William C. Riggs ’64
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[DAVID J.]
MANNES: Today is May 10th, 2016. My name is David Mannes, and I’m here today for an in-person interview at Rauner [Special Collections] Library with Mr. [William C.] “Bill” Riggs. And how are you today?

RIGGS: Lovely, thank you.

MANNES: Yeah. Well, so I want to start this interview off kind of at the beginning and a little before the beginning, so I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your parents: where they’re from, their backgrounds.

RIGGS: My parents were both Midwesterners. My father—actually, they’re both born in northwest Missouri. My father was a physician, surgeon, and my mother initially was a medical technologist. They met while they were each at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit. My father was a resident in surgery; my mother was working in the lab as a medical technologist.

They fell in love and got married in 1941, and my father was—had been in the [U.S.] Army Air Corps Reserves and was called up with the beginning of World War II and served until the end of hostilities in 1945, at which time we were living in officers’ quarters at what is now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in—outside Dayton, Ohio. At the time, there was Wright Field and Patterson Field; they were two separate installations right next to each other. They’ve since consolidated.

My dad was not called into service overseas. He was—although he volunteered several times, he was told that the Army Air Corps had him right where they wanted him, and he didn’t—didn’t want him to go overseas. He helped with the—I was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey. My dad was stationed at—stationed there at the time. It was—it was a large Army Air Corps receiving station, where, I gather, new

recruits and new enlistees, new draftees, new whatever had—were sent there to be processed into the service.

His job was, as I understand it, to convert—help in the conversion of one of the resort hotels into an Army Air Corps field hospital. And so that's—that's what he did. I'm told that we lived there for about six months after I was born and then transferred to Patterson Field.

And while he was there, in Patterson Field, the war was ending. He had—he was consi- —looking at different places to go to set up his practice after the war, and he had two other doctors on his staff who were from the town of Hamilton, Ohio, where I grew up. And they both told him that they needed—they were going to need surgeons in Hamilton after the war was over. Hamilton is about 35 miles southwest of Dayton and north of Cincinnati. And so after looking at some other, more exotic locations, including Boulder, Colorado, and Minot, North Dakota, he settled on Hamilton, and that's where we—that's where I and my two sisters grew up.

My mother was from a farming family, and they moved I think when she was seven or eight years old from there in Missouri to a farm in northern Illinois, where she lived most of her life. And after completing high school. She had—her family was relatively poor, I understand. She was given a chance to go to the University of Oklahoma by one of her aunts, her mother's sister, who had married an oil man in Oklahoma, lucky for her. And so my mother's aunt and her family bankrolled my mother's first year of college at the University of Oklahoma.

While she was there, she got a job as sort of an au pair or nanny to a Presbyterian student minister, who was on—serving at the university. And then he got transferred to Nebraska, and—to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and he and his family asked my mother to accompany his family to Nebraska. So she did and ended up graduating from the University of Nebraska and then moved on to Detroit, to Henry Ford Hospital, where my dad was in resident—residency as a surgeon.

And at that time, while they were there, World War II broke out, the invasion of Poland in 1939, and I think they were transferred to St. Louis [Missouri] for a time before moving to Atlantic City while he was still in the Army Air Corps.

And that's—does that give you enough background?

MANNES: Yeah, no, and they both stayed in the medical profession after—

RIGGS: No, actually, my mother—as soon as I was born and probably beforehand, she became a housewife, which was typical in the '40s and '50s,—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —and she never worked outside the home again.

MANNES: Gosh. So I guess that brings us to your childhood.

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: To the man of the hour. So can you tell me when and where you were born? It sounds like you moved around a lot, but—

RIGGS: A little bit. I—I was born in 1942 in November, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, where my dad was stationed. And, as I say, I'm told that—of course, I have no memory of it, but I'm told that we lived there for about six months after I was born, and then they were transferred to Patterson Field in Ohio. And so after World War II, I grew up in—grew up in Hamilton, went to—went through school there, through elementary and high school. And while I was there, of course, I applied for college and was accepted at Dartmouth and Princeton [University] and a couple of other places and decided on Dartmouth, although I was getting some pressure from some family friends who wanted me to go to Princeton. Nobody in town, in my generation—none of my classmates went to Dartmouth. I was the only one. And people asked me why I came here, and the answer I'd always give is that I liked the songs and I wanted to learn how to ski.

So, I mean,—and academically it was sort of a toss-up between Dartmouth and Princeton, in my mind, and so I came, and I got into the [Dartmouth] Glee Club, and I—and I learned to ski also, so my—two things off my bucket list, and I was—enjoyed my time here. Never regretted the decision.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: I always enjoy coming back.

MANNES: Yeah. I actually want to take you back. I've never been to Hamilton.

RIGGS: Nobody has.

MANNES: I don't really know—

RIGGS: [Laughs.]

MANNES: I don't know what it's like. Can you tell me what—like, it might have changed a lot since—

RIGGS: Sure.

MANNES: —then, but growing up—

RIGGS: I think it has.

MANNES: —can you tell me what the neighborhood was like?

RIGGS: My—when I was growing up, it was a heavily industrial town in the great Miami River Valley, which is really part of the Ohio Valley system, about 25 miles from Cincinnati. Heavily industrial. A large German population and a large population of people who had migrated from the South, specifically from Kentucky and Tennessee to find work in the factories, you know, in the northern Midwest.

At the time I was growing up, the prim- —there were some major industries there, and we learned about them when we were in school. It was a source of pride, for example, that the vault in which the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence are stored in the National Archives in Washington [D.C.] were made in Hamilton. There

was a large—there were two large safe manufacturing companies there, Mosler Safe [Company] and Herring-Hall Marvin [Safe Company]. I don't know what happened to Herring-Hall Marvin, but Mosler I think was eventually acquired by Diebold [Inc., now Diebold Nixdorf] [pronouncing it DEE-bold] or Diebold [pronouncing it DIE-bold], however you pronounce it. And so that—there was a lot of heavy industry there.

There was also a foundry, a large—large foundries. Champion [International] Paper had its world headquarters in Hamilton. Fisher Body, which was a division of General Motors [Company] at the time, was responsible for making the—the body panels for all of the General Motors line of vehicles. At the time, there were five automobiles, and, you know, the truck lines. I don't know if they made farm equipment or not, but they had all of the major automobile parts for all the General Motors vehicles. All the body parts were—were stamped out in the Fisher Body plant in Hamilton.

Bendix Corporation, which in Hamilton made jet engine parts, was—was located there. And there was another paper mill in Hamilton besides Champion Paper, called Beckett Paper [Company]. They make fine papers for—you know, like stationery, business cards, that sort of thing, corporate reports.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: Champion made what was called coated paper, which is the—the slick paper that's used in, again, company brochures and magazines, such as and including *TIME* and *LIFE* and *National Geographic*. And, you know, anytime you see a slick paper document, usually a magazine, it's often made by—by Champion.

So there was a lot of prestigious industry, major industry in—in the town also. There was a diesel locomotive works in the ci- —in the town, called Baldwin-Lima-Hamilton at the time. It was a—had been combined from Baldwin—Baldwin [Locomotive] Works, which is from upstate New York, and Lima is a town in northeast Ohio—northwest Ohio, sorry. And Hamilton, of course, is Hamilton, Ohio. And they made

diesel locomotives and other industrial engines and engine parts, including for the military.

Most of those have now gone or been—Champion is still there, but as far as the other industries are concerned, the corporate headquarters for most of them have moved elsewhere, to New York or elsewhere in the country. But at that time, it was a booming industrial city, and it had a population of between 65[,000] and 75,000 people. I don't think it's that big anymore. And I haven't been back since my mother died in 1995, so the last time I was there was kind of a melancholy place. Now the circumstances were melancholy, but the town was melancholy.

MANNES: To match, yeah.

RIGGS: Actually, I went back there subsequent to that. My wife is a graduate of the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati. She's a musician and the chair of the opera department at Peabody Conservatory [sic; Peabody Institute] in Baltimore [Maryland], which is part of the Johns Hopkins [University]. And she went back to be on a—on a jury, I think, to hear some singers competing for a prize. And I went with her, and we drove through Hamilton on the way—on the way back, and I hardly recognized a lot of the place. It was—and I—I have no reason to go back there.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: All of my friends have moved away, and most of them, the ones I keep in touch with, live elsewhere, so—but with the advent of Facebook, I've—a lot of them have popped up again.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: And I enjoy that, actually, but I—I—I don't anticipate going back to Hamilton unless somebody has a good reason to want me to come back.

We live in Maryland now. We live on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, right across the bay from Annapolis [Maryland].

MANNES: Right.

So you described the physical and kind of the industrial base of the city. How about the people who live there? You mentioned briefly a large German population, migration from the South.—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: How did—what was the general—I mean the average person like in Hamilton, and how did that compare to your family, coming from two educated parents?

RIGGS: Yeah. The—I went to public schools. I think everybody I knew here went to public or parochial school. I only knew one or two people who went to prep schools. A couple of guys went to—were having trouble functioning in a public school environment and went to a military academy for a while, but everybody—it was pretty well integrated socially, melting pot of people in the schools, so my—my good friends in school were—were sons of other professionals, sons and daughters of other professional people but also sons and daughters of factory workers. Most of them were highly skilled because of the nature of the work.

MANNES: Mm-hm.

RIGGS: They worked in paper mills or in, you know, automobile plants. It was—you know, there was, I guess,—I mean, I was not aware of any hierarchy. The neighborhood that I lived in was—was—initially was comfortably middle class and—and remained so. My—my family moved to a new house, a different house, I should say, in 1960, when I was a senior in high school, and—but they moved only two blocks away into a bigger house and a slightly nicer neighborhood. But most everybody was sort of in it together.

Racially, the—the city was—was segregated geographically. The schools were not segregated. There was clearly a lot of racial prejudice, but it wasn't as—as pronounced, in my view, as it is—as it was at the time in—in other parts of the country, in the South, for example.

When I was—until I was in high school, everybody in my class was—was white. Everybody was Caucasian or Asian. I moved into high school. Then I was fully integrated. And that's by virtue of geography. And you could argue about, you know, why the geographical segregation occurred, and I think, you know, there are some not too admirable reasons why that's true. The less desirable places in town to live were on the—excuse me, on the east side of town, and we lived on the west side, the east and west being divided by the Great Miami River, which is a river that flows down through southwestern Ohio. It goes through Dayton and—and—and Hamilton and on into the Ohio River just east of Cincinnati.

