Jean-Nickolaus Tretter

March 8, 2016
Part 1
Interviewed by Ed Sanderson
Transcribed by Rachel Berlinski
Edited by Jena DiMaggio & Teri Embrey
Web biography by Unknown
Production by Brad Guidera

SANDERSON: So, I'll go ahead and start real[ly] quick[ly]. Today is the ninth, the eighth… Today is March 8, 2016. We're here today with Jean Tretter, former CTI [communications technician interpretive] first class from the United States Navy. We're here to talk to you today about your oral history. And thank you for coming out and thank you for coming all the way from Minneapolis to come see us.

TRETTER: Well, thank you for inviting me, and for being so extremely kind and everything like that. I really appreciate it.

SANDERSON: And you were in the Navy from 1964 to 1960… '72. And during that time, you were a linguist, you know, on the Navy side of the house [as] we'd like to call it: communications technician interpretive. But for linguists, for everyone else, they know what it is. God knows the Navy and our acronyms; we gotta… everything has to be initialized.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And you were stationed in various areas of the world. Specifically, you were on board the USS Ranger CVA-61 as well as the TUSLOG [The US Logistics Group] 28 in Turkey.

TRETTER: TUSLOG.

SANDERSON: Oh, TUSLOG.

TRETTER: TUSLOG Det 28.

SANDERSON: And then also--

TRETTER: Which was actually an Army base.

SANDERSON: And with the Turkish army or the US?

TRETTER: No, American army.

SANDERSON: American army.

TRETTER: Yeah, 'cause the stuff was so highly classified that it was a listening post, so…

SANDERSON: And then you were also based out of Hawaii, Fort Meade, Maryland, as well as you did some time in the Philippines…basically all over Southeast [Asia], Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia--

TRETTER: Yup.

SANDERSON: --in that time frame.

TRETTER: In the Caribbean, I spent some time there on a destroyer, mostly in…around Cuba. That was a little bit later, after a lot of the Middle Eastern and, you know, Southeast Asian stuff had happened, but, Cuba had gotten a bunch of big planes. My primary language in the Navy was Russian, although I did have a number of other languages that I…that they used me for. And one of the things we had to do was listen in on the planes that were flying out of Havana. And so we were on a destroyer that actually went within the three-mile limit. They went two miles into Havana harbor. So we were like a mile off shore.

SANDERSON: Aw, nice. You probably got to hear all kinds of interesting things.

TRETTER: Oh no, mostly just scary stuff there. There are two Russian words that we had to listen for, and that's what they wanted from us. One is just a different accent on different syllables. One means "to drop" and the other one means "to fire". And so we would stand right next to…or I would stand right next to the captain of the destroyer, and when they flew the MIGs out, he would want to know if they were going to just drop flares on either side of the ship or if they were going to fire on the ship. And that was a little bit tense, you know, because when you're a non-native speaker, you know, it's very hard to, you know, just that second. You know, I mean you do that with English sometimes, you know, you don't hear exactly properly what the person is saying; it's just the accent on the syllable.

SANDERSON: Definitely, especially that's one of the…I always had my hats off to all the guys on the speaking…or the guys, you know, specifically linguists learning other languages. I can barely speak the English language, much less try to learn another one. That was…thank God, thank God for two years of high school Spanish; that got me through my college requirement. But all right. So we'll go ahead and…well, one of the things we always ask: is it okay to film and record you at this time?

TRETTER: Oh, sure. Yeah, that's why I'm here.

SANDERSON: Well, we always have to have the verbal confirmation of yes. But--

TRETTER: Sure.

SANDERSON: And like we were saying that also during the course of this, you will…we give you full transcripts, both audio and visual. And during…and actually typed out so that way you can go through, and if there's something you're like, "Eh, I don't want that," or if there was something that you might have want...you might want to add to it, that's something we can [do,] because this is your story. We're here to listen to what you did. Why you're in the military and how it shaped your life. And that's one of the…before and after the military, so that way we kind of have an idea--especially later on down the road: historians, activists, whoever would like to learn--what it was like to be a linguist, but also a closeted gay man in the Navy during that time frame. They can go and be like, "Okay. We have it for this time frame. What was it like during wartime when they were…basically if you had a pulse and were somewhat medically fit, they were throwing you on the front line, what was it like to be someone who has pretty much the highest security clearance a person can have and involved in pretty much everything that shaped the latter half of the twentieth century and even the early part of the twenty-first century?" So...

TRETTER: Will I be able…just out of curiosity, and I don't know if this is something you want on there, but will I be able to make a copy of or keep the transcript?

SANDERSON: Oh, yes.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: Everything we send to you, that's yours. And then anything that you want edited out, you just send us the information back, and we can--

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: --we can edit that. But that's your copy. That's yours.

TRETTER: Because I was just thinking, the University of Minnesota of course has my archive, and would probably like a copy to go along with the archives.

SANDERSON: And then we can even give both the official copy and unofficial copy as well. 'Cause I know a lot of times afterwards you have what…the official copy is what will be posted on the site. And then we also keep the

unedited documents around as well. Because sometimes, you know, the person might not want it now, but later on, you know, fifty years down the road, there might be something like, "Oh." You know, especially as a historian that would be definitely one of those where sometimes those little historical tidbits are what's the most fascinating about it. It's more the…they always, say the devil in the details.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah. Sometimes those details are always the best. So what we're gonna do is we're just gonna dive right into it. We'll start in [with] where were you born and raised?

TRETTER: I was born in Little Falls, Minnesota. As I like to say, my one true claim to fame was I was from the same hometown as Charles A. Lindbergh. And born at St. Gabriel's Hospital there.

SANDERSON: Now was that something…being born and raised in the same town as Charles Lindbergh, [were] there still some of the family members around?

TRETTER: Oh, yeah, yeah. But it was interesting because Lindbergh was not universally liked, primarily because of his sympathy for the Germans during the early part of World War II. You know, he later changed his views and that, but early on during the war he was rather pro-German, and so, you know, there was a lot of…I mean, it was…it's a small town in northern Minnesota. It was about ten thousand people, which was a good-sized town back in the forties and fifties. You know, and it had a lot of manufacturing in those days, which later on got lost, and…you know, with the changing things in America. But a lot of those feelings from that period of times were very prevalent. I remember I…one of my friends was Mary Saldine. And her father owned some apartment buildings and things like that in Little Falls. He bought the first Volkswagen in that part of Minnesota. And the family was criticized and all kinds of things because they were driving a Volkswagen. A German [car]. And we just fought this war and people had, you know, people that had died in the war and everything like that. So it was... Although he got it because it was efficient and, you know, they ran well and everything like that. But a lot of other people thought it was absolutely horrible that he'd even buy a Volkswagen. So there was that thing. And there was that kind of prejudice against the Lindberghs too. So…but it's all over. There's a big museum there. Lindbergh State Park is there, you know, and everything like that, so. Something.

SANDERSON: All right. Well, definitely would be interesting growing up, especially…and that was another thing I was gonna ask you, was what was it like growing up in post-World War II Minnesota where during…especially in some of your formative years, that was during the fifties when everyone had the white…you know, the house with the white picket fence, the two cars in the garage, you know. Trying to remember, they'd always say that during the fifties, that's when they say that no one really…well everyone finally had it…well, they never had it so well. Trying to think of what... It was one of the British prime ministers right after Churchill. He said that they never had it so good, 'cause during that time, everyone had a good job. They were making money hand over fist. People could actually afford to have a family for the first time.

TRETTER: Well, and my father was in logging and lumbering. So he had a small-- [phone rings] Oh, I'm sorry. Let me just, in case it's the hospital. The VA. [On the phone] Hello. Oh I'm in Chicago right now. Is the manager in the office? Oh, one of them. Okay, thank you. Bye. [Hangs up] UPS leaving a package for me at my apartment. Probably something my cat ordered. So--

SANDERSON: You said he was in logging and lumbering?

TRETTER: Yeah, he was in logging and lumbering. And an interesting part related to the wars of my family history, and we didn't find out until my mother died at the age of, what, ninety-four, ninety-six. Something like that. My family was one hundred percent German, but we were raised and told that we were Norwegians. And actually, until we saw the family papers after my mother died, we thought all along that we were Norwegian. You know, and being dumb little kids, we never thought, "How come all of our relatives are German and we're Norwegian?" But my mother and father, in between World War I and World War II, decided that we can't be German. For one thing, if we go into a Second World War, it will hurt my father's business. You know, and he won't be able to make the lumber sales and the government will want lots of lumber during the war and everything like that. And so they actually moved into Little Falls from the farm, or from the country I should say. And Little Falls in those days was divided into four parts. You had a Norwegian section, Norwegian Lutheran section. You had a Swedish Lutheran section. You had kind of a generic section that was a little bit of everything and anything, and then you had a German Lutheran section. So, and we…my family decided to become Norwegians, moved to the Norwegian section of town, started going to the Norwegian National Lutheran Church, which eventually became the first English-Lutheran church in America, because it was the national church of Norway and everything like that, and we were just

never told. The customs, the food, the language, everything that was Norwegian, and Scandinavian was what we learned and what we lived in. Even though we eventually found out, and that was a whole new discovery for me to find out that I'm really a hundred percent German. We don't have any Scandinavian in us at all, so and there's more to it, but that was part of that whole psychology of, like you say, post-World War I, you know, and pre-World War II: how you acted and reacted. And of course Little Falls is very close to Camp Ripley, which is a staging area for the Army before they go over there. You know, and I remember people would complain bitterly because the troops were coming into Fort Ripley and it tied up the traffic and the convoys and all the people getting off the trains that came to the railroad station there, and everything like that. And so, there was…they were not happy with the military, and of course that was right during the Korean War, and so the base was very busy. Fort Ripley was very busy and people coming and going. A lot of training and that kind of stuff. But it was not a happy relationship, you know, between, you know the…I think a lot of people didn't want their daughters dating, you know, soldiers. And a lot of people of course would leave there and get killed and never come back, and everything like that. So it was…it was, I would say, kind of a difficult time, you know, just because of that whole military relationship there. And we just grew up with it. I mean, it was part and parcel of our life. The soldiers that come into town on Saturday nights or Saturdays and go to the movies. We had two movie theaters, the Ripley and the Falls. And of course that's where we kids always hung out and everything like that. But I mean, the military aspect was all-pervasive 'cause Little Falls was the biggest town next to Fort Ripley. Fort Ripley was, like, ten miles away, and so there was a lot of…that was the place you went. You couldn't afford to…soldiers in that [time] back in those days couldn't afford to go down to the Twin Cities. You know, that was the big time. That was like New York or Chicago or anything like that.

SANDERSON: Back in those days, I think the standard military person was making not even a hundred dollars a month.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: So it was--

TRETTER: I'm sure they weren't. But we had…and you know, of course it was also the housing shortage after World War II, and we had a huge house in Little Falls. An old one and everything like that. And my mother used to rent out rooms there to soldiers mostly 'cause there weren't many…I mean, it's Minnesota, middle of the country. Even though my family was

more of a Navy family or whatever, I guess just because my oldest brother had gone into the Navy instead of the whatcha-call-it. And that so we'd always been kind of a Navy family. My second oldest brother was Army, but that was during the Korean War, and he went down to Alabama. Never left the States, you know. Everything like that. But the rest of us were Navy. My brother was on active duty mostly in the Pacific, a little bit in Europe during World War II. And then my sister, who was also older than me, was in the Navy during the Suez Crisis. She was a nurse during that. She was a medical technician, [that] was her profession, and she'd gone to college and everything like that. And so she had joined the Navy and was in action [as] an officer in the Naval Nursing Corps during the Suez Crisis.

SANDERSON: Definitely a large military family. And that was…one of the things was…now, your father didn't…did your father serve in the military or no?

TRETTER: He was too young for World War I and too old for World War II. But he had a valuable function for the government in that he owned a sawmill and provided lumber for the government and for all those barracks and for all those, you know, Quonset huts and everything like that. You know, he sawed--

SANDERSON: How many brothers and sister do you have total?

TRETTER: I had two brothers and one sister. All of them older than me. I was the youngest by a long time. I was a post-World War II baby. '46.

SANDERSON: And then, so your brother was in the Navy and your sister was in the Navy?

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: And your other brother was in the [US] Army?

TRETTER: Was in the Army, yeah.

SANDERSON: What did your brother--[who] was in the Navy--what did he do?

TRETTER: I, you know, I'm not…it was just interesting when we started talking about this, I never really ask. I know he was on ships, must have been destroyers mostly in the Pacific, you know. I know one of his ships got hit by a kami-…Japanese Kamikaze thing, and his friend was standing next to him, and his friend got hit by shrapnel and died, and my brother didn't, you know, when the plane exploded and that. And the ship made it back to port. It limped back to port and everything like that. But I never really…it's funny how, you know, by the time I was in the military so that I

had the credentials to talk to him about being in the military, you know, he was already, you know, quite, quite old. I mean, I was born in the forties and they were…my two brothers were born in the twenties, and my sister was born in the thirties. So I was young by quite a…let me illustrate it, if I may, by a story. I had a friend, or have a friend, that lives up near Duluth. And we went up there and stayed with him. And he lives in Duluth now, but his family was from Duluth. And we were staying at his parents' house, and I got to talking to his dad. Turned out, his dad had been in the Air Force during WWII and was in the Aleutian Islands and had done all the evacuating and things like that when the Japanese tried to take over the Aleutians and the bombing and getting stuff off the bases. You know, he wasn't a pilot, but he was one of the grounds people that, you know, made sure everything was safe and got moved and everything like that. And after that when we were driving back to the cities, my friend and I, he said, "You know I never knew…" He said, "I never knew any of that about my father." And he said, "I've never been able to talk to him or ask him about it or anything like that." I mean, he was just amazed because his father had done multiple wonderful things, you know, during the war and everything like that. And in this whole big thing with the Aleutian Islands, which is kind of a hidden part of WWII, you know, and everything like that. And that's kind of it. You have to have…with a lot of people, you don't want to talk about the war, so you have to have the credentials of having been in the military, you know, so that you can talk to a person like that.

SANDERSON: Sounds like… It was the same way with my uncle. He was in Vietnam. He never would talk about it until after I joined. And even after I joined, he really didn't talk about it until after I'd been to Iraq. He didn't want it. And, like you were saying, building up the credentials. Yeah, he would never talk to my brother about it. My brother was in the Army, but he was never--

TRETTER: Yeah, and I…actually, I didn't…you know, I mean, this is a whole different thing with the Pritzker, so it's not…it's not something that I've talked a lot about. I've had…in a political thing, they were telling…some of my friends were telling me that this one guy was really interested and wanted me to talk about it, and they said he was just chasing you around the table trying to get you to talk to him about having been in Vietnam and your experiences in Vietnam. And he had been like a peace-nick during the war and all this kind of stuff, and it was just…you know, and I didn't even realize what was happening. I was just…I didn't want to talk to him, and I just wanted to get away from him. And I don't talk generally…I doubt my family knows very much. They know I was there, but that's about it, you know. So--

SANDERSON: Yeah, that's definitely…that's one of the things that I've thoroughly enjoyed about this, you know, with the oral history program here. It allows a person to be able to talk to…and that's generally why the majority of the interns and the people that they bring in to do the interviews are military, so that way, it's like you can talk military back and forth. But also, it makes it more comfortable for you to be able to actually talk about it. Whereas, you know, if this…if a civilian was sitting in this seat, it would…you know, someone who had no military experience whatsoever, you'd go through the motions, you would speak, but you probably wouldn't want to dive into the nuts and bolts and the weeds, so to speak. Especially--

TRETTER: Yeah, well like Ken was saying, with the Navy, the acronyms, you know. And you use the CTI. Nobody knew there was communication technician interpretive branch, you know. I mean, I knew it right away because that was my MOS as soon as you said it. But everybody else was going like, "What? What?" You know, and so--

SANDERSON: There's been a few times where I've started talking Navy around them, and I'm like, "Okay." But when I finally explain to them why, why we have acronyms and initials for everything. And as we're talking, you know, I actually broke it down. I'm like, "Okay, this is why we say COX OCMC." And we basically took a thirty-second conversation and trying to expand all that out, it wound up being a two minute [conversation], and I'm like, "Yeah, it's a big time saver."

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah.

SANDERSON: So I'm kind of going back in with it. What did…well, by this time it was just pretty much you and your sister and your mom and dad. What was it…you know, what did you and your sister do to relax and to have fun during that time frame?

TRETTER: I don't quite understand the question.

SANDERSON: Like, well, what did you and your sister do to have fun? Or what did you guys do for your leisure growing up?

TRETTER: Oh, in Little Falls and everything like that? Well first off, like I said, all my brothers and sisters were much older than me. My sister was the one that was closest to me in age, and she was thirteen years older than I was. So she was into high school things and girl things and boyfriends, and, you know, she did musicals at the school, and I think she…yeah, she played clarinet and that sort of stuff. When I was in Little Falls and growing up, I was into music. I played trombone. I was into stamp

collecting. I've been a stamp collector since I was six years old. Not so much into athletics because I was shot in the stomach when I was four years old. I still have the bullet in my leg, and everything like that. So, that was a long time that I was very restricted in what I could and could not do. But it led to other things. I mean it's…I started reading by the time I was four years old. You know, mostly comic books and that kind of stuff, but you know. I've always been a big reader 'til my eyes started going bad, and that kind of stuff. But…and I was always into natural history. I collected bugs and butterflies, and I'd make little zoos out of mayonnaise jars and, you know, ketchup bottles and have live insects in them and take care of them.

SANDERSON: Ah, nice.

TRETTER: That, and worked for my dad from about the time I was seven years old on, 'cause he had a sawmill. And what I did…I was paid the magnificent sum of a dollar a week, so I was one of the richest little kids around in school 'cause I'd work all summer for my dad. And the big thing that I did there was, he would have a skidway, and they would bring the logs in on a caterpillar and dump the logs in the skidway. Well, somehow the logs had to get up the skidway to the saw where they'd put it on a carriage, and it would go back and forth while they were sawing and things. And so my job was to take a cant hook and roll the logs up the skidway. You know, and everything like that. I kinda liked it. I spent a lot of time, you know, at my dad's lumber camp. Always had kind of a sense of adventure as a little kid. I remember going up there in the winter on weekends because I had school so I couldn't go up during the week. But if my dad had to fix something or something, he'd take me along up to it. And his sawmill was in all different kinds of parts of Minnesota. And I would go up with him. And, as you know, northern Minnesota is filled with ponds and lakes and all this stuff left over from the glaciers. And as a little kid I used to love to go up with him in the winter, and I would walk out in these ponds, which probably was dangerous, but, you know. Minnesota, a lot of them, they freeze solid, you know, or they're eighteen inches of ice or whatever on them. But I remember always going out on them and I'm thinking, "I am the first person that ever stood here in this spot. No explorer, no pioneer, no anything would have walked out into the middle of the lake. And I am here." And I really loved that. And that was probably part of what I was fascinated by with the Navy, because it allowed me to travel and allowed me to go a lot of places and try a lot of different things and to speak foreign languages and, you know, meet people and everything. I loved it, you know, in…from that respect. There were things I didn't like. I vowed at that time, when I got out of the Navy, I said, "I will never again polish a shoe." And I haven't.

SANDERSON: Yeah. God knows. That was…that's always been an interesting thing, trying to keep them things polished. Especially on board [a] ship.

TRETTER: Yeah, I hated that. I hated that. Everything. Those inspections and that kind of stuff.

SANDERSON: Oh, definitely. Now what…when did you graduate high school?

TRETTER: '64.

SANDERSON: '64. And were you still in Little Falls at this point?

TRETTER: No. By then my father had passed away and we had moved to St. Paul, 'cause we were more of a St. Paul family than we were a Minneapolis family of the Twin Cities. But we'd moved up to the cities because in those days, that was about '58, that was the only place my mother could really get a job, you know. And--

SANDERSON: What happened to the…your father's sawmill?

TRETTER: She sold it. She sold everything. There's things I'd like. I'd love to, someday, if I ever go into an antique shop and see an old cant hook, I will buy one and get it framed and take it home and that kind of stuff. But yeah, I know, and I think she got ripped off on a lot of the stuff, you know, but she just sold it for whoever was interested and would buy it and everything like that. You know, they didn't have a big auction or anything like that.

SANDERSON: And a lot of it, she just didn't want to run the business or have your brothers run the business?

TRETTER: Well, my brothers, of course by that time, had gone on with their own lives and were doing other things. The one that was in the Army ended up working for Land o' Lakes creamery and made butter and cheese and all that other stuff. And then my oldest brother, the one that had been in the Navy, liked driving trucks, and so he was a truck driver almost all of his life and--

SANDERSON: Oh, nice.

TRETTER: --drove all over the United States and still had that kind of wanderlust in him too.

SANDERSON: Oh, nice. So what was that like, going from a small…well, you know, a small town nowadays, but a decent-sized town to one of the largest cities, and pretty much the largest area in Minnesota.

TRETTER: Well, and we lived in a suburb, and it was…it was okay. I made rather good friends right away. Interestingly enough, they were also stamp collectors. [Chuckles] You know, it was fun because the three of us would get together and we actually…it was kind of like fighting one of those war games, only we did it with our stamp collections, and the way you conquered that country was to have the most stamps from that country.

SANDERSON: Country?

TRETTER: And I was generally the British Empire. My friend John was France and the French Empire, and then our friend Roger was Germany and the German Austro-Hungarian Empire. You know, and so we…that was how we did it. And the biggest country we always fought over that changed hands time and time again was a place called Tannu Tuva, you know, an old place that was taken over outside of Mongolia, in between Mongolia and the Soviet Union or the old Federation of Russia. And in that whole section, and that was…it was for a while part of the Chinese Empire but then the Russians got it and made it a republic, a socialist republic, part of the… And that was the one that we fought over the most. If we would have had armies, they would have been back and forth over Tannu Tuva all the time.

SANDERSON: Ah, nice.

TRETTER: So...

SANDERSON: It's kind of like…reminds me of the game Risk.

TRETTER: That's exactly what it was like, right. Yeah.

SANDERSON: But instead of the little bitty men and the cannons, you guys were doing it with stamps.

TRETTER: Yeah. And it was good for all of us, because there's so much history put on stamps. You know, countries put history on stamps, and it was languages. We could keep our languages up and speak…which was kind of why we had…John had taken France and Roger had taken Germany and things like that because those were languages that we all spoke, and we could get along, but, you know, John was the best at French and that sort of thing. Yeah, it was…it was just really…you know, it teaches…stamp collecting teaches you geography, history, linguistics, you know, I mean just name it and name it. And I still…I'm still fascinated by them and collect them to this day.

SANDERSON: How nice.

TRETTER: And there's so much military history on stamps.

SANDERSON: Oh yeah.

TRETTER: One of the biggest part of my collections, or one of the things I've started to collect…at first when we started out, you could get stamps and occupation stamps, like Japanese occupation in the Philippines, things like that for…you could buy bags of them for ten cents. You know, and so nobody wanted them. Well, a few years ago--I'd say maybe five, ten years ago--I realized, "Hey, those aren't around anymore." And one of the things I specialize in my collection now are military occupation stamps. I've got a wonderful collection of Manchukuo, which was the Japanese taking over Manchuria during WWII. You know, and Japanese in the Philippines and all this kind of stuff. And now all this stuff is much harder and much more expensive to find.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, I wish I'd have had the common sense to collect it back in the day.

SANDERSON: Right, when it was a ten-cent--

TRETTER: Right, yeah.

SANDERSON: You know, ten cents for a bag.

TRETTER: But as a kid, you were far more interested in like Tannu Tuva and things like that. Those were more exciting.

SANDERSON: It's kind of like, you know, looking back…you were talking about comic books earlier. Looking at some of the comic books I had as a kid and seeing what they go one eBay…you know what they're…and Amazon and in these auctions nowadays. I'm like, "Why didn't I keep them?" or "Why didn't I protect them better?" Or kind of like when my dad, you know, growing up in the same time frame and taking baseball cards and sticking them in the spokes to make a motor.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: God only knows how many hundreds of thousands of dollars he wasted because he didn't collect them. He basically threw them away.

TRETTER: Yeah, well, like they just found that paper bag with those Ty Cobb cards in it. And they're estimating that at auction now they will probably sell for around six million dollars. And it was just in their uncle's stuff, and when

they were cleaning out his house, they were…"Well, what's in this paper bag?" And here it was, five or six Ty Cobb cards. Just--

SANDERSON: Yeah, I heard about that.

TRETTER: Wow. Yeah, so it's funny about the things that are collected. And with a museum like this, there [are] a lot of things, and that'll be some of the gifts that you'll see late on. But I mean a lot of this stuff, especially the stuff from WWII, was like I say a dime a dozen when I was a kid, you know, because all the soldiers had brought back souvenirs. And things like that, you know, I mean there were a few special things like those presentation daggers--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: --that Hitler used to give to his generals when they had done a really good job, and everything like that, that were gold and silver and everything like that. I mean, those were the prize souvenirs that you wanted but I mean, people brought back helmets and uniforms and everything like that. You know, you could…it was easy and cheap and available. And now, you know, fifty years later--

SANDERSON: If you can find one thing, it's a…you know, almost priceless nowadays.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now, you were talking about you guys had already started learning different languages.

TRETTER: Mm-hm.

SANDERSON: Where did this…where did your love of learning languages start?

TRETTER: Well, I mean, you just grew up with it in Little Falls. You know, we lived in the Norwegian section of town, like I said, so we needed to know Norwegian. Now, my parents would never let me learn German, probably because they knew about our history and because it was post-World War II; you didn't study German. I know I signed up for a German class, and they were just furious with me until I dropped the class when I was, like, in junior high. Something like that. Because they didn't want us speaking German. That was the enemy. And it was funny because where we lived, and maybe because so many people in that area were German, and our ancestors were from Germany, which is a whole other group of stories about how we got there and everything like that. We were…basically my family was refugees from the Lutheran section of Germany during the Reformation and went down to Munich, and then a guy by the name of

Father Pierce brought a whole bunch of those families to northern Minnesota where they re-founded all those towns from northern Germany that had switched to Lutheran and they re-founded them as Catholic towns in Minnesota. So you have these whole bunch of towns: Pierce and Flensburg and all that. The same as the towns over in Germany, except in Minnesota, they're now Catholic 'cause it was the Catholic refugees from the Reformation. But, anyway, so we were constantly confronted with languages and, you know, one of the things we used to do every year is they have…Lutherans have what is called Summer Bible School. It lasts for two weeks when regular school is out for the summer, and that. And that was the only time that we really associated with the Swedish Lutherans is for that two weeks, all the Norwegian Lutheran kids would go over to the Swedish side of town and have Bible school, Lutheran Bible School, in the Swedish Lutheran churches, and all the Swedish Lutheran kids would come over to the Norwegian part of town. And the Germans just had their own Bible school in the German part of town. And then, of course, like I said there was that fourth section that was…it was all those strange and exotic religions like Catholics and Baptists and Methodists and, you know, those really strange and exotic things that--

SANDERSON: And probably a few Pentecostals, Assembly of God, and yeah.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah. But--

SANDERSON: The stuff that they grew up on.

TRETTER: Yeah, but you know, northern Minnesota in those days, you were basically Lutheran or Catholic. You know, so.

SANDERSON: By the time you graduated in '64, how many languages could you speak?

TRETTER: Basically, I would say two that I was familiar enough with. I knew a little bit of German, but you know, we'd been so forbidden to learn German that I really didn't start learning German real[ly] well. I did some while I was in the Navy, but I really didn't learn German until after my mother passed away, 'cause that was just…everything German was forbidden. You know, so, but it was mostly Norwegian and English at that time. You know, and I knew a smattering of other things, you know. I knew enough Swedish to get by. You know, I could order lunch in a Swedish restaurant, you know. That sort of stuff.

SANDERSON: Kind of more the conversational or very, very minimal, minimal.

TRETTER: Yeah, but the thing that was nice about it, and with me going into the Navy, you know, they'd already started drafting people when I graduated from high school, and when I went in the Navy….that sounds kind of silly, I guess, but you have to take all these tests. And of course, I took the mechanical aptitude test. And at that time, I scored the lowest score on mechanical aptitude of anybody that had ever tried to join the Navy from that. I don't know if it was area or whatever, but they told me, "You've got the…" I scored something like a two on the mechanical aptitude test. However, on the linguistics test, because of my own background and my own knowledge and everything like that, I had something like a ninety-seven, ninety-eight.

SANDERSON: Oh nice.

TRETTER: I think. And they said, "Well, you can either become a botswain's mate or you can become a linguist, and of course I was interested in becoming a linguist and actually requested…they said, "Go ahead and request what you want. We can't guarantee you anything." And so I requested Chinese. I really wanted to learn Chinese and you know how to do all the--

SANDERSON: The characters?

TRETTER: The characters and that kind of stuff. But the day and the age was in those days that everything was…our big enemy was Russia.

SANDERSON: Russia. Right.

TRETTER: You know, we had Quemoy and Matsu [reference to the First Taiwan Strait Crisis, a short armed conflict between the Communist People's Republic of China and the Republic of China] and, you know, all the things that we were fighting with China over and you know, but…and there, if you want to talk about a war that people have forgotten about, most people, you say Quemoy and Matsu and they say, "What?"

SANDERSON: Or they have no idea what that--

TRETTER: Yeah. That was a forgotten piece of history.

SANDERSON: Oh definitely. And that's a lot of those wars, even the some of the smaller stuff is constantly…a lot of it is constantly forgotten. And it's almost heartbreaking at times.

TRETTER: Which is one of the reasons that's it's nice to collect stamps because then all of a sudden, you have a perspective on the Belgians taking over German colonies in East Africa during World War I, and then you have the German overprints from the parts of Belgium that they took over in

World War I, you know. And you've got all these things that are all mixed up, but you knew more about it. Everybody always thinks, you know, East Africa, well, that it was the British and the French that took over the German colonies. But actually, it was the Belgians who then seceded most of those colonies to Britain, instead of…because Belgium was always having its own problems with France. You know, and things like that.

SANDERSON: That and also the…Leopold's kids.

TRETTER: Ah yes. Yeah, they had their own little problems with the good old king.

SANDERSON: Oh, definitely. All right, and then let's see. So this brings us to '64. You graduated high school. And with the draft going on, did you do any type of community college or university?

TRETTER: Didn't really have the money. You know, my mother was not a good money manager, I mean she was…she had done things. We had some of the social security because when my father was still alive and operating the saw mills, she had insisted that we do social security. You know, thought it was a good thing, although even though my family was very Republican, you know, didn't like Humphrey, didn't like FDR or anything like that, but there was a person that they did like, and that was Floyd B. Olson in Minnesota. You know, he was kinda like the Huey Long of Louisiana only of Minnesota.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: And yeah, but basically, we were…another somewhat interesting aspect of me: when I went into the service, I was probably a little bit to the right of the John Birch society. When I got out of the Navy--by the time I got out of the Navy and had seen what was going on in the Nixon White House and all that kind of stuff--I was probably slightly to the left of I.F. Stone. So, a lot of things you know that infected my life…not infected but affected my life rather dramatically for the rest of my thing, because I became very much a Democratic liberal. You know. To the point that it even kind of scares me being around here because I have a tendency to think that, you know, with the Pritzker and everything like that, that you guys are probably all Republicans, hardcore.

SANDERSON: In actuality, it's one of those where I can…out of all the places I've ever worked, this is one of the few places where you really don't talk much about politics. You know, and a lot of it's just more of…and even here, it's just more of, we've done, you know, especially Ken and Jennifer's done…you know, they've done a great job of making sure we really don't

take a stance. That the museum and the library is…whatever your views are is what your views are.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You know, we're…they won't make any type of comment either way. And a lot of it's because we want people to come into where if you're a far left-leaning Republican…a far left-leaning liberal or a far right-, you know, leaning Republican you can…you can be who you want to be when you come in here.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And that's one of the things where I think a lot of the…a lot of museums, a lot of groups, veterans groups, they tend to want to go either way. It's like, you know, stay in the middle ground. You know? When you walk into an area, especially and area like here, you've done your bit for king and country. You're a veteran regardless. If you want to vote far left, that's…you've earned that right. If you want to vote far right, that's your right. You have earned that right. And that's one of the things that…that's one of the things I love about working even with the civilians that [have] little to no military experience or no military experience whatsoever, I think it kinda shocks some of them that we're very…"Okay."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: "You're voting for that guy. Okay. You're voting for that guy. Okay."

TRETTER: Yeah and we were…[clears throat] We've always been…excuse me, I seem to have been [clears throat]…We have always been very careful like that with my collection back at the University of Minnesota. You know, we're very cautious that everybody's included in that collection and everything like that. Because you want to get the entire historical picture. Like you say, the devil is sometimes in the details, and if somebody's not telling you something because they're afraid of whatever, and so we have things in the log cabin, Republicans and, you know, from the, you know, Democrats and you name it. So we were always very, very careful about that too.

SANDERSON: That's good.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: A lot of it's like…I was telling a friend of mine that we…I did an interview a while back on an individual. Prior to Vietnam, prior to the military, "'Merica." You know? Very far right, very I mean very much Republican.

By the end, we're talking about borderline communist in his views. And a lot of people were like, "Well, how can he do this? He did that. He did this. He's got all these awards and stuff." And I'm like, "First off, he earned his…he earned that right." If he…he can think however he wishes. He earned that right to do it.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And [those are] his views, and that's one of the things that unfortunately, that a lot of people nowadays, they are like, "Oh my god. You're a liberal?" Or, "You're a Republican?" You know, it's just kinda like, okay well...

TRETTER: Like I say, that's generally my story too. Like I said, I went in to the right of the John Birch Society and came out to the left of I.F. Stone. You know, and…but it was also the nature of the times too. You know, Nixon turned so many people, you know, and that stuff. And I know the first time I really started getting upset about it is, my family…and one of the things we haven't talked about yet is, my family, from as young as I can remember, were always readers. Like I said, I could read by the time I was four years old. And huge, huge readers. And when Nixon tried to do the stuff that they now do with the libraries where they can…the government can now have access to library records and that, I mean, that's what first started turning me against it. And then this stuff about you can't talk to reporters, and they were so paranoid when we went into Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam and all that kind of stuff, and it was just…nobody needs to know, and you've got these security clearances and, you know, and we weren't…we were on the frontlines but we weren't on the frontlines. We had to be close enough so that we could get the radio transmissions but they didn't want us too close because they didn't want them to pick us up and make us prisoners of war. And of course, we were the linguists so we were kind of the non-athletic intellectuals [chuckles]. You know, and they didn't know what we do, you know, and everything like that. So we had our own reputation in the military.

SANDERSON: Oh yeah.

TRETTER: [clears throat] Yeah.

SANDERSON: Kind of going on that, when you joined in '64, of course you went up here to Great Lakes, looking at your history of assignments.

TRETTER: Mm-hm.

SANDERSON: What was boot camp like in '64?

