fighting in Vietnam while she was there. You need to talk to those people, because everything that I explained to you about the paranoia, about

everything that's going on with the political will of our government and the culture with everybody protesting the Vietnam war, are we going to be sacrificed because we could be royally screwed, being left behind or just being sacrificed. Then all of the sudden you have physical proof that we are going to be screwed because our own countrymen are there in Vietnam telling us that we have to surrender or die.

They're in the middle of the Easter Offensive. She's on the radio waves telling us that we have to surrender. She is there telling people that are fighting for the Constitution and the freedoms that we believed in that protects the United States, that were trying to help with the Vietnamese for their freedom, and here you have our own countrymen, such as Jane Fonda, telling us that we have to surrender or die. And here she's up there in Ha Noi watching POWs getting beaten, literally. When the POWs were brought before her they tried to inform--they thought that she was there to help them. All they knew is that there are Americans coming to see POWs. In their minds, all the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marine prisoners of war up there, all they're probably thinking about is,

"oh great maybe we can get some information from her and we can get some information to her and pass information back and forth."

And so they write down parts of their social security numbers and as she's shaking their hands they're passing the social security numbers to her hoping that she would just bring it back home and at least tell somebody back home that they're alive. But no, what does she do? She takes the information and gives it to the head of the prison.

"Hey, is this right? Should these guys be doing this?"

And all the sudden these guys who passed information to Jane Fonda--well, after Jane Fonda gives the information, they're drug off and beaten. Now we didn't know that this was going on up North. I only found this out by reading what happened throughout history of the Vietnam War as time went on. Now, as she's up in North Vietnam, we're down in South Vietnam. She's on the radio waves telling us that we have to surrender. That doesn't bode well with everybody who doesn't want to be the last one to die in Vietnam. So everybody's paranoid. Everybody's apprehensive.

Interviewer

So you're on the opposite side, not only the opposite side of popular culture, but your own country.

David O. Chung

Exactly. Actually beyond that. Well, it was beyond popular culture and the reality of war all around you because it was almost living outside of your own realities. You had to do things to survive. You had to get involved in situations that normally a regular person would not get involved in.

Interviewer

Why?

David O. Chung

There's just a lot of things that a lot of people did in Vietnam in 1972 to survive. I'm not saying that people premeditated their actions but it's just things that they did in order to survive. Certain medevacs--your job is to pick

up Americans, wounded, and there's Vietnamese villagers. They're climbing on board the aircraft. You can't take all of them and so there's only one option. And you know what I'm leading to.

Interviewer

So you have to leave them?

David O. Chung

Yeah. And the only way you can get them off the aircraft is to make sure that they're immobile and that's as far as I'm going to go. Vietnamese villagers trying to clamor on board trucks that want to get off the highway or need transportation because they're under attack and a transportation just can't hold the numbers of people that wanted to escape the onslaught of war. And you have to do something because you are charged with taking care of Americans. You're an American, so you have to leave people behind, but sometimes people are still holding on and --

Interviewer

You had to use force?

David O. Chung

Yes. You have to use force to get them off. Deadly force. So, it created a problem.

Interviewer

How was it being an Asian in Vietnam?

David O. Chung

Well you had to do things to survive. Basically that's the bottom line. Even me as an Asian. When Randall was in Vietnam with me before they transferred him to Thailand, we both did things that it was part of survival. It sometimes got to the point that you had to prove that you were a better American than the next guy. It's kind of funny. Randall told me before he left Vietnam to go to Thailand, he said,

"You know back in the States you have the blacks hating the whites, the whites hating the blacks, the Hispanics hating the whites and the blacks. It's a mish-mosh of racial prejudice and segregation and then we come here to Vietnam and you got the blacks, Hispanics and the whites hating us. So now it's our turn. How do we survive?" Because I remember one time Randy was, actually it was a group of people, and this staff sergeant was looking at Randy and told the group of people, "Hey remember this guys," pointing at Randall --Randall was Hawaiian, he was Asian. Pointing at Randall, he goes,

"That's what you kill, that's what you shoot because that's what they look like." I'm standing there flabbergasted wondering what am I gonna do when Randy leaves because they're going to send him to Thailand and I'm going to Bien Hoa Air Base and in my entire unit of Marines that were there, and Air Force personnel and Army that were in our transportation group, I'm the only Asian, the only oriental. How am I going to survive? So in reality I had to live outside of reality in order to survive.

Interviewer

Did you start employing some methods that would help you survive?

