

Stewart Barbee

Part 1

Prior to Sept. 23, 2015
Interviewed by Edward Sanderson
Transcribed by Rachel Berlinski
Edited by Leah Cohen

SANDERSON: Good morning Mr. Barbee.

BARBEE: Hello, Ed, how are you?

SANDERSON: Doing great. How about yourself?

BARBEE: Fabulous.

SANDERSON: Outstanding. So thank you for definitely taking time out to speak with us, today, about this.

BARBEE: Indeed.

SANDERSON: Definitely. I was telling--the running joke of the office has been for me not to geek out too much, just with all of everything I've done, research-wise on DASPO, but also when I pulled up your name on IMDb, I was just like, "Ohh." So—

BARBEE: Yeah, and you know, those are just little--those are just some of the credits that were prominent. A lot of movies I didn't get credits for, like *Empire Strikes Back* and all the television. You know, this was just some of the major motion pictures. So that's my--I'll just say, the IMDb has just a handful of credits.

SANDERSON: Wow, 'cause even that handful of credits—

BARBEE: Thank you.

SANDERSON: --was severely impressive. I was just like, "Oh, my god."

BARBEE: Well, thank you very much. Thank you very much. I have the military to thank for it, that's for sure.

SANDERSON: Oh definitely. And that was something later on down once we got into your post military experience that we kind of dive into just a little bit.

BARBEE: You got it.

SANDERSON: And a lot of it through the course of it, if there's any time that I ask you something or we get to a subject that might be taboo, just say, "Ahh, I don't want to talk about it."

BARBEE: There are no taboos.

SANDERSON: Okay. And then, one of the question is, how much time are we gonna have today, so that way I can—

BARBEE: As much as you need.

SANDERSON: Okay, well, I can ask a lot of questions.

BARBEE: Yes, indeed.

SANDERSON: All right. So one of the things that—okay. So I greatly appreciate that, so then I know exactly how far we can go and to exactly where we can take that if it gets to that point.

BARBEE: Great. Well, there's no place we can't go. And I'm an open book, so you ask away.

SANDERSON: I greatly appreciate that, sir. So what we'll do is we'll go ahead and start it. And I'll do my little spiel to start with. Today we are speaking to Stewart Barbee, who was a specialist in the US Army during Vietnam with the Department of the Army Special Phototropic Office. Thank you for joining us today via phone interview.

BARBEE: Indeed.

SANDERSON: And is it okay for us to video—well, to audio record this interview?

BARBEE: Yes, it is.

SANDERSON: Thank you very much. We greatly appreciate that.

BARBEE: Great.

SANDERSON: Starting off before we get into your DASPO experience, from what we found you were born out in California?

BARBEE: I was actually born in Virginia, at Portsmouth, Virginia in 1946. And we moved to California in 1949. And I lived the first ten years of life--roughly ten years of life--in Encino, in southern California, ironically surrounded by motion picture people.

SANDERSON: [Laughs]

BARBEE: My father was coaxed out to California by his mother who had preceded him by some years, and he was actually an amateur still and movie guy but passed away before I got involved in photography. And ironically both of my brothers ended up in motion pictures as well as myself, all by accident. So that's how I ended up in California. My father took ill from emphysema, and we had to move from Los Angeles, and we moved up into the southern Sierras to a little town called Kernville on the Kern River in Sequoia National Forest, and that's really where I was raised.

SANDERSON: And what did your father do for an occupation back in Portsmouth?

BARBEE: I think he worked as a mechanic at the Chevron or Standard Oil Motor Company, Standard Oil Company, but he was the son of a fairly wealthy woman, so as a hobby he liked to take photographs. So we have 16mm movies of our family going back to 1939.

SANDERSON: Oh, nice.

BARBEE: And we have probably about five generations of a family on film, which is kind of an interesting side note. And so I grew up, you know, hearing the sound of that projector, little Bell and Howell projector, while we were watching the movies of our family in Virginia, 'cause my mother missed her family very much, and my father had adopted her family, as well. So we used to get out the family albums and look at all the photographs he took. He used to develop and print his own pictures, too, in the kitchen. But we would sit around the old Bell and Howell movie projector, and I just can still hear that--smell the lamp burning and hear the sound of the twenty-four frame pull-down mechanism ripping through those old movies, and the flicker of the thing. And I don't know, I think that somehow just embedded itself in the back of my brain.

SANDERSON: And you said that you have two brothers?

BARBEE: I had two brothers. One has passed. Two older brothers. My older brother Charles became a motion picture cameraman by way of college. And my brother John who was a--the middle brother who was a--had quit high school and joined the [US] Air Force in the early 1960s, spent his tour in Thailand with the 8th Air Force as a technician that worked on the firing control systems on the F4 Phantom flying out of Ubon, Thailand in the early part of the war. He was well trained in electronics, and after he got out of the Air Force and had done some time working for Bell & Howell and Rocketdyne and so forth, using tape recording machines to test rocket equipment, kind of dropped out. Your classic dropout in the '60s. And came north to San Francisco, hooked up with my other brother Charles, and discovered the motion picture sound realm and became a sound mixer and had a career as a sound mixer in the motion picture business. So two cameramen and one soundman.

SANDERSON: Nice. So you definitely--definitely sounds like it's quite interesting, pretty much had the entire family--you guys could produce your own stuff and mix it together.

BARBEE: Well, we worked for other producers, but we did work together as a crew on many projects in the past. It was about a four or five year stint where we traveled extensively and did a lot of programming for television.

SANDERSON: Nice. And then, you said your mom was also from the Portsmouth area.

BARBEE: Well, she was born in Baltimore, Maryland. I think my grandfather, her father, was in charge of tending the lighthouses all around the Chesapeake Bay and up and down the east coast in the United States Lighthouse Service, USLHS. And he and all of his brothers, about six brothers, all were lighthouse keepers and so forth, and out of--from Virginia. And he, when the Second World War broke out, Roosevelt had the US Coast Guard absorb the Lighthouse Service, and so he became a--I think a boatswain, or I think he ended up a captain in the Coast Guard, still in charge of all the lighthouses around the Chesapeake and up and down the east coast. And ironically, one of his tenders was used as the presidential yacht before they actually had a presidential yacht, so we still have some memorabilia from the salon where I guess it would have been President Harding or Taft used to cruise up and down the Potomac on his ship. It's kind of fun. Yeah, so my mom grew up in and around the Tidewater area of Virginia, and the Lewis family, which they hailed from--it's a long history in Virginia, northern Virginia.

SANDERSON: Yeah, definitely. That was--I've got some family from that area, and I was stationed there multiple times because I was active duty [US] Navy for

fourteen. Been in Missouri--Definitely know the Tidewater area quite well, especially—

BARBEE: So where the Gloucester county and Matthews county were where the Lewis clan basically hailed from from 1622, and we were connected to that family, the Meriwether Lewis' and the Belford Lewis' and Warner Hall Lewis', all those people; they were all relatives. And so it's a--we have a long, long history, Virginia history, and it's all military and water connected. Shipbuilders and lighthouse men and all that.

SANDERSON: You also said with the family, with your father's family, that it was pretty much the same way on that side?

BARBEE: No, on my dad's family I think we're French Huguenot and immigrated fairly late into Alabama and Georgia, the Columbus, Georgia and probably Gerard and Phoenix City area of Alabama, which is literally across the river. And so the Barbee clan, of which there were quite a few--and still there I think, I've discovered--they were like cabinet makers and they did fine cabinetry in New York and some of the larger cities, department stores, and things, like Tiffany's and probably the emporiums, things like that where they would build show cases and so forth. They were furniture makers. So different Southern clan.

SANDERSON: Then did you have any sisters, or it was just the three—

BARBEE: Nope, just the three brothers.

SANDERSON: Just the three boys.

BARBEE: Yup.

SANDERSON: Definitely must have made it interesting for the mom, having three boys and doing what most boys do.

BARBEE: Yeah, oh yeah, we gave her a run. [Laughs] We sure gave her a run. Yeah, you bet.

SANDERSON: Did your father ever serve in the military, or—

BARBEE: He was in the 3rd Artillery National Guard in Virginia. I think he served during the war. His mother was pretty well connected and kept him out of the fray, and so he did reserve National Guard duty. But I guess the 3rd artillery has a long history. They go way back.

SANDERSON: What was it like growing up during the '40s, '50s, and early '60s out in California?

BARBEE: Well, it was fabulous. I just remember a lot of blue sky and lot of produce and a lot of citrus orchards and so forth. And our time in southern California was really wonderful. You know, we had the classic ranch style house. Encino was a movie town at that time. A lot of people in the movie business who had families came over the Hollywood Hills and then to the San Fernando Valley to bring their families into what was considered kind of the county or the country at that time. And so all the kids I went to school with were the sons and daughters of movie people and TV people and writers and directors and all that. It didn't really mean anything to me at that time, but later on remembering back I went, "Oh my god, that was just really--lived right in the middle of all that." My very first day of school at Encino Grammar School, a young red-headed kid came up to me before they even rang the bell for the first time and brought us all in to sit us down to introduce themselves to us and say good morning, and he said, "My daddy's Roy Rogers." I said, "Oh, yeah, my daddy's Hopalong Cassidy." and he said, "No, he isn't." And I said, "Yes, he is." He said, "No he isn't," I said "Yes, he is," and we argued back and forth. And he sat down on the playground, took off his cowboy boot, stood back up, and hit me in the nose with it. And the next thing I remember, he and I were standing on opposite sides of the principal of the grade school. This is the first grade I think. And my mother drove up in her '52 Chrysler or whatever it was and asked the teacher if--'cause they had called her to come get us, and she said, "Would you like me to take the other boy home?" And she said, "If you wouldn't mind." So we drove out to the Rogers' Ranch there in the valley, and she turned Rusty over to Dale. He really was Rusty Rogers, I mean Roy Rogers' son. And that was my first day at school. I think my first girlfriend was the daughter of the Lone Ranger or the guy who coached our little league team was the Cisco Kid. And Gale Storm's kids were our classmates. Sally Field was my classmate. They were all around us. It was pretty fun, but like I say we didn't—didn't mean anything at that time. Didn't really register, you know. They were just people.

SANDERSON: Just another kid to hang out in school with, huh.

BARBEE: Yeah. Yeah. Later on in my life I would say it's--thinking back on it I went, "Oh, my god, there really wasn't a thing of it." You know, my brothers and I would--did a Flip Wilson special back in the '70s called, "Travels with Flip". He did two shows—"Travels With Flip 1", "Travels With Flip 2". And the first one, he took his convertible Rolls Royce that he used to like to go to Vegas and all around and do all these road trips, and one of the

road trips was, 'cause he used to make jokes about Roy Rogers, so we went out to I think it was Apple Valley or somewhere out there, to visit Roy Rogers, and while I was there Rusty actually showed up, and, of course, I hadn't seen him since that day. I don't remember seeing him after the first day of school. So I walked up to him, and I looked at him-- he was a real big guy. We were both probably in our thirties or forties. I said, "My dad's Hopalong Cassidy." And he looked at me, and he smiled. He said, "No," he says, "you aren't?" I said, "Yeah, yeah." And we had a fun little reunion out there. That was kind of fun. We talked about it.

SANDERSON: You still keep in contact with any of them from school?

BARBEE: No, no, no. You know, I'm very kind of under the wire and low-key about that whole movie business. To me it was never more than anything but a job and just a craft. I think Vietnam took all the stars and the glitter out of it for me when I got home from Vietnam. I knew Hollywood had no heroes for me. I had already seen them all.

SANDERSON: What was it, especially growing up in California, did you guys make it out to the coast a lot, or was it—

BARBEE: No, you know, not much. And like I said by the time I was ten years old we had moved from Los Angeles up into the southern Sierra, and that was really amazing to me because it was an old mining and gold town, a lot of cattle, lumber, and very rural and kind of isolated up there on the Kern River. And it was sort of like going back in time. They always, and even to this day, seem to lag behind trends by about ten years. So you know, when people had moved on from the kind of '50s rock and roll era, they were still experiencing it there--clothing styles and music styles and everything. They just seemed to lag. So when we got up there to the southern Sierras, oh my god, there were people still riding their horses into town to the post office, tying up their horses to go in to get the mail. And sitting out on the--sitting outside with their feet up on the rails, just picking their teeth with toothpicks. Just, I mean, people--it was not unusual to see people riding around on horses.

SANDERSON: Just, was that a major culture shock for you guys going from—

BARBEE: No, we loved it. As kids we just were crazy about it. We thought we'd landed in the middle of paradise. And it was just a real great place to grow up as a kid. And I think that's what really got me interested in, partly at least, into lighting, because the town was on the edge of a river in a very steep canyon, both on the east--high mountain on the east and the west side. And the sun would come up in the morning, and you'd

watch the shadows just come down the mountains on the west side. And then you'd have this hot sun during the day, and then in the afternoon because of the mountains on the west side you'd see the shadow come up from the river and sweep up the side of the mountain on the east side. And it was such a great lighting effect with the long shadows. I used to just sit, as a kid, just sit there and study the light on the trees and the rocks and watch how the sun worked its magic during the changing light during the day and especially in the morning and the afternoon. And that had a terrific influence on me when I became a cameraman and used to light—you know, do lighting for motion pictures. I was probably eleven or twelve years old at that time when I started noticing that stuff, so had a terrific influence on me. And I'm not sure I would have noticed that kind of thing if I had stayed living in Los Angeles because the sky down in southern California stays rather—at least now, once they start building freeways and so forth, the sky turned into like milk glass, and so there always looked like there was a silk over everything. So you don't get those real strong shadows and things, which I love.

SANDERSON: Definitely. You get the more pure mountain--just seems like it's—up in the mountains the higher you go.

BARBEE: Yeah, 'cause it's just this horrible kind of smoggy effect, and it just diffuses the light so much, you don't get those strong shadows.

SANDERSON: What all did you guys do for fun growing up in the mountains?

BARBEE: Used to explore old mines, mountain climb, swim in the river, ride the rapids, fish, hunt, explore. There were a lot of Indian artifacts and petroglyphs and hiero--not hieroglyphs--pictographs and petroglyphs. Which are unusual because you usually don't find them in the same area. You'll either find petroglyphs or you'll find pictographs. And this area of the southern Sierra has both, which is unusual. So I used to find arrowheads and just check out sights and things. And I actually found a place where there was an entire intact village that you could see on the ground one time when I was young, which I've been back to try to find many times since, and unsuccessfully. But you could see the rings of rocks in the earth where they had put the rocks around the outsides of the--I guess they were called hogans or whatever they lived in. And the mortar rocks and mortar beds. And you could see the design of the whole village. It was very fascinating. And there was a lot of that. There was an old--some ghost towns, old mining towns, and there was plenty to keep us busy as kids there.

SANDERSON: During that time when did you get your--when did you start playing around with the cameras?

BARBEE: My father had died when I was fourteen--this is 1961--and all of his photographic stuff--his still cameras, his enlarger and developing equipment, and the movie projector and all the family films--everything--were in the garage, just kind of in storage. And one summer afternoon, out of boredom I guess--the summer before my junior year in high school--I was in the garage roaming around, and my eye caught the projector, and I just started kind of fiddling around with it. And then I noticed there were still some boxes of chemicals and things. And so I picked them up and read the back of the box, and it said, you know, you mix this with warm water and so much at that part and that part. And I thought, my god I could actually--maybe I could do this. And I thought, "Maybe I could print a picture." So I mixed up some chemicals and put out the trays, and dug out one of his negatives and put it in the enlarger, and just kind of did what I had seen him do as a child so many times. And I actually printed a picture on my own. So that really got me interested. And then I also took his camera and put some Kodachrome in it and tried to catch one of those beautiful lighting, late afternoon lighting situations behind one of the mountains that I was telling you about. It wasn't a single-lens reflex, so then I actually screwed up the focus, so it didn't come out really well, but I did try--attempted to take some still pictures. And then--and my father had also given us Kodak brownies that we used to take snaps with, so I knew kind of how to take a picture. But when I went to high school that year, must have been '63--I went to see the high school counselor, and I asked him--he said something about having industrial arts and college prep, and I believe there was an elective class of photography. We had a really great photo lab at our high school. And so I decided to take a photo class, and I just loved it. I took it, and I just loved it, and it was the first straight A's I got out of high school. 'Cause I wasn't really interested in school, living in a place like that. I was more interested in the hunting and the fishing and the old gold mines and finding Indian stuff than I was studying out of books. But this course, this photography course, really got my attention. And I got straight A's in it. Well, that got my attention as well. And I just loved being in the lab and printing pictures, and I was very good at it. I just seemed to have a natural talent at it. So my senior year I wanted to retake the photography course, and the counselor told me that you could not repeat a class in high school. So I said, "Well, what if I were to, like, be the teacher's aid?" And he said, "Funny you should bring that up, because the teacher who is gonna teach photography"--the fellow who taught the previous year had left to go to another school, and his replacement was actually an agricultural teacher. He was an ag major. But he did photography,

amateur photography kind of on the side as a hobby. And he had gotten the assignment to teach photography, but he wasn't really good at it, practically, so he said, "I'll tell you what we'll do." He says, "You can be the lab aid. You can stay in the photo lab and help teach the students how to print pictures and develop film and so forth, and the teacher will teach the theory in the classroom. And you guys can work with him and work for him for credit." And I said, "That's fabulous." So I did, and so I had photography in the last two years of high school and got straight A's in it. And actually when I graduated I got an achievement award in it. I was part of the--became the school photographer the last year and did all the photos for the high school album and sports events and school events and also was the guy in school when they would show films, I was the one who'd set up the projector and so forth. I just got really fully into it. And during the summer I--one of my first jobs was--we didn't really have a proper motion picture theater in our town because it was so small. But there was a fellow who wanted--had done some--something, had been a projectionist or something in the movie business and moved up to this area. So on Saturday nights during the summer he would set up a theater in the old dance hall, one of the old saloons, and so he was setting up the 35mm projector and the screen and so forth, I would set up the seats, make the popcorn, take the tickets, and all that kind of thing. So I guess I could say one of my first jobs as a kid was in the movie business. So there was that, but when I graduated 1965 from high school, there were really only two choices to young men during that time, and that was either go to college--get a college deferment--or get drafted or enlist into the military. So I chose to go to college. My brother John was in the Air Force. He was in Thailand. He was involved in the Vietnam War at that time, and he was telling me, "Don't go. Don't go. If you want to go to school, go to school. That's the right thing to do." And so I went to Bakersfield--enrolled in Bakersfield Junior College, which was a little bit like a four-year school 'cause there were a lot of oil money and cotton money and cattle money in Bakersfield at that time, and the school just had more money than they knew what to do with. But they had a full-on photography program. I can't remember the professor's name, but he had been a Life Magazine photographer for many, many years, and when he retired he taught photography at Bakersfield Junior College. So I did a--enrolled in school and took photography as a major. And I did about a year--three semesters there. And we learned color processing and commercial photography. It was really, really wonderful, so I got even further into the photographic realm in school. But about three semesters in, I wanted more. And I just knew I wanted more. And so I think somewhere along the line I learned that most motion picture cameramen or Hollywood photographers I should say, were military trained. And it may still be the fact. I'm not sure, but at that time it was. And so I

enlisted in the Army. And they had--in I think May of 1967, they had three military MOS's. They had combat photographer, combat cinematographer. They had lab technician. And since I had spent so much time in the lab and figured that if I went in the military I might get sent to Vietnam, I thought it might be nice to be in a photo lab where there was some control over the temperature and be inside kind of thing. So I put labs as my first choice. And I think I got a guarantee of photo school, at least. What they did after is up to the military, but they guaranteed me the school, anyway. So I enlisted early. I think they had a three-month program where you enlisted, you go into the reserves, and your time starts, but you don't go active for three months or something like that. So I actually went to active duty in August--I think it was Friday the 13th, August, Friday the 13th, 1967, I went into the [United States] Army. And went to Fort Ord, went through basic training, and immediately they sent me to--I got orders for the Signal Corps photo school at Monmouth, New Jersey. So I went to New Jersey to Fort Monmouth, went to lab school. Graduated as an 84G20, which is a lab technician. When we graduated--oh, they had everything.

