



VADM David Robinson, US Navy, Vietnam War Veteran

Interviewed by: Joe Galloway

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Dallas, Texas

Joe Galloway: Sir, before we talk about your experiences in Vietnam I'd like to get a little biographic information about you. ... Be delighted. ... Where and when you were born?

David Robinson: I was born in Alexandria, Louisiana. And I spent about-- I think about 30 days there. My grandmother told my mother that I was not gonna be born (I was the first) with that strange man, so she shipped her home [both laugh]. But I grew up mostly in Denton, Texas.

1:27 JG: And your birth date?

DR: Twenty-six October, 1939. ... *Alright.*

1:37 JG: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

DR: I was 30 years old. ... *Thirty years old. You were an old man.* ... I was an old man. I was a commander, commanding officer of a ship. And I had had two sea tours before that, and then had been in postgraduate school. And so yes, by the nature of the business I was an old man. ... *[Laughs].*

2:07 JG: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you deployed? Had you kept an eye on it?

DR: It had really been something I guess. Not an overriding sense. Went to the Naval Academy; graduated in '63. And so Vietnam was just bubbling when I graduated. I had gone to Vietnam waters on my second ship¹, a destroyer, and we provided gunfire support. So we knew something was going on over there. And then I went to Monterey, California where I went to postgraduate school. And I've always been somewhat of a policy wonk, if you will, so we watched the news every night. And of course we watched CBS, Walter Cronkite. And so we kept up sort of with what was going on. That was when the body count business started, and things of that nature.

I still can remember the night Walter Cronkite switched from calling it the Vietnam conflict to the Vietnam War. And at that point it sort of hit home that that was my business. ... *It had got serious.* ... It had gotten serious.

3:31 JG: Now you were commissioned out of Annapolis. ... I was. ... What year? ... 1963. ... '63. What sort of training did you have before you deployed to Vietnam?

¹ USS *Rowan* (DD-782) Sep 1965-Jul 1967 (Engineer Officer)

DR: Well, the normal work up training, if you will, for a ship. When I took over the ship, she was in San Diego, California. And we went through the fleet training there, practicing all the things that a ship should be required to do; whether it be firing the guns or fighting a fire or taking care of engineering problems. And then we forward deployed to Guam. I made the transit in the ship to Guam where we changed our home port. And then we would go to Vietnam and back from Guam. ... *From Guam.*

4:28 JG: *Describe your ship.*

DR: The ship was an innovative ship. It was called a patrol gunboat. It was the USS *Canon* (PG-90). She was innovative in that the US Navy does not have a lot of small ships. And the Navy, primarily because of Vietnam, wanted a ship that could participate in the interdiction—coastal interdiction operations in those waters. This ship was the-- was built to go fast. This ship could do 40 knots. It was the first ship in the Navy with a gas turbine. But I can only do about 360 miles in the gas turbine because it really ate up gas [laughs]. ... *It ate fuel.* ... So I spent most of my time on diesel. So it was a combination diesel and gas turbine ship. She was about 165 feet; about 250 tons; aluminum and fiberglass was her primary construction for speed-- *What was her armament?* ... She had a three inch 50 gun forward, single mount; she had a 40 millimeter mount aft on the fantail. Turns out that was an Army 40 millimeter. I didn't know that until I tried to get parts for it. ... [Laughs]. ... Then we had four .50 caliber machine guns and then-- then a handful of rifles and M60 machine guns.

6:00 JG: *Now, what was your mission once you got into Vietnam waters?*

DR: Our mission was primarily coastal offense. We went to Cam Ranh Bay, checked in with what was called CTF 115. And Commander Task Force 115's mission was interdiction. And so there were various zones off the coast, all around the coast of South Vietnam where we would be assigned to investigate, intercept potential supply trawlers, and investigate junks, and things of that nature. ... *They were carrying supplies to the enemy.* ... Exactly.

And then we periodically were assigned a mission of protecting what was called Sea Float. Sea Float was an afloat command post down in the IV Corps area, down on the Cua Lon River-- *Mekong Delta.* ... Right in the middle of the Mekong Delta; swampy territory. And Sea Float had really no protection other than PGs and Swift Boats and so forth that'd go up and provide-- ...



