

# John “Bud” George Domagata

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[0:23]

Mcmanamon: Today is March 26th. I'm Benjamin. I'm a volunteer at the Pritzker Military library, and today I am speaking with 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Bud Domagata who served in the Vietnam War. So normally we like to start these interviews with discussing your childhood and before you were in the Military. We want an image, a picture of you as an entire person, and also just we understand that being a soldier is just part of your life and people are going to be interested in not just that, but also the time you lived. So when and where were you born? I believe you said Chicago.

[1:02]-Youth

Domagata: I was born in Chicago and lived there 'til I was four. We moved out... at that time we lived with my father's parents, they had a four flat and we stayed there. When I turned four, my younger sister was born, and my parents bought a home out in an unincorporated area between Westmont and Downers Grove. We moved next door to my great grandparent's farm and right next to my grandparent's property, so we were surrounded by relatives. The farm itself was mostly a poultry farm, and they had a stand up front or a store or a grocery store type of building and they sold fruits and vegetables and dairy products as well as the poultry, which was their mainstay on eggs, you know that type of thing. So I grew up in that area, and went to Downers Grove High School. After high school, I went to college here in the city for a year and a half, and at that point I really came to the feeling that being in college wasn't where I had belonged. I just wasn't the best student, at all. During that time, the draft, this was 1967, I graduated high school in '65, so I quit school probably around December; that was the end of my last semester in college. I had wanted to go into the transportation industry, in my youthful brilliance I had thought that no matter what happens to the economy, things will always have to move from one place to another. So I wanted to get into the transportation industry. So I attended a transportation school at the time, and got a job with Warwick Electronics. They supplied all the electronic supplies: TVs, radio's, stereo's, types of things for Sears. So I worked in the transportation department tracking railroad cars of, you know, those kinds of products. After oh... momentarily after I left school, I got a notice to go in and get, you know, go in for a physical, and being in

relatively good shape I immediately became A-1. Short time after that, I got a notice that I was going to be drafted. I had an uncle that was a Sergeant Major and he was very high... he was command sergeant major and very highly decorated in the Korean War, and he and his sister, who happened to be my mom, said they didn't want me to go into infantry, and, you know, see if there is something in the transportation world, that of the military, of the army that would fit my needs, and they really found a great school. I signed up for it and had to go through a battery of tests to qualify for that, which I did.

[4:26]- Family Military History

Mcmanamon: So was your uncle in the military at the time?

Domagata: Yes, he was. He was in the reserves here in Chicago.

Mcmanamon: Okay, so he was in it currently serving.

Domagata: Yes, as a command sergeant major.

Mcmanamon: So he then saw, sort of, firsthand what was going on in the military at the time?

Domagata: He knew exactly what was going on. To back up a little bit, my dad was in the military, he served in both-- he served in Africa, he served in Europe, he served in the South Pacific, he was in the Philippines, he was in New Caledonia, and he was in a couple other places that escape me now. So my dad was all over. He was a male nurse and he was with a small group of guys that, where-ever a battle was, they would go up and stabilize a few thousand troops at a time, a couple thousand, put them on a ship and bring them—the worst, the worst troops that were wounded badly, and get on a ship with them, and take them back to the United States for the better hospitalization. So he made seven crossings which was a big deal going back and forth across the Atlantic and the Pacific so he was my, you know, my hero—my impetus, you know, for remaining loyal to America and not going to Canada or any of that; it wasn't even a concept for our family. Both of my Mom's brothers were in the military, one of them was that sergeant major. My dad's two brothers were in the military. One was a decorated infantryman down in the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry in the Pacific, and dad's older brother was in the Coast Guard on the East Coast, so they were always looking for submarines and things of that nature.

Mcmanamon: So your father's family all served during WWII. And then your mother's uncle served in the Korean War?

Domagata: Mother's brother.

Mcmanamon: Mother's brother. [Laughter] Your uncle, your mother's brother.

Domagata: Right. And then she had an uncle that also served in the Army, and, interestingly enough, he was on the — he was in, oh, I can't exactly tell you what unit, but, he was on the north [or rather] very south China border, and they had something to do with downed pilots and he, he did a number of things in the China area. So that was that. So those guys all had an influence of loyalty to our country, you know patriotism, things of that nature.

[7:15]- Experience Being Drafted

Mcmanamon: So you got your draft notice, and you decided at that point to enlist in logistics effectively?

Domagata: Well, yeah. As opposed to just being drafted for two years, to get the guarantee of that class, I had to sign up for three years. So, I did get the class, and it was a terrific school. I just... you wouldn't believe how much movement the military has to make, they move people when they transfer them from a post to a post, they move them in a war zone, a product or supplies from point A to point B, they move troops from the continent to the war zones, so, I mean everything is moving by truck, bus, train, plane, yeah. If it moved, the military has some paperwork that identifies what it is, how it's going, and when it gets there, and that's the transportation department's responsibility.

Mcmanamon: Yeah, you get nothing done without paperwork.

Domagata: No.

Mcmanamon: So you talk about that, obviously you felt this loyalty to the previous service of your relatives and also the United States...

Domagata: Patriotism.

Mcmanamon: Yeah, patriotism. I guess, I'm just wondering, did you have strong feelings, or were you very political before you were drafted/enlisted. I apologize if I'm making assumptions, but it doesn't sound like you were planning on, despite this long history, it doesn't sound like you were planning on going into the military if you hadn't been drafted.

Domagata: It's hard to say, you know, no it wasn't my career choice, but you know the draft, and how it, affected all my uncles, it just seemed like the thing to do, you know. Our family didn't, or I didn't have the political bent to be anti-war— I was a fairly naive nineteen year-old and you know, my country right or wrong, there were anti-war things going on, but, you know, I was nineteen. I liked cars and girls,

simple things. I was not into the political scene at all. It just didn't exist in my mind.

Mcmanamon: Good to know. It's pretty common from a lot the soldiers we interview, the veterans, it's that driving patriotism or loyalty to country, they weren't like, it wasn't like I'm gung-ho or I'm super anti-war.

Domagata: Yeah, I was in the Scouts, and you know, we go in the Memorial Day Parades, you salute the flag, and you pledge of allegiance and, um... I went to a Catholic school through 8th grade and the nuns were all about patriotism, you know the nuns and Kennedy and all that stuff... there's that tie in there. It just wasn't even a concept to be anti-war. Also, right out of high school one of my pals, one of my closest pals, joined up. He signed up right away and a couple weeks before I went in, which would have been July of '67, I was a pallbearer for him. He was killed with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. Ron Elza was his name, he was from Downers Grove, and he was a classmate at Downers Grove High School. So yeah, was I getting even with him, you know, for him, I don't think so, it was just I knew it was dangerous, and I knew I didn't want to be in battle every day so that's how this transportation thing evolved.

[11:43]- Transportation Training Experience

Mcmanamon: Oh. Okay. So you talked a little bit about how thorough your training for transportation, movement specialist was very useful, was very helpful.

Domagata: Well, it wa-, I think it was a pretty restricted MOS, you know what that is?

Mcmanamon: Yes.

Domagata: Okay, military occupation specialty, and we even had some prior service soldiers who were active duty and had the rank of E5 come back to take the same class that I was taking, and I was just a PFC at that time. I wasn't even a PFC, I made PFC upon graduation from that class, so I'm an E2, which is about as low a grade as you can get and we have E5's, which is the equivalent to a sergeant, taking the same class I'm taking and you know, what the interesting thing is that, they had to qualify just like I did, and I ranked in the, you know, top three of the class, I think I was number either two or three. It was a good class and there weren't- If anybody wasn't sharp enough to be there, they were gone by the first week. So if they made it through the first week they finished the class.

Mcmanamon: Okay. Now I believe you said in your background questions that after your training you were stationed in Saigon?

Domagata: Yup. As soon as I graduated in, like, the first week of December, I went home for leave, spent Christmas at home, and New Years at home, jumped on a plane, and went to California and flew out from Oakland Arm- Travis. We went to Oakland Army Terminal, to, you know, be put in groups and then bussed to Travis Air Force Base and flown over to Vietnam. And we left for Bien Hoa Air Base just outside of Saigon.

[13:50]- Vietnam, Funny Story

Mcmanamon: So is there anything you would like to add before we move on to your experience in Vietnam proper. We'll try and go chronologically throughout this interview, but if you feel something reminds you of something, feel free to bring it up. As I said, it's very free form. Do you have anything else you would like to say about your training?

Domagata: Sure. Interesting story, well in my mind it's interesting. One of the E5's, or sergeants that were taking the class, and I connected. He was a neat guy. He was Hawaiian, and, he heard, or he knew, that the flights out of Oakland flew to Hawaii, for our stop over to gas up or something, you know, fuel up. So I flew with him out to California, and we got on different planes. My plane went to Hawaii, his plane went to Alaska. So his whole family that was all excited about seeing him didn't get to see him. We landed within hours of each other in Bien Hoa. Then we went to the 90th Replacement Depot and in that area right outside of Saigon, and here is the, you know, the funny story, he said, "Whatever you do, stick with me." Um so the process was they would line you all up, hundreds of guys that just landed and they read names off and if your name was [read] off you said goodbye and you went to your unit. And this could take two or three days before they sort it out. So the three-hundred is continually being filled but it's continuing being emptied, and what they have those guys [who are waiting] doing is breaking right into the worst job in Vietnam and that is, if you went to the washroom, you typically went in a can, a half of barrel, a cut off barrel that was filled with kerosene, and your poop, crap, whatever.

Mcmanamon: The kerosene did kill the...

Domagata: Well that's not it, then once a day, in the morning, they pull that can out, and it's, oh, about 3 feet, 2 1/2 feet tall, and they pull it out and light it. So guys had to burn the-- junk every day. Someone had to do it so the people from the cadre at the 90th depot, the replacement depot, didn't wanna do that, so that job was always to these guys coming in. That's a job they would have to do or do KP or pick up cigarette butts, or all kinds of crummy jobs. While this guy, Dennis Doss was his name from Hawaii, and he says, "Stick with me," and we get in line, he pulls—and they start assigning jobs, first they call the names, the guys left who are going to their unit, then they go down the row and assign jobs and when

they got to us, he pulls out his clipboard with some paperwork on it, and he says, "We've already been assigned a job. We're supposed to inventory mattresses." There was no such job, and we went to the club and drank beers and pops and stuff while everybody has the jobs that they had to do. And then the next formation he'd have some other cockamamie form that we were supposed to do. He brings out his clipboard. I never had to do anything but hang around with Dennis. Then we went and both got assigned to our positions. He went to a different one than I did.

[17:32- Port Authority]

Mcmanamon: Okay. So that was after you arrived in Saigon. How long did that period last?