SANDERSON: There at Fort Monmouth?

BARBEE: Yes, Fort Monmouth, where most all the DASPO guys went through there, unless they were already photographers when they came in, professionals. I think by and large 99.9 percent of us went through Fort Monmouth. But interesting enough, when I graduated from the Signal Corps school there, bar none, everybody in my school, everybody in my platoon got orders for either Germany, Korea, or Vietnam. And I was the only one who didn't get orders on the day they passed them out. And I was very upset. I didn't understand why I was the only one out of the whole school that didn't get orders. And it took a couple of days for my orders to show up, but when they did my orders directed me to the Army Pictorial Center in New York City, which is called the APC at that time. The old Paramount motion picture studio out in Queens, where all the training films were produced for the Army. So I packed my stuff up and took a bus up to New York and went out to the Army Pictorial Center and reported to a guy who ran the studio. Civilian--it was all civilian run. I think they were all civil servants at that time. And his name was Joe Lipkowitz, and he had done movies with Mary Astor and all these famous people. The '20s, '30s, '40s, I guess. And I reported to him. I didn't know--he had Oscars on his mantelpiece in his office. I didn't know whether to salute him or what 'cause he was this big cigar-smoking movie producer type. And he looked at my orders, and he said, "Lab technician? We don't need any lab technicians." He said, "How would you like to be a cameraman?" And I said, "I'd love that. I'd love that." So he said, "Okay,

go down to special effects and report to Charlie Hemingway." So I went down a freight elevator, found my way to the special effects department, went in, and there was this guy with his eye to a camera--probably an old Akeley, which were the motion picture cameras that they used to use during WWI out of the open cockpit planes to film air battles and so forth. You can still see pictures of them, but the Akeley had an interesting mechanism in that they had a two-claw pull-down so the images were very stable. And in the motion picture industry the guys doing the special effects would like to use these cameras because they had the double claw pull-down. So he had an old Akeley on the big animation stand, and he was doing some kind of a shot for a movie, and I kind of interrupted him coming in the room. And he said, "Just stand aside. Go in there. Wait for me. Wait for me." Kind of blew me off. And then he came in, he took me into a little insert stage, and there was a stack of boxes. I said, "You know, Joe Lipkowitz sent me down here. He says for you to train me." And so he took me in a room and said, "There's everything you need in those boxes. There's a camera. You set it up. When you get it set up, you come and get me." And so this process went on day after day after day after day. I would take this old standard Mitchell, I think it was, and I was smart enough to figure out what the tripod was and the camera body and the magazine, but there would be a dozen things wrong with it. And he would show me what I did wrong, and he'd make me put it all away, completely away in the boxes, and pack it up just like I had found it, and then rebuild it. And so I'd set this thing up; I'd take it down. I'd set it up and take it down. I'd set it up; I'd take it down. And each time he'd show me two or three things that needed to be done or that I did wrong or whatever. But when I got it to where it was actually—he said, you know, "When it's camera ready. When I can just walk up to it and turn the switch on and it takes pictures, that's when you'll be done." So once I got it to where I could put this camera together and make it camera ready--so it would actually take a photograph if you walked up to it and turned on the switch, then I was done with that camera, and he'd give me another camera system. So this went on for months. And pretty soon I got very adapt at being able to set up these cameras. Standard Mitchell, BNC, the Mitchell--you know, whatever type of camera it was. And when I got really good at that, one day he took me out onto a full motion picture set. It was a whole civilian crew, all IA union New York crew that were doing a motion picture on one of the main stages there at the studio. And he took me over, introduced me to the director of photography, and the DP had his first assistant take me over and show me the loading room. And so I stayed in the dark for the next few months or whatever, just loading film. They had what they called a light lock box that was like nine o'clock to twelve o'clock, like a drawer that would face out into the stage, and the assistants would take the magazines that had

the shot film, exposed film, and they'd put it in the lock, and then they'd rock it to close it, and it would open into the loading room like twelve to three o'clock. So it was a light lock. But I didn't even get to come outside. So they'd put these magazines in that little drawer on the outside. They'd flip it up, and it would come into the inside. I'd be in the loading room, and I'd have to load the film and inventory the film and get it all right for processing and all the things the film loader would do. And after I got adept at doing that then I was able to come out onto the stage and become the slate boy, so I used to do the slates. And after a while I became a second assistant, camera assistant, and I did that for a while and then started traveling up and down the eastern seaboard as an assistant on these motion picture crews and then became a first assistant. And then they started training me as a cameraman so my first motion picture experience was all in 35mm, and then after a year or so they started training me in 16mm. And I did a lot of traveling to Fort Sill to make training films about the artillery and to Fort Huachuca, Arizona to make films about the OV-1 Mohawk. And Fort Bragg to do films about the jungle training of the Special Forces, the Green Beret, and films on stage in New York, how to brush your teeth and how to take care of your feet or whatever. And but I did about a year and a half at the Army Pictorial Center. And then I got orders one day actually from Westmoreland's office out of the Pentagon directing me to the Republic of China. And I guess the Military Assistance Command there, so they issued me a diplomatic passport with a picture of me in civilian clothes. I was gonna live in the Grand Hotel, Madam Chang's Grand Hotel there in Taipei, and God knows what I was gonna do, 'cause I never actually got there. I came home on leave with those orders, and about the third day I was here in northern California at my brother's house staying with him on my leave time, and a guy came up on a motorcycle actually, believe it or not, from the Presidio in San Francisco. And he said, "Are you Stewart Barbee?" I gave him my military number and so forth. I said, "I am." And he had me sign for a telegram, a Western Union telegram. And the telegram said, "Stop. Do not proceed. Wait for further orders." And I just went, oh, shit. This is not good, right. I was gonna be in the Republic of China and from New York. I thought I had it made, you know. Anyway, a week went by, ten days or so, lapsed. And now I was into my leave time by about thirty or forty days. I was way over the time allowed me. And the orders showed up in a big package. I can't remember if they were hand delivered or I got them in the mail, but the orders directed me to Department of the Army Special Photographic Office, Detachment Hawaii. So I went down to San Francisco International, got on a plane, and flew to Hawaii and reported to Fort Shafter. And nobody knew who these guys were. I think it was the 25th Infantry there at Fort Shafter or something like that. But I was directed there from the front gate up to

the barracks, and I went up and reported to first sergeant and showed him my orders, and he assigned me to a bunk up on the third floor of one of the barracks buildings there and said they'd get back to me, and I spent three or four days just kind of ramming around the place trying to figure out where I belonged and where I was going, and nobody knew what DASPO was. Nobody had ever heard of them, and they didn't know who they were. So first sergeant called me down one day, and he said, "You know, we're just gonna take you right into our unit here 'cause we don't have any idea a clue who these guys are." And another first sergeant from another company just happened to walk into the room at that time, and he asked what was going on, and the other first sergeant was trying to explain it to him. And he said, "Well, let me see those orders." And he looked at them, and he goes, "Oh." He said, "DASPO, that's that photo unit that's down across the highway across from the MP unit," kind of thing. And he said, "I think that's who those guys are." So the first sergeant said, "Well, go down there and check it out, and if not you come back here. Your ass is ours." So I got a ride down there and walked in--saw this little funky little wooden barracks building and kind of an obscure place. And as I was walking into the front door with my orders in hand, Sergeant Bridgeham, who was our first sergeant at the time, saw me coming and came out the front door, met me right at the front door, and he said, "Are you Barbee?" And I said, "Yes." He says, "Where the hell have you been? We've been looking for you for days." And I said, "Well, I've been looking for you. I hadn't--nobody knew who the hell you were." He says, "Get a haircut, and then come back." Because I'd been on leave so long my hair was long I guess. So I went out, got a haircut, came in and sat down and was introduced to Department of the Army Special Photographic Unit. And that's how I ended up at DASPO.

SANDERSON: What was it like being there at Fort Shafter?

BARBEE: Well, it was a nice place. I mean it was just right there in Honolulu. And the weather was great. I thought I had it made being in Hawaii. You know, I thought, "Geez, what a lucky draw of the straw." New York City motion picture studios, now I'm in Hawaii in a photographic unit. But within the first hour being there, just by the pictures they had around on the walls, I knew I was headed to Vietnam. These, that day was just a stepping stone for the mission that they were assigned to do. And—

SANDERSON: This was in the—

BARBEE: --yup, yup. And I got there probably March or April I think. And what had occurred was that they had just lost the second cameraman that we lost, KIA in the unit DASPO. The first one was Kermit Yoho, and I think he died

in Chu Lai in 1966. Charles Ryan I believe died. His helicopter got shot down in February of 1968, I believe it was. And so there was a huge dark cloud over the whole detachment at that time. He was a very well-liked and loved member of DASPO, and everybody who was there was just morose about his loss. So I walked into a, you know, like walking into a wake. So I wasn't received with slaps on the back and cheers, you know, we got a new guy. It was like, "What the fuck are you doing here?" And as it turns out I think over the years I've been convinced that I was actually Charles Ryan's replacement, and that's why my orders were changed when I was headed to China. Charles Ryan was killed, and the Pentagon saw it in its infinite wisdom to direct me to DASPO to fill in his place. And the other thing was that I was a production-trained cameraman. I was not a combat-trained cameraman. Almost all the members of DASPO were combat-trained still or motion picture or sound guys. And I had been a production trained cameramen, because at the Army Pictorial Center in New York, I was in what they called camera branch, which was the production arm, so we didn't do any kind of combat stuff or even documentaries. It was all training films. It was all production with scripts and lighting and script girls and grips and gaffers, and it was full-on motion picture production, movie making. So there I was assigned to DASPO, and I don't know if it was by a plan or it was just irony, but the day I landed there they also received two full—

[Clock chimes in background]

BARBEE: --full-blown motion picture scripts, several hundred pages thick from the Army Pictorial Center. Hang on a second, if this thing stops clanging. So let me back up. So here comes Stewart Barbee, a production trained cameraman from the Army Pictorial Center, lands at DASPO at the same time two motion picture scripts land at DASPO—

[Sound cuts out]

BARBEE: --which require lighting and direction and all the motion picture techniques. So that first day I got there--are you still with me—

SANDERSON: Yes. There for a minute it sounded like—

BARBEE: My wife--I think my wife's trying to reach me from the other line. I have a granddaughter who's on her way to the hospital. Can I put you on hold just for a second?

SANDERSON: Sure.

BARBEE: I'll be right back to you.

SANDERSON: No problem.

[Pause]

BARBEE: Hello?

SANDERSON: Yes, Sir.

BARBEE: Okay, I'm back. I guess she tried something else. So that first day that I landed at DASPO and Harry Breedlove [i.e., 1st Sergeant Bridgeham] our first sergeant brought me into his office and sat me down, and said, "Look, you know, we've been waiting for you. Glad you're here. You come highly recommended. And your first assignment is gonna be in Vietnam. We're gonna send you to Vietnam. And what you're gonna do is these projects." And he reached across the desk, and he plopped down these two motion picture scripts in front of me. He said, "You're gonna go do these movies for us." And I picked them up and looked at them, and one was "Grave Registration, Memorial Activity Part II". And I said, "What's this?" And he said, "Well, it's a training film for mortician's school at Fort Lee, Virginia." I said, "Oh, you know, what--why, why, why this?" He said, "We've never had a--the Army's never had a mortuary in a combat zone before, a full mortuary, until Vietnam, and we have a need for morticians' training films." And the other script was called "Disposition of Personal Property". And so it was a full motion picture, picture script on how to—a training film on how to, you know, deal with personal property of KIAs. So off I went, and that was actually my first big DASPO project. The very, very first film I did there--it was probably a warm up where they just wanted to get me used to being in country and assign my cameras and all that--was I did the news conferences that General William S. [i.e., R] Peers, Lieutenant General William S.[i.e., R.] Peers did the investigation of My Lai incident. So I filmed that. That was probably the first thing I did. And then I did something on target acquisition. But by June of 1969, I was in the US Army mortuary there in Saigon unzipping body bags. Yeah, so that was a pretty life-changing event. I worked on these two projects for months on and off there at the mortuary in Saigon and Cu Chi and Chu Lai and different places in order to fulfill the needs of the script, and it was pretty tough duty.

SANDERSON: How many hours would y'all film a day?

BARBEE: All day...I'd load up the pick-up truck with all my equipment, leave the villa, go over to the mortuary, which was at the end of the Tan Son Nhut

runway at Tan Son Nhut [Airport]. It was a very modern facility, huge, well-staffed, all modern. It probably looked as good and well equipped as any mortuary probably in the United States. And run by civilians. And I would spend all day until four or five in the afternoon, pack my stuff up and come back to the villa. And during my time there I had help from a lot of the other DASPO fellows: Bryan Grigsby helped me, Burt Peterson helped me, Ted Acheson helped me, Don Mechum helped me, Bert Harris one of our officers, he helped me. I had lots of help, but nobody stayed more than three or four days, and then they'd be off doing other projects. But since I was the main guy I was always there, and that was my main job my first tour in Vietnam. And it was rather enlightening.

SANDERSON: How long was your first tour?

BARBEE: Three months. We did three-month tours, ninety-day tours there. And the reason they did ninety-day tours is that we were always temporary duty, TDY. They didn't want--in order for us to stay unattached to any command other than the Army out of the Pentagon where our main office was, was to stay on TDY orders, and TDY orders were only good for ninety days. So we would go over for ninety days, then come back to Hawaii for a week or two, and then go back to either Vietnam or Thailand or Korea or other places for other projects. But we couldn't stay in country more than ninety days or we would have been assigned to or attached to another command.

SANDERSON: How many times did you go over?

BARBEE: I went twice.

SANDERSON: Twice.

BARBEE: I did two ninety-day tours of Vietnam back to back, and then I did a ninety-day tour to Thailand.

SANDERSON: And pretty much the two projects were the grave registration and the personal effects? That was just during the Vietnam time or did you also—

BARBEE: No, that was just in Vietnam. And then I did other jobs. I actually have a printed sheet of most of the jobs I did there. I did initial occupation of a fire support base when they went in and blew a hole in the jungle and then would build a fire support base. I did deactivation of the 9th Infantry [Division]. I did vehicle maintenance films, 9th Division withdrawal. I did the Army education. I did Vietnamization. I did medevacs, target acquisitions, tactical communications, the Hawk unit departure, which

was a mission up in I Corps. Films with the 1st Cav, films with the My Lai press conference. I did the Army surgeons in Vietnam, you know, a lot of different projects. But the main one I did, and the one that occupied most of my time there, was the mortuary training films.

SANDERSON: And you said you filmed surgeons. Where did you film the surgeons?

BARBEE: In Saigon. I actually won an Army Commendation or a DASPO award for the film I did with them called, "Army Surgeons in Vietnam". What these surgeons did was, on their time off, when they weren't operating--these plastic surgeons, when they weren't operating on wounded soldiers, they would go out to a village and find a young child with like a cleft pallet and do reconstructive surgery on the side, and that was one of the projects that I did that won me the award. And it was beautiful because we had before, during, and after photographs of this young girl who had a complete reconstruction of her pallet by these Army surgeons, and it was just really a wonderful gift, you can imagine, for her and her family. And it was a real nice effort on our part.