But once we were into an integrated school environment, you know, I became friends with quite a few of the African-American students. I mean, they—they participated in all the sports. They participated in—I was in—in chorus and—and drama, and they were—they were right there with me, so I probably got an unrealistic view of how bad things were racially, on a national scale, but in a sense, I'm—I'm glad that—that I did because it deferred my having to ask some hard questions and observe some things that I probably—you know, I don't know how I would have reacted if I had been—if I'd grown up in a less tolerant environment.

MANNES: Would you say Hamilton was insulated, then, from kind of the national [cross-talk; unintelligible; 19:39]?

RIGGS: I guess so. In a—in a—in a sense it was, because—just by virtue of—of who lived there. There were plenty of African-Americans who lived in—who worked in—in the plants and the factories and who taught in the schools, and there were a few African-American physicians, but they largely served African-American patients. There were African-American people on the police force. They tended to get stationed in African-American precincts.

Of course, they always say that the most segregated hour in the week is the hour between 11 and 12 and Sunday morning, when church is in—church is going on. And that was true. I mean, I grew up in a—in a Methodist household, a very nominal Methodist household. I went through Sunday school and confirmation class and sang in a choir, and—but

as far as religious indoctrination was concerned, it was pretty low key for me and for most of my—my companions.

I got off the track a little bit, but that's—

MANNES: Yeah, no, thank you.

RIGGS: —it'll give you a flavor of what it—

MANNES: Yeah. So I guess kind of on that—you touched on briefly your course in drama, but what else did you do kind of extracurricularly, let's say, outside of school?

RIGGS: Yeah. I'm not very athletic, so I didn't do much athletically, but actually when I got to Dartmouth and went through the phys ed program in the freshman year, I learned to ski, and in the fall quarter, I—fall trimester, I was on freshman crew, and I'd never been exposed to that before. I also learned to play tennis in the spring trimester.

In the summer, my family would often go up to northern Michigan on vacation. This was in sort of a pre-air conditioned era, and southern Ohio was a pleasant place to—to live, but there's nothing much about it to recommend it for outdoor recreation. Largely, you know, farms and suburban stuff.

But—and my dad loved cool weather, as did my mother, and so we—we—they found some places—and some—some friends of theirs often vacationed up in northern Michigan in the summer because it's cool and the lakes are pretty and clear, and fishing is good, and learned how to sail, and so we did all that. And I learned to sail. And that—now that we live in Maryland, we've continued that. My wife and I own a sailboat. We live right—in a community that's right on the Chesapeake Bay, and so my other pursuits and other interests included not just sailing and swimming and water sports but also we—as a family, we—we raised bird dogs, pointers mostly. And so my dad and I would train the dogs, and we—when I was old enough, we'd—we'd go hunting together, hunt quail and pheasants and—and in the off-season, we would compete in trap shooting and skeet shooting.

And I was also interested in—in art. I loved to draw, and I was—I—as long as I can remember, my mother would—would go to the stationery store, and she'd bring home stacks of tablets and blank paper, and I would just draw. And I would draw comic strips that I would invent myself, and I gradually learned how to do—make things. My mother was a wonderful inventive and creative person. She could make anything. She used to take my dad's—occasionally, she would take one of my dad's old suits and cut it down and make it into a suit for herself, either pantsuit or, you know, make a skirt with—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —a jacket.

She made one—one Christmas time—because after I graduated from college, she—she made the whole family, everybody in the family, which—which by then included me and my wife and my oldest son and my two sisters and their husbands and my dad—she made for each of us an Icelandic wool sweater. [Chuckles.] It's just that kind of stuff she did!

And she—she made another—another time, she made goose down parkas for everybody in the family. One wasn't enough. I mean, we all had goose down parkas. I still have mine. It's all full of holes now, but—they were wonderful, you know, not least because she made them.

And she encouraged our creative interests, my sisters and me. She welcomed us in the kitchen. She taught us how to sew and make things, and also make things in the kitchen. She was—she had been interested in photography as a college student. She made her own enlarger, so she—she had a—a camera that had a—was modeled after a—it was a knockoff of a Leica camera, which is a German 35 mm camera, and she—she made an enlarger using a lens from that camera and a bellows from another camera and some kind of a—an articulated device that allowed her to move the lens up and down, and she—she—you know, these things were available commercially, but they cost a lot of money, so she—she made them herself. She'd look at something and say, "I can do that," and she did it.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: She was a very unassuming woman. She just did this stuff. I sort of thought that everybody could do that, but probably not,—

MANNES: Yeah, it sounds like she nurtured your—

RIGGS: —but I didn't know anybody—

MANNES: —artistic—

RIGGS: —didn't know anybody else who did it.

MANNES: —yeah.

RIGGS: She nurtured my interests, and so I—I got into building model airplanes and—and—and, you know, I began to think I could—I could make stuff, too, and so I did and enjoyed it, and most of my friends did too. So, I mean, I—in many ways, it was—it was an idyllic boyhood and, you know, manhood, and I—you know, I credit both my parents for that, because I think about it, especially my mother, what—what she made possible for us.

Both my sisters are—are accomplished women: chefs, cooks. The older of my two sisters has a master of fine arts in theater, and she still uses it. She's retired now, and she lives up in northern Wisconsin, but she—she's in a couple of theater companies up there on Lake Superior, and she just finished a run of a play at a local—local theater in—in—in Washburn, Wisconsin.

My other sister owned and managed a B&B [bed and breakfast] in Wisconsin, and she's married to a very creative cabinetmaker, who can—again, somebody else who can make anything.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: My older sister, the older of my two sisters, is divorced, but her daughter is an art teacher in—in Portland, Oregon. And she's amazing. She's won all sort of—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —accolades for—for her work as well, so—

MANNES: Did you ever try to get anything you made or drew or—published, or was it just kind of your own—

RIGGS: It was still mostly for my own enjoyment and—and pleasure.

MANNES: Your own comic strip in the newspaper or something?

RIGGS: Well, that was—yeah, that was really crude, but—no, but I just continually worked on developing my craft. In later—later years, I was—as I got into the architecture profession, became friends with a couple of writers for *The Baltimore Sun* newspaper. And they were—one of them wrote a lot about urban affairs and architecture, and the two of them devised the idea of writing a guidebook to Baltimore architecture. Baltimore is an old city. It was founded in the early 1700s and has gone through a renaissance, probably several renaissances.

But at any rate, these two guys began preparing a guide to Baltimore architecture, and they asked me to—to illustrate it, do the—draw the maps, tour maps, and design the book. So I did. I got paid for it a little bit, but that was my first venture into—

MANNES: [unintelligible; 30:55].

RIGGS: Yeah, grown-up work at the time. [Chuckles.] And the book went through three revisions, three subsequent editions between 1974 and 2004, so it was, like, over a 30-year period, so—

MANNES: And you did all the art when you were younger, without any formal training.

RIGGS: At the time, yeah, without any formal training.

MANNES: That’s [cross-talk; unintelligible; 31:24].

RIGGS: Yeah. But we had a very good art education in public school, and when I got here, came here to Dartmouth, I started out on pre-med track, not because I thought I wanted to be a doctor, but it was one of the things I hadn't ruled out. I remember in freshman year, when we first arrived and it was time to sign up for classes, my—Collis [Center for Student Involvement] was then called College Hall, and the large room in Collis that has a stage at one end was—I guess had been a dining hall when it was the College Commons, and they had stations set up where people could go—students would go sign up for classes and talk to faculty advisers.

And at the time, I think probably two-thirds or more of my class as freshman thought they might want to become doctors, so we all started out on a pre-med track, which turned out not the right thing for me to be doing. But I stuck it out for the first year, year and a half. By that time, I decided that I—you know, I began dropping the—the science courses and—and gravitating more to English and arts and humanities.

So that's—that's how that evolved. I had not—when I came here, I had no idea what I wanted to do, and—as a—as a career, and I made up my mind by early in my sophomore year, I guess.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: So that's—that how all that came about. As far as publishing anything is concerned, that guide to Baltimore architecture and now the *Dartmouth Veterans: Vietnam Perspectives* are my two only published works. [Transcriber's note: William C. Riggs' contribution to the book is here: https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/1076228] However, it's never to late to do something new, I guess,—

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: —so I've begun an outline and am working on a book, a personal book of recollections and—and stories from my growing up, because I'm getting questions from my older son and from my grandchildren, so why not?

MANNES: Yeah. Well, speaking about growing up, again, I just—this is the last kind of aspect to your childhood I sort of have to ask: What was—like, what sort of events shaped your childhood? Like, obviously, the Cold War must have been—

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: —important to some degree. Like, to what extent did that shape your childhood or impact you, growing up?

RIGGS: I think—again, I can't speak for everyone, but in my case, I was of course aware of what was going on in the world, and I had—you know, there was a lot of paranoia outside my immediate activities but stuff that I read in newspapers and magazines and saw on television about world events, and that—that began to take place, take a place in my mind and in my thinking. There were a couple of comic strips in the papers, the newspapers, that I really—I liked. One was *Pogo*, by [Walter C.] "Walt" Kelly [Jr.]. I don't know if you're familiar with *Pogo* or not.

MANNES: No.

RIGGS: It would be worth Googling and—and looking around here in some of the collections. But he was very topical. It was a story about these animals that lived in the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia, and Pogo was a 'possum, and he had a friend named Albert, who was an alligator, and Porky was a porcupine. There were other characters that showed up, and they be- —they began to look a lot like characters in the news. In the 1950s, the—Sen. Joseph [R.] McCarthy of Wisconsin began literally—

You're nodding your head as if you know about him.

MANNES: I studied him in history class, yup.

RIGGS: Began witch hunts in Congress, and he was—he was scary. And a lot of the current climate politically reminds me of—of the McCarthy era and the kind of powerlessness I spoke about last night was something that I think a lot of people felt during that time. But *Pogo* began to take him on. Walt Kelly began to take—take him on, and he invented a character who was a bobcat, I think, but he looked just like Joseph

McCarthy. And he had all these sycophants around him, people who were enabling him and supporting him and trying to bathe in his reflected glory, in the cartoon.