David O. Chung

I developed a really bad chip on my shoulder because people knew who I was, but because of the apprehensiveness and the paranoia and because of the Easter Offensive and everything that was going on; the war was winding down but who was going to be left behind? I had to really, really develop a chip on my shoulder just to survive and that became a habit. And the habit transformed me into a different person and sometimes it transformed my personality and the way I reacted to people. Not only to some of the GIs I was stationed with, but also the Vietnamese people. And it wasn't a comfortable feeling.

Interviewer

Were you getting letters from home?

David O. Chung

I was getting letters from home, but it was almost like they didn't understand what war was or what the reality of war was or the commonality between two cultures and social venues that were so different from what they were experiencing at home and what we were experiencing. It's kinda strange when you get a letter from a friend and it's Christmas time and in the letter she's talking about she's going to this great Christmas party. Are you near Saigon? Do you have any great parties planned? Have you been invited to any New Years' parties? What parties? Christmas Day we got rocketed. We got mortared. I mean, war is a 24/7 thing. People don't realize there's a war going on. They're writing letters thinking that,

"Oh, I'm in South Vietnam by the South China Sea that I'm probably surfing or it's Christmas and I'm partying. I'm going to a New Years' Eve party."

They don't realize that there's a war going on. I'll give you a good example about societal difference when it comes to being in the military and the civilians living back home here in the United States. When you're in war, you really forget about what's happening on a day-to-day basis. You just want to survive. One day me and my sergeant Danny Gummels, we were pulling defensive perimeter at Bien Hoa Air Base. Special Forces had a camp on the other side by an Air Force unit called Red Horse and they would patrol the outer perimeter of Bien Hoa. We were sitting in this tower, I've got pictures of the tower that I gave her over there. We saw this armored personnel carrier pull out of their compound. As they passed the tower we're looking down at these guys, one's wearing a white sheet another one's got these Vietnamese black pajama with bones painted on it and the other one was wearing something like--he pulled out some bed mattresses or something and taped it to his head and painted red on his nose and we couldn't figure out what the heck they were doing. And they were armed, they were going on perimeter and they passed us and I looked at Danny Gummels and Danny Gummels looked at me,

"Did you see what I saw?" I said,

"I saw what you're looking at right now 'cause I'm looking at it, too."

And then we just thought maybe these guys are so burned out from war that they flipped out. When we finished

perimeter, a guard mount came out to relieve us we came back and we were just sitting there in our bunker and we were looking at the calendar. It was Halloween. We forgot it was Halloween. And these Special Forces guys probably knew it was Halloween and in order to alleviate tension and strain and stress, they decided to do something about it. Danny Gummels made a comment, he said,

"Boy if I was Viet Cong working this area of operations and saw those guys dressed the way they were in that armored personnel carrier, I'd run. Because these guys look Looney Tunes."

But the fact is that we forgot. So there's two extremes, you either don't know what's happening or you'll go to the opposite extreme and just go way out there. Way, way out there.

Interviewer

Were people drinking a lot? Were they turning to alcohol?

David O. Chung

There was a lot of drinking. I didn't see any dope when I was over there, marijuana, dope. I think it's got to be Hollywood because my tour of duty in Vietnam none of the guys in my Air Force unit, in the Marine unit or the Army unit that was with us at Bien Hoa in that transportation squadron, I never saw any drugs. I saw a lot of alcohol, but I never saw any drugs. And when I come home and I turn on the TV and damn it, it's always about marijuana, smoking drugs, shipping drugs back home. I never saw any of that and I was in a transportation unit. We shipped stuff back and forth. I never saw any drugs. And if someone was drunk and they had to jump on a chopper or they were part of an air crew or we were working logistics to transport them to the flight line or whatever the case may be, we would just take them back and let them dry out. I think that was the worse extreme I saw as far as alcohol. But I never saw any drugs over there.

Interviewer

So tell us about finally coming home.

David O. Chung

None of us thought we were going to go home because what had happened is Nixon, when the peace agreements began and they started bombing Ha Noi, he extended everybody. We were the last ones there.

Interviewer

How much time were you extended?

David O. Chung

Until either they overran us or they signed the peace accords.

Interviewer

So this was open-ended?

David O. Chung

Yes.

Interviewer

So tell us about how it all ends up for you.

David O. Chung

They signed the peace accords. But you know what? The day they signed the peace accords, the next day we still got mortared, rocketed. I don't know how everybody was reacting back home here in the States, I really don't. When they said the peace accords had been signed and everybody has to stand down, nobody did. Both sides didn't until maybe a few weeks later things started to really slow down. But I don't know how people were reacting when they signed the peace accords.