SANDERSON: Now, I know from the research I've been doing with DASPO, the villa, as you guys called it, it was basically almost like a home away from home.

BARBEE: It was. It was. We had two cooks and two housekeepers. There was, oh god, I'm trying to remember their names. We called Mama-san and Baby-san. Mama-san was an older Vietnamese woman. She did all the laundry and so forth. Baby-san was a young Vietnamese girl kind of under her care, a protégée, under her wing, and she would clean the rooms and help keep the house clean and help Mama-san with the laundry and all. Mama-san was like a Nazi, man, she—[laughs] we would make fake, phony advances at Baby-san, saying how cute she was and everything, and Mama-san would chase us around with the broom and tell the fellas we were all dinky-dow [Vietnamese for crazy] and so forth. We had two Vietnamese girls who were cooks, Sam and--god, I can't remember the other one's name. I've got it somewhere written down. But they were really kind of fun. They didn't put up with anything from us. They were pretty straightforward girls and wouldn't have anything to do with us. They would chase us out of the kitchen with spoons when we were fooling around. Yeah, the villa life was pretty interesting. I remember, my routine was, I'd come in out of the country, and first thing I'd do when I got to the villa, back to the villa, was clean my camera. I was fastidious about taking care of my equipment. I would clean my camera equipment, get it completely back to shape and immaculate, get it packed away, and then I would take a full set of clothes and go across the street to an old French bathhouse that was about four or five stories high that was, I

think, diagonally across from Truh Minh Ky from our villa. And I would take a huge tub, you know, get all scrubbed clean, then get in the steam cabinet, then have a full massage, and put on clean clothes, and then come back over to the villa to do the paperwork and ship the film and to—it was like a ritual for me. It was kind of a physical and spiritual, emotional cleansing that I had to go through. But then you'd have—we'd have to write up a summary objective and a shot story objective and a complete shot list and all the technical patterns that went along with the film—what type of film it was, how much film it was, how to be developed and all that stuff, and then have it packed up and ready to be shipped back to the US for processing. And so there were a lot of rituals that kind of went with the villa life. And of course everything we shot they would send us a one-light work print of. So after about four or five days or so we would receive a copy of the film we had shot, and we would sit together, whoever happened to be in the villa at the time, and be able to view your footage that you had shot, and it would be accompanied with a critique that was done by the officers not only in the Pentagon sometimes but the officers who would view the film in Hawaii before it was forwarded to us. And they would give us a critical observations—you know, you're panning too fast. You're zooming too quickly. You need to slow down. You need to get this shot—whatever critiques they could come up with, constantly trying to improve our talents. And we would take meals together and so forth there at the villa.

SANDERSON: There was a couple of the—from the Texas Tech website, I know a lot of y'all sent in information, Acheson did interviews for them, wrote up some summaries. Talking about how, there's a couple letters that Ted Acheson had wrote talking about how he'd go across the street, talking about the bathhouse, how the first couple of times he was nervous, and he got used to it after a while.

BARBEE: Yup.

SANDERSON: That and then also with the rituals there at the villa.

BARBEE: Yes, indeed, Grigsby pulled a real good one on me. He was a real trickster, Grigsby was; he still is. He's got a twisted sense of humor. I think maybe we all do. I know I especially do after all that mortuary work I did, I have a totally twisted sense of humor. But the very first day I was there at the mortuary introducing myself to the head guy who ran the place—I can't remember his name—I was speaking to this man, and as I had walked into the mortuary, I guess they were taking a lunch break. And some of these guys were sitting on the slabs, you know, eating cheese sandwiches, and I just, I couldn't quite grasp that concept, you know. But

I'll tell you, before I left the place I was probably eating my lunch there too. But while I was introducing myself to this guy, showing him my scripts, telling him what my needs were, and so forth and making my initial introductions, a fellow came out of a side room pushing like a little service cart. Everything there was stainless steel. Old stainless steel cart. It had like a linen towel over the top shelf of the cart, which was about three feet high. Little four-wheeled cart, like you'd roll around a restaurant to bring your dessert on. Anyway he came out of the side room, this fellow dressed in a green smock or white smock or whatever he was wearing. And he rolled this cart out in the middle of the room, and he stopped, and then he went back into the room, and he rolled another cart out, and he parked it next to the other cart. And I'm looking at these things while I'm talking to the head of the mortuary. And there were pieces of meat, looked like a chuck roast that had been overcooked in the middle of the cart, just on the linen. And there were these little tabs with wire that, like you would--like attach to something for identification. And I kept looking at these things, and I kept thinking, "What the hell is that? What the hell is that?" I finally said to him, "What is that?" And he said, "Oh," and he turned from me, and he walked over to the one cart, and he lifted up the little tag, and he said, "This is Warrant Officer so and so." And he grabbed the other one off the other cart, and he lifted it up, and he said, "This is First Lieutenant So and So." And I just, I think I went into shock because I didn't recognize it as being anything human. It was so bizarre looking. And then I—[tearing up]--recognized a piece of bone sticking out of one of them, I think maybe a rib or something. And that's when I recognize it.

[Audio cuts out]

SANDERSON: Hello, Mr. Barbee?

BARBEE: And I just, I just—hell, I was only nineteen, and I just had not ever been prepared for anything like that. Anyway, to tell you about Grigsby, what a twisted son of a bitch he was, that night when I got back to the villa, everybody was sitting around the dinner table, and Gus and Sam--that was the names of the two cooks--they were putting out plates of food, and Grigsby was sitting there with a shit-eating grin on his face. And he said, "Barbee, Barbee, I got something for you." And he went into the other room, and he came back, put a plate in front of me, and it had a—burnt T-bone steak on it--overcooked. So it was all burnt up, with the bones sticking out of it--

SANDERSON: It sounds like someone's trying to contact you.

BARBEE: --and they all had a good laugh. Thought it was real funny. And it wasn't [funny] at all. I didn't eat that night. I couldn't eat. I couldn't even stay at the table. I went up on the roof of the villa and just tried to take my mind off of what I'd seen that day. And it actually kind of went downhill from—there – [I had] no resentment or anything about it because in the situation of war, you've got to keep your sense of humor otherwise you'd go crazy. But I just remember having to unzip body bags every morning when I went into work because they wouldn't stop [the process even] with the orders we carried we could do almost anything. Good god, one guy told us one time we had a license to steal. We could rent cars, wear civilian clothes, stay in hotels, we could take a lieutenant colonel off a plane and take his seat if we had to, to get where we were going. We didn't have to wear rank. We didn't have to tell people who we were. We carried orders that could basically take us anywhere on the planet. But the one thing we couldn't do was stop that process of the--the US Army mortuary. That was something nobody could mess with. So when those bodies came into that mortuary, they went through a system that would not stop. Not for one hour, not for one minute, not for Stew Barbee's movie, not for anybody. So every day I had to look for fresh props, as I called them. And in order to accomplish my mission, which was to make these training films, I had to look for fresh props every day. So we got into a routine where I would show up in the morning, and they would have the body bags on the slabs down both sides of the room, and I'd unzip the body bags and see what remains were in an acceptable state that I could film. And it got to be kind of routine to have to go through those bags every day. And it's kind of hard for—[choking up]--a country kid. I never saw anything like that, you know. It was really hard looking into the faces when there was a face. It was hard watching them cut these guys apart when there was something to cut apart to do an autopsy or to take the tops of their heads off with their saws to be able to do an autopsy. Or sometimes there was just a hand or a leg or part of a body, or they'd been out in the water for a week or two. Or they'd been burned up in a plane crash or blown apart by shrapnel. It was pretty tough.

SANDERSON: You were saying you—

BARBEE: And then one day I just couldn't take it, and I walked out the door. I just had to take a break and get some fresh air. And it was the funniest thing. I wish I had stayed in the building, 'cause when I went out the side door, there were probably two or three hundred of those silver containers just stacked up, ready for receiving remains and being shipped back home. And between that wall of those caskets and the door I went out of, it was kind of an overhang. It almost looked like one of those drive-thru car

wash places with the drain, the cement drain and one of those spray devices. And there was this little Vietnamese guy, and he had a stack probably four or five feet high of body bags, and he was cleaning them out with that spray device, and the residue was going down the drain into the ground, and I just, it as like, "Oh, fuck. This is--these are guys that are--part of guys that are getting washed down this drain into the ground." And they're still there. I'm sure they're still there. So that was--I'm sorry if I'm grossing you out.

SANDERSON: Oh, no. No.

BARBEE: I'm really sorry.

SANDERSON: Quite all right. I worked on--been in the medical field for—

BARBEE: Yeah. Trouble for me out of all of this was that after the Vietnam experience I realized there was no place for me to fit in, you know what I mean? Not even with the other DASPO guys. It was like, where can I go to talk about this stuff? There was no place to talk about it. There was no outlet. I just had to keep it inside. It wasn't something you could talk about with other people. And ultimately by the grace of God I found my way into the vet center program that Jimmy Carter started, I guess, to help vets get into the VA system. It was a community-based thing, and through that I got introduced to the VA system. And in the VA system I did--I had a doctor who was smart enough, he ran the posttraumatic stress department at Fort Miley in San Francisco, and he recognized the unique situation I was in. And there was an Army nurse named Rose Sandecki who had started a combat stress group for nurses and medics of Vietnam. And that was exclusive just to them, and he assigned me to that group, and I did about seventeen years with that group, and that really was the perfect place to be because the medics and the nurses I could identify with, you know, for the job I did, and that ultimately just was a real terrific thing for me, and it worked out really great. So—

SANDERSON: Seeing what's—

BARBEE: So that's where I got my help from with those experiences. And then over the years talking with guys like Bryan and Ted about those experiences.

SANDERSON: During that timeframe, like I said, I was reading some of the stuff that you would have--those guys would come out and help you out, set up.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: And they just kind of rotated every few days. Correct?

BARBEE: Yes, yes. And I think Bryan, specifically Bryan, helped me during the time I was doing the Army disposition of personal property. And he made an interesting discovery one day in one of the barrels where they threw stuff out that wouldn't get shipped back home to the families. You know, they had to go through your personal stuff, things like pictures of porn or Playboy magazines, toothbrushes, you know, stuff like that. They wouldn't send that stuff home. They would just throw it out. And he found a diary that had been thrown in the trash barrel, which we still have copies of. And the fellow who wrote the diary, it starts with his being inducted, being drafted into the Army, and he makes some entries while he's in basic training and then Fort Lewis and then getting sent over and assigned to a unit, and his first patrols and being the new guy, and you know, guys that he knows around him getting killed and so forth. But you can just, the whole mood and the tenor of his diary entries slowly change from this very naive--you know, we're gonna go save these people from communism and we're gonna do the right thing, and we're gonna kill Charlie--to just this very kind of *Platoon*-ish character that ends up getting killed himself in the end. The entries just stop. He goes out on a night ambush or patrol, and that's the last entry. So that was a fascinating read. And, but that was Bryan, Bryan's the one that came up with that. We never identified the guy. I suppose we probably could if we did enough research, but I know Bryan still as copies of it. I've got copies of it, and it's a fascinating read. I think Bryan gave it to one of the military museums back east, but we've got copies of it. I've got copies of it. It's pretty fascinating.

SANDERSON: I would definitely be interested—

BARBEE: I'll bring it with me when I come back.

SANDERSON: We appreciate that.

BARBEE: Yeah, it will probably be an interesting thing to have in the museum. And or--I'll ask Bryan if he wouldn't mind, and we can furnish you guys a copy 'cause it's a pretty interesting read. It was written in, you know, printed or long hand. Bryan sat down at a typewriter at the villa one evening and spent a whole afternoon or whatever transcribing it with the typewriter, so it's in type form, 'cause the original was kind of hard to read. But I think he did give it to a museum somewhere back east, or at least a copy of it. But that was a fascinating thing.

SANDERSON: When you were there, was there any other type of artifacts or anything along those lines that you guys found?

BARBEE: Not me, personally. I never took--well, the only thing I ever did--when I started that project I made myself a promise. After that first day at the mortuary, I made myself a promise. Maybe, it was between me and God. I can't remember. But I said I would never, never, ever take a picture of a dead GI that his mother could recognize him by. Which made my job actually even harder 'cause I had to constantly select camera angles, camera positions, lenses, lighting so forth so if there was recognizable features or remains that I could make my movie without revealing the identity of any of these people. And so I can tell you that I succeeded in that. I never did take a picture of a dead GI that his mum could recognize him from, and for that I'm very proud. I also promised myself that I would be an objective person that I would never try to create a picture that would give you a political stance, one way or another. I was very well aware by the time I got to DASPO that the camera was an extremely powerful instrument, probably one of the most powerful on the planet in that you can make a bad guy look good; you can make a good guy look bad by your lighting, your camera angles, your lens selection, just your technique, that you could create moods, and you could really influence what it is you're photographing. And I promised myself I would never do that. I would always be true and film what was there as it was and leave it up to the observer to draw their conclusion from what they were seeing. And I think in my career in general I've always tried to hold to that. But there was one exception, and this is kind of a funny story. Coming through the personal property depot, 'cause we used to go into the mortuary that--by that route, and they were separate units. I don't know why I was going through, but I did. And as I went through the personal property depot, in one of the barrels where they were throwing stuff away I noticed a poster sticking out that was a real kind of iconic poster of the '60s era. It was an antiwar poster I guess you could say. It had a graphic of a sunflower, and along the side of the sunflower it said, "War is not healthy for children and other living things." And it was kind of an icon of the protest movement. And I think I'd had it up to my eyebrows with the mortuary. I had been there way too long, and it was really starting to tilt my thinking and so forth. So I grabbed this poster, and I took it into the main mortuary, and I tacked it up on the far wall--[audio cuts]--and there was a cadaver on a slab the guy was working on. And I set up the shot so that I could have a photograph of the cadaver without revealing the poster on the wall in the background. And I did about a three or four second shot of the cadaver and then I racked the focus on the lens so that you could now see the poster and read it, and just long enough for you to read the poster, and then I racked the camera back to

the cadaver. Now that shot wasn't in the script for the mortuary training film. But I left it in there, and I didn't write it into the paperwork that I had to do every evening with the day's work, you know, in the shot description. I just left it in there; I didn't say anything about it. And about forty-eight hours later I got called into the officer's quarters there at the villa. I can't remember what officer it was at that time who was in country with us, but he very formally told me that they had gotten a notification from the Pentagon about this shot I had done and that if I ever did it again I would probably never see the light of day.

SANDERON: Woh.

BARBEE: Yeah, it was a wild moment. And I played dumb and played naive and said, "What? What? I only shot what was there. What are you talking about? I didn't do anything?" And I denied everything. But they didn't like it. All those films were being screened at the Pentagon before they were being sent out or released to wherever it was their destination was. But yeah, so they saw it, they didn't like it, and they made sure I heard about it. I got my hand slapped real hard. Fast forward to 1996 when we had our very first DASPO reunion in Washington, some of the guys who were still involved in the USIA at the Pentagon heard we were having our reunion, and they sent a message to us and a liaison. They wanted us to come home to mama, and they invited us to the Pentagon to take a tour, 'cause they were all very excited we were getting together. You understand, we weren't an official unit, but everybody at the Pentagon knew us well. So they sent over one day during our reunion, at a designated time and day they sent over a bus with a liaison from the Pentagon, and we all got on the bus, and they took us to the Pentagon, and we went in, and they took us through security and then to a big screening room where they used to daily screen our footage. And they gave us a briefing and a history of our unit and really divulged a huge amount of information to us about who we were, why we were, how we came to be, and all that, and then gave us a tour of the USIA [United States Information Agency]. And the deputy director was with us who had been there when we were a unit and in Vietnam. And we were walking down the hall, I think, to lunch, and he apparently had some member of his family that had the same last name, Barbee, and we were just kind of chatting about that back and forth. And I finally said to him, I said, you know, 'cause at one point I had gone to introduce myself to him, and he said, "We know who you are." It was very kind of tongue-in-cheek and kind of funny 'cause they really did know who we were. But we were walking down the hallway, and I said, "You know, there was back in 1969, I was doing this film for you guys called 'Mortuary Services Part II,'" and I said, there was a shot that I did in that movie, and I started to

describe to him what I had done, and he kind of looked back at me and he said, "Oh, we know that very well." And I dropped it. Now this was nineteen years later. So apparently, it rattled a few cages back there in the Pentagon, doing that shot. But that was the only time in my whole career, quite honestly--I retired in 2000 from the motion picture business, but that was the only time I ever really set up a picture, set up a shot like that to try to make a statement. The rest of my career I stayed true to my goals, to just be like an observer.

[end of podcast clip]

SANDERSON: And you were with DASPO 'til--from '69 to '70, correct?

BARBEE: I was in DASPO '69 to '70, yes.

SANDERSON: Besides that, that footage, what would you say would be your -- what would be something that would be your favorite, I wouldn't say that would be your favorite, but what would you--what is your favorite picture that you ever took or section?

