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**Interviewer:** James Easton  
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**Easton:** Ok.— we're going to start — I'm going to have you guys introduce yourselves starting with Uncle John [John Gregory].— Basically tell us a little about your lives before you got involved in Vietnam.

**J. Gregory:** Ok — my name's John Gregory and I was a Chief Warrant Officer in the United States Army and served in Vietnam from October 1969 thru mid 1971 and prior to that I was a high school student and I had gone to Europe to study for the summer at the University of Paris — the Sorbonne — and on returning I decided that instead of pursuing my law degree I thought I would go into the Army — I volunteered and I wanted to see what was happening in Vietnam. How about you Diana?

**D. Gregory:** Diana Gregory — Army Nurse, worked in the Operating Room and 1967 I was attending an all girls Catholic school — kind of isolated but I had a very good friend and she told me about the program that if you go into the Army they would pay for your last two years of school and we were starving students and my dad had been in the Navy and her dad Army and we were very patriotic and when there was a war going on we decided that we wanted to join with the intent that we were going to volunteer to go to Vietnam once we finished our training.

**Easton:** Excellent — Uncle John — When did you first begin hearing about Vietnam, and what did you know of it before getting involved?

**J. Gregory:** Ok, I think I first heard about it with the Kennedy Administration and Kennedy began sending advisors and almost every night you would see news clips on CBS, NBC, ABC, with escalation of more and more advisors going over there and then by Tet of '68 which was a period of when there was all out enemy attacks throughout all of S. Vietnam by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army — this was on the news constantly and it was about that time I entered the Army — to become a pilot with the intent of flying DUSTOFF.

**Easton:** You both volunteered — that's awesome. Aunt Diana I guess we will go with the same question. What did you hear about Vietnam that really made you want to get involved?

**D. Gregory:** I just always wanted to be involved. About that was the time of the Detroit Riots and my girlfriend and I volunteered down there in the middle of the riots after being pulled out of buildings that were burning where we were doing volunteer work, which of course the Nuns were ready to kill us for later. But we were always involved in anything going on. Since there were wounded over there and we were going to be nurses, that's what we wanted to do. And at

the time I was a very strong Democrat — I was a Kennedy Democrat, and out there and everything and this just seemed — it's what you did. Everything for the country — Very patriotic and very proud of it.

**Easton:** What was your training like?

**J. Gregory:** Basic Training — typical Army, Fort Polk, Louisiana. Didn't like it at all. After Fort Polk, went to Fort Walters, Texas for Warrant Officers candidate training, and then from there to Fort Rucker, Alabama for advanced helicopter training. And then from there I went to Fort Sam Houston for an Aero-Medical course called AMEDS and that is where I met Diana. She was taking her basic —

**D. Gregory:** My Basic

**J. Gregory:** Your basic — And then from there she was assigned to San Francisco The Presidio and then I saw her again, I went through San Francisco on my way to Oakland to be sent to Vietnam.

**Easton:** Aunt Diana, What was your training like?

**D. Gregory:** After graduating from the nursing college and taking my state boards, we had to do that first to pass the others, then went to Fort Sam, Texas for 6 to 8 weeks of basic training, that's where I met Uncle John, then because Kathy and I, my buddy Kathy and I both wanted to go to Vietnam we signed up for a special course to get to be operating nurses in Vietnam. So I went to San Francisco, that was a fun experience, we were there for 17 weeks and got to see a lot of — John — go to see a lot of cousins and friends and people that we knew from basic and other places would stop over in San Francisco on the way over a lot of dinners at our little place and say goodbye. As a matter of fact my cousin, spent his last days in the States with us there — he was killed over in Vietnam. But our apartment kind of played in the transfer of a lot of people coming and going, good friends and memories.

**Easton:** Do you feel your training prepared you for Vietnam?

**J. Gregory:** Oh Yeah. Sure. But I think that as a pilot you really learn in combat. Your not very good until you get about 300 hours — your dangerous. And over all yeah I think the training was OK.

**Easton:** Aunt Diana? [Same Question.]

**D. Gregory:** We didn't see daylight all the time in San Francisco. We were there early in the morning, it was still dark until long after dark. All the other roommates, there were 5 of us that was sharing one of those great big huge houses and they had regular schedules and the two of us that were in training — it was constant — it was very intense, but beginning we were new

graduates and that really was hard, because even a new graduate nurse is usually has a preceptor and such. And we had that training going over there, still kind of incompetent and unsure of yourself and it was a little scary.

**J. Gregory:** As far as preparing yourself for combat you really learn something from the people who have already been there. You know the guys, the old guys. You're a "Newbie" when you first arrive. And it probably takes a few months before you start getting that combat, 50 mission crease type thing, where you start having confidence.

**D. Gregory:** It's a funny feeling when the planes coming in and landing. The trip over was horrible. When landing we were told to disembark quickly, get off the pad and go straight in, and all this kind of stuff. And all of a sudden it hits you, there's somebody trying to shoot at our plane (laughs) You know what I mean. I'm this young 21, 22 year old girl what am I doing here? It was a very strange kind of sensation, I mean at the moment.

**Easton:** That actually leads to the next question, which is: Explain how you came to Vietnam and what your first impressions were? And we'll continue with Aunt Diana.

**D. Gregory:** Well the planes were the Flying Tigers and they had a contract to pack in as many people as they possibly can with the least amount of services. The toilets were blocked, there was no place to drink, everyone was sick by the time we landed. Our knees were on our chins, and that was a long flight over. We were really, really miserable. Actually when we landed, I was probably the only happy person in Vietnam because Uncle John was waiting for me when I got off the flight. So I was quite excited and pleased to see him there. That was a long day.