David O. Chung

Let me back up here, the peace accords were signed after I got home, but I didn't know. I left in November of '72, but I was still in the military and I was recuperating. The bad thing about my situation is that when I got wounded and they sent me back home, they didn't tell me what happened to the guys that were left behind. It wasn't until many, many, many years later when I got home that I hooked up with Randall Sojot, Danny Gummels, and Mark Jasper. Danny Gummels told me that when I left things were still horrible. I was at Nellis Air Force Base recuperating and I kinda blanked everything out.

Interviewer

Do you mind talking about how you were wounded?

David O. Chung

Well I caught shrapnel.

Interviewer

What were you doing at the time?

David O. Chung

I was walking across a transportation yard and a 122 rocket landed and exploded and took me and a Marine by the name of Frank (Zelly?)(51:41) and blew me into a deuce and a half. And next thing I knew they sent me to Tan Son Nhut and they said you can't work here anymore, so we're going to send you back to an Air Force base. You can recoup. But by the time that happened, everybody already knew that it was open-ended like you said. Everybody knew in their minds, it's either sign the peace accord or they overrun us. Now, when they started bombing Na Hoi we knew that was happening. When they started bombing Ha Noi everybody knew that Nixon had to do that because in our minds, those of us that were serving there in 1972, while they were discussing this thing in Paris, that if Nixon didn't do the moral thing of supporting the Vietnamese people, what's going to happen to South Vietnam, the troops that are still left there? During the Easter Offensive when they started linebacker, when they decided that they had to do something to bring the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table, it was so bad for the Air Force. I'm sure you know, we lost tons of B-52s. How many people don't realize that when they started linebacker and they started bombing North Vietnam because of the Easter Offensive, on the first day of the bombing runs we lost almost 12 or 13 B-52s. That's a pretty big asset to lose. How many people don't realize that

during the Easter Offensive how many AC-130 gunships we lost? How many Cobra gunships we lost. Intelligence was horrible. We had no idea that the North Vietnamese would have anti-aircraft in placements that far south, all the way down towards Tay Ninh Province. How many people don't realize that the Easter Offensive was so bad when we got word at Tan Son Nhut that the USS Higbee and the USS Oklahoma were bombed and strafed by North Vietnamese MiGs. I mean when you hear that a Navy cruiser and a Navy destroyer has been bombed and strafed, I mean your mind starts thinking we're screwed.

Interviewer

So were you on an aircraft full of wounded guys?

David O. Chung

I was on an aircraft of wounded guys on a C-141 and they flew me to Tripler and I was there for about a day and a half and then they flew me to Travis Air Force Base and then they flew me to Nellis Air Force Base. Then they checked me into Nellis Air Force Base Hospital. I was in the hospital there for about three weeks and then they assigned me to detail there, to work there. I think most Vietnam veterans went through this. When I got back to the States, when they told me you're going back home, it was just like nothing had happened. You were never there. There was no decompression time. There was nothing. You reported to your commander, they signed your paperwork, you got a new set of uniforms if you were still in the military, and then it's like nothing ever happened. No one wanted to talk about Vietnam. Nothing. Not one word. And if you were a Vietnam vet and still had military time left, you were pariah. Because most of the guys I was stationed with at Nellis, when I got back had just got out of basic training, and the guys who were Vietnam probably got out of the service. There were only a very few of us left that were Vietnam veterans as opposed to the whole big picture.

Interviewer

Why were you pariah to them?

David O. Chung

We lost the war. We were the losers. "

Why promote this guy, he's new. We've got new blood coming in, he's ready to get out anyway. You're a dinosaur. The Vietnam War is over. You lost. Why would we want you around?"

That was what I felt with a lot of the Vietnam vets that came home and still had military time. You about had six months left. I felt sorry for the guys who came home from Vietnam. The minute they stepped off the aircraft they were civilians and they were told to throw their uniforms away and their medals and go home and forget about it.

Interviewer

When you're on that plane, were you under anesthesia?

David O. Chung

No, no. I drank myself to oblivion. Let me tell you something about the end of the war. You remember what I said earlier that it was just mass chaos? No one was checking anything. No one really cared about protocol, paperwork,

as long as you weren't violent and you looked like you met all the criteria to get on the aircraft whether you were wounded or not, get on board.

"Go home, get out of here."