TRETTER: Well, it was crowded. [Chuckles] Because this was when they were very much drafting people. The Vietnam War was just starting. And they were trying to…in '64, I don't think they'd activated the draft yet, but everybody knew it was coming and they were afraid of it, and they wanted to make sure that they could get in the Navy. And then that didn't work for them all, either, because people would join the Navy and then they'd get transferred to the Marines. You know, and that, but…trying to think of what else. There was…it was the first time for an awful lot of people to be racially integrated. You know, I'd grown up in Minnesota. [Clears throat] Excuse me. I had known one black person all of my life. One African American. He was a student in my high school in St. Paul, in Roseville, from Kenya. You know? And I didn't even really know him. I knew of him because he was there, but that was the only African American person. He wasn't even African American. He was African Kenyan. But we didn't know the difference. Now, I'd grown up with Native Americans all the time, you know. And of course, the other big minority in those days was the Polish that were coming to Minnesota from Poland when they could get out of the Russian circle and everything like that. But you know, I mean. And we lived in a white suburb when we moved to St. Paul. And St. Paul wasn't the most African American city at the time, you know. I mean, that was when they were dismantling Rondo and the African American neighborhoods so that they could build a freeway through it, and everything like that. And now I know a lot more of the African Americans that lived in that area, and they talk about that. And they have societies about the Rondo Neighborhood Society and all this kind of stuff. But, so, the thing about boot camp was…is that was a place when you actually first met other races. You know. Not many Asians, but you first met your African Americans and, you know, a lot of minorities. Italians, Polish, you know, things like that. I mean, and these were all things that you just didn't have in northern Minnesota. I mean, when they first introduced zucchini to Minnesota, everybody was…"What is this? How do you cook it?" You know, "What do you do with it?" You know, what…you know. Literally, what is it? You know, we don't know what zucchini was.

SANDERSON: And why did you pick the Navy? 'Cause I know--

TRETTER: Because of my family.

SANDERSON: 'Cause the family?

TRETTER: Yeah, 'cause my brother had been in the Navy. My sister had been in the Navy, and it just seemed right. And besides, my brother that was in the Army, like I say, they ended up in Alabama in the Korean War. They never

even got to Korea. That kind of stuff, and it all sounded pretty dull and boring and, you know…and the Navy, even though I did so poorly on my mechanical aptitude test, they were quite enthusiastic about me doing so well on my linguistics tests. And like I said, they promised you that you could get whatever you want, but of course they assigned it to you.

SANDERSON: They still do that one. [Chuckles]

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now, when I was looking at the history of your assignment after you graduated boot camp in September '64, you reported on board the USS Ranger.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: Now, what rate were you when you got on board the Ranger?

TRETTER: What rate was I? I was a seaman apprentice.

SANDERSON: A seaman--

TRETTER: Yeah, I was still the seaman apprentice, 'cause I hadn't been to language school yet. I knew I was going, but they had to do something with me for those couple of months before the next batch of Russian linguists started. [Clears throat]

SANDERSON: Okay, and that was one of the questions--

TRETTER: And it wasn't 'til after I graduated from language school that I got to be a full seaman.

SANDERSON: Oh. 'Cause that was one of the questions when I was looking at it…I was like…you know, 'cause I saw basically from October of '64 to March of '65 you were on board the Ranger.

TRETTER: Yup.

SANDERSON: So, when I was looking at it, I was like, were you contracted CT-…as a CTI when you first came in, 'cause I know the Navy is one of the few branches where you're still…you can be contracted.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You're…whatever you're contracted when you came in, and even back in the sixties, if you signed that contract of, I'm gonna be a…like with myself

being a hospital corpsman, you're a hospital corpsman. Basically, it takes some act of Congress to get you out of that rate.

TRETTER: Yeah, no, and what they did with me is on board the Ranger, I was assigned to admiral's plot kind of as a gopher. You know, I went and got coffee for people and I listened on the headphones sometimes and, you know, when things would happen and stuff like that. It wasn't languages, you know, because I was scheduled to start language school in March, and you know, they send me…that was also the first time I ever flew off an aircraft carrier, where you go from zero to three hundred miles an hour in a second. Or however long it is, you know, but they…you know, with the catapults and all of a sudden, wham. You know, and they put you backwards in the seats and belt you in so that, you know, you're not whatcha-call-it. But, yeah no, I worked with the admiral's plot. You know, and we had the big boards and we'd have to put where the ships were when we were off the coast of Vietnam. And the other thing that's real[ly] interesting that I remember about then is that was when I first got exposed to Agent Orange. And nobody knew what it was. I mean, we didn't think it was a danger, because, you know, I mean, of course, the United States wouldn't do anything that would harm you. You know, and I remember we'd walk by this big cage where they'd be filling the cylinders with the thing, and there'd be this cloud of things, and when the planes would come back and land on the deck, they'd have to wash them off, and you'd be walking along and there'd be all this chemicals running off the deck into the ocean from when they washed the stuff off, because, you know, when they sprayed it from the planes, some of it stuck to the planes and that. And I imagine somebody…because, you know, because they were washing it and everything like that, I imagine somebody knew that it wasn't good for you to see and breathe and everything like that. But you know, that was the first that I can remember of exposure to Agent Orange.

SANDERSON: Okay.

TRETTER: And that was early in the…that was very early in the war. And like I said, nobody even knew…I mean, you could have gone up to me and said, "What's Agent Orange?" and I wouldn't have known. You know, it's an insecticide. Maybe I would've known that it was a defoliant, but I don't think I even knew that at that point in the time. It was just a chemical we were spraying in the jungles to help locate the Vietcong.

SANDERSON: Okay. And what was carrier life like for you? Especially being part of…'cause it sounded like you were with the admiral staff. So did

they…were you in, well, basically, you know, like, general birthing or did you guys have your own birthing?

TRETTER: We were in general berthing, and we were the lucky ones because they put us right underneath the catapults. So you would lay in bed and you could hear 'em shooting the planes off the deck all the time. It was kind of nice for me because…and you did say that you wanted me to talk a little bit about the…being gay and lesbian in a time of, "Don't ask don't tell", and of course that was “don't tell at all.” And I'd lied on all my forms when I joined the Navy that says--

SANDERSON: 'Cause during that time, they would specifically ask you. Correct?

TRETTER: Right, and specifically because of your security clearances. And they used to…I know when we were in language school, they'd come and they would warn us. And they'd say, "If any of you end up being homosexual, you're going to Leavenworth." You know, "And you will be in prison." You know, and everything like that. And of course, we were…you know, I was seventeen and afraid of the Marines. Everybody was afraid of the Marines then, you know, and everything like that. But when I was on board the Ranger, I knew another guy…I didn't know if it's appropriate to say his name?

SANDERSON: That's all up to you on that. I mean, we can edit it out.

TRETTER: Yeah, I just don't know, because I've never known his family or anything like that, but we got to be very, very close friends. Intimately close friends. And we would go when we were off duty--usually two, three in the morning--we'd go down to this one…what would you call it, like a janitor's closet or cleaning whatever. And you know, be intimate with each other all the way down there, and everything like that. So that was a real[ly] interesting aspect of my life, but it was very warm in that. And then when…later on, when the Ranger went back and I was back in language school, I'm very sorry to say that…the Ranger, you know, had an explosion on board. And it killed a whole bunch of people. And one of them was my friend.

SANDERSON: Oh, sorry to hear that.

TRETTER: You know. Well, it was wartime. You expected it. And everything like that. But, yeah.

SANDERSON: That was right around…'cause that was, what, in sixty--

TRETTER: That must have been '65.

SANDERSON: Yeah, because a couple years later, that's when you had the fire on board the Forrestal.

TRETTER: Right, and that was afterwards.

SANDERSON: And that was both the [USS] Ranger and the [USS] Forrestal, you know, we still call the…you know, every ship has its nickname. The Forrestal still to this day, you know…we always call it Forest Fire. But it was [chuckles] but it was one of those that, between the two, that was when the Navy really cracked down and required everyone to be a decent. You know, you have to get your ESWS [enlisted surface warfare specialist], you actually…or your surface warfare pin, you actually have to be firefighter qual.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And…'cause before then, it was a crapshoot if you were…if you even knew how to handle a nozzle. Now it's…everyone has basic firefighting…basic, you know, damage control. It's required if you're on board the ship now. So...

TRETTER: Yeah, and see, we didn't have that at that time. And so what they trained us with admiral's plot, because supposedly we were a little bit more…I hate to say it, but considered a little bit more intelligent and that is [why] we got trained in chemical, biological, and atomic warfare. And what we had to do and how we had to, you know, kinda take care of the rest of the ship people, and things like that, and that was the big thing for us, was chemical, biological, and atomic. You know, we didn't have fire training. You know, didn't really know what to do, but you know, if we had to wash things down because of radiation exposure, something like that, or chemical exposure. Whatever. They were always more iffy about the biological, because I don't think…I think they thought we were just goners if we got hit by an old germ warfare thing or something like that. But, yeah.

SANDERSON: Especially being out on a ship in the middle of, you know, the ocean, it's like, "Ah, biological, if the ship goes fast enough, you move out of the cloud." And it's kind of like, "Ah, no"--

TRETTER: It doesn't quite work that way.

SANDERSON: You'd be surprised what will stick to haze-gray metal.

TRETTER: Yeah. Well, and they should've known it because, like I said, they were washing off the planes from the Agent Orange. But you know, what did

we know? I mean, I was…like I said, I was so much a kid in those days. I didn't… I was more interested in, you know, when we were at Yokosuka in Japan and learning all the things about Japan and eating octopus for the first time in my life, you know, and going to Hong Kong. And you know, Hong Kong was the place I really wanted to go and see and everything like that. And we had a…in January, I think, of '65, we had a layover in Hong Kong for a while. Everything like that was all exciting and adventurous, and I was more into that part of it than anything else, you know.

SANDERSON: And 'cause during that time frame, you guys…'cause although you're on board just for a short time, you guys had…you hit Yokosuka a couple of times, and didn't you even go to Subic Bay twice?

TRETTER: Yeah, we would go…see, because the trip to Vietnam was so long, we went from Yokosuka to Subic Bay, and then we refueled and got more bombs and things like that put on. And then we went up towards Vietnam and, you know, that whole thing and Hanoi Island and the whole thing, and we're off. Basically, the Ranger and the destroyers that went with the Ranger did stay outside the three-mile limit. You know, but our planes, of course--

SANDERSON: Would go in.

TRETTER: Go In.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And during that time, one of…during their research, Yankee Station was what they called where the Rangers stayed the majority of the time, or any--

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: --any vessel would be off the coast, and it was approximately twenty miles off…twenty to thirty miles off the coast.

TRETTER: Right, but that was still close enough for the planes to fly. They didn't, you know, it wasn't having to ditch at sea because they ran out of fuel. 'Cause that was real dangerous because the Ranger and all those others would be followed by groups of sharks because of the garbage that we threw in the ocean, and that was, you know, mealtime for the sharks. And we, interestingly enough, years later--after I was out of language school and everything like that--we went back to Yankee Station a couple

of times, because by then our ships were being followed by Russian trawlers. And we were competing with the sharks to…we not only…I was in the listening portion of listening to what the trawlers were saying and what they were doing and everything like that. But we had people in there that were very specifically trying to get the Russian trawl-…fishing trawlers, and the submarines especially, when they would dump their garbage in the ocean, we'd try to get it before the sharks could so that we could see what was going on and if there was anything, and there was never anything classified in it. It was mostly red cabbage and onions, and, you know, things like that. But yeah, that was a whole big part of the thing was finding all that stuff

SANDERSON: But the…going on…kinda looking at the…well, while you were on board the ship, did you ever…did they ever give you an opportunity to go for your surface warfare pin or your…you know, 'cause I believe they had the program during that time frame.

TRETTER: Yeah. What I was technically supposed to do…and we never really did it, because there was always this thing about if we have to invade Vietnam, you know, and what I was supposed to do was I was supposed to jump off the landing craft, set up the machine gun, and spray the treetops for snipers. But we never did it. We never had to do it, I mean. It was a couple of those things in the Navy, throughout my naval career, that we had to be ready to do it. You know, we had to be trained to do it, but we never did it. You know. Well, we never really invaded North Vietnam.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: But that was the big thing, in that early part of the war, was are we going to have to invade, and what do we do? And to protect the other people that would do the actual fighting, they needed people that could jump off and, like I say, just spray the tops of the palm trees for snipers. But--

SANDERSON: Nice.

TRETTER: Never had to do it.

SANDERSON: So, what was it like transitioning from being a…you know, being an actual sailor, you know, quote/unquote, being underway on board a ship to now you're a student again back at Quarry Station?

TRETTER: Yeah, that was kind of nice. When we went back to Monterey.

SANDERSON: Did you go to Monterey first, then Pensacola, or?

TRETTER: Yeah, Monterey first. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. We had…'cause I was there from March through December learning Russian, and then it was January through March, I think, I was at Pensacola learning the security aspects of it, and that was when I first met the guys that took the Morse code and worked with Aber mal and all those kinds of things, so. Which almost none of that I guess is done anymore. Now if they want to listen in on somebody, they can do it from Fort Meade. Nobody has to go out to all these exotic posts anymore, which is kind of sad. It was…you know, it was something that I certainly enjoyed, was looking for--

SANDERSON: They still send them out to a point. On like…we got friends that are in the CT world. They still, like…we still send people out, but we don't…we might not send them out, out like you probably did. You know, they're still in areas, but you know.

TRETTER: Yeah, but you don't have the big listening posts and stations and, you know.

SANDERSON: They're generally integrated. You know, there's, like…each base, there's a certain area where you have to have an access…you have to have proper access to even get into it. And generally, that's where all the…you know, like, where I think they develop the acronym… Well, the saying back during Vietnam, the super-secret school club. Yeah, we still use that one as, "Well, you're part of that club." You know this…to the point where everybody's like, "I wonder what goes on in there?" Then you realize, "Ah, I don't think I want to know."

TRETTER: Yeah, I would imagine the other thing that they still do--and I'm just guessing, of course, since I've been out of it for so long--I would imagine they still use a lot of CTs on embassy staff.

SANDERSON: Mm-hm, yes.

TRETTER: You know, that's the easiest way to get into a country.

SANDERSON: They--CTs--get, you know, probably some of the best duty stations out there still. Those guys and ISs.

TRETTER: Yeah, and some of the worst. At least, we used to get the worst ones, you know.

SANDERSON: The best and the worst.

TRETTER: Where was it, Diego Suarez in the Indian Ocean?

SANDERSON: Diego Garcia.

TRETTER: Diego Garcia, which is like a rock in the middle of the ocean. And I remember they did send people to Ethiopia before Ethiop-…Haile Selassie died and had all those problems and things like that. You know, some of them were real[ly] nice like Turkey: Sinop, Turkey and that. But others were just…and I hate to think of what it would be like with my Hindi and Urdu languages now with all the problems in Pakistan.

SANDERSON: And that was one of the things that I was gonna ask about in a little bit, was with the other languages besides Russian. But kinda looking back to the when you're in…when you're out in Monterey. You know, this is during the time where, you know, it's pre-Tet. Some of the activism and a lot of the mili-…you know, the protest against the war started. It was kind of still in its infancy. But what was it like being stationed out there in Northern California in, I mean, a very prominent base; it's still there. You know, what was that like? You know?

TRETTER: It was…actually, it was very nice because, you know, we studied languages eight hours a day. We had homework that we had to do, and we had to write papers and things like that. And so I would do research with the Bolshoi Sovietskii Encyclopedia and things like that. 'Cause they weren't looking…they were looking more for our language skills than they were for our definitive papers on anything. You know, but of course, I was always the kind that kind of had to go the little extra and did things that I was interested in as opposed to just writing about barbed wire entanglements and things like that. It was very school-like. But I mean, you had Saturdays off. I can remember taking off in California on a Saturday and, you know, having breakfast, and walking someplace. You know, I was much more capable of getting around.

SANDERSON: Were you guys required to wear uniforms off base, or was it more--

TRETTER: No, we could have civilian uniforms, yeah. You know. Well because…and part of it was because so many of us were going to or in the process of getting security clearances that they didn't and there were other parts of the world where we were not to wear our uniforms because they didn't want us to be recognized as--

SANDERSON: As military.

TRETTER: As military or as security group, you know. You know, and that. But it was, what would you say, very Californian. You know, it was very relaxed and very whatcha-call-it. You know, we spent a lot of time…we didn't have, like you said, seamen and apprentice seamen weren't paid that much. We were paid very little, and so we didn't have a lot of things. [Phone rings] So I walked a lot of places and everything. And I'm sorry.

SANDERSON: It's quite alright.

TRETTER: I never get this many phone calls. I'm not that popular. But--

SANDERSON: Murphy's Law.

TRETTER: Hello. Oh, they want to pay my student debts, which I've paid off about two years ago now. So, but I apologize.

SANDERSON: It's quite alright. Now, with the…did you choose Russian or was Russian chosen for you?

TRETTER: Russian was chosen for me. Like I said, I chose Chinese. They decided that I…what they needed then was Russian linguists.

SANDERSON: Now, was it one of those at the time…did you ever try to get them to switch you to Chinese or to another…you know, something other than Russian?

TRETTER: Well, not…once I was studying Russian, that was fine with me, you know, 'cause I was interested in it, and I was reading all the history and, you know, doing that…learning the Russian. So that wasn't a problem. Later on, when I was offered a second language, again I tried for Chinese, but they were…that was when they were first getting real anxious about the war between India and Pakistan, and so they sent me to the Crowell Collier Institute for Advanced Language Studies in Washington, D.C. to study Hindi and Urdu, simply because I was an advanced enough student or had the linguistic abilities that they figured I could learn two languages, at once. You know, whereas somebody who was learning Chinese would just be learning Chinese.

SANDERSON: Just Chinese, right.

TRETTER: Or just a dialect of Chinese. But they wanted me to be able to recognize both Hindi and Urdu and so they sent me to…you know, and there again, they chose for me. You know, but I was interested in India. It had been…India and Pakistan had been part of the British Empire and, you know, I was…I've always been a bit of an Anglophile. And things like that, so it wasn't an odious task. You know, if I'd have…then after that they offered to send me to computer school, but by then I was kinda ready to get out of the Navy, and had they offered me Chinese, I might have stayed longer, because I still wanted…and to this day, I haven't been able to find the language course where I can study Chinese. I've got a lot of Chinese friends, but without going back to the university and, you know,

SANDERSON: Formal--

TRETTER: And, you know, doing it formal and everything like that. And so many things have changed now, and just my physical health that I don't think I could do the characters and that anymore. Well, I'm not very artistic, anyway. You've gotta be kind of artistic to write those characters.

SANDERSON: Oh definitely. Now can we…backtracking a little bit.

TRETTER: Sure.

SANDERSON: Why…here you were in Monterey, California. Beautiful, you know, California area. Very relaxed, very easy-going. Then they send you to Pensacola, Florida. What was it like, you know…basically, here you are in the height of the Civil Rights Movement going, and being a small-town Minnesotan guy who…we're talking about not even a year, but roughly about two years before then was the first time you actually met more than one African American. You'd never really…you kind of lived in a bubble almost. And now here you are in the panhandle of Florida. Basically, we call it lower Alabama. I'm from Alabama, originally. Yet, there are bigger hicks in Pensacola than there [are] where I'm from in Alabama. I mean, they are like…we're like, "Wow, we can't talk good English." Yeah. "Hooked On Phonics" did not work for these guys.

TRETTER: It's funny you bring that up, because one of the more shocking instances of that period of my life…you know, graduated from language school in December, came back, spent Christmas and New Year's with my family, and then had to jump on a Greyhound bus to go down to Pensacola. Well, the buses in those days went this way [gestures] and then across to Pensacola. So I land, and I don't even remember the name of which town it was, but it was Alabama. And we stop there, and it was everybody can get off and have lunch and everything like that. So okay, I get off and you know, once again I didn't have a lot of money, but I walked into the restaurant that was right in front of me as I got off the bus, sat down at the counter, and everything like that, and nobody would serve me. And I sat there for the longest time, and nobody would serve me, and everything like that. Didn't figure it out. Finally somebody kind of pointed to the signs and pointed at me and told me I had to go out and go around the building to the other side. I had walked off the bus and walked into the blacks-only part of the restaurant. I had to go out and go around the restaurant and go into the whites. And then they weren't real[ly] happy about serving me because I was probably some sort of a radical that was trying to liberate blacks. And it wasn't that at all. I was just stupid. You know, I was a very, very stupid, naive kid, you know, and didn't realize what was going on. Never even occurred to me that segregated

restaurants, you know, that you wouldn't just…you know, I'd never had that problem any place else. You know?

SANDERSON: And especially the areas you'd been, it really didn't exist.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: It didn't really exist up here, you know, especially around the base in Great Lakes. Out in California…California's always been kind of its own country to begin with.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: You know where…and then, that's very interesting, the fact that here you are in very deep South out…you know, Florida, in probably that part of…you were probably in Mobile in that part of Alabama.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And Mobile was highly…very selectively, highly segregated during that time frame.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: With it being one of the bigger cities.

TRETTER: Yeah, and it was a major Alabama city that we were in. I don't…like I say, I don't remember which one it was now, but it's very likely it was Mobile. You know, 'cause it was right on that northern edge. You know, and you go down… Now of course, everybody takes 35, but I don't know what it was. We had gone down, and we'd gone through, you know, all those other states and stopped there 'cause they needed to refuel and, you know, they had to let everybody have lunch and things like that. And, you know, and then of course we went across Mississippi and everything over to Pensacola. But, yeah, no, that was a learning experience for me for sure. I didn't know what was going on.

SANDERSON: Now, during that time while you're in…what was base life like there in Pensacola? Especially--

TRETTER: Much more restricted, much more Navy, and of course it's a naval air station also. And also, we didn't do much because we were there during hurricane season. And a couple of times we'd have to walk back from the mess hall, like four or five of us, all arm-in-arm, not because we were partners or anything, but just because we didn't want to get blown away. You know, and things like that. I spent a lot of my free time…it would

have occasional clear days, and I got hooked up with a historical preservation group in Pensacola, and we'd work with them on various projects, restoring, you know, Southern mansions and this kind of stuff. You know that was…and that was kind of fun and kind of interesting, and I liked that. But--

SANDERSON: And while you were there, what was some of the stuff that you did while you were…you know, for Navy-wise there in Pensacola?

TRETTER: Well, that was when they were finishing up…and I was hearing from people back home that, "Oh, the FBI's been out and talked to us," and everything like that. We…the time that we spent there, and I was only there like about three months, but that was when we learned about the other aspects of CT's, the ones that did Morse code and, like I say, Aber mal. And we learned about those things and were told that you don't have to worry about that because what they do--or what you'll do at these other bases and ships and things like that--is they will intercept the Morse code, type it out, and everything like that. If they see large numbers, they will then bring it to you to translate. If they don't see large numbers, they just type it out and--

SANDERSON: Send it forward--

TRETTER: It goes in the thing to Fort Meade, and they'll translate it there…kind of at their leisure because it's not important. But if it's a large number, then they're worried that it may be transfer of something, which actually, in Turkey, ended up being kind of funny, because they…one time they…I was at an Air Force base in Istanbul, too, and they came rushing out to me with some papers which had 50,000 on it, and they were just…"Oh, what is it? Is it bombs, is it this, is it that?" What it turned out to be is the Russians had always had a problem with toilet paper, and they were transferring in the Caspian Sea fifty thousand rolls of toilet paper over to one of the ships that they wanted to go through the Bosporus and Dardanelles. So, and that was something that they were, you know, concerned about. And that was a big deal with the Russians then, trying to sneak submarines and everything else through the Bosporus and Dardanelles. That was when the Navy told me I was a Canadian student, and bought me a ticket on a cruise ship that went up and down the Black Sea. And what I was supposed to look for was to see if I could spot one [of] these merchant ships, these Russian merchant ships from Odessa going through the Bosporus and Dardanelles, they would sometimes try to have a submarine go underneath them to get through the locks without them knowing so that they could get out to the Mediterranean and eventually through the straits of Gibraltar and to the Atlantic and

that. And we were supposed to try and see them. They actually pay-dubbed me I think two trips, something like that.

SANDERSON: Oh nice.

TRETTER: And I was listed as a Canadian student that was just--

SANDERSON: On a holiday.

TRETTER: --traveling. Yeah, on holiday, and everything like that. So that was kind of fun. But, Pensacola was much more military, you know. We learned all about the things, you know the…like I said, the aber mal and the Morse code and they started…they did a little bit of the cryptographic stuff, and they said, "You will be confronted with this, but you won't…you need to know it and have a background in it, but unless it's a real dire emergency, you won't even be asked to try and break the codes," they said, "because the codes go to Fort Meade and they break them there and then the linguists there translate them. But if it's an emergency or something that needs to be happening…you know, if it's going to endanger people, you have to have enough so that you can at least try to break it or help somebody else break it. And then you do the translating."

SANDERSON: Oh nice.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now what were your thoughts when here you…they start giving out orders and they are saying, "Hey, we're gonna send you to Turkey."

TRETTER: Oh, I was happy to go, you know, because I was…it was an adventure, you know. I'd never been to Turkey.

SANDERSON: And did you ever think that…here you were going to be stationed at a base in Turkey, you know.

TRETTER: I…before then, before I got my orders, I hadn't. I didn't even know bases existed in Turkey, you know.

SANDERSON: And was this--

TRETTER: --I mean it made sense afterwards, 'cause we were listening to, especially, Odessa and that kind of stuff and all the Black Sea stuff.

SANDERSON: And during that time, did they do what they…what we still like to call, “the dream sheets,” where we fill out where we would like to go? And of course, they look at us and be like, "Dream on."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: "Here [are] your orders."

TRETTER: Yeah, I never got to go [to] any place that I put. One of the places I wanted to go the most when I was in the Navy--and I thought, with the Russian bases down there, that they might let me go--was Antarctica. I really wanted to go there, but they never sent me. They had their own people and everything like that: the scientists that could already speak Russian, and that. So they didn't need some foolish little Navy kid going down there and everything like that. But I was excited about Turkey. It was…you know, it had been a Greek…I went to Sinop. It had been a Greek city before and then captured by the Romans and you know, everything like that. And of course, I knew a little bit about the wars between Turkey and Russia, but…I'd read that history, you know, with Catherine the Great going down the river and having them set up villages during the night, so that when the boat went through during the day and she had these ambassadors from Europe and that on there, and they'd see happy villagers dancing and laughing and, you know, everything like that. And then as the ship passed by, they'd break the village down, move it up in front of the thing during the night, because the ship would park during the night, and they'd move it up and next day they'd go through the village again and it would be…but it would look different enough so that they never caught on. So I was aware of all of that history and the Roman history. I'd read a lot about Sinop, you know, and its history and interested, of course, in Istanbul. Made a big point of--when I was in Istanbul--going to Topkapi, which is the big museum, and everything like that. It was…I was more interested in the historical aspects of Turkey than I was in the military things, but that got more interesting, because it was while I was there that I started intercepting the Russian manned space program. And that was…that ended up being my big thing in the Navy, was that, for the Navy, I was the go-to person for intercepting Russian cosmonauts, you know, and translating them and everything like that.

SANDERSON: And that was one of the things I wanted to ask you, was that during that time frame because, you know, on your questionnaire that was one of the defining things of why you were in the Navy, of…with the cosmonaut program and also the missing cosmonauts. There's…yeah

TRETTER: Well, the one…and what happened…and that probably is what got me to being where I was in the Navy with the Russian Space Program, was I intercepted the whole thing when the…not satellite, but when the ship--I'm not sure what to call it right now--crashed. And see, the Russians

never did…ours were always sea landings, and we'd pick up our people in the middle of the Pacific Ocean or something like that. Theirs were always ground landings, mostly in Siberia. And the one time, the capsule caught on fire and it…when it crashed, or on its way to Siberia, and when it crashed…and they were…I mean, it was really horrific, because they were in the capsule, and they had the broadcast thing on and they were sending it, and I was copying it, and they were yelling "Argon, argon", and they were dying as I was listening to them, because the capsule had caught on fire, and they eventually all died. They died in the crash if they didn't die by the fire and the smoke before then. And that turned out to be a big deal in Turkey because they wanted to know…even more about now, we used to record everything. We recorded it on what they called R-390s, which were old great, big tape recorders, reel-to-reel tape recorders. And then at the same time we were recording it, we were supposed to type it out. And actually, I got to be fairly good at typing live, you know, and you always have to go back and catch a spot, because you didn't understand something or you got it wrong or something. But, you know, we had to do a transcript, and then we would bundle the transcript with the reel-to-reel tape and send it off to Fort George G. Meade in Washington, D.C., which was all very well and good except that this was such a big deal with this spaceship landing that they wanted to talk to me, but they didn't want to fly me from Turkey and from Sinop and go through all that stuff. ‘Cause to get to Sinop, you had to get on a Black Sea boat, sometimes a cruise ship, sometimes anything, you know, and then you would take that up the coast of Turkey and the Black Sea. And you go by all these other places. You go by Zonguldak and, you know, all these other Turkish villages until you got to Sinop. And they really didn’t have a place for these boats to…I can remember climbing down the side of the ship, getting into like a little rowboat that would then take you in and put you on the dock in Sinop. And everything like that, but they didn’t want to go through all of that and send me back to Washington, D.C. to Fort Meade to be interviewed on this, 'cause you know, well, they already had the transcript and they had the tape and they just had some questions they wanted to ask me. So what they did instead was send me to Ankara, which was nice enough. It gave me a chance to see inside Anatolia and central Turkey and that. The bad thing about it was that the Navy would reimburse me but I basically, had to pay my expenses. Now, I had bought some things that I was planning on sending home, you know, that were, you know, various Turkish antiques and things like that that I had really wanted, but I had to suddenly sell all that stuff in order to have enough money to go to Ankara, 'cause I think then I was only like an E4. Yeah, no I didn’t get to be an E5 'til I was in Hawaii and then it was after that I got…when I went to Crowell Collier that I got to be an E6. So they sent me to Ankara. I got to stay in a nice

hotel. Not as nice as the one across the street here, mind you, but it was a nice hotel and I got to act like a big shot and everything like that. But the most important thing and the most fun thing about it was is that was right at the beginning of Telstar, [communication satellites], and I was one of the very first people…I don't know where I was in the thing, but I think I was one of the first ten people that actually got to use Telstar to call from Ankara to Washington, D.C. to Fort George G. Meade. And then they interviewed me over the phone. Like I said, they already had the transcript and they already had the reel-to-reel and everything like that. But they had other questions, you know, like, "Do you remember what the weather was like?" Well, we weren't in Siberia, we were in Turkey, but the broadcast was relatively clear, and we could hear it quite well, you know, and everything like that. But that was real exciting and fun for me, and I got to…while I was in Ankara, I was there long enough I got to go see the Hittite museum which was a big deal for me, you know, 'cause I was always…no matter where I was in the world, you know, I would always try to…you know, when I was in Japan and Yokosuka off the Ranger and that, I'd travel as far as I could and went to Kamakura and saw the Great Buddha of Kamakura, which I understand now you can no longer walk up…in those days you could walk inside into his head, and there was a long…or, not a long but an alter in the head of the Great Buddha of Kamakura. One of the Seven Wonders of the World. And that. And so I got to do that.

SANDERSON: Nice.

TRETTER: So--

SANDERSON: Sounds like you got to have all kinds of fun while you were there.

TRETTER: Well, and that was it with me and the military. I wasn't so much engaged with the military as I was with the things I was interested in. You know, I still tried to…I always tried to learn the language of whatever country I was in well enough so that I could go to the post office and buy stamps for my collection. [Chuckles] You know, things like that.

SANDERSON: And then during that time, what was, you know, besides the traveling and the work what was it like being in that part of Turkey at the TUSLOG.

TRETTER: Well, there's a couple of stories that might illustrate that. And you keep saying "TESLOG" when it's "TUSLOG." It's T-U-S.

SANDERSON: T-U-S. Oh, okay.

TRETTER: I'm sorry, I don't mean to--

SANDERSON: No, it's quite alright.

TRETTER: TUSLOG det 28. Couple of things come to mind. It was…I tried very hard to learn Turkish, which we had…we stayed in dormitories, so it was an Army base, and we had what they called “abis,” which means “older brother.” And these two guys that would come in and clean the dorms and, you know, do all that kind of stuff for us, and I would try to get my abi that worked my section to teach me Turkish. And he said, "Ah, you don’t want to learn Turkish. Nobody wants to; it's a language that only Turks use," and everything like that. So, there was a wonderful chi garden down in the middle of Sinop, and I would go down there. And there was this little shoeshine boy who'd shine my shoes…once again, the thing that I never wanted to do. And he would shine my shoes, and I got him to start teaching me Turkish. And I'd go down there and you know, buy a cup of tea, and, you know, pay him maybe, you know, a couple of kurush, which was a big thing for him, you know, and everything like that. And he'd try to teach me his Turkish as best he could. So then I would go back to the base and I would speak Turkish at my abi. And finally one day he sat me down, and he said, "Okay, Jean, since you want to learn this, you speak Turkish like a gypsy. Let me teach you real Turkish." So, okay. Then he started teaching me Turkish and I got to be a little bit better. Actually, I ended up being…since I was the only one in the Navy that spoke Turkish, I ended up being the person who negotiated with all the abis for their labor contract with the Navy. You know, 'cause the Navy had to pay them and you know, they wanted labor contracts, and the Navy was American, you know, and in those days you still had labor unions and things like that. And so I acted as the interpreter between the abis and the US Navy. So he's teaching me Turkish. Then I finish at Sinop, go back to Istanbul, and I can’t remember the name of that Air Force base that I was at there. But there was a rather big Air Force base just right outside or right in Istanbul, and everything like that. And of course, I’m--no shame here--I'm jabbering away in Turkish and trying to…everything like that, and finally, one of my Turkish friends sets me down and says, "Jean, you speak Turkish like a farmer." He said, "We'll teach you real Turkish, European-style Turkish like we speak here in Istanbul." So that was kind of what it was like. It was…it could also be very, you know, they were very, very hardcore. I know there was an instance where…I was still in those days taking pictures. I've got some wonderful pictures of Turkey. And, you know, little kids would always kind of follow you around. Now, [it] wasn't a problem for me, you know; I’d talk to them and, you know, everything like that. And I was going out at night trying to get some night pictures of the harbor and things like that. And a little kid was following me, and I'd asked him, you know, "Where's a good place to go to take pictures?" and you know, this and everything like that. Well, all of a sudden, he got

picked up by the Turkish police, and then the Turkish police picked me up. And I didn't know what was going on. I eventually learned that what they thought was that I was trying to lure him into a dark secret place at night. They didn't…you know, and I'd given him an ink pen and things like that, you know the stuff that was wonderful for him in school that he had a real ink pen that actually worked and things like that. But they thought I was trying to pick him up and was going to molest him and everything like that. But fortunately for me, the kid told the truth and told them exactly…and they were hitting him and all kinds of things, and he was crying the last time I saw him and that. But, you know, I felt kinda…I felt really badly but they were totally wrong, you know. It wasn't anything like that at all, but they, you know…that was kind of the mindset of the Turkish police, you know, and everything like that. I had another instance when I was in Sinop, too, that was really very interesting, 'cause I always liked to make friends with the nationals and everything like that. And I had a favorite restaurant there. Served great pot leshan, which is something I loved. It's kind of a mixture of ground lamb and eggplant, and I love eggplant and that sort of thing. And I used to go to this restaurant all the time. And one time, this guy comes by and asks if he can talk to me, and everything like that…"Oh, sure, you know." Well, we're chatting away and this and that and you know, we-- talking to me about all kinds of things I wasn't really paying a lot of attention until he wanted my, like, name and address and everything like that, maybe to send cards or letters and we could write to each other and everything like that. And I told him my name and I was about to spell it for him because my name Jean is spelled with J-E-A-N and not G-E-N-E, but he sat there and I was looking at him, and he wrote down on the paper J-E-A-N. So, I was immediately suspicious that; how come he knows my name so much? And we were always told that there were spies. I mean, that was a big thing in the Navy. There were always these spies, and you gotta watch out for them, and everything like that. So I went back to the base and I told them. I said, "Here's what happened. I'm talking to this guy and just thought you know we were just talking, and he went to write down my name, and he wrote down my correct name without me even having to tell him what it was." And I said, "It just made me very suspicious." And they took all the information, and he disappeared. And I never heard any more about him. He…I think they turned it over to the Turkish police, and the Turkish police, who were even [more] paranoid than our MPs, you know, about spies…Russian spies, people that were whatcha-call-it, 'cause he…like I say, I never ever heard from him again and he just disappeared off the face of the earth.

