

Interview with Roger Poszgai

VRV-A-L-2010-047

Interview # 1: October 14, 2010

Interviewer: Mark DePue

COPYRIGHT

The following material can be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes without the written permission of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. These materials are not to be deposited in other repositories, nor used for resale or commercial purposes without the authorization from the Audio-Visual Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, 112 N. 6th Street, Springfield, Illinois 62701. Telephone (217) 785-7955

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

DePue: Today is Thursday, October 14, 2010. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today we're in Atonement Lutheran Church, and we're here because both Roger Poszgai, who I'm going to be interviewing today, and myself are members here. Now, did I pronounce the name wrong?

Poszgai: No, you pronounced it correct.

DePue: Okay, whew. Roger, why don't you start by telling us when and where you were born?

Poszgai: I was born in Illinois, in 1944.

DePue: Okay. How did your family end up being in Illinois in 1944? That's the middle of the war.

Poszgai: Yeah, that's the middle of the war. A good question. I probably don't really know why they were in Illinois, except my mom and dad were both in the military at that time, in the Navy. My mom was a Navy nurse, and my dad was in communications. He was the E-7 top rank at that time, chief petty officer, and he was in the electronics and communication field. My dad's rating would have been ETNC, as I would remember.

DePue: ETNC?

Poszgai: I think that stands for something like electronics technician. [Electronics Technician Communications]

DePue: Well, Illinois isn't close to any kind of ocean. It's on the border of Lake Michigan, and you guys got Great Lakes Naval Training Center there. Is that where he was stationed?

Poszgai: Well, being as I was just born, I don't really know. My parents never discussed a lot of personal history like that, but I would suspect that for a while he was stationed at Great Lakes Naval Base, and my mom was a Navy nurse. They may have both been home on leave at that time, because Illinois is where she grew up, and that's where my grandmother lived, and all the relatives on my mom's side lived in that area.

DePue: Chief petty officer would suggest your dad was a career Navy guy.

Poszgai: Yes, he was. He spent twenty-two and a half years in the Navy.

DePue: Just doing some quick math—does that mean he came in after the first world war?

Poszgai: Actually, I think he was in during part of the first world war, towards the tail end, and I do remember my parents telling me that he got out somewhere around that Depression era. And whenever he did get out, he went right back in, because there were no jobs out there, and then he turned it into a career for a lifetime.

DePue: Poszgai is a rather unusual name. What's the background for that?

Poszgai: Well, we kind of thought it wasn't so unusual. (DePue laughs) It's a Hungarian name, and my father's ancestors all came from Hungary. In Hungarian that name would be pronounced POOJ-goy. We kept the original spelling of that name, although he had so many brothers and sisters, and they came in through the St. Louis area—East St. Louis, actually—that when they lived together, some of them, in the same apartment building, they changed the spelling of their names because they'd get their mail mixed up otherwise. He had also kept his spelling, which was interesting, because over the years we've run into several professional people—one was a doctor—that recognized our name immediately as Poszgai from Hungary and pronounced it POOJ-goy and told me all kinds of history about the name and the family. Actually the family in Hungary came from royalty.

DePue: That's what these other people told you?

Poszgai: Correct.

DePue: In what timeframe did your ancestors immigrate to the United States?

Poszgai: Well, I have to think that since my dad was the firstborn—he just passed away a while back—I would say just over a hundred years ago.

DePue: So it sounds like they would have come here before the First World War, which would have been good timing for them.

Poszgai: And they started a grocery store in East St. Louis.

DePue: Did your father serve on board ship during the Second World War? Do you know anything about that?

Poszgai: Yes, I do. Unfortunately I don't have the black-and-white movies. He took many black-and-white movies, and if you recall the movie *The Sand Pebbles*, the Hollywood people had offered him quite a bit of money for his films that he had made when he was out there. He was on the Yangtze Patrol in China, and he had actually even had a ring made that said "Yangtze Patrol, China" right on it; there was a picture of a dragon on one side and a pagoda on the other side. I wore that ring all through the service and through high school, and when my son finally got of age in high school that they wanted to buy class rings, I offered him that and he took it, and he was very proud of it. Unfortunately, somehow it got lost over the years, as teenagers sometimes do, you know. (laughs)

DePue: I'm assuming your father has passed away?

Poszgai: Yes.

DePue: Well, he would probably have a very interesting story to tell, too.

Poszgai: I'm sure he would, although my father and I never really bonded a whole lot. After I became a certain age, the family seemed to change somehow, and that was rather disheartening to me as a youngster because I remember always missing my dad when he wasn't around and he was doing Navy stuff. That was when we lived down in the Norfolk area and he was stationed at Dam Neck, Virginia, as an instructor for electronics. And then when we moved to Baltimore, I don't know what changed in the whole family life and everything, but one day he walked in the door. I had missed him, and I hugged him. He pushed me away and said, "Men don't hug; we have to shake hands from now on," and that kind of hurt me. So when I raised my family, we're all huggers.

DePue: Do you recall what age you were at that time?

Poszgai: I was probably in the fourth or fifth grade.

DePue: Okay. When did your father retire from the Navy?

Poszgai: Probably around 1953 or 1954.

- DePue: Okay. So you still would have been ten years old or so at the time, so maybe that was about the time that this incident happened. Is that why you had moved to Baltimore at the time, then?
- Poszgai: After he had retired, he was in Norfolk at that time, working out of Dam Neck, Virginia, although you know there's a big Norfolk Navy base. I guess he found a job with an airplane company called Glenn L. Martin that he went up to Baltimore and he took that job. He had several other job offers, because like most people even today, he did a lot of networking from being in the military. He did have an opportunity to move to Florida; one of the people that owned part of the land where Cape Canaveral is now wanted him to go in on a land deal and move to Florida, but for some reason my mom didn't like the environment down there with the snakes and alligators and everything. I guess she weighed her influence heavily enough to have them move up around the area that we did move to in Baltimore.
- DePue: We probably ought to get on the record your parents' names.
- Poszgai: My dad was George Martin Poszgai.
- DePue: And your mom?
- Poszgai: My mom was Anna May Theresa Poszgai.
- DePue: Okay. Is that Theresa with a T-h?
- Poszgai: Yes, I believe so.
- DePue: I would assume that those early years, you got moved around quite a bit.
- Poszgai: Yes, I did.
- DePue: Was that tough on you as a young kid?
- Poszgai: Well, it was very interesting, let's put it that way, because not only do you move around a lot, that means making new friends. By the time I was maybe five years old, it was figured out that I couldn't actually see very far. I walked into my father and said, "Excuse me" out in a parking lot where the cars were parked when we lived up at Great Lakes Naval Base, and I called him by a neighbor's name. I said, "Excuse me, Mr. Geragi" And obviously Dad wasn't (laughs) Mr. Geragi. So that put him in tune with getting my eyes checked, and then they put glasses on me. In those days, glasses were very heavy and thick, and it may have corrected my vision, but then it made me an outcast among all the other kids; so every time I moved somewhere, I was always teased about my glasses as well as being the new kid on the block, and so then I'd really have to work on relationships a lot differently than most people.

DePue: Well, (laughs) I have a couple different images that get conjured up by your comment about working on relationships. Can you flesh that out, what you mean by that?

Poszgai: Just trying to get along with the rest of the kids and not get into a fight and get sent home (laughs) from school or something for misbehavior or anything like that.

DePue: Roger, were there a couple of scrapes that you got into?

Poszgai: Well, my parents said I came home crying every now and then, but they never saw all the other times that I didn't come home crying and other kids went home, so (laughs) it's kind of hard to say. You know, they were sitting kind of off to the side, not really knowing what was happening in the kid's life, you know.

DePue: And you weren't telling them, sounds like.

Poszgai: No, I never told them any of that.

DePue: Is part of that because you didn't think your dad would be receptive to that?

Poszgai: That's correct. My dad was very unreceptive to violence in that regard. In fact, he told me if I got in a fight and some parents came to him, or anything else like that, that there'd be more discipline involved on my part, that I needed to deal with whatever I had to do to not be in a fight.

DePue: How was your relationship with your mother?

Poszgai: Well, in the early years it was good, and then when we were in Norfolk, like I say, it seemed to change with my mom a little bit from the time we moved from Norfolk up to the Baltimore area. I have a feeling a lot of this—now that I'm older and have talked to my wife that knows more about my family than I do from talking to my mom—I think there was a lot of stress in my parents' life because they had numerous miscarriages, which I never even knew about. They never talked to me about it, but yet after I got married, they told my wife about it. So I think that created a lot of stress, though, a lot of different points in my parents' life, when myself and my sister were around, we were sometimes—well, let's say it seems like the parents had emotional swings towards us kids as far as what we could do and what disciplines happened, you know. It was never consistent; there was no continuity to it.

DePue: After your father got out of the Navy, did the family settle down and stick in the one place for a while or you keep moving around?

Poszgai: No, he basically stayed in the Baltimore area. We moved to a place called Dundalk where my parents had bought a house, and I went through grade

school and high school, from fourth grade all the way to high school, in the Dundalk area.

DePue: So that would be the place you considered growing up and home, then, for when you were a kid.

Poszgai: Yes, that would be. And my sister grew up there as well. She was born just right before we left Norfolk, Virginia, so she was tiny when we moved—maybe a year old, something like that.

DePue: How much older were you than your sister, then?

Poszgai: There's five years' difference between us, and she was born—well, I guess we'd have to count on my fingers when she was born.

DePue: When you get into your teen years, you're into the late '50s and early '60s, and a lot of people in American society, especially the Baby Boomers, look back at that with kind of an idealized sense of what the late '50s and early '60s was like. What was life like for you growing up, then?

Poszgai: Well, as I grew up, I went to four years of Catholic school, from fourth to eighth grade. It was a little over a mile away, and I had to ride my bike or walk every day—rain, snow, anything, any kind of weather. While I was growing up through them years, I was a member of the Boy Scouts because there was a good troop in our church system there. We went out on a lot of camping trips, every other weekend, practically. One would be with the whole troop, which was four different patrols' worth of kids, and then the next one would be just the patrol would go out on a camping trip. I was the treasurer during all that, and as I got too old for that, it kind of seemed more tame—which, hard to believe that it'd be tame, because camping in the Maryland area is really nice with all that they have for the beauty of all the forests and everything there, and we did that summer and winter, any kind of weather.

The last year before I graduated high school, I heard there was a Sea Scout unit, so I joined the Sea Scouts, transferred from the Boy Scouts to the Sea Scouts. They had donated to them a military crash boat from World War II, and the idea was you went and did a whole lot of preventative maintenance on that. It would take seventeen people, and then you would be able to qualify if you had more hours than the next guy to go out on a cruise on the Chesapeake Bay. So I put in all the hours I could after school, after my studies and everything, and I missed it by one person. I was number eighteen on the list. And like at five o'clock in the afternoon we got a call at home that one of them had to back out, so I was packed and ready to go in minutes, and it was really a fun cruise.

DePue: It sounds like you had an interest in the sea, in the Navy, perhaps, when you were growing up in high school?

Poszgai: Well, from growing up as a little kid and seeing all my dad's World War II Navy movies in black and white, you know, with the projector—if they'd have people over, that's the way they would entertain. He would narrate through every one of his films that he would show, and I almost had some of it memorized for a while—(laughs) what he was going to say on these—we had seen them so many times. And with being in Norfolk and seeing the Navy yard and going down to Dam Neck, Virginia that was right on the ocean, so we used to go swimming there at the beach. That was my first beach experience, which was interesting. I had a certain amount of enjoyment with the water at that time.

DePue: Were you thinking in high school that you wanted to join the Navy?

Poszgai: I did. I thought all the way through high school. I was specializing in drafting—that was one of my best subjects—and I was going to be a Navy draftsman. In fact, in my yearbook, that's what it says, is that I was going to be a Navy draftsman. And when it came time to decide, you know, I thought, Well, what else can be offered to me besides just going in? Because obviously I was going to go in because at seventeen I'd either have to go to college or continue just into the workforce, which the other option was to go into the military, which a whole lot of people in that era did go into. I just felt I should explore all the options, and so we had different recruiters come over and tell us what they could offer. I chose the Army instead of the Navy because they offered me not only a school but a specific school within a field, and I chose that over the Navy.

DePue: What was the field and the school that you were going to go to in the Army, then?

Poszgai: I went into electronic repair, and the specific was the Nike Hercules missiles.

DePue: Didn't the Navy offer you the opportunity to go into electronics?

Poszgai: Only electronics, but they wouldn't offer what field of electronics you could go into. You might have been stuck fixing radios, or you might have been stuck fixing something else, but there was no guarantee where they were going to put you after that, and this gave me more insight, plus their schools were shorter. The one in the Army that was offered to me was a year long down at Fort Bliss, Texas, right outside El Paso.

DePue: You liked that idea, I take it.

Poszgai: I did like that idea. It was very enticing to be able to get a little bit more education that way, because whatever I'm going to receive as I go into the military hopefully is going to build how I'm going to support myself and my family for the rest of my life, so I was pretty serious about that.