It was just like nobody cared, just get me out of here. I'll give you a good example, I have a good friend who was in Vietnam but he was stationed up north of Da Nang, his name is Mike Forsyth. His father was killed in an airplane crash and the Red Cross got a hold of him. He left Vietnam still wearing his jungle fatigues going all the way back to Chicago in his jungle fatigues. They didn't even know that he was gone from his unit, from the 95th Evac Hospital up at Da Nang until he reported into Fort Sheridan, outside of Chicago with his paperwork from the Red Cross. He didn't court martialed or anything and he got a hardship discharge because he had his paperwork from the Red Cross. But his unit in Vietnam didn't even know that he had left. He was still in jungle fatigues. It was just at the end of the war. It was just chaos. No one wanted to be there. No one cared.

Interviewer

After you were home and were watching, what were you thinking about the fall of Saigon?

David O. Chung

It was just such a tragic day for me personally. I was sitting at this restaurant, they had a little bar and I was just watching the TV and they were broadcasting the fall of Saigon. There was this guy sitting there, he was a little drunk, and he was watching the TV. He started talking to these two women who were at the end of the bar about how we had won. Because of the war protestors we had won. The war is over. I looked at him and I said,

"How could you say that? We're evacuating all these people from Vietnam, the communists are destroying South Vietnam, you're protesting the war because you want to save the South Vietnamese or the North Vietnamese people, or whatever the case may be, and you're saying that it was because you did that, you won? You didn't win. The North Vietnamese did. So what you are talking about?"

He looked at me and said,

"Ah you damned gook, why don't you just go back to the country you came from." So I picked up a barstool and I told the guy to commence chewing. I left. Walked out, went to Redondo Beach, stared across the ocean and cried. Because what was this all about? What was it all about? I mean gosh, man, the war went from 1959 to 1975, all these guys got killed, wounded, maimed, families lost sons and daughters, and you're just saying what the hell happened? It was a bad day. A real bad day.

Interviewer

Did you ever travel alone?

David O. Chung

Oh yeah. I had to.

Interviewer

Tell me what it feels like.

David O. Chung

Well when they told me that these are critical documents that need to go back and forth to 7th Air Force Base in Tan Son Nhut and Bien Hoa because we have to get all of this administrative protocol done before we either sign the peace accords or don't sign the peace accords. My captain told me that the information that I'm carrying is very important and do not let it out of your sight, guard it with your life. We're picking you to do this courier work because we figure you can get along with the Vietnamese people a lot better. I don't know why, probably because I look Asian. He told me that if you cannot hold onto this information, if the Communists get a hold of it and use it at the negotiations in Paris, they could use this information about--if you're talking about peace, how come you have this many Marines at Bien Hoa Air Base? This many Army and Air Force? The Marines were brought in from Iwakuni, Japan. They were TDY, they were not permanently assigned there so the numbers were skewed. So the Communists could have used it in the negotiations because the United States has this many men in Vietnam, we need to pull this many men out. But wait a minute, where did this Marine air wing come from? Things like that. So it was all logistics.

I had to bring logistical information back and forth from Bien Hoa Air Base to Tan Son Nhut and I was told to guard it with my life. Driving back and forth I would try to tag with convoys going back and forth. But there were a lot of times when there were no convoys and it's at night and I would have to drive by myself. If anybody tells you that they fought a war and they're not scared then they're bullshitting. Because I was scared, terrified - no doubt about it. I was just like scared out of my wits, out of my skin, but for some grace of God, I just did my job. That doesn't mean that I wasn't scared, that doesn't mean that I was just frightened to death, it was just very uncomfortable. I think back about those days that I had to drive by myself and I don't think I ever want to do it again. Ever, ever, ever.

Interviewer

Did you ever question the documents?

David O. Chung

I just did what I was told. For all I knew, those documents could have been that we've discovered a new weapon with toilet bowls. I couldn't have cared less. I had to do my duty. They're ordering me to do this, so I had to do it. I'm the only Asian there, and for God knows why they picked me to do it. But they would give me an M-16 and a .45 and they would give me directions and information and details on intelligence reports on the highway before I would leave. So they cared about where I was going. They would brief me at dusk before I left on intelligence reports. Are friendlies or un-friendlies on Highway 13 at the intersection of Highway 1? What's going on the first few miles outside of Bien Hoa Air Base on Highway 1? What's going on at Tan Son Nhut Air Base? Your check-points that you had to check through when you went through Long Binh. They would give me all this information every day I had to do courier work.