Domagata: Three days, and then you get on a bus or a plane depending on where they wanted you to go and I got on a bus to the Saigon harbor, the port area. That was... Initially I went to the 4<sup>th</sup> Transportation Command. They looked at my typing scores and whatever numbers that they look, and they wanted me to be a clerk— a clerk typist— it was like, hell, you know. I didn't sign up to be a clerk typist. I wanted to use... So after about a week of being a clerk typist I said, "Hey, I can't do this, I have to do what my MOS is," and I made a big enough stink that they let me get into a job that was for a 71N20, [Transportation Movement Specialist] which was my MOS at that time.

Mcmanamon: What did that involve?

Domagata: Okay. Besides that, where did I live? That's what's interesting. We resided in a hotel about three blocks from the port, and the hotel was the Truk Gang Hotel. Probably a four, five story hotel, all GI's that were... oh and when I left that clerk's job, I went to my real unit that I ended up the rest of my tour in, and that was the 125th Trans. Command. So the first was the 4th Trans. Command then the 125th Trans. Command. And that, it was the port authority in the... Okay so we'll skip back to where I lived. The hotel, I had a room that either did or didn't have a roommate, so sometimes I did, sometimes people moved out and you know went back home or whatever, so that was just a dream deal, and... Now I arrived just a couple weeks before the Tet of '68.

Mcmanamon: Yeah, you mentioned that in your background.

Domagata: Okay so, what I'm doing as a job is, I'm assigned a cargo ship— a freighter— and it will generally have a couple holds that'll be filled with merchandise. It could be grain, bags of grain, 100 pounds, 200 pounds, bags of grain. It could be boxed up product, Car parts. I was in the civilian side of the harbor. There was the civilian side, and there was a canal and then the military side, so I really never worked at the military side. So on the civilian side, civilian ships would come in from all over

the world: from the US, from Japan, from India, where ever, and it would be filled with anything, you know, from refrigerators to bags of grain, and, um as the ship had cranes on them that would go down, drop the lines down, pick, you know, get hooked up to a pallet, lift the stuff up, put it on the shore, on the dock, then a guy with a forklift would move it out. So my job was to have cargo checkers who would count either the amount of one product on a pallet, and count the amount of pallets. If it was bags of grain, count the amount of bags of grain. So I would have two cargo checkers per hold and sometime I would have two holds, sometimes I would go to the next ship and I would have three. So I would have as many as six guys that I'm supposed to see that are marking numbers down, then at lunch when they break, I would make sure all their numbers matched and I would take their numbers up to the ship and go on up these cargo ships and match my numbers with their chief's numbers and see if we had an agreement. Now, prior to this... This whole process started, shortly before I got there, and prior to that all kinds of things disappeared, the numbers never matched, they didn't have a formula with supervision that worked. There was a lot of theft going on. I never had a problem really with the amounts not working, I had a problem with the guys saying they have to go to the bathroom, so one guy would take the other guy's clipboard and all of a sudden I only had one guy per haul, where is everybody? Well they're playing cards in some warehouse and I'm running up and down trying to track them down, and chase them back out to do their job, but all said and told, nothing was ever wrong, and we didn't have any problems with that. That was basically my job twelve hours a day, six days a week mostly, and occasionally seven days a week and we got one day off on occasion.

Mcmanamon: Okay, obviously the Tet events were very important, but before we move onto that, you mentioned that this program was implemented shortly before you arrived, with six checkers, was that largely due because, obviously, one of the big things that comes up when your discussing the history of the Vietnam war, is the amount of US supplies that came in and the corruption within the South Vietnamese government.

Domagata: Now the US supplies were on the other dock, the military docks, but that happened up and down this whole dock. This was one place they can moderate it. Moderate? Monitor it. Monitor it. So I knew exactly what was coming on. As soon as the forklift picked it up, I was not responsible anymore. So there was another cargo checker that had nothing to do with me, but he was in the warehouse where the stuff was stored 'til trucks came and hauled it out to where ever it was going. So theft was a huge problem. Corruption was a huge problem. The black market was a huge problem, and it stil was, but at least this area was corruption free.

Mcmanamon: And you were working with a combination, both US personnel and South Vietnamese personnel?

Domagata: My cargo checkers were all college people. So yes, they were all Vietnamese, they all spoke English, I would say they were all older than me, 'cause I'm nineteen and they were all, I would say, more educated than I was. They had read Hemingway. They had read Faulkner. They knew American poetry, and I was just astounded by their intellectual wherewithal and here I am, and here they are with clipboards counting bags of rice, or whatever. And they did import rice. You wouldn't think that, but they were importing rice, as well as other things, but the advantage for them was that if they had this job, it was a draft exempt job. So they were draft dodgers. You know, by having this job they would not have to be drafted in into the ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

[25:16] Tet Offensive, and Getting Shot at

Mcmanamon: So obviously you mentioned, previously, that you arrived shortly before the Tet offensive. Were you affected by that directly in your position at the dock or indirectly?

Domagata: Evaluate it any way you want. I was in the dock area as it started, or as it started in our area. If you've studied or looked at history, the Vietnamese -- the Viet Cong mostly attacked militarily important sites. They attacked police departments, they attacked radio stations, they attacked headquarters, and they attacked the [US] Embassy. The embassy was just several blocks down from the docks where I was at so that was all going on. The Cholon stuff was going on. The racetrack had some big things going on. It encompassed that whole area. The guys that were doing most of that fighting initially were MPs. Probably one of the least strategically important areas in this whole thing is the civilian docks. The other side, the canal, there was junk going on down there, but one ding-a-ling Viet Cong, probably climbed up the wrong crane, and there's some cranes that when the ship didn't have strong enough or the appropriate cranes to lift the stuff out of their cargo hull, there was this gigantic crane, that's monstrous, that would reach down and get things out. And there was a cabin, and inside the crane... [The cabin] on the top of the crane there was probably oh 12' by 12' or 10' by 10', and you could look around and peak out, you'd drive the crane over, drop and pick it up. Well, some knucklehead sniper got up there and started shooting. Well, myself, and one or two other guys dove under some trucks. We did get issued weapons, but they were locked up in the hotel, [laughter] you know, big freaking deal. So here we were working our usual jobs, unloading ships and now this knucklehead climbs up there with a rifle and everybody scatters and it was an unimportant, militarily unimportant area so they didn't have extra MPs to come rescue a couple clerks under a truck in the harbor area. So to ask me exactly how long I was under the truck, to me it seemed like I was there



probably a whole month, but was it a day? Was it half a day? Was it two days? I'm not remembering exactly, and I'm not staking my life on it, but it seemed real long and I know that we were hungry and thirsty, and we peed down underneath that truck; and part of it was because you were scared and part of it because you just needed to pee. But this guy knew we were down there, and he kept shooting around the truck maybe thinking a ricochet would get us, and you know, maybe he was shooting at some other people, also, but eventually some, seemed like the next day to me really, I don't think it was right away... I know it wasn't right away, but it was way long, and some MPs came roaring up with their jeep and the machine gun on top and they took care of him in no time and rushed us back to the hotel. Then at the hotel, it was just a hotel down an alley; let's change that, it was just a building down an alley, and it was probably housing for Vietnamese families and we lived in their rooms, maybe it was a Vietnamese hotel for stevedores that came in on the ships and things. It was just bedrooms with showers. Every room had its own shower, and there was... one floor had a big mess hall in it so we would get, we had civilian cooks fix us breakfast if we were there for breakfast. And then on the roof top, it was a place where we had lounge chairs, you know, like you'd have at the beach, long lounge chairs. So, we were sent in two places. We were sent to the front door where there were cement [no] sandbags and there were, culverts you know round cement culverts and, it was cut out in the back and you would get it in front and defend the front entrance of the hotel, or more than likely, you were up on the roof which is five stories up and you're given your M-14 and a dozen magazines and this is again probably the only thing that's less strategically important than the docks where the civilian bags of rice came in, but here we were with our helmet and our cutoff blue-jeans and t-shirts, and our M-14's on the roof, waiting for the Viet Cong to come charging down our alley, cause we had buildings all around so it was quite a deal. What was interesting when you were up on the roof, we saw all the fighting all over, and particularly, we could see the dock and the other side of the Saigon River. We weren't on the Mekong we were on the Saigon River. And the ships would come into the Saigon River at Vang Tau, and it would be about forty miles up, twenty-five-forty miles upriver, to the port area of Saigon, and the river was pretty big to get all these freighters in there. But on the other side, we watched helicopters doing runs, you know, bombing runs or machine gun runs, and tracers going all over the place, and when you turn around and then look into the city we could see the same thing going on all over the city, particularly over towards Cholon it was um... Again, as a young guy who was brought up to be a clerk with very little military experience other than basic training, my whole goal was to track merchandise, not defend a civilian hotel in downtown Saigon. So, that was my Tet experience.

Mcmanamon: So was the hotel ever attacked?

Domagata: No, No chance. I mean we didn't have anyone over the rank of E5. If they're going to attack a hotel, they'll attack the BOQ's, Bachelor Officer Quarters, hotels, or Senior NCO hotels. It could be the, you know, Plaza hotel or the Rex BOQ, that type of thing.

Mcmanamon: While the Tet offensive was going down, were you taken off dock duty to protect?

Domagata: Right, just defend our hotel. You couldn't get anybody to come and pick up the merchandise or the freight that was coming off the ships. You know, nobody was working, it was all about the fight.

[33:00] OCS

Mcmanamon: So, after the Tet offensive, that happened early, two or three weeks into your position at the docks, and then you stayed working at the Saigon docks for a little while and then you went back to Officer Candidate School, is that correct?

Domagata: Not back. When I first got drafted, or when I went through basic training...

Mcmanamon: You were transferred to OCS?