This was kind of a mo-- a stable mother ship? ... Actually, it was barges. ... *Barges.* ... It was several barges put together. ... *Ah.* ... And these barges as I said provided a command post. And from these barges they had Swift Boat operations and they had SEAL operations. And of course this was during Vietnamization, and so they also supported the ARVN forces down in that area.

7:50 JG: *What year was it that you landed in Vietnam?*

DR: Nineteen seventy. ... '70 ... And the-- Sea Float was there while they developed Solid Anchor. Solid Anchor was a shore-based command post. And it was not uncommon to see tugboats. These tugboats were out of Louisiana somewhere. And the tugboats going up and down the river with barges of sand while they filled in the coastal area there so they could build Solid Anchor [both laugh]. ... *Tugboats from Louisiana.* ... Exactly. ... *That's awesome. Strange things in Vietnam.* ... We did that [both laugh].

8:39 JG: *What were your initial duties?*

DR: Initial duties in Vietnam? ... *Yeah.* ... were that coastal interdiction; steaming up and down the coast; making reports back to CTF 115; and then as I said periodically we would be sent into the Bo De River, Cua Lon River for fire support.

9:05 JG: *What was your daily routine like aboard that ship?*

DR: That's an interesting question. We would-- we would provide-- we would have I guess you would say a normal US Navy at sea routine. And you know the Navy—unlike our Army/Marine brethren—we had three square meals a day, you know; we had clean sheets at night. We did a lot of maintenance underway, and we did a lot of surveillance underway. So our days were pretty well the same thing, day in and day out—unless we got in a firefight or something of that nature.

9:56 JG: *What-- did you have any interaction with the Vietnamese people?*

DR: I really did not. The only interaction I really had was the first night I went aboard Sea Float. I went aboard for a command briefing. And as I said, it was Vietnamization. And I was still unsure of the situation. I was unsure of the tactical situation, if you will. And I was standing there waiting for the briefing to start, and I saw an ARVN soldier over in the corner on a radio. And I never saw him stop. He just talked constantly. ... *Was it right through the briefing?* ... So-- yeah. So when the briefing started they said, "Are there any questions?" I said, "Yes. Does anyone know what that fella in the corner is saying?" And they didn't, so-- [both laugh]. But I had no real association with the Vietnamese people. None.

11:06 JG: *What-- describe some of the main actions that you had on that boat.*

DR: Well, we were in two significant firefights. We got over there in I think June, late June of '70. And in early July, we were going up the river. We were escorting a supply ship that was taking supplies up to Sea Float. Before I got there I had talked to the other PG skippers, and they had said that the Viet Cong or Vietnamese, North Vietnamese tactic was to put B-40 rockets on the tip of a bamboo shoot and stick that shoot in the riverbank, pointed up at about the level of the bridge of a PG. And then they would fire them remotely. But when they fired them remotely, the injection gasses would force that bamboo up and they would fire over the ship. And so the tactic was to stop, and let the things go off, and then proceed.

I said to my crew on the way over there, "I don't think these guys are all that dumb. So if this is not working, I'm not sure that's the right response-- ... *[Laughs]*. ... if we get in a fire—a firefight." The first

time we got in a firefight, they did not use that. They fired from the port side of the river. They hit my ship with a B-40 rocket in the vicinity of a hydraulic oil tank.

Now the Patrol Gunboat had variable pitch propellers, and they were controlled by hydraulics. And based on the pitch of the propellers is how fast you went or whether or not you were going forward or astern. Well, when this B-40 rocket hit that tank it severed the hydraulic oil supply line. And since we had forward way on, it lost hydraulic pressure to the screws and they slammed into full reverse. ... *Uh oh.* ... And the rocket went through several layers before it found something large enough and heavy enough to detonate and that was the port engine. So we had a fire in the after-- we had a fire in the engine room and we backed smartly onto the bank because I couldn't get-- [laughs] ... *You couldn't get any control.* ... We were-- we could not do-- we were firing every-- ...

[First clip ends at 14:03]

David Robinson, cont. (2nd Video)

... thing. We were firing the three inch and the 40 millimeter and all the machine guns. And my weapons officer is literally shouting into the phones to get someone to go up to the fo'c'sle and drop the anchor so that we can stop [laughs], but they just never-- *Otherwise you're going clean up on shore [laughs].* ... Exactly. So-- but we just sort of backed smartly into that soft riverbank. And the attack was subdued, and I got some help from a couple of Swift Boats. And they-- *Pulled you off.* ... They pulled me off [both laugh].