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah.

TRETTER: So it was interesting, but it was a bunch of other things. I still have a wonderful…they broke my heart because they would use some of these beautiful old Greek pieces of marble and that to carve their streets; their streets were cobblestone back in those days in Sinop. And there was one piece that I really wanted that I never did get. But I managed to get one small piece that I still have at home. Beautiful piece of marble that's carved with Greek letters and everything. And of course, they hated everything that was Greek anyway. There would be little things with Greek angels on them and they'd gouge the eyes out of the angels and things like that. I did a lot of going over the little tiny bridges and streams and things like that. And I would hire a…like a fishing rowboat that had a Turkish guy it belonged to, and I'd have him take me to here and there out in the country so that I could look at the Greek ruins and things like that, and did all kinds of things. And that's one of the things that I brought for the museum here, 'cause one of the things that I picked up was one of the ballast balls that the Romans used to break down the walls when they were trying to conquer a city. You know, and they'd use these big ballasts, but this wasn't the big flaming stuff, these were just…I think they were cement. I think it's cement, not concrete that these are made out of. And they would just load the things up with those and knock them down, and of course they were laying all over there, 'cause it was quite a bit of Greek ruins in that area. And I managed to pick one up and ship it home. And it is coming to the…since it is military, it's coming to the museum here.

SANDERSON: Oh, nice.

TRETTER: So, that will be one of the things at the presentation this afternoon that--

SANDERSON: Very nice.

TRETTER: --I decided to send along, because it's very specifically military. The other marble piece I have at home isn't--

SANDERSON: Right, it's not military in nature.

TRETTER: Right. Yeah. But that. I tried fishing a couple of times off the dock. Wasn't very successful. Best I did was I did catch a small hammerhead shark. But that was about all. Fishing was terrible there. But then they had professional fishermen that went out and caught fish all the time that fed the village and that. So, I enjoyed it. I spent a lot of time in the tea garden and, you know, would try to talk to people and tried to…never did manage to do it some elderly guy had a…I guess, a big collection of Turkish stamps that he would have liked to have sold me but could never work it out, and everything like that, but you know.

SANDERSON: One of the other things that you had put on here was interception of the Impossible Russian Space--

TRETTER: Oh that. That's Hawaii. That's much later, yeah.

SANDERSON: Okay.

TRETTER: They would…one of the places that they sent me quite frequently especially because I was there a lot, I ran the language school at the Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station, and I would cross-train linguists in various languages so that they could go out and, like, we had a lot of French linguists there. That's where we sent a group out to Pago Pago to listen in on the French atomic bomb testing and things like that. But they would also take and they'd say, "Jean, you have to go over to Waimea," which was the big naval security station in the middle of…next to Waimea Bay, to listen for Russian space shots. Except the one time I got there and, you know, the Navy is…if you're assigned duty in this area for this long, you are in that area for that long regardless of what happens. You know.

SANDERSON: Right

TRETTER: And what happened was the teletypes in Washington, D.C. broke down. And I still don't quite understand technically what happened with all that. But the teletypes were what I used to get all my information off of…for the…where the capsule was going and what…you know, so many degrees this way and so many degrees that way and everything like that. And the times. And they would have, you know, their big computers in Washington, D.C. And in those days computers were bigger than this entire room.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: --Would figure out all the details and would send that information to me in Hawaii. And then I could turn my…tune my R-390 in to where I was supposed to be at the times I was supposed to be. And get a…and they said, "Oh, it's all broken down. There's nothing we can do about it. You know, just go ahead and kind of make yourself at home and, you know, everything like that." And we don't have any jobs for you because that was your only job, but of course we can't send you back to Kaneohe because you're supposed to be here and that's what your orders say." And everything like that. So as long as I'm sitting there and not really doing anything, I mentioned to them and I said, "Well look can I go ahead and work on this anyway?" and they said, "Sure. I mean, you can't do anything. There's nothing you can do, and you won't get it, and you won't

know when and everything like that." So what I did is I mathematically figured out what the past trajectories for this capsule had been, what the times had been and everything like that, and then I…what is it…anyway. I guessed at if it was this. And here I had, like, two or three times that it had passed over Hawaii already. And I said, "Well this is how much it varied each time it passed over so this is how much it would vary when it passes over the next time. And here's the time variance and everything like that." I worked all the mathematics and everything like that out for it, and they were all kind of poo-pooing me and everything and, "You'll never do it, and you'll never do it." And I did it. I turned my R-390 on and I got them, and I got the thing, and they were just, like, blown away. Just flabbergasted. How could anybody figure out all that spacey junk and still get the interception? That was when I got my letter…my big letter of commendation, which I don't think exists. I think that's something that they removed from my--

SANDERSON: From your service record?

TRETTER: Yeah. 'Cause it was too…back in those days, you know, we didn't listen in to Russian cosmonauts and--

SANDERSON: Right. Well, this is…definitely they wouldn't want any type of potential record for that.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: So...

TRETTER: Well, and especially when it was just some lowly, you know, CT3. Or was I a four or five by then? I was a four by then. But, you know, when some lowly person like that managed to do it and everything, so they would want that letter to disappear. But they were really happy that I got it. You know, and like I say, I got…the commander of the Waimea Naval Station gave me a letter of commendation. It was a little ceremony and everything for it. But you know, that was interesting. That was…made me feel good that I could figure something like that out. I mean, it was just basic math, but it still makes you feel good when you can do something like that.

SANDERSON: Oh nice. Now looking at it on…looking at your history of assignments, you're…you were in Turkey from May of '66 to August of '67.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: And when you left in August, you went to D.C.... oh no, to Brooklyn, I'm sorry.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --to Brooklyn, and you were there for just a couple of days, and it looked like you were…you actually got out of the Navy for a short time--

TRETTER: Well, that's what I was supposed to do. Yeah, that was…my tour of duty was up. You know, and everything like that. And I came home. And it was a recession at that time, and there really were no jobs. I worked for a while with a landscaping firm here, in St. Paul, Minneapolis. You know, where we laid sod and all that kind of stuff. And then it would rain at night and all the sod would wash down, and we had to go back and relay it and bound stakes in it, and all that kind of stuff. And I had very much wanted to be…work for the…oh, the natural history thing for the state. You know, like a forest ranger kind of thing, only working a little bit more with the natural history. And I'd applied and everything like that, and it was all good, and I passed all my tests and everything like that. But I was also poor as a church mouse without religious affiliation. And wasn't, you know…couldn't get a job, couldn't find jobs, and like I said, was working part time with that landscaping firm whenever they needed. But it was a recession and people didn't need landscaping that much. It was housing developments and things like that, and so finally I just got kind of whatcha-call-it and went back to the Navy and said, "Can I still reenlist?" And they said, "Oh, yeah, and we'll give you all this money," and you know, everything like that. And [I] reenlisted. That was when I got my second language school for Hindi and Urdu. They sent me out to Washington, D.C., and I think it was two or three weeks--or maybe two months after I got out there--I got the thing from the Minnsota Department of Natural Resources saying that I was accepted and I could go work where I wanted to work and that. But by then I had already signed the papers and I was in the Navy for supposedly the next ten years but then the war ended, and they wanted us out of there faster. They sent a lot of people home early. And--

SANDERSON: At this point did you need a break or do you want to continue on?

TRETTER: I certainly could go to the restroom if that's--

SANDERSON: Okay, sure.

TRETTER: --okay. I mean, we don't have to if you don't want to.

SANDERSON: Oh, well, it's all up to you on that one. It's one of those that…when I've been…like I was saying, I've been pretty much using your history of assignments as a go-by.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: For time-wise. And I'm like, you know, knowing that there was a break there, I'm like…you know, this would probably be the best time to stop for a minute and, you know…in case you needed to stretch your legs, use the restroom. Whatever.

TRETTER: Yeah, use the restroom mostly. So I'll--

SANDERSON: I'll disconnect you right here.

TRETTER: Oh, okay. So I will need some help in finding where the restroom is.

SANDERSON: We will definitely do that.

TRETTER: So, well, I hope I'm not chatting on too much.

SANDERSON: Oh, no. I believe it's going well. How do you think it's going?

TRETTER: I just don't know. You know, I mean. I'm just talking but what I did…you know, I hope it's all right.

SANDERSON: Oh yeah. It's so…from what I can…you know, from what I've seen so far, I'm thoroughly enjoying it actually. So...

TRETTER: Okay, well good. I'm doing what you want done.

SANDERSON: Right. And then it's gonna be down this way.

TRETTER: Well, and just taking the break like this, a couple of things occurred to me that we hadn't talked about before. I noticed a lot of the brass fixtures here, and was wondering who polished them. Because when I was on the Ranger before language school, that was one of our big jobs as [an] admiral's plot, was to polish doorknobs--and anything that was brass—constantly, and belt buckles and that, but I remember very distinctly polishing doorknobs and thinking, "My god, they're just going to put their greasy hands on this again." And you know.

SANDERSON: Oh yeah. You spend all the time polishing and cleaning it and five minutes later--

TRETTER: It's dirty again.

SANDERSON: Right, you've got the chief crabbing at you, "Dang it. Why didn't you get it done?" "I did. You touched it." "Do it tomorrow."

TRETTER: So that was one of them. And then the other one was another thing from Pensacola. I forget what it is but it will maybe come to me again.

SANDERSON: All right. And then…oh, before we get going too much, you did talk about, are you okay on…do you have to take any type of medication or anything like that?

TRETTER: No, I don't until later this evening. I'm supposed to take my blood pressure…I'm on an experimental drug at the VA Hospital now, which they are very pleased that I'm doing it 'cause they needed some people. But it can lower your blood pressure, and my blood pressure has been going down, but I can only take it after I've eaten something. And not having eaten at all yet today wouldn't do any good to take the blood pressure thing.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: So.

SANDERSON: Did you want to go a little bit longer then take a break for lunch or…so you could get some food in you, or?

TRETTER: Whatever's appropriate for you. I'm--

SANDERSON: Like--

TRETTER: You know, I mean, I'm--

SANDERSON: I'm yours for two days, so--

TRETTER: Okay. Well, I'm yours for the week, so...

SANDERSON: Well, what we can do is just kind of keep going a little bit and--

TRETTER: Besides the blood pressure cuff is in my room and everything, and that's such a long walk, so.

SANDERSON: What we can do is we'll talk about your reenlistment and then the new languages on this next one and then start rolling in to your second school when…in DC, and start rolling in to that and then kind of take it from there. And if…then eventually, I'd like to be able to, at least to at the…you know, by the end of the day today if we can at least finish up with the…all the way up to Hawaii and right before you went to Point Mugu. Yeah,

with the missiles. Everything like that. That's always a…when I asked Lisa for this information and she sent me stuff, I'm like, "Specifically, DVT-14 and the history of assignments and qualifications if you can." and that was the three main things I printed off. And of the affidavit that you did for the trial that we'll talk about later on. But on something like that, you know, of course everybody was like, "What's this? What's this?" You know. The other guys couldn't make heads or tails over half of this stuff. I'm like…I was, like, the history of assignments. That right there, that is truly a snapshot of military, 'cause regardless of any type of super-secret squirrel club stuff that you did, it gives the best timeline to be able to go off…let's talk about this duty station, what you did here. Because it gives a really good snapshot of your military career during that time frame.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: So, but--

TRETTER: And as long as you're aware about the super-secret stuff, 'cause like I say, they…you know, and you know I told Lisa that. I said, "You know that a lot of this has been redacted." And she said, "No it hasn't." But her idea of redacted is a black marker crossing things out. The Navy's idea of redacted is, like I say, they cross it out--

SANDERSON: They retype it out.

TRETTER: --and then you retype it, yeah. Right.

SANDERSON: And then one of the good things was the copy I had of the assignments, you can tell that it hadn't been completely retyped 'cause it had various level-- you know various different types on there. Whereas-- I've seen some of the redacted stuff where all of a sudden everything is nice and clean, and it's the same ink. Like, no.

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah, no they're very…and like I say, that was a big thing with the whole Nixon era. You know, they'd just…he was so paranoid and with all of it, and it was all this hands-on stuff. You know, I mean, he was just…you know, he made sure. And that was an interesting part and I guess that's to come yet when we talk more about Hawaii because they did…you know, part of my disillusionment with military and that kind of stuff why I didn't stay in longer. Now I realize that had I stayed and gone to those computer schools out in Boston, you know, I'd have…probably be a functioning computer person now and doing all…'cause I have a friend who I had gone to one of my language schools with that did take them up on that. But you know, I'm practically computer illiterate. That…between that and going to the university and working at the

university and getting about a hundred or more emails every day when I retired [clears throat]--excuse me--I said, “No.” You know, if people want to write me, have them write letters. They can phone me, you know, everything like that. I'm not gonna do emails, anymore. So I…it's kind of like polishing my shoes after the Navy.

SANDERSON: You're kind of, like, "Eh, I'm done."

TRETTER: I did that long enough and everything like that. Now, one of the things about going to Vietnam first, you know, with the Ranger and that, that I didn't mention too that I probably should mention is it did make things a little bit easier for me in places like Pensacola and Monterey and that, because they would still hold inspections. Okay? And here I was, a seaman apprentice, or a seaman by those times mostly and everything like that, and I had all these medals from Vietnam. [Laughs] and they wanted to give me a hard time because my shoes weren't shiny enough, or something like that. But here they would have this class, and it would be all these other guys with just plain uniforms and nothing, and I'd be there with all my medals from Vietnam. And they would sometimes--not always--but they would sometimes take it easier on me and be nicer to me because I had already served in Vietnam.

SANDERSON: Right, and you were already a quote/unquote actual sailor, so to speak.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: Instead of booter. You know.

TRETTER: Yeah, instead of just out of boot camp or whatever.

SANDERSON: 'Cause that was one of the things that when I was in my…you know, I didn't…my active side, at the base I was an instructor at corps school. It was one of those that you could tell the, you know, the booters and the fleet returnees. And even out in the fleet you could…you know, of course, you know, the ribbons are…especially nowadays, how many ribbons you have, how many awards you have, medals, would determine how long you've been in. And--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And if you've…if you're E5 and below and you've got a couple of, you know, Sea Service Ribbons, overseas ribbons, it's like automatically like, "Yup, they've been out. They've done something." Whereas if you've seen somebody and they've got the nice little National Defense Ribbon and you know, most of them…you know, 'cause they're all still getting

that. And a couple of them roll out of boot camp with their rifle ribbon or their pistol ribbon. You know, so some of them will come out of boot camp with an entire rope. And I'm just kind of like…you can be like, yeah, you can tell they just joined the military not too long ago.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And it took me three years to get a, you know…I had one ribbon for three years. That was the rifle ribbon. I was in the hospital for the first three years, so it was like…we don't give you anything.

TRETTER: So, they didn't…when I was there in boot camp, they didn't give out rifle ribbons. 'Cause I wasn't a bad shot. You know, I'd grown up like I said in northern Minnesota, so hunting was part of our lifestyle. But that's another thing that I have not done since I've gotten out of the military is used guns at all. You know, I don't go hunting, I don't, you know…I've much more compassion for animals and people and everything than I ever had before I went into the military. And you know, it's just something that was there that you learned. You know, it's like pilots that are bombing places. You know, you don't ever forget that you did that, you know, and you know. So I've never been hunting since then. So…

SANDERSON: Did you do a lot of hunting before then?

TRETTER: Yeah. You know, my family, you know, like I said, we lived in northern Minnesota and my dad would go out hunting and sometimes he'd take me. And you know everything like that. I had I think it was called a 410. You know, and everything. And when I came back, I just had no interest. No interest in killing them and making somebody or some animal or something suffer, or something like that. I just...no. It just really…I don't even like it on TV now. I'll turn it off. My cat Maximilian and I will be watching TV and they'll have something on there, and we'll just switch the channel. He doesn't like it either. So, but yeah. And then the other thing that I didn't mention about Sinop when I first went to Sinop, was that was the first time that we had…or that I had an incidence of Agent Orange. And that was real unusual and interesting too because what happened is I got to Sinop and I was…you know like I said, I'd walk everywhere. I'd walk back and forth to the base and things like that instead of taking the trucks and the buses and that kind of stuff. 'Cause I could go when I wanted to, as opposed to when I had to in reference to those things. Once in a while I'd catch them, but I developed thrombophlebitis in my right leg. The thing that was remarkable about that was here I am at this little TUSLOG det 28 tiny army base, middle of Sinop…or not middle of Sinop, but right on the Black Sea…you know, away from everything and everything like that. And here I am a

seventeen-year-old kid getting blood clots in my leg. And the doctor there took a look at me, and he said, "You can't do that. You don't get diseases like thrombophlebitis." He said, "That is pregnant women that get thrombophlebitis, and you're a seventeen-year-old male." Thing was…is this doctor, before he'd been drafted or gotten into the service--however it was he got into the service--had worked with pregnant women and thrombophlebitis which is why he recognized it in me right away. Had he not been at that base at that time when I got sick, a lot…one of the reasons that they don't have more information on Agent Orange causing blood clots…I'm a hyper-coagulator. I'd had blood clots all over and all through my body. But once he identified it and knew that I got it and everything like that, he basically saved my life. 'Cause I was in the hospital in Sinop for a couple of weeks, I don't know how many weeks it took to dissolve the clot and, you know, allow me to walk around and everything like that again. But had…like I say, had he not been there, had he not had the experiences with pregnant women, he wouldn't have been able to save my life. And I've talked to the doctors at the VA hospital in Minneapolis and a couple of them have said, "You know. you are so lucky because we think that's one of the reasons that we don't have more information on hyper coagulation with Agent Orange is because people didn't recognize what it was and the guys died from their blood clots. You know, they said, "You know, you're one of the lucky ones 'cause you got a doctor who knew what was going on.

SANDERSON: --on, right.

TRETTER: You know, "And it saved your life." So I've been very lucky in that way with a lot of stuff, but that's, you know, just…you know, what are the chances of having that kind of a doctor in an Army post? [Laughs] On a, you know…on a peninsula going out into the Black Sea. You know?

SANDERSON: Right. Very lucky on that one. On here, you reenlisted on the fifteenth of November '67.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: And you got the nice, fat bonus of 5,349 dollars, sixty cents. But--

TRETTER: And got to stay home for Christmas and New Year's.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Before I had to go to DC--

SANDERSON: 'Cause it looks like you didn't have to show up to D.C. until [the] eleventh of January '68.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: No, was it one of those…'cause that's right…we're talking just a couple of months…you signed the paperwork just a couple of months before Tet kicked off.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: In Vietnam. During that time was it ever one of those where-- were people trying to talk you out of it? Your mom trying to talk you out of it? Or was it ever one of those where, like, eh...

TRETTER: No, I mean, people didn't necessarily want to see me go back because of the Vietnam War and everything like that, but my advantage was…is that I had been there, done that. I was already considered an adult. Everybody we knew disliked the Vietnam War, but I was going to do what I wanted to do. And everybody realized the economic conditions at the time. Like I say, it was very…at least in Minnesota, it was very economically depressed at the time with no jobs. You know, there weren't jobs for anybody and so, I was I think considered enough of an adult that, like I say, they weren't happy about me going but they weren't going to stop me. You know, and that was before it got to be…like you say, it was just before Tet. And it was after Tet that people started with the baby-killer stuff and all that. And I remember a lot of that when I got out in '72, you know, that that was a big thing then. And they hated…and you didn't wear…the only place it was safe to wear your uniform when you got out in '72 was a gay bar. You know. 'Cause gays like guys in uniform. And, of course, I was also much thinner, and I had a lot more hair, and my hair was a lot more blonde and everything like that, so I was perfect in '72. You know.

SANDERSON: Now what was it like…'cause at the school you went to…instead of going back to Monterey you went to D.C. this time.

TRETTER: Right, because that was the only one that could teach a double language class, and that was the Crowell Collier Institute for Advanced Language Studies. And it was done for military people underneath the auspices of the Foreign Services Institute.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay.

TRETTER: So when I tested out of the school, we tested through the Foreign Services Institute. And that was interesting, because I had long since learned there's a little trick with speaking foreign languages. When you learn a new language, learn colloquial phrases, or at least one of two, so that you know what they mean and what they are. It's just like, you know, a mouse always seeks its hole. We know what we're saying in English, but you say that in Germany and they have no idea what you're talking about even if they speak English very well. You know, and in fact, my German friends used to tell me that "you Americans talk too much in colloquialisms." You know, you're always using colloquialisms.

SANDERSON: Especially us Southerners.

TRETTER: So, what I always did…pardon me?

SANDERSON: Especially us Southerners.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah, we like to call them Southern Euphemism.

TRETTER: [Laughs] Well, I had long since learned that you learn things like that. So in Russian I'd learned, you know, [in Russian] "quiet as a fish." Which in English, we say "quiet as a mouse," you know, and everything like that. In Hindi, when I was there, one of them that I had learned is that, "a thief always finds a spark in his beard". And what it means is "a thief returns to the scene of the crime," in English. But in Hindi they sa,y "a thief always finds a spark in his beard." In other words, you know, something's gnawing at him and he's the one that did the bad deed.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Now, okay. When you get tested by the Foreign Service Institute they have a Foreign Service linguist and they have a native speaker that are testing you. And you do an oral exam and everything like that. And I managed during the oral exam to slip in, "a thief always finds a spark in his beard". I don't even remember the full things. But of course the Foreign Services Institute speaker immediately stopped me and said, "What did you say? What does that mean? That's nonsense." And everything like that. The native speaker was sitting there laughing. [Chuckles] And he said, "It's just a colloquialism that you probably don't know, and it means, you know, a, you know, a thief always returns to the scene of the crime and, you know, a thief finds a spark in his beard." So I passed my Hindi test, my oral exams, with the highest grade that one could get and that they'd ever passed anybody before with, and

everything like that. Because I used the little trick, you know, and that's half of what life is, if you know the right tricks.

SANDERSON: You're good to go.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: What was it like living in DC for over a year during that time frame?

TRETTER: Ah, I loved it. Absolutely loved it--

SANDERSON: --Especially during that time, you know. 'Cause, I mean, 'cause you were in DC right after Tet. Especially when it was like…you know, when the protest really got big about…you know, "Hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?" That was really huge during that time frame--

TRETTER: Well, that was--

SANDERSON: While you were also going to school.

TRETTER: First place, we always…almost always went to school in civilian clothes 'cause we were at a civilian institute. They didn't want us out there. Actually, they made the Army guys wear their uniforms much more often than they made us Navy guys wear our uniforms. Okay? And we were at the naval station Anacostia Annex. You know, in a barracks there and everything like that. Hardly ever…by that time I was an E5. And there was also when Martin Luther King was assassinated. And I know…sometimes I kind of wonder…I have had the opportunity to do so many things and so many amazing things during my life. You know, like making a Telstar phone call and things like that, that I wonder how people can believe me simply because of all these things. So Martin Luther King was assassinated. Guess who was the highest-ranking person at Anacostia [chuckles] naval annex? Me, in E5. Well, first thing I did is I had a few guys, a couple of marines, but everybody else had been taken off base and were…you know, they were doing all sorts of national guard and military things and guarding, you know, the Lincoln Memorial and, you know, all these other things. And I had my Navy linguists, a couple of Marine linguists, and I had the admirals' and captains' wives that were living on base and their Filipino servants who were military. And I was to defend all these people and Anacostia Annex itself. So the first thing I did, and I hope you don't mind me telling this story, but the first thing I did is I told my Marines, “Go get the big trucks.” The four by--

SANDERSON: The 5-tons?

TRETTER: Yeah. And I said, "Park them in each gate." You know, 'cause we don't know what gate they're gonna try to come through or if they're gonna try to come through. 'Cause there was…it was rioting, and a lot of our people had had trouble getting back to the Annex from Crowell Collier and most of them were taught in Virginia. And this was a couple…this took a couple of days to do all this stuff. And we had had trouble getting back. Buses were being overturned. You know, it was not the time to be in a military uniform on the street, you know, at all SO, but we were in Anacostia Annex. So I had them park the big four-by-fours in the gates, totally blocking off all the gates. And then I said, you know, "Stand"…we didn't really have any weapons. We were linguists. We didn't have guns and didn't do that kind of stuff. Some of the Marines, I think did have access to guns, but most of them had already left the base anyway. And so we blocked off the gates, and there was a way of going by going over the rooftops that we could go over to the Anacostia Bridge and go over to the other side of the river from Anacostia Annex. And for some reason, I think because it was a naval base, it was more vulnerable than the other side of the river. There wasn't as much rioting and that going on. And I just said, "I don't want anybody to get killed. What we're gonna do if we get attacked, we're gonna retreat. You help the wives and that of the admirals and the Filipino servants and that, and you take them and you guide them across this bridge, get them over the other side of the river you know, I just want everybody to just evacuate. I don't want anybody to get hurt, and everything like that. Well, they never did try to break into the thing, and it could be because they saw that the trucks were there and that they weren't gonna be able to get by and that. Who knows? I mean, that was a long time ago. But we never had a thing. But I was the person that was in charge of saving the Anacostia Annex.

SANDERSON: What was the thought running through your head? Here you are trying to learn a language, proverbial hm hits the fan, and they walk up like, "Hey CT2, you're in charge. You gotta protect all the head-honchos' wives. See ya."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And just left you to it. What was the…what was running through your head at that time?

TRETTER: Kind of like, interestingly enough, when I saw the room that Jennifer got me over at the hotel. I was just befuddled. You know, I mean, what do I do? You know, and everything. Fortunately, I had--even at that age, and by then I was in my twenties--I had enough common sense to know that the first thing we gotta do is block off the gates. You know, 'cause we

gotta stop people from getting in as opposed to us getting out. I knew it wasn't safe for us to get out. I kinda knew about the bridge. I wasn't so sure as to how safe it would be on the other side of the river, but I knew that that would be easier to defend than our part and everything like that. 'Cause we were just buildings and houses and, you know, everything like that. I mean they could have set it on fire and burned down the whole thing. And, my big thing was, you know, 'cause I'd…you know, I'd been in the service long enough. I'd been in Vietnam and I'd been in Turkey and, you know, gone through enough adventures in my life already that my big thing was I don't want anybody to get hurt or killed. And so it was…once we…or I decided that we've got this pathway, and I think there were other people that helped me figure it out and know where it was and everything like that, I said, you know, "That's our plan of action. We don't defend diddly squat 'cause it's not worth it. You know, let them burn it to the ground." But we get everybody out.

SANDERSON: Out.

TRETTER: And that the…that was the only thing that was really on my mind, you know. 'Cause like I say, they were already in the city burning places and tipping over buses and accosting people and everything like that and you know, all the big military honchos were gone. Half the admirals and captains were at sea. You know, they weren't gonna come back for their wives or anything. You know, they were out at sea. And the poor little Filipino guys, most of them just spoke Tagalog anyway. You know, they were there as servants, you know, more than anything else. The Navy used to do that quite a bit, you know, have…especially Filipinos for some…kind of like the Kuwaitis and them do now, you know.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: So, but yeah. No, my…from what I can remember of that whole thing, my basic thing was I don't want anybody to get hurt or killed. You know. I don't care what people think of us, how chicken we look, or anything like that. We escape. That's what we want to do.

SANDERSON: Cool.

TRETTER: You know, we save the lives and we'll worry about the rest of the stuff later.

SANDERSON: There you go.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Then…sounds like DC was definitely not a boring time for you. Well, especially with you being also a history buff. Museum…yeah…

TRETTER: That was the other thing, when you first asked about D.C., that was the first thing that popped into my mind. I love D.C. because I would spend my weekends at the Smithsonian. And I was there long enough, 'cause that school lasted over a year, I was there long enough that I went through almost every single Smithsonian museum item by item. Which I loved. Which I just absolutely loved. A lot of times, you know, you were in a foreign country or something like that, and you had to go through…you know, my one and only…and I still want to go back there and see it better…my one and only time in the British museum was, you know, start at the door and then you shoot the gun off and you run down the halls and all that and try to make it back before the bus leaves.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know.

SANDERSON: I definitely hear you on that one. That's one of the down sides to some of those trips. You really can't hit all the fun stuff.

TRETTER: Yeah, and some of them worked out. Like I said, when I was in Ankara, I got to see the Hittite Museum. You know, and I covered that pretty thoroughly. You know, I also got to see Topkapi in Istanbul, and I got to see the Hagia Sophia, which I guess now they've done a lot of restoration work and brought back a lot of the Byzantine paintings and that. When I was there, they had just started and it was of course a big controversy among the Turks about, why do we want to take our mosque and bring out these Christian saints? Then suddenly they get the idea that, oh, by the way that's bringing in millions of tourist dollars. [Laughs]

SANDERSON: To a country that needs it badly.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: So now you're at the tail end of your time…your adventures in D.C. And I mean, you're there during…I mean, that was one of the most pivotal times of the twentieth century. You know, next to WWII.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: Yeah. During that time frame, you get orders to Hawaii. How many cartwheels did you do down the National Mall?

TRETTER: Not really any. I mean, I was excited and happy to go to Hawaii, but you gotta remember I was leaving the Smithsonian. And I didn't…until I got to Hawaii, I didn't realize that there were things in Hawaii like the Bernice P. Bishop Museum.

SANDERSON: Mm-hm.

TRETTER: Which was…is to this day one of my favorite museums in the world. I would go back and see the-- and every time I hear somebody's going to Hawaii, I say, "If you're on Oahu, go to the Bernice P. Bishop Museum." It's magnificent. It's an older museum. They don't have all this stuff about, you know, kiddies and getting you to pull wires and all that kind of stuff. I hate that modern crap in museums now. You know, I mean, they've destroyed the Science Museum in St. Paul, you know, 'cause it's all for kids and everything. And it used to be a beautiful old, old museum that we used to go to as a kid with. You know, mastodon or mammoth skeletons and all those sorts of things and that. And now it's just…now it's just ruined. But the Bernice P. Bishop, the last time I was there…and like I say, I'd love to go back again, but also I'm a little bit afraid that they will have modernized it.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: But it was beautiful. It was dark. It was quiet. And they had to keep it dark because they didn't want all the feathers on the royal family's feathered cloaks to fade.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, they wanted it to be the bright reds and yellows and that of the Hawaiian birds that are now extinct and can never be redid. And at that time in DC, I started really seriously watching birds for a long time. And so to go to Hawaii and be able to pick up the extent species that were still living in Hawaii was really something else. You know, we used to…I had a friend, Gerhard Wayne Tyson from Indiana, that we used to every Saturday in D.C. also when I wasn't going to a museum of something like that, we would go down the canal there in D.C. and look for birds. And we kept bird journals and all that kind of stuff.

SANDERSON: Wow. Outstanding.

TRETTER: I embarrassed everybody because I would go down there and I would pick up the trash and throw it in the things. And they usually didn't get upset with me unless I would walk into the canal and pull out an old tire

or something like that. And they were always upset with me 'cause I was doing stuff like that. You know.

SANDERSON: Oh definitely.

TRETTER: But, loved Hawaii. Got involved in the children's theater in Hawaii and with the Honolulu Opera. I sang in the chorus.

SANDERSON: Oh nice.

TRETTER: You know, in the Honolulu Opera. I was a tenor still back in those days. I think I'm, you know, more of a bass now, but in those days I was still pretty much tenor. And I worked with the Kaneohe Lutheran Church. I helped them build…they had a school, a Lutheran school there, but they didn't have a library. And so I talked them into letting me redo one of the old buildings there and put in shelves and built a little library for them and used my…almost got myself in trouble with the book of the month club because I spent an awful lot of money buying books for the library there.

SANDERSON: There in Hawaii?

TRETTER: Yeah. I got a special stewardship award from them.

SANDERSON: Oh, outstanding.

TRETTER: And in D.C…and I don't know--Lisa said she didn't see it--somewhere in my records I think there's still the commendation I got when I was in D.C., because I would tutor disadvantaged kids. Most of them were African American, and they had trouble with, you know, both English and math, and I would tutor them and that kind of stuff. And I've got…somewhere in my records is a commendation for working with you know, impoverished kids in Washington D.C. [Pause] [I] ran a comparative religious program in both D.C. and in Hawaii. You know, teaching comparative religions at Sunday school. You didn't have to have a degree for that kind of stuff.

SANDERSON: `Oh nice.

TRETTER: It was just Sunday school. So, [those were] some of my off-time activities. And in Hawaii…as long as we're talking about off-time activities. Now, I don't know if you want me to talk about off-time activities. But the children's theater there, Honolulu Theater for Youth, had a thing where you could go to them and hire a Santa Claus. So I played the part of Santa Claus one year for them and got hired for this big Hawaiian group and everything like that. Got introduced there, and it was funny, because the guy that introduced me said, "And kids, this year we've got a special treat

for you. For the first time, we've got a white Santa Claus." A Haole Santa Claus. The only thing is I was a lot thinner then and I couldn't keep the pillow where it was supposed to be, and it kept slipping down. And I wasn't a very good Santa Claus, you know. In those days. I probably make a much better one now. But that was fun, and I enjoyed Hawaii. You know. But--

SANDERSON: It looked like--according to your records--it looks like you were there for about three months. Then that…work-wise, what did they have you do before? 'Cause after that they sent you down to Point Mugu in California. But when you were first there in Hawaii for the first couple months, what all did they have you do during that time frame?

TRETTER: Part of it was…I think that was when some of the early cosmonauts went over Hawaii. And so I was…that was always my primary function. You know, when that would happen, everything else would stop and I would go and do that.

SANDERSON: And that was when you did the calculation for the Russian space shot?

TRETTER: I think that was maybe a little bit later.

SANDERSON: Little bit later.

TRETTER: That was after Point Mugu.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay.

TRETTER: But we had a language thing there, and that was another interesting whatcha-call-it. We had a small naval group there that was mostly linguists and everything. And it wasn't…which later became the Kaneohe Marine Corps air station language group. But at that time we had a naval warrant officer and a lieutenant. Lieutenant Althment, who was there. And you ever meet those lieutenants who know everything and are just whatcha-call-it. I mean, the thing about me being an E5 having all kinds of medals, speaking multiple languages, and everything like that just grated on him horribly. And I so one of the things he had me do was to teach all these dull and boring military classes and everything like that. And then he found out that in the classes, one of the things that I was saying was that if something goes against your religion or against you that you do have the right--even in the military--to refuse. I mean, it has to be a basic…you know, and I explained that to them, it has to be a basic life concept within you. But if you want to grow your hair long or grow a beard and a mustache; that was when they were experimenting with beards and mustaches in the Navy. I forget the admiral that grew a beard.

SANDERSON: Elmo--

TRETTER: Huh?

SANDERSON: Elmo Zumwalt.