And I think *Pogo*, the cartoon *Pogo*, was an effective tool, in a broader sense, in helping bring down the McCarthy era, but not alone of course, but he was—it was an important way for that transition to begin. And once he finally became—began to look ridiculous, then he was done.

There was another cartoon by a guy named [Alfred G.] "Al" Capp, [who wrote] *Li'l Abner*. I don't know if you're familiar with that one or not, but that would also worth—be worth looking at. Same sort of deal. I mean, it was supposedly a story about a bunch of hillbillies, and—but it also had a real political edge. And—I don't know, I think *Doonesbury* is a—and *Bloom County* are—are logical heirs to that tradition. And I think—I think they really performed a valuable service in—I keeping the country informed, just like [comedian] Jon Stewart did when he was—had his show.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: You know, people of your age and older were getting most of their news from Jon Stewart, and that's probably not a misplaced trust. I mean, although he's a humorist, he's very serious—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —and very—he doesn't say stuff that's not true. And that's important. So, as I said last night, in my limited way, you know, I tried to bring that same kind of irreverence to the stuff I did in the Army, with the illustrations I did in the Army.

By the way, I brought photocopies of—or scanned copies—

MANNES: Oh, wonderful.

RIGGS: —of all the illustrations that I kept from that time.

MANNES: When we get to that, I'd love to see them.

RIGGS: Okay, yeah.

MANNES: Take me a little further as well. Was the Cold War something you discussed in your family? Was it something your family wanted to talk about or—

RIGGS: Not specifically, but it's always there. My dad was very strongly opinionated, and I—I grew up—he was—he and my mother were both Republicans, I think until they died. I'm not, and—you know, I don't know what my parents would be now. I think they'd be appalled at what they see nationally right now. But they—and that was—that was I think indicative partly of their own upbringing and their own actual bent, and the fact that we were in, you know, a very Republican state, in Ohio, where the Taft family was, well, royalty. And, you know, whatever they had to say, my dad especially, was often—often, it was always critical of anything the Democrats were doing. I think he tended to believe that—that the Cold War scares, the threat of nuclear war was—was real. I don't think they questioned the power structure, the United States power structure much, if at all, certainly not on the Republican side.

The imputed, my dad especially, evil motives to President [Harry S.] Truman and President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt before him. I think they thought that President [Herbert C.] Hoover got a bum rap, my dad. I say "they"; it's really my dad. My mother was—might have been his shadow in that respect. My dad had been a debater in high school and college and loved to debate formally. I mean, just loved the mental exercise of it, I guess, and competing in interscholastic or intercollegiate debates. So, you know, I think that's—that's where that came from.

And what the effect of that had on me was it was hard for me to try out my own opinions with him—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —because he would shoot me down. I mean, I don't mean he would do that maliciously, but it's just the way he was wired. We—we shared a lot of—a lot of good experiences together. I never doubted his love or his generosity or—you know. But he was not somebody in whom it was easy to

confide, so—and I think my sisters felt the same way. I mean, that—that changed over time. It got better, but—

And my—you know, growing up—my friends and I in high school didn't talk much about the Cold War or—you know, we were just interested in being kids—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —and how the Reds were doing or—you know, there was such paranoia that there was—for a few years, the Cincinnati Reds were not called the Reds. They were called the Redlegs because "red" meant communist.

MANNES: Right, right, right. Yeah.

RIGGS: Crazy. So after they stopped calling them the Redlegs, they went back to being the Reds, but that lasted for several years.

MANNES: Was the—was—did they speak about the Cold War and communism in school as well, in the public schools?

RIGGS: Yeah. I hear—I hear stories about people remembering "duck and cover" drills or they'd pretend they were—

MANNES: I know all about them. I saw the old videos, yeah.

RIGGS: Yeah. We didn't go through that in Hamilton. We had—Civil Defense was a quasi-governmental program that designated shelter areas for people to go to if there was a nuclear attack, and public buildings had storerooms where they kept supplies and water and medicine and First Aid equipment, dry food and that sort of stuff. But nothing much was said about it. You know, I think we got information at school assemblies about where this stuff was and what we were to do in case of an emergency, but the emergency might just as well have been a tornado or something. I may have a blind spot personally about—about this, but I really don't recall a lot of widespread fear or paranoia in—in the environment where I lived.

You know, again, as I said last night, at—at that time, the U.S. hadn't really had the experience of losing a war or—or

being subjected to, you know, the full effect of being in a—in an environment in which war was around us. You know, we knew about, you know, the nuclear war in Japan. We knew about—I guess we knew that it could happen. I don't think anybody really—at least in my circumstances, really thought that it would, even though there were—you know, I had family who were still in Missouri who—who grew up with [LGM-30] Minute Man silos in the farmland around where they lived, and other people had the experience of having Nike antiaircraft missile batteries outside their towns.

I don't know how that was—I mean, I guess the government I think purposely did not overemphasize the—the purpose for those installations except it was there to keep us safe—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —and prevention. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" and so on. And you may get different responses from other people you interview.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: Probably will. But at least, you know,—I'll give you another example to sort of—to answer your question: I told you I was born in Atlantic City, and at the time, there were German submarines patrolling up and down the East Coast of the country. And my dad told me—this is the many times he would be in the hospital, operating, and in those days the operating rooms were up on upper floors, where the air was cleaner and they could get fresh air. Now everything is—tends to be on lower floors that are completely sealed off, with no windows, but—as far as operating theaters are concerned. But in those days, it was—it was up on the upper floors of buildings of the hospitals, with the windows open.

And he said many times he would be at work, operating on somebody, and you could see the ocean from where he was operating, and the ocean would be black with oil and debris from a ship that had been sunk off the coast. And they were within sight of—of—of land, those ships.

So at night, they had—along the East Coast of the country, they had blackouts. The air raid—the sirens would go off at a

certain time, and everybody would turn off all their lights. And it would run—their automobiles were very tiny little pinholes of light, just the parking lights on. And there was a reason for that because the Germans were literally within sight of the beach. It wasn't because they were afraid of bombers coming over and dropping bombs, but it was because of the—the submarines.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: The same kind of thing was taking place in Ohio, you know, 500 miles from the coast. They had air raids, and they practiced for air raids and—and—by the time I lived there, I didn't—you know, that didn't register with me as something that made sense. But they did it anyway. They practiced. Nobody ever flew over and dropped a bomb, and there weren't any German spies around that I know of.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: But—but that's the way it was. Just everybody thought they were doing their part in some way.

But at any rate, there was, I think, a different—I think it depends on where you are at any—any particular time when something momentous is happening that may affect large numbers of people, but in Hamilton, Ohio, not much affected me.

MANNES: It wasn't affected by the Korean War or—

RIGGS: I think that the—the—the fear or the concern was that—that there were—that there—had to do with the political infiltration of communists into American society, and I—you know, there were communist spies, I suppose.

MANNES: Mm-hm.

RIGGS: But the—the Korean War for me was largely invisible, although I had—I know now I had—I have friends who—whose—whose parents—whose fathers served in the Korean War. But it was—you may not understand this at this point in your life, but—but the Korean War started five years after the end off World War II. And for me, that five years

represented, you know, more than half of my life up to that point. Five years now is nothing to me, but at the time, it was incomprehensible.

I mean, my parents would talk about childhood experiences of theirs or college experiences that—you know, my mother graduated from college in 1937; my dad graduated in 1934, I guess, and—'33, and I was born 1942. And that might as well have been, you know, as if World War II had happened in Shakespearean times. I mean, I couldn't intellectualize or conceptualize what happened before I was born. It was just out there.

I—I—again, I can't speak for other people, but I don't—you know, it would—World War II movies were popular. There were World War II articles in the papers and magazines for a long time after the war, but—and I knew they were—they were true or they—they depicted true events, but for me it was as if they happened on another planet.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: It came home to me that that was not—my perception was not true when I went to Europe. I lived in Vienna, Austria, for a year while I was in architecture school, and that was in 1966 and '67, when—which was 21 and 22 years after the end of World War II, and there were still bombed-out buildings around. And I could walk down the street in Vienna or other large city and see, you know, bullet holes in the walls. And—and I was then old enough to have some historical perspective and realize what was—what was going on, how serious this all was.

I was working in a building in Vienna. I was working for an architect, and I was measuring an old building in the old part of the city. It was going to be converted into a furniture store, and I was down in the basement taking measurements, and I found a Nazi flag and a bunch of Nazi banners that were strips of red cloth about that wide [demonstrates] and six or eight feet long and had the swastika printed on them. And I took these things, and I held them in my hands, and, you know, I—in that moment, they were—they were quite real. They really sent a shudder through me. Nobody else around me knew they were there. And I took them, took them home

with me. In fact, I ended up donating them to the [U.S.] Holocaust [Memorial] Museum in Washington years later.

But for me, you know, it's—it's taken something personal, something that's touched me in a personal way to—to make it live for me.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: And, again, I'm off—I'm off the track here, but I—as I get deeper into this Vietnam project, you know, my hope is that you and your fellow classmates, students can begin to make that connection, make that leap back into time to a deeper level of understanding.

MANNES: To make it real for us, so to speak.

RIGGS: Pardon?

MANNES: To make it real for us, so to speak.

RIGGS: Exactly, exactly, yeah.

MANNES: That brings us now to Dartmouth,—

RIGGS: Okay.

MANNES: —all right, since you're here now. Let's start, I guess, at the beg- —before Dartmouth. So the decision to come here. You mentioned briefly you wanted to sing and you liked skiing.

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: Was that really the call to Dartmouth, or—

RIGGS: Yes, it was. I mean, it sounds silly or petty, but when you have a choice between Dartmouth and Princeton, it eventually comes down to something unique about one place or the other.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: And for me it was skiing and—you know, [unintelligible; 58:22] 1960 Winter Olympics, and Dartmouth had several

members on the ski team. You know, I'm living in southern Ohio, where there are no mountains. There's no skiing anywhere in the state. I'd never been on skis. It just looked like a cool thing to do.

MANNES: You want to find somewhere more in the middle of nowhere, I guess, than Hamilton, I guess.