Interviewer

What was the distance in miles?

David O. Chung

About 48 miles, 49 miles.

Interviewer

How long would it take?

David O. Chung

It would take about two and a half hours max.

Interviewer

Did you ever come under fire? Did you ever sense something out there?

David O. Chung

Yeah. On the first Sunday in December of 1971 I was tagging along with a South Vietnamese Army convoy and there was a roadside attack. I caught shrapnel, mortar rounds, and I pulled two South Vietnamese soldiers out of a truck. Both were killed. I think that's the first time I think I ever shot anybody. I'll leave it at that. I get really mad at people who talk about the Air Force and they say,

"Oh, yeah, were you a pilot?"

I say no. The Air Force did a lot of dirty jobs over there. Did a lot of ground operations. I have a good friend and one day I'm going to try to locate him. His name is Paul Huff. He was an Air Force security policeman. He did a lot of ground pounding. A lot of us worked on the ground, a lot of us. We did convoys, courier work, and transportation. And then, again, let me stress that because it was towards the end of the war and Vietnamization was going on, a lot of us were sent to Vietnam and we just did all kinds of weird jobs. A lot of our AFSCs or MOSs we didn't even do. They just assigned us to where they needed bodies.

"Here's an M-16, here's a sidearm, we're sending you over to the ammo dump.

We're sending you to Saigon, we're sending you to Bien Hoa, there's a Marine convoy that needs to go to the other side of Long Binh, you're going to ride along with them because they're short-handed. They need somebody to man this .50 caliber machine gun on top of this deuce and a half and it's got some Air Force supplies on it but since it's a Marine truck, here Airman, here's your weapon, go with them."

MACV just had no idea where people were. Everybody did some strange jobs over there. It was the end of the war. It's almost like a short syndrome. You know it's gonna come to an end, but you don't know what the outcome is. Are we going to be left behind if they don't sign the peace accords? Or are we going to go home because they did sign the peace accords? Is it going to be here or there?

Interviewer

You went to Catholic schools. Are you Catholic?

David O. Chung

Yes. I'm LDS. I knew about the LDS faith when I was in high school, a lot about it.

Interviewer

Were you Catholic back then?

David O. Chung

I was Catholic back then, but I didn't really get into the Catholic religion. I didn't understand what this thing was about praying and bowing and kneeling before statues. And then again, the LDS faith, what caught my attention when I was a kid was really the faith of Native Americans. People don't know that who aren't LDS, our faith is about the story of the people who lived here during the times of Christ on this continent. People have this stereotypical social ideology that the story of Native Americans began when Christopher Columbus landed here and they don't really bother to go further back than that. But there were nations upon nations of people living here on this continent during the time of Christ that we need to study and know about and understand.

Interviewer

Did any of your Catholic background help at all?

David O. Chung

There is faith. Religion divides people. Faith brings people together. When Danny Gummels made that statement when we were at An Loc that it's Easter and we're supposed to believe that Christ died on the cross for our sins and here we are in Vietnam dying for nothing. It still showed that he's trying to keep his faith. Even though he made that statement, it was somebody who was scared out of his wits trying to make a statement,

"Please God, help me. Why am I in this mess?"

When they started this one particular military barrage we were in that bunker for two and a half days. Two and a half days. What really gets me pissed off is that when I got back home and I'm talking to people and when people would ask me "So where've you been?"

"Well, I was in the service."

"Oh."

And then they find out I was in Vietnam and I tell them what was going on in 1972, no one knew. No one cared. The big news was that the Israeli Olympic team was killed in Germany and it's like they forgot about Vietnam. This whole country forgot about Vietnam. It's almost as though when they heard that Nixon was going to pull people out, peace negotiations ongoing, Vietnamization is now starting to turn, they forgot about the guys that were left in Vietnam in 1971, '72 and '73.

Interviewer

Is there anything you want to say?