DePue: It sounds like you didn't have any other intentions after graduating from high school than to go into the military someplace.

Poszgai: That would be pretty correct, because I was not the A student that most people like to brag about their kids as; I was more of an average or below-average student, and a lot of that came back to the fact that if we look at our earlier discussion on me wearing those glasses early at five years old, the school system in those days pushed a lot of kids through, and I learned some of the basics—how to read—but I didn't learn well enough, so I couldn't keep up in class. Every year you can't keep up and you're still passed, you're losing. And actually, when I got into—I went to fourth through eighth grade at Sacred Heart of Mary School—that was the Catholic school I went to,

Then when I went to ninth grade, that was public school, and they spotted right away my learning disabilities, and they had a new program they were just starting out. They cleaned out a closet area that was a pretty big closet, because they could get a table about as big as what we're sitting at in there, and they were starting a special education group in those days. There were several other kids besides myself that they just started re-teaching us how to read and spell. So I'll spell a lot of words incorrectly, but they'll be phonetic, and you'll be able to recognize them immediately to what I wrote. (laughs)

DePue: Works for me.

Poszgai: Unfortunately I don't read good in public, I don't read good out loud. I can read to myself at a fairly good rate of speed and understand what I'm doing, but that's been a disability that I've carried with me now all my life because of not being properly educated in the first place on the basics.

DePue: You mentioned when we were talking earlier that you were also in the Junior NRA?

Poszgai: Yes, I was, and on the weekends that I didn't go on a camping trip with the Boy Scouts, I used to go up to Fort Holabird, Maryland, which used to be one of the major intelligence training centers. I think it's finally closed down as far as doing the intelligence training. But I'd go to Fort Holabird a lot, actually, and I was able to get in with shooting a .22 rifle; it was sponsored by the Junior National Rifle Association. We had special arms people that were in the military there, and we used their weapons and their training. And I was pretty good at it. I had a lot of medals. I could probably weigh them, (laughs) I had so many.

When I did that, I also, as I became a teenager, joined the teen club that was on post because I was allowed to do that being as my dad was Navy retired. I also remember a lot of nights when I had finished my homework, they had a movie on post, and I would ride my bike—that was about a mile,

mile and a half one way—and I'd ride my bike to that movie, pay a quarter and get in, watch the movie and go back home again. So I was always away from home. I found different things to do to stay away from home, and that was just another one of my projects that I had finally lucked out and got into, which I really enjoyed.

DePue: Did you get involved in some of these things like the Boy Scouts and the Junior NRA and some of the other things you're talking about so you didn't have to spend as much time at home, or because you had the passion for those things?

Poszgai: Well, I think the passion for those things developed after I got involved in them. I think the big reason I got involved in all that stuff at first was because growing up, especially as a teenager, my parents just didn't exactly treat me with the respect that we treat kids with today, and there was a certain amount of, I would call it abuse or violence. I can remember one time when I put an end to it finally before I left home. My mom had taken my dad's belt. I can't even remember what the small infraction was that I could have did, you know, but I had chores to do, whether they were wash the dishes or do something else, but I came home from school, and there was some infraction that she must have been stewing at all day, and she came at me with the belt like she usually did a lot of times. That time I took the belt away from her, and she had this unusual look on her face when I had disarmed her. All I did was roll the belt up, put it down, went up to my room, and waited for my dad to get home and deal with me. I figured I'd be a dead duck about then, because whenever he dealt with me he was very physical. I can remember being in the basement at the bottom of the stairs, which butted up against the wall in the basement, and I can remember him shaking me so hard that I thought my head was going to fall off. I could hear my mom at the top of the stairs yelling something—"George, you're going to kill him if you keep doing that. Stop," you know.

So that's why I was always gone. Even when I came home on leave, I'd find things to do when I'd visit them, which wasn't too often. And the one thing I'd do then, because I had a car and I was in the military, I'd go out to one of the chain of lakes out that way and I'd rent a rowboat. Before, when I was a teenager, I used to rent the rowboat and it was five bucks. Now that I came home from the Army on leave, I had more money, so I could spend \$7.50 and get (DePue laughs) a boat, the same rowboat, but (laughs) I got the motor on it and an extra tank of gas.

DePue: Who was the most important influence on you, then, growing up, do you think?

Poszgai: Oh, I'd say probably—I can't name any of them, but I would say the leaders that I had in the Boy Scouts. They were an excellent group of people. A lot of them were firemen and tradesmen.

- DePue: Okay. Well, let's get back to your days in the military, then. You graduated from high school what year?
- Poszgai: June of '62.
- DePue: And did you immediately enlist, then, after that?
- Poszgai: Graduation was on a Saturday. I had pre-enlisted, and all I had to do was go in and hold my hand up, and the recruiter picked me up that following Thursday morning.
- DePue: Were there any young ladies that were complicating your life at that time? That's a loaded phrase; I'm sorry to put it that way.
- Poszgai: There were not. I grew up in an environment where I guess Dad and Mom were worried that if I had too much freedom, some girl would come up pregnant, so I had a lot of restrictions that I had to go by. So basically a lot of my social life was like at that teen club we discussed, but then I also went to a high school dance every week, which was in our neighborhood. Then we had another school that was maybe two miles away. And one dance was on Friday night, the other was on Saturday night. So I don't remember which was which, now. I think the one farther away was on Friday night. So I would walk down, and I would go to that dance as well. But there were no serious relationships.
- DePue: What did you parents think about you going into the military, into the Army specifically?
- Poszgai: Well, because I recognized I wasn't college material, and my dad had offered to pay for college. I didn't see how, with my learning disabilities, I was going to get through college very easily when I could barely make it through high school at that time. I chose one branch of the armed forces, and he said I couldn't leave home unless I had somewhere to go, and he knew I was going to leave home because of all of these incidents that we had had with discipline. So he recognized the fact that I needed to go somewhere, and he signed for me to go into the military, into the Army specifically, but he would have signed for any branch of service as long as he knew I'd be somewhere where—well, Uncle Sam's a good teacher to watch over somebody when they're starting out, you might say.
- DePue: Do you think he was proud that you'd made that decision?
- Poszgai: I think he was.
- DePue: Tell us a little bit about basic training, then. Where'd you go?
- Poszgai: Fort Jackson, South Carolina.
- DePue: Do you remember much about basic?

Poszgai: I remember it was a good time. We did a lot of things, opened my eyes to a lot of various things in a world that we open our eyes to as we start leaving home, and the training was excellent. I remember going on forced marches, and I remember one of my buddies: we could see the end of the march where we're getting back to the barracks, and he was a larger fellow, and he just couldn't make it. And I had maybe half a canteen of water that I had saved—he had drunk all his—and I gave him the rest of my water, and he made it. He never forgot that. That's the way you build character.

DePue: Most people when they talk about their basic training experience, it's not necessarily one of the highlights of their lives. They remember, you know, grizzled old drill sergeants and harsh discipline and all of that precision that the military's looking for, but you described it quite differently.

Poszgai: Well, I had all that discipline growing up, and so I was used to the discipline. That was second nature to me. That was not a distraction. A lot of young kids that have never seen that, that's a big distraction, throws them off balance. And then I had all of my scouting experience behind me, you know, and you start looking at basic training, a lot of it is basic scouting, too, for what you're learning.

DePue: Did you like the camaraderie that you had with the other recruits?

Poszgai: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. You always had some friends, you know—sometimes you would stick together and help out another friend and everybody got through everything, just kind of like—I would use that movie *The Officer and a Gentleman*. I love that movie. But I don't remember ever having any of the cheating going on or anything; it was all straightforward and up above-board, you know, what we did and how we helped one another. But if you remember in that movie where the one guy was shining shoes and then selling them, you know, and we wouldn't do anything like that. We were just all sticking together and getting through it and learning what we needed to know.

DePue: You remember any other stories from basic?

Poszgai: Oh, I'd have to take a break and think about that.

DePue: (laughs) Okay.

Poszgai: There's probably a number of them.

DePue: Okay. What happened after basic training was completed?

Poszgai: Well, I took a short leave and then went out to Fort Bliss, Texas, for that year-long missile maintenance school.

DePue: Had you ever been in that part of the country before?

Poszgai: No, I never had.

DePue: That's the high desert, basically.

Poszgai: Yeah. Well, it's interesting. It has a winter there I didn't expect. They do get a little bit of snow. The more interesting part about that part of the country, though, where I was located—and occasionally it makes the news now—you can see the Rio Grand, and some parts of the year it's dried up, it's just a piece of mud down there, you know; we know a lot of the controversy about what's going on. But when I was there, I could go into Mexico and I could buy my mom some carved leather purses that she liked. I used to bargain and buy chess sets that I liked. And some of the Mexican shop owners I got to know, and they taught me how to bargain really well. (laughs) In fact, I don't know if you want to be a car salesman and bargain with me. I'm not really too bad at it. And I learned—

DePue: So this would be Juarez, right?

Poszgai: Yes, it would be, and I learned a lot of my techniques down there. At the end of the month was good because, you know, when you're out of money, it's hard to go anywhere; a movie on post would be a quarter still, something like that, maybe fifty cents, and it cost me about twenty-three cents to go spend a whole day and go have some fun and just walk around. It would be ten cents on the bus to go down there, two cents to get across the border, a penny to get back, and then another dime to get back to the barracks again.

DePue: You didn't include any money even for beer, let alone some of the other distractions that were down there.

Poszgai: Towards the end of the month, (laughs) you don't have money for all those distractions. (laughter) You have to buy the purses and all that and the chess sets earlier in the month.

DePue: Well, it sounds like you enjoyed your year down there at Fort Bliss, then.

Poszgai: I did.

DePue: Why did you choose missile maintenance? This is a timeframe when this is a pretty new concept and the military was doing it as well.

Poszgai: Well, that was the school that was a year long, and it was supposedly electronics, but it turned out to be electronics, hydraulics, mechanical. It gave me a real good basis as a repair guy, and I guess it was just blind luck choosing that as opposed to some other kind of school.

DePue: So fair to say that you really liked the training that you received?

Poszgai: Excellent training. The military's got excellent schools.

DePue: Tell us about the Nike Hercules. What was the mission, the purpose of the Nike Hercules?

Poszgai: Well, the mission was to defend our country against foreign and domestic foes. [The] Hercules missile was able to shoot off a nuclear explosion if it had to, if you had an aerial attack, and it also would be able to have a high explosive - HE explosion – if you had troops to be supported on the ground somewhere. It depended how you programmed the missile and how you put the arm plug in as to what was going to happen. There were a lot of controls to how that was done.

After graduation I'd be working in a couple of different missile sites; they would go back to Fort Bliss, Texas, and they would test their skills and fire a missile, which meant assembly and then firing it. I was in the assembly part, and I was actually the guy that did all the electronic RF-ing [radio frequency] and in charge of putting together the missile. I would have a couple of sergeants that outranked me, of course, but I was basically the guy that was turning the wrenches and screwdrivers and getting it done. I went to that kind of an exercise twice, and both times—you know how your missile performs because you put it together—and on that same day, for time constraints, the IFC, which is the Integrated Fire Circuitry section, which is radar, they track it, but they fire a different missile; they fire the one that was built the previous day. You're a day behind, so then you have to find out how your missile performed—like, we put it together today; how will it perform tomorrow?

DePue: I know that Fort Bliss is the Army's center for anti-aircraft artillery, or air defense is what it's called now. So was this missile designed to be used against troops on the ground or against other aircraft or missiles in the air, or what?

Poszgai: It was for both. That's why you could have surface-to-air or surface-to-surface plugs.

DePue: What was the main emphasis, do you think?

Poszgai: Air defense.

DePue: And you mentioned sites. You know, when you think about the Army you're thinking about going in combat and into the field and moving on occasion, but is that not what happened for these Nike Hercules sites?

Poszgai: Nike Hercules were a mobile site, and they could be taken around, but they were basically non-mobile sites, and they were installed all over our country at one time. There were a lot of sites in Los Angeles, Chicago, all over the country; they were underground, and they would have a launcher come up from underneath the ground, and great big doors would open, and then they could launch the missile if need be.