Domagata: Prior to that, Basic training first then the transportation, but at the training, basic training was at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, the transportation headquarters for all transportation training, and transportation OCS is in Fort Eustis, VA. So when I'm taking my basic training in Ft. Leonard Wood, another battery of tests, I had taken more tests than in high school, really, and at the conclusion of these tests, they pulled a handful of us out and said, you guys really qualify for Officer Candidate School, OCS. So I qualified for OCS and they brought us in, had a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant/1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant, tell us how great that would be, we could be leaders, and, you know, do more for our country, the patriotism thing. And I... at least half to two thirds of the guys said, "No thanks, were out of here," and a couple of us said, "Yeah, that, you know, that would be a good thing to do." Now, the impetus for that is there was probably about six months between leaving college and going to basic training. During those six months I had a tremendous job. I worked for Warwick Electronics tracking railroad cars of merchandise and empty cars to make sure they were charged back to the freight companies, and I had a guy who had just won, or been awarded, or recognized to be the traffic manager, for the year for the whole country, and it was a big deal. And I reported directly to him, and when I left, when my draft date came, they had a little party for me at work which was kinda cool, and, um, Woody Woodberry was his name, and he shook my hand and said "Domagata, you're going to be an officer right?" You know, All I knew was officer friendly, I mean, I didn't even know what it meant to be an officer, everybody in my family were

enlisted guys; just troops, you know. So the thought went in the back of my mind and I said, "No "here's what I'm going to be. I'm going to be in transportation, just like this job." And he said "Okay, well good luck too ya" and boom. So when this opportunity to sign up for OCS, I'm thinking, wow, I can, you know, take advantage and learn about leadership and even more management of transportation, and I said, and I asked them "Can I go to that school?" and naturally they lied, you know, the guys at the training place where you take those tests say, "Sure, but you have to put three things down two of them can be your intellectual duties, but one has to be a combat arm." And I put down Transportation, number 1. I put stars by it. Second choice, I put down Intelligence, I thought that was kinda a joke, but I'd like to be in Intelligence. Third one, I put it in logic of the only knowledge I had, being a nineteen year old, and those were watching war movies, and I thought that in war movies, of the movies I've seen, the infantry guys were way up front getting shot, and I remember my uncle said that's not what you want to do. So I didn't want infantry. Then there were the tanks, the cavalry, and I think, in my mind I saw bigger targets, so that isn't going to work. And they had combat engineers and my dad said I didn't know a screwdriver from a hammer, so combat engineers are out. Then I'm thinking artillery! You know, in World War II, World War I, and history, the artillery is back here, the fighting's here, I'm going to be in Artillery. If I have to go that route, I can do that, so I checked that box. So I finished basic... So that was before basic training, went to basic training, finished that, I said, "What about that OCS," and he [the Commanding Officer] said, "No it'll catch up with you just go to your MOS, you know." So I went to Fort Eustis, got there, they said just hang on, it'll come, that finished, and I asked them again, you know, "Where's the OCS classes?" "Well they must have not needed you," so they sent me to Vietnam. Well, I'm in Vietnam for four months and the orders came in, you know. Four months into Vietnam, and I'm working the night shift at that time, twelve on, twelve off, and it had to be like 2:00 in the afternoon, which, I'm in bed sleeping, and it's like 2:00 in the morning for a normal person, and someone is pounding, a CQ, a charge of quarters, is pounding on my door, he says "The 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant wants to see you down in his office, right now" and I'm asleep, says, "Leave me alone," he says "You got to get there right now." And I went there in my underwear, and I was mad. I mean, I was good at what I was doing, I had good reports, good reviews. Why are you doing this? So I get down there, and he was pretty outraged that I was in my underwear, and he, we're in a hotel anyway, who cares you know. He did. We got in there and he says, "Here you have orders for OCS, you really need to decide now whether you want 'em or not." I said "Now? What does now mean? Like today? This week? What?" and he said "Now. Right now. While you're here. If you want 'em, you're gonna have to chase all over the place and get checked out of Vietnam, and you know, get your medical records in order, your finances in order, your personnel orders in order, and get down to the airport tomorrow at four o'clock." So that's like I have twenty-six hours if I wanna do this or I can just can say, "Screw it, I like

living in a hotel”, and, you know. I didn't even ask what kind of OCS it was. I thought it was the transportation OCS you know. All they said was it was OCS. You know, I'm- its two o'clock in the morning for my brain. So I said, “I'll do it” and I ran in and started stuffing everything I had into my duffle bags. I had a couple things by then. I think I bought a stereo and a fan or something, I had to run them to a place to get them shipped back. Then do the medical records here, the personnel records there, and I'm taking cabs all over the city to get to these various sites. It wasn't convenient, I don't know why they didn't have just one place, but the 4<sup>th</sup> Trans. Command or rather 125<sup>th</sup> Trans. Command had the stuff scattered all over. I had, you know, this cab driver stays with me running around, and I got on a plane and they gave me a few days to fly home first. So I didn't tell my folks I'm coming home; didn't have a chance, so flew home. “Surprise, I'm here!” I think my dad thought I'd gone AWOL. Fine, I told them what happened and they're all you know, happy. By now, all my friends are in the military. The only two guys that didn't get in the military, one pal had been in a serious car accident, and he actually signed up for the Marines, and he couldn't get in 'cause of his accident and how it affected him. The other guy had asthma and he didn't get in. They were the only two guys left, and they had jobs and life. So I spent a few days at home then flew out to Fort Sill, which meant nothing to me. It was just another place to go through OCS, I was kinda surprised it wasn't Fort Eustis. But low and behold I find out that this is the Artillery OCS. And they kinda said “Okay, this is the Artillery OCS” and I thought that's kinda wild. The normal artillery candidate is a candidate who has gone through basic training, Artillery AIT, so whereas I was learning transportation, they were learning everything about cannons, howitzers, and then they would go into this class. Well I went straight from Vietnam into the class, so I didn't know a cannon from a rocket. There were about three guys like myself. We were all the prior service, they called us, and we all had a Vietnam patch on our shoulder, whereas all the other guys, all they knew about the military is what they learned in Basic and AIT, we'd all served. One was E6, and he was as sharp as a tack and the other guy was an airborne guy from the 101st who fought in Hue with the Tet [Offensive] and he was battle hardened like crazy, tough, tough guy. So nobody messed... Really we were not messed with a lot. In fact, it just wasn't a benefit, but it wasn't a harassment to be a prior candidate. It became a harassment because we didn't have college degrees. All of the guys that were going into OCS had been college graduates, and upon graduation from college, they went into OCS, and the three of us didn't. So there was an uppity attitude about us not being smart enough to be in OCS by a certain clique or percentage of the other OCS candidates. That was a problem...for some people but, I believe right around a little more than half of our class didn't graduate [from OCS] so we took all the abuse. We did the studies, the artillery studies. We learned what we had to learn about trajectory and cannon placement, and calling in artillery... We skipped a part! So week two of OCS, the week one is just pure harassment and teaching you about being able to deal with people screaming at your face, turning your footlockers upside

down, banging on things, just personally trying to see if you could take harassment, and we lost people cause they couldn't. This is just, mickey-mouse, it's not worth it. I mean, these guys, these senior candidates, and TAC officers were just brutal. I mean, you'd polished your shoes so they could reflect to the moon, and they would step on your toes to scuff them up. I mean, it was just a terrible time. Then you're just trying to get used to that and no matter what they did, I always smiled, because I had been to Vietnam. This was just some goofy guys yelling. It didn't mean anything to me, and other guys are coming close to peeing in their pants. Really, I mean they were so scared of these upperclassmen who were nothing. They're just a guy who's been around the school a little longer, so the three of us had an advantage that this is a joke, and we could put up with this, so we did. And then classes started, and you learned about the various weapons, artillery weapons, from the small 105 to the 175, which is a huge. It seems the numbers are pretty close but the variants in the weapons are amazing. One has maybe a 7 or 8 mil range while the other has a 25 or 30mi range. One has a 100 pounds, 80 pounds shell, and the other has a 200 pounds shell. So we learned about that stuff and about week two maybe three, I had an enlightenment.

Mcmanamon: In what way?

Domagata: What do you think? Remember what artillery is, a bunch of guns over here, shooting over there. Well, the enlightenment was the realization that there was somebody out there, by the target area, whose calling in the artillery, whose calling in the grid coordinates, to the guys back at the battery. That's a forward observer, and every 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in the artillery has to be a forward observer first. So you get assigned to an infantry unit; infantry my mom and her brother didn't want me to be in. Now I'm going to be in the infantry as an artillery observer, not only will I be there, I'll have a guy with a radio next to me all the time, that's a big target with his antenna. I was like, this couldn't be a worse situation, however, I had written everyone in my family, and every friend I had, that I'm going to be an officer. I'm in OCS, I'm back from Vietnam. I'm safe. I'm in Oklahoma, beautiful state, so I couldn't quit.

Mcmanamon: And was your tour... You signed up for three years because of your specialty, or was that extended when you started officer school?

Domagata: Well, it came out to be pretty close to the same. I went in in July, but my graduation, well, okay, my three years would have ended in July, but with OCS, you had to have two years after you graduate. So, I graduated from OCS in December, so the only extra time would have been from September to December. So, you know, I quickly got over that, you know, just for three months. The pay was almost double, you know, the finances of it was [were] important, and to learn about leadership, was critical to me. I would have

learned about transportation and I was learning about artillery, the key thing was leadership. You know, I watched those guys who had composure; the other guys who did manage and lead the troops. We were always broken down into jobs so you would be the squad leader, platoon leader... the acting squad leader, acting platoon leader, acting 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant, acting this or that. One of the biggest rewards you could have would be acting battery commander, and I was selected for that. Somebody recognized that I had some leadership qualities to be the acting battery commander. And then I had it when we had a [field] exercise, so that was even more crazy, you know, so that means, we had a pretend battery, with six real guns that we had to haul out into the fields and valleys of Fort Sill and have a fake enemy that we would be shooting at. I had the battery commander [job] at that time so, you know, it was a big deal to be recognized as a leader, and to have that opportunity. So, I did learn a lot about artillery, but I was always freaking out about being this forward observer, holy crap. How's this gonna work? So I graduated from OCS.

[50:12- After OCS - Panama]

Mcmanamon: And then you went back to Vietnam after that?

Domagata: I got three sets of orders. Here's your lieutenant's orders, you are now a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, congratulations. Here are your orders for Vietnam, you're going right back, great. Oh, and by the way, here are your other orders, before you go to Vietnam, we're going to send you down into Panama, to a jungle training center, and my eyes rattled, I could hear them rattling. I asked "What do you mean jungle training center?" They said "Well, we want you to know that the jungle can be your friend", and that was the essence of this. We wanted to eliminate one enemy." Um okay. I was used to living in a city in Vietnam, and the suburbs, or whatever in Illinois. So for two weeks we were trained how to live in the jungle. How to do survival. How you could eat snake. We could eat snakes, we ate snake, we ate rat. We killed chickens without a knife, you know. I mean, we did all kinds of wild things, and prepared a chicken for dinner without using a knife, you know, so um. Had a [laughter]... we had an escape and evasion for a couple days, couple nights. I don't know what it was, you know, it was a period of time. I know for sure it was one night, could have been two nights. But they take ya out in the middle of the Isthmus of Panama, and say, "You've got to get here. Here's a map." Okay, and it was an odd mix of guys. I don't know why I was picked, but I had guy who was a captain in my squad, and I had a guy who was a Harvard graduate, and two other guys, and myself, and we had to do the map thing and get to this end place, and then cross the river and you're safe. Now all over this area that we're in are Special Forces guys and if they catch us, they get a pass, if they catch us, we go to a PoW camp and they torture you because they give you a secret and you can't tell the secret, and they do bad things to you. So your goal is not to get caught, to be sneaky and get across this isthmus, to this

place. You know guys huddled up and everybody is talking and stuff; one guy is going to go out and steal a boat and another guy is going to go out, and they told you we had to stay in this area and we can't go out of it, well, they said there's no rules like that in Vietnam, if you're going to survive, you're going to survive, so some guys did make it that way, and the majority of people were captured and put in this PoW camp, and they, um, they tortured people. They put them in a barrel upside-down that was on strings and swung it around and beat on it. Guys were throwing up on themselves upside-down in that barrel. They had electric prods to get you to tell that secret. They burned a hole through a guy's eyelid. So it was grim, grim stuff, however, this genius 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant [himself] got lost. The Special Forces guys knew every logical trail that anybody with brains would take, but they didn't count on somebody not having brains and getting lost, and we went out to the river and came around a back way, and my group made it by the last five minutes, otherwise we would have had to take it over again, but we came in, and they said, "Where we're you guys, where have you been." You know we say, "We had a plan, you know, here we are." So we graduated that, and went to Vietnam. You know that was funny.