BARBEE: Hmm. You know, I couldn't say. It--I mean the absolute favorite picture that I ever took was one I took with my personal still camera. We were doing a film at a Vietnamese orphanage halfway between Saigon and Củ Chi. And while we were there filming, there were some Catholic, Vietnamese Catholic nuns there and so forth, and these little kids were just like all little kids, running around trying to put their hands in our pockets and teasing us and just interacting with us. And this one little Vietnamese girl, I took her picture, a full-face picture. That picture still hangs on the wall in my office. It's my Vietnamese Mona Lisa. I can see my reflection in her eyes, and the smile on her face is very much like Mona Lisa. You can't tell whether she's smiling or frowning, and you just totally cannot read her emotions. And she's looking straight into the camera, and to me of all the pictures I've ever seen in Vietnam, that one really hits me right in my heart, because I've always wondered what she's thinking of me. Whether she saw me as a liberator or a barbarian. And I--you can't tell by looking at the picture. And I've seen pictures that Curtis, the famous photographer that went all around the west to film the Indian tribes before their demise, took some pictures of Indian children that look almost identical to this picture, that I have always wondered if he had the same feeling. You know, I figured, what's behind the eyes, what are they thinking? What's going through their minds, you know? But as far as motion picture, god, I just don't know. I know there--the two moments stand out the most in Vietnam was of course the one, the mortuary films. Those are burned into the backs of my eyelids. Those are images I'll never forget. But the other one was--my cameras weren't

rolling, but I had gotten assigned to go up to the Phuoc Vinh where the 1st Cav was to do some films up there and got there late at night or late in the evening. It was almost totally black. The sky was still lit a little bit. But enough of the helicopters had their red blinky lights on, and I remember landing at this place and not knowing the lay of the land 'cause you couldn't see. Never been there before, it was in a strange place. I asked these guys where the information office was, the IO [Information Operations] office, so I could tell these guys I was on sight and give them a copy of my orders and tell them what I was there to do. And while I was--after I introduced myself and made my introductions, and they told me where I could store my equipment, I got out my tape recorder. I think I had a tape recorder or something, but I was outside talking to a group of GIs, and the Klaxon went off. You know, the siren, (whirrs), and thuds started (thumping sound) and somebody yelled, "Incoming." And that group of soldiers who I was talking to--it was totally black out--just took off running. And there was about five of them went one way. And I followed these guys, and then they split off, and two of them went one way and three went another way, and I followed the two guys, and then they split up, and I followed just one guy. He dove into a hole in the ground, and I dove into the hole in the ground, and it was a bunker--'cause I never carried any weapons, so I didn't have any weapons, and so I just went for cover. And by then you could hear the machine guns, rockets coming in, and they were under full attack. And guys were yelling and screaming orders and all that. And I landed on the--in the dirt inside the bunker, and another guy landed on top of me and rolled off and got up. And as I kind of went into a pushup configuration to push myself up off the dirt, and I looked, and just a couple of feet away from me were two GIs sitting on ammo cans facing each other, and there were three or four beer cans in the dirt around their feet, and they were smoking big old doobies. They had been in the bunker when this attack started, and right between them sitting on a piece of wood that was jammed between the sandbags was a little thirteen-inch black and white television. And there were no mountains between Phuoc Vinh and Saigon. It was flat terrain. And they had a little cable going out to a generator somewhere. And they were watching Armed Forces Television on this little black and white TV. You've got to understand that dust was coming down through the ceiling, the ground was shaking, the cacophony of weapons firing coming in and out were just really loud, I heard guys running and screaming and machine guns and all that. And as I was getting up out of the dirt I'm looking at this little TV screen, and this is I think this is July 21, 1969, and there's Neil Armstrong getting out of the lunar lander, and he's saying, "One small step for man..." And I lost it. I just lost it. There was Walter Cronkite crying on national television, and they cut to London, and they cut to Moscow or wherever, and people are

out in the street celebrating and slapping each other on the back there at NASA and popping champagne, and everybody's carrying on--"Oh, my god, what a wonderful thing that's just occurred. We landed man on the moon." And I was just going, "What about me? What about us?" Nobody, nobody knew where we were, what we were doing, what was happening, nothing. And I remember that just being one of the most amazing moments of my whole Army experience was that very moment, because there were two complete different realities happening at the same time. And it seemed like everybody's eyes were on the moon that night, and nobody could give a rat's ass about us. I remember that.

SANDERSON: Definitely, one of those when you wish you kind of had a camera on that one.

BARBEE: Man, don't I. And I think that was so traumatic I had a lapse in memory, because I have no idea where I was the next probably twenty-four hours. I have no memory of it at all. Zip. But that was an interesting--that was a very interesting moment there.

SANDERSON: One of the—

BARBEE: Ted Acheson--hmm, yes?

SANDERSON: I was gonna say, one of the things I was gonna ask was, during the--I was going through the Texas Tech, there was a recording you submitted of a Vietnamese woman singing—

BARBEE: Wow, you really did do your homework, oh my god. Wow, I'm impressed.

SANDERSON: I was--I've been having, to the point where I've been having way too much fun with this. I was saying I was geeking out. The whole time I've been digging as much--if I could find a file--it's almost to the point of, some of the people at the museum have been saying, "Okay, you're getting almost stalker-ish. You know where these guys live." Because—

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: I was just kind of like, well, thank god for the Internet. But I was looking through the files, I listened to the audio, and I was like-- of course I had no idea what the lady was saying. What was the context of the song? Why did you record it? What was it--

BARBEE: There was a little bar down across Truh Minh Ky and about two blocks away down an alleyway. The first night I was in Saigon, one of the guys, local guys, DASPO guys that was there--it may have been Ted because Ted Acheson took me under his wing, and he became like my big brother, God bless him, especially after I started doing the mortuary stuff, I think Ted really knew what I was going through, and he was really there for me. But the first night I was in Saigon, someone said, "Let's go get a beer. There's a little place we go." So we went across the highway or the boulevard, went down this alleyway, turned a couple of back alley things, and went into this little corner bar that was back, back, back off the street. And it was a very small little bar, had a mama-san, had three or four bar girls that worked there, and they would sit and drink with you, and you could, you know, have sex if you wanted to. I guess you could buy—they would take you upstairs, that kind of thing. And we used to go there fairly frequently when we wanted to go out, didn't want to go far, we'd go down to this little bar and have drinks. But there was this one girl who was always in there. Turns out her name was Deeb. I don't know how you'd spell it--I think it would be D-E-B maybe. They called her Deeb. That was the phonetic translation that I would get from them. But Deeb wore traditional Vietnamese clothes: the silk top with the split down the side, the black pajamas, everything. She was always dressed in the traditional Vietnamese clothing, unlike the other bargirls who dressed in Western fashion. And Deeb was a girl that if you even started to approach her, Mama-san would come back around the bar like the cooks did with the spoon and our housecleaner did with the broom, and she would attack you. She just would not let any GI get close to or even talk to this girl. But Deeb would sing. She would sit there in the bar--she was like a parakeet, you know, that was in a cage. You couldn't touch it, and she would just sit and sing. And I could never figure out what her function was, why she wasn't your typical or classic bargirl, but she also had this quality to her voice that I didn't hear anywhere around Vietnam on the radio or out in the villages or anywhere. I never heard anybody who could sing like that. And she had this very unique voice, as I'm sure you heard. And the tonal qualities to her voice, the inflection. And she would just sing and sing and sing and sing and sing. And if we weren't putting money in the jukebox--I think there was a jukebox or something--and making a lot of noise, she would be singing. Just a quick little aside, the first night I was in that bar having a drink, just getting used to that environment being in Vietnam, 'cause I hadn't been there twenty-four hours--someone threw a tear gas grenade into the bar, and it popped off. And somebody yelled, "Tear gas," and I got up and started to run out the front door, and one of the guys who was with me grabbed me around the ankles and tackled me and said, "Don't go out the door. Don't go out the door." And I'm kicking and trying to get loose to run out the door, and

said, "What, are you crazy?" They said, "No, if you go out the door, they'll kill you." And I went, "Oh, shit." Welcome to Vietnam. That's what that was about. But aside from that, I frequented this bar and decided that I needed to record this girl because I had never heard anything like it before. So the whole, I don't know if it was the first trip or the second trip I was in Vietnam--it might have been the second trip even--I constantly was working on this mama-san to let--to convince her to let this girl come back to the villa with me where I could record her. And she wouldn't do it, wouldn't do it, wouldn't do it, wouldn't do it. But finally at one point she decided that she would let me record this girl's voice, I guess 'cause I convinced her I had honest intentions. But I had to not only pay for Deeb as if she were an escort, but I had to pay for a second girl who--to come along as an escort, as a chaperone. So there was two of them. So this one afternoon--and I had taken the officer's quarters, which were a separate room in the villa down on the bottom floor, and lined the walls with moving blankets, set up a mic stand and a Nagra tape recorder and had it all prepared ahead of time like a little sound booth and went over to the bar and gave the mama-san a bunch of piasters or dollars or whatever I gave her. And the two girls, Deeb and this other girl, came--we walked back to the villa. And I sat her down and just had her sing. And you've heard the recording that's what I got. Now all these years later I've tired to figure out--and the girl who was with her who could barely speak English, told me that these were Vietnamese folk songs. That was about the best I could get out of this whole thing was this girl sang traditional Vietnamese folksongs. Well, fast forward to just recent years. My grandson ironically married a Vietnamese American girl, and has had a baby. So I have a great grandson now who is American Vietnamese, which is really sweet 'cause it kind of brings the Vietnam War around full circle for me. But her mother, her grandmother--my great grandson's grandmother was one of the boat people who came out of Vietnam after the fall. I was telling her about this tape, and at one point I took the tape up in a cassette from, and she and I went in a room, and I plugged it in and played it for her. And she said, "Oh." She said, "That's opera. It's Vietnamese opera. She's singing classic Vietnamese opera." And she gave me a VHS videotape of a classic Vietnamese opera. And Le-Thuy Thanh-Sang or something. And by god, that's exactly what she was doing. She was singing classic Vietnamese opera. And I've always wondered what happened to Deeb. Did she become an operatic singer of classic Vietnamese, in later years or what? 'Cause she as very young at the time. But that was really a nice thing to find out--and that's why these women didn't want anybody to have anything to do with her. She was an icon to them, kind of a safety deposit box to Vietnamese culture that they didn't want tainted to American culture and Army culture. [Audio cuts]

SANDERSON: Hello.

BARBEE: --classic culture, which I thought was fascinating.

SANDERSON: It is, 'cause when I was listening to it, I was sitting there, I'm like—

BARBEE: But that's the story of Deeb.

SANDERSON: We might have to talk to Thom to see what we can do.

BARBEE: Are you still with me?

SANDERSON: Yes. Can you hear me?

BARBEE: Are you still with me?

SANDERSON: Hello.

BARBEE: Hello?

SANDERSON: Hello? Mr. Barbee, hello?

[Audio cuts. Phone ringing.]

BARBEE: Stewart Barbee.

SANDERSON: Mr. Barbee, hey, this is Ed.

BARBEE: Ah, I guess we got cut off.

SANDERSON: Yeah, the line went dead for about a half second, and then you came back on and then it sounded like I guess just a connection problem.

BARBEE: Yeah, I've been using a cordless phone, and I think the battery went out, but I got another fresh one here. So anyway that's the classic story of Deeb and what all was about her. She's always been kind of an interesting mystery to me.

SANDERSON: Yeah, we'll have to bring that up to Thom and also to Kat with the collection to see if that's something they would potentially want to add to it.

BARBEE: Yeah, if they would I've got the original quarter-inch. I made a--I have the original quarter-inch recording, and then I made a, what do you call it—a

sub--I made another original. I dubbed it. And the dub is what I gave to Texas Tech University, so I actually still have the original in my office here.

SANDERSON: 'Cause that would definitely give a--when I first found it and as I was going through--'cause Texas Tech did an awesome job. A lot of the research I've been able to find has been off of there, and just going through the different stuff—

BARBEE: Yeah, they're really good. They're really, really, really excellent. And—

SANDERSON: --audio recording, I was like, "Huh?" I was listening to it in the office, and I was just like, "Wow." 'Cause it gave a very calming effect, and I was just like, "What is this young lady talking about?"

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause then there was an intro about a young soldier being killed.

BARBEE: Yeah, I was asking the--her cohort, which is the chaperone, is the one who's doing the talking. What I did was--Deeb couldn't speak English at all. She couldn't say hello or goodbye in English. She spoke to just Vietnamese, that's all. But the bar girl who came with her as a chaperone, I asked her if she would interpret what Deeb was singing. So she, without my prompt other than just to ask her that, before I even started the recording, every time Deeb would sing a song, she would give an interpretation in English of what it was about. You know, "Boy loves girl, he goes off to war, he comes back," that kind of thing. So she was trying to interpret the songs. That was the chaperone.

SANDERSON: How many songs do you have recorded?

BARBEE: You know, I couldn't tell you. It was a full thirty-minute or hour tape. I can't remember what speed I recorded it at. But I think the reels were about a half hour, and if you slowed the recording down I think you could get about sixty minutes out of it. But it's at least half an hour. And there are six or eight songs on there, but like I said it turns out to be opera, which is pretty fascinating.

SANDERSON: Definitely. That is pretty nice.

BARBEE: Yeah, and I've got it on--god, what was the technology that came in after CD? It was kind of a digital technology.

SANDERSON: Like an MP3?

BARBEE: Yeah, I've got an MP3 copy of it. I took it to a professional soundman friend of mine. And he made cassette copies. He made an MP3 copy for me. So I still have it in MP3 as well as the original quarter-inch.

SANDERSON: Yeah, have to like I said definitely talk to them and have Brad and Aaron, two of our production guys—

BARBEE: Yeah, 'cause I'll tell you what, it might be something that would be interesting to have playing in the background during some of your shows.

SANDERSON: Oh, definitely. Especially I'm already thinking, that could be something that could be added. 'Cause like Thom was saying, we're actually gonna take some of the sound bites to kind of use as we're going through.

BARBEE: Yeah. The other thing is, I have a three-quarter-inch tape, or a quarter-inch tape of--I went around a fire support base one night. I'm not sure if that was also at Texas Tech in a VHS form, but I—

SANDERSON: I didn't see anything—

BARBEE: But I cut a little film out of--I took two reels of work print with me when I left the unit. We weren't supposed to. It didn't belong to me. It belonged to the government, but I took it because I didn't have anything to show of any military photographs that I had taken while I was in the Army. So I took these one-light work prints with me, two reels, and sometime in the middle-'70s I cut a little film called, *Impressions of Vietnam*, that I edited, this little 16mm film, and as the soundtrack I used the soundtrack that I did when I was at Phuoc Vinh during that trip when the lunar lander incident occurred. One of the nights I was there I took the Nagra recorder and just walked around the fire support base and just asked those guys, just asked them questions and just kind of interviewed them. There were some real drunk guys that were saying stupid jerk stuff, and then there were some very serious guys. There was a guy playing a violin who was from Stanford, who had his violin. He was playing *Greensleeves* in a bunker. And I used that as a soundtrack. It was basically done as a letter home to my brother and his wife, my family, but I did it on a quarter-inch tape. Like I say, I used that for the soundtrack. I think I still have the tape. I also have a tape, quarter-inch tape of just a bullshit session of DASPO guys on the roof of the villa, where we just, we were all drinking and carrying on and saying stupid stuff, and there's a whole tape of that, too. That's stuff I still have. I did not submit that to Texas Tech.

SANDERSON: Have you brought that out at some of the reunions?

BARBEE: No, no. Nope, nobody's seen it or heard it since 1969.

SANDERSON: We'll have to talk to Thom about-- see what we can do to--if that would be okay with you to be able to potentially use something like that—

BARBEE: Sure, absolutely.

SANDERSON: --when you guys come up for the reunion, that'd be a hell of a conversation piece.

BARBEE: Yup, indeed.

SANDERSON: Definitely. Appreciate that.

BARBEE: Yeah, oh indeed. You know, you asked me what was an interesting photograph I took. This is online. This is at 3fold.com [i.e. Fold3.com] or one of the websites. I've seen it online. It was Thanksgiving Day 1969. I had got caught with some pot because I used to smoke pot heavily after I'd go to the mortuary. I discovered that was the only way to relive my mind and take my mind off of what I'd seen. You gotta understand, I even wreaked of the smell of the mortuary. I think it was in my skin; it was on my clothes. And even the DASPO guys kept a distance from me while I was going through all that because I don't think I was talking sanely, I don't think I was acting sanely, and I don't think I smelled particularly pleasant. 'Cause that just permeated me. So I'd come back to the villa at night, I'd have a quick bite to eat, and I'd go up on the roof of the villa and just smoke myself into oblivion. But somehow or other we had an inspection. Somebody, thought we were shipping drugs home in our camera cases or something, so they sent one of the officers over to do an inspection. And none of us were doing any of that kind of thing. That was ridiculous. But they went through my personal stuff, they found a pack of cigarettes that had tobacco in it, and then they found a pack of cigarettes that had some pot in it. And so I got, you know, called on the carpet for that. And because of that our commander came from Hawaii to do a kind of inspection tour or whatever of Vietnam and the villa, and he came on Thanksgiving in 1969, and everybody got called in from the field, so they had big Thanksgiving dinner and a turkey and all at the villa, but with me being the exception, and they sent me out into the boonies to do a film. When we weren't being directed by the Pentagon we could do our own projects, and they told me they wanted to see Thanksgiving Day in the field. So they sent me out in the boonies to do Thanksgiving Day. But while I was out there I was at a place called Fire Support Base Nancy and

filming them prepping these soldiers for the Thanksgiving meal they were gonna have before they went into battle. And there was a priest giving a Thanksgiving prayer and at mealtime when they got out their little paper plates with cranberry sauce and the turkey on it, so forth. And they gave this prayer, and everybody got their food and went to sit down and eat it, and the picture I have with my camera is seeing all the white guys sitting at one table and then panning very slowly over to the other table where all the black guys were sitting. And that just really stuck in my brain. It was like, Jesus Christ. You know, one, we're sitting there--these guys are maybe, having their last meal together. They're fighting together, they live together, they die together, and yet here they are sitting at totally separate tables having this Thanksgiving meal. And that just really struck me as very odd--very, very odd. And then of course after the meal they all got on helicopters together and went over the hill and went into a big battle that they had. But that picture, and that's on actually online on the Internet, you can find it if you Google it. And yeah, it's just--it's the most bizarre, I think, picture I ever took, 'cause it was just total separation, you know. It was like, what's up with that?