0:33 JG: How long do you think did it take to repair your ship?

DR: It took about two weeks. We were able to get the ship back to Cam Ranh Bay on our own, with just one engine. And we went back to Cam Ranh Bay. And it took us about two weeks to get that engine realigned, and repaired, and back on line. ... *Get your hydraulics up and running.* ... And get the hydraulics-- you're exactly right. ... *Reminds me of what they say about Marine helicopters: If you don't see hydraulic fluid leaking, it means we've run out and we're really in trouble.* ... {Both laugh} Exactly right.

1:13 JG: Describe your friendships with and your impressions of your fellow officers and sailors.

DR: I had a wonderful crew. And one of my-- we were in a larger fight than the one I just described about a month later. And my good fortune, if you will-- I shouldn't say my good fortune. I felt best and after two tremendous firefights I never lost a sailor. And I had three officers and I had about 27 enlisted; a lot of one-off. I only had one cook. I only had one radioman. I had a couple of gunner's mates. So these sailors had to do their jobs and a lot more. And we had a great relationship. I could not have been more proud of that crew.

2:17 JG: Describe that second firefight to me.

DR: The second one was more serious. And this time the enemy had gotten even smarter. ... *Oh.* ... And as we were steaming up the river, we were attacked from the port quarter and the starboard bow. So

they had us in a crossfire. Later it was determined I think 80 B-40 rockets hit the ship. I don't know how many were-- ... *Fired. ... fired. I can't-- I don't remember how many small arm rounds or machine gun rounds hit the ship. ... Eighty B-40 rockets? ... Not 80; eight. Eight. ... That's a lot better. ... Yeah. And as I said, this ship was aluminum and fiberglass. It provided no real protection. So every sailor in that ship was in harm's way². The first B-40 hit in my vicinity and the vicinity of my weapons officer; wounded me and wounded him. And I could feel the ship stopping. And I knew that that was positively the wrong thing to do because we were in a crossfire. ... Yeah. ... And so I crawled to a voice tube. The voice tube had been severed by the rocket, but I crawled to the voice tube and told the XO that was on the bridge to continue, continue up the river so that we could clear the ambush site.*

Half my crew earned Purple Hearts that day. ... *Whew. A lot of shrapnel flying around. ... A lot of shrapnel, a lot of damage to the ship. It took about two months back in Guam to repair the ship after that damage. ... Did you manage to subdue the fire? ... We subdued the fire. We called in-- remember the old OV-10? And the Navy had helos there, gun helos. So we called in the OV-10s and the helos, and-- . Yes, we subdued-- we never saw a person. Reconnaissance on the beach after the—not by us, but by the SEALs—found evidence that we had killed several, but we have no knowledge of what happened to 'em.*

5:15 JG: Did you have any feeling after those two engagements-- did you learn some lessons from that and have an opinion as to the usefulness of a fiberglass ship [both laugh]?

DR: Well, a fiberglass ship is wonderful for going fast, but it's not so good for stopping weapons. In fact, after we were attacked, the PG that relieved us over there was USS *Marathon*³ I think. And they started painting *Marathon*, the other PGs in camouflage paint, like in World War Two. But I mean we stuck up so high on the river, the banks were just flat. It was like-- it was like the bayou country. It just-- ... *Should have paint a mud color. ... It-- should have painted a mud color. Exactly right. I mean, we just stuck up-- we in my opinion should not have been in those rivers. We were too big a target with limited maneuverability. I mean, the river was wide enough in some places to turn around, but not everywhere. And it had a very swift current in it.*

So I learned what I thought from the beginning: We should never be up those rivers. And then they tried to outfit a patrol gunboat (or at least they designed a patrol gunboat) armor; cage made up of bar armor that they were gonna put-- install on the superstructure of the ship until some Marine engineer did his calculations and realized the ship would turn turtle and—exactly [both laugh]. So that idea never bore fruit. ... *What-- could have turned it into a submarine. ... Turned it into a submarine, you're exactly right. It'd have been a much lower profile. ... Yeah.*

7:10 JG: In your naval service and in your service in Vietnam did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds-- ... Oh yes. ... that-- ? Yeah, tell me about that.

