Bob Vandewalker: Today we are going to be talking to Captain Dale Eddy from the El Toro Marine Corp Station. This is Marine Staff Sergeant Bob Vandewalker and today I’m going to be talking to Captain Dale Eddy, a wounded helicopter pilot that returned from Vietnam in the summer of 1965. Captain Eddy, could you sort of fill me in on your tour duty in Vietnam, what squadron you were with over there, what your job was?

Dale Eddy: Right I was in HMM 163, a medium helicopter squadron, and we were flying out of Da Nang support missions, supporting the Republic of Vietnam. Most of our missions consisted of resupply where we flew, basically, rice and bullets to the outposts in the vicinity of Da Nang, in the I Corps area.

BV: What month are we talking about now? Approximately what times were you in Vietnam?

DE: I was there from February through the last day of March 1965.

BV: One particular day we’re going to be talking here, you were involved in being shot down. I think maybe you can tell the story a little bit more of exactly what happened.

DE: We weren’t shot down. What had happened, we were taking what was listed as a strike mission into an outpost—well, actually a landing zone—south and east, south and west of Da Nang about forty miles. We were picking up Republic of Vietnam troops and hauling them into a zone that was considered loaded with Viet Cong and on the first
two trips in we were doing okay. There was a little bit of shooting going on but on the
third strike or on the third trip into the landing zone is when I was injured.
BV: In other words, small-arms fire actually got your aircraft or had you already
landed when this happened?
DE: We were on the ground when I was hit. It was small arms for the most part;
nothing, nothing heavy of course. We didn’t even have .50-caliber out there.
BV: What happened is, the Viet Cong let you land and then they sort of snuck up
on you, is this what happened?
DE: Yeah, of course we already had lots of friendlies in the area and we weren’t
too sure just flying overhead looking down as to exactly who was who. You could see
people in the zone but you weren’t sure they were friendly or the enemy. So we landed in
the vicinity of the Viet Cong and they shot us as we were sitting in the zone.
BV: In other words, you had Vietnamese troops with you and then you let them
off the aircraft.
DE: Yes.
BV: Then the Viet Cong starting firing at you?
DE: They fired at us just about the time we touched down, and that’s when I was
hit.
BV: What was your job at the time?
DE: I was the aircraft commander.
BV: And who were the other members of your crew?
DE: They were Sgt. Owens and Sgt. Garner who were my crew chief and my
gunner, and the co-pilot was Lt. Magle.
BV: After you had sat down you start to take off and these people started
shooting at you? Exactly what happened then?
DE: While we were unloading our troops I was, of course, was panning the area
and I saw thirty yards out there what appeared to be three Viet Cong standing behind
what looked like an adobe or brick wall of some nature. I was getting ready to call it out
to my gunner on the right side but they hit me before I could call it out.
BV: And you were wounded at the time?
DE: Yes.
BV: I understand that Sgt. Garner helped get these people out of the way or killed these people. Can you explain?

DE: Yes, the first burst hit Sgt. Garner in the leg and myself in the neck, and while we were in the zone to be evacuated Sgt. Garner got out of the aircraft and set his machine gun up on the rice dyke nearby, and shot up the VC thirty yards away. This was a great deal of an aid in our rescue because this made it possible for other aircraft to get in the vicinity to pick us out.

BV: I understand that Sgt. Garner was also awarded a citation for this

DE: Yes, he got the Silver Star.

BV: Now, there were other Marine helicopters in the area?

DE: Yes, this was a strike mission and we were working in waves where three aircraft flying together would land and be closely followed by three more, so there was a considerable number of aircraft in the area. Plus we had few Army Hueys with us. They had the rocket pods on them and they were flying cover for us.

BV: Do you remember what happened after you got wounded? Or were you in a state of shock, where you don’t remember? Can you sort of fill me in? The other helicopter landed and sort of rescued you fellows?

