

Dick Durrance

August 17, 2015

Part 1

Interviewed by Edward Sanderson

Transcribed by Unknown

Edited by Leah Cohen

Sanderson: Thank you very much, Sir, so I'm start off with the beginning I'm Edward Sanderson with the Pritzker Military Museum and Library today is August 17th 2015 and today we are talking with Richard Durrance.

Durrance: Dick...Dick Durrance.

Sanderson: Dick Durrance.

Sanderson: A member of...

Durrance: Yeah...

Sanderson: The Department of Army Special Photographic office from 1967 to 1968, and today we are doing an interview. Thank you for joining us, today!

Durrance: It's my pleasure.

Sanderson: So we're... well, kinda going into when before you had joined the military: what were some of the things that helped push you to get towards...towards being a photographer or interest in photography?

Durrance: It was kind of a genetic ...I'm... my interest in photography was kind of a genetic implant. My father had been a professional photographer before he became a documentary filmmaker and my mother, after marrying my father and acquiring his interest or catching her interest in photography from him, went on to be a photojournalist shooting assignments and publishing pictures in magazines like *Time* and *Life* and *Sports Illustrated* and *Holiday Magazine*. So I was raised in the world of photography, but I really never thought of myself as a photographer until my sophomore year at Dartmouth, when I came across a book by Ansell Adams called *Eloquent Light*, and instead of working on the English paper I was supposed to be doing, I was intrigued by the book and just, you know... I kept thinking, "Man, I can I can see myself up in the mountains, taking pictures just like Ansell Adams." And so that's where the interest was sparked. And then about a year later, a group of us put together a canoe trip to paddle canoes

down the Danube River. In 1964, the Soviet Union had sealed off much of Eastern Europe from Western Europe and the United States, and so *National Geographic* couldn't get their photographers and writers into this... into those countries -- the eastern European countries -- that the Danube flowed through. Well, because my mother had sold some pictures to National Geographic the year before, we were able to get an introduction to the director of photography - - guy named Bob Gilka. And so we put together a proposal and took it down and presented it to Bob, and he was delighted, 'cause he couldn't get his photographers into those countries. So he gave us six cameras... loaned us six cameras, and gave us four hundred rolls of film and said, "Boys, I want you to shoot, shoot, shoot." And so having at that point shot maybe twenty five rolls of film in my life, my first assignment was for *National Geographic* magazine. Well...

Sanderson: Nice.

Durrance: Yeah. [chuckles] When I was in college, I was a member of the ski team and competing in four events: downhill, slalom, jumping, and cross country and so my winters... they sent us the cameras in January. My winters were really packed, 'cause I was practicing slalom on Monday morning; you know, downhill in the afternoon; cross country Tuesday morning; jumping Tuesday afternoon, and then racing Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I didn't have any time, and taking full load of classes, I didn't have time to do much shooting. So, come spring, I hadn't gotten much done, and Gilka called up and said, "Dick, we haven't made a lot of progress here over the winter. I'd like you to go to the Missouri workshop," which was the first of the photographic workshops that did ... since sprouted, and are all over the country, like the main photo workshop in Santa Fe, the Anderson Ranch in Aspen, there are many. And so, I went out there and, the faculty for this thing were some of the top photo editors and directors of photography's in the magazines and newspapers all over the United States, including Bob Gilka, and the director of photography at *Life* magazine. And so I go out there, and I'm out there about two o'clock the first afternoon. I run into Gilka and he says, "Dick, how's it going?" I say, "Bob, I'm getting some great stuff." I say, "But I have this extraordinary roll of film in my camera. I must be on frame 72, and it's still going!" Well, he looked at me... he said, "Let me see that camera." He took the camera and he held it, and showed me... see he released a shutter, and then as he advanced the film, he said, "You see this little knob over here this one on the left?" He said, "If that's not going around, your film ain't going nowhere." [chuckles] I had exposed... the film hadn't hooked. I shot all 72 masterpieces on one frame!

Sanderson: [laughs]

Durrance: [chuckles] And that was the start of my photographic career with *National Geographic Magazine*. It was not an auspicious start! [laughs]

Sanderson: Sounds like... it sounds like... looks like you definitely got used to the camera shutter and the film.

Durrance: I did, and you know... and on the Danube trip, you know, we did manage to come back with enough pictures for them to publish a forty-five page cover story; but it was not without mishap. I mean there was one... [chuckles] one day, we were sweeping around a bend in the river – just, kind of floating -- and all of a sudden --we'd had three days of rain and just we hadn't been able to shoot anything -- all of a sudden, this cloud started to break up, and then just at one point where the other three canoes were perfectly lined up with a giant castle called Dürnstein, the sun broke out of the clouds, leaving a shaft of golden light on the three other canoes. I grabbed my camera -- 'click' -- I got one picture -- one frame -- before it went back in the clouds, and I'm screaming at the top of my lungs, "Guys, I just got the cover picture!" And I would love to be able to show you that cover picture, but what I got was a black frame. Yeah, the lens cap was on! [chuckles]

Sanderson: [laughs] Wow.