² The USS *Canon*'s motto "In Harm's Way" is taken from a quote by John Paul Jones to M. de Chaumont on 16 November 1788 when he said, "I wish to have no connection with any ship that does not sail fast for I intend to go in harm's way."

³ USS *Marathon* (PG-89)

DR: When I was in the Navy, the nature of the Navy changed dramatically—the nature of the armed services—because when I went into the Navy, the draft was still in existence. And I was an engineer officer on a destroyer. And that was the hottest, most unpleasant, most dangerous area on a ship. And I would have college graduates who would be down there in the bilges, cleaning out the bilges. And I would have high school graduates who would be in charge of the college graduates. And you know-- and it was a cross-section of the United States. And we had-- we saw tremendous changes in the armed forces policy for minorities that changed dramatically when I was in the Navy.

When I first came in, Filipinos could only be stewards. And in fact blacks in some cases could only be stewards. And then when we opened up rates-- ... *To everyone*. ... career opportunities to-- they just did gangbusters. It was wonderful. And then when the all-volunteer force was implemented, that did change dramatically-- not-- it increased the professionalism of the armed forces, but it changed the diversity makeup of the armed forces. ... *We no longer had college graduates sweeping up*. ... Not many college graduates down in the bilges, no. Exactly. ... *Yeah*.

9:13 JG: *What is your most vivid memory of your time in Vietnam?*

DR: That attack on 11 August 1970. ... *The second one*. ... The second one. That-- there was-- I don't know if there still is; there was a saying in those days that-- to buy the farm. ... *Yeah*. ... If you bought the farm, you were dead. ... *You were dead*. ... And when that rocket hit and I wound up on the deck of the flying bridge that was the first thing I said: "*I've bought the farm*." ... *Bought the farm*. ... *Yeah*. ... *How bad were you wounded?* ... I-- not all that bad; perforated eardrums, a lot of shrapnel holes, and a fractured leg. ... *So you were out of action for a while, while they were fixing the boat?* ... I was. My executive officer-- I was medevac'd off the ship at the end of the-- when we got back to Sea Float. I was medevac'd, and my executive officer, an officer named Carl Sandburg (just like the poet, but he was a lot tougher man I'm sure than the poet was); Carl took that ship to Cam Ranh Bay. And then he took that ship from Cam Ranh Bay back to Guam. And he did a superlative job.

10:42 JG: *Did you then rejoin the ship?*

DR: I did. I did. The-- there was a policy in the Navy then that if a commanding officer was absent from his ship for 30 days or more they would assign a new commanding officer. And I never have found out who my mentors were, or who my guardian angel was-- *But they blocked that*. ... They blocked that. And they permitted me to go back to the ship.

Now there were some people who didn't get the word. In the Navy we have what we call detailers. Those are the people who assign officers-- *Right*. ... from duty to duty. And I was sitting on the ship one day and got a call from my detailer. And he said, "I don't know what I'm gonna do with you." He said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "I'm right where I want to be; I'm back on the ship." And he didn't know that [both laugh]. ... *He was gonna find you a place*. ... He was gonna find me a new place, yes. ... *Ohh*.

11:46 JG: *What about the rest of your tour? ... In Vietnam? ... Vietnam.*

DR: sort of mundane, if you will, compared to that attack. But with the leg mending I was having to go see the doctor periodically, and physical therapists, and things of that nature. *Canon* was due to go back to Vietnam, and my doctor had given me permission to go with the ship. I was wearing a long leg brace, but able to get around. Two weeks before we were due to sail he says, "You're not healing well enough. You're not going." And I said, "Doctor, you don't understand." He said, "No son, you don't understand."

So I went back to see my commodore. And there was another PG in country, the USS *Ready*⁴, who was getting ready to have a change of command. And so I called my doctor and I said, "Well, would it be alright if I just went over to Vietnam, picked up a ship that's coming back?" He said, "Sure." So I went over to Vietnam and I took command of that ship. And we stayed there about another four months, which is-- ... *That's not coming back*. ... That was an item I did not tell doctor. ... [Laughs]. ... So I commanded two PGs.