SANDERSON: That would definitely be one--I guess—

BARBEE: Yeah, like what the—

SANDERSON: Definitely doesn't make any sense, especially with—

BARBEE: No, makes no sense.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I know with me being—since I've been in the military it was always one of those, Navy-wise it was always like, we didn't care about that part. It was just kind of like, hey, we're all together.

BARBEE: No, absolutely not. In the firefight or during a battle or something, none of that made any difference. You didn't--you never asked us those questions, you didn't think those thoughts. You depended on the guy right next to you, and they depended on you, and we're all in this together. But when it came time to sit down to a meal, they were totally segregated. They segregated themselves. I just, I couldn't understand that. It was really--it really struck me.

SANDERSON: Definitely gonna have to find that picture.

BARBEE: Yeah, and they say there's two websites that have all our pictures on them. [Fold3.com] and History--god, there's another site. But it was definitely--the title of the film, and I think the way it's listed is

Thanksgiving Day, 1969, Vietnam. And might be able to find it that way. If not I'll look for it, see if I can maybe send it to you from the website.

SANDERSON: Definitely, have to check that out.

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause that would—

BARBEE: And they took that day's film, and they kind of separated it by camera rolls, which is interesting, so it's in three different sections. But that was an interesting, interesting moment to me.

SANDERSON: Definitely check that out.

BARBEE: Mhm, mhm.

SANDERSON: Let's see. By the time you got done, you guys were--well, you left in '70 from DASPO, right?

BARBEE: Yes, summer of '70.

SANDERSON: Now, did you get--were you completely--did you completely get out?

BARBEE: Yes, I came home in August of 1970, and I think it was just right around August 13th, 12th, something like that. I got sent to the Army Oakland Base over here in Oakland and rotated out at that point, which was kind of an interesting thing. August 7. I separated 7th of August 1970. I had had my car shipped from Hawaii. I had a little Volkswagen. I had it packed up and shipped over ahead of me, ahead of my separation, so that it would be in Oakland when I got there. And I remember the day I got out--the scene is burned into my brain. There was a parking lot at the Oakland Army Base that was just as big as one you'd find at any airport. It was huge. It just went on forever. And anyway, when I finally got my walking papers, they said, "Right out that door." And there was a long hallway, and there was a set of double doors with the push bars on them. And the doors opened, and I walked outside, and the doors slammed shut--bam--and I was all alone. There was no person to be seen. There was a street right in front of me and a chain link fence, and on the other side of the street was a vast parking lot that just went on forever, as far as you could see, with a sea of cars. And the sun was high. There was no modelling of light or anything. It was all just stark contrasting. And there I was standing there in my—you know, with my duffel bag and my personal stuff, and I was alone. And it was frightening. I--I turned around. I tried to

go back in the doors. The doors were locked. And I just went, "Oh shit." It never occurred to me. What am I gonna do? Where am I gonna go? I had no home to come home to. And there I was just standing there with the whole rest of my life in front of me, and no idea, no clue what to do or where to go or who to see or what to say or anything. It was an amazing moment. And I wanted to go back in. DASPO was really what I knew. All my friends were there, and I just-- if I could have gone back on through those doors I would have reenlisted right on the spot and said, "Please send me back. Please. You know, I'd rather be in Vietnam than standing out here on the curb all by myself." So I went and found my car--took me about an hour, but I found my car, and got in it and drove to my brother's house, which was on the other side of the bay. I knew where he lived, and I went over there. But that was what getting out was like. I didn't like it at all.

SANDERSON: Nowadays when you come off active duty or get out, you go through all these different transition programs, pretty much have to have a solid, "Okay, this is what I'm gonna do afterwards," before they ever let you out.

BARBEE: Yeah, nope.

SANDERSON: Sounded like--"Okay, bye."

BARBEE: Yup, that was it, and it was like, oh my god, and you know after about six months living with my brother in Mill Valley. And like I said my other brother John had dropped out of the tech industry, and he had come up and was living with my elder brother, and he was fully involved with the sound business and was working as a sound man, and they were working together on some projects. And so my brother John was living on the back porch, I was living on the front porch in this little two-bedroom, one bath house that my brother and his wife and kid had in Mill Valley, and I tried to start making a life for myself. Tried to find work, tried to find a job, had no clue what to do. And on weekends and Wednesday nights we'd go down to Sausalito to the dance clubs and, you know, I'd try to meet somebody. And, oh shit, it was just a horrible, horrible, horrible time. I had people spit on me, I had people throw drinks on me, I had people calling me a baby killer, and it was just--I couldn't get to first base with anybody. And it was like well, what am I gonna talk about? I could talk about high school, but that won't work. I'm not gonna talk about the last three years of my life, so eventually it'd come out that I was a Vietnam veteran. And being a Vietnam veteran in 1970 in the San Francisco area was not a good idea. So after about six months, I said, "Screw it. I think I'm gonna go back in the unit." Before I left DASPO I was

offered a commission. I remember the ride from Biên Hòa back to Saigon with one of the officers, and he said, "You know, I've been designated as the person to give you your reenlistment talk," and he told me that the officers in the unit had all agreed that I might be a good candidate for commission, and that if I were to stay in the unit and teach the younger guys coming into the unit photography because I was production trained and all and understood lighting and screen direction and all that, that they would guarantee me a commission and I could either be butter bars [i.e. nick name for 2nd lieutenants] or I could choose to be a warrant officer of some category. And I just turned it down flat, no way, no way. But after about six months being here in the San Francisco Bay area being called names and spit on and so forth, I said, "Screw this. I think maybe that would be a good thing to do." So I had a ticket, and I was gonna go back to Hawaii and pursue that and/or go back to Thailand where I was very well accepted and loved there. The Thais loved GIs because we kept communism out of there. That domino never fell, and so the Thais were very receptive to army and military people. And I was on my way. And that last night that I was here, I had a personal battle going on inside my head about whether to go down to Sausalito or not, to the club and have a beer. And I had one little character on one shoulder saying, "Oh, go on, go on. Don't be a chicken." And the little guy on the other shoulder is going, "Nope, don't go. You know what's gonna happen. You know what they're gonna say." And back and forth and back and forth until I finally got up the nerve to go down there. And literally three times, I got out of my car, started to go into the club, and couldn't get through the front door. Could not physically get through the front door. And I turned around, get back in my car, and drive back down the highway towards Mill Valley, get about halfway home and go, "Oh, go on you big chicken." And I turned around and go back, park the car, get out, try to go back in the club, and not be able to get through the front door. This happened three full times that I got in my car and left and came back. And the third time when I left, turned to leave, something caught my eye, and it was my wife, who became my wife, was sitting in the bar. Her girlfriends had taken her down there. Said, "Linda, you'll never find anybody if you don't get out." She was a single mom. And didn't drink, didn't smoke, didn't do drugs, didn't do any of that, but her girlfriends said, "You've got to get out." So they a got her a babysitter and took her down there that night, and when I turned to leave the bar, she had beautiful red hair, and one of the lights that was supposed to be on the band that was playing was kind of cockeyed. The light was hitting the back of her head, and so she had this beautiful highlight in her red hair. And I saw that out of a dark room, and it piqued my interest. And I was able to go into the bar. And I walked in, and I looked at her, and she was the most beautiful thing I ever saw. So I just walked up to her and said to myself, "Okay, let's just get this over

with." So I walked up to her, and I said, "Hi, I'm Stew Barbee. I'm an unemployed Vietnam veteran. Let's just get this over with." And she couldn't have cared two hoots about Vietnam, because she was in survival herself as a single mom. And she just put her hand on her chin and looked at me in a coy way and said, "Oh really? That's very interesting. Tell me more about that." That was forty-three years ago, so—

SANDERSON: Congratulations.

BARBEE: [Chuckles] Yeah, it was a pretty interesting moment, but if I hadn't seen her that night, I probably would have gone back into DASPO. There's no doubt about it, would have come back to the unit.

SANDERSON: So they always say things happen for a reason. Guess it's good that it did, especially forty-three years later.

BARBEE: I wasn't supposed to be there that night, and she definitely wasn't supposed to be there that night. So we figure it was kind of destiny. It was a nice way to meet. Yup.

SANDERSON: Now that takes us to a point where--I was gonna ask you before we get into the rest of the stuff, did you need to take a break or are you okay?

BARBEE: No, I'm good. I'm making myself a little coffee. How about you?

SANDERSON: I'm doing fine. Doing fine here. Now that we--like I said, when I was looking through everything with the ILM, with your IMDb, it's one of those where it looks like--you say you pretty much started getting into the motion picture industry, you started at ILM?

BARBEE: No, I actually started off working in and around locally doing commercials for, like, McCann, different milk commercials, Coke commercials. I had to go back to being an assistant cameraman for a while to try to break into the business, 'cause nobody would hire me as a cameraman. One, they didn't know me, and two, I was a Vietnam vet, and that didn't--my military experience didn't amount to anything. Nobody even wanted to talk about it, so it was like starting all over again. So for the first year or so I worked as an assistant cameraman. But slowly I worked into the business.

SANDERSON: How did you get started off even as an assistant cameraman?

BARBEE: Well, actually somebody thought I was my brother. I went into a production studio. I used to make the rounds of all the little studios and the TV stations and different people. I knew I wasn't gonna be a news cameraman. There was no way I was gonna shoot news. I was done with the blood and guts. That wasn't gonna happen. I would have dug ditches before I shot news. But I tried to get into production, tried to get into documentary work. There was a lot of documentaries in the '70s and so forth and commercial work. There was a lot of work in San Francisco and industrial film and things. So I tried to get work in those realms. And there was this one little studio called Studio 16. I think--god, who was the guy who used to be the comedian back in San Francisco? Oh he was a very famous name. I think he got arrested a couple times. What was his name? Doesn't matter. There was a film done with this fellow called *Mask Man*, *The Mask Man*. And there was still a bohemian element still in San Francisco and art films and things like that. But this old studio called Studio 16, I went in there to see if I could find work, and I was talking to the lady behind the desk and trying to give her the little bit of the resume that I had. And the guy that was in there said, "Barbee. Barbee, I know that name." And he said, "Oh, you're looking for work?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, I'm shooting a milk commercial for Foremost Milk up in Petaluma." And he says, "I could use an assistant." "I'll take it. What ever it is I'll take it." Turns out he thought I was my brother Chuck who was working for Lee Mendelson at the time. Lee Mendelson did all the Charlie Brown shows for television that still air. And he, Lee Mendelson, was also a producer of a lot of entertainment specials and things. And he also produced a show back in the '70s, a kid show called *Hot Dog*, which had Jo Anne Worley and--god, who's the redheaded film director? With glasses. Lives in New York, does all the Diane Keaton movies. Woody—

SANDERSON: Woody Allen.

BARBEE: Woody Allen and Tommy and Dickie Smothers and Jonathon Winters. And these people did all the on-camera kind of host bits of this show called *Hot Dog*. And my brother had hired this guy named Dan McCann as a second cameraman to do one of their segments or part of one of their segments. Anyway, Dan McCann thought I was my brother Chuck, and so he was gonna return the favor and hire me to do this gig with him. But that was my absolute first gig after the Army working with Dan, so I used to do commercials with Dan for a while, and then just kind of branched out from there. Worked with some of the other cameramen until I was able to start getting jobs on my own. But I used to--kind of started out as a cameraman doing work for *Good Morning America*, *60 Minutes*, *NBC White Paper*, industrial films, some second unit work on commercials,

television commercials, car commercials. Just slowly worked my way back into the business. And so for the next thirty years I did--I knew, like I told you, that after Vietnam there was no heroes in Hollywood, so I knew I didn't really want to go there. And nobody down there was gonna impress me much. And but San Francisco being a location town, there was always a lot of movies coming through town. So I did over the years, I did--you know in the motion picture feature film realm, I worked on the movie *The Net*. I worked on *Down Periscope*. I worked on *Copycat*. I worked on *So I Married an Axe Murderer*. I worked on *Being Human*. I worked on *Heart and Souls*. A movie called *Golden Gates*. A movie called *Final Analysis*. U2 *Rattle and Hum*, *Home*, *Deadpool*, *The Patty Hearst Story*, *Batteries Not Included*, *Wildfire*, *Golden Child*, *Star Trek IV*, *Star Trek II*, *Star Trek VI*, *Howard the Duck*, Ewok movie, *The Right Stuff*, *Return of the Jedi*, *Star Trek II*, gospel movies, *American Graffiti 2*, *True Crimes*, *Woman on Top*. I did television series like *Beakman's World*. I was director of photography on that and was nominated for an Emmy in '94 for that. *Wolf*, *Midnight Caller*, *Earthbound*, *Family of Five*. The *Nature* series on PBS, I worked for them for fourteen years over the years, freelance. Movies, TV series, Jesse Hawkes series. *King of Love*, *Full House*. I did the last five years of my career--I was one of the cameramen on Nash Bridges' television series with Don Johnson and Cheech Marin. I did that for five years. Had a lot to do with the look of that. Did a lot of commercials--did Tylenol and Nescafe, United Airlines, Household Bank, US Army, Apple computer, coffee commercials, Duncan Hines, Toyota, Coca Cola. You name it, probably filmed it. Lifesavers, all that kind of stuff. I did work for, like I said, *60 Minutes* for probably twenty-something years, freelance. I did *20/20* from the pilot to probably 2000—I mean 1996. I probably did twenty years for them. Did HBO specials, Fox television specials. I filmed the Ali/Frazier fight in Manila for Don King. You know, name something, I probably worked on it.

[Chuckling]

SANDERSON: I was gonna say.

BARBEE: Literally, you know, NBC *Dateline*, promos for movies like *Terminator* and--Jesus, it just goes on. I did a lot of music videos for people. Tom Petty concerts and Lionel Richie concerts and Commodore concerts and you name it concerts. Did industrial filming and did films still for the government. I went to Cuba and Nicaragua, Grenada. You know, just done a world of things. And it's been fabulous. I just loved it. I give it all credit to the US Army for training me so well. Like I said, I was trained in every aspect of photography.

SANDERSON: I was gonna ask, especially looking back at the fact that knowing—
Lipkowitz.

BARBEE: Yeah, Joe Lipkowitz.

SANDERSON: Him being—

BARBEE: Yup, and Charlie Hemingway. And Charlie Hemingway, the guy that was in the special effects department, that gave me my initial training in motion pictures, he was actually a Technicolor trained--he was a Technicolor technician. He worked back when they used to do three--three-strip Technicolor movies. And so he was very exacting guy. There was no room for error in his world. But I was just so well trained and cross-trained. Production documentary style. Thirty-five mm stage production stuff, and 16mm run-and-gun documentary style. And I just--there really wasn't anything I couldn't do when I got out of the military. I was way over-trained, and it served me well all those years.

SANDERSON: And when you first got out, before you could really break into the field, did you ever thought about calling those guys back and just saying, "Hey, you know, back from Vietnam," using those connections?

BARBEE: It never occurred to me. One, I didn't know any--there was no cohesive unit after Vietnam. When you left, that was it. I didn't have a list of addresses. We all came in at different times, we all got out at different times. It was the shotgun effect. When you all got out, Ted went to Michigan or whatever, and Grigsby went to Philadelphia, and Peterson went to Oregon, and Barbee went to California. You know, there was no--there was no place to go. There was no official unit. There was no official unit history. There was no place you could call and say, "Hey I'd like to get in touch with--" there was nothing. And it wasn't until the early 1980s--I mean, it was a very lonely experience because of that, and I decided that I had to find some of these guys myself, so I started doing some research. This is before the Internet and all. And started finding--went through my--I kept copies of all the paperwork that I did for the films that I did in Vietnam. I kept--I made mimeograph copies of everything, or what was the black paper you used to--carbon copies. I made a carbon copy of everything. So I had some names, and I tried to track some of these guys down using the yellow pages, you know, information. And the information operator. So I would call different states and ask for people. And I think I tracked down John Gilroy. I tracked down Chuck Abbott. I tracked down Bryan. I tracked down a few, handful of guys and asked them to please send me names, addresses, anybody like that. I wanted to kind of--it occurred to me that I wanted to--the mission I decided to be

on was to reestablish contact with the guys I knew while I was in DASPO. But unbeknownst to me--it never occurred to me that these guys knew other people, people that I had never met. Right? So everybody had their own group of guys. 'Cause we were always coming and going and crossing paths. We were never all in one place at one time. So Grigsby or Acheson or Gilroy, these guys would send me a list of people that they knew, and they would be names I didn't know. And I realized, "Oh shit, where's my list gonna start and stop? Do I exclude those guys or do I include those guys?" I decided without knowing that DASPO could not have been that big in total and that I would try then to put together a list of guys total, all the people who ever served in DASPO. I decided that was gonna be my mission. So for about six or eight years I was on a writing campaign to these people to try to collect a list--I called it the DASPO roster--to try to fill it out and find out where everybody was. Because I knew that the unit had started in 1962, and with a conversation I guess with John Kennedy. I don't know if you know that history.