- DePue: This is not a small missile, then.
- Poszgai: No, it's not a small missile, but it's not really as large as some of the ICBMs [Intercontinental ballistic missile] that you see in those pictures where they're going way down into the ground, look like a pencil coming up out of the ground.
- DePue: Do you have any idea—the dimensions—how tall it was?
- Poszgai: I would say that it would probably be a little bit longer than a car, maybe a car pulling a trailer, and then the booster would be, again, probably just about as long as that.
- DePue: Now, you've given us some pictures. Most of these look like they're from Vietnam.
- Poszgai: That would be correct.
- DePue: Didn't see anything of the Nike Herc [MIM-14 Nike Hercules missile] here, so that might be something we need to...
- Poszgai: I don't have anything from that era of my life.
- DePue: Okay. How is working as a mechanic on a Nike Hercules—which has the potential to have a nuclear warhead on it—how is that different from a lot of the other jobs that you might have in the military?
- Poszgai: Well, having not done the other jobs, hard to compare, but I would think that you would perform that task that you're trained for just as you would any other task. And it's a very exacting task, because as we assembled a missile or a warhead, you would go down through a book, and one person would read and another person would do and another person would check and make sure it was done, and then another person would validate that it was done. When I was in Germany, stationed on a missile site, I went to a warhead training school and came out honor graduate in that school.
- DePue: This sounds like the kind of thing where you're allowed zero mistakes, that it's that exacting.
- Poszgai: You're dealing with a nuclear weapon; there are zero mistakes.
- DePue: Does that kind of permeate everything else, the attitude that the soldiers take in the job?
- Poszgai: I'd say it definitely would. Nobody wants to make a mistake anywhere, because mistakes are costly to human life if you mess up with explosives, so...

- DePue: Now I'll put you on the spot, here, Roger. Is that something that's kind of stayed with you since that time, that you have a lower tolerance for mistakes or slipshod work, perhaps?
- Poszgai: No, it's probably something that's just innate with me, because even as a boy, I had a hobby flying model airplanes, and I had to have my airplane just right. No matter what I did, I had to have it just right. If I fixed my bicycle, it had to be perfect. Some people tell me that because I was born in September that that's probably my sign dictates that I should be that way. (laughs)
- DePue: Well, some people would be in that kind of an environment and find it incredibly stressful over time. It sounds like you thrived in that environment, then.
- Poszgai: Well, yes. I thrived in environments like that to have the extra pressure on me and to be pushed, and I enjoy that kind of thing. One of my friends and I, when I was in the Boy Scouts, learned how to play chess, and that stuck with me through my whole life, too. And if you're a chess player, you've got to be fairly exact about everything, too.
- DePue: Okay. What happens then after you complete your training at Fort Bliss?
- Poszgai: I was stationed in Los Angeles, in a town called Brea, on top of a mountain and it overlooked the original Disneyland.
- DePue: This was one of those permanent Nike Hercules sites that were guarding major cities at the time?
- Poszgai: Yes, it was.
- DePue: What was the daily routine, then?
- Poszgai: Well, the daily routine was for me: got up in the morning, and like all military procedures, you know, if you're living in a barracks, you do all the barracks stuff, then you go to chow, and then you go to work. And when you went down to the maintenance shop, depending on what the warrant officer had—and he was the guy in charge—whatever he had for you to do, that's what you did. A lot of times you knew what to do and nobody was around, even, because you would be working with preventative maintenance and keeping the shop spit-shined, nice and clean and ready to work. Any other time you would read technical manuals also and post the changes to the manuals.
- DePue: So what you're maintaining are these missiles, then.
- Poszgai: Correct.
- DePue: Did they have enough missiles that they could rotate some for maintenance and then always have some out on the platforms ready to do the mission?

- Poszgai: Actually, the different sites that I was on had, I think, two or three of those kind of bays where they had several missiles in them, and they had guys that did preventative maintenance to the missiles down in those. I call them a silo, but maybe it was called a bunker or something.
- DePue: It was underground, then?
- Poszgai: Yes.
- DePue: How far underground?
- Poszgai: Not real far, because there would be an elevator that the missile would come up on. If you were down there, you could see up there, and maybe it would be twenty feet, something like that.
- DePue: It just occurred to me, about the time you graduate from high school and started your military training was the Cuban missile crisis.
- Poszgai: Yes, it was. I was still in school at that time at Fort Bliss.
- DePue: Any memories that attach to heightened tensions during the Cuban missile crisis?
- Poszgai: Oh, I think we had this idea that you better stay in school or you might not be in as good a place somewhere else. In those days you didn't have computers, so whenever people had orders cut, it was by typewriter, and about the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the personnel buildings were running day and night. You could see their lights on, and you could hear typewriters going all the time, so you knew people were going somewhere. (laughs)
- DePue: Mm-hmm. Well, it's a couple years later by the time you get out to California, but you're near the Los Angeles area—obviously close enough to protect the city. It sounds to me like you're a big fat target, too.
- Poszgai: Well, I never thought of it as being a target. If you stop and think about it, how's an airplane going to come over, an enemy airplane, how's it going to get to our country in the first place? There's so much water that surrounds us.
- DePue: Was the threat as you guys thought of it at that time primarily with Soviet missiles?
- Poszgai: You know, they never really discussed it, but probably. They were probably more worried about an aerial attack from a missile. You always hear that Khrushchev or one of them might push the button during the Cold War, you know.
- DePue: So this is in the age when they're not nearly as sophisticated as missiles are now, where you can fire a missile and hit—exactly pinpoint—the other

missile coming in. How—or is this information that was secret and we can't discuss today?

Poszgai: I'm sure by now it's been declassified. If not, I could be in Leavenworth for saying it, right? (laughs) But those kinds of missiles worked on a burst pattern, where the missile wouldn't actually hit the target; it would explode so close to the target that the target would be torn up in all the shrapnel that was there in the explosion.

DePue: So not unlike flak in World War II that we see in all the movies.

Poszgai: Not unlike.

DePue: Okay. Did you like that job?

Poszgai: I did. It was a great job. And then after working for, I can't tell you, I think six to nine months—and it's hard to trace my career to exactly each time I changed duty stations--but from there, I transferred to a missile site in Germany for what I thought was about nineteen months, but maybe it was sixteen months.

DePue: Well, I've got down here roughly February 1964 that you went to Germany. Is that about right?

Poszgai: I think it is. I think so.

DePue: Where in Germany were you?

Poszgai: I was outside of a little town called Rockenhausen. It was between Baumholder and Kaiserslautern. Kaiserslautern we always referred to as "K-town."

DePue: Those being the industrial cities that needed to be protected, then?

Poszgai: I don't know that they needed to be protected, but I think we were there on that missile base for whatever threat was going to come our way, and I think most people recognize Baumholder as a part of Germany where a lot of the tank brigade and all that train.

DePue: This was part of the area of Germany then that the United States Army obviously was assigned at the end of the Second World War.

Poszgai: Correct.

DePue: Well, now you've gotten overseas. That's another reason to join the military. Did you like your time in Germany?

- Poszgai: I enjoyed it. I got on an American Express tour for like 250 dollars. It was I think about a six-day tour, and it went by train and bus. We went all over Austria, Italy, Switzerland, the Bavarian Alps, many cities in Italy. I was in Pisa when the Pope was there at that time—I don't remember what pope it was. But it was very interesting to be able to travel and it was all expenses paid. You know, you had your hotel room, your food, every—it was an all-inclusive, 250 bucks.
- DePue: This is now twenty-plus years after the end of the Second World War. What was the economy? What was the environment like in Europe at that time?
- Poszgai: I don't think it was doing too bad, because as I remember, my friend that had a car was paying something like a dollar a gallon for gasoline at that time, so if they're charging a dollar a gallon, they must have been making some money somewhere. Back in our country it wasn't even close to a dollar.
- DePue: Did the German people, did the other people that you encountered there, treat Americans pretty well?
- Poszgai: Mostly they did, yes. I think they just wanted... They were happy to see people that were respectful of one another. If there was a person that was disrespectful, whether he be German or any other foreigner, you know, disrespect breeds more disrespect, so. Basically I never ran into a lot of problems like that, though. People were always nice where I went.
- DePue: The missiles that you'd been working on, the Nike Hercules missiles, these things can't be cheap, and it's not like a lot of the other weapons systems the military have where you get a chance to fire it all the time. So did you ever have a chance to fire one? You talked about when you were in the schoolhouse doing that, but once you get out to these assignments, did you ever have a chance to practice actually firing these?
- Poszgai: That's why we went back to Fort Bliss, Texas—to White Sands, New Mexico, actually. Like I said, I was on the crew that fired two different missiles at two different times when we went there over that period of time I was in the missile field.
- DePue: So one time while you were in California and one time while you were over in Europe?
- Poszgai: I'm thinking that that would be correct.
- DePue: So that part's expensive, too, for the military to be sending people back to do that. Did you enjoy the live fire exercises?
- Poszgai: Well, they shoot a drone up into the sky, and that drone is what is targeted for you to be able to fire your missile at, and we never saw any of that part

because we were just in the assembly building putting one together, being tested on that part, and the radar area was being tested on the firing part.

DePue: Well, but you didn't answer the question whether or not you enjoyed that.

Poszgai: I found all of it enjoyable.

DePue: (laughs) Okay. Put you on the spot here. You had mentioned earlier that while you were in Germany you also went to a school?

Poszgai: I went to the Nike Hercules warhead school, and I came out an honor graduate, Then later in my career in Germany, I was sent to the 7th Army NCO Academy, and that was again where my Boy Scout training paid off. Because as I recall, there were many things we had to do there as we were taught to be leaders, and I remember they dropped us off from like a deuce-and-a-half. [two and a half ton truck] Figure how many guys fit on one of those. They gave us each a compass, a flashlight, and a map just as the sun was going down, and it was a topographical map. They said, "Okay, get back to the barracks." There were quite a lot of fellows that never got back and got any sleep. I think I got back maybe forty-five minutes later and got my area straightened away and my studies done for the next day and everything prepared. I got a good night's sleep. But there were a lot of them that came in the next morning about breakfast time, and I heard they got washed out right away; they were automatically dropped from the program.

DePue: If you're going to the NCO Academy, that suggests that by this time in your life, you were thinking that you wanted to make the Army a career. Would that be correct?

Poszgai: Well, I was an E-4 by then, and I was probably up for promotion, because I was probably one of the more ranking E-4s.

DePue: A specialist?

Poszgai: A specialist E-4, yeah. And they sent me to that 7th Army NCO Academy. I can't really say why they chose me over somebody else, but usually when you come back from there, you get promoted to the next grade up, and I recall that that wasn't happening. They always said they didn't have an allocation for the stripe, you know.

DePue: The stripe would have brought you up to sergeant?

Poszgai: Yes, or actually specialist E-5, but they always referred to it as a stripe.

DePue: Okay. This would have been about the time, if my math is correct, that you'd be due to reenlist as well.

- Poszgai: That's probably one of the things that prompted me to reenlist. I figured, I'm not making any rank here; maybe I should just change fields. So I reenlisted for a school—I guess I could have reenlisted for a stripe, but it seemed to me education would be something that stays with you longer than that stripe does. So I chose explosive ordinance disposal as my first choice and medical equipment repair as my second choice. It might have been just the opposite; it might have been vice versa. But either way, it finally came down that I was accepted for medical equipment repair school in Denver, Colorado, at Fitzsimmons General Hospital.
- DePue: Would that have been about the typical time that you'd be due to rotate back from Germany?
- Poszgai: I was getting close to that. I was getting close to that time anyway. And at that time I had thought I would probably stay in the military.
- DePue: What timeframe, what month and year, then, did you return back to the States to go to this medical equipment training?
- Poszgai: Well, I'll bet if we looked on my DD 214, it'll say when I reenlisted. It has that month on there, and whatever that was would probably reflect it. And if I check it over... (pause)
- DePue: Well, I know that you went to the NCO Academy in July of 1965, so it sounds like it would have been something...
- Poszgai: It looks like September of '64 as I look across. See, Baumholder, Germany, and look across here.
- DePue: Well, anyway, the question I have—and the reason I was asking of the timeframe—this is about the time that things in Vietnam are heating up a little bit. After Johnson's reelected in 1964, in 1965 there's a lot more news, there's a lot more activity, there's a steady build-up in Vietnam. Was that something that you recall being discussed a lot when you were over in Germany?
- Poszgai: Actually I didn't have it discussed. I don't remember ever hearing any of that for some reason. I guess we just didn't get a whole lot of news; you know, you were just doing your job and working. In a foreign country like that, you've got Armed Forces Radio that you could listen to, and most of us were going downtown or doing something else in our off time, not paying a lot of attention to current events. And the biggest newspaper that we would get would be that military newspaper, *Stars and Stripes*, and we didn't see too many of those either. So I really didn't know about Vietnam until—to be honest—and it's embarrassing that I didn't keep up with current events, I suppose, as well as some people might have—but I didn't know about Vietnam until I came down on orders for there. (laughs)

DePue: So even when you were at Fitzsimmons in Denver, Colorado, you weren't hearing much about it.

Poszgai: No, no.

DePue: Well, tell us what the training was like then for medical equipment repair.

Poszgai: They walked us through classroom and practical instruction of all their basic medical equipment that they had that would need to be serviced if you were working in a hospital or in a field hospital. If you recall that TV show *M*A*S*H*, [MASH: Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] that would reflect some of the ways some of the field hospitals were. There was equipment that needed to be repaired, obviously, if you have lifesaving equipment. So it was a good course. I didn't have any trouble getting through it because I had all this other repair experience by then.

DePue: Was it different kind of repair than you had experienced with the Nike Herc? You mentioned there was a lot of different aspects to that kind of a repair job.