Durrance: I mean, I've never... I've never forgotten. I still miss that picture. Any time I'm kinda slacking off, or not doing something I need to do, all I have to do is remember that picture and I try even harder. So... but we did... as a result of that... we did come back with enough pictures for the story that turned out to be the most popular story they published that year. Not because of the pictures -- not because of the brilliant pictures -- but because it was a very good idea, and it was not my idea. Dan Dimancescu is who came up with the idea. But people just loved this idea of nine American kids paddling through Eastern Europe. You know, back behind the Iron Curtain, in the Soviet sphere, and we were the first Americans these people had seen in thirty years -- first outsiders, really -- and so it was an enormously popular story. And as a result of the story, then Gilka asked both Chris Knight -- the other photographer -- and I to come as interns the next summer. And so I did a story on Monticello as an intern, like you're interning now. And then... and then the draft was looming and I had... so, I did some research and I had found the DASPO unit, and I'd written Colonel Halloran. But, you know, I'm just another kid out there writing him. He never responded, and I

had no realistic hope that he would. And so, I got drafted and went through basic. And as I was going... as I was drafted, I knew, by then, I really wanted to be a photographer, and so I decided I would try and document my two years in the army as best I could and keep a photographic journal. Now, have you seen the book *Where War Lives*?

Sanderson: Yes.

Durrance: Okay, good. Well that... well that's were... that's what came of that effort. And, miraculously, I did get assigned ... eventually got assigned to DASPO and [chuckling]... God, I don't know if I should tell this story... yeah, I should. So, I finally got into this unit and I was thrilled. And so when I got picked up at the airport by the clerk typist, when we arrived in Honolulu -- where I was in the Pacific version of it -- he was driving. He says...

Sanderson: And that was over at Fort Schafter, correct?

Durrance: Yes, that's right. And so, the clerk typist was driving me to the post and he said, "Dick, I'm gonna get I'm ETS [expiration term of service]-ing in five days. Do you want to be the clerk typist?" Well, I had just come from being a clerk typist for the nuclear storage facility, and I did not want to be a clerk typist, I wanted to be a photographer. So we get to the base, and the office was up on the second story, and I walk I sit down and Sergeant Bridgham was there, who was the... you know, I can't remember... I think he was the sergeant major by then. He might have been an E-8 [? 0:13:03] but I think he was a sergeant major. He says "Hi Durrance. Here, type this." Well, I knew what he was... he wanted to see if I could type to be the clerk typist, and I really didn't wanna, and that's when I made what is still the most stupid remark I have ever made. I sat down at the typewriter and I went [very slowly] 'plunk, , plunk, plunk, plunk,' and now, he had my records. He knew I'd just been a clerk typist, right? I didn't think of that at that moment. I just was desperate not to be a clerk typist. And finally I said... he says, "Come on, Durrance. College boy like you -- you can type." I said, "No, Sergeant, I always paid somebody to do it!" Well, now that was truly a stupid thing to say. I've never topped it, really. And, well, he knew what I was doing. He knew I was lying, and he was going to punish me for it. So he sent me to typing school for ten weeks [chuckling] just like the frickin' guy, 'cause I could type sixty words a minute you know. Not without several errors, but I could type that fast. And during those ten weeks I would go around and photograph in my time off. And I'd show Sergeant Bridgham the pictures, and he eventually could see that I did have a knack for taking pictures. So finally, he relented, and he had punished

me -- I had it coming. And I knew that, I accepted that, and that's just the work through it. And then he sent me to Vietnam. To Thailand and Vietnam. And on that first or second trip, I happened to catch what was selected as the best picture taken in that quarter in the Army, and thus the ended my... the threat of clerk typing. [laughs]

Sanderson: And was that picture taken in Vietnam or Thailand?

Durrance: In Vietnam. It was in the A Chau Valley. It was a picture taken at dusk, with quad forties firing into the valley from a little base up on a hilltop, and shot at dusk, so the tracers were these arcing out into the valley. It turned out to be a pretty picture.

Sanderson: Nice.

Durrance: So, that's kinda how I got to DASPO.

Sanderson: That definitely sounds like you had a very interesting journey getting into the unit.

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: And so, kinda back tracking a little bit: were you drafted, or did you join?

Durrance: I was drafted.