TRETTER: Yes. Yes, yes, thank you. My memory isn't as good as it used to be, but yeah. You know, and so, you know, this was…I was teaching them this and Althment was jus…-- he found out about it and he was just furious and, "You can't tell them that." And you know, blah blah blah this and blah blah blah that, and he was gonna do this to me and he was gonna break me and, you know, take my E5 status away from me and everything like that. And he had gone as far as the commander of the base. You know, the base commander, the captain I forget who it was. That was…at that time in Hawaii, I was still at Waimea. I wasn't out to Kaneohe yet. And so I wrote my mother, who brought it up to our representative, Congressional Representative Mr. Karth, and told him, you know, what I was saying and how I was teaching the class, and everything like that. And like I say, again it's another one of these things where I've almost done too much in my life. So anyway, our congressman calls the captain of the base in Hawaii and says, "What are you doing to this poor guy? And he's…what he's saying is correct." You know, and of course, that was, like you say all the time--with the protests and everything that was going on and everything like that--and Karth said, you know, "You can't do it." To make a long story short, everything against me got dismissed. I got…the warrant officer ended up taking over for Lieutenant Althment, and the last I heard, Lieutenant Althment was on a destroyer in the middle of the Pacific Ocean somewhere. 'Cause he had misrepresented the Navy and the honor of the Navy and all this kind of stuff. And I don't think…I think his naval career was kind of at an end. You know, so. But yeah Hawaii was a real interesting place, you know. It was fun. Lots to do, you know, and just everything.

SANDERSON: Then they…when the…you were in Point Mugu for…not for very--

TRETTER: Yeah, just a little while.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Mostly I remember going to the PX there and buying…they had a particular shirt that I liked, and they had a whole bunch of them, and I bought like three or four of them that lasted me for years before they wore out.

SANDERSON: Was it just norm-…just part of the standard TAD cycle to send you over there, or?

TRETTER: Yeah I think so. You know they were--if I remember correctly--they were concerned at the time that either the Russians were listening in to Point Mugu, or were trying to find out more information about Point Mugu, because they didn't know, and it was a missile site. And you know, what kind of missiles and everything like that. And so they needed a Russian linguist there to kind of--

SANDERSON: See what was going on.

TRETTER: Yeah. See if we could get anything. And there really wasn't anything there. I mean, 'cause the Russians, if they were sending anything they were sending it directly back to Russia. You know, it didn't go through our waves. It wasn't anything that we could tune in to and listen and get. Not even like a…you know, we used to listen to all the taxicab nets and everything like that. In Odessa, but this was…you know, it wasn't. So it didn't stay there, I know, very long. I went back to Waimea. You know. It was…I'm glad I went. I mean, it was fun. I liked…you know, I kinda liked Point Mugu. It was an interesting place. Not one I'd been before.

SANDERSON: Right. It generally is…it's one of those duty stations where they pretty much have to drag you there kicking and screaming, and they have to drag you out of there kicking and screaming.

TRETTER: [Chuckles] Yeah.

SANDERSON: It's a love/hate [thing]; people either love Point Mugu or they hate it. There [are] very few people I've met that actually hate it, and they actually got there and they actually enjoyed it. 'Cause, I mean--

TRETTER: Well, they were very relaxed. You know, I mean, it wasn't all that hyper-military stuff and everything like that. It was very relaxed. And they really weren't doing anything at Point Mugu except sitting around waiting for something to happen so that they could fire the missiles.

SANDERSON: Mm-hm.

TRETTER: So there wasn't a lot of, you know, chatter going on. There wasn't…I mean, there really wasn't even anything for the Russians to listen to, because the missiles were there and everybody knew what they were. And you know, I might go and talk to you about the missiles, but I wouldn't call you up on the radio or on the phone.

SANDERSON: Right. You would physically go.

TRETTER: Yeah. It was very peaceful. You know, I remember taking a lot of walks and going out and spending the time and like I say, bought shirts at the PX and you know, wasn't a big deal I guess.

SANDERSON: Then one of the…after you got back to Hawaii, there was a block on here where almost a month, they had you at the Naval Medicare administration unit over at Tripler.

TRETTER: Yes. I'd forgotten about that. One of my adventures in Hawaii. I had a…oh, what were they about the E6--

SANDERSON: Chiefs?

TRETTER: Chief, yeah, that I was friends with. And his wife and his kids and everything and he had about…I think he had two or three kids. Two for sure. And I was friends with them, and we used to do something. And my niece came over from…to visit me and she stayed with them while she was there. What happened there when I went to Tripler was his kids caught the mumps. I had never had mumps in my entire life. Suddenly I was a fully adult male with the mumps. And I ended up in Tripler flat on my back 'til they were completely gone, 'cause they didn't know what was gonna…you know, adults, mumps aren't good for adults. And everything like that. And so that's why I was in Tripler Army Hospital. For the whole time, yes, and it was a long time.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: 'Cause they--

SANDERSON: It was almost a full month, huh?

TRETTER: Yeah, 'cause they wanted to make sure that the mumps were totally gone. You know they couldn't…I mean, I wasn't allowed to like walk around the hospital or anything. You know, it was…they were very, very frightened, you know, about having a fully-grown adult male catch the mumps. So, yeah, that was that. I kind of…I'd kind of forgotten about that.

SANDERSON: When I saw it, I was like, "hmm." It's like, yeah, definitely have to ask him on that.

TRETTER: Yeah, no, there were Russian spies in Tripler Army Hospital. I had to--

SANDERSON: Yeah, well, the funny thing is, it's one of those where that's probably where they…where we protect the data quite well, but you can learn a lot about a person from their medical record. So if they can hack…you know,

especially now that everything is digital, if they can hack a medical record, nowadays, I mean kind of gives you an idea that, you know…an idea about that individual.

TRETTER: Yeah, with HIPAA [Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act] and everything, they try to protect it. And yeah, the veterans' hospital is just paranoid about it, as you know.

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah.

TRETTER: But yeah, no. I was in Tripler because of the mumps. Don't think there's too much that's secret there. Except how bad my mumps were.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Those were pretty bad.

SANDERSON: Then now we're getting to the meat and potatoes of everything.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: You know, you're back in Hawaii in sixty-…August of '69. And during this time frame this looks like when the majority of…you know, during that time you're…this is when you were going to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and quote/unquote a lot of the stuff that you did during that time frame.

TRETTER: Yeah, that was very…see, well, like I said before is we would go out, we'd be assigned, and we'd just be told that we were assigned and that we had to report to the tarmac by the airplane at eleven o'clock at night. And there'd be a guy there with a little folding table--a little card table--and he'd hand us our orders and we'd get on the plane. We'd end up Subic, Clark, you know, Dien Bien Phu, whatever it was, you know. But a lot of times, it was most often Clark and Subic, and then they'd fly us from there to some place in Vietnam and do whatever they wanted us to do. Mostly it was…I was to be…I was assigned to be listening for…'cause that's when the Russians had been getting involved with the Vietnamese. And the Russians were afraid of the Chinese having too much influence. They didn't realize how much the Chinese…how much the Vietnamese hated the Chinese. So they were trying to do all this stuff, and this is the stuff with, like you said, with Checkpoint Charlie and submarines and the fishing boats. And all that kind of stuff. We'd do our thing. We'd get back on the plane, go back to Clark, Subic, whatever, and then go back to Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station. The guy'd be there with the card table and have a little machine that would just grind up, and they'd collect all

of our orders and grind them up right then and there. We couldn't even walk off the--

SANDERSON: Off the tarmac?

TRETTER: Yeah, no.

SANDERSON: Now with that, how many times between '69 and the time you left the Navy in '71, March of '71, roughly how many times did you go back and forth on these missions?

TRETTER: [Pause] I would guess--and it is a guess, 'cause I don't remember like I say when I don't…it's a long time ago now, and my memory isn't as good as it used to be--I'd say it would have to be five or six maybe. Something like that. But then there were also one's where we would…we used to call them Willie Fudds. I don't remember what the actual name was, but they were planes with great big radar things on the top of them--

SANDERSON: The Hawkeyes?

TRETTER: Yeah. And we'd fly over and try to intercept whatever we could then.

SANDERSON: Yeah, they're…the Navy's version is a Hawkeye and the AWACS for the Air Force.

TRETTER: Yeah. And AWACS, yeah. And then there was one, and I didn't really get to go on that one, but I had to send all my French linguists on it. That was when they went down to Pago Pago, and our ships tried to stay out of the dust cloud as much as possible. Some of the guys were real[ly] concerned about that. But that was when the French were testing atomic weapons down in Pago Pago. And so we had to send people there. And I did a lot of…that was when I ran the foreign language school at Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station. And most of what I did there was to cross train linguists. So I'd get a Vietnamese linguist that didn't speak any French. I'd make sure he got training in French so that if he was in a situation where the Vietnamese switched from Vietnamese to French, he would at least kind of know what was going on. And we did the same with Cambodians and Laotians and some Chinese. We didn't do as much with the Chinese. We had a little bit of Chinese and Vietnamese. You know. But of course we didn't…and most people to this day don't realize that after the Americans left Vietnam in '72 was the big North Vietnamese war with China when China invaded and the Vietnamese, and the Cambodians and Laotians just defeated the hell out of them. They had their own form of communism, which is interesting. And that's interesting in some of the books that I've brought that I'm donating today. Two of the books are by

a Laotian linguist who did the same things in Laos that I did, you know, in Cambodia and that kind of stuff. Cambodia was the big one and the one that you always remember because that's the one that Nixon was so paranoid about--

SANDERSON: Right

TRETTER: --because they didn't want anybody to know that we were actually inside Cambodia. You know. And they just…and he was just paranoid as hell. And we couldn't talk about it. We couldn't tell anybody else. You know, we couldn't tell our friends. And you know, if you had wives and sweethearts and that, you weren't supposed to tell them or family members or anything. You couldn't…you went and you came back and you were a ghost. And what was interesting to me was recently…and I like President Obama. I think he's probably one of the best presidents we've ever had. But you notice that he did the whole thing, or said that whole thing, about the guy that got killed in Iraq that was a linguist. And I thought, "They're doing the exact same thing with those guys that they did with us." It's all secret. Nobody can know that it's happening. They're sending these…you know, and there was more than just that one guy. There was like four or five linguists that went in there. Well, I'm sure it was an Iraqi linguist and a Farsi linguist and a, you know, couple of others. The, you know, things that they sent them all in there, and they were trying to find out who's doing what, and this poor slob got killed. But at least Obama was honest enough to mention it publicly and say, "Yes, we did send these people in there on these secret missions." You know. And of course Nixon would have never ever let anybody know that he was sending secret missions into all these countries.

SANDERSON: Oh, definitely, yeah.

TRETTER: You know.

SANDERSON: I remember reading articles about when they started releasing that data, he blew his top on that one. He was not quite--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --he was not happy.

TRETTER: Well, before we go on, I'm sorry, but I can give you another good instance of that. I had this language group that I was in charge of as an E6. Kaneohe Marine Corps Air Station, okay? We were allotted, I think, a hundred twenty-nine people for that language group. For our-- whatcha-call-it. When Nixon did his big reduction in forces, we never had more

than about a hundred, maybe a hundred ten or a hundred fifteen, people in that unit. When he did his reduction of services, he reduced our unit down to I think a hundred fifteen. We had never had more than that number of people--

SANDERSON: To begin with.

TRETTER: --in that unit ever.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: But that was part of his…that was enlisted and that was one of the things…you know, that was the kind of stuff that made me become much more liberal, because he out-and-out basically lied. He said, "Oh, this is one of the groups, they had, you know, a hundred and twenty-nine people. We've reduced it down to a hundred fifteen and everything like that." Those other fourteen people were never ever there. You know, they could have been there, but they were never there. You know, they reduced it. So, sorry, but--

SANDERSON: Oh, no, no, no.

TRETTER: I just thought that was…to me, that was a real[ly] significant thing.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, that they were basically lying to people about…and I thought, "You know, how many of these other reductions in forces are out there that are just plain lies?"

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know.

SANDERSON: I hear you on that one.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: One of the questions I had was, on here--where you're talking about the experience that best…you know, best exemplifies your time--you had put some…it's kind of, actually, hard to read, because it's…well, just because when it was faxed, it was over-dissemble. Something-affair.

TRETTER: Oh, that may be the thing that I told you about with Lieutenant Althment.

SANDERSON: It might be. It would be number three on that one. The Althment Affair. Is that? 'Cause I wasn't quite sure exactly what it was.

TRETTER: Oh, yeah. The Lieutenant Althment Affair.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay.

TRETTER: So that's the one I already told you about Lieutenant Althment.

SANDERSON: I just wanted to verify and double check especially now that we're talking about Cambodia and the atomic testing at Pago Pago.

TRETTER: Yeah. And that one was again significant to me because that was another thing where, you know, a lieutenant was basically abusing his power. You know?

SANDERSON: And being a shmuck.

TRETTER: Yeah. And for once in the military got his comeuppance.

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah. And that's the thing. A lot of times, you know, people don't realize how much that actually happened.

TRETTER: Yeah. Well, there was the big thing--and I'm trying to think of the name of the ship--not too many years ago where it had the explosion and it killed all those people. I can't remember, but I collected everything I could find about it.

SANDERSON: The Indy--

TRETTER: And that for the--

SANDERSON: --the Indianapolis?

TRETTER: No, not the Indianapolis. That was too much World War II. I'm talking about just--

SANDERSON: Would the second Indianapolis, there was the…or was it Indiana? It was a battleship. It was decommissioned--

TRETTER: Oh, Iowa. The battleship Iowa.

SANDERSON: The Iowa. There you go.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: I knew it began with an "I", and it was a battleship.

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah. And that exploded. And the Navy, when it first came out, the Navy tried to blame the two gay guys that were on there and said it was all their fault, and they were having an affair. And the one guy committed suicide and everything like that. Fortunately, the guy that was still living…Kenning I think was his name or, you know, last name Kenning. Not Kenny as in…that. Fortunately, his family backed him up and he said, "No that can't be true," and, you know, "he wasn't depressed, and we weren't having…we had had a fight but it wasn't a big enough fight that we were gonna blow up the ship and kill people." You know, and everything like that. And when they finally investigated it fully and completely, they found out that he was right and he was telling the truth, and the very…that was the very first time that the US Navy had ever had to apologize to gay people for blaming them for something that wasn't their fault. You know, it was always…always used to be real[ly] easy for the military to just say, "Oh it's the fault of those crazy, you know, homosexuals. You know how homosexuals are, and they're all crazy." Whereas if you really look at it--and if you look at any of the big spy cases from the twentieth century--almost all of them were heterosexual spy cases. You know, so...

SANDERSON: Yeah. No, you definitely are on that one, they like to, you know, they like to cast the blame. Then, you know, then people call them on their quote/unquote BS and that's when they're like, "Oops." Then they go back and they're like, "That really didn't happen."

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah.

SANDERSON: And what was it like…during your time there at Kaneohe Bay--K-Bay, as we like to call it now.

TRETTER: Ah, okay.

SANDERSON: When you were there at K-Bay, was it one of those where you were…you had Marines under you or was it more of…you know, was it…what was the name of the te-, or unit, that you were with?

TRETTER: I don't remember what we called it anymore. I mean, it was "Linguistic something-or-other." Yes, I did have some Marines under me, but the Marines never trained as many Marines in foreign languages as the Navy did.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: The Navy was much more into training Navy people. You know, and even our numbers were smaller than the Army. The Air Force was kinda like

the Marines. There weren't all that many Air Force people that were trained in foreign languages either. So, you know, I would have maybe two or three Marines at a time. I had more Marines when I was in Washington, D.C. than I had a Kaneohe.

SANDERSON: Yeah. Okay.

TRETTER: But we were just the linguistics unit. I don't know that we even had a special designation or number. You know, we weren't like TUSLOG det 48 or anything like that, you know.

SANDERSON: Right. Oh, okay.

TRETTER: Anything.

SANDERSON: Now--

TRETTER: I don't remember what the name of our order or unit was. But we were just a specialized unit and all we dealt with literally was…and we got excused from a lot of things in Kaneohe, you know, because Kaneohe was great for inspections and all kinds of things.

SANDERSON: It's still--

TRETTER: --And flight training--

SANDERSON: It's still like that.

TRETTER: Ah. Okay.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: And they did a lot of flight training for pilots and things like that. But we dealt only with the languages. And like I say, our biggest thing that we did there was cross-train people in multiple languages. So if I had a Vietnamese linguist who was fluent in French, I could send him to Pago Pago with the rest of the French linguists. Because he was fluent enough. But, you know, for the rest of it, half the time I'd have to use French linguists to retrain, you know, Cambodian or Laotians in French or things like that.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay.

TRETTER: So...

SANDERSON: All right. Well, before we continue on, did you need another break, or are you…did you want to break for lunch? 'Cause it's almost one o'clock. I wasn't, you know...

TRETTER: Yeah. It might be nice. What should we do in reference to lunch?

SANDERSON: Generally we just go grab…generally it's just one of those where…actually, I need to find out what…'cause I just generally bring my lunch with me. I don't know what they...

TRETTER: Well, 'cause what I was hoping to do at some point this week is one of the restaurants over there has a buffet at lunchtime. And that…I don't know how much time we are allotted for lunch.

SANDERSON: Generally anywhere from between thirty minutes to…thirty to forty five minutes. How long would you need for lunch?

TRETTER: I'm kind of a slow eater, so maybe I should go someplace where there's a hamburger or sandwiches or something like that.

SANDERSON: And there is a place downstairs, Pret A Manger. It's the Pret A Manger. It's a little sandwich shop here in the building.

TRETTER: Ah, okay. So.

SANDERSON: So, all right. And I know you said you had to take some meds.

TRETTER: No, not this time of day. I--

SANDERSON: Okay, that's closer to night or?

TRETTER: Well, I do have meds that I have to take about two o'clock.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay.

TRETTER: You know, but if they're late, that's not gonna hurt.

SANDERSON: Because we can definitely do that. And that way, if you want to do that and then we could start back up…there we are. We could start back up in about say, forty-five minutes from now.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: About 1:45, and then we can unpack a few more things until three, and then whatever we don't finish today, we can finish tomorrow.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: All right?

TRETTER: Sure.

SANDERSON: So yeah. Alright. I'll go ahead and hit the pause on all this and disconnect you.

TRETTER: And then you'll have to let me know where that restaurant is downstairs.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay. Definitely.

TRETTER: 'Cause I--

SANDERSON: And then what I'll do is--

TRETTER: Maybe I should…as long as we're going to take a break, I should go to the restroom. Sorry.

SANDERSON: Oh, that's alright.

TRETTER: It's the pills. The pills do that to me.

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah. That's why it's one of those, I'm like...

Jean-Nickolaus Tretter

March 8, 2016
Part 2
Interviewed by Ed Sanderson
Transcribed by Rachel Berlinski
Edited by Jena DiMaggio & Teri Embrey
Web biography by Unknown
Production by Brad Guidera

WEBB: I'm just gonna let you guys go. And then when Jean, or, Lisa shows up, I can knock or send you a text when…depending on what you guys--

SANDERSON: Yeah. You can just go ahead and send me a text.

WEBB: Okay.

SANDERSON: And it's on vibrate, so it will be one of those--

TRETTER: Yeah. And my phone isn't on silent. It keeps interrupting us all the time.

WEBB: That's okay.

SANDERSON: That's all--

Webb: All right, enjoy.

SANDERSON: Thanks.

TRETTER: Yup.

SANDERSON: We're gonna go ahead and continue on.

TRETTER: Okay.

(0:40)

SANDERSON: So, looking at it, we left off, we were talking about…we were getting ready to start talking about your time when you were there at there in Honolulu, and then you were doing Laos and Cambodia.

TRETTER: Uh-uh.

SANDERSON: And then, you had mentioned before with the…about with also with the French Atomic testing at Pong Pong.

TRETTER: Pago Pago.

SANDERSON: Pago Pago, sorry. Pago Pago. And we were getting ready to kind of dive in to more of some of the other stuff that you had done in Vietnam. Specifically, when you got to Vietnam, was it more of the times where they'd send you to, like, Tan Son Nhut, outside of Saigon and up to Da Nang, and--

TRETTER: Well, like I mentioned in the thing, they wouldn't ever send us any place that was too close to the…I mean, they wanted us there. We had to be close enough to be able to intercept what was being said back and forth. But they didn't want us so close that if the base fell or if, you know, the Vietcong overran us or anything like that, that we would not be captured, because of our security clearances and, you know, all the rest of them.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay. Now, with that being said, one of the things that kind of, you know, when we were upstairs talking, specifically with the USS Pueblo.

TRETTER: Oh, yeah, in North Korea.

SANDERSON: Right, and back in sixty-…you know, during that time in '68, you would have been in D.C. during that time frame. Did you know any of the people that were on board the Pueblo at the time?

TRETTER: No. Not the Pueblo. That was North Korea. That was Chinese. That was a whole 'nother area, you know. I mean, their desks would be over there and our desks would be over here. The ones I did know there is when I was in Turkey was the time the Israelis accidentally torpedoed our cruiser, and we lost a bunch of linguists on that. And I knew basically every one of them. I'd been in a unit with them and had, you know, like, either recommended them or knew of them. I wasn't doing the assigning 'cause I wasn't that high up on the echelon at that time, but I would recommend people to go on these sorts or trips and things like that.

SANDERSON: Oh, okay. 'Cause I know like, with yourself on the linguists' side and, you know, the Corpsmen side specifically within the nohelt{?] realm, there's very few of us. So it's like, it's a very small close-knit community.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: And it just kind of popped in my head. I'm like, "Oh, I wonder if he knew anybody off the Pueblo."

TRETTER: Not off the Pueblo. That was a whole different language group. And it's just like the…some of the books I'm giving this…today, [are], you know, from the Laotian side, but we never actually knew each other before… Actually, what happens is he's now a stamp dealer, and as a collector I go to the shows and he's always there. Jim Stanton. And you know, he's written a couple of books which is one of the reasons I feel more secure about talking about a lot of this stuff in reference to the security clearances, because he's writing about it in his books, and they haven't come down hard on him. Like I said, they now let me travel to Russia. You know, that sort of things, so--

SANDERSON: And with that, you had mentioned that a couple of times, since what was it like that first time that you were able to go into Russia knowing what you knew about--

TRETTER: [Coughing]

SANDERSON: --you know, going into modern Russia knowing what you knew about the old Soviet regime?

TRETTER: I went in 2006, which was shortly after Putin started coming to power. At that time, Putin was still being kind of careful. The ones that disliked us and didn't want us there were the skinheads and what we call the babushkas, the grandmothers. Fortunately, American baseball isn't very popular in Russia yet, because the babushkas would try to throw things like tomatoes and eggs at us and couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. Which was interesting because the other Russian people were really angry with them because they said, you know, you're always asking for more money. You want more money for your pensions, and here you are wasting food by throwing at Americans. You know, and tomatoes and eggs, things that would get you all messy, but they never really could hit us 'cause they just weren't…so that was a big joke amongst me and the other people that I went with, that…the only one we really had trouble with was Belarus. And Belarus didn't want us anywhere near there. We couldn't get visas for it. We couldn't even get a visa to fly over Belarus. So when I returned from Moscow to Berlin, I had to take a German airline that went in an opposite direction--

SANDERSON: Direction, oh--

TRETTER: --that didn't fly over--

SANDERSON: Belarus.

TRETTER: --we weren't even allowed in the airspace of Belarus.

SANDERSON: Wow.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now, and did they know that when…was it just more of when you're applying to go--

TRETTER: Well, it was kind of interesting, because we got to Russia and all of a sudden, this young lady shows up talking to us and everything like that and was supposedly at the same conference. I went there for a conference, and was supposedly at the same conference and I was speaking at the conference and everything like that. And she was from the American Embassy. And she would tell us this and that and, "Don't go here" and "Don't go there," and it's real[ly] whatcha-call-it. And we finally figured out--actually after we had already left Russia by then--that she had been sent to follow us by the American Embassy and that they were real[ly] concerned about what we might say or could say or something like that. And of course, that wasn't what the conference was about at all, you know, and everything like that. So it was really interesting. But all of a sudden, you know, she was there, and she'd follow us and, you know, things like that. And we ended up spending far more time with the Swedish delegates that were there. They kind of knew their way around Moscow and had been there before, and so we went out to eat with them and things like that and they…I know one time that the…one of the guys from Germany, one of the legislators from Germany, got punched in the face by the skinheads in Moscow, and we were downtown and actually I think we were looking for some place to eat, and the Swedish…two Swedes knew this place, and when the skinheads started kind of almost advancing, you might say, in our direction, and everything like that, we just ducked into this restaurant and decided we were gonna eat there. And we ate there and, you know, and the restaurant owners had paying customers, and he wasn't gonna let them come in and cause any problems and everything like that, so we kind of lucked out the whole time we were at Moscow. But the people were very friendly and very nice. They weren't upset with us as all. They were more upset with the skinheads and the babushkas and that. And, you know, again it was kind of a thing like these are people that are here spending money. You know. And of course Moscow is always going through difficult financial times. You know, and so...

SANDERSON: Well, the reason why I brought that up is 'cause looking at one of them, you know we briefly talked about it, was your security clearance: the fact that here you had a top secret security clearance. I mean, basically clear to what we in modern day call Yankee White. You're all the way up to, I

mean, you know, where you can get…you can rub elbows with the President.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And especially with that type of…with your type of security clearance, you have access for…to be able to not only just, you know, get that close to the President…to get that close to the president, but you actually get to see what the President sees. With that in itself, what type of scrutiny did you have to go through to be able to, one, obtain that security clearance but also to maintain it?

TRETTER: Well, once you've got the clearance, it really wasn't…I mean, the FBI would come back and do a check and everything like that. They dealt less with me than they did with my neighbors back home, my family back home, people that we lived next to and everything like that, and, you know, they were very…they very much…and people were very, I guess you might say, defensive of me. And, you know, I know one elderly gentleman practically threw the FBI off his thing. You know, "Why are you, you know, doing that? Jean's a great kid and don't you come around here saying that he isn't." And everything. And they were just…you know, they were looking for anything but I hadn't belonged to any socialist…and they were only looking for left wing things. They didn't care about--

SANDERSON: The right wing.

TRETTER: --right wing at all. You know, and like I said, my family actually was very Republican. So, but they wanted to make sure and they mostly interviewed anybody and everybody that had been a friend or that I'd known or--

SANDERSON: --had any type of contact with.

TRETTER: Any type of contact with at all. You know. Yeah, and they basically went over everything. You know, they looked at old hospital records. That was in days before HIPAA. You know, and they looked at school records. You know, what I'd done, what my grades were, and who I associated with and you know, everything like that. But they basically never came and talked to me specifically. You know, which I always thought was kind of interesting. But they were searching everybody else. I imagine they figured if I was somebody who was a danger or something like that, that I'd just lie anyway. So why talk to him directly? Talk to these other people that are not as aware as he is of what's going on.

SANDERSON: I think that's a definite…the reason why I brought that up, was that's definitely a big change nowadays where the candidate has to go through a very long, lengthy…with an SF86, very long, lengthy document. Then they have to go through an interview themselves, you know, whereas you didn't have to do that as much. And, of course, they scrutinize your background. But now…nowadays, credit: your credit score and your bank records, I mean; they can actually go in and look, especially for something along those lines.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: They would scrutinize your bank account, your spending habit, your credit score, you know, anything along those lines. 'Cause anything that might look off kilter, they will…they can freeze the security clearance or suspend it, whether temporarily or indefinitely or, in the downside, a total revocation. And then--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --and in the modern CTI world, if you even have a suspension of sec-…of a security clearance, you have to cross-route. You have to change jobs. And if you just happen to be at that time where, you know, you're quote/unquote too old in the Navy to stay in, you know, too close to retirement and you can't switch to another rate, they actually send you packing. So, and it was interesting to see the contrast between, you know, 1960s Navy for CTIs versus, you know, the twenty-first…you know, the twenty-first century.

TRETTER: Yeah. Of course, the other thing to keep in mind about the 1960s is the fact that I was seventeen. You know, and a seventeen-year-old kid doesn't have many bank accounts. You know, maybe a small savings account. Something like that, and hasn't had any-- in those days you didn't have credit. They didn't send out credit cards to everybody that was graduating from high school and things like that. And so it was a little bit different world. But, I mean, that would be another reason why they wouldn't…I'm sure they must have done some financial checking for older people or maybe people that had been in college and had gotten, you know, college debt worked up and things like that. But, you know, I didn't have anything because I didn't have anything.

SANDERSON: Right. You didn't have anything 'cause there was nothing to be had, right.

TRETTER: Right, right. Not financially. You know, not financially. You know, I mean they could have found other things, so. And I'm wondering too, should

we…could we…would you be interested in going back maybe a little bit to Pensacola, Florida?

SANDERSON: Mm-hm.

TRETTER: Because I thought of another incident that happened in Pensacola.

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah.

TRETTER: Another thing that took up a bunch of my time while I was there…and this is kind of inter-…I think this is very interesting, which is why I bring it up. While I was there, there was a young man that was in my unit, you know, that we were studying with that got accused of being a homosexual, and they were dumping him out. But he had couple of months he had to stay before they could get rid of him and send him back. He was from Texas and they were gonna send him back to Texas and everything. And I guess I'm kind of proud of it because he was…he kind of became a pariah. Everybody was leaving him alone, didn't want to be seen talking to him, and everything like that. And I ended up befriending him and ended up being quite a good friend to him. He was Jewish and so, being fascinated by the Jewish religion and not really having had much exposure to it during my life, I would go with him. And that actually got me some other friends that were Jewish too that were more radical and had the little box that they tied to their head and everything like that. But he was more the average American Jew, you know, from Texas and everything like that. And he'd take me with him to temple on Fridays, and we'd go, and the people in the temple that he went to didn't care that he was being accused of being a homosexual and being kicked out of the Navy for that. But it was my first taste of gefilte fish, you know, and, you know, a lot of things like that. There [were] a lot of Jewish foods that I did like and some that I wasn't real[ly] fond of. I liked gefilte fish fine, but, you know, it was the boiled eggs and things like that that really didn't enthuse me very much. I didn't even like them at Easter. You know. So anyway, I kind of made friends with him. And having lied on my entrance things, being gay myself, and knowing it, you know, and this was something that I became more and more aware of over time. Okay? So I got to thinking, you know, maybe I should deal with this and see what I should or should not be doing or something like that. And we had a Lutheran chaplain on base at Pensacola. And I went to the chaplain, told him the whole thing, you know. And you know, I didn't really have a reputation, but I was known as a person who did not pick on homosexuals and would not let other people around me pick on homosexuals and that kind of stuff. So I told the chaplain the truth, that I thought I was a homosexual and, you know, everything like that, and

what kind of problems would it cause, and everything like that. And the culmination of it was that he did one of the things he absolutely shouldn't have done with me, and one of the things you don't do to most gay people is say you can't do it. You know, and he said, "Well, you'll never make it through the rest of your tour of duty. You know, you just can't do it. It's…it would be too hard. You know, and all these other people around you--" Now mind you, I had already had about three years in the Navy. [Chuckles] And kind of knew what I could do and what I couldn't do. And him telling me, "No, you can't do it." I stopped him and I said, "As a chaplain, can you…you cannot tell anybody else about my private conversations with you. Right?" And he said, "Yeah," that was right. That was true. But he advised me to go and admit it to somebody and let them let me go and get out of the Navy and everything like that. And I said, "No, absolutely not." I-- 'cause I knew I could still do it. I had just done it for three years, and I knew I could still do it. So I said, "You cannot say a word. Don't say a word to anybody." And went on about my business, and you know, like I said, ended up spending seven years and nine months in the Navy. You know, even though I was not supposed to be in there and they threatened me, like I say, with Leavenworth and everything else, but nobody ever knew that I was really a gay person. You know, but that was I think kind of significant too. And like I say, he just said the wrong thing. It just made me angry when he said, "You can't do it." And I said, "But I have been doing it." You know.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Don't tell me I can't do it. I do it every day. You know. And so that was kind of that. So I just thought I should mention it because you did say you were a little bit interested in the whole process of me being, you know, gay during the time before "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

SANDERSON: Right, and especially prior to the, you know, can I even think of the…it happened '68-'69 time frame. I cannot think of the name of it. One of the big riots up in around New York.

TRETTER: The Stonewall riots you mean?

SANDERSON: Yeah, there you go. Stonewall.

TRETTER: Yeah, that was '69.

SANDERSON: Yeah, and especially prior to that, 'cause it was even you know, it's like after the Stonewall it was like the veil had been lifted so it wasn't…it was kind of, you know, like the last couple years of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" where nobody really cared. It was kind of like that…eh, whatever. You

know, if anyone got processed out during that timeframe, last two years of “Don't Ask” …well actually the last five years of “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” because they were a discipline problem and that was an easy out to get them out.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: You know, like, I know quite a few…I actually assisted in processing a couple of people out that I knew…you know, it just happened to be one of those where we did it not because we were being anti-gay, anti-homosexual. It was more of, all right, you're discipline-problem. You don't need to be in the Navy, but they toe the line just enough that we can’t process them out as a disciplinary problem, and when we found out, we're like, all right, deuces…you know, it was an easy out to get them out.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: And that's--and correct me if I'm wrong--that's what I saw, you know, from my research. It was like, after the Stonewall, it's pretty much like the military really didn't care at that point.

TRETTER: Well, during the Vietnam War, they actually didn't. And I knew a couple of gay people that served during the Vietnam War. You know, they were looking for warm bodies during the actual war. Once the war ended, then they were trying to get rid of everybody, and it didn't [Chuckles]… You know, they wanted everybody out 'cause they wanted to…they had to save money, you know, and the military couldn’t afford to have all [this] personnel. And they weren’t even letting people reenlist by the time I got out. You know, there were not only encouraging us to leave, but they were not allowing people to reenlist because they didn’t have the money anymore and everything like that. So that was whatcha-call-it. Now the Stonewall riots. I actually learned about them when I was in, I think it was Turkey. And we used to get old newspapers after the fact like *Chicago Tribune* or *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. And I think it was the *Washington Post*. And because we were a base, somehow, they'd be sent to the base library and they'd just put them out in the reading rooms for us to read, or the TV rooms for us to look at and read. And I found out about the Stonewall riots from a newspaper article about the size of a postage stamp, and I think it was in the *Washington Post*, that just said that gays and lesbians had been rioting in New York at the Stonewall Inn and that was it. And that was probably at least a bit of an incentive for me to start changing my life around and wanting to get out of the service instead of staying in it. You know, that was a thing. Like I said, maybe if the Navy had done certain things, had they maybe, offered me Chinese

school instead of computer school, I might still…you know, I'd be a whole different thing about talking to you now. I'd still be gay, but I you know, would have never probably left the…I'd have served the full twenty or thirty years and everything like that.

SANDERSON: Especially in the CT world, pretty much you guys are almost push-button chiefs all the way up, you stay in long enough, you're pretty much push-button to E7. And then after that as long as you don't screw up, you do pretty well. Well, 'cause most of them get out and actually go work for the NSA, BIA, stuff like that.