Poszgai: Well, in Nike Herc there was electronics, mechanical, hydraulic... There were a few differences. There was still electrical and not as much electronic, but some, but there was mechanical again, as you might think. Then there was also, like when you worked on sterilizers, you'd need to know the steam theory on a sterilizer in order to fix one of those.

DePue: Was it as demanding, as exacting?

Poszgai: Oh, yes. You're not going to get any piece of equipment to work if you're not exactly fixing it correctly. I wanted to say, when I transferred then from that school, I went down to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

DePue: That was your next duty station after the school?

Poszgai: Yes, yes.

DePue: Is that something you had a choice in?

Poszgai: No, Uncle Sam was kind enough to choose for me. And I worked in the main hospital there at Fort Leonard Wood for quite some time, repairing the medical equipment in the hospital and doing preventative maintenance on it as well.

I remember the first day when I walked in, there was a warrant officer I was going to work for, and it was interesting. As the story went later that I found out, he had been working on a sterilizer for maybe three weeks, hadn't fixed it, and here I am green, walking in right out of school, and the first assignment he's giving me is to go work on that sterilizer. And I said to him, "Well, sir, would you mind just reviewing the steam theory on a sterilizer for

me before I go up there so I don't look like a klutz or something?" And he says, "Just get your you-know-what up there and get it taken care of." So I grabbed the pouch full of tools, and I went up there. And the medics up there let me know that the warrant officer had been unable to fix it for three weeks. So I fixed it probably in twenty minutes, and the warrant officer didn't have the courtesy to tell me about the steam theory on that sterilizer, and so when I came back down after it was fixed, I didn't tell him how I got it fixed, and he was very upset about that. (laughter) I said, "If you didn't want to share with me, (laughs) I'm not sharing with you." Obviously that was not a good thing for our relationship. (laughter)

DePue: Perhaps a mistake on your part?

Poszgai: Well...

DePue: You still don't look like you regret it much.

Poszgai: I got to tell you, (laughs) it couldn't have been a mistake, because I had a lot of fun with that, (laughter) and so did the rest of the hospital. So from my standpoint, it wasn't a mistake.

DePue: Were you wearing E-5 stripes by this time?

Poszgai: I was not. I was still an E-4, (laughs) and I'd have probably remained one forever if I'd have been working with that warrant officer (DePue laughs) because of that incident. But one of my friends I went to medical maintenance school with was in the field outfit down there, and he and his captain wanted me to transfer over to them. And I kept saying, "No, I don't want to do it," and I'd run into these people at the bowling alley and everywhere else, you know. Well, "Have you thought about it? Do you want to come over with us? We can make it happen." And I said, "Well, I want to learn a little more about the medical equipment that they have in the hospital so if I continue on I know what to fix, how to fix it, and so on." And at one point in time I finally gave in, and I said, "All right, I'll transfer over, and I'll come with the field outfit."

So I did that, and I got an immediate promotion. I got my E-5. And then we were working together, fixing the equipment. A lot of it is in conex containers, and you have to take it out, because they're a unit that was going to go out on a moment's notice, just like a MASH unit. Anything we couldn't fix, we'd order a part for. All our paperwork was in order, and I learned an awful lot about doing paperwork and ordering parts and keeping everything just right up to snuff there that I wasn't learning in a hospital, so actually it helped my experience in two ways. I then knew a lot of how to fix all the stuff that we would be responsible for, and now I learned a whole paperwork side of it, because I think the warrant officer basically did the paperwork in the main hospital. And then they had a CMMI [Command Maintenance Management Inspection], which is an equipment inspection on post, and the hospital scored a sixty-eight. We scored a ninety-seven.

DePue: Out of a total of a hundred?

Poszgai: Correct. And then the post commander came to congratulate us and brought the warrant officer along, hat in hand, and all I could do was just smile.

DePue: (laughs) Well, now I know why you say you didn't regret that.

Poszgai: No, sir, I did not. (laughter)

DePue: A little bit of the sweet revenge, perhaps, on your part.

Poszgai: Well, at least I could keep my chest stuck out.

DePue: How long were you at Fort Leonard Wood?

Poszgai: About nine months.

DePue: And then what happens after that?

Poszgai: I was transferred out of there to the Chicago area, 5th Army Medical Maintenance Team.

DePue: Was that Fort Sheridan where you...?

Poszgai: Fort Sheridan, correct.

DePue: Now, why only nine months at Fort Leonard Wood? Normal military tours were quite a bit longer than that at the time.

Poszgai: I just went wherever I was needed, you know. People come down on orders all the time; never an explanation of why you're the lucky one being chosen to pack your bag.

DePue: What was the unit you were assigned to then at Fort Sheridan?

Poszgai: Fifth Army Medical Maintenance Team.

DePue: Okay. Yeah, you mentioned that before. I'm sorry.

Poszgai: They sent me out to various dispensaries in northern 5th Army. Could go up to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, could go downtown into Chicago where they had an area right on the lakefront at that time—they don't have it anymore, I think—but they had an induction center or something down there, and they had some equipment. So we were going all over, plus whatever came into us to be fixed from the hospital up there at Fort Sheridan. And whenever we went anywhere, we had kind of like what you'd refer to now as an expense account, because you'd turn in all your receipts when you'd leave, and you got per diem, which was covering all your meals and everything, and you had

a staff car that you drove, so all the gas was complimentary on Uncle Sam.
(laughs)

DePue: In other words, maybe for one of the first times in your life, you're doing okay financially.

Poszgai: Yeah. Had a lot of freedom there.

DePue: So you liked that job, too, sounds like.

Poszgai: I liked all my jobs in the military.

DePue: (laughs) Okay. I know that something else important happened during the timeframe that you were at Fort Sheridan, so why don't you tell us about how you met Julie?

Poszgai: Oh, yeah. That's right, I did. I met my wife there. What happened was my cousin—

DePue: What was her name?

Poszgai: Her name was Julie.

DePue: Last name.

Poszgai: Cihlar, C-i-h-l-a-r.

DePue: C-i-h-l-a-r.

Poszgai: Uh-huh. But I met her at my cousin's house. I grew up with my one cousin. Remember, I was born in Illinois, and so we had relatives, and some of them were in the Chicago area. My cousin was a couple of years older than me. His name was Jerry. And I went over to his house—he was also a Vietnam veteran, but he had come home early—I think about eight months he served over there. Because of his mom dying they brought him back home. But I called him up when I got up there, and we met up. He was married at that time, and I went over to his house, and they were going to set me up with a date, you know. It turns out the girl that I was supposed to go out on this blind date with had a little kid, and she came in with the little kid, going to drop him off, and they started talking, and I guess the women were talking for so long that all of a sudden another lady comes in, and that turned out to be Julie. So they all were talking in another room and Julie came in, and we introduced ourselves and hit it off.

My blind date didn't turn out to be a blind date because I didn't go out with the girl that they had set me up with; instead I (laughs) made a date with Julie for the next day. It was kind of interesting, because I had just the weekend pass, you know, so it was like a Friday night. So Saturday morning I

was going to go down to visit my grandmother, and she said she wanted to come along. So I slept at my uncle's house that night, my cousin's house—they all lived together at that time—and so then I picked her up the next morning, and we went to see my grandmother, and I did some work around the house for her that she needed done. As I recall, she needed a light put in her basement.

DePue: It's always nice to have somebody in the family who knows how to do maintenance and all kinds of repairs, huh?

Poszgai: I could be popular everywhere, yeah. (laughs)

DePue: Did the relationship then develop pretty quickly after that?

Poszgai: I'd say it developed very quickly, because I don't think I knew her more than a couple of months and we'd set a date to get married, and that was July twenty-ninth.

DePue: July twenty-ninth of what year there?

Poszgai: 1967.

DePue: Okay, so that's your anniversary date.

Poszgai: Yeah.

DePue: And still, you had mentioned that one of these people you had talked about in this story had been coming back from Vietnam, but you weren't curious about what was going on over there at the time?

Poszgai: It never really sparked me as anywhere different than like Guam or any of the other islands that I had been to, because as a boy I was on Guam for a while with my parents, so I just never gave it a thought. I guess I was just too engrossed in having fun.

DePue: Once Julie's part of the picture, was there any difference in your thought about whether or not you wanted to stay with the military long-term?

Poszgai: Well, I wanted to, and she didn't, but I didn't know that till after we got married. (laughter) She didn't want no part of moving around and all that other stuff going on. The housing that the military gave I thought was pretty nice, but she didn't want any part of any of that, so maybe something in her life had turned her sour against being a military wife.

DePue: What's the next move after Fort Sheridan, then?

Poszgai: Well, I was at Fort Sheridan when I married her, and then we went on our honeymoon and came back, so we took two or three weeks—I can't

remember—because I had leave time accumulated. We had an apartment that we had rented together. And I got a phone call from Fort Sheridan that said, “You need to come in here right away because you’re on orders.” And I said, “Where am I going to go?” And that’s when they told me it was Vietnam, and I didn’t know where that was, didn’t know what was going on there. So I looked into it and found out that was a war zone they were sending me to. (laughs)

DePue: Well, if you’re going to find out, you better find out before you get there.

Poszgai: Yeah. So I said, “Well, when do I have to come in?” and they said, “Right away.” And I said, “Well, I got some leave time saved up.” So they said, “All right, you can take your leave time first and use that up.” Hindsight, I should have probably did it the other way around and went right away and maybe came back from Vietnam (laughs) a little bit earlier or something, you know. But I did it that way. So then on our honeymoon, we went to an area around Boston where my parents had moved from Baltimore, from that Dundalk area, and we visited them. That was kind of our honeymoon. Then we came back, and I went and reported in to Fort Sheridan. They kind of gave me this introduction to what to expect in Vietnam.

DePue: What did that entail?

Poszgai: It entailed some lecturing and a couple of short movies and stuff like that.

DePue: But what were the subjects?

Poszgai: Probably what I could expect some bad people might want to do to me. And they showed us the punji sticks and the holes that your foot could go into and explained about eating downtown, if you get some bamboo shavings, because one of the VC might shave some bamboo into your food or something like that. Just how to basically be street-smart and survive.

DePue: Well, that had to be a little bit of an eye-opening experience.

Poszgai: I couldn’t believe my government wanted to send a nice guy like me to somewhere like that. (laughter) We also took care of our M-16 at that time and clicked in elevation and windage, you know, zeroed it in, so we needed to remember that number, which seemed to pay off for me when I got into Nam.

DePue: This isn’t the most delicate question, but was the VD film or lecture part of that training as well?

Poszgai: You know, I can’t remember. Throughout my military career you would see those films in training sessions, sometimes on the larger posts in the big theaters, and sometimes in the smaller theaters, you would—there was always education about all that.

DePue: When was your ship date?

Poszgai: I can't really remember exactly, but since I came home in September and I was there almost a year or a year, it was sometime middle of September, I would say.

DePue: September of 1967.

Poszgai: Correct.

DePue: And this is the time when there's definitely a lot of build-up going on. We're going from a few thousand in the early '60s to tens of thousands, and by this time we're into hundreds of thousands and moving pretty quickly up to five hundred thousand—plus troops stationed in Vietnam. I know by 1968 it was there. Okay, this might be a good place for us to take a quick break, if I can suggest that.

Poszgai: That's a good suggestion, but let's put on there that I served under [General William] Westmoreland and [General] Colin Powell.

DePue: Okay.

Poszgai: Before I forget that part.

DePue: Well, we're going to spend the next session here talking all about your experiences in Vietnam.

(pause in recording)

DePue: Okay, we took a very brief break, and now we're at the point where we need to talk about how you got to Vietnam, Roger.

Poszgai: I got to Vietnam by airplane.

DePue: Commercial?

Poszgai: It was. It was a commercial airplane. I should remember the name of it—Orient or something. Northwest Orient I think was... And I think they were the only ones at that time that were flying into Vietnam. Something about other airlines didn't want to fly over there. I can't remember exactly how that worked out, but I'll tell you it was a nice airplane ride getting there.

DePue: Were you wearing fatigues during the flight then?

Poszgai: I think we traveled in Class A.

DePue: Tell me about arriving in theater and arriving in Vietnam. First of all, where did you land?