Sanderson: Drafted. What year was that?

Durrance: I waited for the draft. Obviously, I knew it was coming, but I just waited for it

Sanderson: Now, did you... what year were you drafted?

Durrance: '66. July of '66.

Sanderson: Okay, and then-

Durrance: So in the year from... go ahead.

Sanderson: Well, had you already finished your degree at Dartmouth, or...

Durrance: I graduated. Yes, I graduated in 1965, and I spent the winter of '65, '66 shooting for the ski magazines, because I'd been a skier at Dartmouth. And so I did a couple of assignments. One for *Ski Magazine* and one for *Skiing Magazine*. And so that's how I spent... that next winter working as a photographer shooting through *Ski Magazine*.

Sanderson: When you were drafted, did they try not... did they not want to make you an officer or was it a-

Durrance: They did want to make an officer, and I'd looked into various ways of doing it. And I realized that I didn't want to be an officer, because I wanted to be a photographer, and if I were an officer I would be in charge of photographers, but I wouldn't be taking pictures and... it just... I was really determined to document the military experience. Because, you know, I learned in college -- in history courses -- that... that war has been with since... for 2,000 years, since the Peloponnesian War. It... and I wanted to try and understand why. And so I really was determined to try and document that, and so I just would not sign up for OCS [Officer Candidate School].

Sanderson: Nice. 'Cause definitely looking at, from that... from your book, *Where War Lives*, and then also some of the other pictures that we've been able to find... with that you...that we know that you've taken, specifically, some very, very nice photographs. Some of them are-

Durrance: Oh, thank you.

Sanderson: I'm just looking at them, it's just like... wow. You can... it's almost like you captured... where you can tell you captured the emotion on a lot of it. There was one, specifically, that we're actually using... we're actually using quite a few of yours in the exhibit, but there's one of ...a looks like a soldier that was in a bunker in a... has dirt all over his face and it was like you snapped it at the right point, where you could tell were the guy was very exhausted, but--

Durrance: Yeah, yeah. I think that's the... yeah, from page 62? He's actually in an APC [armored personnel carrier].

Sanderson: An APC.

Durrance: Yeah, and we had just been in... we were in the midst of a very intense firefight at that point. And I... there's an interesting side story to this, is that I shot eleven rolls of film on my DASPO Rolleiflex that were in my pocket, and just after I took this picture, a kid just one APC over from us, got hit. And so I ran over to help pick him up and help him get back to a trench, and doing that I lost the eleven rolls of film that I'd shot for DASPO, which was most of the battle. And I have no idea I... only when I got to the trench did I realize that it was gone, and I sure as hell wasn't going to go back into the firefight to try and find it. But I don't think Sergeant Bridgham ever really believed that I had lost that film. I don't know if

he ever believed it, but I did. It just fell out of my damn pocket. I'm very sorry those pictures did not survive.

Sanderson: 'Cause there definitely would have been a ... very interesting aspect...

Durrance: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Sanderson: In the firefight, a lot of times, depending on the situation, either there...sometimes the pictures... well, there's not that many pictures during actual firefights, and a lot of times due to just the people were trying to take cover make sure everything's good to go.

Durrance: Well yeah, and particularly since we were shooting with Rolleiflexs, which meant you had to stand up to take the friggin' picture! And then they did eventually change and go to cameras where you didn't have to... there weren't twin lenses where you had to raise up to shoot, or lay on your back and hold the camera up, that could actually look through. They did finally switch us over, but after I was there.

Sanderson: That's good that they... so that's definitely gonna help reduce you guys... Now, when you first started out -- kinda backtracking a little bit -- now, since you already had your degree in photography did you ever--

Durrance: Oh, no, no, no, no, my degree was... the truth is my degree was... I was a ski racing major, with a minor in art. There were zero photographic classes offered at Dartmouth at that time. I got no training.

Sanderson: No training during that time. Okay, so then, when you joined the Army, did they ever send you to the unit in... were there Fort Monmouth where all the rest of them had received their training there?

Durrance: No. Well, they... because they knew I had done the story, there's another piece to it, which is that my father had done some films for the Army, and he worked with a colonel named Colonel James G. Avery, who is a colonel in the Pentagon at that time. And when I got my orders to go to Vietnam as an ammo humper -- I actually wasn't even going as an infantry man -- as an ammo humper, my father called Colonel Avery and said, "Dickie's just been assigned being an ammo humper in Vietnam." And Colonel Avery said, "Geez, that doesn't make much sense. He's a *National Geographic* photographer." And so dad told him about DASPO, and he talked to Colonel Halloran, as I understand it. Now, I don't have a clear documented trail here, but my sense is that Colonel Avery went to Colonel

Halloran, and Colonel Halloran said, "Well, sure. I'd love to have a *National Geographic* photographer." And so he put in for me, so I came in known... it was known that I had done work as a photographer. And so they... I didn't have to go to the training.