**Easton:** And Uncle John?

**J. Gregory:** My flight was pretty much the same. Landed in Vietnam and at the replacement center and from there we were sent to the 45<sup>th</sup> medical company in Saigon — in Long-Bien from there we were to get our assignments to go out to the various DUSTOFF units, all the DUSTOFF units needed replacements. And there was an interesting thing that happened. There was a fellow at the 45<sup>th</sup> and he had been accused of cowardice — OK

**D. Gregory:** We don't have to put his name in there — I mean we mentioned before not to mention his name for his families sake.

**J. Gregory:** There was a fellow and he has been accused of cowardice by as Colonel Rolex. We say Rolex instead of Roland. And I had asked a number of people, being a brand new guy in Vietnam and a little scared and not knowing exactly where I was going — How come this Colonel is calling the Warrant a coward? And I asked this from the executive officer, a major, and he told me that he was no coward. And I even asked the pilot, I said "Hey, What happened?" And he explained to me that they were going in for an emergency pickup and at the last moment he felt that if he went into that pick up, he would be killed. No one else would be

killed in the helicopter, but he would be killed. And I guess this had really made the Colonel mad, he was an aircraft commander on that flight, and the Colonel decided he was going to punish him by sending him to the 57<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment, which is known as the original DUSTOFF. And at a meeting we had the Colonel explained to all of us that he wouldn't be a bit surprised if no one wanted to volunteer for the 57<sup>th</sup> as replacements because he would be going there with a coward, he was sending him there to die. He used the words I'm going to send him there, and he's going to die.

**D. Gregory:** A lot of people died there.

**J. Gregory:** The 57<sup>th</sup> had a high mortality rate. And anyway as they got us all into a little bar in the 45 Medical Detachment, and we were supposed to select the units we wanted to go to and after he gave this lecture about sending this pilot to the 57<sup>th</sup> Medical Attachment to die as punishment, he asked if anybody wanted to go to the 57<sup>th</sup>, so I raised my hand, and he basically said, the Colonel basically said "I can't believe you are willing to fly with a coward." And another hand went up in the bar by the name of Jack Freidman, he was a practicing attorney from Fort Lauderdale who decided he wanted to see what the war was like so he was taking an absence from his job at th law firm. And so Jack, myself, and the pilot were sent up tot eh 57<sup>th</sup> Medical Attachment in Lai Kai, Vietnam. When we were boarding the aircraft to go to Lai Kai, one of the Crew Chiefs an Afro American by the name of Hendrix, who was rather militant, it was a militant time, he came up to me, I was sitting in the Hell Hole, and he said "Hey Mr. Gregory, are you ta pilot", and I pointed to my wings and said, "Yeah I guess so. And he said "I'll tell you when your going to be a pilot". So anyway, we ended up at the 57<sup>th</sup>.

**Easton:** How was life in Base camp?

**J. Gregory:** Lai Kai was in an area known as the Iron Triangle, and it would be rudimentary, when we arrived, Jack and I, we were told by the billeting officer where we would be staying. He took a stick and drove it into the ground and said "That's where you're gonna stay". Well Jack and I were able to procure from an old gunship company area of Lai Kai, where they had abandoned their base, we went in and scavenged their entire bar and some of their Hooches, and we built our own place. We built ourselves a nice place. About 20 feet wide by 40 feet long, and complete with bar and mattresses.

**Easton:** Aunt Diana?

**D. Gregory:** Actually I was supposed to go to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field hospital with Kathy, because we were guaranteed buddy system together in Saigon, but since I had met Uncle John at basic, and Kathy was very understanding that I wanted to be with him. So my hospital to be sent to Saigon, it was all white starch uniforms which Kathy was very disappointed, because she was the combat boot type. She was wearing starch uniforms. Uncle John had manage to get in and talk to the Chief Nurse before I got there. And when I went in to get my assignment, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field in Saigon was marked off, just in pencil and the 3<sup>rd</sup> surgical, where Uncle John was at was written in. So I

got to go down there, and it was kind of, it had our quarters down there were wooden buildings, 2 story wooden buildings and all the officers had 8 by 8 room. It was little. Cement floor, screened front with wooden slats so the air could come in, supposedly it was for privacy Very Hot, and it only had a bed and a dresser, and that was it.

**Easton:** We're going to switch up the questioning a little bit. Can you describe what your first combat experience or your first DUSTOFF experience was?

**J. Gregory:** Probably not the 1<sup>st</sup>, but one of the 1<sup>st</sup> ones. We were — we were in our Aircraft, we had come in from a mission, I don't remember the mission, and we were parked in our area near some aircraft revetments, and there was this Ice Cream stand, like a Dairy Queen, and I had gotten out of the aircraft and I had gotten 4 Milkshakes. 2 for the crew members, 1 for the pilot, and 1 for myself. And I was walking back to the helicopter, the aircraft commander started to bring up the RPM up to 6,600 RPM from idle, which indicated to me I better rush because he wanted to get out of there. Probably an emergency mission. And so I rushed spilling a little bit of the Milkshakes. I got inside and handed out the Milkshakes, and all this was being done while aircraft commander is swinging the aircraft around and we're taking off. And it was a mission to follow a LOACH (Light Observation Helicopter) that was going to lead us to the location of 2 severely wounded Emergency, life and death 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division soldiers. As we were following this LOACH, we were doing low level, in what's known as the Iron Triangle area, over triple canopy jungle. And we were probably just a few hundred yards behind this LOACH, at about 200, 250 feet above the ground, when it suddenly disappeared, we couldn't find him. And we started looking everywhere. "Hey, where's the aircraft we were following?" And as we swung around, we saw smoke coming out of the triple canopy jungle, and apparently the LOACH had crashed. So we circled, and once we were able to identify that that there were Friendlies in the area, we went in to check out the aircraft. And everybody on that LOACH that we had just been following to lead up to the other pick-up, they were dead. They were fried. And I remember, while we were sitting on the ground I noticed there were ashes from the bodies that we had put in the helicopter had flown into the Milkshake that I had at my feet. And I wasn't about to drink that knowing that, so we took off and we went back to our base camp at Lai Kai to drop off the 2 killed in action. While we were sitting there I remembered looking down at my Milkshake and thinking, should I drink this. I mean it had the ashes that had blown off of these guys' and the other pilot said to me "Oh be a man, drink it". So I drank it. That's probably one of my early missions that I remember.