- Poszgai: Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay is on your map, south of Qui Nhon.
- DePue: Right there.
- Poszgai: That's it. That's the big place, right there.
- DePue: Now, you mentioned Qui Nhon: That's where you spent most of your time?
- Poszgai: That's where I was assigned; that's where I spent all of my time. And the headquarters for our medical depot and outfit was actually this other guy, right here, where you see Nha Trang.
- DePue: Nha Trang.
- Poszgai: Right. So I went, I believe, by Jeep from Cam Ranh Bay to Nha Trang, and C-47 from here, from Nha Trang to Qui Nhon, and then got picked up by my outfit there.
- DePue: So that initial drive, you got a chance to see the countryside, to get a feel for what Vietnam was like. And I want you to, as best as you can, tell me the first impression you had of Vietnam. First of all, getting off the aircraft, that's usually something that some people remember.
- Poszgai: Yeah, and people should remember that, because when you land, you know, and then they open the doors of the airplane for you to disembark and they shut off the air conditioning that you were enjoying, there is a few moments in between, and you could feel the heat already in the airplane before you were even getting out of the airplane, how hot it was when we landed in Vietnam. And then of course when you get outside the airplane and start walking across the airport, you could feel the heat right away. So that's probably the first thing everybody gets greeted by, just how hot it really is.
- DePue: What was your impressions of the Vietnamese countryside during that Jeep ride north?
- Poszgai: Well, I've seen jungle area before because as a little boy I was on Guam for a while, and so I thought it was very nice, very beautiful, very peaceful-looking.
- DePue: Peaceful-looking?
- Poszgai: Of course, we know it turns into something other than peaceful.
- DePue: Were you warned about anything on that trip north? Were you wearing your steel pot by that time?
- Poszgai: Yeah, Actually I didn't get issued any of that stuff until I got to my unit, and so I wasn't. I didn't even have a weapon at first, not until I got to Qui Nhon.

So I guess if we would have had an altercation of any kind, I'd have been using one of my buddies' weapons after he couldn't use it any longer.

DePue: What was your unit of assignment once you arrived?

Poszgai: Thirty-second Medical Depot.

DePue: And what was the mission for the 32nd Medical Depot?

Poszgai: As you can imagine, a depot is a place that's really large that deals with the supplies, and we dealt with medical supplies and issued them out to all the surrounding hospitals, whether they were stationary hospitals or field hospitals. My part of it was to repair all the equipment that came from any of those hospitals.



Roger Poszgai in Qui Nhon

December 1967

DePue: Was the unit in good shape when you first got there?

Poszgai: Actually, when I got there, I found it quite interesting because after I got there, they wanted to send me back down to Saigon to process-in where they said they kept all our records, which to me made no sense at all. And Saigon, if you look on a map, would have been quite a trip.

DePue: Yeah, and I don't know how many miles, but that is a long way south. [373 miles, 12-13 hours]

Poszgai: It's not a good trip to be going anywhere in-country if you don't need to go. And when I walked into that unit and they were telling me I was going to go down there the next day, I went in and introduced myself in the maintenance shop. I found four or five fellows in there, including the sergeant that was in charge of running the maintenance shop, and they were just kind of sitting around not doing a whole lot because there was nothing to do. They didn't have any parts. They had empty shelves that they had assembled. It was just a

new place, starting up, basically. They had no real accumulation of parts to work with.

I had a lot of knowledge already, as we have explained, of repair and supply and everything, and I just was kind of an assertive individual in those days and walked in the commander's office and introduced myself. I had to see him anyway to let him know I was there. I couldn't believe what I was looking at and asked why, and they said, "Well, our people don't seem to know how to get parts. We're waiting on Department of the Army to send them." And I says, "Well, I don't really prefer to go down to Saigon or anywhere with my records and walk in and see some guy that's wearing a uniform like me and say, 'Hi, how was your trip?' and we all know how it was, and then come back, you know." I said, "That's a waste of time. I think we would be farther ahead if we went and got right to work. And for me to get to work means I need to have some privilege exercised to me to be the leader in there and get some parts into that place." And I said, "I don't want to step on that sergeant's toes, but everybody needs to stand up and just be counted as I lay out program for how to order parts and get this done."

He agreed to that, and so I didn't have to go anywhere with my records; they just mailed them. After that, every person that came into our unit never went anywhere; they went right to work, and they mailed their—you know, through the pouches that they carry all over. We all went right to work after that. We never lost any man-hours in transit just for silly stuff like showing your records or something.

When I went into the maintenance shop and explained to these fellows that I knew how to get some parts for them, everybody was willing to jump right in, and they said, "Well, show us how to do this." And I showed them how to fill out these little three by—well, you remember the old IBM cards?

DePue: Yes.

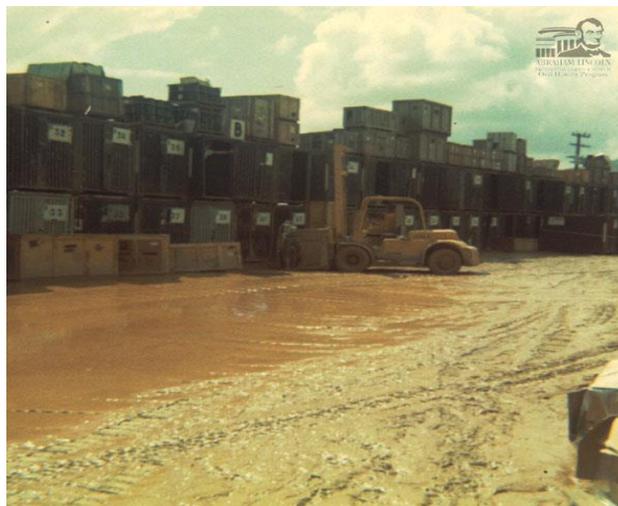
Poszgai: That's what they were, and they had a special thing on there so you could order your parts and everything. I said, "Go through," and I just grabbed manufacturer's literature that they had in their drawers on the various pieces of equipment they had gotten literature on. I said, "Go through here as a repair guy and look at it and figure what are the parts that are going to wear out the quickest or that you're going to need?" And everybody took a different book, we went down through all these technical manuals and started filling out cards. We had cards this thick at the end of a lot of different days.

DePue: A couple inches thick.

Poszgai: We would hand them to the mail clerk that would process them and get them sent to Department of the Army, and within three months, we had all kinds of parts coming in. Before that, most of the medical equipment that came into

that shop, if they couldn't fix it with, you know, rob Peter to pay Paul, two pieces of equipment, make it one, and one that worked, they were sending it to Okinawa, and they told me their turnaround time for equipment was a year and a half. So if you sent a piece of lifesaving equipment out today, nobody's going to benefit for a year and a half? That didn't make any sense to me either.

So once we got this program up and running and started getting our parts in, our turnaround time for a piece of lifesaving medical equipment was most generally the guys would come out of the field overnight, drop off their list of what medical supplies they needed and what they needed to have fixed. We'd have it fixed within that twenty-four-hour period when they were going back upcountry, because they were working out of various, like MASH unit field hospitals. So our turnaround time went to just overnight, basically. And then we stocked extra equipment, and that was because sometimes a hospital could come under mortar attack or something and equipment [would] be destroyed and need to be replaced right away as they were trying to get back up and running. So we tried to keep an extra stock of some stuff.



Supply yard for the 32nd Medical Depot at the base in Qui Nhon, South Vietnam. December 1967.

DePue: You were an E-5 at that time?

Poszgai: Correct.

DePue: Were you wearing sergeant stripes or specialist stripes?

Poszgai: Specialist.

DePue: And the sergeant then would have been what rank?

Poszgai: He was an E-6.

- DePue: So higher-ranking, but not that far ahead.
- Poszgai: But he had to come up through the ranks as a medical equipment repairman, same as me.
- DePue: In other words, you didn't think too highly of his skills as a medical equipment repairman.
- Poszgai: You know what, I never really evaluated his skills. I never saw him in action. I saw when I walked in, that they weren't doing a whole lot, and when I asked them probatively what they intended to do, they weren't sure what the next step was to get parts, and they were kind of waiting on Department of the Army to take some action for them. I don't know that they'd been waiting real long or quite a while; I was just a little assertive on that, and we got it going.
- DePue: Qui Nhon, is that how you pronounce it?
- Poszgai: Qui Nhon.
- DePue: Qui Nhon is pretty close to the coast.
- Poszgai: It's right on the coast, actually. Yeah, you could even go to the beach there.
- DePue: And basically you're on the coast. If you go inland far enough you get to Pleiku. This is the central highlands region of the country?
- Poszgai: Yeah, we serviced Pleiku. We had a lot of people come from Pleiku for supplies.
- DePue: It's the II Corps area of the country, the part that the II U.S. Army Corps is defending or fighting in. So within the interior, there's a lot of activity, so there's no shortage of need for medical equipment repair, I would think.
- Poszgai: You always need medical equipment repaired—always.
- DePue: Was there a hospital that was adjacent to you as well?
- Poszgai: As I remember, it was 85th Medical Evac Hospital, and actually we shared the same mess hall with them, the same shower. It was kind of like a little bit of civilization in the middle of the jungle there.
- DePue: Tell me about the base, then. Did it have a name?
- Poszgai: You know, I don't recall whether it did or not, other than just we were in Qui Nhon.
- DePue: How many soldiers would have been at this particular base where you were?

Poszgai: Well, that I don't know either. You know, we were kind of in our own little world, in our little compound there, with barbed wire all around and being guarded and so on like that.

DePue: Did you have American infantry units guarding you?

Poszgai: We could see some American soldiers that were stationed there, but it was my understanding that the Korean Tiger Force was on the outskirts of town, and they were actually defending the whole area down through there. A lot of nice fellows. I knew a couple of them personally.

DePue: It sounds, though, that you guys weren't under attack yourselves very much?

Poszgai: We were able to hear all kinds of gunshots, especially at night, and you could hear mortars going off and things like that. I don't know who was shooting them at who. There'd be a sniper who maybe had a bullet now and then, just somewhere out of the village, which was right across the fence from us, that would take a pot shot and maybe shoot somebody, maybe not. Most of the time not, but you'd hear a shot fired or something.

But you had to be concerned about vehicles that went off of the compound, or even some on the compound where some of the little kids would—you would look at a little kid and just think that little kid is a little kid, but some of them were armed with a hand grenade with a rubber band on it. Pull the pin and drop it inside a deuce-and-a-half or a five-ton's gas tank or something like that, and as the rubber band deteriorates, then you get an explosion. I guess their hope was always to take out a bunch of GIs.

DePue: Did you actually see that occur on the compound?

Poszgai: I never did. We've heard stories of it, and that's all we heard.

DePue: Were there Vietnamese civilians who were working on the compound?

Poszgai: There were. We had Vietnamese civilians working all over the compound for us.

DePue: Doing what kind of things?

Poszgai: Well, we had what we called the hooch girls that were cleaning our uniforms and our hooch that we stayed in. Our hooch is like our barracks; I've provided pictures for you of that. You can see it's kind of like a little shanty thing that was built before I got there out of—it looked like scrap wood that they had from different shipping carts—and then the top of it was the top of the tent, you know, for the roof. You'd see some Quonset hut material and corrugated stuff, and that was that. But they would do the cleaning of the inside of that as well as our uniforms. I got to tell you, every time we would come back to the barracks, if we would change our boots, you could see the amount of mud that

we dealt with all the time, and that amount of mud, they had a lot of cleaning to do on uniforms and personal items. So it was a hard job for these hooch girls. I provided one picture that has the hooch girls—I think having lunch—a bunch of them, as they're sitting in a circle there.

DePue: With the traditional caps. What did you call those, the caps that they wore?

Poszgai: I didn't call it anything. Maybe they had a name for it. I've heard them referred to as coolie hats—

DePue: Coolie hats, okay.

Poszgai: —but that would be, I think, a Chinese expression from the coolies that used to pull the rickshaws in China. But that's what I would have referred to them as. We used to call what they're wearing the pajamas, black pajamas.

DePue: Did you suspect that some of these would have been Vietcong or Vietcong sympathizers?

Poszgai: The word was that some of them could have been. Keep your eye on them at every minute, every second. Don't turn your back on anybody; you never know. Even the guy that cut our hair was a Vietnamese, and there were a lot of times I just absolutely refused to get my hair cut unless there was a couple of GIs standing there too. I remember one time one of the GIs, one of my buddies, he stood there and told papasan as he's shaving, and they've got that big razor, you know how they do the sideburns and all, and he says, "You might want to skip doing that because if you draw blood, so will I." And papasan was real careful about it.

We had another one that was on the compound servicing just our medical depot, and he was like a carpenter. If you wanted anything built—and I had to build several different things in the maintenance shop—he would build it. He would come up with materials and everything. One of the first requests I had from one of them was we needed an air compressor in that maintenance shop so we could check dental equipment out and so we'd have an air gun to blow stuff out and things like that in the normal course of repairing. So I had to talk to one of the papasans that was a carpenter, and he put in an air line for us and everything—did a nice job of it.

DePue: Did the fellow soldiers that you work with treat these Vietnamese pretty respectfully, do you think?

Poszgai: I think we all treated them respectfully unless there was something that came back towards us that was negative. You never saw anybody being abusive to anybody.

DePue: How about vice versa, the Vietnamese, the way they dealt with the Americans?

Poszgai: Always very polite. I think they were very grateful that we were there, most of them, because especially the ones on the compound were getting paid money. And you know, in Vietnam, I'm sure that the squalor of living they had across the fence from us, it was hard to even meet the standards, you know, without cash flow coming in from somewhere. Obviously the only cash flow was going to be from either us or the VC.

"Across the fence."

The view of Qui Nhon from the American base which Roger Poszgai and the 32nd Medical Depot called home.