RIGGS: Yeah. Well, I liked the architecture school in St. Louis [Missouri]. A friend of mine [chuckles]—he had a poster that said, "Ski Missouri," and it had a picture of a guy on skis standing in, like, a—a plowed field of mud, and he's just sitting there with his skis in mud and rain on his—on his boots and feet. That's—that's what it was like in the—I don't know. Where are *you* from?

MANNES: Chevy Chase, Maryland.

RIGGS: Okay.

MANNES: So, yeah, East Coast skiing [unintelligible; 59:28].

RIGGS: Yeah. Yeah, if you like skiing on ice.

MANNES: Yeah. [Both chuckle.]

So what were your first impressions, then, when you got here?

RIGGS: Well, I—I—I came up with my dad during my senior year in high school. We did a college tour. Did not go to Princeton, but I went to Bowdoin [College] and to—and to Dartmouth and some of the schools in Boston [Massachusetts]. And I really liked the place. I thought it was beautiful and it was—it was—it looked like a place where I could—I could be happy. And I liked—I had done a lot of outdoor activities, and I liked that aspect of things.

I wasn't—at the time, it as an all-male school, and I wasn't sure what that was about, but it—it didn't stop me from wanting to come here. So I did. I mean, I got into Princeton. I got into Dartmouth. I think I was wait-listed at Bowdoin.

Dartmouth physically appealed to me more than Bowdoin or the schools in Boston we looked at. My feeling about Boston was I didn't think I wanted to be in school in a big city. I liked the access and the proximity to the out of doors here.

As I said, I had sung in glee clubs and choruses, church choirs, growing up. We had a record album, I remember, at home, of college songs by [Fredrick M.] "Fred" Waring, who was a famous choral director in the '40s and '50s, '60s. And it included the "Hanover Winter Song" and something else, maybe "Dartmouth Undying." But at any rate, I just loved the harmonies. I loved the images that they evoked. It's something I could see myself doing, and I liked the idea of being in a group of such high quality.

When we came up here, I bought the college—the album that was—that was done by the college glee Club at the time, and I heard the whole range of Dartmouth songs. I don't think we went up to the [Dartmouth] Skiway, but we did drive around a lot, and really liked—just loved the area. I also liked the idea of being in a place that had a real certifiable winter.

MANNES: Yeah. [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: You know, in southern Ohio we didn't have much snow. We had actually more snow than we have in Maryland, but—but it was nothing you could do with it. So that was—I mean, as silly as it sounds, that was—I mean, I liked—there was a—I liked the academic rigor that was presented in the—in the school catalog, and I liked the—there were things like—I don't know if you still have an independent reading program, a Great Issues course, but when I was—when I was here, people of my vintage were here, freshman and sophomores were required to do an independent reading—there was an independent reading requirement. You had to read something from an approved list every trimester and write a paper on it. And so that appealed to me. It was not part of a course or anything, it was just something everybody had to do.

And there was also a course that seniors took called Great Issues. Met on Monday night. By that time, Hopkins Center [for the Arts] was open. We had it in Spaulding Auditorium.

And the national—people in the national news would come and speak to the senior class, and I don't recall that there was a writing requirement, but at any rate, we had to—we called it "GI," of course. And it was the only time we were required to wear a tie. So all the seniors had their GI ties, which they kept tied at all times and hung over their doorknobs so they could just slip it on—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —and wear it with some ridiculous outfit or something. As long as you had a tie on, you were good. And that was—I mean, that was also part of the irreverence of not taking them- —ourselves too seriously that I liked about the place.

And I also—I mean, the idea of being more independent and having more free time in my freshman—in most of—actually, most years, my—my classes were over by noon. I don't know what your schedule is like now, but at the time, we took three courses each term, and we had three trimesters, and each was supposedly equivalent to one semester, so—it was a semester system.

I liked the idea of having all the exams finished by the time we went home for break, not having to worry about them, coming back. We'd take exams after Christmas. As distasteful as it was, it was better to get it over with—

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: —and have your vacation free to not—

I did not take full advantage of all the academic resources that were available. I remember having—as we were getting ready to graduate, some of our department heads had receptions or parties for students and found that at that time, I was actually getting to know the teachers better as I was preparing to leave school than I had during the—you know, during the academic year. That was sort of bittersweet. I realized that I—I had missed, in the service of having fun or trying to avoid [chuckles] too much rigor, so—

MANNES: So what—so you said you—so you started pre-med, and then you changed later to art and architecture.

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: Can you talk a bit about that transition?

RIGGS: Yeah. When I first started—well, I knew Hop- —Hopkins Center was coming on line. In fact, I guess I had a class—my first art class, studio art class was in the basement of this building. They had a few classes in here, and they were—the art department. It was kind of a—kind of an afterthought, I think. But there were some studios in the basement.

I was not cut out to be a physician. I really didn't have the passion for it. I was not—even though my dad was a doctor, I didn't have any particular affinity for—couldn't see that that was what I wanted to do.

I did want to do something, quote, "respectable." I wanted to, you know, make a contribution. And I saw architecture as a way to—to do that. It seemed like a somewhat logical extension of my interest in—in art and design. And so it proved to be—although it's not—it's probably one of the lowest-paid professions in the country right now, but it's—you know, I think it's what I needed to do.

So switching from pre-med to—you know, you don't select a major until your sophomore year anyway, the second half of sophomore year, and it was not a hard choice to make. I hadn't considered anything else. When I came here, I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do, but by the time I got into taking art and architecture history courses here, Hopkins Center was coming up out of the ground. I was learning about the—you know, the great architects in the country and in the world. But the designers of Hopkins Center were the same people who designed Lincoln Center [for the Performing Arts] in New York. And, in fact, Hopkins Center was in many ways a prototype for Lincoln Center.

And the—and it was just spectacular as it—when it—when it finally opened. And I remember walking through it and thinking, *Wow! I get to go to school here. I get to—this is where my major is going to be based.* You know, we were in the studios that are on the lower level that backs up on—on the west side of the building. It backs up to the stores on

Main Street. And they had these—these wonderful north-light windows—were—the studios, which was really great. They had a great wood shop and great theater facilities.

It had an elevator. It was the only elevator on campus except for the one at the [Hanover] Inn at the time, and[[chuckles] as silly as that sounds, that was—you know, that made an impression on me. I thought that was cool. They finally had an elevator [unintelligible; 1:10:47].

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

RIGGS I'm in New York, or I'm in—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —somewhere or other, a real city. You know, it went very slowly. It had three or four stops, but it was enough for me. That was not a serious consideration; it was just something that I remember—

MANNES: It was just a perk.

RIGGS: —thinking.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: Yeah, it was another perk.

So those were—those were kinds of the things that—that I remember.

I also remember and really enjoyed taking courses outside my major. I took a lot of English courses, English literature courses, and I—there was one course on the philosophy of art. It was a Philosophy 40, I think it was. And I got my first A at Dartmouth in philosophy of art, and that was—that was nice. At the time, most of the classes were graded on a curve, so it was hard to tell for sure how well you were doing. I remember getting back papers that had a numerical grade of 36 or 40 or something. *What the hell does* <u>*that*</u> *mean? It can't be good.*

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: But it's graded on a curve. You know, an A might 48, and an E, which was the failing grade, might be a 28. So nobody got 100. Nobody got a 90. Nobody got an 8[0].

MANNES: Right. Yeah.

RIGGS: But then you get a letter grade on your grade report. I mean, it's not entirely true that I didn't know. You know, I knew that I didn't understand stuff. I remember taking a physics course, which was a part of the—beginning physics course, which was a prerequisite for the architecture—modified art major. You had to take physics.

Physics was taught by a guy named Frances W. Sears, who was *the* preeminent university physics professor in the country. He wrote *the* textbook that everybody used. There was one called *College Physics* and one called *University Physics*. And they were supposedly—*University Physics* was more rigorous than *College Physics*, and so, of course, that's the textbook we used. And he was a great guy. He was a real showman. You know, he had a big lecture hall, amphitheater where we—where we went, and it was all—

Have you taken physics at all?

MANNES: No. In high school.

RIGGS: [Chuckles.] Well, he had—he had gizmos rigged up all over the room, so if you're studying Newtonian physics—you know, vector analysis or something, you know, he'd have - he'd had, like, a mover's cart, like a furniture mover's cart, a moving van company cart with casters on it, and he'd stand on that, and he'd take a spring, a long spring from those tied up under the ceiling in one part of the room, and he'd attach it to the—to the—to the cart in a certain place, and then he'd take another spring from another corner of the room, and he'd then predict which direction he's going to go. Showing all this vector analysis—

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: —by demonstration. It was really fun to watch, and—and—but then, you know, his exams were ball busters. I mean, it was just—

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: —god-awful. And I couldn't get out of the cellar. I was—I was drowning. Finally, I dropped the course and—*I'll do it in summer school*. So I did it in summer school. I think I switched into an English course or something here. Took a course in physics in summer school at Miami University, which is 12 miles from my home. And at that class, it was ridiculous. I aced going away. No—it took me one session to figure out what the guy wanted, but he was doing—our lab work included—I remember one of the lab experiments, lab exercises was to measure the circumference of a quarter, of a 25-cent piece. *What?* So he said—showed us how to do it, and everyone was to do it three times, take the average measurements that came up. We'd mark a little line on the edge of the quarter, roll it across a piece of paper: where you start, where you end and that's the circumference. Do that three times.

And so I did that, and I got a bad grade on it. *What the hell? How can that be? Any idiot could do this, right?* So then I realized—because we had a lab manual—that all I had to do was change the verb tense in the lab manual to say—instead of—say, "Take a quarter. Put it on a piece of paper. Roll it across the piece of paper." And then to write your report and say, "I took a quarter."—

MANNES: Yeah. "I rolled it across the paper." Yeah.

RIGGS: And I got A's. And that did nothing for my—I mean, I was glad to have an A, but I—made me think that Dartmouth was—was so much harder than any other school that whatever grade I was getting at Dartmouth was probably worth two grade points higher, you know, in a public university.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: I don't know.

MANNES: So you spoke a lot about what you were doing in class. How about what you were doing outside? You mentioned the skiing and—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —you joined Glee Club as well.

RIGGS: Yeah, I did.