SANDERSON: I know John Kennedy and one of the generals—

BARBEE: They were—

SANDERSON: One of the—

BARBEE: Well, they were watching film of Vietnam in the oval office, somewhere with JFK. And he was watching film at this particular moment of General LeMay was showing his some film that was 16mm color film shot out of the back of, like, a C-123 Caribou or a C-130 where these Air Force guys were kicking flares out of the back of this plane, and of course, in the background was a blue sky and green jungle and all this beautiful 16mm color film, and just prior to that the Army, George Becker had shown some Army footage, and it was all black and white grainy 35mm Army-looking film. And apparently the unit history goes, is well documented, that apparently JFK turned to look at General Becker while he's watching the Air Force footage--and you know there was always this rivalry between the Army and the Air Force--and said, "Why doesn't your footage look like this?" Meaning General LeMay's footage that he was showing, the color footage. And apparently it pissed off General Becker so badly that he got together some powers that be--and he was the general of the Army at that time--and created the unit DASPO. That's when it was created, in the spring of 1962, 'cause he said that was it. These guys are gonna have the best money, the best equipment. They're gonna be able to go anywhere at any time, do anything, and I'm not gonna be humiliated like that again. So DASPO was created, I guess Colonel Jones was the one who actually was assigned the task of putting

the unit together. But the rest is history, and I think they lasted until about 1974 when all the original guys who started this unit had probably all retired by then, and I think, like that famous scene in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, somebody in the Army looked around one day and saw all these DASPO guys running around all over the world with their cameras and went, "Who the hell are these guys?" And they reined them in.

SANDERSON: Someone forgot to send the memo down.

BARBEE: Yeah, and that's when it became combat camera or whatever it is, and they tried to make them real soldiers. 'Cause they didn't understand who they were or what they were doing running around with all that power they could do.

SANDERSON: Then the time they tried to rein in or went to the first volunteer, back to the volunteer force. They had a lot of problems for a while.

BARBEE: Yup, so I worked on this DASPO list for years and years and years. So I made a trip back east and I was working for ABC or NBC, something like that. And while I was on the east coast I went to see Chuck Abbott 'cause he and I had talked a lot about trying to get a reunion together. And we drove up and met with Bryan Grigsby in Philadelphia or just outside of Philadelphia, and went to his house and talked about putting something together. We hadn't really ever--hadn't really ever had anything. There had been a group of guys that got together once or twice prior, handful of guys, but nothing that was an official reunion that everyone was invited to, everybody we could find anyway. And so we-- Chuck Abbott and I tried to get this together over the next year or so, but I kind of went into a very dark PTSD place where it all became too real to me again, and I hadn't really dealt with or coped with all the stuff that I told you about. And I just couldn't handle it, couldn't deal with it, couldn't handle it. So Chuck took my--I mean, I wouldn't even answer any of his phone calls or letters. I just dropped off the planet. And he took the DASPO roster, the list that I had kept publishing and sending out to everybody as it would go, and contacted a reunion group down in Georgia or Alabama or one of those southern states, South Carolina or somewhere, and contacted them. And they started sending out my list, my mailing list, and sending out notices for a reunion. And bottom line is, in 1996 in Washington we had our first official DASPO reunion. And from there you know, now we're having our fifteenth reunion. And my goal was complete. Like I said, I always wanted to see the unit get back--for us to get back together as a unit. And out of that I guess I was the second president of the association, and with Ted's help I found Texas Tech

University and contacted them, and the rest is history about that. We established an archive there. We established a scholarship fund through them, and I have just continued to build on that.

SANDERSON: Outstanding. I'm glad you guys did, because initially when Thom told me about that, I'm like, "The what?" I mean—

BARBEE: Nobody.

SANDERSON: It's definitely—even one of those where, there's very little bit of information out there on it.

BARBEE: No, we have all the information. And I actually have tons of it. I've got a whole file drawer full of all those original letters I sent out that I was telling you about back from the 80s and the responses. I've got all the original lists and subsequent lists. I've got the history, I've got stories that people have written, and I've got just my own archive of DASPO data.

SANDERSON: I'm just looking at this, 'cause I know--'cause I'd have to say ninety percent of what I've found has been from the Texas Tech archive.

BARBEE: Yeah. It's a pretty remarkable unit. I mean, we've got, you know, some of our members were at the Nuremberg Trials. You know, some of our members were in, like Rupy Ruplenas. God, he was in WWII, Korea, and Vietnam as a cameraman. And we've got guys who were there in the jungles of Bolivia when they took down Che Guevara.

SANDERSON: I guess the one picture that was kind of published around showing his body I think was taken by one of you guys.

BARBEE: Yeah, that's right. With guys in the Dominican Republic. People who did the Mayaguez Incident, the Pueblo Incident, the POWs coming out of Hanoi; that was all DASPO.

SANDERSON: Now one question that I did have, 'cause we found a list that was published on Texas Tech that had the DASPO addresses. Now I know your nickname is Outasite. And according to one of the things that Mike Laley, Lily—

BARBEE: Mike Laley, [his nickname is] Bummer.

SANDERSON: Yeah, Bummer. It was one of those where he called you Outasite, and you called him Bummer? I believe was the story—

BARBEE: Yeah, it was actually Bryan Grigsby. I was a little bit of a hippie, kind of in look and attitude during those days. I had my John Lennon glasses and mustache and all that, and I used to say, whatever would happen I think my--I had two responses. One was, "Outasite," and the other was, "Far out." And it was Grigsby, Bryan Grigsby, who gave me the handle Outasite. He just started calling me Outasite I guess 'cause I said it too much. But likewise when Mike Laley came into our unit, he used to say, "Bummer" a lot. "Oh, bummer. Oh bummer." So I started calling him Bummer, so he got his handle from me.

SANDERSON: Well, when I was sitting there reading though some of Grigsby's stuff, I read that, 'cause I was like-- "Where the hell did he get this nickname?" 'Cause like every unit, being in the Navy I've been called Sandy, I've been called Hick. You name it. You know, yeah. Been called every--it's like every place I go I've always got a nickname. And there's always a kind of a story behind it.

BARBEE: Well, that's where those came from. Like I say, I'd say, "Outasite," so that's what they called me. It became my name.

SANDERSON: And then I--'cause you guys, this is gonna be the fifteenth anniversary of the reunion, right?

BARBEE: Yes, yes.

SANDERSON: And I know there's quite a few people coming to it, and we--I've been psyched about it, just with looking through all the pictures that's gonna be put up exhibit-wise, and reading the different histories.

BARBEE: It's gonna be fun.

SANDERSON: And one of the questions I did have, from what I could see it looked like you guys were, when you were back in the rear, especially back in Hawaii, you guys were constantly nothing but a bunch of jokesters. Was it--that's the impression I got. Was that pretty much how it was?

BARBEE: Would you state that again? 'Cause you were breaking up. Just kind of--left alone and wild you mean?

SANDERSON: Well not left alone and wild, but just like a lot of pranksters, especially there was the one book, *DASPO: An Unhinged [Novel] of Vietnam* by--I cannot think of his name. I had it written down. That was written, and basically it was almost kind of like, you guys were had a lot of pranks.

BARBEE: Oh, you mean the one that was done recently by--oh, god, what's his name? I think I know the guy you're talking about.

SANDERSON: And basically it was almost like--it's almost like instead of Robert Altman in "MASH", it was like you guys and--I cannot think of his name. I had it written down. I know I had it written down for Colonel Halloran.

BARBEE: Fenster. [I.e. Rodald B] Fenster.

SANDERSON: Yes. It just--from what I could gather you guys were a pretty tight-knit group. And you guys—

BARBEE: We were a pretty tight-knit group, but honestly I would take anything he says or writes with a grain of salt. I would not take anything to the bank that he has written. I think he single-handedly was one of those guys that tried to disband the unit. And I think his book and his writings are totally inaccurate. And I just wouldn't--I would say he's not part of the core.

SANDERSON: Okay.

BARBEE: I think it's--I have no idea why he wrote a lot of the things he wrote, but I know he pissed off a lot of the guys when he came out with that book, not because he wrote the book, but because it wasn't done accurately.

SANDERSON: Because from what I could read from the reviews--I haven't actually been able to read it. It's one of those where it's—you have to order it from the publisher. It's not very widely distributed.

BARBEE: I think it was the Sunday paper comic book section history of DASPO.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay.

BARBEE: And I just--you know, he was a latecomer, and the unit had really changed by the time he came into it. And I don't know--a lot of us are wondering what prompted him to write the book, especially in the way he did, when he could have written the real truth which would have been far more interesting than the fiction that he came up with.

SANDERSON: That was one of the things where when I saw it I'm like, "Let me ask some of the guys about it." 'Cause I'm like, should I buy it? We even talked about, is it something we should get for the library side of the museum.

BARBEE: I don't think so because it's sorely inaccurate as far as I'm concerned. And there's a lot more actual historic data written, like stuff that I have,

where guys had written their own personal experiences and histories and, you know, stories and personal stories and so forth that are far more accurate than what he wrote. He made up a lot of stuff and said things that weren't true, wholly aren't true. And won't even read it because I think it's such bullshit. But that's just my opinion. I think you'll find that opinion is common among a lot of us in the core groups. I keep saying the core group, guys who helped form/reform the unit, guys who have created the association, guys who have been involved with Texas Tech and the other shows and reunions. I think we would all agree with what I just said.

SANDERSON: Thanks, Now, we're getting close to the end of my questions.

BARBEE: Okay.

SANDERSON: And the other question was, it was to tie into this, when someone comes to the exhibit featuring the different photographs, videos, or anything that we use, are any type of exhibit that, you know, your pictures and your videos have been used—

BARBEE: Mhm.

SANDERSON: --what would you like for them to take away from it? If there's like--if you could be standing there and seeing them, what would you want them to take away from that picture or that specific piece of footage that you shot?

BARBEE: Well, two things. I--that come to mind. One is something that has stayed with me for all these years, and that is that I think if you want--well, let's just say it this way. I've never understood why people were not interested or more interested in the combat cameramen, because especially in the 20th century it's the photographs by which we know war the most. A picture is worth a thousand words. And I have never understood the lack of interest in combat cameramen because you could find out not only what happened during the instance that the photograph was taken, but you could find out something about what occurred before and something that occurred just after. And it was our job, our mission, to observe and record the history. So you'd think, or I would think, that we would be the first guys that you'd want to talk to, and it turns out we're like the last. But primarily I guess the--if I could put a caption under those pictures, the caption would say, "No greater glory." There's no greater glory [pause, tearing up] than to fight for another person's safety and freedom. And I think that's what I am left with. No matter what they say about Vietnam, I think it was a very noble effort.

SANDERSON: Very well said.

[Pause]

BARBEE: And I certainly feel that when I look into my great grandson's eyes or I go up and visit them and Huan who escaped from Vietnam in the middle of the night with only what she could carry around her back, throws her arms around me and says, "Thank you." So I never bought into the, I call it, the urban myth about Vietnam. I've always thought that it was a very noble effort. And for me, personally, I said there's no greater glory than to fight for somebody's safety or freedom. I don't care if it's just an individual on the street, in a domestic situation, or going to Vietnam to try to help those people live a free life. If you read the history of Vietnam, which, their war with China lasted 1,049 years, you'll read that everything we experienced was experienced by the Chinese before even Christ was born. And so was it a winnable situation? No, probably not. But that has nothing to do with it being a noble effort. And that's how I'm--that's what I'm left with.

Woman's voice: Yeah, thank you for—[breaking up]—

SANDERSON: Are you still there, sir?

BARBEE: Yes, yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: Okay. It sounded like a—

BARBEE: I just don't know what else to say. [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: Well no, it sounded like something else cut into it, cut into the line there for a second.

BARBEE: Yeah, probably my heartbeat.

SANDERSON: Well I greatly appreciate your time, Sir. Was there--that's all the questions I have at this point.

BARBEE: Well, we covered a lot of ground, didn't we?

SANDERSON: Oh, definitely. I was thinking, I'm like, "I've had him for a couple hours." I mean, I knew this was gonna be good and detailed, but by far thank you very much, sir. It's gonna be a pleasure meeting with you guys. It's gonna be a pleasure.

BARBEE: Indeed. Indeed.

SANDERSON: Can't wait--definitely can't wait 'til you guys get up here to Chicago.

BARBEE: Yup, and ironically I don't have a squeak of sound. I don't have a still picture. I don't have any motion picture that's gonna be in this show, but as I said to one of my pals, compatriots, I said, "You know, it's not about me. It's really not about me." It's about our—about the unit and our legacy. And I don't have to be in it. You know. It doesn't have to have anything to do with me. It's about who we were collectively and what we did collectively, which was to record by far and away the largest amount of photographs in history of the Vietnam War that exists was done by our little outfit. From 1962 'til and after--until and after the fall of Saigon.

SANDERSON: Right. Definitely. Like I said sir, we greatly appreciate it. Hopefully--I know Kat and everybody has been working very hard, and we hope the exhibit will exemplify everything you guys did.

BARBEE: Oh, I'm sure. I just thank God that there is a Pritzker Military Museum. I think that is so cool, and I can't wait to come and meet you guys. And like I said, in the meantime I might dig around and--you have a way to play MP--MP tape things?

SANDERSON: MP3 players, yes.

BARBEE: Yeah, MP3. Maybe I'll just package that little thing up and send it to you so you have it.

SANDERSON: Oh, great. We would greatly appreciate it.

BARBEE: And--or anything else I have. And then I'll be bringing a lot of the paperwork stuff probably with me, so if there's anything in there you'd like to have copies of, you're certainly welcome.

SANDERSON: Definitely. We'll definitely have to--definitely will be fun to look through all that.

BARBEE: Indeed. Indeed. Well, I sure thank you for your time. Thank you for your effort.

SANDERSON: Thank you. Thank you for your time. We—

BARBEE: And thanks for your service.

SANDERSON: Hey, no problem. Thank you for yours.

BARBEE: Indeed.

SANDERSON: You guys set the bar for us.

BARBEE: Have a great day. Great afternoon.

SANDERSON: You do as well, Mr. Barbee.

BARBEE: Okay, my man, bye bye.

SANDERSON: Bye.

Stewart Barbee

Part 2

September 23, 2015

Interviewed by Edward Sanderson

Transcribed by Rachel Berlinski

Edited by Leah Cohen

SANDERSON: Today is September 23, 2015, and today we have the honor again to be speaking with Stewart Barbee. You were a specialist with the Department of the Army Special Photographic Office, DASPO, from '69 to '70 as a cinematographer, motion picture, an 84 Charlie [i.e. MOS 84 C 20: MoPic, Motion Picture Camera Operator, or cinematographer] and 84 Gulf 20 [i.e. photo lab technician]

BARBEE: Indeed.

SANDERSON: Thank you again for coming out, and thank you for agreeing to sit back down with us. The first was a phone interview. Now we get to see you face to face. Although when looking at pretty much--all of us have seen your work, we've just never seen you.

BARBEE: Right.

SANDERSON: So, especially with the--pretty much as you were saying in the other interview, if there was a movie or a TV series from 1978 to, what, 2005, or—

BARBEE: 1971 'til 2000.

SANDERSON: Yeah. It's pretty much, yeah, you were part of—

BARBEE: I worked on that, indeed.

SANDERSON: So like I said, thank you very much again for coming out. So we're just gonna kind of jump in on some stuff--when you joined, you eventually got to Vietnam in '69, in May of '69. That's your first time when you first got there, correct?

BARBEE: Yes, yes. I think I actually--I was on the way to the Republic of China, and I had special orders from the Department of the Army Foreign Assignment. And the Republic of China, I'm not sure what that is or was-- where I was going or what I was gonna do there because I never made it to China, but it was a civilian status job. I got as far as San Francisco. And I was on leave, staying with my family, and a guy on a motorcycle came up with a telegram. It was from someone from the Presidio, and it said, "Stop. Do not proceed. Wait for further orders." So I never did get to China. I don't know what that was about. But the orders that came amended were for DASPO, Department of the Army Special Photographic Office, Detachment Pacific. And I do believe from the people I've talked to that worked in the Pentagon and so forth, although I've never got a definitive answer, I was the replacement for Charles Ryan, who was killed in November. So I was in route when someone at the Pentagon decided that I should be his replacement, and/or they decided they needed army-training films for the US Army Mortuary Service at Fort Lee, Virginia. They had several scripts they needed to be shot for training films. And because I was a production-trained cameraman, had been trained at the Army Pictorial Center in New York in production, that maybe--that combined with the loss of Charles Ryan, they decided it would best serve the army for me to go to the Department of the Army Pacific, DASPO Pacific. And those scripts were sent there, I guess, to save the army from having to send cameramen out of New York to go Vietnam to do these films. They just utilized me to do them instead since I was at hand and available.

SANDERSON: And then--and when you were there you were talking in the other interview you had been pretty much trained by the greats of Hollywood during that timeframe.

BARBEE: Indeed. There were—

SANDERSON: --in cinematography.

BARBEE: --when I landed at the Army Pictorial Center in New York I had had two years of high school photography, which I did very well in. That's where I really found photography. And then after I graduated from high school I attended college and majored in photography. And about three semesters in, a year and a half into college, I realized that the very best training I could probably possibly get in motion pictures would be in the US Army. Traditionally Hollywood cameramen are all military-trained cameramen for the most part. Second to that would be guys who go through, like, UCLA or Columbia.

SANDERSON: Berkeley.