DePue: Did they speak English?

Poszgai: They did, a lot of them did, or in-between English, you know.

DePue: Did you have opportunities very often to leave the compound?

Poszgai: Not too often. About the only time I ever left the compound was on official business when we had to make a run out to what I called the valley, which was the immediate area outside of our compound, where there was a couple of dispensaries out that way that needed any repair work done or anything like that.

DePue: You said there was a village right outside the gate. Did the GIs go out into the village?

Poszgai: Some of them did. I didn't. I was not interested in spending my off time putting myself in jeopardy downtown where you couldn't trust nobody. You can't tell who's the good guy or the bad guy when they're all wearing these black pajamas. I know a lot of GIs that would go into some of the little roadside bars and get a cold beer or whatever they could get, you know, or try some of their food and other things. I wasn't into that.

DePue: Well, you're being rather delicate here. I'm sure any time you have American GIs go to different places, one of the things that oftentimes pops up is you've got prostitution outside as well. Was that a problem with the command there?

Poszgai: Well, I don't know how much of a problem it was, but I do know that I knew a few GIs, a few of my friends, that went downtown and came back with some venereal disease. You know, I guess that's going to be something that you deal with wherever the Army is or any military organization, because I can go all the way back to my days down at Fort Bliss, Texas, where one of the students that I was [a] student with went across the border and thought he got a good deal on it out in the alley there for two bucks and came back with some clap and was leaving his fingerprints on the urinal there as he tried to urinate; you could hear him in there screaming, and then he figured out he needed to go on sick call after that.

I mean, a person needs to be street-smart and protect themselves when they're in these environments. It's not just like a college town where you go out and, you know... I'm not saying anything against college people, but you think that college life is kind of a loose life, and I think some people think the military life is that way. You know, if you don't have certain standards of integrity and morals, things are going to catch up to you.

DePue: Did this village exist, you think, before the Americans decided to set up a compound there?

Poszgai: I think it did, because as I drove through it, it was a large village, and when you drove a big truck through there, a deuce-and-a-half, you had to go very slow because it was like a sea of people, and they were just having to move out of the way of your vehicle. Some of them were probably trying to sell you stuff or whatever. I always used to sit on the top of the deuce-and-a-half with my shotgun and view everybody as we were going through the crowd to make sure there wasn't any aggression getting ready to come our way. It had to be a pretty big city.

DePue: Could you tell of any French influences in the area?

Poszgai: I think sometimes if you looked at some of the Vietnamese, especially the Vietnamese women, you could see a lot of French and a lot of that.

DePue: But not the architecture or anything like that?

Poszgai: Well, I didn't see a whole lot of the architecture that I could speak on like that.

DePue: Were there any Vietnamese Catholics in your area?

Poszgai: I think there were, because there was one mission that we went to when I was there to do something, and I think that was run by some nuns.

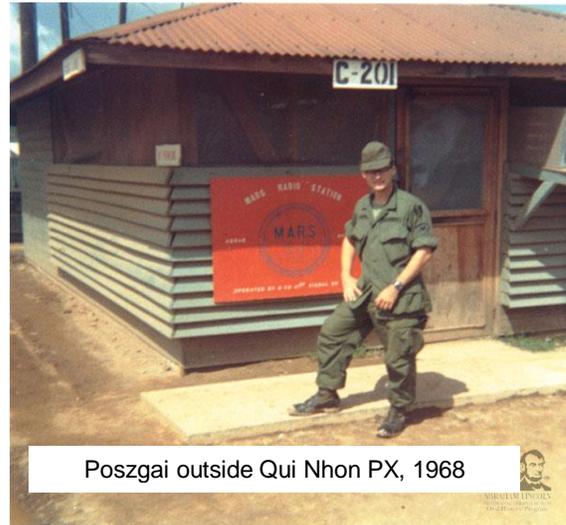
DePue: If you're not going into the village, and you've told there are very good reasons not to do that on your off time, what do you do to keep yourself interested and engaged in your off-duty time?

Poszgai: Oh, well, I provided a picture of a MARS station, and I don't remember what MARS stood for exactly now [Military Affiliate Radio

System], but that was a communications station. You could go there and probably sit all day, or the better part of the day, but what you would do is coordinate with your family at home to be able to make a phone call—and it's in your group of pictures. So you would sit there till your name was called, and then you would maybe get a three-minute phone call with one of your loved ones at home. And if you weren't doing that—yes, you could go to—they had a PX there

in Qui Nhon—I provided a picture of that as well—and you had three beer rations and three soda pop rations and cigarette rations. I didn't smoke and I didn't drink the pop, so we traded off everything so at the beginning of the month we all had what we needed, and we would go and get our supply. I hung out with several fellows; I think there were four at first and then we

graduated up to about eight of us that hung around in the evenings. We had sent home for chess sets, and we had at least three chess sets where we had games going all the time. And then we had our refreshment, our beer or our soda pop, in there. We also had a club there on our compound; you could go there if you had extra money, and you could buy a little bit of food instead of eating in the mess hall and drink a beer. Sometimes they would have a USO show come.



Poszgai outside Qui Nhon PX, 1968

Poszgai at a Mars station, 1968



DePue: Any memorable names from the USO show?

Poszgai: No, uh-uh. Nothing that I can remember of anybody famous. Some of them were put together with like Vietnamese people that would get up there on a stage, and they'd sing the old songs that you'd like to hear, word for word, right to the music, but you know they didn't know a word of what they were saying. (laughter)

DePue: Was there a movie theater?

- Poszgai: No, no movie theater, at least not that I know about.
- DePue: Now, I know that the military was running their own radio stations for entertainment purposes. Did you get any of that?
- Poszgai: Yeah, we could hear that every day. Remember, they made a movie about that with Robin Williams in it, and that pretty much depicted the radio station part of it anyway [*Good Morning, Vietnam*, released 1987]. You know, they always had good music on there. A lot of country and western.
- DePue: Well, you talk to the World War II generation and the Korean War generation, and they oftentimes talk about getting radio that the enemy was sending out, broadcasting, but were playing popular American tunes of the day. Was that also a factor where you were?
- Poszgai: I don't recall ever hearing anything but the Armed Forces network station.
- DePue: Okay. You had mentioned earlier—not today, but a previous conversation—that there was a POW compound close to your area?
- Poszgai: It was at the end of the 85th Evac Hospital, right next to our shower, adjacent to the mess hall. The prisoners of war that were captured that would be injured, were healing there before being sent on to another place to restrain them. That made for some interesting viewing as far as some of the GIs that came in out of the field that had been beating the bush didn't appreciate seeing these people being taken care of with such good quality, you know. They had MPs guarding them.
- DePue: Were these North Vietnamese or Vietcong?
- Poszgai: Well, I would think that that name would be synonymous. Whether they're North Vietnamese or Vietcong, I'd say that's both the same.
- DePue: Okay. Well, the North Vietnamese, though, would have had something akin to some kind of a regular Army uniform.
- Poszgai: Well, these guys, all they had was a hospital-type uniform, so we—
- DePue: No way of telling.
- Poszgai: —couldn't identify them any further than that.
- DePue: The Korean troops that were in Vietnam always had a very fierce reputation. Now, you described this Tiger Force, that you knew several of them, and they were nice guys.
- Poszgai: Yeah, yeah.

DePue: Did they have that reputation, though, while you were there?

Poszgai: Yes, I'd say they did. They were an honorable bunch of people. I understood that they were being paid by the Korean government and by our government and NATO, so they were bringing in, to their standards, some really large money, sending it home—most of them that I knew--and they didn't care if they lived or died; they only cared if their family got the money so that their family could live better. That's what it was all about for them, is to do their job over there and send all the money home they could.

DePue: Were there any occasions when you were stationed at this compound that the compound took enemy fire?

Poszgai: Well, as I recall, we could hear a sniper bullet every now and then. You know, you just kind of brush that off. Even the first day when you're in Nam, you just: if it didn't hit me, then it wasn't meant for me, and I continue with what I'm doing. But as the Tet Offensive started off, it was pretty late at night and we were in our bunks. There must have been an ammo dump a compound or so over from us that exploded to kind of get the ball rolling on all that, and the concussion was bad enough and strong enough that it knocked us right out of the standard military bunks that we're sleeping in. Found ourselves on the floor, and got pretty interesting after that.

DePue: Did your compound take any mortar fire at that time?

Poszgai: Not that I know of. Not that I know of. Just those little incidents that come up, you know.

DePue: But having the ammo dump get blown right close to you, that gets your attention, then.

Poszgai: Yeah, it got my attention and got a lot of people's attention. We went out on the fence after that and organized right away and had our weapons and ammunition out there. By the next day, we were trying to find out what all had happened, and we were getting the word down through very slowly, because you don't get a lot of news when you're in the military. We kind of understood what was going on, that there was a lot of VC coming our way, and the Korean Tiger Force was kind of separating us from them as well as a few of the U.S. outfits out there. We weren't sure if we were going to get overrun or not, hospital and everything. We were on the fence, and I suggested that maybe I pass out more ammunition to the fellows, and the lieutenant said, "We don't have any. We've got the forty rounds." Each of us had two clips, and that was all we had. So at that point we went to fixed bayonets and put in a little more anxious time. Nothing bad came of it, but it sure could have.

DePue: Yeah, I would think the tension level goes way up at that time.

Poszgai: Well, we passed our meal out: C rations I remember this one young fellow, he was pretty upset, you know. Nothing wrong with a little fear; it makes you sharper eventually. But he was pretty scared, and he saw I had peaches. He says to me, "Before I die, I'd sure like to have some more peaches. I really like peaches." So I traded him my peaches for something else, and I traded somebody else something and got what I wanted to have, and eventually the tension went down. But that's kind of the way we handled it, by supporting one another.

DePue: Did the amount of casualties increase dramatically after that?

Poszgai: Well, it's my understanding that we didn't have too many casualties in the hospital at that time, in 85th Evac. Evidently, during that Tet Offensive, as it started, some of that was due to the fact that President Johnson had ordered that we stop bombing Hanoi harbor and the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which was the way the VC got all their supplies underground. I saw some footage of pilots that had flown a lot of those missions that had been bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and they had made a good dent in their supply line to where we didn't have casualties going on; they were kind of being pushed back and out of the country. When Johnson ordered all that to stop, well, that gave them a leg up. With the Tet Offensive starting out, after that, we had all kinds of casualties coming in from the field from other areas, probably Pleiku and up by the DMZ and so on like that, and helicopters air-evac-ing people in all the time.

The sound of those helicopters, it took probably a good twenty years before I never heard a helicopter coming. When I would hear that noise in civilian life, I'd know there was one of those kind of military choppers coming over and nobody could see one, and I'd know it's coming; then a few seconds later people could see it, you know. So you just never forget things like that. But at one point, the main hospital over there was even asking for extra beds from our unit because they didn't have enough right away to take care of all the casualties coming in, to lay these GIs in. A couple of days later, then we got shipments back to normal, with ammunition and beds and everything we needed. But we were probably caught by a big surprise with some of that.

DePue: This is January of 1968, I believe, when the Tet Offensive began. '68, of course, in the United States is going to be a very tumultuous year. A lot happened, and a lot was happening in Vietnam itself, and the American public's opinion about what was going on in Vietnam was really changing in '67, but especially '68 and afterwards. What was your view of the war by that time?

Poszgai: Well, I didn't really know about all the political aspects of that war when I was there. I knew I was sent there to do a job, and the job I was sent there to do was fix medical equipment to save lives. And that's what I did. As the Army will tell you, you're a soldier first, and then you're whatever your

secondary job is second. And I put some days in where I was a soldier first and not a repairman first.

DePue: And some of those occurred during this timeframe we just talked about?

Poszgai: Yes, especially from then until I left, yeah.

DePue: How was the morale of your unit?

Poszgai: Morale was always good. People were always walking around, and some of them would be short-timers, and you'd hear the standard (cough-speaks) "Short!" something like that, you know, just out of nowhere. People can be serious as heck, and somebody would go to the group and go (cough-speaks) "Short!" You know, it was standard.

In the area where they had the medical supplies going out, it was a covered area and they had a ping-pong table; a lot of fellows played some ping-pong there when they had a break, you know. People would watch the game, and it would be exciting. There was also the communication, not only from that MARS station, but we got free mail. All you had to do to write a letter home was write "free" on the envelope. And also in those days, my wife and I communicated with cassette tapes, and we'd write "free" on them and send them home to her. I had bought two tape recorders in the PX, and I sent one home to her, so they were matching. So we each had a tape recorder, and that's how we communicated back and forth. So we spent a lot of time writing letters and talking into the tape recorder. I never would discuss all of the things that went on as far as the sniper fire we'd hear, or the mortars that we'd hear going off. I never discussed any war issues with my wife; I never wrote anything to my wife like that. I know some guys did, and they liked to puff their chests out. I didn't want to worry my wife, so we just communicated about little nonsense stuff, you know.

DePue: How important was it for you, though, to hear Julie's voice, either on the MARS station or on these cassette tapes?