David O. Chung

Freedom is very, very important to each individual in their own individual ways. For those of us who have been in a war, in a warzone, whether you saw action or you didn't, all of us, if you were in a warzone, we all know what it's like to dream of being not free. I think the American people are in for a rude awakening when the day comes when freedom just disappears and they have no idea why. Because of what happened in Vietnam, I honestly believe that

it was necessary--this is my own personal feeling--it was necessary in order to end communism. We won most of the battles over there. Yes, we did lose a lot of people. We did lose a few scrimmages but it was for a reason. And the reason was is because of the way we were brought up. Each of us took an oath. When you raise your right hand you go into the military whether you like it or not, you still take the action of taking an oath whether you're drafted or you're enlisted, as an officer included, to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign or domestic. As scared as someone might be in a war zone, as many tears as might fall because you're scared, you still do your job. I'm very, very saddened because of what I had to go through in Vietnam because I saw the war from both sides. When you live with the face of the enemy and you wear an American uniform and then you experience your own countrymen coming over there and telling you to surrender and then you come back home to a country that doesn't want you, you become a very bitter, lonely person. The only way you can survive is to do what you do best and that's to just work 24/7 and forget about everything else, just so you don't have to suffer the anguish of what you've experienced.

Interviewer

What was your rank over there?

David O. Chung

I was an Airman 1st Class. Then when I got back home I got promoted to Sergeant. But I didn't even care about that, making Sergeant. Big deal. By the time I finished my tour of duty in the Air Force, I got discharged from Nellis Air Force Base I just wanted to leave Vietnam behind.

There are two things that happened to me when I got back from Vietnam. I ended up with a company that was all Vietnam vets but we never really talked about it. It was all about work and making this company successful so no one really talked and as the company grew a lot of people were hired that weren't Vietnam vets because the company was expanding quite rapidly.

The second thing that happened was in 1986 which really opened up the floodgates about Vietnam and I really had to assess where my life was going and how I wanted to lead my life. A lot of people never heard about the Chicago Welcome Home Parade for Vietnam Veterans. It happened on Father's Day weekend, Friday the 13th, in Chicago. The mayor of Washington agreed with a group of veterans that got together and said we need to really recognize those who live around the city area that served in Vietnam because there were a lot of rust belt veteran, a lot of blue-collar workers. I heard through the newspaper and radio that this parade was coming and I thought to myself, "Why would I want to go to something like that?"

Most veterans felt like that because they thought that they would be, you know, tell a few war stories, have a few beers and there would be a few war protestors and then there would be a few fights, so why even get involved with that? On the day of the parade, my buddy called me up, Mike Forsyth, and he said,

"I've been reading about this welcome home parade. Do you want to go down there and just check it out." And I said,

"I don't know if I really want to." He said,

"Come on, let's go." I said,

"All right, whatever."

So I met him down at a place called Logan Square in Chicago and we took the subway. When we walked up from the subway to Chicago Avenue by downtown Chicago, we were in complete and absolute shock because we saw a sea of humanity and they were all Vietnam veterans. It was just something that you had to experience. It was a once in a lifetime thing in the history of Chicago and even in this country because at the last minute for this parade they were only expecting 25-, to 30,000 veterans and their families to come and be appreciated that they served in Vietnam and almost 400,000 showed up at the last minute. Check it out. Look in your archives about the Chicago Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Parade. And here's the defining moment for me realizing that I'm going to have to deal with Vietnam. I had a friend who worked with me at Federal Express for over 10 years. I'm the godfather to two of his kids. His name is Akers. I was wandering around Navy Pier where everybody was gathering trying to find their units so they could march in this parade and I run into Akers and he looks at me and I look at him. He's this black guy, really good guy. And we're shocked. Totally shocked. He comes up to me and says,

"What are you doing here?" I says,

"Well I took the day off just to come to the parade." I said, "What are you doing here, you're supposed to be at work over at the FedEx station." He says,

"Well I took the day off just to come to this parade."

And he looked at me and said,

"When were you there?" I told him. I said,

"Well when were you there?"

We've known each other for 10 years, 10 fricking years, and we never talked about it. And I'm the godfather to two of his kids. That's how much Vietnam affected the veterans, because we were told to forget about it, not to talk about it, throw away your uniforms, dump your medals, you lost the war, get on with your life and if you can't get on with your life, it's your problem. This country doesn't want you back home, we don't want to deal with you, go away boy, you bother me. It was at that point that I realized, you know what, I can't continue on like that because it's eating at me and I can't talk about it. I think it was like that for most, if not all, of the people who served in Vietnam 'cause we came home to a country that did not want us to come home. You want to hear something that's even worse than that? Working at the Department of Veterans Affairs we tried to change the amnesty bill that was created in 1976. A lot of the people who dodged the draft and went to Canada wanted to come back to the lower 48 after the war was over. So the politics decided to create a program so these guys can come back. These guys can come back if they served in the military or some civil service and it would expunge their records because people forget. If you were caught dodging the draft back during the Vietnam War you had to go to federal prison. That was the law. So now these guys come back from Canada. If they served in the military, they get VA benefits, it expunges