MANNES: Do you want to go into, like, I guess social life or—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —what you were doing there?

RIGGS: I—I didn't join a fraternity until my senior year, until I [unintelligible; 1:17:42] [Theta] Delta Chi. Most of my friends were—a lot of my friends were in it. And, I mean, a fraternity was—fraternities were accessible to anybody, mainly to go to parties.

MANNES: Still are, yeah.

RIGGS: And you might have to pay a fee for, you know, Winter Carnival weekend or something, but it was—that was—I mean, that was sort of the center of campus social life. I did—you know, I did some outdoor activities. You know, I went trout fishing and hiking and stuff like that. Went to—did take advantage of—of, you know, going to—going to Boston a lot. I had friends in school down there, MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] and elsewhere. Met some girls down there also.

I joined the Flying Club here at Dartmouth. I don't know if they still have one or not.

MANNES: I don't think so.

RIGGS: But it was a flying club. And the club owned an airplane, and you could learn to fly. At first it was stationed—the airplane was kept at Lebanon [New Hampshire], the airport at Lebanon. And then they moved it up to a little airport on Lake Fairlee up in Vermont, a place called Post Mills. It's

about 10, 12 miles away. And so I learned to fly. I had a friend who was—I lived in Middle Mass[achusetts Hall]. This guy lived in South Mass[achusetts Hall]. And he was a year—a year or two younger than I was, I guess. But he was already a licensed pilot, and I remember he—he flew my roommate down to his home—my roommate's home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. His mother was sick at the time, and so he'd fly down there, and I went along on the ride and helped pay for it and see what it was like.

And we took the Flying Club's plane, and the way you got to do that was you—you would sign up for it. They had an office in Robinson Hall, I guess, and you'd go sign up for when you wanted to use the plane, just the number of hours. And if nobody else wanted it or if you wanted it for more hours than somebody else did, you got to take it. In fact, people would take—take the plane home with them. They would bid—bid hours to fly the plane home for vacations or weekends.

This little airport up at Post Mills had a—a guy who was a certified flight instructor, and it cost $11 an hour for an hour of dual instruction. It was $7 for the plane and $4 for the pilot—or for the instructor, which even then was cheap. So I did that, and that was—that took a lot of my time my senior year, especially—junior and senior year.

I guess I was a member of the [Dartmouth] Outing Club and—I'm trying to remember; it's a long time ago.

MANNES: Yeah, I know.

RIGGS: I mean, those are the sorts—sorts of things I did.

MANNES: Yeah. Well, from all of that, so your academic experience, your extracurricular experience—how did Vietnam or, like, anything happening in Vietnam factor into Dartmouth or into your life? Was there any sort of—did it coincide at all?

RIGGS: Initially, not so much. I mean, the thing that was—the country was going through a dangerous period. Maybe all periods are dangerous, but the first thing that happened was the Cuban Missile Crisis, I remember. Of course, the Bay of

Pigs [Invasion] happened before that, but [the] Cuban Missile Crisis was pretty scary.

I remember having my consciousness raised by our janitor in Middle Mass. He was a nice guy. We got to know him. He said, “So, Bill, are you ready to go to war in Cuba?” “No.” [Laughs.] But it was a real possibility. I mean, it was a real—another one of those things that happens for the first time, and it just—you don’t know how to react to it.

But Vietnam was very much in the background. I think a lot of the other guys in the class who were taking part in this project have said it wasn’t on their radar. It wasn’t on my radar either. I think by the time—by the end of my junior year and beginning of senior year, we began to hear more and more about it, and it seemed kind of not a good thing. It seemed like something that was worth paying attention to.

I had no—no interest in trying to avoid the draft. Again, it was something that I wasn’t sure would—would happen or could happen to me. That changed very rapidly in ’64 and ’65. But [at? by? 1:24:33] the time I graduated, it was not something I was concerned about.

We had a classmate named [William B.] “Bruce” Nickerson [‘64], who was a Navy pilot, and he was—he was killed. I think he was one of the first, maybe *the* first Vietnam casualty from our class. Nice guy. A real—a real loss. Everybody’s a real loss. But it was, again, one of those things that brings—brings the event closer to you and makes it—makes it real, and I think he was killed shortly after we graduated, if I’m not mistaken.

By the time I got into architecture school the following—started architecture school the following year, I mean—I was—the following fall, I was already trying to hedge my bets and made sure that I stayed in school as long as I could. And I’m not alone in that. A lot of other people were—were doing the same thing. They were going into graduate school of some kind or getting married or—you know, there were ways to avoid getting drafted.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: I didn't have a lot of friends in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. It was a—somebody was asking me last night—it was a big deal. I mean, they used to have—I remember walking across the [Dartmouth] Green this morning. The ROTC battalion, as it was called, used to have a—a parade every spring, and they'd march from somewhere down by the [Leverone] Field House up to the Green, and—and they'd have a ceremony and give out awards, so I was in Air Force ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] my freshman year, and there were hundreds of people participating in the parade. A lot of people came out to watch it. But there wasn't any—because that was '61. Nobody was protesting or doing anything [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:27:07].

MANNES: Right, not until later in the '60s, yeah.

RIGGS: And I—I dropped out of Air Force ROTC partly because I didn't see myself taking a commission in the Air Force or any other service, for that matter. I mean, my eyesight wasn't good enough to—to fly or to do some other things in the Air Force. But by the time—as I say, by the time I graduated, this is something people were beginning to think about and prepare for.

And, you know, we had a classmate, [Anthony B.] "Tony" Thompson ['64], who was encouraged by the dean to take a couple of years off to mature, and Tony was a good friend of mine. And he went to Vietnam. And he came back to Dartmouth. He was—he was one of the advisers. He wasn't in active combat. As a part of an American unit, he was an adviser to an ARVN [pronounced AR-vin] unit, Army in Vietnam, Army of the Republic of Vietnam. And he—he was in some combat with them, with the Vietnam army people, but he survived. He came back. He went back to Dartmouth. Came back here to finish up. And he was a member of Gamma Delta Chi, and he got shunned and ridiculed and insulted by the people in his old fraternity when he came back.

MANNES: What was his name again? I'm sorry.

RIGGS: Tony Thompson.

MANNES: Tony Thompson.

RIGGS: He's in the book. He—in on of the earlier chapters. He—he ended up moving off campus and getting an apartment in White River [Junction, Vermont], I think. Or West Leb[anon, New Hampshire], somewhere down there. And came to classes, did his work, graduated, moved to Australia, actually. He's back in the country now, but he moved away for quite a few years.

MANNES: So you weren't that concerned, though, your senior year for getting drafted.

RIGGS: No, but, I mean, my concern was staying in school.

MANNES: Right. That was your way out of the draft to start [unintelligible; 1:30:08].

RIGGS: I knew that if I dropped out of school, if I suspended my education for any reason that I would be reclassified. I was classified 2-S [Selective Service System classification meaning "Registrant deferred because of collegiate study"], which was a student deferment. And if I—if I stopped going to school, I would be reclassified by the local draft board. And so that's—I stayed in school. I went to—I went right into architecture school that fall of '64.

MANNES: Where'd you go?

RIGGS: Washington University in St. Louis.

MANNES: Gotcha.

RIGGS: And I—I went to—through two years there, and it was—it was a struggle because the work that I had done in the pre-architecture program here really didn't prepare me for what a real architecture education is—is like or what it's about. I got through it, but I decided to take a year off and went and worked for a guy, an architect who had been a visiting professor at Washington U. while I was there. He was a Viennese architect, and I went to work in his studio in Vienna. And while I was there, there was kind of an internal coup at the univer- —at Washington University. They kicked out the dean and raised tuition and a bunch of other stuff, so

I—I went back—I applied at Ohio State [University]. Since I was still a resident of Ohio, I went back to Ohio State.

And while I was there, I got drafted. Of course, during that intervening time, the war really heated up, and that was—I was in Europe '66 and—'66 and '67. I came back in the summer of '67 and fall of '67 went to Ohio State. And around the first of the year—or actually during Christmas break I got a notice reclassifying me as 1-A [Selective Service System classification meaning "Available for unrestricted military service].

MANNES: Mmm. Merry Christmas.

RIGGS: Yeah, right. So I write about that in the book. But I—that's how I—I went down to the draft board and tried to get myself reclassified as 2-S and showed them I was still a student, and they said, "Well"—[chuckles]—"basically, the rules have changed a little bit. Things are much more serious in Vietnam. We need—we need people to go, so you're gonna be 1-A because you've been a 2-S ever since you were 18 years old, and now you're 25. So we think that's long enough."

So I investigated other options. You know, I looked at conscientious objectorship. I mean, I wasn't—I thought of it—if it was an avenue that was available to me. I might consider it. I wasn't going to go to Canada. It was like I said last night: There was no guarantee if you went to Canada that you'd be allowed to come back, that you wouldn't have to serve [unintelligible; 1:33:59]—wouldn't have to serve a sentence, serve some prison time. Didn't want to do that.

I had no moral objection to military service. I thought it was—I mean, up until that point, it was something that men did.

MANNES: Yeah. With your father having served, was this something that he—

RIGGS: Yeah, he was—I don't know what the requirements were at the time, but—but he would have—he would have gone in anyway. He would have served anyway, I'm sure, but just because—

MANNES: I was going to say, was there any pressure from him? Like, did he want you to serve, or did he not—

RIGGS: He didn't—he let me go through the process pretty much by myself. He didn't—I don't think he wanted me to go into the military necessarily, but he understood that it was something that—that men did. So he didn't pressure me one way or the other. As I said, everybody I knew, every man I knew in my family served in the military, not as a matter of proud tradition but simply because that's what you did.

MANNES: Mmm.

RIGGS: And it seemed like there was always a war that came along for every generation. Every generation gets its own war. And that's—so under that—under that auspices, you know, I didn't fight it. But, you know, in 1968 it was not an auspicious time to be in the military.

Now, we all deluded ourselves in my training company and—and subsequently, thinking that, well, there are certain jobs, MOS's, Military Occupational Specialties, that are not combat related, and you could get—you know, the hope was that you could get assigned to one of those branches of the military, like finance or Judge Advocate General or something like that.