Poszgai: It was a morale-booster, and mail call was always a morale booster, as you well know. When I left Vietnam, the tape recorder I had I passed on to one of my buddies that wanted to do the same with his wife.

DePue: So kind of continuing in that legacy, then.

Poszgai: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

DePue: A lot of these questions I'm going to be asking you because I know enough about the period and have heard the stories about what was going on in the American Army especially, in the American military, and most of that was '68 and beyond. Were there drug and alcohol problems in your unit that you saw?

Poszgai: Well, I'd say there was some alcohol problems. We heard of one young man that I don't know if it was on a bet or some kind of whim or if he just did it to show off, but he drank like a fifth of whiskey straight down, and he died from that. I don't know who he was. It was one of the other fellows in our unit that I didn't work with. And then there was a lot of fellows off duty that would drink beer. I would drink beer. I don't think any of us really abused that. Especially us E-5s, we kept a pretty clear head because you didn't know what was going to come around the corner next to be dealt to your unit, you know, with somebody trying to attack or something. You needed to be prepared and street-smart. But we didn't **not** drink beer, you know. But hard alcohol you could only get if you bought it at the PX, and I don't remember any of my buddies having any of that; we just used our beer ration. You can figure three cases of beer a month is what they allotted you, and so there's not a lot of beer drinking going on unless you went to the club and drank a couple of beers. But there were a lot of fellows in our unit that were smoking pot, and even one of our company clerks was smoking pot. Several of us would take him aside and tell him, "You're going to really damage yourself with the pot issue" and all. They kind of blew us off, like, "Well, you're drinking a beer; we're smoking the pot." So.

DePue: How were they getting pot?

Poszgai: You know, I don't know.

DePue: Going down to the village?

Poszgai: Probably. Obviously it wasn't Army issued.

DePue: Were there any discipline problems that you recall?

Poszgai: Not really discipline problems, although when I was there, it was interesting. Evidently there was a GI that had gotten caught downtown selling medical supplies to Charlie, and he was in our unit, so—

DePue: To Charlie

Poszgai: Charlie, to the VC. So he was being detained for trial, and if you pulled charge of quarters, which is CQ, if you remember that, we had to guard him. He was free to roam around our area, and a lot of the CQs at night would have the guy just sit in the CQ room so they could guard him that way. They had the shotgun, pump shotgun. I think it was a Remington 8, and one in the chamber. And come my turn to guard this guy and do CQ, he says, "Well, can I go over to the latrine, and then can I stop at the club and"—they had a show going on that night. "Go ahead, I don't care. If you run away, nobody likes you anymore," I said, "the Army's going to prosecute you, and if you're gone, you're AWOL. If you go downtown, Charlie's got no more use for you, so they'll probably kill you. So just make sure you're back before head count." So everybody in charge runs things a little different. But then again, I was one

of the oldest fellows there. I was twenty-three, my buddy Marty I think was twenty-five, and our company commander was between twenty-five and twenty-eight, I think. We were the oldest fellows there, so I guess with age goes a little bit of judgment. You don't need to be pointing a shotgun at somebody, especially when you're in Vietnam and he's an American. How do I know if he's guilty or innocent? All I know is he's being charged with something and he's being detained.

DePue: Another thing you hear a lot about in terms of what's going on in the Army at that time was racial tensions. Was there any of that where you were at?

Poszgai: Well...

DePue: Were there blacks that you were serving with?

Poszgai: I served with a diverse population in the military, and I was raised to not have any prejudices. My parents never introduced that into me with my upbringing, so anything that molded me was just how people treated me. When I was down at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, they had a race riot down there in medical company; several of my buddies got hurt and put in the hospital. One guy was killed. I don't know if they caught the people that had done that. I wasn't there that night, I was downtown having a good time at one of the bars down there, and when I came back I found out that there had been a race riot and a lot of people had gotten hurt. But I didn't see any real prejudice when I was in Vietnam.

DePue: This medical unit was the thirty-second medical depot, then; it had—

Poszgai: Oh, no, that was in Fort Leonard Wood, so—

DePue: Okay, I'm sorry.

Poszgai: When I served in Fort Leonard Wood, that would have been at that main hospital in that field hospital. I think it was the fellows from the main hospital, some of them, that exercised some bad behavior.

DePue: But your unit in Vietnam did have blacks.

Poszgai: Yes, it did.

DePue: Hispanics as well?

Poszgai: Yes. We even had an American Indian.

DePue: Okay. You had talked before about short-timers, and there was a lot of lore about counting the days as well. Were you one of those who were counting the days to when you could go home?

Poszgai: I doubt that there was anybody that never counted the days. I mean, that was just the part of being there. (laughs) Yeah, you counted the days. You had a short-timer's clipboard where you ended up putting pictures on the clipboard, and some would be your family pictures, some might have come out of *Playboy*. You also got a swagger stick, sort of, and that was made out of maybe some wood and some casings, the end of a bullet, something like that. I'm sure you've heard of those.

DePue: Well, you check something off every day, then? What was on the clipboard? What was on the stick? How did this work, exactly?

Poszgai: You could have a clipboard with your letters on it or something. You just carried it around. And as far as that swagger stick, some people carried those and showed them off, you know, and how they're short. You know, you went along with it. All your buddies, you're looking forward to them going because you can't go home until they do (laughs) if they're going ahead of you.

DePue: Did you know exactly how many days you had left in-country?

Poszgai: Yeah, we always knew, and there was a calendar always in our maintenance shop, so we always knew.

DePue: Check off the days as they move on, then?

Poszgai: I never checked any off. I mean I could look at it and figure it out in my head.

DePue: Okay. I don't know if this would be the timeline, but maybe it was. Were people talking to you about reenlisting while you were in Vietnam?

Poszgai: Can we take a break?

DePue: Yes.

(pause in recording)

DePue: We took a very quick break, but I'd asked you to talk about reenlistment, whether or not that subject came up when you were in Nam.

Poszgai: It did come up. I can't remember who brought that up. Probably one of the officers in his amount of chores that he had to do, he probably had to ask everybody that was getting ready to rotate out of there if they wanted to reenlist and offer them whatever kind of deals. I don't think he had a lot of takers, although there were some fellows you heard that were in country for two and three tours, you know. Then again, when I finally left Vietnam and processed out through Fort Lewis, Washington, we were detained there for about three days or so, and they must have had a recruiting program there, because they weren't letting anybody leave. They talked about it was our processing out. I didn't understand that, since we were already processed out

in Vietnam. It seemed like they kept pressuring everybody to reenlist, and they would offer them a stripe or they would offer them a place to go, a different duty station.

DePue: But you say that happened after you returned to the States.

Poszgai: After I got back to the States at Fort Lewis, Washington, and these guys were pretty rude about it, too, and it seemed like they were a little bit on the harassment side. It got kind of old pretty fast that we didn't get processed out. I know one guy had finally lost his temper and got a little physical with one of those recruiter guys, and then right after that we were all finally able to leave at once.

DePue: Tell me about some of the buddies that you hung around with, that you spent your time with in Vietnam.

Poszgai: Well, a lot of them were just country boys like the rest of us, you know, and came from different parts of the country: some from Tennessee, some from Texas.

Roger Poszgai and fellow soldiers relax in his sleeping quarters in May 1968.

Clockwise from rear left:
Marty, "Woody," "Earle," and Roger



DePue: Anybody in particular that you were especially close with?

Poszgai: Well, I used to hang around during work with this one guy that we played chess with and all. His name was Marty. But Marty sometimes would go his own way and get himself in trouble downtown.

DePue: Are there any stories connected with Marty?

Poszgai: All I remember is when I got back from Vietnam, he sent me a postcard after he rotated back about a month after I did. He sent me this postcard, and it says, "Back in the saddle again." And I said, "Oh, my goodness."

DePue: Okay. I wanted to ask just some more general questions here. Let's start with this one. Tell us a little bit about the food.

Poszgai: Well, we ate in the hospital mess hall, and the food was always good. They had your normal variety of GI food, which we all looked forward to every day, and I don't think we could ever complain about all that. We always ate well, always provided with good food, well cooked. Treats. You know, they even had desserts over there. Considering they were in a war zone and they had a lot of nice stuff going on, we probably ate a lot better than some of the people that were in some of the outlying hospitals and...

DePue: Does that mean you weren't eating a lot of C rations?

Poszgai: No, the only time we were ever offered that was when we were on the fence that one day from Tet, and then after that, we would relieve one another and go to the mess hall. It was just that one time.

DePue: Did you have encounters with some of the infantry or the front-line troops that were seeing a lot of combat occasionally?

Poszgai: I would see some of them that came from the outlying units that needed medical supplies. And I had a buddy of mine that at one time was assigned to our shop. His name was Woody. He's another one of the guys in the picture there. They were starting a medical depot up north, north of Chu Lai. I can't remember the name now. It's right on the tip of my tongue. I think it was north of Da Nang even, where we were going to go to. By the time he went up there... Oh, sure, there it is: Hue, spelled H-u-e.

DePue: Okay. That's the old provisional capital of Vietnam.

Poszgai: Yeah. I wanted to go up there as part of the unit to set up the maintenance shop and the commander wouldn't let me go; he said I was needed down right where I was at. They let Woody volunteer instead of me. He went up there, and I think they got in a few firefights up there and everything. He sure came back a changed person.

DePue: Was he up there during the Tet Offensive?

Poszgai: I can't remember that he was or wasn't. He might have went just after that, when they started to set it up, because I was already in Nam a while. Let's see, but before I went on R&R, so probably six or seven months into it, he had probably went up there. He was certainly a changed person when he came back. He was not really the repairman we used to know; he was more on guard, more of a soldier that was just on guard.

DePue: Hue was especially hard-hit during the Tet Offensive. The Vietcong actually were able to seize control of the city for a short time, and then there was some pretty rugged fighting in there afterwards. You just mentioned R&R. Did you have a chance to leave the country while you were in Vietnam?

Poszgai: R&R for a lot of fellows was Thailand, and one guy that went to Thailand I gave him some money and asked him to buy me one of these Chinese warlord chess sets; it was made of carved ivory, which was legal in those days, and that would be priceless. I passed that on to my son some time ago. But for myself, since I was married, I went to Hawaii, and Uncle Sam paid for my whole trip there and back as far as travel went, and for my wife, she was paid from the Pacific Ocean coast to Hawaii and back to the coast again and only had to pay just her ground fare, whatever was in the United States.

DePue: The American government was paying for that?

Poszgai: Well, she had to pay from Chicago to I think San Francisco, where she departed, and then the government paid her trip from there to Hawaii and back.

DePue: How long were the two of you in Hawaii together?

Poszgai: I think it was six days. No, maybe it was seven days, six nights, something like that.

DePue: I know today there's a military hotel that's right on Waikiki Beach. Was that there at the time?

Poszgai: I don't really know. We booked a hotel that we were very dissatisfied with the first night we were there, They had a lot of signs that said "tow-away zone," but there was nowhere to park our rented car, so the next morning we got up and found our car was gone and found out that the people on the island had keys to the rental cars, so when they tow your car away, they just actually get in and drive it away, and then you pay a fine to get your car back. So being as the people in that hotel didn't tell us about any of that and took advantage of us, we changed hotels. It turned out in one of the big high-rise buildings this fellow owned several units, and he rented those out, and so we rented from him and we paid ten dollars a day for the room and a rental car.

DePue: Was it tough to go back to Vietnam after spending some time in one of the garden spots of the world and getting caught up with Julie?

Poszgai: Well, yeah, I'd say it was pretty tough for everybody to go back after they got a little bit of civilization again, but we all had a job to still do and we couldn't let anybody down. We needed to go back there.

DePue: Was there any discussion between the two of you about whether or not you should reenlist?

- Poszgai: Well, there was a small amount of discussion, and it was pretty much one-sided. Julie told me if I reenlisted, her and I were going to be history, (laughs) so take that for what it's worth. I decided to not reenlist, and now we've got forty-three years of marriage and two kids.
- DePue: If that hadn't have been the discussion, would you have considered it, you think?
- Poszgai: I would have definitely considered it, because I could have made a lot of rank in those days. I could have retired as an E-9, I'm sure, or, even better; I'd have probably went to warrant officer school by the time I finished being an E-6.
- DePue: We've talked quite a bit about your experiences in Vietnam. Anything else that really has stuck with you in terms of incidents or anecdotes that you've got from that year?
- Poszgai: Well, is that where I would explain about our bean soup, or is that coming in your food part?
- DePue: Well, we already talked a little bit about the food, though. I asked you about the chow.
- Poszgai: And I didn't bring that up, did I?
- DePue: No, go ahead.
- Poszgai: Should I?
- DePue: Yeah.
- Poszgai: All right. One part of the comradeship of everything in the maintenance shop—we had five or six guys, depending on who rotated in or out—we had a hot plate that was there when I got there, and the fellows had already established this as part of the routine. We all sent home for bags of beans, and it was one guy's job to—
- DePue: We're not talking about green beans now, I take it.
- Poszgai: We're talking about lima beans and navy beans and all those kinds of beans. And it'd be one guy's job to stir the bean pot, and we'd have a break at about 10:00, 10:15, 10:30, and all sit down in between the breakfast and lunch part and have a big plate of country beans. I think them guys got me started on my love for beans.
- DePue: Well, Roger, I'm thinking this might make for the maintenance shop to be kind of a ripe place sometimes.