In Vietnam, I was met by a friend that I went to high school with. He was working in that area, and he knew what plane I was coming in, said he knew my first assignment. He said not to worry you're not going to... you're going to a normal unit not some of the crazy units out there. And so he gave me a little peace of mind, and went up to 1st Field Forces, up in Nha Trang. Met with a bunch of people, they assigned me to the 27th Artillery Regiment— 5th Battalion, 27th Artillery Regiment, 5th of the 27th, and had to go back down south to Phan Rang which was their battalion rear. They sign you in and then send you to the Battalion forward, which was in Đà Lạt, and I met with the colonel, and he said "Well, here is what your year is going to look like. You're going to spend four months working as a forward observer, you'll spend four months working in a battery because you'll learn as a forward observer, how important it is to get rounds in quickly. You call in, you get into contact, you get on the radio, you call in the coordinates, you want those rounds, right away, and you'll learn that by being a forward observer. So after you're a good forward observer you'll work with the battery, and then your impetus is to get those guys [on the howitzers] to get those rounds to the guys [in the field] right away. And then, your last four months we'll have you work in the rear as a liaison somewhere and other staff positions. So there's your year, four, four, and four. Then we shake hands, give you a couple medals, and send you home." I said, "Really? I can do that." He says "Okay, well we're going to put a little spin on that. We see that you worked with [Saigon] civilians, and with Vietnamese. We are not... Typically, we would sign you to an American infantry unit, but we're going to assign you to the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Viet Nam] unit."

Mcmanamon: So you were attached to an ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] unit as a forward observer?

[56:28- ARVN Unit]

Domagata: Yes, I was. And I was given an RTO [Radiotelephone Operator]. Sometimes, you know, I had a sergeant, recon sergeant with, you know, it didn't make sense, but sometimes, I had him with, but mostly it was the RTO and myself we're the ones who were there to call in the artillery for the ARVN's and we went to the 53rd ARVN Regiment which was headquartered in Di Linh and that's halfway between Đà Lạt and Bao Loc. A lot of people that served in II Corps, Đà Lạt is a mountain village, very beautiful. A number of universities there, it could be a French village in the French Alps. I mean just magnificent. You would never guess you were in Vietnam to be in Đà Lạt. And then several miles away, twenty maybe, more, there's Di Lihn, and then a little bit farther, the same distance there's Bao Loc. So I get assigned to these ARVN's, and, the whole world changed for me. They sent me first to forward observer school to make sure I knew how-to call-in artillery relatively accurate. You know, that was a week, big deal. So then, I went to this ARVN unit, and it's me, my artillery, my radio operator—he carried my radio—my map, and a bunch of Vietnamese. There was an infantry advisor with them, also, and he would sometimes talk to me, but it was a very alone time. In the beginning, I didn't trust them, they didn't trust me. Were the ARVN's that I was out with really Viet Cong? You know, that kinda worried me. I think for the first two or three days I didn't sleep at night, I just was like, "Wow. This is crazy." And then when something did happen, the first time or two, my artillery technique was accurate, and I created some, I got some respect. And shortly after that, they offered me a bat man, somebody that would carry my rucksack, and make my food for me, and things of that nature and I said, "That ain't gonna happen." So they assigned him as my bodyguard, so I have my RTO guy, I have my personal body guard whose, no matter where I went the same guy was with me, and the real guy I connected with was the [ARVN] company commander. [Domagata's phone goes off]. Okay, so I'm with the ARVN's and trust happens and, you know, the ARVN's I was with were phenomenal soldiers and they had phenomenal leadership, and, you know, what that means to me is they had flanks out when we needed have flanks out, we didn't walk down trails, we were quiet, and now, it's them and me, it's we, you know. And I feel part of this group. It was really a learning thing. I trusted them, we did well together, and we went on several, no, well I didn't keep track. I wish I had a journal or something as to how many operations we went on, and maybe, we went on a lot of them. I went through several, radio, uh, RTO's. The first one I had I inherited from the guy I replaced. So he was seasoned. He was the best thing at the time. I mean he was really good, and he taught me a lot about field craft, you know, packing things right and walking quiet, and how you walk quiet, and who you watched, and he was really good. He just got burned out in the field. You see one too many firefights, and he's a volunteer so he went back to the battery, and I had to call them to send me a new RTO, and then I would send him back so it would be a switch.



And I think the battery had this great idea of who do we want to get rid of. So, they sent me just like the worst knucklehead I've ever known. I mean, he was big. He was a high school football player, but he was a complainer, and everything was a problem. The radio was a problem, the batteries was a problem, the frequencies were a problem, and following quietly was a problem. He just whined and whined and whatever. I think he was such a problem that the Vietnamese knew he was a problem. They'd complain to the battalion advisor who was the regimental advisor who went up their chain saying that there was this guy who's making noise, he's not doing stuff, he's not fast, you know. He was making noise, that was the big deal, and so, it came back down that I had to get rid of him, or I had to bring him in line or get rid of him. Well, I knew by this time I couldn't bring him in line unless I shot him. That was the only way it would be quiet, so I called the battery commander and told him about the problem, and said, "If another guy comes out like this, I will shoot him." 'Cause now I'm an FO, who's tough. You know, I'm out in the field, I'm a hardened warrior in my mind and I'm not putting up with this s\*\*\*. So I sent the guy back and they sent me a spectacular young man. You know, he had... He was an interesting. He was Irish. Denny Mueller, and he had music in his ears all the time, and he would be walking like this, all the time [imitating his walk]. All the time. He was quiet, but every time you looked at him, and his nickname, I later found out, I called to the artillery guys, "What's with this guy?" "Well we call him Bouncing Denny. He always... You ask him what song he's singing in his head, and he'll sing it for ya" and he knows it right, you know, but he knew to be quiet in the field. He was good at field craft. He knew how to step appropriately, he knew how to work the radios, he knew what was going on when the rounds were flying, but bouncing Denny, with his bleached white, Marilyn Monroe colored hair, and curly, Bouncing Denny. So that was a joy to have him with. And we went to stage number two, okay. So time number two, and it's about four months bouncing around this regiment to different groups of [ARVN] companies, that are in... So a regiment has different battalions, and then there's different companies to a battalion. So we would stay with one for a week or so, and then move to another one, you know, a couple weeks, and maybe move to another one so, that how that time went. Before we continue the story, I'll tell one story about the ARVN's that is noteworthy.

#### [1:04:32]- Special Đà Lạt Story

I had been with these guys; this is my second time with them. I wasn't with them earlier, we did our thing, and they must have requested me again for another operation, so I went with them again. We were concluding this operation and-- that was a story in itself— but we concluded it by walking into Đà Lạt , and I said, "Okay, this is that magnificent French alp city," and he [the Company Commander] says, "Every once in a while a different company gets to be assigned and it's almost a relax period according to the headquarters, and what

that means is that the Viet Cong and the ARVN's both used it as an R&R area. They... It wasn't written any place, but they went in there and they never fought. It was just a peaceful time in this city, and he says, "Our role is to have our platoons go on what they called "butterfly" or "horseshoe" type operations, and they will do patrols in loops around the city. We'll stand here, we'll set up a headquarters, and they'll do their mission, and what we'll do, what my role would be, is when they get to the peak of their arc, they'll set up, call in their night position to me and I will, I'll call in some defensive artillery rounds for them. So they're here, and maybe 300-400 yards out, I will fire an artillery round in, and the gun will have all the data for that, so if they get under attack, they can move off that round. So I've got three platoons out, three sets of plotted and shot in artillery targets, and that would be our night. Now, he says that's what we're supposed to do. So he called the company in, and he released them all. They all went into town. I said, "What about these little things we're supposed to be doing?" He says, "That's just on paper. Let's go check into a hotel." So we checked into a hotel, went up to the roof, and there's a rooftop bar. We set up our radios, we got our map, and, say, "Well, here's where this guy's supposed to be, call in that round. Here's where this guy supposed to be, call in that round, and here's where this guy's supposed to be call in that round," but we're staying in the hotel, eating steaks in the restaurant. We're sleeping in the beds. There is nobody out there. This is like a fake operation. Can you, are you imagining what I'm saying?

Mcmanamon: Yes.

Domagata: The next night, well, this guy and I are becoming buddies like crazy. We talk about music, and I say I like blues, and I like jazz and he did too. He says, "You really like blues and jazz?" and I said, "Yeah, I really do like blues and jazz." "Do you wanna go listen to some real blues and jazz?" I said "Sure." Okay, we take our rifles, go into town, and he said, "Now we're gonna go into a place, you're gonna just sit down at the bar, you're gonna listen to the music, and you're not gonna make any eye contact with anybody else in the bar." I say, "What do you mean?" "You'll see, come on." So we go into this underground, you know, it's a basement of a building. It's right by one of the universities, and low and behold, there's the coolest blues band you've ever heard. These guys have their berets, smoking the cigarettes, and they're doing blues music. I mean there's harmonica, there's guitar, there's a couple other pieces. You know, there's a snare drum going on. I mean this is the coolest blues, but leaning on the wall are M-16's and AK-47's. AK-47's are the enemy's rifles, and we are in this place, sitting, listening to blues music, drinking Vietnamese beer, and having an evening I'll never forget the rest of my life. It was totally crazy, totally wild crazy. And so we went back. I still live in wonderment as to how this night really occurred. So, our stay was two or three days in Đà Lạt, and another operation comes on and we go into that operation and life never is the same afterwards. So I'm at about four months.