There were combat engineers, and there were engineers that weren't designated as combat engineers. Didn't want to be a combat engineer because you'd get blown up. Armor, artillery and infantry were the three main combat arms. There was something called Air Defense Artillery that was missiles. Didn't want to get involved with that. Artillery was maybe better than infantry because you'd be farther back from the lines.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: So anyway, I got drafted, and I went in, and I was going to be sent to—I was going to be trained as a prisoner of war interrogator. I didn't—it's not something I chose; it was something that was chosen for me. In basic training—as I was getting at the end of basic training, I got orders to report to Fort Holabird in Baltimore [Maryland], and—which was the

headquarters of the [U.S.] Army Intelligence School and the [U.S.] Army Intelligence [& Security] Command. The School is what trains people, and the Command is what administers—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —the whole intelligence operations for—for the Army. And as luck would have it, I got—you know, I was able to get a job as an illustrator in the Training Aids Division of the school, so I didn't have to go to Vietnam, and I didn't volunteer, certainly. Everybody I knew who went to Vietnam was screwed up by the experience. There's no other way to put it. I mean, they had suffered major problems.

I write in the book about a drill sergeant I had at Fort Benning [Georgia], in basic training. After I got out of basic training, I spent a couple of weeks still at Fort Benning, until my new orders went into effect. By that time, I had a stripe on my arm. I had gotten promoted to private E-2 [private second class], and I had—you know, the guys who had been my nemeses, or nemesises, whatever, during basic training, the drill sergeants became friends now. We were more or less on the same footing. I had done what they asked me to do. I passed their—their course,—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —and so I was okay then. One guy, one drill sergeant, who was drunk at the time, admitted that [chuckles]—he said, "Riggs, let me know if you want me to kill anybody for you." I wrote about that in the book. He really did say that. Everything I said in there was true, based on my memory. He thought that was one of the nicest things he could do for me because he thought I was a good guy. I said, "Well, thank you, Sergeant, I really don't need to have anybody killed at the moment." [Chuckles.]

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: "I'll let you know."

MANNES: What was your work at the—the tra- —it was called the Training Aids Division?

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: So what was your work there? What did that entail?

RIGGS: Well, it's time to bring out my—

MANNES: Bring out the photos, yeah.

RIGGS: We did slides and illustrations for all of the various courses that the—that the Intelligence School taught, and they were taught not just at the school in Baltimore but around the world, wherever the Army had a post. Some of these—these were, like, extension courses. They were done by—you know, by TV or video. So they had—so an officer, usually, sometimes a senior enlisted person, would request a series of illustrations for a particular unit they were teaching. Often—I mean, these are all cartoon-y sort of pictures, but often they were things like organizational charts or wiring diagrams for certain types of communications equipment or whatever.

And so you would have to—we had a graphics studio, where everybody had a—a light table and you know, access to every kind of graphic presentation material that was available: pens, inks, lettering machines, cameras.

So—I mean, this—this was for a closed-circuit television station at the Intelligence School, and somebody asked for a series of slides about—

MANNES: Do you mind if I lay this out a bit?

RIGGS: Sure.

MANNES: [unintelligible; 1:42:25].

RIGGS: In case there was audio trouble or in case a program got changed. Now, these are for a unit that was taught about different intelligence agencies within the government, not necessarily military.

MANNES: So, like, to inform? Or what is that purpose?

RIGGS: To—to inform. I mean, they were supported by text and by lectures, but, you know, I guess, like,—I mean, I don't know because I never was in any of these courses, but I would—we would be asked to do slides depicting—"Now, we're going to talk about the Central Intelligence Agency," so they'd talk about this slide at the beginning of the class about the Intelligence Agen- —about the CIA.

Or about—which one is this? Defense Intelligence Agency, which is within the Defense Department.

MANNES: And the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation].

RIGGS: And the FBI.

MANNES: [unintelligible; 1:43:35].

RIGGS: Yeah. So this is—the NSA [National Security Agency]—one of the things it does—the only thing I knew about it at the time was they maintained the hotline between the Kremlin [in Moscow] and the White House.

MANNES: I see you have the red telephone going there, yeah.

RIGGS: Yeah, that's—that [General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid I.] Brezhnev, and that's [President Richard M.] Nixon up there.

MANNES: Oh, okay, yes.

RIGGS: A lot of satellite communications and stuff.

MANNES: Very futuristic looking.

RIGGS: Yeah. And the State Department [sic; U.S. Department of State] is also a great collector of intelligence, so that was—guys in suits and hats,—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —doing their dirty business.

This was for a military history course.

MANNES: Okay, with all the—

RIGGS: This is a Macedonian [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:44:19].

MANNES: [unintelligible; 1:44:20].

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: Gosh.

RIGGS: [unintelligible; 1:44:23] these guys walk or march or run into battle on the front line, would get killed or—

MANNES: Right, with the giant spears.

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: Yup. And the next guy would take their place.

MANNES: I remember this one from the book.

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: Yeah. And this was—

MANNES: Colonel Sanders.

RIGGS: [Chuckles.]

MANNES: Can you tell me a bit—I think you mentioned it last night.

RIGGS: Yeah. This was a course for—well, MIPT stands for Military Intelligence Presentation Team, and the colonel who requested these slides was teaching his class to the—a group of Green Berets [members of the U.S. Army Special Forces], who were—were taking this course. And he—he gave me a piece of paper like this [demonstrates], with a cartoon scribbled on it with stick figures, with that exact caption. He said that's what he wanted. So, okay, I did that.

And so I had this guy in the front row, an enlisted man, cutting Z's all over the place.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: And Colonel Sanders, who wasn't Colonel Sanders at all, but he didn't like being compared to Colonel Sanders, so he had me change that to some other name, not his own.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: But these are put on an overhead projector and projected—

MANNES: Right. Right, right, right,.

RIGGS: —on a screen.

This is for another Special Forces course, Green Berets.

MANNES: Evasion training, yeah.

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: There's another one, so that's—there's—

RIGGS: The guy, our classmate, [James] "Jim" Laughlin [III '64], who was there last night—he was one of the people who flew in the back seat of these light planes. This is like the plane I learned to fly in college.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: I mean, it's just a very—it's a two-seater, probably with fabric wings and—it was very flimsy.

MANNES: Yeah. And you drew all these by hand. Is that right?

RIGGS: Yeah, yeah, I did.

MANNES: Okay.

RIGGS: I did.

MANNES: And this is another one. I think you mentioned the [snake? unintelligible; 1:46:27].

RIGGS: Yeah, yeah.

MANNES: —where you would share with the families or something?

RIGGS: Yeah. The colonel who—who requested this came in and said, in his best Army voice—he said, “This is outstanding, Riggs.” Everything is “outstanding,” you know?

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: That’s the Army version of “awesome.” You know, “This is outstanding,” he said. “We have these picnics every year, and our wives get really squeamish if we had a snake barbecue,”—

MANNES: [Chuckles.] Yeah.

RIGGS: But they—I thought I was just blowing him off, but he thought it was great.

MANNES: Yeah, a guy eating a snake.

RIGGS: And this one, I took a—a Polaroid photograph of one of the other guys in our studio. We went outside, and I took a picture of him, swinging a bat or swinging a stick or something so that I could get his position right, and I drew—and he’s supposedly knocking out a Viet Cong, [unintelligible; 1:47:30].

And this is the—

MANNES: The Super—

RIGGS: —Super Spook, yeah.

MANNES: Yeah. And what was the story behind these?

RIGGS: Well, these are—these are, like, organizational charts or—or, in this case, it’s trying to explain what STANO [pronouncing it first as STAN-o, then as STAY-no] means. It stands for Surveillance Target Acquisition and Night

Observation. I mean, they'd take perfectly good words and turn everything into acronyms.

MANNES: Acronyms. It's the military. [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: Yeah.

And this—this was another organizational chart. And I really don't know what it meant, but [turns pages] he liked it.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: This is the iconography for Super Spook. This is the crest of the Army Intelligence School. And some of these are replicated in the—in the branch insignia. Like, the infantry has two crossed rifles as a branch insignia; artillery has two cannons crossed.

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: And this is a chess board, a sphinx,—

MANNES: Sphinx.

RIGGS: —you know, a lamp, sword. The crest also included a rose, a flower, because that represents deception and cunning, and a so-called compass rose, which is, like, north, south, east and west —

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —[unintelligible; 1:49:07]. And—whatever else. But those are the things that were—

MANNES: Yeah, those are [noise; unintelligible; 1:49:12].

RIGGS: You can have these if you—

MANNES: Oh, thank you.

RIGGS: —if you want them.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: Don't have to.

And so you have the originals as well. They're trying to make a collection of—from the people we interview, and we would welcome those.

RIGGS: Okay. I have the originals at home. I mean, I have the original slides at home.

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: But I can—I can scan them and send scanned copies—

MANNES: Yeah. We can talk about that after as well.

RIGGS: Okay. All right.

MANNES: So the one thing I find really interesting is that you're—you're experiencing—and you brought this up last night at the panel discussion that we had—

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: —about how you were a soldier by day, a civilian by night,—

RIGGS: Right.

MANNES: —with a foot in each world.

RIGGS: Right.

MANNES: So can you talk a little bit about that? Because it's a really interesting relationship to me, to be in the military during a war that's publicized and as I guess criticized Vietnam was—

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: —and to be living right next to the people who are the ones that are criticizing.

RIGGS: Well, I mean, I was one of the ones who was criticizing, too. I mean, I heard a lot of ambivalence or outright disagreement expressed last night and I'm sure at other settings. I—when I— when I went to the Intelligence School in Baltimore, I was

initially living on post in a completely isolated, insulated environment. I had one friend from Dartmouth who was in a doctoral program at the time, at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health [now Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health], studying to become an ecologist. He's getting his Ph.D. [doctor of philosophy] or Sc.D. [doctor of science], doctor of sciences in some kind of ecology. His—his specific field of study was Adélie penguins in the Antarctic. I don't know how all that works together, but he and I were—were good friends at Dartmouth and have remained so. In fact, I was just in touch with him yesterday.

He is—and he introduced me to the first civilians I met in Baltimore. I was lucky, in fact, because Bob was often not *in* Baltimore, he was often in the field, either in Antarctica or Alaska, as it turns out. But when I got there, he *was* in Baltimore, and so we hooked up and spent a lot of time together.