TRETTER: Right, and I had job offers like that when I got out of the Navy. I had three. One was with the FBI, and they wanted me to go to school in California and live in Russian Hill in San Francisco and report if there were any…I was to report to them on a regular basis if there were any Russians saying things or encouraging Russians to react against the federal government. Another one was from the CIA. They wanted me to go and be an interpreter at the UN and to listen in on everybody and anybody that I knew in the, whatever foreign language it was, not just Russian, but the other foreign languages that I knew, and report back to them. And, you know, by the time I was getting out, I was getting out because I wanted to be able to be openly gay. I was getting out because I was sick and tired of all the stuff with Nixon and the lies and the thing with the federal government. I would have never...before I went into the Navy, I would have never believed that the federal government would lie to me as much as they did or that they were lying to the public as much as they did. But I learned, you know, when I was in the Navy how much they were lying. And Foreign Service Institute kinda wanted me too. They were a little bit more vague, but, you know, travel around and be a tourist and report on what you can and that kind of stuff. And I just…I'd had it up to here with all the security and I didn't want to be secret police anymore and anything like that, and I just turned them all down. And the other…there was another aspect to that too. Having been at the National Security Agency, I had learned that the top salary for the head of the National Security Agency in those days was sixty-five thousand dollars a year. Now, I was stupid enough and arrogant enough as a young kid to say, "I'm worth a lot more than sixty-five thousand dollars a year. I'm not gonna work for them if that's the top salary I can make." So that was also another incentive for me to get out, was 'cause I was never going to realize my full potential. Which, I never did realize my full potential. I never realized the sixty-five thousand dollars a year potential. You know, it's so funny, but that's how dumb and ignorant I was. I have always been fairly dumb and ignorant, and--

SANDERSON: I wouldn't say that.

TRETTER: Naive.

SANDERSON: I mean, I wouldn't say dumb and ignorant on that. But, you know, I mean, just a lot of it specifically and I think, you know, we're all young and…I remember…well, I'm thirty-eight pushing thirty-nine and I still act like a seventeen-year-old sometimes. You can't tell me anything.

TRETTER: Yeah. Well, me too and I'm almost seventy. I'll be seventy this year. And yeah, there [are] things you can't tell me.

SANDERSON: Right. But in…kind of going into that, you…with the time you were in Hawaii from '69 to '71, when you left in '71 you did about five trips to the Vietnam/ Laos/ Cambodia area.

TRETTER: Mm-hm.

SANDERSON: During that time frame, while you were out there, did you have to do any type of after-action reports or any…'cause of course, all that stuff would probably stay there and be, you know, redacted or basically destroyed.

TRETTER: Yeah. Most of our stuff was on reel-to-reel tapes. You know, we would type out whatever else we needed to type out. That was all turned in as soon as we arrived back in the States. You know, and we never saw it again. We were never asked about it again. You know, that was…like I said, I don't even know how to express how paranoid President Nixon was. And he was…he was just…it was, that was the most remarkable thing that, you know…in a sense, it kind of infected all of us, you know, with how we felt and how we dealt with things and everything like that. But he just, you know.

SANDERSON: And what was that transition like? Going from a micromanager like Johnson was to all of sudden now you have a paranoid micromanager.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: What was that like when…'cause with you on the intelligence side and the interpretive side, it was…you got to see…well, you felt more of it than like someone like myself who's a hospital Corpsman.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: You know, we…it's just kind of like, whatever, you know, new President, new Commander in Chief, whereas you had more of a direct access as in everything coming from the White House would be filtered directly to

you, whereas by the time it got to us it was so diluted…you know, by the time it got to the medical folks, it's so diluted and changed to where it's kind of like, okay whatever. We're going here? All right.

TRETTER: Yeah. LBJ was never really conceived of as a threat. You know. And that was earlier on in the war too. You know, he didn't have…Henry Kissinger didn't work for him or anything like that like with Nixon. You know, and there wasn't…there was a lot of people in the Nixon cabinet that we didn't trust. We didn't like, we were kind of afraid of, including President Nixon himself. LBJ was, even though he was a micromanager like you mentioned, was a lot more relaxed about the whole thing. He didn't get all hyper. You know, he was more concerned about the newspapers in his public stance, you know. You know, the stuff about showing his appendix scar and it being in the shape of…like they did in the newspapers, in the shape of Vietnam and everything like that. He had things that he wanted to accomplish but he was more concerned about his domestic policy than he was about his foreign policy. Nixon was all about…and of course at that time, we didn't know that he was gonna go to China, you know, and everything like that. But he had Kissinger, and I can't even think of some of the other guys that were like Department of War and all that kind of stuff that he had. But he was scary, and in a way, we were a little bit afraid of him. You know, like I said, there was a whole thing about library books, and that was…you know, now with Homeland Security, it makes me angry but it's something that we…before Homeland Security started with this library thing, we would…whenever somebody would come in to use the collection at the University of Minnesota, we'd put down their name and their address and what book they were going to look at and you know, everything like that. Or what series or what magazine or whatever. After Homeland Security, we would put down the name of the person, we'd put down their address, but we stopped listing the things….we would just leave blank Title of Book and things like that because it just wasn't fair to make people reveal what they were reading because most of it was totally innocent. I mean, we didn't…at least not that I'm aware of at the University of Minnesota, we didn't get people that were trying to make bombs that were going to blow up anything or kill anybody or anything like that. We had very few Muslims who would even come in--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: --to the collection. You know. That sort of thing. Nixon, on the other hand, and his cabinet and his people, were scary as hell. And we really believed it when, you know, 'cause they…like I said, they threatened us not just because of homosexuality but because of all kinds of things

that…you will go to Leavenworth and you'll be beaten by Marines everyday maybe two or three times a day you know, depending upon how good you are, and you're gonna be there for anything…ten to fifteen years to life, you know, because you're giving out secrets or something like that. So we pretty much towed the line and kowtowed to the whole thing when Nixon and his people were in there.

SANDERSON: In there.

TRETTER: Like I said, they were just damn scary, even though we were part of the military that was supposedly defending them and the United States and everything else, they just…you didn't trust them and you didn't feel good about them. You didn't feel…like I say, LBJ was more relaxed. He was much, much more concerned with civil rights and the things like that, and that was good. You know, and all of that again goes into this whole thing about me being so conservative when I went into the service and being so liberal when I came out.

SANDERSON: Came out, right. Now, in…at this time, you're now also shifting from Honolulu where you're…you've done your time in Vietnam and in the Far East, and now you're in Maryland at Fort Meade.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: And during that time you were also associated…well, that's when you worked for the NSA, correct? During that time frame?

TRETTER: National Security Agency, yeah. Yeah.

SANDERSON: And during that time when you were there, now it's like, here you have a peripheral outlook. You have a direct line, but you're more in a peripheral setting. Now you're basically, you know, hanging out in the back porch, so to speak. You know, and especially where…now where you used to send data…send all your data and your tapes to and all your transcripts to--

TRETTER: Yeah. I was--

SANDERSON: --Now you're physically in the same building as where the transcripts and stuff were

TRETTER: Right. And I was getting it and translating it and, you know, that kind of stuff. You know, looking for things on the tapes to see if they matched what was in the transcript and everything like that. But also, and I don' t know if it's in there, that was when I had the stuff to Cuba and

Guantanamo Bay. And it was from a naval port down in Virginia. Was it Jackson?

SANDERSON: What…Virginia would be Norfolk. Either Norfolk or Portsmouth, Virginia.

TRETTER: Oh, okay. I thought there was one named Jackson, but maybe--

SANDERSON: Oh there's…well you've got NAS/JAX, in Jacksonville, Florida, and Mayport. That's where the main port is based out of. Jacksonville, Florida.

TRETTER: Yeah, it has to be Jacksonville, Florida then, is…was where we were sent there, or I was sent there in those group…another group of kids sent there, a lot of them Spanish linguists. I was the primary Russian linguist again.

SANDERSON: And you were on the destroyer--

TRETTER: --Destroyers--

SANDERSON: --destroyers, right.

TRETTER: Right. And it was right after Russia had sent a whole bunch of MIGs to Havana to protect Havana from the evil Americans. And we were to listen to and interpret, you know, what the Russians were saying. And like I say, it was that whole thing about [Russian] or [Russian]. You know, different accent. Same word, different syllabic accent. You know. And actually, I was kind of bad in that because I told my guys, I said, "We can never…we're not native speakers. It's too hard to tell." You know, and I'd been up there a bunch of times and everything like that. And I said, "It's too hard to tell." So I said, "Look at it this way. If we get it wrong, and they're shooting instead of just dropping flares on either side of us, we're not gonna live through it anyway because we're standing next to the captain on the bridge." [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: And when it explodes, we're dead.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, so I said, "From now on instead of making"…it was another one of those military things that I did that I probably shouldn't have done. But I said, "Instead of all the angst and the anxiety and everything like that, just always figure you're going to say 'drop'…tell the captain that it's gonna be drop. 'Cause if it isn't drop, if it is fire, we're never gonna live through it anyway, so just tell him it's drop." [Chuckles] And

things were much easier to deal with, but we were all when we got back from that…when we went back to NSA after that, we were all just--

SANDERSON: Kinda shaky.

TRETTER: You know. Yeah. They had…they gave us a tranquilizer that's used generally in zoos on animals, and I can't remember what it was now.

SANDERSON: Ketamine?

TRETTER: Huh?

SANDERSON: Ketamine?

TRETTER: No, I don't think so. But anyway, that was what they did to calm us all down and get us back to normal, and…'cause we were just basket-cases basically by the time we got back from that.

SANDERSON: How long was that deployment?

TRETTER: I think that deployment was maybe a month. You know, something. I mean it was…it wasn't real[ly] long, but it wasn't real[ly] short. You know, I mean it wasn't three, four months. I think it was one, possibly two months. And like I say we went, you know, within a mile of Havana harbor, when you know it was a three-mile limit. But we actually went inside the limit because we were…they very, very much wanted to hear what the Russians were saying. And of course, they weren't saying much different than any of the Russian pilots anywhere. You know, most of it was tuning up the radio and how do you hear me, and you know, [Russian] or [Russian], or whatever. You know, they would say how clear they were based on the number of balls. If it was one ball, you could hardly hear them, it was too scratchy, and everything like that. If it was [Russian], that meant it was really clear and your communication was fine. You know, and that's mostly what they said the whole time was that. And then we were relieved by another destroyer with another group which I didn't meet but it was interesting. And a lot of my guys in there, especially the Spanish ones, were young kids just out of language school. I had a friend that…we'd gone through boot camp together, who was a Spanish linguist, and by that time was a senior Spanish linguist. He--David Wrightson--and he was a…you know, he was…like I say, he was a senior Spanish linguist by then. I don't even know where he was working at the time. You know, we tried a couple of times, but I haven't been able to-- we haven't been able to successfully contact with each other. I'm not real good at Facebook and that kind of stuff. But the other things, and just kind of anecdote. My kind of solution to the whole thing with these

young kids, and we're…like I said, we were all nervous wrecks…well, Florida had a state law that I think you had to be twenty-one to drink. Okay? Most of these kids were under twenty-one. You know, and there was, I don't know, what, five or six of us that would go out together. You know. And technically they couldn't drink. But in Florida, if you go to a pizza parlor and you order a pitcher of beer, that's enough for at least one beer for everybody, they don't check the IDs. Or they didn't back in the Sixties. And so what we would do is we'd set out and we'd go to about six different pizza parlors, you know, get six…we'd order small pizzas because we were so sick of pizza and beer after a while that--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: --you know, we couldn't stand it. And there was nothing else that we could drink other than beer because that was the only thing that we could get away with. And that was kind of fun, though. It was good camaraderie. We had a lot of camaraderie with that little language group. That we had on board that ship and everything like that. And we…I don't know, we just…we all got along well together. You know, so.

SANDERSON: What was the transition like going from…'cause a lot of people don't realize that when you're in the operational setting, an operational environment, everyone bonds pretty [easily]. Everyone, you know, comes together and they spend a lot of time with…well, we have to spend a lot of time with each other, even if we're in port. What was it like when you got back up to Fort Meade, and you're now…it's kind of more of a civilian…you know, when you just kind of go in, do your job, and go home at night?

TRETTER: Yeah. And that was fine. I was already…you know, I was an E6 by then and everything like that, and I had enough rank and enough time in, and everything like that, that I was fairly comfortable at Fort Meade. You know, and rode my bicycle back and forth. I stayed in the community. I didn't stay on base.

SANDERSON: On base.

TRETTER: You know. But yeah, that was fairly relaxing. It was…Fort Meade in and of itself was fascinating. The National Security Agency was fascinating because that was the first time that I realized that the government employed idiot savants, for especially code-breaking and that kind of stuff. And they would have them there, and they would provide an escort for the idiot savants, because a lot of them couldn't go to the bathroom by themselves, had trouble eating, ordering food, you know, anything like that. So they would have a companion for each one, and, you know, they

paid them a regular wage and everything like that. But their thing was, they would hand them this encrypted message, and you know, these people were just so remarkable, you know, that they could decrypt these things faster…now, they couldn't translate them. You know, and that's what we were there for was doing the translating and that. But they could--

SANDERSON: Do the decrypting--

TRETTER: --they could decrypt messages like you wouldn't believe.

SANDERSON: Oh nice.

TRETTER: Yeah, you know, and they were…and I was really surprised at the number that they used then, and that the military employed. You know. And it was all the services each had their own…had at least one or two of their own idiot savants to do decryption. I didn't really see them doing anything else. You know, you know anything…maybe some mathematical stuff or if there was musical encryption or something like that, then they could do it. But their primary thing was just encryption and just decrypting it, you know, and you know all these impossible, because the more and more we got into computers, the harder and harder it became.

SANDERSON: Oh yeah.

TRETTER: And--

SANDERSON: Especially with all the different algorithms that they could use to encrypt a message with.

TRETTER: Right, and the idiot savants could just see right through all that stuff for some reason. I mean, we still to this day don't know how they can do it, and we know they can do it, you know, whether it's music or whatever. So, but yeah, Meade was pretty relaxed. I lived in Glen Burney, Maryland, rode my bicycle back and forth all the time. It was whatcha-call-it. And then as I got closer to getting out of the service, that that was real[ly] interesting. Was some of that stuff, but one of the things that they did is they finally took me off of the linguistics desk and put me to work in the supply desk for the Navy…for the Navy dorm, you know, barracks.

SANDERSON: For the barracks.

TRETTER: Yeah, because…and the reason the guy...talked to the off…I actually…that was one of the only times I became kind of friends with the officer. He was an Ensign, but he was pretty sharp, and he said the big problem that he was having was he needed somebody on there that could be honest.

People were stealing them blind in the barracks, and everything and anything. And I developed for him, and that's somewhere in my records. I…she—Lisa--probably didn't send that to you either. 'cause I'm sure that doesn't look too important. But he talks in there about how happy he was to have me because I was able to develop a system that knocked the pilfering down to almost zero. Everything like that. And I mean, and we're talking dumb things like toilet paper and you know.

SANDERSON: Pillowcases.

TRETTER: Pillowcases and sheets and blankets and, yeah, all that kind of stuff that eople were just walking off whenever they needed it. And it was just a question of developing a method to count it and cross-count it and count it again, and when something was missing, then say, "Who was the last person here?" and we caught a couple people, and you know, it wasn't anything difficult but he did need somebody… He wanted first and foremost somebody he could trust, you know, to develop…and that's what I was doing when they finally…I finally got discharged.

SANDERSON: What was that like, going from basically knowing the country's deepest, darkest secrets to basically driving a desk in the barracks?

TRETTER: For me, it was fine. Like I said, I was so sick and tired of the spying. I was so sick and tired of the lies and everything like that. And believe me, people don't lie about toilet paper. You know. You catch them, they've either got a roll in their hand or they don't. You know? And the spying stuff was always so secret and so, kind of dirty and slimy and--

SANDERSON: So it's almost like--

TRETTER: It was a relief.

SANDERSON: Right

TRETTER: It was a relief to be done with it. You know?

SANDERSON: Is that one reason why you decided not to continue in the civilian world in that field?

TRETTER: Yeah, I just…like I said, I was…I had just had it up to here with all the whatcha-call-it. And you know, that was…I probably got in more trouble when I was a civilian afterwards than ever, because of course as soon as I got out, I joined the Gay Rights Movement. And everything like that. And that was the time when Hoover and all them were--especially gay rights people--were keeping--

SANDERSON: --keeping tabs?

TRETTER: Tabs on us and files on us. And, you know, we were gonna blow up the universe and all kinds of things. They never did believe that all we wanted was equal rights. That's just funny. But yeah, they did, and everything like that. Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now looking back, [I] was looking at your awards that you got while you were in. Corsica Conduct Medal, you know, means you didn't get caught. You know, that's what we always said. "The Good Cookie." Like--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah. We didn't get caught. Of course, with the expeditionary medals. But specifically you got a Bronze Star.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: When did you get the Bronze Star?

TRETTER: [Pause] Trying to think of when it showed up. I think it was actually before…it had to be before I went to language school the second time. And I'm not exactly sure, but you know, they used to…they never did any big ceremonies or things like that. They'd say, "Report to the personnel office at 0900 hours." And the guy would open the desk drawer and say, "Here, you got this," and hand you your Vietnam Expeditionary Medal or the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal or whatever it was…Bronze Star. Whatever it was you were getting. Good Conduct Medal. You know, the only thing different about the Good Conduct Medal was you then got the horizontal stripes for on your Navy uniform. You know, for however many years. And that was always kind of frustrating to me because I always felt myself as being part of the regular guys, you know, the seamen and the E3s and all that kind of stuff, and they would tease me mercilessly about being an old salty dog, you know, and everything like that because I had stripes on my sleeve. Everything like that and you know. Everything like that. But I had always tried to…lot of times…the whole time I was in the military, whether…no matter what I was doing with them, and there was a lot of good things about the military, don't get me wrong, but I was more interested with being friends with the lower-ranking guys than I was with the--

SANDERSON: The high-ranking.

TRETTER: The high-ranking…the officers and that. Well, and of course we weren't supposed to fraternize with the officers anyway. And which makes me

think, I never participated in it 'cause I was never there long enough and everything, but I did know of people, and I think in those times, I think it was…I think that was also called fracking, where people would set up their officers, especially lower-ranking officers, to get hit by a grenade or something like that. Everything like that. Like I said, that was nothing that I ever had anything to do with, but I was never there long enough to be that involved with another person. We were very…a lot of our things only lasted a day, 'cause they only wanted to know if there was, you know, a Russian group out there that was talking to them or if there was a French group or if, you know, they were switching from Vietnamese to French. You know, and so some of those Asian linguists would end up staying longer than the rest of us. But the rest of us would go out there, we'd do our bit, you know, and see what we could find out and so we could listen and that. They didn't like having us on the front lines. That was…they were so…and I don't know what we could have told them, but they were always kind of crazy about all that stuff. I remember one time in the Philippines, we used to have bus drivers, you know, that would drive us back and forth on Subic Bay. This was back before Pinatubo erupted and got rid of both Clark and Subic, you know, and everything like that. A code word…when they say cryptographic code word security clearance, a code word was usually a five-letter nonsense word that they just attached to a document that, you know, you knew the document was secret because it had a particular code word. And we had all kinds of different things in the military that were kind of fun and that. That was also the time that the song, "Secret Agent Man" came out. At that time that that song was going on, we had a code word, "savin," S-A-V-I-N, and so we would sing the song, and we'd change it from Secret Agent Man to Secret Savin Man. You know, and but we generally would do that where it was safe and nobody would find out that we were breaking the rules--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: -- by speaking these code words out loud.

SANDERSON: Was this something like in the barracks or…?

TRETTER: No, not so much in the barracks, but actually at work.

SANDERSON: Oh, at work. Okay.

TRETTER: Yeah, you know, where it was all secured and that. And they had different kinds of things there. You know, we had…especially in Turkey and when I was in the Air Force Base; they were always so concerned that we used to do drills, that if the base was overrun and we were there, they would…they had, like, little burners that were on wheels that could

be plugged into the electricity, assuming the electricity didn't get bombed out or cut off or something like that, that they would just wheel over to our desks, and then we were supposed to take our secret papers and just lay them on that, and the burner would not exactly melt it but it would set all the paper on fire, and it would be very fast and very quick and, you know, would destroy it. But when we were in the Philippines one time, the word ended up becoming…I think it was Bango or something. It was like Bingo or Bengo, something like that. But it wasn't…of course, it couldn't be Bingo--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Because that was an actual thing, and it had to be a nonsense word. But it was something…I think Bango, maybe was what it was. As it turned out, they sent it out, they changed all the documents all over the word…world, to this new secret word, Bango. You know, we had to destroy all the old documents like you did, and then you got the new ones that were stamped with Bango on them and everything like that. What they didn't know is that one of the bus drivers on Subic Bay in the Philippines was named Bango. And they found that out, and within three days we had to destroy all of our Bango documents and we got some new secret word.

SANDERSON: Secret word. [Chuckles]

TRETTER: And had to redo…I mean, it cost the government thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars. But they were…you know, it was just real…they were all hyper about that security and, you know, making sure the words, and everything like that. So, it was inter-...always something was interesting going on. You know, and everything like that, so.

SANDERSON: What I'm looking at…it's about 3:15, well, actually 3:12. So what I'm thinking, we can end it today here, and then we can pick up tomorrow, kind of go over a little bit more of some of this stuff and, you know, kind of like with the stories of you know, kind of how life was in the Philippines and continuing on that. Spend a couple of hours you know…'cause I'm thinking maybe an hour, hour and a half tomorrow just going over some of the final stuff, and then anything that if you think of tonight, you know--

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: That you might, would like to add, so that way…'cause I mean, we've hit a lot of good stuff today.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And then--

TRETTER: Well, we haven't hit many natural disasters. It was Pinatubo in the Philippines. There was the massive earthquake in Turkey. There were the hurricanes in Pensacola.

SANDERSON: Pensacola, right.

TRETTER: I mean--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Somehow I managed to live through them all. But some of…the worst…the most scary ones…well, Pinatubo, I was flying out of Clark, and I was going to be gone, and of course when that started erupting…and we knew it was erupting and starting to erupt, but we also knew that we were never coming back to Clark, 'cause there wasn't gonna be a Clark. You know. So the one that was the most scary was the big huge earthquakes in Turkey.

SANDERSON: Turkey. Ah, definitely. Yeah, we'll definitely have to hit that up for tomorrow. And, 'cause definitely…you know, that way we can get the full, [well-]rounded experience of everything that you would like to add, but also what it was like to be in it, especially 'cause now we have a…it's one of the few times where we actually can speak to someone who was stationed in Turkey.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: I don't think, except for one friend that was at the Embassy there…a Marine buddy of mine that was, [who] did Embassy guard there. You're the only other person I've ever met that's ever been stationed there.

TRETTER: Ah. Oh, yeah, that's--

SANDERSON: I mean--

TRETTER: I did spend a lot of time there and in the Middle East and, you know, traveled down through the Middle East to Ephesus. That was one of the places I wanted…I wanted to see Troy very, very badly but could never while I was there get a trip to Troy. But I did get to go to Ephesus with the early library--the ancient library, you know--and that kind of stuff. That was amazing. Ended up being more amazed by the sewage system that

they used. I didn't, at that time, realize that the Romans had developed an actual sewage system. Pipes and--

SANDERSON: Well, that's what a lot of people don't know. It's the same way with the…what is it, the Scotch. You know, a lot of people think the old Scottish during the days of William and Wallace, everyone thinks, you know, nowadays the whole…what is it, from the movie, *Braveheart*.

TRETTER: Oh, yeah.

SANDERSON: That it was this primitive area. Like, nah, Scots were more advanced…were just as advanced if not more advanced than the English.

TRETTER: Well, except the Scots...

Jean-Nickolaus Tretter

March 9, 2016
Part 3
Interviewed by Ed Sanderson
Transcribed by Unknown
Edited by Jena DiMaggio & Teri Embrey
Web biography by Unknown
Produced by Brad Guidera

SANDERSON: Today is day two, March ninth, still with Mr. Tretter. Thank you for indulging me yesterday and spending a lot of time in the chair.

TRETTER: Well, I…you know, I appreciate this. You know, I've got a humendous [sic] ego, and so it's always nice for me to be able to, you know, do things like that. I just hope it was logical, you know, and I hope it isn't something that once we're done here you say, "Oh, good. I'm glad we're done with this," and just toss it in the--

SANDERSON: Ah, no, actually--

TRETTER: --garbage can.

SANDERSON: --it's a lot of good insight on a lot of stuff. And especially on the Vietnam side, it's very rare to talk to someone that was in the Navy in the Vietnam War.

TRETTER: Ah.

SANDERSON: In the Vietnam era, especially a gay sailor from that time frame. Or anyone that would ever…you know, that was basically semi…somewhat

open during that time frame because it was…the cultural norm was not there.

TRETTER: Yeah, right.

SANDERSON: And then also to have someone on the intelligence side. That gives a whole 'nother aspect and a whole 'nother look at it, and especially getting the idea of here you were as a CT2, you know, in Anacostia Annex, and they're like, "Hey, defend the base."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah, like, what? You know.

TRETTER: Yeah, 'cause you did have military duties in addition to…and we got away with a lot of stuff because we generally connected to admiral's plot or captain's plot or something like that, and there was a certain amount of resentment among the other sailors because we got all these special privileges and…supposedly special privileges and that.

SANDERSON: What were some of the different quote/unquote special privileges that were perceived by other sailors but you can kind of shed light on of, nah, we still had to do our fair share of the other work?

TRETTER: Right. Well, a lot of it had to do with timing, because we were, like, on duty twenty-four hours a day. You know, because we never knew when that Russian sub was gonna come by. We never knew, you know, if it was Vietnamese, you know, when those boats were gonna come out. And, you know, they never really went after the Ranger, because the Ranger was too big. [Laughs] You know, and they were just the little, you know, North Vietnamese…they were practically rowboats. You know, I mean they were just little motorboats and that. And the destroyers were there, and everything like that. But since you never knew when those things were going to happen, we were on duty twenty-four hours a day technically, which meant that we got off time that the other sailors didn't. We were never asked to do things like go make coffee, you know, stuff like that, you know. I did all that stuff, remember, when I was…when I went out to the Ranger before language school, and I was telling you about polishing brass and, you know…I mean, I got a taste of it then. You know, of the kind of grungy stuff. And we started to talk about…and I hadn't, or we remembered about the chipping paint, you know. And I did that I think once. Maybe it was maybe one or two days. Something like that. And, I mean, that's just…'cause they put you down on the ropes in those things like those window washers do. You know, and you're supposedly taking the old stuff off, and you're saying, "Why are we taking

this off?" And then you put the red lead on, and then you have to put the, you know, Navy gray on over top of the red lead and everything like that. And it's miserable and dirty work, and you know, that was the stuff that we were excused from. We weren't necessarily excused from inspections and things like that, but the officers that did the inspections also weren't the intelligence officers, because the intelligence officers like us, you know, had different duties and different ideas about things, and they very seldom held inspections. Whereas the guy that's in charge of the dorm--you know, the bosun who's in charge of the dorm and that--would say we had to…or the base commander would want to have an all-person inspection or something like that. And then we'd have to show up for them. So we…like I said, we also had some aspects of that stuff but not the real, you know…we weren't sitting there polishing doorknobs and have him come and call us and say, "Hey, there's a Russian MiG flying overhead. You know, go listen to them and tell us what's happening." You know, we--

SANDERSON: It's kind of like how we were on the ship as a corpsman. They'd always get mad, and when there'd be a working party, our…you know, any type of major evaluation going on, unloading supplies and stuff--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: We wouldn't be a part of it, and they'd get…the rest of the sailors would get mad, and just kind of like, no.

TRETTER: That's exactly it. You know, it's, you know, "Why can't you do the work in addition to, you know, whatcha-call-it?" And they just didn't understand, like I say, that we were technically on duty and we had to be ready. You know, if they called us at two in the morning, they called us at two in the morning.

SANDERSON: Right. Yup. Truly goes back to even…goes back to the old saying…I think they actually created that around the turn of the century…"choose your rate, choose your fate."

TRETTER: [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: And some people, they get to the bosun's [boatswain's] world and they love it, and other ones, they still have the highest turnover rate. But they either, after…basically you have a bosun's [boatswain's] mate that will stay in for, you know, one enlistment, maybe two now.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Rare. Anyone that is a bosun's [boatswain's] mate after one enlistment, they generally stay in and you wind up seeing them as a salty old first class or chief that's being pushed out the door or if they're lucky enough to have been around and hit senior chief at the right time or, you know, master chief right at the right time, you'll see those are very select few.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah, and--

TRETTER: And I can say they've really gotta love it, but they also know that stuff. You know, somebody like me, like I was telling you, how low my mechanical aptitude score was, you know…well, that extended to things like tying a bosun's knot [boatswain's] knot or you know--

SANDERSON: I still can't do it.

TRETTER: Yeah, all these various knots, you know, and in the hole and out of the hole and--

SANDERSON: I can tie a square knot, and the only reason why I can tie a square knot is for the neckerchief.

TRETTER: Ah.

SANDERSON: For the uniform. That's the only reason why. I'm good at square knot.

TRETTER: Well, and it was just like yesterday when Lisa saw me putting on my tie, you know, and she said "Oh, well that's backwards." Well, yeah, but that's all I really know how to do is to do a single Windsor, and you have to tie it backwards to get it…to get a single Windsor so that it's out, you know, and the same width. Yeah, I did eventually learn to tie my shoes. [Laughs] You know, kind of things. Should have… I… it's one of those child's…children that probably should have grown up in the Velcro age. You know. But--

SANDERSON: I hear you on that one. Especially depending on the uniforms that we have. You know, on the Navy…you know, 'cause back in the…when you were in, you had dungarees, maybe one working type of uniform, and then your dress uniforms.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: [For] Us, we have coveralls, we have now the NWUs everybody picks on it and calls it aqua-flage for the…you know, they look…it's like a digital-camo, Navy-camo uniform.

TRETTER: Ah, okay.

SANDERSON: Completely and totally impractical. Then we have our NSUs 'cause they got rid of the working whites and the working blues.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: Now it's like a…you know, it's a khaki shirt and black pants. And then we have our two dress uniforms. Well, at one point we had, you know, the coveralls, we had the dungarees, we had the working whites, the working blues, you know, the dress whites, the dress blues, and any type of additional uniform, depending on NEC, depending on rate, you know. I know at one point, I think I had to maintain fifteen different uniforms.

TRETTER: Wow.

SANDERSON: Yeah, it's--

TRETTER: Yeah, we never had that that much. I mean, there were basically three different uniforms. Like you said, dungarees, whites and blues. You know, you wore whites in summer, you wore blues in the winter, and you wore dungarees when you were working. And for us, in the linguistics corps…and like I said, we were always assigned to captain's plot or admiral's plot, so we had to wear whatever the dress uniform was, whether it was winter blues or summer whites. You know, that was our uniform 99.9 percent of the time. The dungarees yeah, like I say, we occasionally get a work detail. Or I know at one point, the Navy decided that I should learn to drive a…and I heard it last night. We were talking when we did the tour of the museum. What are they, 4x4s or four?

SANDERSON: The 5-tons?

TRETTER: Yeah, I guess.

SANDERSON: Like the big truck, the five-ton truck?

TRETTER: Yeah, the big trucks. And they decided they wanted me to learn that. Well, I'd never driven anything but an automatic. And so I had to learn how to drive a stick, and two or three trucks later I finally did learn. [Laughs] You know, but--

SANDERSON: So, in other words, the motor pool hated…loved and hated you like, at least we have something to do, but like, oh god, here comes this guy. He's gonna strip out the transmission.

TRETTER: That was about it. And I was really glad, you know, and it was nice later in life to be able to know how to drive a stick. And, you know, there's always kind of arrogance that goes with, well, I can drive a stick. You know, it saves gas and it does this and it does that. But it was…with my mechanical aptitude, it was not an easy thing to teach me. I think that was…that had to be in Hawaii when they suddenly decided that you need to drive…and it was more because of the whole combat thing that if you need to get away, you have to be able to jump into any vehicle--

SANDERSON: Any vehicle--

TRETTER: --and get away, and so they decided that, you know, he will learn how to drive that and, like you say, the poor guys in the motor pool. But I eventually learned, and you know, it's…that's with most things with me; if I can repeat it long enough and do it often enough, then I do learn. You know, even computers I can kind of use, but that's a voluntary thing. Like I said, when I retired, it was like, I am so sick of emails. I never want to see another one in my life, and you know. You want to get a hold of me, write me a letter, call me on the phone, you know, everything like that.

SANDERSON: It's kind of like with me and social media. Facebook and everything else. I'm like, I have the email. Same email for, you know, fourteen years, same cell phone number since 2007.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah. Call me.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah. And like, "Well, we want to know how you're doing."

TRETTER: Yeah, and I don't--

SANDERSON: Pick up the phone.

TRETTER: --I don't get that also. This, everything. "Oh, gee whiz, I'm having coffee this morning." You know, and everything like that. And my students, when I was at the university, I had a student that set me up with Facebook because he felt I needed to have Facebook, and they'd take pictures and so then they'd post the pictures on Facebook for me, and they'd comment for me. And I've got another friend now that just gave me a new Facebook account and everything like that. And I just…I'm not into it.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: You know, I will sit down and write a letter. You know, in fact, I've been thinking about how I'm going to do this with when I get home, I need to write you guys “thank you” cards, but I'm not sure I want to write out eighteen “thank you” cards.

SANDERSON: Really.

TRETTER: You know. So I'm thinking, "Well, is it okay for me to just list everybody's name and say, you know--

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah.

TRETTER: --‘Thanks to all of you,’ on one card? Or do I send a separate one to Jennifer and then one to the crew and staff, or…" you know, I'm still puzzling all that out in my mind. So--

SANDERSON: I hear you on that one.

TRETTER: You may never get a card because I will delay so long.

SANDERSON: Oh, it's quite alright. It's one that…I've been having a blast for this, so I, you know, the “thank you”…I always tell the people, when, you know…the fact of being able to sit down and listen to you, but also talk to you about it, and that right there…that's all the thanks right there. You know, it's almost like that…everybody always says, you know, if you can sit down and have a conversation or a cup of coffee with one person, who would it be? You know, well I've had the luxury, especially ever since being an intern here and helping out with the DASPO exhibit, and then doing this part with the oral history program, I can honestly say I've…you know, I've fulfilled that requirement more times over. Just like every time I got to do it, it's like…you know, because I'm sitting down talking to someone specifically like yourself, where you get to see things that shaped not only socially on the civilian side, but also socially on the military side, and you opened up doors and boundaries for sailors across the board. More so for, you know, the GLBT side eventually when DADT [Don’t sk, don’t tell]was repealed. But at the same time, when that was repealed, it actually opened up a lot of stuff across the board.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And it also helped out during that time frame of how…of everything that you guys did in the…you know, during the Vietnam War especially for…on the sailor side how that actually opened it up for other rates as well because people started to realize, "Hey." You know, that's when we

started really paying attention to the whole “choose your rate, choose your fate”.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause it was one of those that, hey, we're here to do a job we're all…have the same…you know, we're all trained on certain things. But at the same time, you go do your job, you go do your job. You know. And a lot of it was…like when you were on board the Ranger, the first time you were trained in CBRNE [Chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear defense].