**Easton:** Aunt Diana, can you remember your first experience?

**D. Gregory:** I can remember one of the very first surgeries I was in. It was a guy's leg, a GI's leg was pretty bad, and we were going to try to do a vein graph to save it. You couldn't do a whole lot then, it was something fairly new, especially in a combat area. Because we really were a surgical hospital. You couldn't get into us except by helicopter. So we were out in the field. So they asked for special equipment to dye the veins so you could identify them when taking them out. I can remember kneeling down in front of the cart where all the special things were at,

which was very specialized, and feeling so horrible. Oh my god, I've never done this before. (Whisper) People were shot and killed. Like, what am I doing here.

**Easton:** Also, I guess this is another change in the questioning, What was your impression of the country itself, like the landscape and the surroundings?

**D. Gregory:** When you flew over it all you saw were pot-holes. It didn't matter where you went, you saw the craters from the bombs. Every place. At first, looking down you think all these little lakes, then it hits you, they are just pot-holes all over the place. And we went downtown a couple of times. We weren't supposed to, but we went downtown, and I got pictures of the kids and the mama-sons, and the papa-sons, and the market downtown. And they treated us very nice. You know, they were probably all VC down there, but they treated us nice anyway. A warm friends people, a very warm friend people. A lot of them worked on those — it was a standard joke, that they were just getting ready to set the mines. But they were friendly and warm, they seemed to like us a lot. I think that there was a lot of good stuff. The we did get very involved with an orphanage downtown too. We spent time doing that.

**Easton:** Would you like something else to drink, some tissues?

**D. Gregory:** Not really —

**Easton:** Are you sure? What was the weather like?

**D. Gregory:** I got a postcard from Kathy who was in Saigon, I still have it, I could show you the card. It was a picture of an alligator, or a dragon and it folded open, and this ugly looking dragon is laying across this gigantic hollow, and it said "How are things on your end of the swamp?" The Monsoon was really something. It's funny, because some of my memories going back are about being out, because you had to get out and nobody had umbrellas. And I remember, walking through this one place and the puddles were huge. And just like a kid, marching through the puddle thinking I love these combat boots. They were really cool. A lot of rain. Lot's and lots of rain.

**J. Gregory:** You know you talk about one of the first missions. One of the first missions that I remember too, probably even more important then the other one. Is one with the pilot who had been sent to die, the fellow who had been sent to the 57<sup>th</sup> DUSTOFF, the original DUSTOFF to be killed by the Colonel. We were second up. We would have three different aircrafts up at any one time. 1<sup>st</sup> up, 2<sup>nd</sup> up, 3<sup>rd</sup> up. 1<sup>st</sup> up on this day was his, and an aircraft commander by the name of Hall, Thomas Hall. And we were 2<sup>nd</sup> up, no no no, we were 3<sup>rd</sup> up, and we were on stand-by to go and spend three days in Dao Tiang, which was N-NW of Lai Kai. And this pilot, the night before our scheduled flights, had come into our Hooch carrying a cane, and he was in a pretty sad mood, and he started striking. He was an electrician in real life, and he had become a pilot just like the rest of us. And hew as striking the florescent lights with his cane. It was actually a pornographic cane, and he was hitting the lights and the light fixtures, because we had

run the electrical wires, but we needed an electrician to hook up everything. And he had promised he would do it, but that night when he came into our Hooch, the night before this the flight the next day. He told us he wasn't ever going to hook up our electrical. And we asked him why. And he said because tomorrow, I'm going to be dead by 10 o'clock. And with that he walked out and went back to his Hooch. We sort of looked at each other and I guess I got volunteered, so I went and followed him to his Hooch and I wanted to know if he was OK. And he explained to me that he could understand my concern, and not to worry because he wasn't going to do anything to himself. Because when someone tells you they're going to be dead at a certain time the next day it makes you worry. So I left him with that. He didn't want any company. And the next day, he was going out to his aircraft and we hadn't left yet. Phil Porter and I, my Aircraft Commander, for Dao Tiang for a field stand-by, and I walked over to the helicopter where this pilot was just getting aboard with his Aircraft Commander Hall and I told him I said "Hey, why don't you just not go out if you feel that you're going to be dead?" and I said I'll take your place, because I could always find somebody else to take my place for the field stand-by in Dao Tiang. And he said No, that's head to go on the flight. And they took off about 15 minutes earlier than we did for our leaving to go to the Dao Tiang standby. In route to the Dao Tiang standby, we intercepted their radio, telephone conversation where they had been called to do an extraction for I believe it was the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division soldiers with high speed hoist for an extraction, that's where the helicopter goes in. In that area it would be at about 200 feet, you lower the jungle penetrator, and you begin lifting up the wounded, usually 2 at a time. And they went in for that pick-up, and since we were listening to their radio/telephone conversations we immediately diverted our course to just hand around them, circle them while they were doing this extraction because hoist missions are very dangerous. And as we approached, Tom Hall suddenly yelled over the radio that his pilot was hit. And he lifted up, actually dragging the hoist out of the trees. And he could have cut the hoist, but that's something that the DUSTOFF pilots try to always avoid if they could. And as soon as they left, we went in. What we didn't know as we proceeded to extract the soldiers was that this pilot had been shot directly through the heart. And he was dead. Well, we entered immediately and continued the extraction, and while hovering in the hover hole, my crew chief, an Afro American by the name of Hendrix, the same one who kidded me about I'll let you know when you're going to be a pilot. He asked me permission to fire, he wanted to take out an NVA North Vietnamese Army sniper that was at my 1 o'clock at about 6 meters off my rotor blade as we were hovering 200 feet, with the Jungle Penetrator going down. And had a clear shot of the NVA sniper. And I ordered him to put his —79 Grenade Launcher down, and to get back on the hoist, because I needed him to help guide the hoist as well as position the aircraft, because we were totally dependent on the crew members to tell us how high, left, right, forward, backward. We used to work as a really good team. And he was very mad about that. I remember looking out to my 1 o'clock and I could see the NVA sniper, he had a Pith Helmet, the proverbial NA soldier, and very young. And he lowered his rifle and he never lifted it again during the whole extraction. Meanwhile, I did give information to the people on the ground that the sniper, where this sniper was located, and they assured me that they were working some people over to his area and they would get him. As soon as we were finished with the extraction, I believe it was 8 people, we started to leave and just as I was leaving the Ground Commander said "We got the guy who shot the co-