13:11 JG: *Now describe a PG for me.*

DR: The patrol gunboat. That's that fiberglass and aluminum ship. Just like the *Canon*. ... *Just like the Canon*. ... Just like the *Canon*. Exactly. ... *So you just swapped over to take that one*. ... I swapped-- you might say on doctor's orders. ... *Yeah [both laugh]*.

13:31 JG: *You have any excitement on that tour?*

DR: We had a little bit of excitement. We got fired at from the beach several times. And Cam Ranh Bay, which is the-- one of nature's finest exhibits of beautiful bays, had North Vietnamese troops to the west and to the North. And as we were leaving Cam Ranh Bay one day, we were fired on. I don't think it could ...

[Second clip ends at 14:03]

David Robinson, cont. (3rd Video)

... reach us, but we could see the-- . But other than that, no. It was just coastal interdiction, inspecting, and-- *You make any big-- good interdictions? Good captures of smugglers?* ... I did not. The North Vietnamese used these steel trawlers, rather large ships. They were-- originally they were used in the fishing industry. But they used these large trawlers, and they would try and sneak them into the coast, to South Vietnam. And we caught several of those in the mid-'60s. And then, for whatever reason (maybe it was the effectiveness of the Navy patrols), they stopped sending those trawlers. And the trawlers started up again about-- about the same time as I got over there in '70. But we never saw a trawler. ... *Hm*.

1:04 JG: *Did they-- no, we'll go into that-- . Describe for me the best day you had during your Vietnam service.*

⁴ USS *Ready* (PG 87)

DR: Probably steaming back to Guam [both laugh]. ... *Leaving that place.* ... That-- leaving that place. Exactly.

1:22 JG: *And the worst day I assume was the day you got shot up?*

DR: Yes.

1:30 JG: *How much contact did you have with our allies, if any? The Koreans, the Aussies, the Brit-- the New Zealanders, the Filipinos?*

DR: Operationally, none. ... *None.* ... But I did have contacts with them in the Air Force hospital in Da Nang. ... *Mm.* ... And the most stoic, proud, competent, professional soldiers I met from another nation were from Korea. ... *Korea.* ... Yes. ... *They were magnificent.* ... They were a magnificent group. ... *And they were wounded like you?* ... They were wounded, but you never heard a-- you never heard a peep out of them. They were-- they were something to behold. I've never forgotten it. ... *Hm.*

2:31 JG: *How much contact did you have with family back home?*

DR: You know, it's-- we had mail. And when we'd pull back into Cam Ranh Bay, at the end of a long line, you could perhaps get a telephone call. But not near as much as of course they have today, but not even as much as you had on a bigger ship that might have a MARS terminal that people could use short wave to talk home; and not near as much mail service. ... *Mm.* ... On a normal Navy ship that gets supplied at sea often, well, there'll always be mail on that ship, for the ship. But in Vietnam, in and out of Cam Ranh Bay, we didn't have much at all. ... *On a little ship.* ... Yeah, small ship; we didn't have much at all.

Our commodore, our squadron commander, was very good about sending official Navy messages if the-- if any crew member needed to be informed of something, or if there was an emergency with his family. But the personal correspondence: limited. ... *Limited.*

3:54 JG: *How often would you get mail?*

DR: You know, I was trying to remember. When I was coming-- thinking about this interview, I was trying to remember. And I don't remember. I think we went into Cam Ranh Bay about every two weeks. So I would say about every two weeks. ... *About every two weeks.* ... Yeah.

4:15 JG: *How much news, if any, did you receive about the war—from whatever source; whether Stars and Stripes, or radio, or whatever?*

DR: We had-- when we were in country we had very little radio. You know, the Good Morning, Vietnam: We didn't hear that because we didn't have radio ... *You didn't hear that.* ... But we did get *Stars and Stripes* on occasion. And we did get AFRT⁵ (Armed Forces Radio-- whatever). We'd little précis about what was going on in the world and in the news, but I don't recall that we got an awful lot through that media about the war itself; primarily from *Stars and Stripes*.