DE: Yes. I wasn’t unconscious. I was paralyzed and consequently I was immobile. But I was very conscious. I could, you know, see a certain limited amount and I had real pain associated with my injury. But I could sense activity going on. I could hear the bullets battering the aircraft and the guns firing.

BV: Were Sgt. Garner and Sgt. Owens both wounded, or just Sgt. Garner?


BV: They evacuate you out of the area, where did they take you then?

DE: They took me to the field hospital there at Da Nang which the Navy set up for us. They’re part of the 9th Expeditionary Brigade.

BV: Now were talking back in early ‘65 where this was sort of a new hospital?

DE: Yes. We were supposed to have been the first patients in the hospital. I’m not real sure about this but the story was it was a brand new hospital.

BV: How long did you stay in Da Nang?
DE: Since it was such a new hospital there they didn’t have the facilities
unwrapped, apparently, to operate on us immediately and they moved me across the field,
and the rest of them they worked on there. But myself, they moved me across the field to
an ARVN hospital which was set up more permanently. This is where I had the initial
operation. After that I was moved to the Na Trang to the 8th Army hospital down there.

BV: I’m sort of getting ahead of my story. Going back to what happened, after
Sgt. Garner had killed these other Viet Cong, I understand another sergeant helped you
get out of the area.

DE: Yes, I owe him a great debt. This was a Staff Sergeant Novotny. He got out
of another aircraft that landed in the zone, came over and pulled me out of the aircraft.
He was a big man and I guess this facilitated his efforts in pulling me out. It was kind of
an unhandy position to be in at the time and I was immobilized totally. I couldn’t help
myself.

BV: Sgt. Garner and yourself had been stationed here at El Toro—or should we
say at the airfield—before you went overseas.

DE: Yes, the squadron was formed at the air facility and then we went over as a
rotating squadron in December of 1964.

BV: So your families were living in Orange County at that time.

DE: Yes, my wife is. My folks are back in the East. She remained right here in
Orange County.

BV: Do you know if Sgt. Garner lived here in Santa Ana also?

DE: Yes, he is in Santa Ana, too.

BV: Is Sgt. Garner in your squad now?

DE: No, he is in HMH 462 which is here at the air facility.

BV: So he also is in Orange County again living here?

DE: Yes.

BV: How long were you under hospital care after this particular event?

DE: We were in and out of the hospital for about five to seven months. It
depended more on the individual. I got out in August

BV: Sort of an outpatient?

DE: Yes, in and out.
BV: Do you feel that being in the hospital so long and being away from flying
these helicopters—is there a program that you must go through to go back and retrain
again in flying helicopters or any type of aircraft?

DE: Yes I’m being retrained in the H-46, which is a new helicopter produced by
Boeing Vertol Company. It’s considerably larger than the previous helicopter and I’ll be
flying this one now, I believe.

BV: Captain Eddy, did you receive any type of award when you were in
Vietnam?

DE: Yes. I flew sixty combat missions which rated me for three Air Medals, plus
my Purple Heart and the American Expeditionary Medal.

BV: How were these Air Medals set up as far as going out on combat flights and
so forth? How does the average crew member and pilots work on this?

DE: We get on twenty missions as the basis for an Air Medal. Some missions,
like the strike mission, there is more of a hazard involved, so you count those as two
missions. Resupply missions, where we would carry our “beans and bullets,” so to speak,
out to the various outposts would be classified most often as a one-mission hop.

BV: Do you feel our job in Vietnam is a necessary job for the people in Vietnam,
helping to assist them?

DE: I firmly believe that, I really do. It’s kind of an unfortunate thing to have to
go to war, but it it bothers me to see the support the American people are giving our
troops right now. I’d like to go into this a little broader. First of all, I firmly believe in
the Domino Theory. The Domino Theory is, basically, if Vietnam falls, somebody else
will fall, and then somebody else, and consequently we’ll be pushed up to the Golden
Gate Bridge with these oppressing nations right at our door. So I have to go along with
the idea that we’ve got to make a stand some place. I’m only sorry that we were waiting
until 1965 really to make our stand. We could have made our stand some time back, I
think.