pilot”.

**Easton:** This is a question. Did you guys have any time on leave, and if you did, how long did you spend your time on leave?

**D. Gregory:** Well we went to Hong Kong together. A week in Hong Kong.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah, that was nice.

**D. Gregory:** The food was fantastic.

**Easton:** You both went together? That’s excellent.

**J. Gregory:** Then I went to Bangkok. Myself, and then I also met Diana in Hawaii. I’m not so sure that was, Diana had already returned to the states, she had to leave Vietnam a few weeks early under orders to become a Army Recruiter for the Tri-State area. What was it Indiana, Michigan, Illinois? [Agrees] It was a tough time to be a Recruiter. Rotten Eggs and whatever. People didn’t want you on their campuses. But I actually, I won’t say it’s AWOL, because I had orders that allowed me to enter and leave the country at my discretion, due to something that I was doing for the government. I had been assigned as an air-mission Commander for Cambodia, and I was in Saigon and I was picked-up by some MP’s for being out after curfew. Actually I had gone out to interview a Colonel who a Vietnamese soldier by the name of Lt. Keen had told em that this Colonel had been the one who shot President Diem in the head at the railroad tracks, as president Diem was leaving the country after the Diem Coup. So I decided I would go up to Saigon and go up to the Choulong Area and interview this Colonel, so I dressed up in these civilian cloths. But when I arrived at the house I rang the bell and a man came to the front gate dressed like a servant with white, short tailed tux, very formal looking guy. He asked me what I wanted, and I told him I was there to ask some questions to the Colonel about the assassination of Diem. I wanted to find out is it CIA, you know, who did this.

**D. Gregory:** This is just on his own you know. Not part of an assignment, this is Uncle John.

**J. Gregory:** Right. Lt. Keen the Vietnamese officer who had given me this information, because he had a cousin who knew somebody, who knew somebody. So anyway, and if I did not give his name. He did not want to be involved. They gave me this information. So by the time I got to the Colonel’s place it was about 5:30-6 in the evening, and I rang the bell, the man came to ask me what I wanted, and I explained to him. He told me “One Moment” and he left, and went back into the house. I thought Wow, Maybe I’m going to get in there, have some tea, maybe a cup of coffee, and talk a while with the Colonel and ask “Hey, Why did you shoot President Diem in the head? And while I’m waiting, suddenly I realized that he was coming back, I saw him coming back first, the guy who was wearing the white tux looking thing. But then suddenly there were about 7 or 8 Vietnamese that were coming very fast, dressed in blue and blue baseball caps, all carry M-16’s. And before I knew it they had all these M-16’s pointed at me. So I was sort of



backing up saying, wrong address, made a mistake. I think I'll leave. I didn't want to turn my back because I believed they would shoot me. They actually had their weapons aimed at my head, they weren't friendly. And just as I'm sort of backing up, getting ready to, should I just turn or walk away, quietly, a jeep came around the corner with 2 MP's, Military Police. And they picked me up for being past curfew. They both kept asking me, do you have any orders that allow you to be in the Choulong area with civilian clothes after curfew. I kept telling them no, when in actuality I did carry orders that allowed me to enter and leave the country at my discretion. And they were top secret so nobody could really question what I was doing. So I didn't give them my orders. Mainly, I just wanted a ride out of there. You know. I might have gotten killed if it wasn't for these MP's. So do you want to hear this stuff [Agree]. So they kept asking me, "Can you just show us anything", and I explained that I was a Warrant Officer, but I didn't have anything to show them. So they'd stop at an intersection, and they'd say something like, "Last time we stopped here at this intersection the soldier that we had in the back jumped out of the jeep, ran down that street, made a left and he was gone and we couldn't catch him, and he is probably staying over in one of those all night bars, and that there's some really good ones over there, and there's no way we could catch them. They went to the next block, same thing. Finally they got to the point of being perturbed and said "Look Sir, just show us anything. Tell us anything!!! You Know, We'll let you go". They really didn't want to bring me in. And I was certainly grateful that they picked me up when they did, because I'm not sure I'd be here today. But finally I decided to say that I do have some orders. And I showed them the orders I had in my back pocket, and when the MP read that, the specialist read that, he said "My god sir, you know with orders like this you could go home. You could go all the way back home if you want. That's what I'd do if I had orders like this, you know." And he said sir, why don't you have us bring you to the airport, and you can ask for an airplane, and because of these orders, they got to give you the airplane." I told them I really can't do that. He said "Sure you can sir. And could you take us with you, all we'll do is call back and they'll send some people to secure our jeep and we'll go with you." So I said, take me to Ton Son Nuet anyway, so they took me to Ton Son NUET to a room where there was a specialist there for the flights and I asked him when the next flight was leaving Vietnam. Now I had no orders per se to leave Vietnam, and no R&R Rest and Recuperation orders or anything. But I asked when the next flight leaving Vietnam was. And, kind of sarcastic, he said "Sir I've seen orders like this before, the last person who had orders like this had me bump people off the flight just so he could go on R&R." I think that's wrong. I said you don't understand, I want the next flight out of Vietnam that has an empty seat. He said there was one leaving for Hawaii, so I said I'll take it. The MP's were really kind of upset because they really wanted me to take them. They said "Sir, just say you need us and we have to go with you. "I said no, I can't do that. So anyway, I went to Hawaii and when I landed in Hawaii I called Diana in Michigan and right away she contacted her officer, her commanding officer, and you could probably explain that [Diana].