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: But…the CBRD [Center for Biosecurity Research and Development] stuff, but firefighting no. But it was one of those, because of the problems that happened on the Ranger and the Forrestal that went in and required to all sailors on board ship are firefighters first.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You know, 'cause they started to realize, hey, duh, it's the thing…you know, last thing you want to be in the middle of nowhere, if a fire…you know, if there is a fire that happens, it can take a while for it to be put out. Specifically,the ship I was on in 2008…well, I got off in 2007. I was on the George Washington from '04 to '07. Well, in 2008, there was a large fire that burned out eighty spaces, you know, pretty much almost the back half of the aft section of the ship from--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: down below all the way up to the hanger deck. Well, actually, all the way up to the flight deck actually. And it was one of those where it took almost a full twenty-four hours for them to get the fire out.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: And it was one of those that we…those lessons were learned by you guys earlier in the career. So for us to be able to sit down and talk about this stuff you know, I'm like…they always…the running joke is when I first started in the museum, I was in an office full of nerds. They're like everybody's nerded out. Well, the whole time we were doing stuff, I was constantly geeking out and nerding out and all that fun stuff. To the point where some of them were like, "Ed, we think you are probably one of the biggest nerds that we've ever had." Yeah, and I'm just kind of like, "Thank you."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: For…to have that kind of company tell me that I'm a bigger nerd than they are, that's a compliment.

TRETTER: Yup. But that also reminded me when you were talking about that…when you were talking about the, you know, the…how the other sailors resented us because we were, you know, linguists and had all these special privileges, but that was something that, like I said, we had chemical, biological, and atomic warfare. Those sorts of trainings were not things that we didn't have to do. We still had to do those, and we had to do those to qualify to go up in rank too. To…not only would we have the linguistics tests and the, you know, the security things and everything like that, but if we wanted to go up in rank, those were…you know, we had to know how to hose down a ship that had been exposed to chemical warfare, you know, and that sort of thing. So there…that was part of the duties that we still had to do…the training, at least, that we still had to do.

SANDERSON: And now kind of looking back at your time in the Far East specifically, you went back to…how many times did you go back to the Ranger? 'Cause…besides the one…'cause you were there once after the very beginning. Did you ever go back to the Ranger or another carrier?

TRETTER: No. And not other carriers. Usually, I ended up on destroyers after that. You know, little destroyers, sometimes cruisers, you know, but I think I was only actually on one cruiser. And no, the big aircraft carriers, that was…I didn't go back to the Ranger, but there were aircraft carriers outside of Vietnam, you know, like you say Checkpoint Charlie, that we would fly on and off if we were doing…if we were flying over Vietnam trying to record things, you know, and trying to get the stuff. Like I talked a little bit about the Will-…what we called Willie Fudds.

SANDERSON: Yeah, it was--

TRETTER: And then there was--

SANDERSON: -- E2 Hawkeyes?

TRETTER: Yeah, those sorts of ones that they would shoot off a aircraft carrier and that. And that was also…sometimes they would get us there, get us to the aircraft carrier, then we would go on our mission, but at the end of the mission, instead of having us go back to the carrier they'd send us…the plane would have enough fuel to take us to Clark or something like that. Clark was real[ly] big for all the services in the Philippines, you know, as

far as going in and out and that sort of thing. That was kind of the catchall, 'cause Subic handled ships, you know, and handled aircraft carriers, but it didn't really handle--

SANDERSON: The aircraft.

TRETTER: Yeah. I mean, they had landing strips. You know, it was kind of like some of the back landing stripes in Hawaii. You know, they were there and they existed and could be used in an emergency but were not really…they weren't for the regular traffic. The back and forth traffic between anywhere else and the Philippines was always Clark.

SANDERSON: Clark.

TRETTER: You know. And you could fly from Clark to a carrier or, like I say, to another spot, maybe in Vietnam or something like that. And you could fly out of Clark back to the United States. But basically Clark was the go-to place. And if you were on a ship it was Subic, you know, in the Philippines.

SANDERSON: Well, I've heard quite a few stories about the…how it was in the Subic Bay area especially with the monetary rate of where you can have an E1 role into Subic Bay, have a two-bedroom apartment with a housekeeper and a cook, two separate people working for him, and still have plenty of money to go out every night. And still pocket money.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I think even now, I think the Philippine peso is like seventy…I think the last time I checked, the exchange rate was like fifty pesos to a dollar. You know, and something there would run you a couple of pesos.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: It's like you can go there with five hundred dollars and live like a king for the…you know, for a week.

TRETTER: Yeah. And you know, at that time when I was in, that was kind of true in a lot of places because even the Japanese currency was…you know, 'cause I can remember going to Japan and we were, like, wealthy as hell. And like you say, we were just seamen apprentices or seamen or something like that. But you know, to have a ten-thousand yen bill was basically nothing. You know, and I--always being a collector--I always kind of collected stuff. And I remember wanting to take home a ten-thousand yen bill but never actually being…there was always something else I had to buy before I left. You know, things like that. And of course, they had everything for sale

there, you know, and the same in the Philippines. You could get most anything. And I wasn't really big into, you know, going into the bars and taking women out for the night or anything like that, but I was into the souvenirs. [Laughs] Loved the souvenirs and of course, sent all kinds of stuff home for, you know, friends and family and all that kind of stuff, so.

SANDERSON: And that was one of the things I was wanting to ask you was…'cause we talked about culturally, how things were and, you know, Turkey, and when you're out east, you know, in the Europe area, European area, kind of looking at it in the Far East, specifically with the Philippines, and then but also when you'd go to Japan but considering you went to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, what was it…what was that transition like of going from two areas of the coun-…two areas with two specific cultural norms like in the Philippines and in Japan and then going to an area where it's more tribal based with the Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia--

TRETTER: Well, it--

SANDERSON: --Cambodian area?

TRETTER: Except that these little things…like I said, the thing with when Obama was talking about sending people into Iraq, when you went there on those trips, you didn't get a chance to…you may not even meet a Laotian or you might not even meet a Cambodian or anything like that. 'Cause these were just, you go in, you do what they want you to do or you look for what they want you to look for to see if it's there, and you fly out. You know. Like I say, a lot of times those lasted like a day, you know, or less. You know, you spent much more time traveling from Hawaii to Vietnam than you ever did in Vietnam, you know. So, I can't really speak to that because we…yeah, you know, that was not a situation where you met anybody or talked to anybody. Occasionally a military person would be there, you know, somebody from the, you know, the Free Vietnam Forces or the, you know--

SANDERSON: Like the RVN, the Republic of Vietnam.

TRETTER: Yeah. And I don't remember, because it was so much trouble with Cambodia and with the communists in Cambodia, and they were doing such horrible and horrific things. I don't think I ever even met a Cambodian until…I met a very nice Cambodian, made a horrible mess of it all, in a gay bar in Los Angeles years later. I was going to impress him. He was the bartender, and I was going to impress him. I don't know that this is pertinent to anything, but by saying that or showing him that I knew that he was Cambodian, and--somebody had told me that he was Cambodian--and I was going to impress him by, you know, talking to him

about Kampuchea using the correct term for Cambodia, and somehow I just totally lost it in my mind, and instead of saying Kampuchea, I referred to it as Khmer Rouge. [Laughs] Well, needless to say, he didn't talk to me much anymore. You know, or anything like that. But I can't remember in thinking back. And Cambodia was the big thing, and the big thing that Nixon and everybody was all whatcha-call-it about. I don't recall ever having met a Cambodian national during that time. We were very isolated, and like I say, we were kept pretty far back 'cause they didn't…they were very afraid of us getting captured. And we went through…that was another training class that we had about what happens, what do you do if you're captured. You know. They never talked much about torture, but they did talk about being captured, and don't…you know, don't tell anything and you know, name rank and serial number and all that kind of stuff. But now that I think about it, it's interesting because they never…we talked about, you know, the sailors talked about torture, and the marines that we knew. But they never did a training class on torture. You know, about how do you resist and what do you do and, you know, that kind of stuff.

SANDERSON: Well, what--

TRETTER: Which is interesting now that I think about it, you know, that they didn't. You think they'd want us more prepared, but that was like a forbidden subject or a forbidden topic.

SANDERSON: What was that…what was kind of…what would kind of run…the first time you ever heard that, what was kind of running through your head? Here you are, a sailor, linguist, you're hanging out and you're primary job is to listen, to interpret what's being said, and all of a sudden they're like, "Hey we're gonna send you to the quote/unquote jungle. We're gonna send you out in the middle of nowhere, and we want you to listen for this, but hey, just in case you might get captured, if you get captured this could happen to you. You know, this is all you can say. Oh yeah, you might get beaten, so forth so on."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah. What was running through your head as a sailor?

TRETTER: Well, I was so much of a kid that probably nothing much was running through my head. You know, I was kind of dumb and naive like I said. But no, the thing that I remember most about all of that is we were very just by the nature of the work, we were very centered on our jobs. You know, and we were more concerned about do we need to take a reverse language dictionary with us, you know, to make sure that we're getting

all the information that we want or you know, do we just, you know, have a pocket dictionary or whatever we might basically need and things like that. We were much more concerned about our equipment and, you know, everything like that. We had a lot of things that we were thinking about and worried about and everything like that but not…it didn't occur much to us. And then, of course, there was this kind of shadow that overhung us about, "Wow, we're going to Cambodia and we can't talk about it. We can't tell anybody about it. We can't," you know…and to be quite truthful and honest, they basically all look pretty much the same. Well, and they were. I mean, actually when you get there, we didn't…I was generally, I think when I was there, I was closer to the lowlands in like Laos. We didn't go up in the mountains where the Hmong were. 'Cause the Hmong basically were very, very good allies to us. You know, which is why we have so many, you know, now in the United States because they were just too good of allies. But they were very, very good. And so we were down in the lowlands, and then Laos was predominantly an army listening post. And like I said, two of the books that I donated yesterday are personal memoirs of James Stanton who was a Laotian linguist in the army. And it's kind of fascinating and he…they were…I mean, a lot of stuff that he went through is the same kind of stuff that we went through except that he was ground based, he was army, you know, outpost--

SANDERSON: And he was probably embedded more--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --whereas you guys, it was more of a TAD [temporary duty assignment]. You were just, you know, like, just a temporary assigned duty.

TRETTER: Yeah. He was…he spent most of his time in Thailand, you know. But, you know, there were excursions and things like that. And a lot of the stuff that's fascinating there is he talks in his books about he was there when Laos was falling to the communists, the Pathet Lao, and he talks about how there were American trucks, army trucks, that used to take supplies in to help the Royal Laotian Forces and things like that, and to keep them supplied and that so they could resist the Pathet Lao. And he tells…the story that I like best that he tells in there that's really interesting is how they knew the government was going to fall, and they knew that there was nothing they could do to stop it. Well, these trucks that would go into Laos and dump off supplies for the Royal Laotian Army would then come back to Thailand and they'd be empty. So they developed a plan, a series of plans where some of the Buddhist temples and the Laotian post office and all that kind of stuff, knowing that all this stuff would be

destroyed or changed, you know, the stamps would be overprinted by the communists and things like that, would pack these empty trucks with stuff to go back across the border into Thailand and that was how they saved a tremendous amount of Laotian history and Laotian culture, because knowing that they were going to fall and that they were going to fall to the communists and how anti-religious the communists were, they sent everything back across. You know, or everything they could. And they had these wonderful empty trucks that they could just pack full. And he talks in his books about that. And they're really interesting stories. I like them. I enjoyed reading them a lot because like I say, it reminded me a lot of the whole thing.

SANDERSON: There we go.

TRETTER: Sorry. Oh, did I do something?

SANDERSON: Oh, no, your coat. I put it over here so that way, 'cause it fell down, so that way it's not…doesn't get wrinkled for you.

TRETTER: Okay. So.

SANDERSON: Now during that time, did they give you a…sorry. Make sure the mic picks up the question. Now during that time, did they give you any kind of specialized classes on…you know, with the various languages, kind of like how you were talking about how you would learn different levels of Turkish from the quote/unquote conversational--

TRETTER: The gypsy shoe boy and the houseboy and the…everything like that?

SANDERSON: Right, the farmer and more, what's the word, formal, educated side.

TRETTER: For Southeast Asia, no. Even the Vietnamese linguists got very, very little of that except when they were in language school, you know; like in Monterey and that, they got some of it. I got the cultural training in Russian, you know, and very much even to the point of how to drink vodka and things like that, you know, because that was a big thing, just in case they ever wanted us to…whatcha-call-it there. Or, the big thing with Americans and Europeans just in case was to learn to…how we will cut our meat and then switch hands, you know, and we…they…we had actual instructions where, you know, they would say, "Don't switch your hand. You use the same hand, you know, for…you know, with the fork as you did with the knife and fork, except you can't switch the fork over to the knife hand and everything like that." So we did that for Russia. I was very acculturated and encouraged to read, you know, Russian language books and things like that. Like for instance, the first time I ever read *Anna*

Karenina was in Russian in language school, you know, and things like that. So we had a lot of that, but for Southeast Asia, no, that was a war. And that was, get in, do your job, get out. You know, we don't--

SANDERSON: It's just more listening on the Russian side and--

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah, we don't care what their culture is, we don't care what they do, you know, what they eat. Nothing. You know. It's Jim Stanton that I talk about, you know, who was the Laotian linguist, got a little bit more of that, but even they didn't get so much, because like I say, the Army base Ramasun that he was at was actually in Thailand, you know, and that. And you know, he talks about when they could cross into Laos and when they couldn't, and how much difficult it was, and everything like that and, you know. He was much more about Thai culture. He ended up marrying a Thai woman, you know. And so he knows much more about that even than we did, and he knows a lot about Laos and the royal family and, you know, all that kind of stuff and all the stuff that went on. But basically, in Southeast Asia, there was no…we didn't care. It was, kill the bad guys, you know, help the good guys. You know, and get out of there and go home.

SANDERSON: What was it like, you know, on that aspect of, culturally, here you were during a time where the United States was….you know, we were all…I can even remember up to, you know, when the curtain first fell, the iron curtain first fell, everybody…it's like everybody became a Russian fanatic all of a sudden. It's like everybody had to know about what it was like. What was that like growing up in an era…well, not so much growing up, but you know, being in an era of being taught about…you know, here you have one side, Russians are enemy, Russians are enemy, but they're teaching you culturally…like you were saying yesterday how, you know, you loved borscht. Whereas, you know, and I can remember growing up in the seventies and eighties where you didn't eat anything remotely Russian because that--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --damn communists.

TRETTER: Yeah, pirozhki and communists and that. Yeah, the way I always look at it is it seemed like Russia was always dark and cloudy. The sun never shone on the enemy, you know. You might be out in the sunshine and in Minnesota or wherever, everything like that, and life was regular, but it never occurred to you that the sun actually did shine in Russia. It wasn't just dark and everybody didn't just…you know, people still laughed. You know, they maybe were more careful about their jokes, but you know, it

was…and that's kind of the way I see it. You know, it seemed very dark and it was…it was something in a sense I had to discover. And that I'm not sure it ever really became a reality to me 'til I went to Moscow in 2006. You know, and then it kind of like lifted the veil, and, of course, that was a big awakening time for Russia too. But, you know, in…we just learned the stuff and it wasn't…you know, I was anxious to learn. I was very interested in it, and so I was anxious to learn it and to read all the histories that I could and… You know, and of course they--at Monterey--had a wonderful library there where they had things like the Bolshoi Sovieskii Entsiklopediia, which was a Soviet thing, and so had a different color to the world. You know, when you read the, or did research with, the Bolshoi Sovieskii Entsiklopediia, you had to be aware that that was from their perspective, not from yours. And you know, and they had done things like they totally rewrote the history of Tchaikovsky. You know, in the Soviet Encyclopedia, Tchaikovsky was never gay. You know, and, you know, he had all these supposed affairs with women, and same with Gogol and all these others, you know, and that. And so that was also one of the reasons that when I was in language school and we'd have to do these reports, I had a tendency…and of course, I'd always been interested in natural history, but I had a tendency to do reports more on natural history in scientific things like that because there was less propaganda. So probably the biggest, longest report, and I guess it doesn't exist anymore, I probably threw it away or it got thrown away or something, was I did a big research report on the wisent, the type of buffalo similar to the buffalo in the United States that lived in the forest, the forest buffalo. And they were very similar to the buffalo that you found in northern Minnesota which weren't really prairie, you know, they were woodland buffalo, and that kind of stuff. And so I did my big reports on things like that. Partly because I was so interested in natural history but partly because also there wasn't any…you know, how do you make a buffalo more communist, you know, than the American buffalo?

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Which…and it's off to the side. If I may, this is a story that's not related to the military or related very lightly to the military. It was interesting when a few years back, at my regular job, I got hurt really badly and couldn't go back to that job, and had some money that I used for school and things like that. And one of the things that I did is I made arrangements with the University of Minnesota to go out to Mammoth site in South Dakota, which is an actual dig for mammoths and mastodons and things like that. The year I was there digging, and that's how I got my biological credits at the…or my biology credits at the University of Minnesota was the Dr. Agenbroad, the professor that led the thing--and is one of the American,

you know, absolute authority on mammoths and mastodons in America--agreed to basically be my teacher…professor while I was out there and wrote a report for me to send back to the university to…for my biology classes. But the thing that was really nice is while I was there, our guest speaker for that year was Alexei Tikhonov from the Russian Academy of Sciences in the newly-renamed St. Petersburg. And he was with the Russian Academy of Sciences, and of course, since he was Russian and I spoke Russian and everything, we got along real[ly] well. And his family was there and everything like that, 'cause they'd brought him over for the summer. And it cost a couple of thousand dollars to do that.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: But in talking to him…we also had a lab there at the mammoth site so you could dig in the ground for the mammoth bones, but then they also…with all the dirt that came up they washed it, and you sorted through it, and you could find all these tiny fossils from the Pleistocene era in the United States. Talking with Alexei Tikhonov, Professor Tikhonov, I discovered that St. Petersburg…the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, because of the Cold War, did not have any of those fossils in St. Petersburg. They just… it was something they couldn't collect 'cause their scientists couldn't come over and collect them and nobody was gonna ship them over there. So I talked to… now I can't remember his name, the name I just said earlier--the professor that was the thing there-- and I said, "Can I work in the laboratory and prepare some of these fossils for Tikhonov so that he can take them back to St. Petersburg?" and that's what I ended up doing, more so than digging for mammoths, was I would get all these different things, I would…and they were test tube size. I mean, these were little tiny things. And so I would spend my days sorting through all this slush and mud and that to pick out these little tiny fossils, put them in the test tubes, identify them, and then translate it into Russian, write the Russian on the outside of what they were, and got a whole series of these test tubes with these fossils to send back to Russia with Professor Tikhonov, and you know, and they were very happy and I was happy. And you can now go to St. Petersburg and look up Pleistocene fossils in the American Midwest and you'll see my name all over it.

SANDERSON: Oh, nice.

TRETTER: And in Russian, my name is Nikolai Nikolayevich. It's not Jean Tretter because we were always given… That was one thing that they did in military language school to get you more into it. They gave you a--

SANDERSON: Like, a native name?

TRETTER: A native name. Yeah. And so I became Nikolai Nikolayevich, because my middle name is Nicholas, and then in Russian, you use the patronymic name and my father's name was Nicholas. So I became Nikolai Nikolayevich Tretter. You know.

SANDERSON: And that's one of the few…it's kind of funny when you say that. You know, I was stationed in Iceland, and there they use the patrilineal name.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: Iceland does the same thing.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: So in Russia, you use your father's name and it's "vich" or "drovna", so you know, like…so your sister would be like Nikola…would it be, what, Nikola Drovna, or--

TRETTER: No, “Tochter.”

SANDERSON: Hm?

TRETTER: In the Scandinavian countries, they actually say “daughter of”--

SANDERSON: Right. Yeah, they have “dottir,” you know, whereas in--

TRETTER: “Jansdottir.” John's daughter. You know.

SANDERSON: And then Jan's son. Yeah, that's why--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: The running joke when I was in Iceland was--and I've seen it on some of the stuff from Russia--where if you don't know a specific…where that person lives, you can’t look them up in a phone book, because there might be five hundred Nikolai Nikolayevich’s in one village.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Same way in Iceland. You know, Magnus Magnusson, Magnus's son…Magnus was a very common, very popular name. Well, and in a small village like Keflavik, fifteen hundred people…no, fifteen thousand, excuse me, fifteen thousand people in that area, you would have five thousand Magnus Magnusson’s. So if you didn’t know where they lived, you were kind of--

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah, go look up Tim Johnson in the Minneapolis [laughs] phone book. You know, you got a list of a--

SANDERSON: Yeah, it's like Smiths back in in the South. You got five hundred, you know, five hundred Smiths running around. Now and you had mentioned earlier kind of like how it was dark, and then when you really didn't quote/unquote have the veil lifted until you physically were there in Moscow, what was that like? You know, that transition of…you were always taught this is our enemy. You knew them culturally, but enemy, enemy, enemy. They're the bad guys. They're…you know, we're here to…we want you to tell us what they're thinking. Then all of a sudden, you know, almost forty years down the road, you're physically standing in an area where culturally you knew. It's kind of like reading something in a book and the first time you step off a plane, and here you are in the heart of you know, the old communist territory and--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You're seeing it for the first time.

TRETTER: I think I had kind of almost subconsciously for me, and I can't speak for anybody else, but in all of these cases, I had kind of subconsciously realized--[clears throat] sorry--that the people themselves weren't our enemy as much as the military and the government. You know. I mean, I'd read things like *All Quiet On the Western Front* and all this kind of stuff, and I knew that the German soldiers that died were just as unwilling to die and just as human as we were, you know. And so I kind of extrapolated that in my mind. It was more difficult with…in my family, and because it had affected my brother during WWII and that, we had much more difficulty with the Japanese than we did with the Russians or the Germans. 'Cause we knew that the Russians and the Germans were like us, you know, and just in a bad situation and that, you know. Like I said, it was the military and the government, not necessarily the common everyday people. And so you know, once you get there. It's…everything is true, you know. Like I say, it was much more difficult with the Japanese. And when I first came to Japan, as silly as it seems, the first thought… I can remember standing in the airport waiting to go through the luggage and everything like that. I went through the luggage and just standing there and looking around and saying to myself, "Boy, there sure are a lot of Japanese here." You know, well I'm in Tokyo, you know, and everything like that. And it took longer though to become climatized. One of the things that helped the most and helped to bring it home to me the most was riding the bullet train between Yokosuka and Tokyo. 'Cause that's what you took all the time if you wanted to get any place. And as

an American, I was taller than most of the Japanese so here I was, this big guy hanging onto the thing. Well, there'd always be whenever I rode the bullet train, these little tiny Japanese elderly women who couldn't reach that and so they would grab onto my arm. [Pause] And as silly as it seems, that's what made them human. That seeing the inability of them to do something, you know, to grab the thing, and being dependent on me, you know, as there was the big strong American and that, so they just hung onto us, and that made them very, very human. That made them not the people that were hiding in the holes during WWII and, you know, Iwo Jima or Kwajalein or any of those. You know, and that. You know, 'cause we had all these things. And then, of course, my brother and, you know, the thing with the Kamikaze pilot killing his friend and all that kind of stuff. The Japanese were much more difficult for me to realize that they were human. And maybe because they were Asian and, you know, Minnesota doesn't have a lot of Asians. The Asians we did have were always Chinese, you know, and the good Chinese that left China before the communists and, you know, everything like that. And they're the ones that ran the restaurants with all the really good food. You know, and we didn't have…we had one Japanese restaurant in Minneapolis, and [it was] something I never really went to until after I got out of the service and after I was out of the Navy and that. And they finally opened up a second Japanese restaurant. Now we've got, like, bunches of Japanese restaurants, you know, all over the place, but you know with the advent of popularity of sushi and all that kind of stuff, but at first, it was very, very difficult to visualize them and to…I mean, it was just a whatcha-call-it. But that was interesting when I was in Hawaii; I made friends with both Chinese and Japanese, and especially the Nagatoshi family. And one of the Nagatoshi's, and that was…I found that real[ly] interesting, and it made me…it taught me a lot too was one of the Nagatoshis was a guy, wasn't that much older than me, but he was a veteran from WWII, had fought in the US Army during WWII from Hawaii, and he was Uncle Tadao, that's how we referred to him. But Uncle Tadao and I became friends because during WWII, he had been sent to Fort Snelling in Minnesota. Turns out that that was where the language school for Japanese in the United States was in: at Fort Snelling. And they did a lot of training with Japanese. A lot of Japanese from Hawaii especially got sent to Fort Snelling before they formed the combat units that they then sent to Europe, because they were afraid to send them to the Pacific, because they might sympathize with their own kind, you know, so that was a…that was a whole different thing. So yeah, he was familiar with Minnesota and he told me how much he loved Minnesota because we were so accepting. Well, of course, during WWII, Minnesota's whole thing was Germans and Italians, and not even the Italians 'cause there weren't very many Italians in Minnesota, but there's lots and lots of

Germans in Minnesota. And there was a lot of dislike when I told you what my family went through yesterday, you know, changing and that. And of course, the Norwegians--especially because the Germans had taken over Norway--were especially objecting to the Germans and that. But that was another thing that made it… You know, knowing Uncle Tadao and knowing the Nagatoshi family and everything like that, that was very enlightening for me, you know. And like I said with the Russians, you know, we knew they were human but, you know, they were as caught up in their thing as we were in ours, you know, with the military and everything like that. So there was never [pause] there was never a real hatred towards the Russian. And I would say towards the Southeast Asians, if anything I was kind of confused. You know. 'Cause they disliked the French so much and the French were more of our allies, and you know, there wasn't really a chance to get to know the Southeast Asians. You know, I got to know the Japanese, I got to know the Filipinos, you know, all those other peripheral things that were our allies, but you know, there was…it was never a situation, you know, where one got to socialize with the Vietnamese or the Cambodians, especially not the Cambodians, you know. Cambodians…everybody, I think, was terrified of the Cambodians. You know, I mean they shot people for just wearing glasses.

SANDERSON: Wow.

TRETTER: Yeah. The Khmer Rouge was very--

SANDERSON: I heard--

TRETTER: --awful.

SANDERSON: I heard they were pretty much the worst of the worst, but, yeah--

TRETTER: Yeah, and much, much worse than the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao was anti-the royal family in Laos, but not necessarily anti-the peasants. And they formed their own kind of communist society, which didn't work actually I mean, it was like the…you know, and that's one of the reasons why they're more economically dependent on the west than they are on the east in reference to that. And then of course, you know, we also talked yesterday briefly about the big war with China afterwards that neither the…none of them--the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, and the [Laotians]--didn't want to be taken over by China either, you know, and had that war that nobody knows about. [Chuckles] And China certainly isn't talking about it 'cause they don't want anybody to know how badly they were defeated. You know, and they just…and that was part of the whole confusion with the Southeast Asia too is they didn't like the

Chinese communists. Now, they'd let the Russian communists come in and they'd associate with them and the Russians provided them with supplies and things like that, but they were very, very mistrustful of the Chinese communists but still were using them, you know, for supplies and for help and everything like that. It was a very…it's a very confusing period of time. And as somebody who was there and involved with it, you know, it was more confusing than anything else. The Russian stuff was much more clear, you know. And then I was also in all fairness, let's say I was doing fun stuff with the Russians. I was listening to the cosmonauts.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: You know, I was listening to space capsules and landings and, of course, the sixties that was…sixties and seventies, that was the…space was the big thing, and landing on the moon. I was in Hawaii when we landed on the moon and watched the whole thing on TV in Hawaii and everything with that family that I was telling you about yesterday, the chief and his family. We watched it together on their TV in their house and everything like that. And that was just…it was a remarkable time, and I was doing remarkable stuff at that time. So, you know, the Russians never seemed quite…you know, I mean, you didn't…you wouldn't want to sit down to tea with Andropov or any of those guys, but they weren't\the bad guys. The bad guys then were, you know, the North Vietnamese and Ho Chi Minh and you know, Hanoi Jane. And they were showing me…Ken showed me the thing like you put coffee cups on and that--

SANDERSON: Coaster?

TRETTER: Coaster, with Hanoi Jane on it and everything from yesterday when we did the tour and…yeah I remember that. And I remember being a little bit confused about that because when I thought of Jane Fonda, I thought of her from the movie *Barbarella*. [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: Oh yeah.

TRETTER: Not from all the bad stuff and that. And I was less enthusiastic about Bob Hope. He was on the Ranger at one point and that. You know, that was old hat. That was a long time ago, and Bob Hope was…you know, his *Road to Mandalay* was funny, his *Road to Hong Kong* and all this kind of stuff, those movies were great, but, eh.

SANDERSON: A lot of people were saying by the time it got down to Vietnam, it was kind of like, "Eh, okay, here comes Bob Hope."

TRETTER: Yeah. Thank you, that's exactly.

SANDERSON: Whereas… Well, and a lot of it culturally in the forties and the fifties, you know, that was…you know, he was…basically he was the star during that time. Everybody loved his music. Everybody loved his comedy, his movies. By the time the sixties rolled around, it's like, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, you know, the Beatles. You know, after they, you know--

TRETTER: Yeah, and none of those ever appeared with Bob Hope and his shows. Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah, 'cause they were considered too scandalous.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And it was all about the quote/unquote hippie movement. You know, the hippie music.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: So it's like in… and I mean, beforehand, WWII you had music that was culturally created for WWII. Korea, nah. It was a continuation, I mean, just a few years--we're talking five years after WWII--so they…it's still the same music. Well--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --by the time Vietnam rolled around--the late sixties--they had there…I mean there are entire groups that…and there's music specifically that was tailored towards the Vietnam War itself.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: And everything in that part of the world.

TRETTER: Yeah, and it was very anti-…most of that music was very anti-Vietnam War.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: And Bob Hope was out there, “Oh, you know, USO show,” you know, and everything like that. Yeah so you expressed that very well and that's kind of the way I felt. That's why I wasn't all that enthusiastic about the Bob Hope shows and that kind of stuff. That was--

SANDERSON: And it's the same way by the time you got into the eighties, you really didn’t have any type of anti-communist music until the eighties. And even then it was more anti-nuclear stuff than anti-communist.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You know, like the Luftballon. You know, I remember that. Oh I couldn't stand the song. It was cool when it first came out, but then after a while you're like, "Who cares?" You know.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: But you know, now when you think about, "Okay, well it was written because of the atomic age." When you're a kid, but, like… “I gotta listen to this song one more stinkin' time on the radio?” You know.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: So.

TRETTER: Yup.

SANDERSON: Now, one of the things that… I know, kind of looking at it…during your time, you also saw a lot of natural disasters.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Earthquakes, hurricanes, you experienced a hurricane when you were in Pensacola, correct?

TRETTER: Right. Right, and biggest thing I remember about that is how we used to have to…or how we had to, especially with the one, just plain…link arms. We had been at the service club, the NCO club, and just to get back to the dorm, the barracks, there [were] about five of us and we had to link arms because we could not walk on our own because of the high winds and everything like that. And I mean, the Navy and where they were in Pensacola and everything like that, they were more concerned about the airplanes than they were about us, [chuckles] 'cause it was a naval air station, so there was a lot more concern about that than individuals in the security school. We can…security people were a dime a dozen. You know. But airplanes cost a couple million dollars, so that whole thing was centered very much on the airplanes, not about us at all. We had to make due on our own, and we did and we survived but you know, their buildings there are built, you know…Pensacola is, the naval air station at least, is built in such a way that it would take a pretty drastic, drastic hurricane to--

SANDERSON: It did happen. Hurricane Ivan.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: That base is almost completely rebuilt.

TRETTER: Really? Okay.

SANDERSON: Ivan went in and knocked down a lot of the--

TRETTER: Infrastructure.

SANDERSON: Right, a lot of the buildings that you saw don't exist anymore. They're newer buildings.

TRETTER: Oh, my God.

SANDERSON: Same way like if you were to go up to Great Lakes now, you would not recognize boot camp.

TRETTER: Yeah, I imagine not. I would expect that. I didn't…I wouldn't expect that from Pensacola, you know, but I would expect that from boot camp that I couldn't, you know.

SANDERSON: The only…let's see. I'm trying to think. From the time when you were there, four buildings exist. No, three. Only three exist from--

TRETTER: Wow.

SANDERSON: --your time. The dental clinic, Osborne. That's still there. That ain't going anywhere anytime soon. The Marlinspike, where you had the little trainer on how to throw the lines.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: That's still there. I don't think…I think they updated the…well, they updated the inside of it, and then there's another administrative building. All the rest of them, razed down to the ground.

TRETTER: Amazing. Amazing. All the big buildings where they were training the guys in Morse code and that kind of stuff. Those are all gone.

SANDERSON: Yup. Because I know the barracks I went through in '97 were built in '60. So the…we were in the same type of, you know, the gray brick three-story buildings.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Those are gone. The grinders, most of the grinders are gone. They've recreated some of the stuff but at the same time they've updated it to

the point of…I'm trying to think what would have…one of the big galley…the really big, big galley that they had--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --that had like…I think they could feed, you know, I think at one point…let's see, I'm trying to remember. It was the old Galley 525 that could feed like half a boot camp at one time.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: What's there now is, they worked with Universal Studios, and they recreated a Arleigh Burke-class destroyer inside. And it's all wired up. It's all super-secret, you know. I mean, they can like…I don't know if they can flood out a space, but they can smoke it out, you know, to mimic a fire. It looks like they went and just basically took the ship, cut the bottom of the hull off, set it down on the building…you know, set it down in the middle--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --of boot camp and built a building around it and connected it to electricity. It's frickin' ridiculously awesome, what they have now.

TRETTER: I'll be darned.

SANDERSON: Whereas we had the Marlinspike.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: I mean, basically a half of a ship sticking out of a wall.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah. And they…yeah, and in our training…I mean, I'm guessing that the training must be much better than…you know, a lot of ours was just classroom stuff. You know, and everything--

SANDERSON: Yeah, it's a lot better than what it was. Now it's, you know…I was the same way with the classroom. It was…we… When I joined in February of '97, they just stopped carrying the rifles whereas you guys had to march with the rifles everywhere. You know, which, I still…that was one point I'm kind of glad we didn't have to deal with, 'cause it's like, you know…no, as a sailor you rarely play with…rarely get to play with a weapon.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Unless you--

TRETTER: This isn't Pearl Harbor.

SANDERSON: Right, right.

TRETTER: You know, so.

SANDERSON: Well. Now--

TRETTER: I'll be darned. I didn't realize that at all.

SANDERSON: They've definitely modernized quite a bit. Now it's to the point where, like for you on…for you guys on the linguistics side, you know, I mean, if…you would have to be severely computer literate because ninety-nine percent of the stuff that they run through, you know, anything, they'd run it through a filter, whereas you would have to listen to it almost as raw as possible in real time, and if you had a bad connection you had a bad connection.

TRETTER: Yeah. Well, and that's why you had the R390s 'cause you could fine-tune them. You know, I mean, how many hours of my life did I lose sitting there just going, you know, one or two notches at a time trying to get it in more clear and everything like that? And, of course, all of ours was on reel-to-reel also, which… Yeah, that's true; with the computers, it would be a whole new world out there. I mean, I knew it was a new world because they…a lot of those stations and that that I knew of and that I [was] at--like Ramasun and that in Thailand—[are] all overgrown and gone and given back to the Thai government and things like that. So I knew that people were listening…you know, I mean, well…and we talked a little bit about that yesterday. Like I said, a lot had gone to, you know, Fort Meade and you just do it there and you get it by satellite, you know. And it's…in some ways, it's probably easier to pick up the taxicab internet off a satellite from Odessa.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, than anything else. But, boy, that's really…I didn't know that about the naval…at Pensacola Naval Air Station.