[1:09:25 - Working with Civilians vs. Military Vietnamese]

Mcmanamon: That was just a fascinating story. I don't know if you wanna talk about this now, or when you talk about your end of the year, but having this experience working with civilian Vietnamese and then military Vietnamese, and you've sort of commented on it a little bit, but I was just wondering if you could comment on it a little more. Obviously, you said the Vietnamese at the docks were all college educated and was it very different working with the military Vietnamese...?

Domagata: Well, the soldiers were draftees. The officers were typically from richer families that either bought their degree, or bought their commission but they were typically also a college graduate -- not all of them spoke English, so I could speak English almost always with some and figure out how to make out an English conversation with the company commander, and occasionally a platoon commander if I would go out with a platoon. They didn't really ever send me out without no one that had an idea what English was about. Now the troops, once I became trusted, they wanted to, just kinda, try to have some kind of rapport. I was blond. I had hair on my arms, those were fascinating things for them. With language being the barrier, I mean we had some pidgin, if that's the correct word. We kinda knew a couple words in each other's language that we could communicate. You know what? There were a couple dopes in the American army and there were a couple dopes in every unit. You could tell that even they didn't like a couple of the guys, but they were generally draftees who really didn't want to be in the war. The NCO's had been in the military a long time. Some of them had fought the French. Some of the people that fought the French went into the Viet Cong, which had previously was the Viet Min when the Viet Min fought the French and they evolved to be Viet Cong as they fought us. Some of the Viet Min old-timers were now Senior NCO's with the ARVN's. They were good soldiers, they were strict. Oh my gosh, if a guy... We went into Đà Lạt one time and they found a guy, and it was one of their guys who went AWOL, went home to see his wife for some reason, I don't know what the heck, was he lonely? They staked him out in the sun for two or three days. They had this little cage that was maybe twelve inches high, twenty-four inches wide at best, and maybe 5 1/2-6 feet maybe 5 feet at most long, and it was all barbed wire. And this guy had to stay out there in the sun for a couple days, and he had whip marks on his back. So you know, they were tough, these guys were tough on their own people. I mean, our sergeants couldn't do that. They probably wanted to with some of the knuckleheads that were in our army. But I think they wanted to stay alive, and my next part of my story, is, remember in the second part I was supposed to get to a battery, well, that didn't happen, I got assigned to the 101st Airborne.

[1:13:16-101st Airborne]

I'm not airborne. So they needed and FO, they were desperate. I don't know if they lost one or whatever, I never got told why that happened, but now I'm with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 506th Infantry, Airborne Division, out of Phan Thiet, and the life is not what I expected it to be, holy cow. I will tell ya, and not to really besmirch them, they didn't always have flanks out. Whereas I knew the places we were with the 101<sup>st</sup>, but if I was there with the ARVN's, there would be flanks out...

Mcmanamon: Yeah, definitely take a break if you need it.

Domagata: But the ARVN's would have their flank units out, you know, but not always with the Americans. And the Americans would sometimes even smoke out in the field, and that carries. I think we had great soldiers. They were brave and the leaders were wonderful. NCO's were... Senior NCO's were great, and, you know, I don't have anything bad to say about the 101st, my life is alive because of them.

Mcmanamon: So you're just saying that it was a very different atmosphere that the ARVN?

[1:15:13] Malaria

Domagata: Yeah. Yeah. With the ARVN's, I got malaria one time. Typically, I don't know where they got their forward observers from, but I would have guessed they would be part of MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam]. MACV is the group that had advisors, they had infantry advisors. I wasn't an artillery advisor; I was just an FO. So when I came down with malaria they called an, um, medevac and sent me to Phan Thiet, now my unit is headquartered in Phan Rang, so I get carried into the hospital there and it's the 101st headquarter. And they were upset that I wasn't a 101st guy. It was pretty wild, and I came in and I had diarrhea all over myself, and I had a fever, a high fever, 103 fever, and they wouldn't let you out of the field unless you had a 103 fever so I'm shaking, and I'm shivering and I'm boiling, and I crapped all over myself and they get me in and this doctor asked me, "Well, what's wrong with you?" and I said "Well I just s\*\*\* on myself." He says, "You can't talk like that here." And I start screaming at him, and he's yelling at me and finally, he said, "Take your clothes off" and they put me in a bed and gave me liquids. I was there for a long time, and I, you know. My mail generally went to Phan Rang which was the headquarters, then it would go to my battery, where ever it was, I was signed to an artillery battery, so I really was in Alpha Battery 5th of the 27th, and then they would send it to Di Lihn, where the regimental headquarters are, and if they remembered what company I was out with, they would send it to that company, and now I'm in the 101st hospital, and nobody on earth knew where I was. The artillery guys didn't know where I was. The MACV's guys didn't know where I was, they put me on a helicopter. So I didn't get mail for about thirty days. And I wasn't writing then because I wasn't feeling good, and my parents got a hold of our congressman,

and created a whole bunch of stink. So I got in trouble for not writing, but I thought nobody was writing me — so why would I write back? So that's issue one. So that got taken care of, then I got well, and they sent me back out into the field, now it's the end of that four months. I'm with the 101st, we had adventures, you know. We went down mountain ranges, where there were... We went through mountain ranges, and there were high cliffs, more cliffs low, and a thin trail. The trail couldn't have been more than two feet and there were drops and there was sheerness. We're going quite a distance and there were things like this down the road, and they're elephant turds. I say, "What are those things?" "They're elephant turds." "You tell me an elephant went down this trail?" He says "Yeah, Hannibal crossed the Alps with elephants." They had elephants, which is a kind of nutty thing to talk about, so I learned about elephants. We never saw an elephant, but we were tracking them to try, they were VC elephants of course. Carrying VC, you know, ammunition, medical supplies, and food, whatever. That's what the theory was. We never found them. Next thing that was kinda interesting, is we're out in the middle of fields... Again, we're in the mountains. And whenever there's the mountains, there's little plateaus and off somewhere we'll find these garden patches. And wow, there are cucumbers, melons, and, squash, so we would rip them up and keep them to eat, and the biggest adventure was when we could find watermelon. They had these little round watermelons, again, bigger than the elephant turds, but round, not the big one's we're used to seeing here. And it was like heaven when you could find the watermelons. So now, maybe we'll have one war story here.

[1:20:22]- Ambush on the Plows

Domagata: Down in the flats, after the mountains, and the ocean, and the South China Sea starts, there's this huge area called the Li Hong Fong forest, big flat area, and it was huge, and Rome plows were these gigantic caterpillar type of plows that had a twenty foot blade in front, and they would line three or four of them across, and would just plow through this forest and so, take the access away from the Viet Cong moving quickly through this area. You know, planes would fly over there, helicopters would fly all the time, and this would give them access to see what's going on down there. Well, this Rome plow unit got ambushed. We were up in the mountains, they said, "Hey, you need to get down there right now, we're sending some helicopters to pick you up. Clear out an LZ." So, uh, they're blowing up trees, and sawing trees... no we weren't sawing, it was all blowing up trees, and we had to have an LZ [landing zone], right where we were right away. Helicopters came, picked us up, and took us the twenty miles down to the flat lands. We landed, in a totally different area of operation. We don't have any of the maps for here. We don't have any of the call signs for who's in the area. You know, I didn't have contact with any artillery units, so now I'm an infantry man, and they couldn't... We landed about two km from where these Rome plows circled up like the uh...

Mcmanamon: Like wagon trains?

Domagata: Like the wagon trains, right! And they had those things and they had big weapons. They had like 50 caliber machine guns, and M-60's, which is a smaller machine gun, but it was faster, more rounds per minute, and smaller rounds but more per minute. They're all huddled up, berms all around them, and we're about two clicks out and it was getting dark, and we were supposed to walk into them. Well, with no radio contact, they open up on us, with all these automatic weapons, and 60's and machine guns, so we're calling on the guys on the helicopter to call whoever to get these guys to quit. And, to this day I don't know how no one got killed. I mean, guys were getting underneath the leaves of grass. You were huddling down into the dirt, and rounds were going through guy's backpacks. Our guys were shooting at us. So it was kinda crazy. By morning, a helicopter came in with all the right maps, and all the correct radio frequencies for the artillery around us and it was a very, very interesting time. People will guess the company commander was outraged, then everybody was screaming at each other, and you know. My artillery liaison came out with my SOI [Special Operating Instructions], which was what the radio frequencies are and the call signs. They change the radio call signs and frequencies all the time, so the enemy doesn't know what line, and frequencies are on and who we are. I don't know, they probably got them before we did. They probably knew the printer, but uh. So I'm at the end of the next four months.

Mcmanamon: And was that with the 101<sup>st</sup> when you were doing that?

Domagata: I think. Right before that happened, we had an event, and we overran a bunker complex. Typically, whenever enemy equipment was captured, it was turned over to the infantry, and they sent it back and inventoried it and got credit for it, took pictures of how tough of warriors they were. Although they depended on me to be the artillery guy, or the guy that does good things for them, the weapons all went that way. Well, at this bunker complex, there were more weapons, and I got one, and we used that complex [spot] for resupply. Again, we cleared out some trees, the helicopter went it. Interesting enough, the chaplains showed up now and then. Had a mass, blessed you, gave out rosaries, whatever, prayer books, and um, low and behold, the artillery chaplain shows up. I thought this is something. This is really cool, "What brings you out here?" I think he wanted to go on an adventure, or something. He knew that this was safe, because we cleared out this complex, there wasn't anybody around, so darn chaplain comes in and I wrote a note onto the back of a box of C-rations, because they brought in supplies, we had all that, and I said to the colonel, "I hope you remember me. This is the FO that you sent out here nine months ago and, uh, four months you said as an observer and four months in a battery and then I could be the uh, liaison guy. My first [request] is to come in and be a

liaison, my second choice is, if that's not possible, I'm aware that the air observer, his tour is over, and his position should be open, and if the need be, I'll sign an extra six months in Vietnam if I can have that job." A job where I fly every day, go home to air strip where there is a bunk waiting with my name on it. And every day I'll have hot food, a bunk, and I will not sleep in the jungle, again. "That's my deal. If it's my time for a liaison job, that's first choice, second choice boom." Shortly after that note went in tied on a string to the rifle that I captured, I gave it to the chaplain, and asked him to give it to the colonel. [my artillery battalion commander] A couple weeks after that we're in this thing with the Rome plows.