**D. Gregory:** Actually it was late at night when I got the call at home and I was doing recruiting and counseling at that time. I got the call that John was going to be in Hawaii for a week. So at 2 o'clock in the morning I called the airlines and made the reservations to leave, and I'm still on active duty, to go to Hawaii. And I packed my bags, and I went to work in my old Army car and

I got in and I had my own Sergeant who worked with me, so I went into the Commanders office at the recruiting base and said "Sir I would like to take leave for a week." And I had just gotten there short time ago, and he looked at me. Because John was in Hawaii, and they knew I was dating John, he looked at me and said "Well, when can you get a flight out". And I said my flight leaves this afternoon at 3 o'clock. He turned to Sergeant Gates and he said, "Can you drive her to the airport?" So yeah, they cut the orders, and I headed to Hawaii for a week. That was my second trip to Hawaii while I was still in Vietnam I was almost a full year in Vietnam, just short a few weeks but while I was there I took another R&R I met my parents in Hawaii for a week.

**Easton:** Did you work with any South Vietnamese, particularly the ARVN, and what were they like compared to American Soldiers?

**J. Gregory:** It certainly depended on the unit you worked with. And yes I did work with a lot of Vietnamese. I actually was given orders to instigate an aero-medical capacity within the Vietnamese Air Force. In fact that's where I met Lt. Keen, the one who gave me information about the Colonel, who had been the one, who has a Captain had shot, as a Major excuse me, had shot president Diem in the head. And these Vietnamese pilots, we used their aircraft's, all their assets. And we flew with tower prototype situation where there would be 1 American pilot 1 Vietnamese pilot on board, 1 Vietnamese crew member and 1 American crew member. And one of the important things there from the very beginning, what was important was that we treat the Vietnamese pilots with the same respect we treat our own. And it may seem like a small thing, but when we would go to our operations and wait on our missions, there'd be no place for the Vietnamese to spend the night or rest. Nobody really wanted to give them a bed. They didn't really care. So I insisted that any of the Vietnamese enlisted sleep in the beds, that an American enlisted give up his bed for the Vietnamese enlisted. And that American officers do the same thing for the Vietnamese officers. And I think that these Vietnamese loved the respect that they got, and they loved Flying DUSTOFF. Lt. Keen, I became very fond of Lt. Keen, because when I was initially instigating this program I needed select Vietnamese pilots. Lt. Keen had advised me not to utilize or waste my time trying to recruit Buddhist pilots because they do not have in their sight the concept of giving ones life to save another. As your Christian type, and I'm not getting into religious thing, I'm just pointing out the fact that a Buddhist would say "Wasting two lives when there's only one that maybe in jeopardy is stupid. Wasting the equipment which the Vietnamese did not have too much of its stupid, taking a chance that you are going to be shot down loose and aircraft and kill everyone on board to save one person. As the Christian philosophy, whether it's Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, or whatever. Well, not Jewish, Jewish isn't Christian. I've no slight there. What I mean is that here is this idea that no greater love has man but to lay down his life for another. This would not be in the Buddhist concept. And so by utilizing as many Christian type Vietnamese pilots, we were able to set up a really successful program, or Vietnamization of DUSTOFF. And this Vietnamization Era of 1970-1971, when we were attempting to turn over as much work as we were doing over to the Vietnamese. One of the biggest problems that we created in Vietnam was the We can do it better then you, we can do it faster then you. And this gave the Vietnamese the whole philosophy that why should we do it if

you can do it, and you can do it so well.

**D. Gregory:** One of the reasons Uncle John was able to do that was because he speaks French, and most of the Vietnamese spoke French too. As well as when I was in Korea visiting Gene-John and Yali, I went to the military base there and they had an old library. And I was looking at the old things and they talked about that project, and I'm reading about that project, and I know that Uncle John was the main person. His name is not in there and it should have been in there. [Agrees] But that was his project, he was the main key person in setting it up and training and doing all that work. So it's recorded in the history books, they just don't put his name in. I was there. I really was there.

**J. Gregory:** That's one thing, I would like to have gotten a little bit of credit. It was a great program.

**Easton:** That's one of the beauties about this is, is that this is an Oral History and that's how history gets to be more detailed.

**D. Gregory:** Well, he's the one who did it, I was there.

**Easton:** Let's see — Aunt Diana, like I said I think you, I guess you answered part of the same question. How long were you in Country?

**D. Gregory:** I was there just under a year. And I would have finished up my year, except they were very short on someone back here to take over the Detroit area for recruiting and counseling. And I was a perfect candidate for it, so — Uncle John was there a long time.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah, I was there a year and a half.

**D. Gregory:** When I found out he extended for an extra 6 months I just sat and cried. I thought we would both go home together.