SANDERSON: Yeah. It…and that was…and of course, they still have the Blue Angels down there. The Blue Angels won't ever go anywhere. But it's one of those that--pretty much and that base in itself--when Ivan came through, it was probably the best worst thing that ever happened, just because a lot of it…it forced the Navy to update the base.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: ' Cause I mean, you know… I mean, you probably saw it being in buildings from…in the sixties, from pre-WWII.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Where barracks-wise…

TRETTER: Yeah, and the… I mean, one of the things I remember from all those bases was…and even the University of Minnesota up until recently still had the old Quonset huts that they built as emergency living quarters during WWII, you know, for the…because suddenly they're inducting thousands of people and they needed some sort of shelter.

SANDERSON: Right.

[Talking over each other]

TRETTER: Where was it that I stayed?

SANDERSON: They were supposed to be temporary buildings.

TRETTER: There was one of those bases that I stayed in Quonset huts.

SANDERSON: Was it in Hawaii? Or was it at Clark?

TRETTER: Yeah, it would be more at Clark 'cause I had a couple of layovers at Clark. You know, so yeah, I bet it was. I bet you're right. It was at Clark.

SANDERSON: Clark in the Philippines.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah. So. So, what happened with Jacksonville, Florida, the Navy base there?

SANDERSON: It's still there.

TRETTER: Was that Andrew or was that--

SANDERSON: That's Mayport. You've got the two major naval bases. You've got the naval air station that's close to downtown Jacksonville and then you've got Mayport. That's where the ships are. It's--

TRETTER: So it would be Mayport that I would have been at. I never went to the whatcha-call-it there.

SANDERSON: And it's still one of the bigger ports for…it's all small boys now. They don't have any carriers based out of it. You know, but they have a lot…that's where you've got your destroyers, the cruisers--

TRETTER: Yeah, and that's where I got…you know, my destroyers that went…we went out to Cuba and that kind of stuff. And Guantanamo and they used to... Do the ships still dock at Guantanamo at all or--?

SANDERSON: They do.

TRETTER: They closed that. They do.

SANDERSON: The base there at Gitmo is still the same. I mean, of course, you know, it's still locked down.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And it's more, you know, it's more restricted than it used to be. Like you could--

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: -- to the point…now that we have Camp Delta down there.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: For the detainees down there.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: At one point it was one of those where…when I first joined, that was considered the…it was the Navy's best kept secret. To the point where, even now, it's still one of those where they still have very nice living accommodations, five-star restaurants. You know, because I mean once you're there in Guantanamo, you're there.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You don't go anywhere off that base.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: But ever since Camp Delta, you know, it was one of those where you could… You know, when I was stationed in Portsmouth, it was you could jump on a space-a-…space-available flight, go and spend a weekend down on Guantanamo. You know, go and hit up the beach. You know, they had one of the best MWR's still, and it's still considered one of the best in the Navy on the military period, but it was one of those where there now, they restrict the flights going back and forth, of course for security concerns. You know.

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah, 'cause they weren't doing any of the, you know, intensive interrogation, and it wasn't…I mean, they must have had some prison facilities at Guantanamo when I was there but it was…that wasn't its major function. Its major function was to have a space on Cuba, and there were a lot of Spanish linguists there. You know, and to listen in to all the Cuban stuff. And it was very, very seldom that they brought in the Russian linguists and that was usually only temporary you know, because the Russians would fly the MiGs in--

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: -- train the Cubans, and then go. And so if we were there as Russian linguists we were there two or three at the most. You know, just because the Russian pilots then of course had to go back to Russia of course right away. So it was a very, very different thing than what I imagine it to be now, you know.

SANDERSON: Well, and pretty much Guantanamo beforehand…I don't even…I think they had maybe a very small brig, like one or two cells.

[Talking over each other]

TRETTER: See that's what I would say, yeah.

SANDERSON: Because with anything like that, they would put them on a plane and send them back. And generally it would…there [were] flights constantly. I mean, we're talking about a flight…you know, two or three flights a day in and out of Guantanamo.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now it's, you know…There it's still like that but, you know, it's more restricted to who can and who cannot go down there. But I was gonna say…do you remember which destroyers or ships that you were--

TRETTER: Unfortunately I don't. I was trying to [remember] ever since, you know, you guys and Jennifer invited me to come here, and then I've been trying to think of some of those destroyers. I used to know the name of a couple of them, but I have just totally forgotten. My memory is not what it should be, so, you know.

SANDERSON: Well, no, especially considering how many you probably went on board. And especially when you're just there for a little bit, it's like after a while, you're like, eh.

TRETTER: Well, that's it, yeah.

SANDERSON: I'm gonna go back underway. Almost kind of like the slight eye-roll of, "Here I go again."

TRETTER: Yeah, and that's very true. You're very…you obviously have been doing this for a while because you're very perceptive about a bunch of these things, you know, and I don't have to go into a big detailed description of what it was like, you know, because you already know, which is good. Which I'm very glad of, you know.

SANDERSON: Well, I appreciate that.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Now, one of the things I was gonna ask, 'cause we had talked before about when you were in DC in the Sixties, in '68 specifically during basically the one time of the year, the one year that you really didn't want to live in D.C.

TRETTER: [Laughs] Yeah.

SANDERSON: It was like, yeah. No one wanted to be there. I don't even think LBJ spent that much time in D.C. He spent most of his time in Texas during that year.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: 'Cause, I mean, it was truly the year from hell. You know, between the Tet-… all the protests that were constantly going on in D.C., then you had Martin Luther King assassination, then you had Bobby Kennedy assassinated, George Wallace's assassination attempt. It was like…to be a politician during 1968 was not what you would call the best time of the year. Now, fast forward, here you are in…here it is, '71, and you're at Fort Meade. You're outside the D.C. buffer, but you're having to go into the inner circle, so to speak.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: What was that like?

TRETTER: And over to the Pentagon and that. Mostly we used city transportation. You know, they didn't…everything that was secret kind of stayed at Fort Meade, you know. If we prepared a report, or had a report that had to go to somebody else, it generally was not classified. It might have to be hand-delivered. You know, it might be considered that important, but they were so paranoid about the classified stuff, you know, that you didn't carry it around, or if you did, like I say, you know, on those rare

occasions, you know, when I was a messenger, it was…I got the briefcase, I never opened the briefcase, briefcase was locked, couple of times it was handcuffed to me, I would, you know, like, go to the White House, they would unlock the handcuffs, and that's the last I'd ever see…you know, and then there's the gate. You know, leave. So, we didn't…you know, most everything we did in D.C. was kind of…we couldn't use personal transportation, you know, but we could use, like, city buses and that. And that, of course, was before the big subways were built--D.C. too--so most of it was on bus, you know, and like you say, it was a tense time. You know, '71 was less tense than before but, you know, D.C. is a African-American city and there are enough…maybe unkind for me to say, but there are enough southerners in the military that they didn't trust people traveling where there would be a lot of African Americans who were going through the cites and, you know, the bus stop was right outside the bases and that. Besides, there was…very confusing because I know on…and I didn't own a car. I owned a car in Hawaii, which was a big mistake. Big mistake. I bought it through the military credit union, and it was right before I came back, had it shipped back to Minnesota by the military. And you know, I keep telling you how dumb and naive I am. Once the car got back to Minnesota and I got back to Minnesota, that was when I realized that buying a car in Hawaii, you don't automatically get a heater and defroster.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: You gotta pay extra.

TRETTER: You gotta pay extra for that, and having a car in Minnesota without a heater and defroster just doesn't work.

[Both laughing]

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: So that was a big mess. But, yeah, it was interesting, D.C. was. So I never had a car there. I used public transportation all the time. But it was really confusing, you know. And if I remember correctly, most of the security stuff was on Nebraska Avenue. I seem to recall that that was where we had to go a lot was Nebraska…that there was a security compound within D.C. on Nebraska.

SANDERSON: Now, and when you were transporting this stuff, were you in civilian clothes or were you in uniform?

TRETTER: In D.C. it was mostly in uniform. They liked you to be in uniform, yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I do know when I've gone to the national capitol area, we are…if we are there on official business we have to be in dress uniform.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah.

SANDERSON: We have to be in full dress, yeah. God forbid--

TRETTER: Yeah, I remember being in my dress blues a lot in D.C. during the winter. You know, during the summer you had dress whites, but.

SANDERSON: I was gonna say it's kind of funny how things have shifted. During that time, even during almost a civil unrest, you know, very hot political time, uniform, uniform, uniform. Now it's still, but they…you can travel in uniform in DC, but it's still one of those, they're like, "Okay, if you're not on official business, leave the uniform at home."

TRETTER: Ah, that would be very different, yeah. No, I remember most of the time in D.C…I mean, because I had a lot of free time in D.C., I was in civilian clothes like when I went to the museums and that kind of stuff. But any time I was doing anything official it was dress. And I must have been there--during that time--mostly during the winter, because it was dress blues. And I remember a couple of times we were waiting to be able to go to dress whites, you know, because they had very restrictive days of the year that, you know, this is the day that you can switch to your whites from your blues and things like that. And then it got kind of warm to be wearing those heavy wool uniforms. You know, and Jennifer was remarking on that when I donated my uniforms, that she said, "These are all natural fibers." She said, “Oh those heavy”--

SANDERSON: Right. The heavy wool stuff.

TRETTER: Yeah those heavy dark Navy blues. And you know, and I had the…I still have the turtleneck sweater too. But that was more for the north Atlantic. If you were on a ship in the north Atlantic, God, you wanted that wool sweater. [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: Yeah, and it used to be standard sea bag issue until we…actually until we…when we switched from the actual bellbottom square pocket dungarees like you and I have where you had to stencil… 'cause when I came in in '97 we still had to stencil our name.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You know, the old chambray shirt that you would have to dump about a can of starch--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --just to get a crease in it but after about thirty minutes the crease goes away.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah, we had those when I came in.

TRETTER: Yeah, you can see all the stencils on my uniforms there. And she—Jennifer--remarked about that too, that my insignia was all stenciled on, yeah.

SANDERSON: Right. And it was one of those where then they updated the dungarees and they called them utilities 'cause they had to give them--

TRETTER: I've heard that, yeah.

SANDERSON: That's when we get everything sewn on. Almost kind of like it went from being… You had to be careful, 'cause I remember the first time that I was stenciling in my rank…'cause we were still in the transition when I made third class. The first time I stenciled my rank, I messed it up and I actually had to throw the shirt out and buy a new one because it was cockeyed.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: So, you know, and I'm like, "Well, I can't walk around with a, you know, messed up shirt." So I had to actually throw that shirt out and buy a new one.

TRETTER: Well, see that was the luxury of being on ships. Whenever you were on ships, if you went up a rank you just sent your clothes…and I can remember saving clothes ‘til I would get on a ship, 'cause I knew I'd be on a ship again at some time. You send it down to the ships laundry and you tell them, "I need this insignia on this." And whether it was sewn on or stenciled or something, I never did any of that because they would do it in the ship's laundry, and of course they would do it right.

SANDERSON: Oh yeah.

TRETTER: You know.

SANDERSON: Those guys definitely know how to launder a uniform.

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah. Yup.

SANDERSON: Well, now we're getting to the point of, you're now transitioning out of the military.

TRETTER: Okay. Did you want to deal with the other…because you know, I'd mentioned about the volcano--

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah, yeah.

TRETTER: --Pinatubo in Clark, but that was kind of… I was flying out of Clark, you know, and wasn't on a ship in Subic. But of course they… It was shortly after that that the volcano went off and just devastated both Clark and Subic, you know. And I think…didn't we…wasn't there something about a treaty with the United States and the Philippines afterwards that we weren't going to rebuild those bases that they--

SANDERSON: Yeah. When Mount Pinatubo erupted, it was right before I joined when it went in and it really messed everything up. Before, the few times it erupted, they'd go in and they'd clean it up, rebuild whatever they needed to.

TRETTER: Right, right.

SANDERSON: Well that last time the treaty was-- well, the SOFA Agreement, the Status of Forces agreement, had pretty much ran out at that point.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: It was one of those when of course Mount Pinatubo erupted, it messed up enough to where the military was-- this was during the Clinton era, where during that time frame, they were like, "You know, it's gonna cost too much to rebuild. We don't need to be there. Bye."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And I mean, it devastated the Filipino economy, especially around the Subic Bay area because, I mean, the majority of that area had built their entire livelihood around the military being there.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: So when we pulled chocks and left, I think the Philippine military still uses that area but, you know, it's whatever they were able to prepare or whatever was still left over from us.

TRETTER: Yeah, 'cause it was a good natural harbor. But it also destroyed Subic Bay. You know, I mean, it killed a lot of people and destroyed Subic Bay and everything like that. But the really…the one that I remember the most and the clearest is when I was in Turkey they had a massive, massive earthquake. And I remember the day; I was on night shifts. You know, you're various shifts change. You know, and you work a night shift and then you work an evening shift and then you work a day shift and then you get a day off and then you go to a night shift again. And everything like that. And I had been working night shifts. And I went back to the dorm and was sleeping, and I remember being angry at my roommate because he was slamming the doors on our…we just had little lockers, you know, like in a high school practically kind of thing. And I remember being angry because he should know that I'm sleeping and not be banging the doors. Until the bed started going back and forth [chuckles]. And then that woke me up enough to where I realized it was an earthquake. And I grabbed my shoes, and I don't think I even grabbed all of my uniform. But, you know, I got out of the building, and there was a big field that they used for like playing baseball and that next to us. And we just got out in the middle of the field. And fortunately, the earth didn't open up and swallow us up, but it was huge. Worst earthquake I've ever been in, and I've been in California. And you know, they always have tiny little earthquakes in California and that kind of stuff.

SANDERSON: What was that like? You know, here you are, you've pretty much…Minnesota, except for the really bitter cold winters, that's really…I mean, it's rare for you guys to get tornadoes, especially in the upper part of Minnesota. Except for the extreme heat and the extreme cold, that's pretty much the--

TRETTER: Yeah, and that's what I was talking [about] with Ken last night at dinner, and it's one of the things I'd mentioned. I said, of course you don't want to move out of Minnesota. There [are] no hurricanes, there [are] no earthquakes, there [are] no volcanoes. You know, and that was kind of the way my mother always felt too, even, you know, up until the time she died, was she didn't…we'd say, "Do you want to go to Florida? Do you want to go to California?" "No." That's…you go to Florida, you get hurricanes. You go to California, you get earthquakes and things like that. So it was scary and actually that was probably one of the times…you know, even with the wars and the ships and the little Vietnamese boats coming out after us and everything like that, that earthquake was probably the scariest thing. And the military building held up. The dorms stood; they didn't crash. But the whole rest of the area around us, the Turkish area, all the buildings collapsed. You know, hundreds of people…they didn't use us in recovery, which is interesting. But then

again we were security, and we had to be there and, you know, what's going on and listening and all this kind of stuff. So we didn't do the recovery, but the one thing we did have to do and that everybody on the base had to do is that was also…that was one of the worst ones in Turkey, and we all…they had, or they brought in…I remember they flew it in…enough bubonic plague serum that we all had to get a bubonic plague shot. One of the worst. I had fortunately gotten out…you know that big penicillin shot they give you when you first get in there?

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: I hadn't had to take that because I'm…after being shot when I was a kid, I'm immune to penicillin, I had gotten so much penicillin that, you know, erythromycin is okay, you know, and all this kind of stuff, but penicillin doesn't do anything for me. To this day, you can give me a penicillin shot and it's like, okay. I don't like the needle but it doesn't do anything.

SANDERSON: Right. It's a waste of time.

TRETTER: So the bubonic plague shot unfortunately is probably the most painful shot I've ever had in my life. And we all had to have them. There was no question about it, you know, and everything like that. But I remember they flew the serum in, and it was within a day or so that they started giving us the bubonic plague shots. And of course, there was plague all through Turkey at that time, because the earthquake had shaken everything up and so many people had died and were buried, you know, in the rubble, and it was… I mean, it was really horrendous but it was…the dorms stood. The dorms did not collapse. And it was just…that was probably one of the most scary parts of my military service was that earthquake 'cause it was so…you know, and the other things were kind of passing. The hurricane was passing. The volcano happened after I left and everything like that. And that, but yeah.

SANDERSON: I can definitely see where that…not seeing a lot of weather growing up and all of a sudden you're being…it's almost like everywhere you've gone: massive earthquake in Turkey, Florida for the first time.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Not only did you go into the wrong side of the restaurant, but then you had a hurricane. Then here you are bouncing back and forth between Hawaii and, you know, the Philippines and Japan.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: In an area where they're like, "Hey just in case, just to let you know, you might get captured. Name, rank, serial number. That's all you need to say."

TRETTER: Yeah. And we did have one typhoon in Hawaii where they evacuated us. It never really got to be that big. I don't know, they only got to be six-foot waves, but… That was when I was working at Waimea and living in Waimea Bay, and I had a little beach house that was right on the beach and everything like that. And they had us evacuate to the center of the island and that because this tidal wave was coming in, but it fizzled out before it ever got there, so--

SANDERSON: Ah, that's good.

TRETTER: Yeah. But the earthquake affected me to the extent that the next time I was home on leave--and my sister lived at that time in a mobile home--we went over there for dinner, and we're having dinner and unbeknownst to me, she…you know, 'cause I didn't know; I'd been in the Navy, you know, and didn't know really what was going on, but she had a washer and dryer in the mobile home. And as I am told, the washer got unbalanced and started going like this [gestures] and started shaking the mobile home and they said I was outside. [Chuckles] Just dropped everything and I immediately… you know, which is kind of shameful because I didn't try to save anybody else.

SANDERSON: You're just like, "Bye."

TRETTER: Yeah. But that shook me up enough that I was just outside. There have been…it's interesting. The military has had some interesting effects on my life. Because of the blood clots caused by Agent Orange, I was at…there's a hospital called Ramsey hospital, civilian hospital before I started going to the VA, and I was in there for a blood clot. I had got…I think that was when I had thrombophlebitis. You know, or no, pulmonary…that was when I had the pulmonary embolism. And it was late at night, and that was when they used to have the nursing section there and then the rooms were all around it. But it was also right in that period before they had switched from all the glass bottles that they used to hang up, you know, like in *Catch-[22]* where he used to switch the bottles.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know. And it was…they said it was two or three in the morning, and I don't remember it very well, but I was there and I was getting heparin and I had needles in my arm and intravenous needles and the heparin is

an anti-coagulation drug and everything, and all this stuff that they were giving me. And one of the orderlies out at the nursing station dropped one of those glass bottles and it kind of exploded. They said the last they'd heard of me was going over the side of my bed, took all my, you know, IV's, bottles, you know, all the…everything that was hanging up around me and everything like that, and they found me under the bed because it was like being shelled. You know, it sounded like being shelled, and yeah. So yeah, it was funny little things like that that happen to you afterwards. I don't know if it's pertinent to this kind of stuff or not, but--

SANDERSON: Mm-hm. Oh, and that's…actually it's good that we can talk on that. 'Cause that with the transition especially, that's one of the things that people…you know, when you come off active duty, especially in a situation like yourself, you know, being involved in areas…you know, being in combat but not really combat.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah. And also, you know, you got to hear some of the coolest stuff, but also the worst stuff, so to speak.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: It's like, you know, we pick up…people pick up a newspaper and they start reading it, and, you know, they hear of oh how bad this is, how bad that is. But we know, okay, this is what the reporters…and probably sensationalizing this so they can get ratings, so they can get readers. Whereas everything you heard was literally from the horse's mouth. So a lot of times like something like that, there's always a larger transition problem for someone coming out of the military. That was one of the things I was wanting to ask. Transitioning out of that world of being in the know, being around the quote/unquote super-secret squirrel club, knowing, you know, hey this is what so-and-so's doing. This is what so-and-so did. And this guy is a complete crook, you know, knowing that, you know, how paranoid Nixon was. And going into the civilian world, how was that transition?

TRETTER: In some ways it was very difficult, because we still couldn't talk about it. You know, they had us sign all these things, and you won't do this for ten years, and you won't talk about it and everything like that. You know, and the travel restrictions and…well, by the time I got out of the Navy, I didn't want to travel anyway. I wanted to stay home. I was a big homebody for a number of years before it finally started to bite me again, and I liked to travel and, you know, started going around to different things and conferences and that. But we couldn't talk about it. It was so restricted,

and they just pushed that on us and pushed that on us. And you know, and we can still whatcha-call-it, and I had…like I said, I was kind of done with the whole thing. I'd been there, done that. So I didn't want to join the Navy Reserve or anything like that, which actually I'm kind of glad with now with my Urdu. [Chuckles] 'Cause I was talking to I think it was Brad here.

SANDERSON: Brian.

TRETTER: Or Brian, you know, and he had had some Pashto, I think the other one that they speak in Pakistan, and of course, Urdu and everything like that. So I'm glad I didn't get into the Naval Reserve, because I never got called back during any of this stuff. 'Cause I was out and I was done.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: And--

SANDERSON: Well, and especially with the type of security clearance you had and, you know, that's still one of those where once they get out, they're like, "Just to let you know, we can call you back at any time."

TRETTER: And they had said that they could…and that was one of the reasons I didn't want to be in the Naval Reserve, because I didn't want to be kept up to date [laughs] on all that stuff.

SANDERSON: You're like, "Please God, let it expire."

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: Yeah, that was very much it. And that's what I want to do. But there [were] a lot of small things that happened now. I mean, I can tell you a couple of those stories I guess. I don't know that you're interested. But I remember one time I almost hit a tree with my car because I was driving…I was going down to this school. I had a…I worked for a--or was involved with--a volunteer organization there. And as I was going there, there were two little boys in a driveway in front of me, and they had what I finally figured out were these little toy machine guns and all of a sudden they were on the thing and they, as the cars would go by, they'd pull out these toy machine guns, you know, [mimics toy gun]. Well, you know, I saw them, saw them shooting, and I knew in Vietnam that the children sometimes were armed or had hand grenades, you know, just like the Islamists do now. They take little retarded kids and give them a hand grenade and say, "Go over there," you know, and blow up the

Israeli post or whatever. And it just, I don't know, again it was kind of this thing about where you black out. And I stopped myself before I actually hit the tree, but I just went cross the lanes of traffic and was heading right for the tree before I slammed on the brakes and stopped. Because you know, they were there and they were shooting at cars, and then I calmed down enough and that, but my first initial…and I still have a horrendous startle reflex to this day. And I know my brother was really surprised, he was…I was talking with my nephew one time, and he walked in the room kind of sudden[ly] and I just jumped up and everything like that. And I still have that as a problem. Another one that happened that I thought was real interesting--or in its own way was interesting, maybe it's a little gruesome or whatever--but I used to live in this really old Victorian house in St. Paul. You know, I knew the owner of the house and the guy on the third floor was kind of a friend and everything like that. And we had a problem. He tore down the old garage in back and was building a new garage. And he did that in the fall, and so all the mice that lived there came into the house. So all of a sudden we had a mouse problem in the house. And it was late fall/early winter, and it was snowing. It started to snow and everything like that. And we were trapping mice and, you know, all this kind of stuff. And the next spring my friend on the third floor came down and said, "Jean, what the hell are you doing?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "Come here." We went outside and out the door where I lived in the basement apartment and you went up the steps and there was the thing, and there was of course snow and everything, it was Minnesota. And he said, "Look." And I had taken…not realized it at all, and I had a whole row of dead mice, just like as if body bags. You know, and the dead were all lined up and everything like that. Didn't know I'd done it. Had no idea, you know, so he very kindly scooped them up and put them in a bag and threw them in the trash for me, and everything like that. 'Cause it kind of freaked me out, you know, 'cause I went out there. But I had deliberately laid out all the mice exactly as if it was, you know, a dead person. And didn't even realize it. That's the kind of stuff that sometimes scares me about this is, you know, the over the top of the bed, you know, the mice being laid out, running into a tree. Not really running into it, but almost running into it, you know, and you just never know.

SANDERSON: And that's one of the questions I was gonna ask you about with…'cause you had put on your questionnaire that you had received a bronze star while you were there. Can you talk about how you got the bronze…were awarded the bronze star?

TRETTER: Well, like I said, with us it was [laughs] it was report to personnel at thirteen hundred hours and by the way, here's your medal. Well, when you got to personnel.

SANDERSON: Well, on that…but specifically why did they give you the…you know, the bronze star?

TRETTER: I think it was for, you know, just for--

SANDERSON: Wasn't specific--?

TRETTER: It wasn't from any…I don't remember ever having done any really heroic deed or saving anybody's life or anything like that. But the inference was there that by translating and things like that in Vietnam that you were saving lives and that. And so I don't really know any more than…why I got an Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal and why I got a Vietnam Expeditionary Medal. The one I always kind of wanted that I never got [chuckles] is I wanted the Defense of China Medal. I don't know if you've seen those, but they're big, shiny, and everything like that. But what I actually did, I know it was somehow connected to…I know that it was connected to Vietnam, but there was really…and there really wasn't any ceremony or there wasn't any, you know, you did this and this and this kind of thing. It was report to personnel, and that was the way we got our medals all the time, whether it was good conduct or--

SANDERSON: Right. And it was just more, "Here, you need to start wearing this now."

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah. Or, "You should start wearing this now." And--

SANDERSON: And they never gave you the citation certificate?

TRETTER: No. I got a citation from President Nixon at one point. That's somewhere in my papers back in the University. And that was something. You know, I mean, it was a "thank you" from the President for all the things you've done and how brave you were and everything like that. And that was a big quandary for me for years. I never did but the thought occurred to me. This is from President Nixon, do I just want to tear it up and throw it away or do I want to keep it? And I had the common sense to keep it. It is, you know, historic in its own way. But yeah, no, they didn't…and it was like that letter of special commendation that was in my records that I don't think I have anymore. I mean I don't…I haven't seen it for year. And I'm pretty sure that's one of the things, because they took our records before we were mustered out. They took our records and went through and cleansed our records of everything, and I bet that's one of the things because of what it was. Even though it was a letter of special

commendation that they cleansed, I don't know whatever happened to that, but that was real nice. And that was the only time that there was any kind of ceremony or anything that I can remember, you know, that…where they did anything, 'cause they just…to them that was just…I had done the absolute impossible, and they couldn't see how any human being could do that, you know. But I did it, and so they wrote the letter, put it in my thing and I saw it. But when I think about it now, when I left the service, that must have been one of the things that they just pulled out of the--

SANDERSON: Redacted.

TRETTER: Yeah. Didn't even redact it. I think they just pulled it out and crumpled it up and threw it away.

SANDERSON: It's probably sitting in a file somewhere in the…you know, in the…on the classifieds repository side.

TRETTER: It could be. It could be. I…you know, my feeling is always more like, you know, they just threw it away.

SANDERSON: But unfortunately that was--

TRETTER: 'Cause these were always just the little…I don't even know what they were; there was a word for them. But they were the, like, the secretaries for the Navy. You know, and they just handled your files, and the thing that was different about them from the secretary over there is these guys that handled our records had security clearances.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I know on board the ship, when I was on board, we…there was…and even now there [are] areas [that] we call "the vault." Even in reserve centers, anywhere, there's a vault center. But even specifically the guys down in personnel, there was always--

TRETTER: Personnel. That's what I was trying to think of.

SANDERSON: There was always a back area that there was a vault, that there were certain things that went back there. It was a need-to-know. The only person that had…the only person that could just walk in and grab anything at any time was the CO.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Anybody else, forget about it. And even then it was a need-to-know…the clerk, even some of the clerks did not have open access. They had to--

TRETTER: Right. They had to have a security clearance to have access.

SANDERSON: Right. But even then, it was you had to have a reason to go in there.

TRETTER: Right.

SANDERSON: And two people had to go into the vault. Like, the only person that could just walk in at any time, open up the vault for whatever reason was the CO.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Anybody else, you had to have a reason for opening that area and another person had to go…equal or higher rank, depending on your rank, still had to be in there with you so that way…you know, because…well, of course this is in--

TRETTER: Well, aren't CO's of all bases--regardless of the military service or whatever--aren't all CO's…don't they have to have a certain amount of security clearance just to become a CO, you know?

SANDERSON: Right, but on that it's also…they still have a need-to-know, depending on where it's at, like…and a lot of it's depending on the base in itself and the tenant commands, like, you know, [of] course over…up in Great Lakes it…you know, 'cause you've got the RTC side, the Recruit Training side, and across the street, you have the training side for all the A-schools. Well there's still some entities on the base where…you know, like the CO of the base is only a captain 06. Well, you have three admirals stationed on that base. So, you know, the reserve admiral's got his office, the regional active duty officer. The admiral has his office and his command, and then you have, you know…so they do have a security clearance to a point but it's also, you know… Even on board a ship, well specifically a carrier, the ultimate CO is the captain. He's in charge of the ship, but whenever flight ops is going on, their boss goes out, and he can be commander or higher. The reactor officer can be commander or higher. And if there's…if reactor officer has to do something for reactor, he goes up to CO, "Hey I'm doing this." Or "Hey, this is going on. You need to do this." and of course you've got the DESRON: the, you know, what we call the old commodores for the destroyer group.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Take them on board the carrier. Then you've got the commander of the air wing and then you've got the admiral in itself. So it's like depending on the different levels, like RCO had it for ship's personnel only. But on the office…you know, on the admiral side, he had his own vault. He had his own staff, galley, the whole nine yards. So it's kind of like the same way on all the bases. It--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: It varies depending on the base in itself, and depending on what the CO is over and their purview. But even then it's, you know…they have ultimate authority over everything since if they're CO over that, they have to have that security clearance because they…they're responsible for everything on board.

TRETTER: Okay. And that would make sense. And that would make good sense with a lot of these duty stations that I was at, because they were security duty stations to begin with. You know, I mean, the Waialua in Hawaii and Waimea in Hawaii, that was all they were there for was for security, you know. If it was something to do with planes or something like that, it went over to Kaneohe, to the Marine Corps air station. You know, but as far as the security stuff it was just there. So all those officers would be…yeah, what you're saying makes sense.

SANDERSON: And it's kind of like there in Camp Lejeune, at the Marine Corps base Camp Lejeune, the 8th COM area, there's a specific area where 8th Com is the Marine Corps version of you guys.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: The linguists, the IT guys, the intelligence guys.

TRETTER: Yeah, Morse code and all that too.

SANDERSON: Right. And these individuals there, they…there's, like, a certain compound within the base that you don't get past that fence unless you have a reason to be there. It's even like [that] on board the ship, you know, 'cause when I was there I was part of the ambulance crew on board the ship. When we'd go up to radio or to the intelligence areas, we weren't allowed in.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: They would hand us…you know, we had to train everybody how to do basic, you know, combat life-saving and basic life support because if someone got hurt, we had an individual who got hurt in 8th COM, we'd

come rolling up…they actually had their own, you know, they actually had their own people that wheeled the guy out on a stretcher, we put him in the back of the ambulance and took him to the hospital.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause we weren't physically allowed to be in there, just in case someone in 8th COM…we had a guy that slipped and fell. It was one of those weird occasions where he busted his head open. I don't know, we, you know…I forgot exactly how, but he hit his head on one of those metal desks on board the ship, cut it open pretty bad, they called away for it as a medical emergency, we show up to the door and they hand him…they hand this guy through the hatch. Had the C-collar on and the whole nine yards. 'Cause we actually had to train them how to do that.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Because we didn't have the clearance to be able to go into the space.

TRETTER: Yeah. I don't remember of anybody ever getting hurt that badly, but I do remember of them saying that medical personnel cannot come in here even if it is something really drastic and that. But they didn't do really… I mean, other than the basic, you know, apply pressure to stop bleeding, they never did much training for us with that. But I do remember that, you know, on a lot of the bases it was known, you know, because a lot of the times the security base would be in the middle of…like the Air Force one near Istanbul, you know, the security. And that was part of the security that it was inside a military…an American military base and it was nothing…you know, in Turkey, we were a little bit more exposed. Like I said, it was TUSLOG det 28, so it was an Army base, but it wasn't really, you know, the--

SANDERSON: It wasn't the base, per say.

TRETTER: Yeah, it was… The big thing was the security stuff and the Army [were] there to protect us and that. But yeah, I do remember us being told at least that medical we weren't allowed to let medical people in.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, regardless of what the problem was or situation was, yeah. Yeah. So, yeah that…yeah, a lot of that, it's interesting. You're filling in a lot of little whatcha-call-its. Another thing you said there that I found interesting is you talked about the reactor.

SANDERSON: Mm-hm.

TRETTER: What, captain or commodore or whatever--

SANDERSON: With the reactor officer?

TRETTER: Reactor officers. Yeah, see I never served on a nuclear vessel. Talked about going on a submarine, but I wasn't real enthused about picking up a submarine and going around northern Russia into the Arctic sea and that kind of stuff. I wasn't… I've become much more claustrophobic the older I've gotten. And I wasn't really claustrophobic at that time, but I still didn't want to do…submarine duty was not…I was not enthused about doing that. Didn't really…even if it did mean I'd get to stop in Norway and that, I still [chuckles]--

SANDERSON: Like, nah, I'm good.

TRETTER: Yeah. And I think our submarines…I think the security submarines left from Germany. Isn't Bremerhaven right on the Baltic?

SANDERSON: There…it is, but most of our subs tend to, even during that time frame, we had them out of Guam. That's where the Pacific fleet was.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Kings Bay, Georgia. Seattle, Washington, Norfolk, Virginia, and we used to pull into Britain a lot.

TRETTER: Okay, the big loch up in Scotland, yeah.

SANDERSON: But more so there in Portsmouth. And in England for the fast attacks, but like the…what we call the big boomers, pretty much. San Diego…well, it'd be San Diego, Pearl, Bremerton, Washington, Guam, Kings Bay, Georgia. That's the--

TRETTER: I thought sure we had something out of Germany that was right on the Baltic.

SANDERSON: They would pull in, but we…at one point we did, but I know…but I'm wanting to say [that] by the time of the Vietnam War, they had pulled all the actual ships. We might have had a refueling station for the old conventionals, but once we started going full nuclear on the submarines, they pretty much pulled out of that.

TRETTER: Yeah. The other thing that it could have been is that, with putting security people on a submarine, it could have been a…like, if they pulled in for refueling or something like that, because like I said, we didn't have nuclear reactors. That was something new for ships. So they…it could be

that they would pull in in some place like Bremerhaven, we'd get on, and then they'd pull out again.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Because I know with the subs, you really didn't…it was still, you know, 'cause the Nautilus had only been launched a few years before then. I'm wanting to say by '64, by the time you joined in '64 almost '65, there was just a small handful of nuclear ships, and with the nuclear subs. And there were very few of those.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And actually the only carrier was the Enterprise at that time. That was the only nuclear ship that was--

TRETTER: Oh, okay.

SANDERSON: --a surface ship at that point. And that didn't start go…now all the carriers are nu-…Kitty Hawk, we finally got…finally decommissioned her a few years ago. She was the last conventional after we had decommissioned the John F. Kennedy.

TRETTER: Yeah, no yeah, we didn't…atomic energy ships, or reactors and that, was not something…that was why when you talked about the reactor officer I kind of…oh, of course they'd have a special officer for that. But the trips that we did…and like I said, I didn't volunteer and wasn't real excited about it. I didn't think I would react well to living under sea for a long time and that. That was--

SANDERSON: 'Cause when they go under, they go under for a while, especially the big boomers.