BARBEE: School of broadcasting. And thirdly, guys who work in rental houses and learn the trade by just kind of being around it a lot. But by far and away most--the best and fastest track into the motion picture business in the camera department is the military. And I think that holds true today. And during WWII when the US Army had the pictorial center in New York--it was the old Paramount Studios in Queens, I guess originally Lasky Studios. It was built out there in the teens. But Paramount was there, and a lot of the people when Paramount moved to Hollywood stayed on, and the military took over--the signal corps took over the pic center. It was mostly run by civilians, but a lot of the cameramen were drafted for duty out of Hollywood. A lot of famous cameramen, cinematographers. And so they got technicians from Technicolor. They got technicians from Paramount and Warner Brothers and Mayer Studios. And they were drafted and worked for the military, and then a lot of them stayed in New York after the war, so when I was there in the '60s there were still a lot of these fellows around. The very first cameraman I was assigned to work with was Charlie Hemingway who had been a Technicolor technician. He was from England, had worked his whole career at Pinewood Studios and knew all the Technicolor stuff, which is very difficult to know. All three-strip camera process. And he was doing camerawork in special effects in the studio there, and they sent me down to him to get my initial training as a cameraman. And I set up and tore down cameras all day long every day for weeks and weeks and weeks. And he wouldn't tell me what to do. He would just take me to the little insert stage and say, "There's your camera over there in the boxes. Set it up. If you think it's ready, you come get me." And he'd go back to work, and I'd go in there, and I'd try to figure it all out. And when I thought I got it all ready, I'd get Charlie, and he'd come in and go, "This is wrong and this is wrong and this is wrong." He would never tell me more than three things at once. And then I'd have to take it completely apart and put it all back into the boxes, close the boxes, and then start over. And I did this over and over and over again. So finally when I could have the camera set up where it was camera ready--

and camera ready means all he had to do was walk in and turn the switch and it would take a picture, then he'd give me a new camera system, and it would start all over again. And I went from that to being a film loader, working in a dark room just loading film for the motion picture crews that were working on stage. They had a lockbox that the assistant cameraman would take the film and put it in the lockbox, and he'd push it and it would go into the darkroom and I would take the magazine out, unload the film, reload the film, do the inventory, all the paperwork for the lab technicians so they could process it, put the fresh film in and push it back out to the stage so when he needed a new magazine it would be in there. Went from that to being a slate boy then a second assistant, first assistant, and then they started training me to be a cameraman, and that was sort of the process. So great. If I had a millions dollars in cash in my pocket, I could not have bought that education.

SANDERSON: Especially from some of those guys, 'cause I believe that was it the pic center--that initially Mary Pickford was the one who actually started that.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: You know, so I mean—

BARBEE: All the original Tarzan movies, Mary Astor, all those people, they all—

SANDERSON: And the only other bigger star than Mary Pickford was Charlie Chaplin during that timeframe when she started it. So it was like--

BARBEE: And now they're doing movies like *The Wiz*, *Sesame Street*, all that stuff. There's still--the pic center, it's now called Astoria Studios, and it's still going ahead.

SANDERSON: So it'd be almost a hundred year--the facilities are at a hundred years old at this point.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: So that definitely--you could say that having that type of background then getting into, later on in the army—

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: That definitely would--definitely puts you on that track.

BARBEE: One of the unique things I remember about it is if you took the freight elevator down in the pic center like a level or two below the main stage was just--the swimming pool still existed from the original Tarzan movies. It was really interesting. And a lot of the grips and electricians who worked there when I was there were still wearing flat caps, vests, knickers. They looked like, you know, the street kids from the Depression era. And a lot of these guys had already been there thirty, forty, fifty years working in the motion picture business, and the director of photography still wore a tie and a three-piece suit. And he would sit in a chair with a megaphone and call out directions to people on the stage with the key grip sitting on one side and the gaffer sitting on the other, and both of those gentlemen would also be wearing a tie. So it was quite a different world than it is now in Hollywood, I'll tell you that.

SANDERSON: I was gonna say now, from the pictures I've seen of people going--you know, when they make movies, yeah. Everybody's bummed out, look like they hadn't shaved in months.

BARBEE: Tennis shoes and T-shirts.

SANDERSON: Their hair's down to their shoulders. Eh.

BARBEE: If you even lit a cigarette not just near the camera, but anywhere on the stage or near, in the studio, they'd put you out on the street. And now people sit around smoking and doing all kinds of things by the camera. It's amazing.

SANDERSON: And when you got there later on, we talked about with the graves registration and the disposition of the personal property. You had also went on a few other missions as well.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: There was a couple of them where you went--you had worked with the Vietnamization, and that was basically going and training the ARVN. And during that timeframe you guys would actually--they would train them in learning how to do missions, weapons training to be able to turn a fire base, right?

BARBEE: That is correct.

SANDERSON: There was one--it looked like it was during Christmastime of '69—

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: 'Cause the dates show from the twenty--around the 22nd, then you had went from Xuân Lộc to Gia Ray, and it looked like during that--did you have any break between that? 'Cause that was the 22nd of December, and Gia Ray was the 28th of December.

BARBEE: Not a break that I can remember. And unfortunately, I can't remember those two missions, although I know I was there because I have the paperwork for it. A lot of times those times and those missions were just a blur. It all kind of runs together sometimes in my mind. I remember doing maneuvers with Special Forces and the—who were training the ARVN [Army of Republic of Vietnam]. And there being a good--little bit of consternation between the two, some mistrust between the two. But this was Nixon's plan, was to Vietnamize the war, turn it over to them. And start drawing down troops. You can see there was some troop withdrawal missions that I went on, like the 9th Infantry. I know I traveled to the Hawk Missile Unit up in Chu Lai up north in I Corps where they were decommissioning the Hawk Missile Unit. And the hawk missiles were put there specifically to combat the MIGS that would unfortunately wander across the DMZ [demilitarized zone], unfortunately for the MIG—

SANDERSON: Right

BARBEE: Don't know if we ever had to shoot any down, I'm not sure of that, but I know I went out to film the deactivation of them. That was part of the Vietnamization unit, Vietnamization process. And artillery. I filmed a number of fire support bases being relinquished to the Vietnamese. The 155 mobile artillery, 175s being turned over, the artillery batteries to the Vietnamese. Artillery had been--I don't know if this is pertinent or not, but some wise soul probably at Fort Sill, Oklahoma where I did a couple of stateside [artillery training films] --when I was at the Army Pictorial Center, I was sent to the artillery school at Fort Sill.. I was sent from the Army Pictorial Center to Fort Sill, Oklahoma to the artillery school specifically to do training films for the new 155 and 175 mobile Howitzers, I believe they called them. So the training films that the Vietnam-bound artillerists were using were films that I had shot out of the army pictorial center. Later on when I was in Vietnam some wise soul in Fort Sill decided they wanted to see footage of a 175 mobile howitzer being--during a combat barrel change. So after they fire so many rounds out of the barrel, they have to put a new barrel on them. And the 175 was a very, very long piece. And I think those things were probably accurate twenty-five miles or something like that. So I went up to Tây Nin and the Parrot's Beak, and I went out to a little fire support base where they had a 175 in the battery that needed a barrel change, and got there

early in the morning and told me there wasn't enough room in the fire support base within the perimeter to maneuver the wrecker that they had to use to change barrels. And they had an eighteen-wheeler with a new barrel on it out there. So we had to go outside the perimeter wire into a flat area and--so we had room to maneuver, and, of course, they used the wrecker to wrap a big chain around it, and they unscrewed it and pulled it out. Anyway, this process with my, you know, needing a take two, or you know, okay, now we need this angle and this shot, and now we need a close-up, and we need--'cause they wanted to see the whole process, and so by late afternoon all the protective forces that were out there, all the infantrymen were eleven bravos [i.e. infantrymen] started kind of drifting away and going back into the perimeter, through the perimeter wire back into the security of the fire support base as the sun starts going down and the cannoneers are saying, "Can we hurry up this process? We don't want to be out here too long. It's starting to get dark." And I'm going, "We just need one more shot. We need one more shot, one more shot." They were really in a hurry to get that 175 back into place in that fire support base and the get the hell out of there. And in my naiveté, thinking I was a—[laughing]--this great filmmaker, I was just really holding up the process. But when they started shooting at us out of the tree line, I got a little giddy-up going, and we finished that--wrapped that thing up real fast and got back inside the fire support base.

SANDERSON: There you go. Especially with something like that--definitely like, "Ah, dodge bullets. Let's go."

BARBEE: Yeah, I was saying, "What's that popping sound I'm hearing?" And they would go, "Oh, geez, Guy. Who is this guy?" [Laughing]

SANDERSON: And we got stuck with him. During that time, it looked like pretty much until you got ready to go back--before you got ready to come back to the states, they pretty much had you turnin' and burnin' pretty quick.

BARBEE: Yes. Yes, generally I think if I could average I would probably go out for three days into the boonies or wherever I was going to whatever film I was doing, would be about three days. And then I would come back to Saigon and to ship and resupply, I called it. First thing I would do was to unpack and clean every piece of film equipment I had. I was methodical about my clean equipment and gear that would work. So the first thing I would do, even if I was covered in mud, was just to clean my equipment. And once my equipment was put away I'd grab some clean fatigues and underclothes and so forth and go across the street from the villa where there was this, about a four or five-story French bathhouse that left over from the French occupation. And I would just get in a big old claw foot

tub and just get myself scrubbed to death and cleaned and then get in one of those old-fashioned steam cabinets. Which I always worried a little bit, you know, being kind of shut into this steam cabinet with this Vietnamese person wandering around the room giving me little sips of beer wiping my forehead. And I always wondered, are you gonna sneak up behind me and just cut my throat or what? But I would go through the bathhouse process, get myself all cleaned up and fresh clothes, and then go back over to the villa and do all the film processing and the paperwork that went along with it to make sure everything got shipped out and shipped to the Pentagon, and probably spent a day or two at the villa, get a new assignment, and the process would start all over again. You know, that was one thing about that bathhouse. I still go to the gym regularly, and I love going in the steam room. And I have yet to spend a minute in a steam room even all these years later that I don't think about being in that bathhouse and getting steam cleaned over there in Vietnam all those years ago. And I think I have figured out that it wasn't so much just getting the bath; there was a spiritual—

SANDERSON: Cleansing as well—

BARBEE: [Choking up] --emotional--cleaning, a cleansing that occurred there that I think I needed it, and there was almost something spiritual about it. And I still think about that regularly. Especially during the process where I was doing all those mortuary training films. I needed that, that daily cleansing. And so that place was kind of important.

SANDERSON: Sounds like even know it's some good things--it's important as well—

BARBEE: As we speak.

SANDERSON: And it was with that--we were talking to Jerry Hains.

BARBEE: Yup.

SANDERSON: We did an interview with him, and he talked about where he used to go up on the roof with you, and you would play the harmonica.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: And to help unwind.

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Did you actually, well you tried to get him to learn how to play?

BARBEE: I did. There was a number of guys that would come up there with me, 'cause the whole time that I was doing that, those mortuary training films—you want to hear this story? I would come back from having spent the day in the morgue, and I remember the first day specifically because there were some really bad remains that I viewed that I didn't even know they were remains when I first saw them, but they had tags on them, and the fella who was there, I was asking him what I was looking at, and he told me, "This is Lieutenant so-and-so. This is Warrant Officer So-and-so." And I was in shock to see what could become of a human body in the war. So the first day was probably the hardest. [Tearing up]. And that afternoon--that evening when I went back to the villa, and the guys who in town were sitting around the dinner table, and I sat down to eat, and Bryan Grigsby said, "Hey, we got something special for you, Barbee." And he got up, went to the kitchen, and came out and put a plate down in front of me. It had a burnt steak on it. I think it was a T-bone, and it was just burnt to a crisp. And when he put it down, he said, "We got you a crispy critter," which is what we called the human remains that were burned. And it had the bone sticking out of it and everything. And I just— [pause] I faulted. And I couldn't eat. They were laughing. They thought it was funny. And it was, and our twisted sense of humor is what got us through a lot of that stuff. About at that moment I just wanted to be away from everybody and everything. And I went up on the roof, and that's when I kind of discovered the roof of the villa. And the song, *Up On The Roof* always comes to mind because that was my sanctuary. And it became a daily routine. Around dinnertime I would excuse myself usually early, and I'd go up to my room and get my harmonica, a wooden flute that I bought from some street kid. A lot of times a bag of dope--grass. And I'd go up on the roof, and I would play music and stay up there sometimes until real late at night and just looking out of the horizon of the city, watching the firefights on the horizon in the distance, watching the snoopies doing their work, watching bombs drop and things light up and explode in the distance. But I would just kind of go up there and chill out and decompress. And it got to be a place to go to just hang out and try not to think about what I'd seen during the day. But since we were all in different places in different times, and guys were coming in and out of Saigon while I was doing that work over at the mortuary, different DASPO guys would be assigned to help me do the lighting and assistant work and sound. And so I think I had Grigsby who was over there with me, Carl Hansen was over there with me, Jerry Hains I think spent some time over there with me. Burt Peterson spent some time there with me. Ted Acheson spent some time with me. Don Mechum spent some time. And so when we were together during the day a lot of times when we came back to the villa after dinnertime and I'd go up on the roof, they'd come

up after they had dinner, and I did; I tried to get these guys to learn how to play the harmonica. Tried to get them to learn how to play the flute. Tried to get a little jam going sometimes. And it was kind of a fun place to go, and it was really removed from everything else we were doing, so it almost became kind of like a little clubhouse.

SANDERSON: What were some of the songs that you played?

BARBEE: Oh, you know, I was very turned on to an album that had come out and actually while I was in New York. John Mayall. John Mayall Blues Band, an English blues band. Probably one of the best there ever was. Had an album that had just come out of a live concert he gave at the, probably, the Avalon or the Fillmore in New York, and it was called *The Turning Point*. I still have that music. I still have the vinyl, I have a couple of disks, and I play it all the time. It's some of the best blues music you've ever heard. One of the songs, a lot of harmonica parts to it, is called *California*. [Singing] California--you know, coming back to California. And so I used to do a lot of that. And some other blues and country stuff. But that's the one album that really sticks in my mind.

SANDERSON: Nice. Bet you the guys really enjoyed that.

BARBEE: It was fun. And we had a couple of guys who were pretty talented. One of our officers, Carl Williams, he was very good. He could play the flute. He could play the harmonica as well, so when he was in Saigon and I was in Saigon--I can't remember whether it was my first tour or my second, we spent a lot of time up there. We kind of would sneak off, 'cause he was an officer, and I was an enlisted man, but we'd go up there, and we'd jam, and we'd really get some good stuff going sometimes.

SANDERSON: Oh, nice. And when you went down to--what, 'cause it sounds like during that timeframe they kind of bounced you guys around, 'cause I know you had specific teams you were assigned to. But there were times where they would intermix the teams?

BARBEE: Actually, the team idea, at least as far as I know, came later. I didn't--I think that was the team scheme, as I call it, sort of got going after my second tour there. I don't remember ever belonging to a team in Vietnam. I was always pretty much just on my own. After my two TDYs [tour of duty's] to Vietnam, they sent me to Thailand for a ninety-day TDY. And at that time I was assigned to Team F. And Don Jellema, NCO [noncommissioned officer] was in charge of that team. But other than that I don't remember specifically belonging to a team with a designation.

SANDERSON: Did any of the guys go with you--'cause right before you left to go back to Hawaii then to the US on your last TDY—

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: --they sent you to the [US Army] 3rd Field Hospital to work with the army surgeons.

BARBEE: That's right.

SANDERSON: And that's still in Vietnam.

BARBEE: That was in Vietnam. That was probably the last job I did there. It actually was spread out over six weeks or so. I know what I gave you actually shows the last portion of it. But that was a great project that I did for a couple of reasons that I'll tell you. One was that I was awarded a DASPO award for that footage that I shot. So I received an Army of War Commendation for that project. And I received that, the news of that and the award itself when I was actually in Thailand on my last tour. But the army surgeon project, what that was about was—when the army surgeons weren't actually doing their duty, their assigned duty, these guys on their free time would go out into the villages and find kids that needed for instance plastic surgery to fix a cleft lip, things like that. And they would on their own time perform these corrective surgeries for these children just out of the goodness of their heart, and I always thought that was really cool. So this particular instance, they had gone out to a village, and I went with them, and they selected this little girl. She was a baby girl, just maybe a one-year-old. Had a really severe cleft lip, and these army surgeons brought her back to the, maybe it was, the 3rd Field Hospital in Saigon. And I found them performing a corrective cleft lip operation, plastic surgery. And it was heartbreaking to see what bad shape this girl was in and how she was kind of rejected by the villagers, and how devastating it was to the parents--the mama-san and papa-san--and the family that this child had this problem. And out of the goodness of their heart, these guys brought her in, fixed her, and did this corrective surgery. And then after she had healed for a number of weeks, I went out with them again, and they brought her back to the hospital, and kind of unwrapped the bandages and revealed the results. And it was a tearjerker. And to see the—[pause, tearing up]--to see the look and the response of the parents for what these guys did for that little girl was just something I wish everybody could see. 'Cause you hear a lot of bad stuff about Vietnam, about who we were and what we did. And that's something that you don't really see a lot. That's something you don't get

to witness. For everything that happened there that was bad like My Lai, there was something really good that happened as well. And that's something I'd like people to know.

SANDERSON: That's definitely--you won't read that in the history books.

BARBEE: No, you won't. No, we were not monsters. We weren't the village-burning baby killers that they painted us to be.

SANDERSON: That was a very small minority.

BARBEE: Indeed, it was.

SANDERSON: Now—

BARBEE: Sorry to be such a crybaby.

SANDERSON: Ah, hey, you have the right. If anybody tells you otherwise, tell them to come see me.

BARBEE: That's right. Thank you.

SANDERSON: No problem. And that was one of the things I was gonna ask was, during this timeframe when you were filming the army surgeons, you filmed the press conference by Lieutenant General Peers about My Lai.

BARBEE: That's correct.