BV: I think we’re fortunate that only a few American people are in this category
that we’re talking about that are sort of against all this.

DE: I think they are getting a big play through the press and you hear about it all
the time, people who are really supporting it.
BV: As an officer, do you feel that the morale of the troops over while you were there was real good?
DE: Oh yeah, it was real great. The people knew they were doing a job. This is something that affects a professional military person more than it would affect a civilian, I’m sure. But a professional military man is trained to do his job and when he is given an opportunity to do his job, he gets a personal satisfaction out of doing it, much the same way, I’m sure, that an accountant gets out of his job, or any other professional person gets when he does a job. The professional military man gets tired of training and not really doing his job.
BV: Do you feel also that there’s a great team effort with all branches services involved?
DE: Yes, definitely. There was quite an experience back here in the States. There’s always some sort of rivalry between the various military organizations but down there, while the Air Force would come over to our side of the field and bum good ideas that we had, consequently we would got over to the other side of the field and bum good ideas that they had. And this was so typical. The Army Huey pilots who were with us on most of our missions, practically all of our missions. Those guys were really great. We just set the clock on them. They were really fine.
BV: I guess with this team effort we can do nothing but win there.
DE: I have the greatest confidence that we will.
BV: Captain Eddy, where is your hometown originally?
DE: I’m from Columbus, Indiana, a small town south of Indianapolis.
BV: And your folks live there?
DE: Yes.
BV: What are your folks’ names and where did they live now?
DE: They are Mr. and Mrs. Edward Eddy, 62 South Midland Street.
BV: And how long have you been in the Marine Corp now?
DE: I’m over five this month.
BV: When did you originally get your wings? Did you go to college?
DE: I went to Evansville College, down in the southwest corner of the state of Indiana. After that I applied for and was accepted in the Officer’s Candidate Program.
BV: Did you start out as a helicopter pilot? I know many helicopter pilots have flown jets first.

DE: I flew the standard syllabus down at Pensacola and then I elected to fly helicopters and was trained in helicopters at Pensacola before I came to the West Coast.

BV: Many of our Marine pilots do fly both and can fly all of them.

DE: Yes, that is true. In fact, the greater percentage of our squadron were all former jet pilots.

BV: I know you’ve sort of summed up some of the Vietnam War. Can you sort of sum up again a finale to our conversation here? What you might say to the American people in regards to this Vietnam War?

DE: I don’t have a whole lot to say there, but I think that if we would in general just show the troops that we’re in support of the whole thing that’s happening down there and give the government our support on this situation, I think that we can think really iron out the problem there. The problem is going to last for quite a while, probably because it’s hard to tell the communist peasant from the peasant who is faithful to his government. But if we keep doing these, well, I like to call them good deeds for the people down there, things that you aren’t hearing about on radio and television and through the newspapers. If we keep doing this and keep giving these people the type of aid that this government with its economic powers is able to give, definitely we’re going to come up on top.

BV: In other word, a kindness and understanding war is as important as the bullet war down there.

DE: Oh yes, and it’s being waged just about every day. The hospital corpsman and the doctors are on the scene and always tending to the Vietnamese, their illnesses. The people are not familiar with health problems that we are familiar with. They drink water out of streams. They hardly know what a well is, and consequently they get all sorts of illnesses right from their drinking water. We’re capable. Our Marines dig wells and show these people how much better water tastes out of wells, for instance. Over a period of time we’re going to show them a little bit better way of life. And that’s all we want to do.
BV: I understand some of those people have not seen a doctor in sixty or seventy years?

DE: It wouldn’t surprise me. Some of them are really pathetic looking. The health conditions as they exist are pretty bad.

BV: When you think that a person can go through a lifetime of sixty years and not see a doctor, this is unheard in our modern-day living.

BV: Captain Eddy, I want thank you very much for talking to me today and I certainly want to wish you an awful lot of luck in your future endeavors in the Marines Corps.

DE: Thank you very much.