**Easton:** So you extended your, your went on more than 1 tour?

**J. Gregory:** No, it would simply be an extension of 1 tour. A tour would be 1 year, or whatever.

**Easton:** How were your feelings towards the war at the actual end of the war?

**J. Gregory:** You mean how it ended?

**Easton:** More, what were your feelings about how it ended? That's a better way to put it.

**J. Gregory:** Well, I think how it ended we're paying for now. Our problem with Vietnam is that time passed us by. You can't fight a war for so many years without the political and geopolitical

aspects changing. By the time the war ended there had already been an Approche-monde between China and the United States through Nixon. Nixon had visited China. Russia and China were not exactly friends anymore. I remember when Kissinger was on Meet the Press. He was talking about some subjects that really had nothing to do with Vietnam per se. When in the of the conversation he injected a statement. And I was sitting in the Florida room in Miami, listening to this and I heard Kissinger say if — He made a casual relation to something. “If the North Vietnamese ever have superiority in the field in Vietnam, we will not come to the aid of the South Vietnamese Army if they lost superiority in the field, it was over with. But I think that today if you look at that we left Vietnam, that we abandoned Cambodia after entering Cambodia and deposing Nordom Sianook. I spend quite a bit of time in Cambodia as an air mission Commander, and I trained Cambodian pilots and worked with senior Cambodian officials. O I developed quite an affinity for Cambodians. But our giving up in Vietnam and giving up in Cambodia and the aftermath of Cambodia with the Kaymer’ Rouge, and hundreds of thousands would be killed. And if you go ahead a few years to Mogadishu — My god it was a foreign aid program where we were trying to deliver food. And the —

END OF TAPE 1

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2

**J. Gregory:** We send a message to individuals such as Osama Bin Ladin, who has actually been quoted as saying, “Hey you left Cambodia, you left Vietnam, and you ran out on Mogadishu”, you know —

**D. Gregory:** They feel bad about that now [Audio Low]??

**J. Gregory:** And I think he expected us to run out of Afghanistan and certainly expects us to run out of Iran.

**D. Gregory:** Probably my views as a woman are a little bit different because I got to know a lot of the mama-sons and the individuals and the people. And there was a very closeness between the Vietnamese who knew us and worked with us. I remember one situation coming into work and one of the mama-sons was acting kind of crazy. It was outside. Quonset Huts, our hospital was a combination of Quonset huts. And the corpsman and I went out back to see her because she was dancing around doing this funny thing, didn’t know what was going on. She came over to me and gave me a big hug. Danced around. Then I found out the VC had come into her hutch last night and had bayoneted her babies. And she was just in hysteria to what was going on. There was a — they really thought we could do anything we could make it better, and I know when we pulled out of Vietnam, it hurt so bad because we walked away. We turned our back on people who really counted on us. If we could have done it any different I don’t know, but he way we turned our back and said we’re not going to do anything, we’re just going to walk away and let the slaughter occur. Those were good people. I think that’s why to this day people like aah that bitch — the actress —

**J. Gregory:** Jane Fonda —

**D. Gregory:** I just despised. Even today, I think still this day she should be hung as a traitor to this country. Today I'm an avid Republican. I felt the whole Democratic Party when I came home — Uncle John and I went and changed our party. We wanted nothing to do with any of the protestors and the government, the whole movement that caused the turning our backs and walking away from these people who were good people, unfairly. Cambodia was like that. Uncle John could tell you some of the pilots he trained. Some of these guys were — one of these guys were educated at Miami-Dade, one was educated at the Sorbonne at France. These were highly educated young guys like us, very very much like us. They were Cambodian. They had this tremendous faith that when they needed us we were going to be there. And Uncle John kept telling them "We're going to turn our backs. We're going to pick up and walk away." Many of them died, fighting to the last man to make a difference for that country. And they really believed that we were going to be there. And so to me all the pressure and the movement here at home caused us to be such traitors in humanity that I've never forgiven them. I'll never be a democrat again. Or ever anything to do with that. The whole psyche changed completely.

**Easton:** How were you treated when you came back to the United States?

**D. Gregory:** Horrible. Uncle John got treated the worst. I remember too. You couldn't talk to anyone. You wanted to get things out and talk but couldn't — I actually did a newspaper article on this thing. You thought it was bad but coming home was worse. It was much worse coming home. Some friends I had over there some of the guys were on a rooftop and the next thing you know jump. I remember one of the guys I known before hand when we were talking back at home, he said "Don't say anything to anybody". I remember calling one of the nurses I went to school with, a very close friend, and it was the last time we talked. They just tried to explain things that were totally different. And I've been there. And it wasn't acceptable to talk. IT was as if you were some kind of drug using monster, and I've never even lit up a Marijuana cigarette, I've never even lit up a regular cigarette in my life. I've never touched any drugs when I was there. A lot of people didn't, but suddenly I was labeled that generation. It just, to this day it makes me very angry I want to deny my whole generation, and everything people associate with it. Very, very angry. Uncle John got treated horrible coming home. He could tell you the story. Really horrendous coming home.

**Easton:** When he comes back in I'll ask him that too. Because I really would like to hear it.

**D. Gregory:** He even took a front — you know when you used to have your cars checked for emissions ever year. This is the minor thing, the other thing was the major thing. He comes back, he had been gone a year and a half. So his car inspection sticker is expired and he goes over to get I renewed, and the guy blast him as being a baby killer. That's why I hate Kerry. He's their claim too — He's responsible for the punishment we got when we came home. Personally, but yeah they yelled at him for being a baby killer because hew as a vietnam Vet. And he tried to explain to them why he was a year and a half late getting his cards. That's what

you got. You had to be some kind of monster if you were a Vietnam Vet. A lot of the homeless guys that you see out there are Vietnam Vets. They just couldn't get over it.