their records. So now we have these guys who served in Vietnam and because the way they were treated they get less than honorable discharges and they're barred from VA benefits. What is that? So we tried to change that because these guys, they did serve in Vietnam. We could upgrade their discharges, but no, they won't even look at it. They don't get the guaranteed home loan program, the financial assistance to get their life together, but yet these guys who come back from Canada under the amnesty program if they served in the military, they get benefits. What kind of political play is that? What does that say, the guys who served in Vietnam, get out of our sight, we don't want you. That sucks. I think that totally sucks. Working at the Department of Veterans Affairs, I don't care what they think about me. I was kind of a renegade back there. But it just sucks. It's not about the people, for the people, by the people or the veterans, it's all about money. It's all about politics. It's all about arrogance.

I remember I got in trouble one time because I actually told a bunch of politicians who were on a committee for Veterans Affairs,

"It's a cold day in Washington, D.C. because I notice you have your hands in your own pockets."

That's how angry I am about the way this country treats its veterans, not only Vietnam veterans but the culture. Yeah, we had these parades for the guys coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, but what happens after those parades? These guys are out there in society. I'll give you a good example of where our society is going.

I had this lady tell me one time she protested the Vietnam war when she was in college. I asked her,

"Why would you do such a thing? For every person who served in Vietnam that meant that you didn't have to go so at least give them that little respect."

Then another lady who was standing by said,

"Well weren't you afraid protesting the war because these guys coming back from Vietnam were violent people, they saw a lot of war, they saw a lot of combat. Weren't you afraid of these veterans?"

You know what she had the audacity to say? She said,

"Oh, we played it safe, we would only throw rocks and bottles and beat up the ones that we knew were wounded."

I thought well how shallow is that? So then I told her,

"Why would you do something like that? I mean come on, if they're wounded, these guys fought for this country. They fought for you." You know what she told me? She said,

"God, where have you been? Haven't you ever been to a protest rally? Really cool parties to go to."

I really wanted to punch her out. And that's what I feel has happened with our society. Everybody's too afraid of somebody cancelling tomorrow night's party instead of looking at reality and what's really happening around the world and where our country is going. These kids that are now fighting this war, let alone taking care of all those who served in past wars, nobody gives a damn anymore. That's how I feel.

Interviewer

You experienced Agent Orange, correct?

David O. Chung

Actually I'm a disabled veteran because I have ischemic heart disease and a lot of health problems right now.

Interviewer

You were around it because your unit was spraying it, correct?

David O. Chung

I was actually in the province where it was heavily sprayed. I was in Tay Ninh Province where they sprayed the herbicides very heavily, more than any other sector. I Corps, II Corps and IV Corps also got sprayed but III Corps took the brunt of it. Millions and millions of gallons of Agent Orange which is a dioxin, it's a defoliant, and it's horrible stuff. It affects Vietnam veterans till today. When I was at the Department of Veterans Affairs they had the New Jersey Agent Orange Commission come in and brief us and the joke is at the Department of Veterans Affairs is that there's not going to be any Vietnam veterans to bury World War II veterans because we're dying at a rate of about 390 a month, on an average. Soft tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, diabetes, all of that stuff within the Vietnam veterans' community, the average for getting those diseases is much higher than the average with the general population.

Interviewer

Could you smell it? Could you taste it?

David O. Chung

It was like diesel fuel, very milky, filmy. If it's on the ground you could smell it and when you step on it, it's kind of--did you ever step on pavement and it felt kind of gritty but sticky at the same time? Kind of like that. But it was used to defoliate the jungle areas to deny the enemy from hiding. What it does it just causes a molecular change in the root system of plant life and makes everything above ground grow at a rapid rate, but it can't handle the rapid rate of growth so it just withers away and dies. It's basically Weed-B-Gone in concentrated forms that they sprayed all over Vietnam.