SANDERSON: What was some of the thoughts going on--here you were with doctors and nurses—

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --performing miracles in the battlefield or kind of along the lines of MASH, the whole meatball surgery. And then you go and listen to the general talk about, kill one of those—

BARBEE: It was pretty tough. I mean it was really 180 degrees apart, wasn't it? On one hand you've got GIs killing innocent civilians, and on the other hand you have GIs—

SANDERSON: Saving innocent—

BARBEE: --saving innocent civilians. Really is a dichotomy, isn't it? The My Lai press conference by Lieutenant William Peers was kind of a difficult thing to hear. Ironically I got two commendations during my DASPO time, and you just brought both of them up. One was the My Lai press conference. I got a letter from the commander, a personal letter from him applauding me for my work of the coverage of that in that I was not only able to shoot the main camera, I was able to shoot second cuts of the news event with a second camera simultaneously, and he said he'd never seen anybody do that. Because I was able to lock off the main camera, close the eye piece, pick up another camera, and go get cuts periodically during the--so it was like I was doing the work of two guys. And I got this wonderful letter of commendation by the commander. And then the second award I got was from the army surgeons in Vietnam, and again they were such totally opposite kind of subject matter. But the press conference of My Lai was very well attended by the news media, you can imagine. I did the lighting for the whole thing. I basically set it up for the whole crowd that showed up. And the questions were pretty tough that he was being asked. He was--had just concluded his investigation of the My Lai incident. And my heart went out to those guys that were involved in that. If anyone has the wherewithal to actually investigate and read the material that was uncovered in the background and what had actually occurred prior to that incident, and understand what those guys had gone through, you cannot excuse what they did, but you can understand why they did it. At least I can, because I don't know that I would have done any different being in that position at that time at that moment. I know there were times in my Vietnam experience where if I was--felt that I was blessed to be a cameraman and did not carry a weapon, because if I had carried a weapon, I may have hurt somebody who didn't deserve to get hurt just because of the madness that was going on all the time around me. And I sort of was grateful that I didn't carry a weapon, which I never did. And a lot of people said I was totally crazy--dinky dau [literally crazy head in Vietnamese]. Boocoo [i.e. Beaucoup, from French] dinky dau, 'cause I never carried a weapon. I just didn't have room for it. It was too heavy. I figured if they needed me to carry a weapon, by the time they got there, there would probably be plenty of them to be had.

SANDERSON: That was kind of funny. We were talking to Rupy earlier this morning, and there was the one picture of him for the book where he was dressed in full gear, got his full kit going. And eventually helmet went away, just because every time he'd go to take a good picture the camera would--

BARBEE: --down--

SANDERSON: --right, and he couldn't get the helmet out of the way and lost the shot. And same way with the weapon. After a while it was a nuisance because it was just there. It was more to get in the way. Yeah—

BARBEE: It was.

SANDERSON: Pretty much the same thing. If you have to pick up a rifle--if it got to the point where, if he had to pick up a rifle and shoot back, something major else is going on, and at that time, yeah, there's no sense in carrying one in 'cause there will more likely be plenty around.

BARBEE: It's true. I had a belt that had two light meters on it, and there was no room for a 45 [pistol], which we were authorized to carry. And I had usually twelve cases of equipment that I was carrying around with me. Three camera packages and lights and sound recorders. There was no room for an M16. I don't know where I was gonna put it. For the room that it took to have an M16, I could put two light stands, you know. And that was much more important to me, so.

SANDERSON: Now, with that, your experience before/during the military really sets you up for, like I said, when--when you gave us the list of people that you've been in contact with just in film, television, music, first words out of my mouth were, "Holy shit." [Laughing]. You even said the same thing.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: Looking back, do you feel that with all the time that you spent with the--learning from pretty much the greats of Hollywood and the greats of motion picture industry set you up for what would eventually become, what, almost thirty years of—

BARBEE: I have to give the credit to DASPO. I have to give the credit to the US Army for my training, not to Hollywood. Even though I ended up working in Hollywood, they had little or nothing to do with it. My background, the knowledge I gained, learned, came about--in motion pictures and photography came from the US Army exclusively I would say. Because I learned production. I learned stagecraft, lighting, camera direction, how to work with scripts, how to work with motion picture crews. All about 35mm motion picture production I learned at the Army Pictorial Center in New York. And then after I was fully trained in that, I was then cross-trained in documentary style 16mm, run-and-gun type documentary filmmaking. So by the time I got to DASPO I had, I think, extraordinary film background plus the high school training and lab tech training and college and color processing and then trained as a lab technician and Fort

Monmouth Signal Corps School. Then the year and a half I spent in DASPO really accelerated my ability to think on my feet, be able to just move quickly, shoot, you know, quickly and being able to just go out and create a story and tell a story on film and bring back the goods. And so by the time I got out of the army, I had had two years of high school, a year and a half of college, three years in the military. I was extremely well-trained, and at twenty-three years old--I was just turning twenty-four, I think, when I got out of the military--there wasn't anything I couldn't do in the film business as a cameraman. I mean, I was ready to go. But after the Vietnam experience, I knew there were no heroes in Hollywood for me. I'd seen them all in Vietnam. There wasn't anything they could offer me in that realm, so I didn't have stars in my eyes, and I didn't just immediately jump into the Hollywood scene. But it was a little difficult to get started. Vietnam veterans weren't real popular, especially around the motion picture business, but I eventually worked my way into the business, and between 1970 and the year 2000 I don't think there is anything I didn't work on. I did *Star Wars* special effects. I did *Star Treks*. I got to work with Jimmy Stewart, Bette Davis. I shot the Ali-Frazier fight in Manila for Don King. I did television commercials. I did children's programming. I did probably thirty years of freelance for *60 Minutes*. I got to work for Walter Cronkite. I got to work with, you know, Diane Sawyer and Morley Safer and--you name somebody, I've probably worked with him. Television series, television commercials, kids' programming, documentaries, entertainment specials, music videos, motion pictures, travel logs, government training films. I did [US] Marine Corps training films. I mean, just name something; I've probably worked on it. And all that was available to me, to be able to do all those different types of work from one end of the spectrum to the other because of the training I had in the US Army. And I'd say DASPO was a huge part of that. I think DASPO camera people, still photographers, motion picture cameramen, soundmen--probably some of the best-trained, well-equipped photographers that there are in the industry. We had the best, and I think we were the best.

SANDERSON: Looking at all this stuff for this exhibit, it's very awe-inspiring. And it's— that's something that just occurred to me; it's almost kind of poignant, that one of your last major assignments in Vietnam was filming a hospital. And then you became associated with the Order of St. John who runs a hospital.

BARBEE: Yes.

SANDERSON: And the one in Jerusalem.

BARBEE: That's true. The [Most] Venerable Order of [the Hospital of] St. John of Jerusalem. I said St. John's. It's The Venerable Order of St. John Jerusalem. The Order of St. John began in 1053 during the First Crusades. They were the Knights Hospitallers who were like the protectors. The Order of St. John were the knights who were like the medics. And I was invited to become a member of the Order of St. John just about a year ago. I was vested. It was kind of like joining the military in that they had to do background checks, and I had to send resumes. I had to kind of prove myself to them, who I was. And what got me interested was their involvement in Jerusalem with the eye hospital. Like the Shriners, they offer free eye care and eye surgery to anyone who needs it, and there's probably the largest amount of eye disease in any country is in the Middle East. So they have the eye hospital in Jerusalem where they have been taking care of people since the First Crusade. And they have a clinic in Gaza, a clinic in Hebron, and clinic in the West Bank, and they have mobile clinics, mobile units that go all around. And so the Order of St. John is well known in the Middle East, and people don't leave--they know them so well, they leave them alone. They don't get messed with. But it's a real honorable thing to be a member, to be asked to be a member, and I take it very seriously. But one of the things that has happened in recent years is the Order of St. John in the United States has worked a deal with the VA hospitals so that if you belong to the order you can volunteer at the VA. So I was in my career-- three times in my life I've lost my eyesight in my right eye. I caught an arrow in my right eye when I was six and miraculously had a healing and became a motion picture cameraman and a photographer and used that eye to shoot with until I was about age thirty. Then I developed a cataract and lost that eyesight, again. And the VA took me and fixed me. And then about age forty I had three retina detachments in a row over a six-month period. So I had major corrective surgery, again at the VA, and once again got my eyesight back. And so the Order of St. John was a perfect fit for me dealing with eye issues and also making available the possibility to be able to volunteer at the VA, so it's a perfect fit for me. And I volunteer every Monday. I spend all day driving a golf cart taking veterans from the parking lot to the clinic in the hospital and just being a greeter, and I love it.

SANDERSON: Outstanding. That's--wow. I guess that I just wish I had about one fiftieth of your career. [Laughing]. I'd be content with one fiftieth.

BARBEE: The interesting thing about the Order of St. John is that the sovereign head of the order is Queen Elizabeth II. And in order to join the order you have to be vested by the queen. So I have the parchment that came from the Duke of Gloucester that has her crest on it, and awarding me the commission. And with it comes a very nice black ribbon with a medal on

it that I'm authorized to wear with my military ribbons, and that's something I'm very, very proud of.

SANDERSON: Outstanding. And she invested you directly?

BARBEE: Yes. Everyone who joins the order.

SANDERSON: Was it at Buckingham Palace, or—

BARBEE: I was vested in San Francisco, but she has to put her stamp of approval on me on the commission.

SANDERSON: Well, that's pretty sweet, huh.

BARBEE: I get to join the ranks of some pretty nice people.

SANDERSON: Well, looking at it, you filmed some of the best, best in the military, doing some of the best of the best in a place nobody wanted, and you go into Hollywood and film some of the best movies ever made. I'm a total geek, and yeah--when I saw your IMDB, I'm like, "Huh? Well, that's only about a third." Now you get to take--invested with the best of the best, helping to take care of some of those people that you were with again, so—

BARBEE: I love veterans. I really do.

SANDERSON: Like a very--very interesting with the symmetry there, going down.

BARBEE: Yes, yes.

SANDERSON: And that kind of brings down to a couple of the final questions I had for you. What does it feel like to have been a member of DASPO, and looking back and saying--when someone's like, "What the hell is DASPO?" And you can say, "Ah, I know, and I can tell you." What does it feel like to be a part of a group like DASPO?

BARBEE: Well, DASPO--Department of the Army Special Photographic Office--was probably, the finest group of men that ever served. Very unique. We were never invited. We were never asked for, but we were always there. We operated in the dark mostly, in that we didn't wear rank. We didn't wear insignia. There was no official unit per say, an office in the Pentagon. And yet the members of DASPO, from the older guys who were shooting from bombers in WWII and did the footage you see of the trials at the Hague after WWII, to the footage of the Pueblo prisoners being released, the Mayaguez incident. The prisoners coming out of

Hanoi being released from Hanoi, the soldiers fighting in the A Shau Valley in '65 with Hal Moore. The footage of Tet. You know, the Dominican Republic incident that happened in '62. Footage of U2s that crashed in the Andes. There's just so much history that was recorded by DASPO. It would be hard--I think it would be impossible to find a group of men that had the history that we had recorded and put them in a room together. I just don't think there's been anything like DASPO in the past. There's nothing that exists like it now in the present, and I doubt very seriously that there were ever be another group in the future. If you take ten DASPO cameramen and put them in a room together, it's like the Encyclopedia Britannica. There probably isn't anything that happened on the planet between 1962 and 1974 that we weren't present at.

SANDERSON: That as one of the things that was picking at Thom and Brad and Aaron, our production guys. I'm like, you know, we need to somehow wire not only the reception, but we need to just have drop mics all over the museum while you guys are here. God only knows--even just listening to some of the stuff that you guys have talked about, it's like-- and then sitting down and having the pleasure of talking and doing interviews with you all is like, yeah--as a historian, I'm like--I've been geeking out quite a bit. The moment we got this assignment—

BARBEE: Well, as you know, books have been published, motion pictures have been made, and some before, but a lot since DASPO's demise in '74, or disbandment. You know, there's motion picture producers in Hollywood at Universal. There's writers. There's directors, there's people still filming television shows like *Hell On Wheels*. George Stephenson. He's cameraman on that. Don Zepfle is producer at Universal Studios. Ted did years of Buick and Cadillac commercials. I worked on *Star Wars*. Dick Durrance, you know, published books, worked for *National Geographic*. I mean, this is just on and on and on and on. Tom Mintier, who was, you know, became a correspondent and reporter for CNN and opened up the Thai CNN bureau. And you know, name something that's happened, and we were probably not only there when we were in the army, but we've been there after as civilians.

SANDERSON: Yeah, I was gonna say you guys should add to your symbol, "Established '62. Been there, everywhere." Someone—

BARBEE: That would be a great motto, wouldn't it? Been there, everywhere.

SANDERSON: 'Cause looking back, I can honestly say we can name something and there was a DASPO person either there filming it, recording it, or they were there for the aftermath. Like with Tom Mintier. He was the only

correspondent to talk when the Challenger exploded. It's like, to the point where some of the people in the reserves and family, they're just kind of like, "What?" And I start naming off names, and like, "Oh yeah, check there. Check there." And you can pull it up, definitely get-- yeah, a very interesting unit biography or just a book itself. Not the one book that was written. The moment I mention that, I've heard a lot of people like, "No, no, no, no. DASPO aren't--" I've heard--it's almost--I've gotten quite a bit of the, almost, what we like to call nowadays the stink eye look.

BARBEE: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You mention that--nope. And the one final question I'd like to ask you. With this exhibit that we're doing and spotlighting DASPO, what is it that you would like for someone that comes to this exhibit to take away from it?

BARBEE: I probably have to check my note, because I know exactly what I want to say, I just want to say it just right. For anyone who comes to this exhibit, I would like them to know, at least from me and my part, that there is no greater glory than to fight for another person's safety and freedom.
[Pause]

SANDERSON: Outstanding. That's good enough to end this on. Is there anything that you would like to add that we haven't covered?

BARBEE: I'm proud to be a Vietnam veteran. I'm very proud. I've always been proud. [Tearing up] I'll always be proud. I can't--no, I can't. I can't say it. I want to say it with a straight face, you know what I mean? This is very-- makes me emotional because I got spit on. I had drinks thrown in my face. I got my face slapped once, all because I was a Vietnam veteran. I got called, "baby killer" and yelled at and ignored. And it wasn't right. We were just young men doing what we were asked to do. Serving our country, doing our best. And for that I'll never be sorry. I have nothing to regret. And I know we weren't perfect. We didn't always make the right decisions, but damn it, it was a noble effort. And I have a grandson now who has married the daughter of a boat person. She's Vietnamese-Cambodian. And so I have a great-grandson who is American-Vietnamese. And that just lights up my heart. That was worth fighting for. Him and his family. And I really do think it was a noble effort. And I just won't listen to those people who say, "Oh, we should have never been there, and we should have--" I think we did the best we could for the most part and as individuals. So I am proud to be a Vietnam veteran, and I'll always be proud to have served my country. And like I say, there is no

greater glory than to fight for another person's safety and freedom. No greater glory.

SANDERSON: Outstanding. I definitely want to say thank you.

BARBEE: I would do it again in a heartbeat.

SANDERSON: And if nobody else did, welcome home.

BARBEE: Thank you. Thank you very much. That means so much. You know that means a lot.

SANDERSON: 'Cause a lot of people don't say it to you guys.

BARBEE: No.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I mean, hell, you guys paved the way for us.

BARBEE: Just between you and me, when I heard that—when that really turned around for us, and I'll never forget it--I used to know the exact date and the exact hour, but I've forgotten. I'm getting old, and I don't care that much anymore, but I remember sitting in front of the television listening to the news when George W. Bush won--not George W., the first—

SANDERSON: G.H.W?

BARBEE: G.H.W. announced that Dan Quayle was gonna be his running mate for vice president of the United States. And when the press announced that, with that announcement came the very first attack on Dan Quayle for having been in the National Guard. And I knew right at that moment. I came up off the couch--I've had very few moments where I say, "Oh, that was post-traumatic stress." But I came off the couch yelling out loud. My wife came off to say, "Honey, what's going on? What's happening?" And I was pointing at the television set, just screaming mad at the television set. I said, "This is the moment, right now at this very moment, I have gone from being a scumbag to a hero. Mark this moment in time, honey, because all those years I spent taking flak for being a Vietnam vet--no count, can't win a war, village-burner, baby-killer--all that has come to an end. And from this day on I'm gonna be a hero. And it's bullshit. It has gone flip flop with one news announcement." Because before Dan Quayle was named his running mate for George Bush, that's exactly what we were. And if you had gone to Canada, you were a hero. If you had burned your draft card, you were a hero. If you had gone into the National Guard, you were smarter than a cookie. You were smarter than

anybody, because you didn't get yourself drafted. And when Dan Quayle was gonna run for vice president, suddenly, "Why didn't you go to Vietnam like the rest of those young men and do the right thing?" And we became heroes, and he became the scumbag. And you can mark that—

SANDERSON: Yeah—look back—

BARBEE: In the history and that moment. And that's when things changed for Vietnam veterans. And it was because you said welcome home to me--it was not a few days after that that I got the first person that said, when they found out I was a Vietnam veteran, that said, "welcome home" to me. And I turned to my wife, and I said, "See, what did I tell you?"

SANDERSON: It sucks it took almost twenty years—

BARBEE: Isn't that amazing?

SANDERSON: --for them to say it. Yeah. Yeah, I have to go back—

BARBEE: Not that I liked Dan Quayle. Not that I would have voted for him. But I just knew in that moment in history that things were gonna change. They were gonna be different from that day on, and they have.

SANDERSON: Now looking back, yeah. 'Cause that's when--'cause that's when it was actually quote/unquote proverbial, it was okay--it was cool to be a Vietnam Vet.

BARBEE: What I'm saying is it didn't happen gradually. It happened over night.

SANDERSON: Right. Yeah, wow.

BARBEE: It was like the lights going on.

SANDERSON: Well, just sucks that it took as long as it did, and from unfortunately his nomination.

BARBEE: Yeah, no matter what, but I mean, that was the day it changed.