**Easton:** I read a book called *Bloods*, which was an oral history of African American soldiers, and that that one of the main points heard over and over again, that when they got back all of a sudden they were —

**D. Gregory:** They were just thrown out. They were thrown out, they were mistreated. They had nothing to do with them.

**Easton:** They were traitors to the black Civil Rights movement because they joined the Army and that they were automatically seen as drug addicts and couldn't get a job.

**D. Gregory:** Some of these guys were real hero's. These DUSTOFF guys. What they did in DUSTOFF never happened before and will never happen again. I'm not saying that guys today aren't doing it, but they got whole different methods now. These guys would go out in the middle of the night in the middle of a storm. If there was a wounded man, he was not going to be out there more than 20 minutes if it meant getting killed or nearly getting killed to do it. And I know because I used to sit there and wait for him to come home. My chief nurse told me one time — I went down to 80 lbs., and my chief nurse says to me, she says, "Diana, didn't they tell you you're not supposed to fall in love with a helicopter pilot." And I said it's too late for that. Because I would sit and wait for him to come back. It was heroic what they did.

**Easton:** Aunt Diana just vividly answered a question that I wanted to ask you also. How was your welcome when you came back to the United States? How were you treated?

**J. Gregory:** I don't think you wanted to tell anybody you were a Vietnam Vet. I mean you would have gotten spat on. Even the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion would not let you join them. [Agrees]. They treated us bad. To this day neither Diana nor I will ever join an American Legion or join a VFW. Not that their attitude hasn't changed, it has. Mostly because most of them have died and they need replacements. Now they have the Gulf War people, so that's great. Diana was in recruiting, when I got back was in recruiting. And I used to go with her, I was working for her father in Michigan in his boating dealership and I would actually go with her because she would have eggs thrown at her and her car scratched.

**D. Gregory:** I couldn't wear my uniform out.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah, paint thrown on her and what ever. In fact when Diana was getting out of the service, we were both invited to go to Fort Sheridan. We had taken a plane from Detroit Metro to Chicago O'Hare. And from there we took a taxi to go to Fort Sheridan. And Diana was pregnant by this time, so she was wearing civilian clothes, and before getting on the taxi we discussed that she would not put her Captain's bars on her blouse so that no one would know that she was in the military. And she forgot while we were in the taxi, and she was looking in the

mirror pinning on her Captains bars when suddenly the taxi cab driver slammed on his brakes, stopped and ordered us out of the taxi. We didn't understand what was happening. I thought that we were at Fort Sheridan, and he said we were. And he pointed far away, he said "That's Fort Sheridan, get out!!" We walked. So this in the middle of winter.

**D. Gregory:** Seriously.

**J. Gregory:** The Great Lakes are on our right side, Fort Sheridan is off to our Left side about 3/4 of a mile away thru a big wide open field. So Diana and I we paid for the taxi cab and —

**D. Gregory:** I was 4 months pregnant at the time.

**J. Gregory:** She was 4 months pregnant.

**D. Gregory:** They wanted me to stay in the service.

**J. Gregory:** And we started to walk on the fields that looked like a giant parade field towards some buildings. And as we are walking Diana started to go into a hypothermia.

**D. Gregory:** That was a horrible storm.

**J. Gregory:** She was literally turning blue, and I was worried for her, she would have died. And the baby also. So I saw some buildings that I thought were warehouses and I thought I would break one of the doors in. And as I was looking for one of the doors to break in I needed a door that the jam was to the outside so I could hit the door. I went through about three doors and I couldn't see the jam which meant it was on the inside. Finally Diana saying "Quick find a door", I just wanted to shelter her cause she would have died. And I kicked the door in finally, and as I kicked it in the wind just blew that door in. And it wasn't a warehouse, it was a general staff meeting with a 3 Star General at the table. And as I kicked it in I went flying, landed on the General's lap, knocked him off his chair. He called for security. There were other people there and other Generals, Colonels, and the Majors n there, and they all started screaming for security and I couldn't stick around, and I told the General— I didn't know he was the General, cause he didn't have his green jacket on. And I just aid — I knew he was important, he was sitting at the head of the table. And I knew this was a staff meeting. I could see some of the stars on the other officers there. I said excuse me sir, I'll explain in a moment. I'm awfully sorry, and I ran out to get Diana. As soon as I brought her in, this General he took command right away. Right away he straightened up his chair and put Diana on his chair, put his jacket over her shoulders. And believe me, she looked good with three stars on her shoulders. He told me not to worry and that he understood perfectly. He cancelled his security thing. The security arrived but they were sent away. I remember a Major coming up because the General was rubbing Diana's legs and arms. I think it was the Major came up and he started to rub your leg, and the General snapped at him. "Don't touch her leg! Get me female personnel." He wanted female personnel. They brought tea and coffee and they insisted on driving us to the Colonel, we actually it was a General that

we were having cocktails with. And interestingly the Colonel had just been assigned to the Pentagon to begin — what's the term — to begin the post Vietnam Army. To change the Army from Vietnam to Post-Vietnam Army. And what was really interesting, he wanted Diana on his staff in the pentagon. And what I didn't know, Diana had made an agreement with him that she would go and be a member of his staff in the Pentagon if he would put me back in the Army. I had already gotten out of the Army.

**D. Gregory:** That was his idea.

**J. Gregory:** It was yours. He told me it was yours. You and him had discussed.

**D. Gregory:** But I think it was his idea.

**J. Gregory:** It might have been. Anyway, so he had decided he was going to bring me back into the Army.

**D. Gregory:** This was, they just had started a policy that you could stay on if you had kids. I was one of the first pregnant women to stay on.