TRETTER: Yeah, and these were the ones that were going up through and under the Arctic circle, you know, and everything like that, because they were still listening post for…but we could get some of the submarine traffic on our RT…our R390s with the, like it was a…I forget what it was called, but it was like a U2 or something. It was a very, very deep signal. Very slow, very whatcha-call-it. And we could get some of that submarine traffic that way, but not…it was unusual for us to even get it. And I know that they did send some linguists up there but that wasn't something that I was interested in doing. You know? I still wanted to go to Antarctica. And Jennifer was saying last night, 'cause she'd been to Antarctica a couple of times, that--

SANDERSON: They sponsored a couple of the research troops there. Her and her father did.

TRETTER: Yeah, and she said that they have a special intelligence group down there that was just for Antarctica and for the scientific things, which is probably why they never let me go, you know, 'cause that wasn't my specialty. You know, my…they got very much into specialties in that sort of stuff, which is why I ended up in the space program and--

SANDERSON: Well, especially on that side of the house, I've noticed within…anything within intelligence side, once you have a knack for something or once they specialize you in something, you're pretty much stuck in it. You--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: You're not gonna be able to get past that anymore. That's why there's still such a high turnover rate for your field and with the whole CT community period.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Whether it be the reconnaissance guys, interpretive guys, you know, regardless of which rate it is within the CT world, very high turnover rate.

TRETTER: Yeah. Yeah, there always was. And yeah, and I guess I just didn't realize how specialized I had become.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, because that was always the major thing that they wanted me for. And of course when the Russians stopped doing…you know, and they started planning for the Mirror and things like that, and they weren't doing as many shots and not doing as many capsules and, you know, cosmonauts and that. Then there was less call for me, you know, and that. And I could be sent to other places and do other things, i.e. Cuba to listen to MiGs and stuff like that. But yeah, that was…and it was very specialized. It was guys that were very specialized in the, like I said, the TACC and the NATC and Odessa, you know, because just in case some important Russian official was riding in a taxi and you know, we'd want to know where he was picked up and where he was dropped off. That was the big thing with taxi nets, 'cause people generally don't discover or discuss classified materials in the back seat of a taxicab. But if it was somebody important, you know, if it was a Russian admiral or general or somebody high in the Politburo, we wanted to know where they got picked up and where they got dropped off. That was the big thing, yeah.

That was what we looked for in those taxicab nets. I mean people hear me say, you know, taxicab nets and I listened in to them and they think, oh, well, all the gossip and the, you know, the half-naked lady in the back seat that the general's telling all of his secrets to and everything like that. And it wasn't anything like that. We were much more concerned about--

SANDERSON: Pick-up and drop-off points.

TRETTER: Yeah, 'cause people really don't talk about classified stuff in the back of a taxi. You know. Or not the kind of classified stuff we wanted. [Chuckles]

SANDERSON: Right, yeah, I was gonna say there was probably more borderline classified stuff talked about in a bar. And a lot of it would just be more of-- like, it's kind of funny you brought that up. You know, we did an interview back last year on Vice Admiral Ron Thunman. And it was one of those where he's real big in the nuclear powered submarine force. And but when the book *The Hunt for Red October* came out--

TRETTER: Uh-huh.

SANDERSON: You know, Tom Clancy actually had the Navy Institute Press actually was the one who published that. So it became a very popular book very quickly. You probably saw that with the…anything military, anything Navy-related, people just kind of hoarded it and loved it. But it was one of those where…and his aid come in and there was classified terms in the book. You know, the Crazy Ivan. At the time when the book was published, that was a classified term. You know, and of course the movie versus what it actually was was night and day compared…what they actually did, 'cause at the time it was still relevant, even when the movie came out in the early nineties. But it was one of those where it was like, "What the heck?" And Tom Clancy was like, "Yeah. I basically was just listening to people." And sometimes something that they might know would be classified or something that's kind of like, you know, you might not want to say that in public but you get a couple of drinks in some people, they start, you know, flapping your yap.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: But you guys, I mean, so severely heavily scrutinized that, I mean, it's…everyone I know in the intelligence field, they talk…even in a lot of stuff, they talk in a lot of [generality] …generalar…[generalities]. I can't even talk today. Yeah, they rarely go into very specific stuff because you guys are so…you know, it's so engrained. You don't talk about specific stuff unless you know it's okay, and even then you only give enough information to get…to placate the person, and then you carry on.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Whereas, you know…that's…whereas you got somebody on a sub, yeah, they have a decent security clearance but get a couple drinks in them, you know, eighteen/nineteen/twenty/ twenty-one year old bosun's mate on a sub, that's been mess…that's been helping out the cook mess-cranking half of deployment, they're gonna pick up stuff on the mess decks and then start talking about it. Now with that, what was it like transitioning from, like I said, you were a specialized linguist and then now you're out of the military? What was it that you wanted to do and then kind of got into after the military?

TRETTER: Oh, there [were] all kinds of things I wanted to do. I tried to get a job with the Minnesota Zoo, 'cause I really wanted to work there because of my interest in wildlife and everything like that. But unfortunately that didn't…I didn't have enough of the right kind of things. I tried going to school and I was never real good about that. I mean I had all sorts of…I mean, I had language credits up the ying yang when I tried to go back to University of Minnesota, but you know, not the other stuff. Mostly it was just…and I was really disappointed with a lot of things, because I entertained for a while, since I was in the military that…and it was always about getting a job and getting work so that I could you know, manage to live now that I was out of the service and didn't have a regular paycheck coming in. But like, the police, I wasn't appropriate for the police department, or so the police said. And I had thought, that, you know, well, just being in the military, but then I was in the wrong military. You know, I mean, I wasn't an MP or anything like that, I was just a plain old goofball. Like I said, I wasn't interested in working for the FBI or the CIA or FSI…or FSA…no, FSI. What else… I worked for a while with Northwestern National Bank, which eventually got bought out by Wells Fargo--which I'm still a little bitter about--but not while I was there. But I worked in their international department, and that worked out well. They liked me and that was nice that I could work with the international currency and, you know, people that, you know, spoke foreign languages could come up and get change and it wasn't a big, you know, it wasn't a big problem, you know with--

SANDERSON: So you did kind of continue in being the interpreter role to a point?

TRETTER: But most of the places that I applied at didn't want American speakers of foreign languages. They wanted foreign nationals, you know, because for some reason, foreign nationals were always…they spoke English better than we spoke their language regardless of what our credentials were or how good we were. 'Cause I remember applying at 3M, you know, to

work with them, and they weren't…not interested at all. You had to have the other degrees. You know, if I had a degree in Chemistry maybe or, you know, something like that, then…or maybe, but of course I didn't have any degrees 'cause I'd gone into the military right out of high school, and, you know, had just spent…here I was twenty-something years old, you know, with no attributable--

SANDERSON: Education?

TRETTER: Yeah, yeah. No education or no skills, you know, that anybody really wanted. [Chuckles] You know. Great language skills but they were going…you know, like I said, that was…and that was made very clear. Even at…when I worked at Northwestern National Bank, it was okay for me to be a volume teller, but I couldn't really advance any at the bank because if they were going to do something, you know, like open up a bank in a different country or something like that, they wanted native speakers. They didn't want Americans who--

SANDERSON: --who could speak it.

TRETTER: Who could speak it, yeah.

SANDERSON: What degree did you eventually go for?

TRETTER: I tried to get a degree in Modern Social and Cultural Anthropology, partly because I was…or mostly because I was gay and I was interested in the fact that in those days there was no…nobody had made a study of gay history and gay culture, which to me was stupid. But everybody was saying at that time that, well, being gay is just a sexual anomaly, and you don't have a history and you can't have a culture because you're not really a separate group of people, you're just a sexual anomaly within American society or within Japanese society or whatever. I didn't feel that that was right. I felt that it was separate, which was very hard, very difficult, because…and I even had a professor from the anthropology department who I would see down at the gay bars all the time, but he also was not very encouraging because, you know, we were… And I had very strong beliefs. So that was when I started collecting the stuff on my own and learning and became kind of a…an authority, and then was deeply involved in the community and everything like that and that's what made me start my collection which eventually now resides at the University of Minnesota under my name as the Tretter Collection in GLBT History and Culture. You know, to me it was stupid, because I said, "If you exist, you produce history. You know, and if you do anything during that existence, you produce culture." To me, those seemed like very logical and clear things, but of course people denied that for a long time, you

know, just thinking that we were just an anomaly and…which is why once the University decided to bring in my collection…partly because they had gotten a five hundred thousand dollar endowment to teach GLBT Studies and I was the only one around that had an extensive library and collection of GLBT materials.

SANDERSON: I think still…I think it is. When I was doing some research on you, one of them say it's still the largest collection in, if I'm not mistaken, the world.

TRETTER: One of the largest…one of the ten largest in the world.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I know at one point it was considered the largest.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause, I mean, I know you collected from all different countries, not just specifically here.

TRETTER: Right, right, and that was something that, you know, that was another one of my theories and my ideas is that, you know, we don't live in isolation either. That you know, what happens to gays and lesbians in England is similar to what happens to gays and lesbians in the United States. You know, the more we have a world culture, the more those…and it's funny how those things…because I know [that] for years, the Japanese absolutely denied that they had any trouble with gays and lesbians. You know, and gay and lesbians in Japan just, you know, "Oh, no," and, "we're accepted," and everything like that. And then this last week, I think before I came here, I was watching a program on TV and they were talking about how it's changed and how…it was a couple of young gay Japanese men who were on there saying that we are finally understanding that, you know, to be gay and lesbian is a separate cultural entity even within Japan, and that we've got a long way to go in Japan before we will be completely accepted and everything like that. And so, you know, it's kind of funny how these things kind of work out, but it took a long time. But that was why the University, after I donated my collection, they almost…the day that my collection started coming to the University, they had people that wanted to study it and were looking for things, and they'd go to them and they'd say, "Well, we want to look at the Stonewall, you know, and the Stonewall Riots," and that kind of stuff. And so the librarians would go back and get them stuff on how to build a stone wall or who is Stonewall Jackson and that, not knowing anything about the riots, you know, in New York. And so that's what caused the University of Minnesota to come back to me and say, "Well, now that we've got your collection, since we've never taught those things and never trained anybody and since we've got to start doing, you know,

GLBT classes, would you consider coming back and working for us in the library?" And so that was when they hired me to come back and--

SANDERSON: --do the library.

TRETTER: Because I was the only one that…and after all my years of study in history and, you know, being a speaker and everything like that in GLBT culture in society and history and that, that I was the only one around that understood what was in the collection well enough to make the collection available to scholars who wanted to use it. And it ended up, much to the University's surprise, to be very popular. It's one of the most popular collections there, and one of the most used.

SANDERSON: And do you think being in the Navy, in basically being a closeted gay man, kind of closeted, bouncing all over the world, you know, and also…'cause when you were in the Navy, you did a lot of outside activities, you know. Specifically, you had talked about, with the various theater organizations, singing, things like that. Do you think that…'cause the Navy, as far as…I mean, looking back at the Navy history all the way back to the turn…you know, the late 1800s, is all about giving back. The Navy's always been very…more about doing community relations and giving back. Do you think that kind of culture that the Navy really pushed for all those years, even what little bit it did in the Sixties, do you think that kind of propelled you to be more of a cultural activist and do stuff along those lines?

TRETTER: Not necessarily. See, one of the things about me is I've always had, you might say, an insatiable curiosity and a desire to learn and to learn about…you know, I mean I hear about countries in Central Asia, then I want to know how they got there and where they're from and you know, what products do they produce.

SANDERSON: Kind of goes back to the days of you and your friends and the--

TRETTER: The stamp collecting.

SANDERSON: Right, the stamp collecting. The Risk Stamp Collecting.

TRETTER: Yeah, exactly. And so I think that was always a part of my personality, you know? And it fit in with my family being big readers like I say. And my brothers and sister and mother and all of that, all of us… My father unfortunately died when…you know, fairly early. But he didn't…his English wasn't that good. He was mostly German and that kind of stuff. But we were all big readers, you know, so reading was…you know. My favorite books when I was four and five years old were encyclopedias,

you know, 'cause they had so much information. That and Donald Duck comic books, Scrooge McDuck mostly.

SANDERSON: Yeah, Scrooge McDuck.

TRETTER: Yeah. But then he always had all these wonderful things like the sorcerer's stone, and so I'd read about Scrooge McDuck and the Sorcerer's Stone and then go to the encyclopedia and try to find out about alchemy and sorcerer's stones and that kind of stuff. So I had a natural tendency. That and then being collectors. You know, my family collected a lot of things. You know, and of course I collected stamps and this kind of stuff. So I don't think the Navy did that as much as my…you know, if you see nature and nurture, I think the nurturing that I had--

SANDERSON: --was from your family.

TRETTER: Yeah, and that was what led me to a lot of these things, to doing the kind of things that I did and what I was interested in. You know, and being interested in the people when I went to a foreign country. You know, I wanted to learn Turkish even though, you know, they told me time and again that nobody speaks Turkish anymore.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: And it's silly to learn Turkish when you can't… And in a sense, it kind of was because I've lost a lot of my Turkish, 'cause there's about four or five people in all of Minnesota that speak Turkish.

SANDERSON: Speak Turkish, right.

TRETTER: You know, so--

SANDERSON: It's not a very widely used language outside of Turkey.

TRETTER: Yeah, right. Right, so…but…you know, there was still that absolute desire and everything that I always have, and I still have it when I go someplace. You know, when I did my practicum in Germany that was one of my big things. And when I spoke at the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Schwules Museum Biblioteca in Germany, my German friends said, "Oh, don't bother. So many people speak English." And they said, "Just give it--." But to me, that was… since I'd been asked to speak at that, to me that was very impolite to be in a foreign country and not be able to speak their language. And so I drove my friends nuts practicing my speech, you know, that I was going to give that night at the, you know, at the ceremonies for the anniversary, all of which was fine except when I got up there, and I had taken my notes with me because I wanted to make sure I could…if I

lost my place or lost my train of thought, I could find it, which was fine except I dropped page three [chuckles]. I'm at the podium skipping over this whole thing, and there's the page laying down there that I was looking for. But that's just me, but the thing was is to me it was very important to be able to give my remarks in German to the German people. That just seemed polite.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, and that sort of thing. So in that respect, I mean, the Navy was very good for me in that they sent me all over. They gave me the opportunity to do the stuff with the Russian space shots, you know, which was a very unique thing. And I got to do, you know, like I said, even stuff like Telstar and you know, all those great and wonderful things which I didn't sometimes realize, like I say. Now when I look back at all the stuff that I've done, I kind of question, how could any one person have done that? But then in the same respect I look back and say how could I have done all those physical things too? You know, I mean, I…there was a lot of physicality, and you had to know how to jump off a ship into burning oil and, you know, things like that. Swim until you were out from underneath the oil before you came up for air. You know, and we had all those things and did them and everything. And now, of course, I can barely walk across the room, but I kind of wonder how I did it. But the Navy, for all the parts I didn't like, there were actually more parts that I did like. And they were very good to me, and it would have been interesting, and sometimes I kind of wish I'd have stuck it out for the whole career, but since we didn't have "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and you know, gay people couldn't serve in the service then, it was…considering the day and age and the time that it was, it was better for me to get out. You know, I had reached that stage of my life that I needed to be more identified with my gay identity than just this--

SANDERSON: Who you are versus--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: --what you're perceived to be.

TRETTER: Right. You know, this wide-eyed kid that was going here and there and meeting people and learning stuff and everything like that. And not…another thing that we didn't discuss, there were…when I joined the Navy I said, "I'm not going to be particular. I'm not going to be fussy. I'm going to eat everything I can when I'm in a foreign country regardless of what it is." That didn't last a whole long time. I did eat raw octopus in Japan, which was probably the first really strange foreign thing. I mean,

growing up in Minnesota, you know, we were the ones that were afraid of zucchinis because we didn't know--

SANDERSON: You didn't know what it was.

TRETTER: Yeah, we didn't know what it was. But by the time I got to the Philippines, I refused to eat monkey brains. I refused to eat hundred-year[-old] eggs. When I got to the Middle East, I would eat…I did eat one sheep's brain salad, but I kind of stopped and didn't even finish the broth when I had a broth that was made, like, with sheep's eyeballs and things like that. And I know eyeballs are supposed to be very tasty and that, but I was not…I…wasn't something I could bring myself to eat, so I tried. I tried to be as…you know, and I never…I was never afraid of, you know, in Turkey or wherever I was riding on the bus with all the other third-class passengers and having chickens running across the front of the floor and all that kind of stuff. I kind of actually preferred that, or like I said, doing the rail trains in Japan. That was…I always like going that way as opposed to, you know, I have friends…to this day, I have one friend that won't go anyplace if he can't stay in a four-star hotel. You know. But I was much more interested in being down there and talking to people and getting to know people and, you know, having the little Mexican guy fall asleep on my shoulder and everything like that. Didn't…you know, it was just in my nature in some way. I don't think the Navy changed that. It in some ways enhanced it or helped it because it gave me the opportunity to do those things, but…and also in having that opportunity I wasn't alone. I had the Navy there. I knew I could go back to base.

SANDERSON: Right.

TRETTER: You know, and I would have a shower and I would be safe. And if I totally ran out of money, there was always the mess hall. You know. It might be fun to eat in a restaurant, you know, in some foreign country, but you had that security of the Navy at the same time.

SANDERSON: That's one of the things that definitely, coming off active duty, you realize real[ly] quick, like, wow, I can't go blow my paycheck 'cause I gotta go buy groceries.

TRETTER: [Laughs] Yeah.

SANDERSON: 'Cause I mean, you always…yeah, you always had the meal card to fall back on. You just run over to the galley, grab, you know…chow hall and grab whatever's there.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: Sometimes it wasn't the best. Sometimes it was better than you could get out in town depending on where you were at.

TRETTER: Yeah. And sometimes the times were difficult. And I remember in boot camp, I lost a tremendous amount of weight in boot camp because I'm a very slow, methodical eater. And that's the way my family is, you know. And we have a lot of discussions. You know, we talk about books and, you know, what we did during the day and everything like that, and so we're very slow eaters. Well, in boot camp it's, you have fifteen minutes, you know. You go in, you eat, and you come back out here and get in line and that. And so I don't think for the whole time I was in Great Lakes I ever managed to have a dessert. You know, because I couldn't finish my meals and for some reason I couldn't stuff myself fast enough. And I was very thin when I got out of boot camp amazingly enough. And that was…it's still like that. They…well, they've laxed the rules a little bit, but when I was there it was the same way. Yeah.

SANDERSON: You sit down, you couldn't…we couldn't eat until the last person sat down. When the last person sat down, we had ten minutes.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And that was them basically running us through the line. We were in and out in fifteen minutes.

TRETTER: Yeah, that was it exactly.

SANDERSON: And a lot of people don't understand that it would be like, "Oh, fifteen minutes. That's plenty of time to eat." Like, no, you don't understand. You don't get to eat until the last person sits down, and that's when the clock starts. Ten minutes later, your butt better be out of the chair, tray in the scullery, and you're walking out the door.

TRETTER: Yeah. You can be chewing on something as you're walking out the door, but you were out the door. And with someone like me, I would barely have my meat cut in ten minutes, you know, and everything like that. Yeah, no, that was something. And that was one of the things that was, once we were out of boot camp that was almost a miracle that you could sit down and have a normal meal. And I mean, you still had restrictions, and you had restrictions of when the meals would start and when they'd end, and like you say, sometimes the stuff was good and sometimes it was bad. I remember I hate liver with a passion, and there would be times that that was all there was to eat as far as the main course went. I mean, it would be liver and mashed potatoes and of course they didn't do anything with bacon or onions or anything and I'd have to get a bottle

of ketchup with me. Kind of cut the liver in very, very tiny pieces and swallow it-- dip it in lots of ketchup and swallow it whole, you know. That kind of stuff. But yeah.

SANDERSON: I'm glad that most places never served it. I'm not a liver fan at all.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: In days where if the main course…the main entree was something like that, let's just say I loaded up on a lot of salad. And if I had any money, yeah, that's when I'm like, "Yeah, I'm gonna go grab a burger."

TRETTER: But and that was one of the things, 'cause I was on the…was it on the Ranger? It must have been on the Ranger. Oh, no, 'cause that was…it was one of them I served, I was on board ship from…and it was from Thanksgiving through New Years at one point. And I remember that was so wonderful because they flew in turkeys and they flew in ice cream. And that was…those were like just really, really big treats. Fresh turkey, you know, and ice cream, and of course they had the instant mashed potatoes and the instant gravy and everything like that, and ice cream. The only problem with that, and the cooks were real[ly] good about it and that, except you were competing with four thousand other guys [chuckles] for just these…and so you would get…what we would do on those holidays is we would get all our stuff at the same time, because if our ice cream melted, we still had ice cream. If we waited 'til we finished our meal and went up to get our ice cream, it would probably be gone.

SANDERSON: Gone.

TRETTER: 'Cause like I say, you were competing with four thousand other guys, and the cooks were good, because I remember that they…you know, if you were on a late shift, but you had to be on the late shift, and they would save it for you. So you maybe got your holiday meal at six in the morning when you got off shift, but if you had worked the night shift and slept through dinner, that was your…they didn't save you anything.

SANDERSON: Yeah.

TRETTER: You know.

SANDERSON: I definitely…the same way they still do that.

TRETTER: I can imagine.

SANDERSON: At this point, I do have one more question for you. After that, you know, if there's anything that you feel we missed, we can definitely go back and hit it up.

TRETTER: Okay. Before we do that, can I conceivably go to the restroom?

SANDERSON: Oh, yeah. Yeah, sure.

TRETTER: I…Wednesdays are big restroom days. I have certain pills that I have to take on certain days.

SANDERSON: Certain days, okay. Yeah.

TRETTER: Yeah, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. And--

SANDERSON: No problem. Let me unhook you.

TRETTER: Okay. Sorry.

SANDERSON: Oh, it's all right. I'm gonna have to tell them to make sure that they edit this out before someone transcribes it. You know, 'cause, well, when we go to transcribe, we always put the headphones on, and since that fell and hit the ground, some poor--

TRETTER: Oh, I see. It's not about the thing about I have to go to the bathroom.

SANDERSON: Oh, no, no. Some poor intern will be sitting there and all of a sudden, "Ow!"

TRETTER: It was…that was the way it was when you listened to it at Admiral's Plot in a plane with…something would happen and you'd suddenly get this big burst of sound--

(2:49:00)

(3:03:45)

TRETTER: I'm just so happy to feel better.

Lisa: Yeah.

TRETTER: You know, 'cause I was in really bad shape this morning.

Lisa: Yup.

SANDERSON: But I could tell about half way through you started to perk up a little bit.

Lisa: That's what food does for you.

TRETTER: Well, that, and we started talking about boys.

Lisa: Okay then. [Laughs]

TRETTER: I'm just teasing.

SANDERSON: The look on her face was priceless.

TRETTER: Pardon me?

SANDERSON: I said the look on her face was priceless.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: I ain't gonna lie, I kind of chuckled a little bit. Like I said, we'll just continue on. And…'cause a lot of it is just more of the last question on that. And then pretty much the formal ending of it.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: Let me just kind of…just so that we have that one tape. And then that was pretty much the main thing.

TRETTER: Okay.

SANDERSON: Okay. Alright, so like we were saying, pretty much at the tail end of it. And one question I always like to end with: what does being a veteran mean to you?

TRETTER: [Chuckles, pauses] A better question is, "What does [being] a Vietnam veteran mean to you?" Because regardless of what people say and regardless of how often they say, "Oh, thank you for your service," Vietnam veterans are still Vietnam veterans. We're veterans from the war that we lost. We're the veterans that killed babies, you know, baby killers. And regardless of how much people say that had gone away, it hasn't. It's also, you know, I told you how I came to mistrust the government because of Nixon and because of the lies that they told about our stations and things like that. That distrust is even…is just as great and even maybe a little bit more so because, you know, I told you about how they would destroy our orders as soon as we got off the plane. So, other than the Ranger, there's no real record of me ever having been in Vietnam. Now, my medical records are filled with the words Agent Orange. Where else in the world would I have been exposed to Agent Orange? I don't live near a chemical plant. I never played near one

when I was a kid. You know, that sort of thing. My exposure to Agent Orange could have only come in one place: Vietnam. But because I have no orders, or existing orders from that time, because my records were redacted, you know, and things were taken out and thrown away and destroyed or saved, like you say, in a vault somewhere that nobody knows about. They even had a terrible time…I told you about the initial instance when I had thrombophlebitis and that, and they, because of the big fire that they had down in Kansas City, I guess it was, or--

SANDERSON: St. Louis.

TRETTER: St. Louis.

SANDERSON: St. Louis, yeah.

TRETTER: Yeah, it took them years to even find a copy of that record. I don't know where they actually found it, but one day they called me up, and they said, "Oh yeah, you did have this." You know, back then and everything like that. And even though I've got a chest full of medals, you know, all related to Vietnam and, you know, the whole thing, you realize that I am not considered…my problems, my medical problems are not considered service-connected. They do not recognize that I was ever in Vietnam and therefore they don't have to recognize that I was exposed to Agent Orange, even though the veterans' hospital treats me. And they keep telling me at the veterans' hospital, "Well, see we're not an official military thing. We're a…you know, a civilian hospital and everything like that." You'd never believe it, 'cause you know how when you were in the military you walked in a room and if there was an officer in the room, you waited to be asked to sit down? You did not just sit down and say, "Hey, how's it going George?" you know, or anything like that. You had to wait and ask. For the most part, everybody at the hospital is real[ly] good about that. They know that, you know, I have trouble with my standing and walking and everything like that, so they say, "Sit down." But there are still some officers over there, I'm thinking of one in particular in what's called the anti-coagulation clinic that I go to because of the blood clots that I get due to Agent Orange, that I walk in that office and regardless of how long…and I have to go there every couple of weeks because they test my, what they call INRs to see how my blood is clotting and how much it isn't and everything like that. But he's an officer and he never ever asks me. I have to stand the whole time I'm in that office. And he's got chairs all over in his office, but, no, he wouldn't think to, you know, have just an enlisted person sit down. You know. And you mention that to people and they say, "Oh, no that can't be. Nobody would do that here." You know. They have…they used to have buses that went right up

to the hospital and you could jump off the bus…not jump. Not me. But you'd get off the bus and walk through the doors, you know, either at the outpatient or at the visitors' entrance. Then they decided, Minnesota…and rightly so, and it's a good thing. They put light rail in. Problem is [that] the light rail station for the veterans' hospital is five and a half blocks from the veterans' hospital. So it doesn't matter if you're on crutches or on a cane or if you're crawling on your hands and knees, you have to walk that distance yourself. And you say, "Well can't you send a wheelchair to get me?" No, because of insurance reasons. The VA hospitals insurance does not extend to the light rail. So there's not even a phone out there that you can call and say, “Come and help me because I can’t make it.” It's forty degrees below zero, you know, and I can barely walk. I'll freeze to death before I get there. No dice. You have to walk it. You know. And then of course if you’ve ever…you’ve probably never been in the VA hospital in Minnesota. Their hallways are not hallways, they are actually a block or longer for most of them. You know, and so you’re one exam will be at M3 which is the end of the M-hallway, and then the other one will be on the third floor, and then the other one will be on D2. And so you’ve gotta walk all the way back, go down a floor, you know, 'cause there's only center elevators and outpatient elevators and things like that. So, being a Vietnam veteran is really not…it's not special. It's not special. Like I say, it's…it does not bring joy into your life. It does not make it a happy life. You know, it's not something…"Oh gee whiz, I'm a veteran and isn’t this wonderful?" I mean, I've been treated more nicely and kinder in the weekend that I've been here, in the week I've been here than any other time since I got out of the service. And not that I was treated with that much kindness when I was in the service. Hell no. But, I mean, this is the nicest I've ever been treated as a veteran. You know, and, [sniffles] you know, kind of, thank you for that. You know, it's just…it's not…you know, and you wouldn’t believe the number of times I ask myself, you know, if I'd had just done things differently when I was getting out of high school and found a way to go to college and found the money to go to college and everything like that and not been exposed to Agent Orange and not…you know, I mean, there's a lot of things in my life that I would have missed out on, but I'd probably be healthier today. I'd probably be running around more and everything like that. My family is long-lived, you know, for the most part. A few heart problems that we have problems with, but you know…and things like that. But being a Vietnam veteran is no…you know, we certainly…I don't have a Tom Brokaw out there that's writing about, you know, the somewhat greatest generation. You know, we were the lost generation. The people that liked rock music better than Bob Hope and you know. It's just not there. There are enough other things in my life that are happy and that make me happy and keep me going, but you know, being a veteran is not

something special as far as I'm concerned. It's more of a burden than anything else. And of course, you know, going back and forth to the hospital, you know, basically every week for one thing or another, you know, whether it's this test or that test. You know, and they're very nice to me with these experimental drug programs. I like those [laughs] but that's usually because then they have lots of money and the drug company is paying for it. So before when I had to really struggle with walking from the light rail to the hospital, all of a sudden now that I'm in this drug program, they're nice enough to schedule my experimental drug meetings and tests and things like that--[clears throat] excuse me--on the same days as I have my other appointments at the VA hospital, which then means that, because the drug company is paying for it, they send a DAV van for me. So I don't have to do the walking anymore and the struggling because the DAV van picks me up at my door at Episcopal Homes and drops me off, you know, at either the outpatient or the visitor's entrance. You know, and everything like that. So they're nice, and they pay us the magnificent sum of seven dollars and seventeen cents every time we come in for the drug program from the drug company. And they give us a food voucher so we can go down to the cafeteria and have lunch while we're at the hospital. But you know, you have to over-order because otherwise you don't get change back from the food voucher, so you always order more so you know, I end up giving them an extra fifty cents or something 'cause I've overcharged. You know, whatever they need. Or a dollar, two dollars. And interestingly enough, the food at the VA hospital isn't that bad. But don't get the salads 'cause they weight the salads and I have a friend of mine…a friend from the Civil Air Patrol, first time he came to visit me and ate at the cafeteria and…he ate at the cafeteria, and he got a salad. And of course he's kind of a big guy and got a great big salad, and it cost him like seventeen dollars or something like that 'cause the salad weighed so much. You know, practically broke the scale.

SANDERSON: Yeah, I've seen that stuff. Yeah, it's…the hospital I used to work at while I was still going to school…you promote us, you want us to be healthy yet you make us weigh our salads. That's not a good thing. Yeah, no one ever ate the salad. The only time they ever ate the salad was during holiday meals, only because they gave us a little bitty cup; they gave you basically five pieces of lettuce and a cherry tomato and that was about it.

TRETTER: Yeah, and now they're on this health kick so there's a lot of things that they're getting rid of or that suddenly is no longer available and that. They used to have these huge trays of fudge. And I don't buy a lot of fudge. You know, I mean, I'm not a fanatic. I had too much of it as a kid. My mom used to, at Christmas time, make pans and pans and pans of it.

But the veterans always had these huge trays of fudge. All of a sudden those have pretty much all disappeared now. They're not there anymore because fudge is not healthy, you know, and the salt and pepper disappears and the this and the that and pretty soon, you know. And like I say there are so many things I'm restricted on from eating anyway. You know, and so. Yeah, I don't think they've had a real pat of butter in that cafeteria since about 1958. So it's whatcha-call-it. But I can't in truthfulness say that I'm real[ly] happy about being a vet. It's no…it's much more of a burden than it is a blessing. So, except for you guys. You know.

SANDERSON: Well, we're glad at least we…and that's one of the things that we always tell people when you come here, we want you to be…we want you to be the star. And a lot of times, unfortunately, it's happened where we've had…individuals are not treated right. You know, specifically a lot of the stuff with, especially in your line of work, with the…on the CTI side. The fact that they don't have that listed is, you know…I'm a firm believer [that] sometimes you gotta have some secrets, you know, through the government, but they should never deny the person for doing the job that the country asked them to do.

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: And for them to basically deny you services and to deny that you were a part of Vietnam when you weren't…well, when you actually were, just to [redact] a couple pieces of paper, you know, they can always…they should be able to at least say, "Yes, you were there." You know, now we don't need to say why--

TRETTER: Well, I mean it's just logical. To me it's logical. I mean, how else do I get exposure to Agent Orange? Where in the hell else did I get the medals from? I didn't go out and mint them, you know, myself.

SANDERSON: Well, there are some people doing that stuff nowadays. The whole stolen valor thing.

TRETTER: Think they could get me a Defense of China? [Laughs]

SANDERSON: They probably could. [Laughs]

TRETTER: They probably could.

SANDERSON: All right. There's…yeah. There's--

TRETTER: That was just such a beautiful medal. That's why I like it. You'd see it in the PXs and things like that. I mean, they weren't for sale, but they'd say this is the ribbon that you need for this medal.

SANDERSON: Right. Definitely. So, well, at this point in time, I don't…I think we've hit pretty much everything on there. Was there anything that you feel we missed or that you would like to add?

TRETTER: Well, like I said, just, thank you, because, you know, this is the first time I've ever really talked about or told the…my story. You know, very, very seldom, very little. You know, even people that I've lived with and had relationships with. 'Cause I used to have a lot of problems with, like I said, my startle reflex. One of the things that I earned…learned early on after coming out of the military was that I almost always, and even to this day still, sleep with the television on, because if I start having I guess you'd call them flashback dreams, or something like that, of something I don't want to remember, if the television is on, I can wake myself up and I can orient myself right away. It isn't something that lasts, you know. And I used to have people that I've had relationships with that would talk about, you know, the night terrors and thing like that, that they would do what they could, you know, for me, but it was still a reality thing, and so I found out that if I just turn the television on... And of course, you've gotta kinda look at the schedule ahead of time because you don't want the movie channel to switch to *Apocalypse Now*. [Laughs]

SANDERSON: Right, right. The last thing you need to do is have a flashback during…hear Robert Duvall like, "You smell that? I love the smell of napalm in the morning." That's probably not what you want to hear when you're walking up trying to orient yourself.

TRETTER: And, you know, I've never seen the end of that movie. I went to it with a friend of mine and I walked out in the middle and waited for him in the lobby. I couldn't deal with it. There's been some of the other Vietnam movies that I have watched. Generally I've avoided them. You know, I haven't…I just haven't wanted to deal with them. I don't want to remember. It's like you were saying, you know, about remembering that stuff and just not wanting to. I really don't want to remember most of it. You know? So I guess you get selective memory in that. But this is about the most I've ever talked about it to anyone or anywhere or anything. You now, a few things slip out here and there I'm sure.

SANDERSON: Well we definitely greatly appreciate you coming out and talking to us, especially coming all the way, taking time out of your--

TRETTER: My busy retired life? [Laughs]

SANDERSON: Hey, there's nothing wrong with that.

TRETTER: I work mostly with my stamp collection and serving my cat who is…he is very demanding.

SANDERSON: I hear you on that. Same way with my dog. So, well--

TRETTER: Yeah.

SANDERSON: We greatly appreciate it.

TRETTER: Well, thank you.

SANDERSON: Thank you very much.

TRETTER: Oh, no, thank you.

SANDERSON: And if no one else has said this, welcome home.

TRETTER: Oh.

SANDERSON: There we go. And generally what we always do is we quote/unquote coin you here--