[1:27:48] Malaria again

We're out of the mountains and in the flat land and malaria hits me again. You know, I was faithful. I took the pills that you take during the week, I took the pill that you take at the end of the week. You take some every day and some different pill on the weekend or whatever, and I was faithful to that stuff, I did not... I knew what would happen to ya if you goofed up. So I get medevac'd out. Since I was with the 101st my unit knew where I was and they sent me to Phan Rang, which was our battalion, where the doctor there said, "Well, you know, you're cooked." I was really boiling. The 103, I surpassed that and I think I actually passed out and they put me on a medevac to Cam Ranh Bay. After a couple days I'm conscious or I wake up, and half of the platoon I was with, with the 101st, all got the same thing. So we were all taking our pills. Apparently, some mosquito that was different than the pills we were taking for wiped us out. Literally, there had to be fifteen guys that I was serving with were all in the same hospital ward in Cam Ranh Bay. So I get out of that and got healthy. Go back to Phan Rang, and at the time the colonel had approved the orders for me to extend for six more months in Vietnam and at that point I became no longer a forward observer, I became an air observer.

[1:29:39] \*Break\*

Mcmanamon: Okay

Domagata: Can we take a break a minute?

Mcmanamon: Yeah, um perfectly fine. Do you need to get up?

Domagata: I'm fine, I just need to stop talking.

Mcmanamon: Yeah, I know, you've just been going straight ahead, I haven't had a moment to get anything in, which is good, very good. These questions are just there to guide

the interview in case you stall or to jog your memory or something like that. So yeah, we've covered a lot of ground, definitely.

Domagata: Are there any questions that you want to cover?

[1:30:15] Air Observer

Mcmanamon: That's why I'm looking back, to see if anything you know. You were with the 53<sup>rd</sup>; we covered that, the time with the ARVN. Yeah so, you've covered a lot. So this is your last ten months we're looking that?

Domagata: Six months. Oh, it's actually more, I have three months.

Mcmanamon: Right, you have three months left and then the six months. And that time was all spent with the air observers?

Domagata: Correct, I have three months on the end of that tour, and six months that I extended for.

Mcmanamon: And that was the end of... were you able to go home after that, or was that just the end of your time in Vietnam and you were gonna be there?

Domagata: When you sign up for the additional six months, you get a free thirty-day leave, and air ticket to fly around the world wherever you want. So I did not take that trip right away. I went into flying right away as the air observer, now... It was the same but different. You were seeing the big picture from above. You really could see where the Viet Cong were that we fought. We typically fought Viet Cong. We did not typically fight NVA, it'd be rare, but it did happen, but mostly Viet Cong. The flying, again I'm the outside guy. Here's a group of... I think I was with the 183rd Recon Aircraft Company. They were bird-dogs. Planes had stamps on them from the '40s, so they were WW2/Korea [war] planes. Open windows. The windows were pulled up typically and the front had a windshield, and looking out the window, that side you come up on your wing and you look out that way. So you could see and we were tandem. The pilot was in front of me, I was in the back, and I've got maps and a radio and a weapon or two. I almost always had two weapons. I had a .45 and a rifle or I had an M-16 or shotgun and sometimes I carried an M-79, which was a thumper. It shot out a round which was like a grenade. So sometimes I carried that.

Mcmanamon: And you had room in the cockpit for that?

Domagata: It's wedged. There was no room. It's wedged next to you.



Mcmanamon: Yeah, some of the pilots we've interviewed have talked about the difficulty of carrying side-arms in the cockpit because of the small space.

Domagata: Yeah very small but always had the uh .45, the uh Colt .45. My uncle, who was the sergeant major, wanted me to have a 9mm and I wasn't sure, but he said he'd send it to me. Um, he could get it to me, and I thought, I didn't... It's obviously a better weapon because they all switched eventually to 9mm's but I didn't think I could have gotten ammunition for it, and I like to practice a lot, so where ever I had a chance to practice I'd be shooting the pistol of the M-16. The thumper was fun to shoot too. I had a shotgun for a while. I don't know where all those went. I don't remember how I got them, and I don't know where then went in the end. But um, you know, how they got moved along but...

#### [1:34:18] Platoon Leader Experience

One of the earlier... So its October, one of the earlier flights I had was over my unit, the 101st, I always flew over the 101st, and Delta Company, 3rd of the 506. I'm out in the field with these guys. A platoon leader has to go back, I don't remember why he had to go back, his time was up or whatever. I had been in the field almost eight-nine months by that and they put me with that platoon, as acting platoon leader/forward observer.

Mcmanamon: So you were in command of airborne infantry?

Domagata: Yeah. The brilliant side is that I had a senior NCO and he really ran things, but I was the guy who would get in trouble if something went wrong. Everything was checked out with him, he knew the squad leaders real well, he knew the fire teams, and when I would get the orders, I knew what to do because I had been in the field long enough, but I wouldn't boss these guys around. That was a couple days that seemed like a long time before we got a replacement, but it was an exciting time. I was thinking, hey, this is what this leadership thing is, leading men in combat. Unfortunately, we never had combat when I was the leader. Nothing happened, but then we get the replacement. He wasn't airborne and he wasn't infantry either. He was an armor officer. Holy Mackerel! They had me stay with him for a while. Gosh, he was just a good soul. He was a good guy. He tried hard. He was enthusiastic. He wasn't dumb. He did what he was told to do when he was told to do it. You know that's what you want. Um, you know, we became close and then I'm flying. Now I know this guy, I transferred to another company or whatever. I'm no longer with, now I'm flying, Delta Company is minus me. I don't even know if they had a forward observer that time, but they were under heavy attack and the battalion commander is on this lieutenant's case, and he's flying around and they walked into an ambush, and he just made this... I can listen because I'm up there to help these guys, I can listen over the

net, and he made this guy, this platoon leader charge this ambush, and he was killed. And his radio man was also... the platoon leader's radio man when I was there, because you're with him all the time, didn't know him, we were together and I'm with the platoon leader's radio man, and he was wounded bad. He became a squad leader and he was wounded bad and they had to send a jungle penetrator down for him. That's a wire [cage] on the end of a [wire] that's hanging down from a Huey and there's a basket, they put a guy in the basket, bring him up, gone. Twenty some years later, I never knew his name, twenty some years later Holly, my wife and I, are in Milwaukee, and we love the Pfister Hotel; very nice upscale la-di-da. So we pretend we're la-di-da people, once in a while. There's a 101st reunion happening there, low and behold, okay so... At that time, I really wasn't into anything with the Vietnam, or any of that. Curiosity - let's go down there, and I went in and, wow, they have a 3rd of the 506 room and they're having a meeting. Gosh, I was with the 3rd of the 506, I'm gonna go over, and it's almost all WW2 guys, and there's like three or four guys from Vietnam there and I went and sat by them. Vietnam era guys, and you see the guys are all my dad's age and a couple young guys, so I sit next to this one guy, say, "Hey, how you doin'?" you know "How you doin'?" "Hey, when were you there?" "Huh, me too, who were you really with?" "3rd of the 506, huh me too." "Really? What company were you with?" "Oh Delta." "Wow, Delta. That's interesting." I say "Do you remember this, or do you remember that?" he says "Yeah" "Hey do you remember this lieutenant who came in who wasn't airborne." He says, "Yeah, I was his radio man, or his squad leader" I say "Really, were you wounded?" He says "Yeah, right then." Here's the guy that got hauled up. And he lives in Wisconsin and he lives by me, and our wives are better friends than we are now. And actually, he was out of it when he got wounded and I mean he was incoherent, and I told him and his wife about what happened the day he was wounded. We've become fast and close friends ever since. Actually, I'm going to a 101st reunion in June with him. We'll go down to this reunion, so here's a small story. It's crazy that this could happen. You know, this coincidence.

[1:40:43- Air Observer Adventures]

Domagata: Back to Vietnam. Now I'm flying. The adventures are wild, in the sky blue yonder. And, always no matter what happens, you go back to an airport. You go to bed. You land, you get a hot meal, and you lay in bed. It's a different kind of war. Now, what was interesting were these pilots. I always looked way younger than I am. I never wore patches. So, you know, when you're in the Army, if you had been on a previous tour in Vietnam, you could wear that patch on your other sleeve, the patch that you wear, and the patch from your previous sleeve. Most people that had been there previously would wear that patch and I never did. I didn't want people to get the idea that I am anything but who I am today. Well, who I was today, even though I spent nine months in the field, in my mind I am

the consummate warrior. Been with the ARVN's, been with the 101st. I had been to battle, but I looked like I'm fifteen and I'll show you some pictures. But you know, that's the deal, I look like I'm fifteen. These guys harassed the crap out of me, a lot, a lot. I with about six or seven or eight pilots and some pilots I would fly the whole nine months and we'd never have a contact; all we did was routine flights. That would mean fly over a convoy, or fly support of a unit that is going into an area that is heavily suspected Viet Cong. Well some pilots, there was never Viet Cong there. Some pilots, it was insane, I mean we had some crazy times where we flew into machine gun fire. And you see those things coming at you. I don't remember this, but two of the pilots I've since met, talk about two separate instances. One time at Song Mao we flew into [machine gun fire], to the point of being out of ammunition. And another time when I was with another pilot, you know, Bobby Biel is the one up at Song Mao and uh, he has got some wild stories and then there's Don Tyler, and he's got stories that again, it's a machine gun outside of Phan Thiet, [L. Z. Betty]. And you know we were running it down and you know, calling in Artillery and we got too low and all of a sudden flying, phew, phew, back and forth. According to him, he's written this up in the seahorse call sign, magazine, about him and I being in this crazy event. I don't remember the Bobby Biel story that he tells, and I don't remember the Don stories that he tells but, you know. Okay. That stuff happened if they say so. Seeing this... I run across these guys and seeing them is just amazing to have them fill in on what I don't remember. So I finished my tours. I went flying. I'm done. I'm getting ready to go home. I go back to Phan Rang. I'm still...oh back to the patch thing. Let's go back to that story. So the pilots, there's a third pilot I flew with a lot, and I liked him. John Anderson, I liked this guy a lot, and one time I went on a leave back to the United States and he had me call his wife and say, "Hey, John's okay, he thinks about you every day. He's one of the true-blue guys." I had thought of him that way. Then he shows up at a reunion, we're both at this reunion. And he tells the story, you know, my wife's there, his wife's there on how they would trick me and make me do some crazy things, the goal was to teach me how to fly from the back seat so that if they got shot I could land. Makes sense, right? Well, what this joker did is he says "Okay, you got it" And the plane... I guess if you let an O-1 Bird Dog alone it would just fly straight. But they would say, "Okay, you got the stick." There was no stick, it was in the side, I had to put it in this thing, and there were pedals and you would flip them up. And he says, "Okay, you got it" and he says, "Okay, I'm gonna let my hands go." And then when he said he let his hands go, he pushed it down so we're like gonna crash into the ground, well, then I pull up so the plane goes up, and then he pulls it up so it almost goes backwards, and, you know, I'm going up and down like this thinking I'm gonna crash. He said he pulled that stunt on me three or four times. Now I never knew that, you know, I'm crapping all over myself in the backseat, trying to get this thing to go level. Okay, so you know, I get over it. I knew it seemed weird that it was so hard to fly these planes. They were always screwing with me, but I never gave it much thought that they were... I didn't

believe that was happening. I really didn't think about it, I just thought that maybe I'm just not a skilled pilot. Now we're at this reunion and he tells this story about how these guys are jackin' around with me. He had never known that I had a first tour. He had never known that I was on these wild missions with Bobby Biel and Don. And he, you know, after he embarrasses me... After he screws with me in Vietnam, know he embarrasses me in front of my wife. That was a tragic realization that you really don't know who your friends are. Now we have since worked that out and I have gone and stayed at his home in Texas. He's at College Station by Texas A&M, and we're pals, but for a while there I wanted to kill him. Twenty years after Vietnam, or thirty years after Vietnam, is when the story comes out, and he apologized, and he said he didn't know that I should have been respected. I guess I didn't have that great aura of being a warrior. I had an aura of being a fifteen-year-old, in a lieutenant's outfit. You know, that was the humbling experience of the war.