**J. Gregory:** I think you were the first.

**D. Gregory:** But we wanted to get out and come home.

**J. Gregory:** Anyway, interestingly, on the flight leaving Vietnam. This is a very interesting story. I was the officer in charge for the flight, and being the officer in charge I was the last to embark, and I was the senior officer. When I entered the aircraft, there were 3 senior NCO's in the front and basically when I got on they informed me that these were not my men, that these were their men. And that's fine with me, but they wanted my papers because I was carrying the orders for all these enlisted people. And they demanded that I turn over the orders that I was carrying. I refused, cause those orders were in my name, they were entrusted to me. And I asked them where I should sit. They told me all the way in the back, where they saved me a seat. So as I made my way tot he back of the aircraft, when I made it to my seat someone had urinated on my seat. And I assumed it was the individual in the seat directly beside me that had done that. So when I swooshed off, I didn't want to take the orders in the manila packet to sweet off the urine so I took my hands and I made sure that a lot of the urine went on him. As the flight progressed, the individual beside me actually confessed that he was the one who had urinated in my seat. But they were supposed to have saved me a seat up front. But when I had gotten on there was some enlisted with his feet across the chairs, the seats. That's when they told me my seat was in the back.

**D. Gregory:** These guys were angry because it was hard to be kicked out.

**J. Gregory:** They had been pulled out of their unit. The Army was ashamed of these guys, and



it was a majority black on this aircraft. As I walked back to my seat in the back of the aircraft, some of the people in the outside rows were pulling off my buttons and tugging at my pockets, ripping. It was symbolic, the officer.

**D. Gregory:** The officer and you were white.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah. It didn't bother me, I'm easy to get along with. Excuse me, I'm going home too. So by the time the flight ended though — These people from the time we got on in Saigon, the bathrooms were clogged, which showed you the Army didn't care, they weren't supervising this. I tried to do something about that in the beginning, but the people on the aircraft probably would have killed me if I delayed their flight one moment. By the time we landed at Oakland they were so happy and they all let out a yell. You know, being back on US soil and we were told when we landed at Oakland, which shows you how little concern the civilian authorities and the military authorities had for these returning troops. We were told that we would not be allowed to disembark for 2 to 3 hours to go through customs because there were civilian aircrafts that had to go through customs and that we would not be given an APU. An Auxiliary Power Unit to power the air conditioning on the aircraft.

**D. Gregory:** It was a — what 12 hour or so, cramp flight.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah. They let the pilots off first. And that was humiliating enough. So we were on the airplane in the hot sun on the tarmac, no air conditioning. People covered with urine. These people had defecated in their own clothes. You couldn't use the bathrooms. All the bathrooms had been since leaving were clogged and weren't flowing. You couldn't even walk into those little lavatories, there was just puddles all over the floor and everybody stunk, including me. And while we were sitting there, they finally had stewardesses, flight attendants. They were the ugliest flight attendants you could ever imagine. I don't know where they found 'em/ But they got off, and with that the soldiers began stomping their boots.

**D. Gregory:** Didn't you instigate it. He instigated it.

**J. Gregory:** I had them stomp their boots in cadence.

**D. Gregory:** By now they're a team.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah right. Now they trust me. And there's no way they would harm me. And they started the cadence which shakes the aircraft. And before we knew it the aircraft was surrounded by Jeeps. Some of the jeeps had 50 caliber machine guns mounted on them, MP's. And a Major ordered all officers and NCO's to get off the aircraft. Well the NCO's were not about to get off. By this time the NCO's would have protected me with their lives, so would the enlisted. Being the senior officer and the only officer onboard I got off and went to talk to the Major where he was under the impression from reports from the pilots and flight attendants that there was some sort of mutiny onboard and that the senior NCO's and the officers were probably

taken control of by the enlisted. And they didn't understand that we were the enlisted. So I explained to the Major on the ground and I also took a look at the jeeps and the 50 calibers and I felt a little better because I noticed there wasn't no ammunition in the 50 calibers. But I told them that there was no problem and that I would stay with my men.

**D. Gregory:** They wanted air conditioning.

**J. Gregory:** Yeah. And shortly after that they resolved. One of the few things the enlisted wanted, and the NCO's for the enlisted and myself was that they be given a decent meal, a place to wash, and a thank you. They wanted a thank you. These guys had been grabbed out of different units. They weren't going back as an integral unit they were picked out here and there and drove to Ton Son Nuet and told to get on the plane. They didn't even know each other. It's not like going home with your combat buddies. And once they arrived at Oakland the Army wanted to get rid of them as fast as possible. Just throw them out on the streets, and that was it. No help, no thank you.

**D. Gregory:** No parades. No thank you's.

**J. Gregory:** Nope.

**Easton:** Is there anything you guys would like to add?

**D. Gregory:** Glad I went.

**J. Gregory:** Oh Yeah. It was a good experience. I spent a lot of time in Cambodia too. I loved working with the Cambodians. And Vietnam was a beautiful country. A few years ago when my son John was at West Point he had a chance to go on a tour of Vietnam that would have encompassed going from the Northern part to the Southern tip of Vietnam with a group of West Pointers. He was able to arrange for my youngest son to also accompany him and the West Pointers. He was able to arrange for my youngest son to also accompany him and the West Pointers — Antonio — To accompany the West Pointers on the tour. Both Diana and I had no qualms whatsoever about allowing them to go visit all the rural villages they would be visiting. Go to all the different places that we had time to also. That's how we feel about the Vietnamese. They're very kind, very loving people and we knew they would be very safe.

**Easton:** I want to thank you both very much. This has been a fantastic interview. Today's date is March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006. This interview was done in Miami with John and Diana Gregory. And I appreciate it very much guys.