Poszgai: Oh, it would be interesting. And after we were in our prime, after we have had a plate of those beans, I can relate one incident that we had where we had one of our friends—his name was Lee Housel. I don't have a picture of him—but he was down in the middle of the floor in the maintenance shop checking an x-ray machine, and he had his hands on his tester, his volt meter, and he couldn't very well move out of there too well as he's making his tests on this live voltage with the x-ray machine being turned on. The whole group of us got around and kind of made this little aroma for him (DePue laughs) while he was there. He chased after several of the fellows that got away. And he was a big guy. We called him, like in wrestling, one of the haymakers, you know. He was quite stout. And if you look at the maintenance shop, if we found a picture of that, these we call Dutch double doors because they were doors, but they were cut in half, and they'd both open. Well, he actually caught up with me and threw me through those, and I landed on my feet. And when I landed on my feet, if I wouldn't have, you can see how muddy it was out in the depot. That mud went all the way up to here that day, to the end of the door. I landed in the door, on the other side. My boots didn't even get any mud on them. I caught my balance.

You ever see the gymnasts that do their thing, and then when they land, it's like they wobble back and forth and that's going to be their point or not a point? I landed, I saved the day, I'm standing there; everybody busted out laughing. We had no work going on that day. We asked the commander if we could take a break. We went up to the club and had a few beers. (laughter)

DePue: I think they would say you stuck the default.

Poszgai: Yeah, that's what they'd say.

DePue: Excellent. Okay. What do you think of the officers and the NCOs that you served with while you were in Vietnam?

Poszgai: Excellent leaders, excellent. We had good leadership all the time there. Anytime you had anything going on or a problem, you could go in and see them. There was a time that we had an optician, optical shop type thing there, and that guy—sometime he'd run behind. They'd let me go from my maintenance shop into there and help him out. So the commanders were very flexible as long as we could get some work done. That was the idea, was get work done and take care of everybody that needed taking care of. So.

DePue: You weren't encountering much of this, but I want to ask you what you thought about the enemy.

Poszgai: I didn't really know the enemy other than the reputation they had. I figured if we have to confront the enemy, we have to win, because if we can't win, then the rest of our people won't win either.

- DePue: Was there talk among the soldiers that you lived with about the Vietcong and why they were doing what they were doing?
- Poszgai: No, we never discussed that. I don't recall discussing any of the politics part of it. We were just there trying to survive for a year.
- DePue: Make the best of it, then.
- Poszgai: And we did.
- DePue: What was the toughest part, then, for you, being in Vietnam that year?
- Poszgai: Well, being as I was probably only married for six weeks and then found myself in Vietnam, I guess I'd say that's pretty tough.
- DePue: So just the separation from your wife?
- Poszgai: Yeah.
- DePue: Okay. I want to take this opportunity, then, because we're going to get to the point of bringing you back home, but I know you've received this letter of commendation. Is this from major, medical service corps, commanding? He was the company commander of your unit?
- Poszgai: That would be correct.
- DePue: Okay. This is dated September 11, 1968, so it's right about that time that you're coming home, right?
- Poszgai: And isn't that an interesting date?
- DePue: Yes, it sure is.
- Poszgai: September eleventh.
- DePue: This is the letter that you received from your commanding officer: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the excellent job that you did while a member of the medical maintenance section in the second platoon. Your willingness to tackle new maintenance problems as well as your desire to learn as much as possible about the mechanics of each piece of equipment did not go unnoticed by your supervisors. You displayed a real talent for repairing dental equipment that was turned in by the various dental units, and it's worthy to note that you were solely responsible for the maintenance and care of all the dental equipment in Qui Nhon, Pleiku area during your tour of duty. Also during your tour, the old field dental operation unit was replaced by a modern, more complex operating unit. Through your tenacity and desire, you became quite adept on the new piece of equipment, and our customers were totally satisfied with the work that you did. It was a pleasure to have

someone of your caliber working for me, and I wish you every success in your future endeavors. If I can ever be of any assistance to you, feel free to write. Once again, let me say thanks for a job well done.”

Poszgai: Thank you for reading that.

DePue: Well, it obviously means something to you. That year was an important year in your life, obviously, and it’s wonderful to get some recognition for doing a good job. Tell us about coming home, then.

Poszgai: Well, as I said when we were at Fort Lewis, Washington, there was a lot of pressure for us to reenlist, but obviously that didn’t happen, although there were some fellows that caved and reenlisted, and they got out of there quicker than the rest of us. But for me, it was just simply getting processed out. I remember that airplane trip on the way back.

DePue: From Vietnam?

Poszgai: The one from Fort Lewis, Washington to Chicago, where I got discharged.

DePue: Were you still in uniform, then?

Poszgai: I was, I was in Class A’s. I entered the service in Baltimore, Maryland; in Maryland, they offer a hundred-dollar GI benefit for serving, but because I got discharged in Illinois, I was never able to collect that benefit. I had even written to various organizations in Maryland and been ignored this whole time, so the hundred bucks I never saw. But on the way home, on the airplane from Fort Lewis, Washington, which went to Chicago in one straight trip, no landings in between. I of course couldn’t afford to fly first class, but there were quite a few openings in the first class section. The stewardess walked through the airplane and picked out a couple of us GIs that were from Nam—obviously she could figure that out from our haircut and our suntan—and offered us that hospitality of first class. So we had everything we wanted in first class; she was offering us the dinners and everything else. About all any of us could do is just take a pillow and a blanket because we were so exhausted, and we slept all the way through.

DePue: When you were at Fort Lewis and you arrived there and during this flight, then did you catch any of the resentment of some other Americans?

Poszgai: You know, I never saw any resentment, actually, when I came back from Vietnam until I was working in a factory. It happened about the time the news media released some information—I think it was maybe in ’72—when Lieutenant Calley had wiped out a village, and that was—

DePue: The My Lai Massacre.

Poszgai: Yeah, that was kind of a questionable episode there. One of the factory workers started to attack me—I didn't even understand why—and called me a baby-killer and a number of other names.

DePue: He attacked you? Did he start punching you or what?

Poszgai: Well, I was working on a piece of machinery in a coffee company at that time. I was probably twenty, twenty-five feet up, and working on a clog of coffee in a funnel that goes down to feed the machine, but he was pulling on my legs trying to pull me down off of there. It hurt me. I mean, even if I fell down off that far up, I'd get hurt. He wouldn't explain what his problem was, he just kept yelling those names at me, and I had to defend myself to the point where he finally realized that maybe he needed to not bother me.

DePue: Do you remember your reunion with Julie when you got back to Chicago? Can you tell about that?

Poszgai: Well, I remember getting a big hug and kiss, (laughs) as most of us probably did, you know. But I think it's a lot nicer today when they all go over as a unit and come back as a unit and are recognized by the town when they come back than what it was then, because we traveled in one-sies.

DePue: You hadn't seen a lot of the nasty combat that many of the Vietnam veterans were coming back with. Was it difficult at all for you to adjust back to civilian life?

Poszgai: Well, yeah, I think we all have a hard time adjusting back to civilian life when we come back, especially from a combat zone and carrying a weapon and all that, then have to lay that down and go back into some different kinds of laws and rules and things like that. There were fellows that I went to school with in that medical maintenance school that never—they were in Vietnam when I was there—and they never came back. One of them, I was going to visit him the next day in his maintenance shop and help fix it up for him; the supply guys came down and said that the visit was off because he had been killed that day from a mortar attack. So I had a lot of problems to carry with me of why I came home and others didn't, but I worked through all that.

DePue: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill?

Poszgai: I took full advantage of the GI Bill. In those days it was like ten thousand dollars. I took three different correspondence courses for repair and maintenance and used my money up that way. One of them was repair of TV and radio, and another was refrigeration and air conditioning, and then a third was automotive repair. When I took that third course for automotive repair, I had to go down to the VA and be tested to see if I actually knew anything, I suppose. And then after I took the test, I scored the highest at that time of anybody that had ever taken that test, and so I had to have a meeting with the gentleman that ran that place. He just wanted to meet somebody that could

actually figure all that stuff out in that short period of time that that test went on before they approved my automotive course. That was kind of an honor, I suppose. But then I did the course and became a journeyman mechanic for Oldsmobile; it takes five years to become a journeyman mechanic. The service manager waived the timeframe, and so did the union, and I was a journeyman in sixteen months.

DePue: Where were you working at the time?

Poszgai: The dealership was Mort Edidin Oldsmobile.

DePue: In the Chicago area?

Poszgai: It was in Maywood, and then later Mort went and built his dealership in Westchester. That would be M-o-r-t E-d-i-d-i-n, I think, Mort Edidin.

DePue: Okay. So did you stay with the maintenance work, then, for the bulk of your adult life after that?

Poszgai: Yeah, I did. I repaired dental equipment for a while, I repaired Oldsmobiles for a while, I repaired some factory equipment. I worked in a school. I had a few people working under me. I was the maintenance guy in the school at school district eighty-four in Franklin Park, Illinois. Then I fell into a situation where I repaired commercial laundry equipment for somebody, and I did that for two different companies; I did that for about twenty-five years, and I went all over a six-county area up in the Chicago area.

DePue: Okay. Have a couple kids along the way?

Poszgai: We had two children, Becky and Brian. Becky was born in '71 and Brian in '73.

DePue: Okay. I'm going to go finish off with some more general questions here about your service, and let's start with this one. You know, the Vietnam War is easily the most controversial war the United States has been in save, perhaps, the Civil War. What do you think about the way a lot of your fellow veterans were treated when they came back home and had been thought of by the American public during the '70s and '80s, perhaps?

Poszgai: I think they're being treated better now than they were then. I don't think a lot of us, when we came home, understood the ill feelings that were coming towards us. We were just asked to go do a job. Then there were all the fellows that went to Canada, and then of course they were finally allowed to come back. But it just didn't make any sense to me, why this particular war was different than any other war, except that there were more demonstrations and college kids that were probably afraid to go to war.

DePue: What did you think about the people who went to Canada?

Poszgai: Well, I was always told that if you were a deserter, you would be shot, and then, of course, there were so many I guess that went to Canada it was probably necessary to bring this country back together by taking the steps that were taken, so.

DePue: You mean President Carter granting amnesty to all of those?

Poszgai: Yes, that's what I mean. You know, we learn that in church as well: you got to forgive. So I think you need to start here at home and forgive there before you can move farther on.

DePue: Do you think your time in Vietnam, the sacrifices that you and your buddies made over there, was justified?

Poszgai: For what I did over there? Most definitely. I wouldn't have had it any other way. Somebody had to be there to get the ball rolling to get this medical equipment repaired on a daily basis. I was happy to be part of the program that actually did that.

DePue: You had quite a few years in the Army. Did that experience change you?

Poszgai: I think I grew up a lot. I think everybody grows up a lot when they go through that, and then they go through a wartime experience as well. I think people grow up.

DePue: So the Vietnam experience—you know, the military experience—changed you; Vietnam intensified some of those changes, perhaps?

Poszgai: Perhaps. Perhaps more street-smart, perhaps more cautious. I can tell you, I don't like being in a crowd of people anymore. It's amazing that I'll go to church and be in a crowd of people even in a church, but at least those are neighborhood people that I pretty much know. But if I go downtown, I'm pretty uncomfortable. We just recently had a car show down there, all the old antique cars and all that. I take the wife down there every year, but it's a real step for me to go down there. I just don't like to be in crowds of people; I like to have a lot of distance in between myself and other people.

DePue: That goes back to those days of looking into the village and seeing all the people and not knowing if they're friend or foe?

Poszgai: I suppose it does. And then for a while, when I was repairing commercial laundry equipment, I repaired in a lot of areas where there was a lot of low income and poverty, and you didn't want to take a chance on getting mugged down there either.

DePue: Looking back on your experiences, are you proud that you served in the Army and proud that you went to Vietnam?

Poszgai: I am proud, and I wouldn't trade any of it for anything. If I had to choose and relive it over again, I would be one of those that would go right on through and re-do it all.

DePue: What would you say to young men and women today who are thinking about joining the military? And we're talking at a time when we've got troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan facing the same kind of challenges.

Poszgai: Our freedom needs to be defended all over the world. If we have it come to our shores, it'll be harder to defend. We need to go elsewhere to defend our freedom.

DePue: Any final words, then, Roger?

Poszgai: I'd just like to take this opportunity to say thank you for the interview.

DePue: Well, it's been a pleasure to hear your story, and it's important to get it recorded, so thank you.

Poszgai: You're welcome.

(end of interview)