#### [1:48:06] Leaving Vietnam

Last thing, I'm getting out of Vietnam, going home. I'm getting an early out, they're letting me go early, not from my tour, but from the Army; they didn't make me stay till December. So when my time came up, they have an officer's going home tradition. You go to the O Club, the officers club, and you drink a lot; get stupid. Then the... If you're close to getting out, the battalion commander tries to get you to sign something that you'll stay in the army, and I didn't drink enough for that signature, and it was a battle of wits for the evening. First, I said, "Well, I have to finish college, I know any of you guys that get any decent rank, you know, have to have a college degree. I got to finish that. There's... I would not be able to move up in the ranks, so what's the point?" And he said well, he had the ability to give me an um up-strap? Strap-up? A Boot Strap! They have a thing called Boot Strap where they would let me go to college, as an officer, and if I stayed in one more day, I would have been captain. You know, it was automatic captain after two years. I would attend college as a captain and as a civilian and they would pay for my... they would give me my pay and pay for my college. I thought, gee that sounds good, you know, a captain's pay sounded good, and I didn't do it. The battle went on for the whole deal [party]. So, signed out, got out of the army. I went to college. I'm older than most college students, and... so I started hanging out with the younger professors, and we're playing basketball. And I'm on the college professor's basketball [intermural] team, and one day we're walking to the gym and he's got a boonie hat, and he's got my patch on. And I said, "That interesting. Where'd you get that?" He says, "Oh my brother served in Vietnam, and that was his unit patch." "Really, that's my patch. Tell me about your brother." Well, his brother was the mail clerk for the battalion rear in Phan Rang, and his side job is, he was the bartender [at the Officer Club], and he was there that night when the battalion commander spent the whole night trying to get me to sign up for the next deal, and so... I didn't

know him, the bartender. He was just the bartender. I didn't give him the credit he shouldn't have, and all I could think of was getting home and being a civilian and going to school, but I got to meet him and talk with him and, you know, relive... I never knew him in Vietnam, but we knew a lot of the same guys, and the same stories. I'm still pals with the brother that I played basketball with, not the guy who's the Vietnam vet.

[1:51:35] After Vietnam and College

Mcmanamon: So, you sort of covered, I think, your entire Vietnam War experience. Is there anything you'd like to add, or just one, maybe, before I ask you a few questions about your experience after Vietnam, after you left the military. But is there anything else you want to add about Vietnam, your military experience or in general, in general, about your military experience?

Domagata: I think we covered pretty well. There's something about afterwards that I'd like to share.

Mcmanamon: You get out of the military and its 1970 correct?

Domagata: Yeah, yeah. Count those fingers. Yeah

Mcmanamon: So, you're getting home and, of course, you go back to college.

Domagata: Right in college, boom.

Mcmanamon: So you're in college, where were you going to school?

Domagata: I first went to the College of DuPage.

Mcmanamon: So you're also getting back. It's 1970 and the anti-war movement is heating up at that movement. So how was that experience coming back and readjusting to civilian life?

Domagata: Initially, I showed up [at college] and I'm wearing a fatigue jacket and that, and I get jumped by a bunch of guys they say, "Hey, we're Vietnam vets, if you wear that kind of stuff here you will not get any girls to go for dates, and there are a certain amount of teachers that you will not pass, so bury that. Don't, you know. There is a Vet Club, we don't meet, here, on campus. We meet at Lum's. It's a place in Glen Ellyn where the troops all went and quite a few of them went one night a week and carried on and rooted and routed and acted silly. There was an issue; particularly some classes I had to take, you know, the economic classes, there was an anti-war, anti-warrior professor there. I played the game, did well. I transferred from there to Circle Campus [University of Illinois- Chicago].

[1:53:53- Circle Campus, UIC]

Mcmanamon: UIC.

Domagata: Okay, oh boy. That was nuts. At that time, the Black Panthers were recruiting, so here are these, I don't know why, but they always had guys 6' 4". It seemed to me they were always 6' 4" they had these black berets, they had army boots tucked in to the blouse[d] [trousers], you know, so they're storming around trying to recruit other Black students to join the Black Panthers, then there's [also] running around the FBI and they're as blunt as a brick, you know you can see guys taking pictures and movies of the guys; that was unnerving. I was there - there was a shooting in the cafeteria. Now that's kinda wild, there was a gal raped in a parking lot right where I parked my car, so after a bit of time there, a couple trimesters or whatever I left. I thought it was more dangerous than Vietnam. I was worried about the Black Panthers and I was worried about the FBI. Why was I worried about the FBI? Because I played basketball. And there are a couple open gyms, and in-between classes it was pickup basketball, and it was like 75% Black guys and a couple White guys. And I just loved playing pickup basketball and I liked these black guys and, I mean, it was just a cool fun bunch of guys. They played hard basketball, run and gun, but there was always these guys shooting movies of, you know. I know my name's in some file that's hanging around with the Black Panthers' some place. It'd be interesting to track back to Circle Campus, 1971 or whatever 1972, whatever, and see what happened there. So after the shooting and the rape, I transferred to Elmhurst College, and got my degree there.

Mcmanamon: And what did you get your degree in?

Domagata: Business administration.

Mcmanamon: You go to college. Were most of the veterans that you met at DuPage... First of all was there a similar veterans' association at Circle?

Domagata: Yeah, I didn't really... I was married by then. I got married pretty quick, right maybe before I switched and so I'd go to attend my classes, and if there was time between, I played basketball. If there wasn't time, I was heading back to... We lived in Elmhurst by then, and so I was rushing back there to be with my wife. She was a teacher teaching at Glenbard North High School and life was either working, or going to school, or studying back, at our apartment.

Mcmanamon: And most of the veterans in the association at DuPage - were they volunteers like you, or draftees, or a combination?

Domagata: We never asked. If you were a veteran, you were a veteran... If you claimed to be a veteran... I don't remember a vetting to that, at all. I just remembered that... you could tell if someone was a veteran. It was just their age. They were older. Maybe they initially showed up wearing some garb, you know a hat or a field jacket or something.

Mcmanamon: Was that experience helpful for you, generally with the...?

Domagata: I think it put me on guard for the next fifteen years. Shut down. For the next fifteen years no one knew I was a veteran. No one. Period.

[1:57:47- Shutting down]

Mcmanamon: You feel was that, was that atmosphere hostile especially against...?

Domagata: You know. It was even in my family. I have an aunt who, you know, lit into me, you know. I don't wanna know if she used the baby killer term, but she used a term that embarrassed me in front of everybody about me trying to be the big tough warrior, and she couldn't have been more wrong. But she called me out, in front of cousins and aunts and uncles. It was just the weirdest thing I'd ever experienced, and that just helped me shut down even more.

Mcmanamon: So did none of your cousins or family members around your age serve?

Domagata: One did. She had a son that did, and she claimed me as the reason why he did. He wasn't a warrior, he had some IT job, which was a phenomenal, brilliant place for him to be, but he wasn't a warrior, so why are you on my case? He made the most of being intelligent in the military. There are fantastic schools, and, you know, he did the right thing.

Mcmanamon: And that's even with the fact that most or lots of your father's family and mother's family served in both in Korea and World War II. So did they, at least, were they, did you shut down with them, as well?

Domagata: There's only one cousin on my dad's side. [He] is the only person I'd come close to talking about the military with. Nobody else served, and nobody, until within the last five years, it was never a subject that was brought up at any kind of family gatherings, just more recently. We've got together again, and one of my female cousins married a veteran and then that's being good. And then this one cousin on my dad's side, we've always had a relatively good relationship, but beyond that it's like, forget about it.

[2:00:01- Out of College]

Mcmanamon: Okay, and then once you got out of college, I believe you mentioned about entering the chamber of commerce or something along those lines?

Domagata: That didn't happen until way later. I went into sporting goods. And, uh, it was actually with my father-in-law. I had wanted to work with IBM, and for whatever reason it didn't work out. I went in for some interviews, and that turned south. And I was relatively depressed, and I was working part time in the sporting goods store to help him out. Maybe he helped me out; I don't know how that exactly shook out. I ended up being able to buy into the family business and we went from two stores, to, at one time, I think we had seven stores. So I mean that was a fun ride. Then the gigantic, huge, you know, big box stores came in, and I think you would have a hard time finding a sporting goods store in any community other than in one of these mega store big things. About twenty-twenty-two years with that. After that I was the next twenty-two years with the... I went crazy and ended up selling long term car insurance and it was the best thing in the world for me. It was the perfect match. So insurance sales, I went from salesman to district manager, to wholesaler, to regional manager with a couple states, and then back to district manager, and then I became an independent. All those roles were with one company and then I went on my own for maybe the last maybe five years, or six-seven years.

[2:01:54- Leadership after Service]

Mcmanamon: I guess, you, when you were talking about your officer training, you talked about this leadership that you leaned, but then you mentioned that after the war you found it difficult to talk about your experience. You felt like...I guess my question is... And you also mentioned that you didn't wear patches; that you were the person you were then, and you didn't want to be judged on past experience. I guess my question is, do you feel that your experience in the military was very, was important to you in shaping your experience in the business world? Did it help you, did it hurt you, or do you feel like it was a separate experience, and that they were distinct parts of your life?