We drank the water, we ate the food, they sprayed it on us. I have the pictures of that spray plane I gave you. We were flying on a C-7 Caribou doing a drop at a place call Xuan Loc and the Air Force and different branches of the service, they share different air corridors and we caught up to these aircraft. Those are C-123 providers. I wonder what they're doing up here. I looked at the boom sticking out from them and I went oh, God, they're sprayers. It was called Operation Ranch Hand. What really gets me mad is that the government tried to say well, we stopped spraying in 1971. Well, excuse me, you gave the equipment to the South Vietnamese Air Force and they continued to spray. So the guys who were left on the ground in '71, '72, and '73 still got sprayed by the Vietnamese Air Force. So Agent Orange is horrible, tragic stuff and it's really been a horror to the Vietnam veterans' community because of the diseases. Not the disease, what do you want to call cancer. Is cancer a disease, I guess. The cancers, the diabetes, the skin rashes, the ischemic heart diseases. I belong to the Vietnam Veterans of America and I get this magazine very quarter and they have this section called "Taps" and it lists all the Vietnam veterans who are members of this organization and there's a lot of them, and it's usually every four months, two pages' worth of death

notices, all Vietnam veterans.

Interviewer

You say the majority of those would be influenced by Agent Orange?

David O. Chung

Yes. Well, if you take a look at it, cancer, heart disease, heart disease, cancer, leukemia, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, leukemia, diabetes, all the way down the line.

Interviewer

Could you ever relax doing the job you did?

David O. Chung

Every day I would be assigned a vehicle. Some days it would be a truck, three-quarter ton Jeep, pickup, or a regular Jeep, or an Air Force staff car. I'd go pick up the paper work, they'd give me my intelligence reports about friendlies or un-friendlies. The minute I would stick the key into the ignition of the vehicle or hit the starter button if it was a Jeep, I would get cold sweats. Then I would start thinking to myself if I go as fast as I can, can I make it there before dark, 'cause I would always leave at dusk. And if I don't make it there before dark what am I going to do because in the dark if I am attacked I don't know if I can defend myself. Once I'd get to Tan Son Nhut I would relax but then they would take me over to the VNAF, Vietnamese Air Force and say okay, you've got nothing to do for the next six hours.

So they would put me training with Vietnamese air crews on C-7 Caribous. I hated that because we would do re-supply, medevac or air support and the Easter Offensive is going on and you don't want to be shot down wearing an American uniform, looking Vietnamese. I had enough common sense to know that,

"Hey, they could shoot me as a spy if they decided to make it that way, or they could use me as a political ploy, why is this guy wearing an American uniform and he's Asian?"

Flying back to Tan Son Nhut I would get relieved, get a little comfortable, go over to Chieu Hoi, grab a bite to eat and then I'd start breaking out in a sweat again because it's still dark, it's maybe about four or five o'clock in the morning and I'd have to go pick up the packet, the documents then they give me my intelligence briefing. All right, you're heading back to Bien Hoa Air Base.

Highway 1 is pretty clear, Highway 13 and Highway 1 intersection is pretty clear. There's no friendlies or there's un-friendlies. These are the detours you need to take if you run into problems. I'd hop in my vehicle and the minute I put the key in the ignition or hit the starter switch I'd break out in a cold sweat and I'd pray for daylight. I would pray to God for daylight 'cause I didn't want to be caught in a situation under attack or be taken prisoner in the dark. I'd break out into a sweat and pray for daylight all the time. Every time I had to do the courier work back and forth to Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut it was like walking on a thin line. A very thin line and I hated it.

Interviewer

When you hear a helicopter or certain aircraft engines does it come back to you?

David O. Chung

Helicopters will remind me of Vietnam but the sound of a C-130 always makes me mad and upset. Every time I see a C-130 fly overhead I get very emotional I get very angry, I get pissed off because of what happened at An Loc. These guys are flying to re-supply some desperate people and you're hoping that you can get enough from this re-supply to last another day. When you hear them coming over your heart is racing and you're going hey, the cavalry's coming or whatever. These were C-130s from CCK, from Taiwan, and when you actually see them get shot down it's horrible. Your heart sinks because they're there to help you and they're getting blown out of the sky. They're unarmed. They're there for re-supply and they're getting blown out of the sky. So every time I see a C-130 I get very, very apprehensive. I get very, very depressed. I get very, very angry. It's a mix of different emotions but every time a C-130 flies overhead--helicopters will remind me of Vietnam, but C-130s because it was such a tragic, tragic scenario during the Easter Offensive. When I see a helicopter it reminds me of Jimmy Jensen but he was just taking off and he got hit by an RPG, but to see entire crews of a large aircraft, you know what a C-130 is, to actually get shot down.

Interviewer

It's a huge aircraft.

David O. Chung

Yes. The American public, they don't even realize--imagine if the United States is under siege and the Air Force is flying supplies in to save you or to medevac you out and as it's coming in you're thinking to yourself, I'm gonna get out of here, and it blows up. How would you feel?