⁵ Armed Forces Radio and Television

5:02 JG: *Now there was an awful lot of political upheaval and demonstrations and antiwar things going on back home. How much did you and your crew hear about that?*

DR: We didn't hear much at all. It's interesting; when I was in postgraduate school in Monterey, you know, maybe eight hours north of San Diego where they were having the riots and antiwar demonstrations and so forth at UCSD-- ... *That was in the neighborhood of Berkeley, wasn't it?* ... Well, it was in the neighborhood of Berkeley, and we didn't hear-- I didn't hear-- I didn't even know where Berkeley was to tell you the truth. I knew where San Diego was, and all that was going on down there. But we seemed to-- I can't explain it. We just didn't-- we were not engulfed by the antiwar demonstrations and the antiwar feelings.

Now, being Navy had a lot to do with that I'm sure. And during that same period you'll recall the *Pueblo*⁶ was captured by the North Koreans. And of course that got our attention because that was Navy. But I just don't recall just being consumed day to day-- ... *Or disturbed by what was--* ... or that disturbed. Exactly. ... *Yeah.*

6:31 JG: *When did you return home?*

DR: 1971. ... '71. *How?* ... I took the *Ready*, who was scheduled for a ship overhaul. I took the *Ready* back across the Pacific from Guam to Long Beach. And then my family joined me sometime after that. And then we went directly to Washington, DC—which was my next duty station. I worked at the time. I was an aide to Admiral Moorer⁷ who was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And so when I got to that office-- and of course we were following the war on a daily basis, almost an hourly basis, then we got in-- we were impacted by the antiwar business.

7:29 JG: *What was your rank then?*

DR: I was a lieutenant commander. ... *Lieutenant commander.*

7:37 JG: *How much contact, if any, have you had with your shipmates from those years, since?*

DR: Reasonable. ... *Reasonable.* ... Reasonable. They are spread to the winds. There are about four or five people that I am in contact with regularly. One of them was a chief petty officer. And you said I was old at 30. Well, Tregoning⁸ came to me, he was older than me. And he went by the name of Trigger. And he was an engineman. And he was my head engineer. And Tregoning had just married. And so when we went to Guam his wife was eight months pregnant. And so she delivered a son about 30 days after we got there. So Trigger had a year to serve in country. And so, we were at the Chiefs Club when he was getting ready to go home. And I said, "Trigger, what are you gonna do the first time you see that son?" He said, "Well, Captain," he said, "I'm gonna sit him down in the middle of the living room floor." He said, "I'm gonna put a bunch of stuff in front of him," said, "I'm gonna put a law book. I'm gonna put a medical book. And I'm gonna put a slide rule." And he said, "I'm gonna put an open-end wrench. And

⁶ USS *Pueblo* (AGER-2)

⁷ ADM Thomas H. Moorer

⁸ ENCS(SS) John H. "Trigger" Tregoning

every time he reaches for the open-end wrench I'm gonna slap his hand." [Both laugh]. ... *So you do keep up with some of 'em.* ... Yes.

9:21 JG: *Did your Vietnam experience affect the rest of your life in any way, good or bad?*

DR: Positively affected it. I think for any Academy graduate, or ROTC graduate particularly, those people (men and women) spend four years preparing to do the nation's business. And one of the questions you always have is: "If I'm asked, if I'm put in a situation that is potentially harmful, will I respond? How will I do? Will I carry out my training and get the job done?" So having the opportunity to serve in combat was—satisfying is not the right word, but it did let me answer that question for myself. ... *Fulfilling, perhaps.* ... Fulfilling is a wonderful word. Thank you.

And then as you go on and this opportunity to command a ship at sea is in my business the penultimate. It is-- there's nothing like it. ... *Everything after that is downhill.* ... Everything. And so my opportunities after that were to command more ships, then to command a battle group. And I believe that perhaps not my performance, but my experience in Vietnam gave me a leg up in earning some of those follow on positions.

11:14 JG: *Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?*

DR: Yes. Very much so. It really is hard to put into words. But these young people (and it is a young person's business); these young people just do phenomenal, wonderful things for our nation. And so when they come home, and they are successful, and they have done what was asked of them: Yes, it's very meaningful.