Domagata: That's a very difficult question. There's like eighty-three questions in there really. Am I better off having been in the military? I think so. I did learn about leadership. I saw some of the guys that I hold in the highest esteem. I really wasn't exposed to, but one or two really guys that I wondered how they got their commission. Um, most of the sergeants were just terrific. Okay, sure, there were some old drunkards hanging on just to get their twenty in, but I'd say that the vast, vast, vast majority were guys that yeah, I'd go battle with them again. If I had to, I would, you know. I wouldn't try to weasel out of it. The leadership component of it was amazing. No matter where I went from the sporting goods stores, you know, I loved leadership. I loved learning and watching key people do the right thing, the right way. If, I think the most important thing I learned out of



that Leadership is to always to an eval. What went right, what would you tweak, and would you never do again? And no matter what I did, that filter went through every big decision with things around home, to major decisions with my career, to you know, minor decisions with my career. You know, when a decision that had impact was done, let's review it. What went right? Wow! What would you tweak? And what then? That was the dumbest part let's get that out. Yeah, I don't have regrets in that aspect.

[2:05:00- Memory Problems]

You know the story about going into those tracers with those two guys; I don't remember that, that's their story. I'm just there. I don't remember anything... I don't remember a single battle. I don't remember firing any weapon in anger. I don't remember calling any artillery rounds while under fire. I don't remember any of that now. So that's a little screwy. I've been attending the VA... I went to a Vet center rap group for seven years to try and tweak that open. Seven years never missed. Every week. Nothing, no memories come. Do I not want them to come back? Do I want them to come back? I don't know. I can't say, but I can't remember ever firing a weapon in anger. I can't remember ever calling in artillery while under fire. How could I be an FO for nine months? How could I fly for nine months and not remember, and have people remember me?

[2:06:23- A "remember me?" story]

Okay, let's have another "Remember Domagata story". All these years go passed, and the internet is opening up and somebody found me. Okay. Then for at least two years, he's badgering me to go to a reunion. That one reunion I just stumbled on. I didn't intend to go there; this is years and years later.

Mcmanamon: Former artillery Officer? Former artillery?

Domagata: Who found me? Interestingly enough it is. He's badgering and badgering. I said, "I don't know you." He says, "Yeah. When you were flying you worked in the T.O.C. [Tactical Operations Center] on occasion. You and your dog." I said, "Wait a minute, I never had a dog." He says "Yeah, that little puppy. Did he grow up?" "You got the wrong guy." Then he starts sending my pictures, and I'm with him and I got a dog. I don't remember this. He is saying, "Well we got this reunion. It's a combined reunion. It's the 3/506th plus the 5/27th artillery they're together. There's a guy named Jerry Berry who's putting this stuff together, he does it every year or two. And you need to come to this thing." And he badgers and badgers and I tell Holly, and she finally says, "Hey. Just go. You're curious, I'm not going to go, just go see what's going on." So it was in Reno, so I fly out there, and there's a lot of guys and a lot of drinking and I never was a drinker, and they're in this hotel and there's this room, the hospitality suite, and there's a

bar set up, and there's twenty tables with guys with picture albums and they're telling war stories and they know each other and all this and that, and, you know, I'm just not feeling part of this thing, at all, and I see this guy, and I don't remember him from Adam, Hank Parker is his name. He's, you know, fine. I take a big chunk of time, I rented a car and I drove from Reno to Lake Tahoe, drove around the lake, they're right by each other, if you know that area, and a lot of thinking. I'm sitting there and thinking I'm going home early. This isn't where I belong. And I go to say goodbye to a couple of the guys that I had had beers with and that, and then Hank finds me and says, "You can't go. Tomorrow is the banquet. Stay for the banquet. The ladies all dress up, the guys, you know, who are drinking like crazy, they act civil. And it's a recognition of some guys who do a bunch of work to get these reunions going, but it's really a nice time to see what this is about." You know, I'm here, maybe another day driving out someplace. I agree to stay and the next day happens. Oh, there's another component. The next day happens, we go to the banquet. The guy that was brought up in that basket, he's there.

Mcmanamon: The one you met earlier?

Domagata: Yeah, this is ten years later. He's there, and there's a celebrity that's gonna be at the reunion. It's the lieutenant's dad who got killed; there are no other parents and stuff there, but the lieutenant's dad and a nephew of the lieutenant who got killed. And there's the guys telling their stories to this lieutenant's dad. And I stayed for the banquet, met him. I spent an hour telling stories about his son that he'd never known otherwise. And it's like, this was worth the trip to be able to share. This dad didn't know how his son died. Didn't know what kind of guy he was. He was a good guy, soft hearted guy. He was a good officer. Yeah, um he did what his commander told him, now the rest of the troops all never respected that commander after that, you know, cause they had two or three guys that called up, "You don't want him to do that," and the commander made him charge. He charged it and got killed. The dad is there. Other people are there. Now the banquet has a wonderful meal. A couple awards happen. The award's really neat. I get this eagle, 101<sup>st</sup> has the eagle, it's that big [motions size], and it's on a plaque, and it's a fierce looking eagle.

Mcmanamon: The screaming eagles.

Domagata: Yeah, yeah, and they have a plaque talking about the band of brothers. Very emotional thing. They have a one of the guys go up and read a commentary about this medic. And I had met the medic, had a couple beers with him, most unassuming guy in the world, you know, just a low key good guy, he's a postal carrier of all things, just a nice guy, and this thing they read is about all the guys that are alive because of what he did. You know, and it just, the women are crying, and I'm crying, and I don't even know him. You know. It's just a

magnificent thing. Standing ovation. They give him this award. Then, they got another eagle there, and they start reading this thing about a forward observer who did this and did that and did that and everybody claps and then say, "You wonder who this is" and they called me up.

Mcmanamon: They called you up?

Domagata: Yeah. I went up there and said guys "I appreciate this more than words, this is so cool, but I think you got the wrong guy. I don't remember you guys. I don't remember any of those things. This guy stands up and says, "We know you. We remember you." You got to be kidding me, I still don't know those guys. I'm friends and went to a bunch of reunions with them since then, but I still don't remember them. You know, what the heck. That's crazy. This eagle is so cool. I have it at home. It has a place of respect. I didn't even tell my family about it. My daughter one day came back from college and it's on the TV and she's sitting watching TV, and says, "Dad, that chicken's staring at me." I say, "It's not a chicken, Codi." You know, I mean, I didn't tell them what it was about, but so. I can't remember that stuff. Could an FO been in the field nine months and never remember ever being in a fight? Could an FO ever fly nine months and... I, that's the way it is. That's my story, and I'm sticking with it. You got questions, now, for me?

[2:14:07- Wrapping up. VFW and things]

Mcmanamon: Um, well, I just wanted to make sure, that you made mention, when we got into the portion on your civilian story, that you had certain things you wanted to bring up and I just want to make sure you got your chance.

Domagata: You know, I never... In my working life, I never did that veteran thing. Except going to these reunions, I started doing that, but now that we're retired and moved to Wisconsin, I joined the VFW. And then, that has been really tremendous. There's this Sauk Prairie for Sauk City and Prairie du Sac has a combined VFW, and it's an amazing bunch of guys and an amazing community who is so supportive of veterans. It just is nuts. When I lived down here in Illinois, the Hines... I didn't ever have any bad experience other than it was slow, you know. Things didn't go at a good pace. Moved up there and it's instantaneous so the coverage for the VA is way, way better. I love the VA up there. They help answer every question in a timely manner. The VFW has... The town that we live in, this community called Sauk Prairie, it's about 7,000 people. Well, one of the veterans gets this crazy idea he says "You know, these Badger Flights are a big deal" - those are the flights into DC where they take veterans. Well you know, when the badger flight goes out, the veteran flies free, but they have to have a guardian go with them, and that's usually 500 dollars, and there are some veterans that aren't getting to go because of that \$500 fee. So let's fill

a plane full of guys from our community, free. Let's get \$100,000, and we'll find the veterans, and they all go free anyway, and pay for all their troops [Guardians]."and there's 7000 people, that's not much. Well, and that was, maybe, December, by mid-summer, they had over \$200,000. That's crazy. So it's a good place to be a veteran. And there's great veterans where I live that reach out and are available, and there's a county... every county in Wisconsin has a service officer who helps the veterans through the VA system. He's not part of it [the VA]. He's a state paid worker by county, and that's been very, very helpful. So um being a veteran now, everybody... if you're ever wearing you VFW hat, or something like that, you get, "Thank you for your service. Glad to meet you!" and they shake your hand. You know that kind of thing. It's all changed so the veterans now are working like crazy to support the Iraq and Afghanistan vets. You know, it's us, my pals, the veterans who served with me who are doing the thing that the WWII vets didn't do for us. They shunned us. You know. They made us not welcome in the VFW, at least the one here in Westmont, made me feel not welcome.

Mcmanamon: You definitely have a changing experience as time has gone on.

Domagata: When I came back [from Vietnam] one of the neighbor's paid for a year's membership in the Legion or the VFW, the one of the two, and we went and we, you know, we were shunned, and it was bad.

Mcmanamon: And the Korean vets?

Domagata: Well if they were even there. Whoever the old guys were when I walked in, they were indistinguishable; you couldn't tell who was from where. They were all older than me and they didn't make me feel like I should be there.

Mcmanamon: The definitely would be hard. You have been through very interesting things and you definitely brought things that I would not have thought of and you got to all of my questions as well. So at this point is there anything else that you would like to add about your military experience and your civilian life or prior to that.

Domagata: I think there were two critical components that let me... If I could be close to normal now, whatever normal now is, I've got the most spectacular wife on earth. We've been married forty-six years. I think there are a lot of veterans who have held onto their wives. You know and the divorce thing... I'm sure the statistics are the same, but I just know a lot of veterans who have their original wife, and that's cool, and I'm one of them. And so blessed, the other thing is my faith. If I didn't have a relationship with Jesus Christ now as my Lord and savior, I don't know how I could be sane, so um faith and family. Which order? I think I could physically see my wife all that time, and it took me a while to accept the Lord, but once I did things became better.

Mcmanamon: And you said, you went to Catholic school as a kid?

Domagata: That was almost a disadvantage. They were tough ladies. Our classes had fifty kids. How could you teach with fifty kids? They were good teachers. They were tough. They were taskmasters. I didn't enjoy that, that period of school. High School, I went to Downers Grove, it's a public school. That um, that was an awakening. It was different than the Catholic school. I don't know. I don't know where to lead that one.

Mcmanamon: It was just clarifying a statement you made earlier. I didn't nece...

Domagata: We joked around. These nuns had these cloisters they belonged to and ours were the Sisters of No Mercy... Will that be cut? [Laughter]

Mcmanamon: No, but it was a pleasure having you today at the Pritzker Military Library today, Domagata. Thank you for both your service and for telling your story. It will be very helpful for my generation and for future generations will all be recorded so we'll have your words to give us an idea into what it might be really like, why you're alive and why you were serving.

Domagata: It was an honor to have been interviewed.