I—I had a girlfriend from architecture school, who came out to Baltimore. We were planning to get married. In fact, we did get married in 1969. And so we got a series of apartments that were near the academic campus of Johns Hopkins, not the medical campus, which is on the other side of town, in a dicey neighborhood. But the area around the liberal arts campus was a very nice area. So we lived up there, and my—my friends, as I began to accumulate friends, they were all people outside the military.

My girlfriend/wife was—the first year was working as a substitute teacher in Baltimore public schools, and then she went into graduate school at the University of Maryland in social work, the School of Social Work.

You know, we were all fairly liberal politically. People did not—I don't know of anybody who supported philosophically the Vietnam War. Everybody knew I was in the Army. Nobody had any problem with that. You know, it was just—it was a job in my case. I'd be a little self-conscious sometimes, putting on the uniform and getting on a bus and riding across town to—to Fort Holabird, but it wasn't a big deal.

And being—you know, living where your family lives and where I lived, still live, around Baltimore, Washington area, there was a lot of political activity of every kind, including antiwar activity. And nobody said we couldn't participate in antiwar activity. It was understood that you weren't going to wear the uniform and you'd be careful, didn't do anything to jeopardize what you were doing in your—in your military life.

And so I was not rabid in my feelings about—against the war. You know, I understood a bit better, by the fact that I was in the military, what that was like, that there were good people there. The training I had gotten was excellent, and I really liked the work I was doing. Still, you know, I realized that many of us were being put in positions we would not have chosen for ourselves.

I didn't have a—you know, I didn't—I couldn't understand what was at stake, what was so important for us to be committing so many people to a war so far away. You know, I didn't buy the idea of a domino theory. I had no faith in—you know, in the politicians, and I didn't—it seemed to me I needed to—I couldn't stay out of this. I had to be present, at least—you know, even if I wasn't on a soapbox giving a speech or storming the ramparts or pouring blood on draft board files. I had to be in it.

My wife was more active politically than I was, although not terribly so, but she and I were in general agreement, so we would go down to—I mean, I don't mean to make it sound like something we did every weekend, but on several occasions we went to demonstrations in Washington and elsewhere in Baltimore, against the war, more as witnesses than as active participants. I mean, we'd get in a group in a parade or a group walking down the street with banners or not, without banners—or without banners.

It was something we could do. I mean, the job at Fort Holabird was very much a nine to five job, for the most part. I mean, there were occasions when—or eight to five. I mean, there were occasions when I had to work on a weekend on guard duty or had the KP [kitchen patrol] or something, but generally my evening and weekend time was—was my own.

And—and it was for all of us—I mean, for all the other guys I was serving with. I wasn't—you know, I wasn't alone in my—in my thinking.

MANNES: So many other people in your unit—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —where you served were anti war?

RIGGS: Yes. Yes, they were.

Excuse me, let me turn this off [referring to a device that had just made a tone].

MANNES: No worries.

RIGGS: Yeah, most—most of us were. It was also the '60s. I mean, it was a time of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: And, you know, we weren't immune to that, either. There were—there were a lot of drugs around, and I was a—I was a casual user of marijuana and a few other things, hashish and a couple of times mescaline, I guess, but it was more experimental than anything. It never got serious. It was—I remember having one episode that was—that was scary. I felt kind of paranoid, and I said, *I don't need to be doing this anymore.* And I stopped. Luckily. I didn't have any trouble stopping, but that's—that's just me. A lot of guys did have trouble stopping. There was—people were experimenting with lots of different things that seemed very weird to me at the time, like getting strung out on cough syrup, literally Robitussin, or Freon, which was an air conditioning hydrocarbon, chlorofluorocarbon, chlorofluorocarbon.

And I can understand, in one sense, why people in Vietnam availed themselves of—of those kinds of drugs: (a) they were available, (b) they were young men doing something very unpleasant, and—you know, and so they were, like,—I don't mean to oversimplify it or—or justify it, but they were, like, coping mechanisms.

MANNES: Mm-hm.

RIGGS: And the stuff was readily available. So there were—I think a lot of us felt—and I heard—heard—heard it last night and earlier, while we were here, some of the guys talking about what I characterize as a sense of betrayal, that they'd been promised one thing and then had it pulled away from them. Like, [Francis C.] "Bud" McGrath [Class of 1964], though he was going to be doing one thing for three years, and then they decided that he needed to go to Vietnam for a year, so—

I guess that's maybe a little naïve because there's always a possibility that things change. All bets'll be off, and your own participation will change. That was certainly my case. I mean, I—I was very lucky: (a) I only had a two-year commitment, and (b) you know, I could have been pulled and sent somewhere else, made to do something else.

I think it was Bud [who] also talked about—as an artillery officer, being put in charge of a bunch of people who were basically clerk-typists, to train them for something he knew nothing about. My training experiences in the Army were limited, but they were uniformly good. I mean, the only real basic training—the only real concentrated training I got was the basic training at the beginning of my service, and that was a couple of months, a little over two months.

But the—most people go through advanced individual training after their basic training. I didn't have to do that because what I ended up being able to do in my MOS was something I'd already had some training in here at Dartmouth and in high school, and in fact, all my childhood, drawing pictures. So, again, I was lucky.

I also made a semi-conscious decision to sort of keep my head down and not—not make waves. I mean, I was willing to go to participate in demonstrations.

MANNES: Right. You're for yourself as a, quote, "a silent witness."

RIGGS: Yeah, yeah. Semi-silent. I mean,—

MANNES: Or semi-silent, yeah.

RIGGS: Yeah, but I was—I mean, I wasn't afraid to say stuff, but I wasn't going to draw attention to myself.

MANNES: Is it something you could have gotten in trouble for, being in the military and, like, being part of the activism, the antiwar—

RIGGS: I tried to stay below that level of involvement.

MANNES: You'd have to be very vocal to—

RIGGS: Yeah. I think so. I don't know. I don't discount the role of luck in all this. But I was very careful not to—not to cross lines or not to—

MANNES: Mm-hm.

RIGGS: —not to be at a parade smoking dope. I wasn't going to do that. You know, whatever I did, I did as quietly as I could. I don't know if that makes sense, but that's—that's how I felt at the time, and I don't know that I would do things any differently now.

MANNES: Also, I mean, you mentioned being close to D.C., but how about things that happened in Baltimore, like the riots after [the Rev.] Dr. [Martin Luther] King [Jr.'s] death and the—

RIGGS: I didn't come to Baltimore until—the riots were in April, I think.

MANNES: Okay.

RIGGS: And I—I wasn't drafted until June. I didn't go into the Army until June, and I wasn't sent to Baltimore until September, so—I mean, the riots—the aftermath was still very much present—it's still there today, for that matter—but I was—I wasn't in Baltimore until—until that September. And I think that's another experience that—that, for those who were in it, people went through without, you know, any guidance, any sense of how it was going to end, what they were going to do. You know, the people who were most affected by it, the African-Americans, were righteously angry.

But—and, as I said, it was kind of dichotomous to have, you know, the guy I was working for, who was the Bowdoin graduate I mentioned, who's living a block away from the National Guard armory in downtown Baltimore, where the 82nd Airborne [Division] was bivouacked—you know, he puts on his Class A uniform and drives to Fort Holabird every day, and the 82nd Airborne goes out in the streets and protects his neighborhood. And that—that had to be very strange.

MANNES: Even months after, you could see—

RIGGS: Yeah,—

MANNES: —see the tension,—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —feel the tension and—

RIGGS: Yeah, yeah. Well, the tension's still there now. I mean, the Freddie [C.] Gray [Jr.] murder last year—

MANNES: Mmm.

RIGGS: —dredged up, you know, old grievances that hadn't been redressed in all those years. You know, they had nothing to do in a proximate sense with Vietnam, but—but they had to do with the very real internal tensions and disconnections within the—within the society now.

MANNES: It must be an interesting experience for you as well, because, I mean, back near the beginning, we mentioned the—how Hamilton didn't really have—

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: —I mean, it was segregated, but it didn't really have that—

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: —national sort of prejudice that you bring up here. And that's just, I guess, a totally—totally at the opposite end for you, coming from your—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —childhood.

RIGGS: And the other thing about that is that was totally—I mean, the experience at Hamilton I don't think was—was because of any specific civic policy. There were racial riots and racial flare-ups that occurred, not necessarily just in the South but other parts, where something will spark [snaps fingers], will ignite something and it changes the whole picture. I mean, there were horrible race riots in East St. Louis, Illinois. I remember my dad talking about riots elsewhere in the country at various times and places, where something breaks down in the fabric of society, allows these things to boil over.

In the case of the Vietnam conflict, I don't recall any, you know, riotous activity. I mean, there were—there were cases in the—in the marches that I participated in where I had a sense that everybody was being a little careful. Everybody was holding back a little bit from full-on confrontation.

The use of tear gas by the police was, you know, about as serious as it got. You know, it wasn't—as I said in the book, it wasn't scary to those of us who had been trained around it, but it's unpleasant. It's not something anybody wants to stay in—

MANNES: Right.

RIGGS: —for a while. You just know it's not going to kill you. But this—this whole interview process and the process of working on this—on this book and this project has been—at first, I was amazed at the interest that it's generated here in the Dartmouth community, but also how much it's—it's allowed *me* to think about stuff I haven't thought about for a long time and to be able to reprocess all of this. It reminds me of—I remember when I was younger, thinking, *Gee, I ought to talk to my parents about what it was like growing up in the Depression* or—and never really did.

My wife has an expression about the importance of giving flowers to the living, letting people know how important they are to you while they're still here, rather than at their funeral,

when it's too late. And this is that kind of experience for me. It's very valuable personally, and I—I hope it's valuable—

MANNES: [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:12:49], yeah.

RIGGS: —for everybody else, too.

MANNES: I mean, each perspective is just very unique in itself.

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: Yeah. So can you—so you finished your service in '70?

RIGGS: Nineteen seventy.

MANNES: Nineteen seventy, okay. So when you were in—

RIGGS: June 18th.

MANNES: Oh, June 18th.

RIGGS: [Laughs.]

MANNES: You remember the day.

RIGGS: Absolutely.