11:54 JG: *How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?*

DR: Incorrectly. There is a-- there is a feeling that we were defeated. And a reading of the war—as you well know—shows that is not the case. A reading of the North Vietnamese memoirs shows that they knew that this nation would lose its will before they lost the war. There are some-- it was a time of great unrest. It was a time of-- deserting seemed to be accepted, in some cases honored (because the draft was still on). It was a time when political and academic-- academics seemed to coalesce, if you will; and different pressures were bearing on the nation. And Vietnam became felt to be causative of some of this, where in my opinion it was just more associative with all this. And I read a fascinating paper the other day where the author made a point that the incorrect understanding of what happened in Vietnam has been fostered over the years to justify those who would not, did not serve. Interesting concept. ... *Interesting concept.* ... Yes. ... *We see history books being written now that says everybody who served ...*

[Third clip ends at 14:03]

David Robinson, cont. (4th Video)

... in Vietnam was a war criminal. ... Exactly. ... And I-- you know, I did four tours. I never saw that. I never saw it once. Mistakes, yes. But criminal acts? ... But not criminality, no. That is not the nature of this nation's military.

0:23 JG: *Did you take away from your Vietnam service more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?*

DR: I think I did. I came away not only with the experience of serving in a war zone, but I came away with some strategic and tactical thoughts, too. The United States Navy, as good as we are, does not do small ships well [both laugh]. We have-- *We're not gonna build 'em out of fiberglass.* ... Right. And we just don't know what to do with small ships. But on the other hand, the Brown Water Navy that Zumwalt⁹ set up was so far afield of what the Navy is normally about, that could not be more positive. ... *Yeah.* ... And that sort of led to some of the Navy's contributions in Iraq and Afghanistan, doing things that one would not think a naval officer or a naval petty officer would be expected to do. But we gained an appreciation for something other than battleships and carriers. ... *Yeah. Exactly.*

1:43 JG: *In the end, what did that war mean to you and your generation? Our generation?*

DR: That's a toughie. I think at the time it was very, very important that we be there. And I can remember the Domino Theory. And I can remember the passion of JFK when he talked about Vietnam. And I can remember not as much passion, but impetus of LBJ. ... *Yeah.* ... And I can remember that we felt that we were saving an ally. And then in 1975, when the Congress made I think a terrible mistake by just casting Vietnam adrift, and not permitting any support, not permitting any military support, it just seemed at that point it was a terrible waste. And that was saddening to me.

3:10 JG: *What lessons did you take from the Vietnam War you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?*

DR: That the American serviceman is a wonder to behold. Not only are they militarily professional, but they are compassionate; they are extremely good with children. I've never seen a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, Airman that didn't stop and help a child. And whether it be in country or whether it be in our country, they are a most compassionate and useful organization. I have said for years that they provide opportunities—whether it be a amphibious ship going in with a 500-bed hospital to help a natural disaster in some country; or whether it be a battalion of Soldiers going out to the West Coast to fight a forest fire; or whether it be whatever—they do wondrous things for this nation that are not always recognized. Now, those are insufficient missions to fund our military. Our military is founded, funded, and trained to do the nation's dirty work. But in between those requirements they are wonderful citizens.

4:51 JG: *Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC?*

DR: I have. ... *What are your impressions when you go there?* ... Overwhelming. The-- when the monument was announced, I was in Washington. I read it in the *Washington Post*. And I fell victim to the

⁹ ADM Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt, Jr

“two black scars and earth” argument. And so I didn’t go for a while. And the first time I went I just-- perhaps speechless, remembering. I carry in my wallet a listing of all my classmates who were killed in the war and their location on the monument. And every time I go, I’ll just go by and read each name, and recall a few fun times we had, and-- . It’s a very meaningful spot. ... *Majestic*. ... *Majestic* is a wonderful description.

6:07 JG: *Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration project?*

DR: Not until recently. ... *What do you think about that idea?* ... Well, I think it’s a wonderful idea because (as we’ve talked here today) it is not a well understood war. And we have-- I don’t know, 40 percent of our nation, 50 percent of our nation who have been born since the war ended. And the dynamics, and the changes in our country that were not caused by the war, but as I said a moment ago I think they were associative with the civil rights movement, and the academia movement, and the political movement, but still it’s important to understand the war I think in that context as well as in the context of lessons learned. I’m reminded of Colin Powell, who said something to the effect: Don’t go in unless you plan to win. And go in with overwhelming force. ... *And if you break it, you own it.* ... [Laughs] You break it, you own it. You’re exactly—that is not restricted to curio shops [both laugh].

7:29 JG: *Thanks you, Admiral.* ... Thank you, Sir. ... *Appreciate it.*