MANNES: So what was—what were your thoughts, then, on finishing your service? Because the war is still going on.

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: There's still people being drafted. So kind of what are your thoughts from then through, I guess, the cease fire and the eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces?

RIGGS: Well, I—I remember being surprised at how long it took. I mean, there was a whole—I don't know if you've gotten into this yet, but there were a whole series of so-called peace talks that went on, and the final abandonment of Saigon took place in 1975. I remember that very clearly because it was all on TV. I remember thinking at the time what a colossal waste and tragedy the whole thing was, how unnecessary it was.

And that—that, for me, is—the word “unnecessary” has become a—kind of a go-to word for me in a lot of situations when something bad happens, when something that needn’t have happened happens. And then you have to deal with it.

It’s interesting—to use a word that my dad used to use a lot—get out the retrospectoscope and look and see what might have been done differently. I mean, something in the psyche of the country or the power structure in the country that makes these kinds of—of ill-advised conflicts almost inevitable, I guess. And I—I think the whole lot of study that would go into figuring out why that is so is, —in my mind, it clearly doesn’t need to be so. It’s unnecessary.

MANNES: You mentioned a national moral ambivalence,—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —was the term you used.

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: I guess that kind of what I’m seeing what you’re saying here.

RIGGS: Yeah, exactly. And I have no answers. I mean, at some point, I’m just—just talking. But I think we try to—I mean, I certainly have tried to bend the arc of my life into—in response to some of these horrible injustices or horrible tragedies that have occurred, either to speak out or to stay away from them, give warning.

I think it’s made me more tolerant, more empathetic to general human tendency to—to get into these kinds of—of avoidable pathways. I think, you know, the current political climate, presidential political climate is—is, in many ways, for me, analogous to the—the run-up to the Vietnam War and the deepening involvement in the Vietnam War. I’m an unapologetic liberal. I’m not—you know, I think it’ll be a tragedy if—if Donald [J.] Trump is - becomes president. I can’t imagine that happening. And I—I find that I—it’s a corner I can’t see around. And in many ways, the—you know, the Vietnam experience was full of corners I couldn’t see around, although I had an idea what might happen.

I had an aunt, my father's sister, who was also an unapologetic liberal, and she—she [chuckles] used to say that she could fix a lot of things. She could fix various political situations. But nobody ever asks her to do that. She says [chuckles] she finds that very frustrating. "They just don't ask me." She's sort of kidding, but not really.

MANNES: So how do you feel, then, the Vietnam War—you kind of went into it a bit, saying how it made you feel more empathetic and tolerant,—

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: —especially towards, like, the human [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:19:19].

RIGGS: I think part of that is also just being older and having—

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: —a life and having had a history of my own mistakes and things that I was not proud of in my own behavior. I realize that we often do things that do not serve our best interests. Everybody does, whether it's, you know, having the extra piece of birthday cake or, you know, smoking a joint. I don't know, it's just—things that needn't be that way.

MANNES: So how would you feel the Vietnam War, then, has shaped you, I guess, in other ways—

RIGGS: Yeah.

MANNES: —after it's ended?

RIGGS: Well, on a—on a basic level, it's given me a greater appreciation of—of what the military is like and what the life of a soldier is like and that there's so much about the military experience that can be inherently unfair to everybody but certainly to people in the military. The unfairness is, for me, you know, as I mentioned earlier, being in a position where you're being asked to do something or required to do something that you don't want to do or that you—that goes against your—your nature or your internal moral code or

what you know to be right. And they—you often hear people say, "Well, if you know something's wrong, just don't do it." Well, that's not always easy. Maybe it's not supposed to be easy, but it's not. People get put in positions that allow that next corner to be turned, if you get in a position where you can't predict what's going to happen but you somehow know intuitively or internally that it's not going to be good.

I talked about my experience working at Walter Reed [National Medical Center] when they were on Georgia Avenue [in Washington, D.C.], before they moved to Bethesda [Maryland]. I never felt that that whole proposed move to the Bethesda was fully thought out. I mean, there were—if you followed the stories in [*The Washington*] *Post* at the time, there were—there were talks about how the traffic was going to be unmanageable. You know, people were going to—you know, that's maybe the least of the problems.

But nobody knew what they were going to do with the facility on Georgia Avenue. As far as I know, it's still there and hasn't—nothing much has happened. I haven't driven by there lately. Maybe you know. But it's—it's—they had plans to turn it over to the District, to make it into mixed use property with residences and shops and things. Nobody knew what they were going to do with the—the old hospital, not the oldest hospital but the active hospital that they were abandoning.

How can you make—how does that lack of foresight become ingrained into a policy decision? You know, at the very least, it's wasteful. And those same kinds of un- —un-fully thought out decisions seemed to be—I mean, they characterized the Vietnam experience for me. I wasn't even there.

I mean, I'm glad that Vietnam has survived and seems to be doing well. I'm glad to hear my classmates talk about their trip there last December, what a wonderful place it is, but, you know, 58,000 American soldiers and sailors and airmen are died—are dead. God knows how many Vietnamese were killed. Couldn't you have just as nice a country, just as nice an outcome without going through all that? I'd like to think you could.

MANNES: What is—can I ask: What is your relationship with or how you—like, the relationship with someone you meet who went to Vietnam? Because you served in the military, but it's obviously a very different experience than someone who was in Vietnam—

RIGGS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

MANNES: —and saw what happened there. So could I ask, like, what that sort of relationship is between—

RIGGS: That's an interesting question. I was especially interested to hear from the other guys who were in the group here this week, who—who served in Vietnam and to hear them express the same sorts of—what I consider the same sorts of misgivings or dissatisfaction with their experiences that I—that I express. But the—in fact, I think what—what—what this symbolizes for me is the fact that, as I said, the—the whole experience is such a waste.

I was struck by something Lee [A. Chilcote, Class of 1964] was saying last night about—talking about how the—and I asked him the same question at lunch yesterday with the ROTC people—what it was like to—I mean, he has—he's a very—was at that time a very driven guy. He was very committed to what he was doing, and he knew that the—he only had a limited view. I mean, you hear the term "stovepipe" nowadays, about people only know what's—only see what's within their stovepipe. And I—what I—what I took from his experience was—and from—from Bud's and Jim's was that they were involved in implementing decisions that they might not have agreed with but they had no control over.

I remember taking—having a management consultant once who was doing some work for me—said that if you want to succeed in something, you need to—we ought to—[Refers to a loud beeping noise that occurred briefly]—

MANNES: No, we're good.

RIGGS: So we need to make sure that everybody who's involved in the decision has something to say—has a say in it so they can make a—a commitment based on their own personal

buy-in to the situation or—[loud beep begins again]. In other words, if ask somebody to do something—

MANNES: I'm sorry. I just need to make sure there's not something wrong with it.

RIGGS: Of course.

MANNES: [A series of beeps of differing tones and durations.] Okay, well, it look like this one is not going to go any longer, and that one may not, either. [Beeps continue.] We'll continue on—I'll [cross-talk; unintelligible; 2:29:34].

RIGGS: Yeah, sure. Is it still recording?

MANNES: Yeah.

RIGGS: Okay.

MANNES: Continue. I'm sorry to interrupt you.

RIGGS: Well, that's something that—the more people who are involved in a decision, the more likely it is to succeed, whatever—whatever you're promoting is likely to succeed. And the other side of that is if people don't have a buy-in, if people are not asked to contribute their two cents to decision, that it probably isn't going—isn't going to succeed. There's a likelihood that it may not succeed or won't succeed as well.

And—I mean, as I say, I—I—I don't—I don't know, of course, but my feeling is that—and the military probably doesn't operate this way, clearly doesn't. It depends on people following orders and doing what they're asked to do or told to do. I think if it were—if it were less that way, if the counsel of more people were taken in the deliberation leading up to a decision, you might get a better decision. Maybe you might not, but I think you probably would get a better decision.

And that may sound a little contradictory because a lot of military situations demand quick [snaps fingers] action, and if it's not taken, you may lose an opportunity. So it's risky.

Does that help [unintelligible; 2:31:40]?

MANNES: Yeah, yeah. I have—before I ask for any final thoughts or reflections, because I'm pretty much done with questions here, I—I wanted to just ask: What made you decide—because you said you haven't really published much—in the past, you published two things, you said.

RIGGS: Mm-hm.

MANNES: What made you want to make the addition of your essay to the book that—I can't remember the name of it.

RIGGS: "Rear Guard"?

MANNES: "Rear Guard." And also what made you want to stay part of this—like, the Vietnam sort of—like [unintelligible; 2:32:14—become part of it or to take part in the panel that we had last night?

RIGGS: Yeah. Well, part of it is based on what I was just saying. I mean, I—I began to feel invested in it and feel that because [Philip C.] "Phil" Schaefer [Class of 1964] had encouraged my participation, that—that it was something that—I mean, it became something I wanted to participate it.

And also I find, at least for my own life, that sometimes I—you know, if I haven't thought about something for a long time, or at all, perhaps, anything that stimulates my thinking is good for me. I mean, it—it forces me to examine something that's important that I otherwise would not have examined.

And I've—I've had that experience elsewhere in my life. You know, to get completely personal about it, asking my wife to marry me was—was something that I felt pretty strongly I needed to do, but I was terrified of doing it. It turned out to be the absolutely right thing to do.

So life does present opportunities like that, and they don't come along every day. This felt like that kind of an opportunity to—to contribute something that would be useful and would live on after me. And I was also gratified to see, as the book project went forward, how many other fellows, who had not served in combat or had not gone to Vietnam,

especially, felt the same way or similarly. So I'm—I'm glad I did it. I have no regrets. I look forward to staying involved in whatever way I can as this project moves forward.

MANNES: Yeah, thank you for that as well.

RIGGS: Absolutely.

MANNES: Can I ask you if you have any final—you've spoken for over two and a half hours. I'm going to ask if you have any final thoughts that you want to share before we finish up.

RIGGS: I don't have at the moment. I've pretty well emptied out.

MANNES: [Chuckles.]

RIGGS: But I—I have your number, and I have your e-mail,—

MANNES: Mm-hm.

RIGGS: —and I will stay in touch with you.

MANNES: Okay, well, great. Thank you very much.

[End of interview]