Sanderson: So, when you joined and you went into boot camp... well, basic... and that's when they posted you into DASPO with the Colonel?

Durrance: No, no, no, no. The... when I... when I was inducted, I had decided I really wanted to document this whole thing, so I started photographing from the moment I walked into the induction station. I didn't... I was not assigned a DASPO platoon until after basic, after AIT [Advanced Individual Training], after being assigned to this nuclear storage unit. Only then did I get switched over. So when I came into the Army, I was just determined to document it, so I photographed everything from the moment we walked into the induction station. I actually turned around while I was being sworn in and took a picture over my shoulder that's in the book. And then, when I got to basic training, I went up to our company commander, Captain Fraish, and explained to him that I was a professional photographer and that I would really like to document the process of going through basic training as I went through it, because as far as I knew nobody had ever done that. And I showed him the copy of the *National Geographic* story and he [indecipherable:24:21], and I had done a little bit of the ski stuff, and he said yes. So I actually photographed basic training as I went through it, and so I had... I shot two hundred rolls of film going through basic and AIT, and then when I got assigned to DASPO, then I just continued to journal. I would shoot my army assignments and then I would take pictures, when I could, with my own camera.

Sanderson: What was that like being able to photograph basic and AIT during a time when--

Durrance: It was... it was really hard work, because I was basically doing double duty. I mean there were times I had permission to step out of formation and take a picture and step back in but, you know, it's hard to get back in step and march in column, and so I'd jump back in. And one time I was... it was 100 degrees, July down in Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and I just couldn't get back in step, and, I mean Sergeant Dennis just got sick of it. He came up behind me and whapped me on the head with the sticks that the Dis [drill instructors] carry. Blew my mind! I mean it startled the heck out of me, so... and, you know, and some of the sergeants had a little bit of trouble with it, but not much. Basically the Captain said, "let him shoot," and so they let me shoot. And it was a very interesting process to try and document this transformation of these, you know, maggots...

civilian maggots into... military... into warriors. And learning that the kill training was a psychological shock for many of us, but crucial. Had to be done. And I'm glad to have the training. It stood me in good stead ever since.

Sanderson: I was... in a... one... 'cause it looks like, now that we know with your back... some of your back story that you know you... sounds like you went a different direction than most of the other people in DASPO when it come down to your actual training... did that once you got into there and then into DASPO and then you were when you were in Vietnam and Thailand, did that help give you a different edge are to When it came down to taking the photographs... in a... in actual combat help you out any?

Durrance: Well, being a soldier rather than a civilian photographer meant I was one of the soldiers and that certainly made it easier to establish a working relationship with them . And being a DASPO photographer rather than, you know, a unit photographer ... because we just... we traveled all over the country. We were based in Saigon and the villa. We worked in all four corps, so I saw much more of the country than I ever would've if I had just been a PIO photographer with one of the units; 'Cause I saw I saw everything from fighting in the Delta, wading through the swamps, riverines, and forests, mountains, Montagnards, DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] we saw it all. And so I had... I had free unfettered access... I was not in any kind of chain of command when I was on assignment. I was, in effect, as free as a civilian photographer... press corp photographer. We had press and credentials, so yeah, it was, we certainly...had good access and interesting assignments

Sanderson: With that... what was it like being basically...being professionally trained soldier and with you having more combat experience versus... well , having more of the combat training versus the other guys, what was it like being... working directly with the Pentagon and a whole 'nother chain of command, and basically being on your own? What was that like with the interactions with the unit?

Durrance: Well, it was terrific, because they accepted us. We had sort of... they had the sense that they should take care of us, 'cause we were the DASPO team. And so we they were certainly... took good care of us. We could get on ply planes and everything, and I loved that fact that... it certainly suited me better to be outside of the chain of command when I was on the assignments. Of course, I was not out of the chain of command when we were in the units in the villa or back in Hawaii, but on out there they didn't... we had the same access as the press, so

the fact that I was an enlisted man made no difference for the most part. We didn't wear insignias at all, as most soldiers at that point, didn't.

Sanderson: And in the process of taking the photographs -- especially since you had already done more of a professional... you had already... you were published professional photographer -- at that time, did you ever feel that the Pentagon ever micromanaged on what you could and could not do? Or was it just more of a--

Durrance: No it was... no, I never... I never got the sense of being micro-managed. What I did learn, which was a very painful lesson, is that everything that they didn't select got burned, and so that, if I had saw a picture that I really cared about, I made sure to try and get it with my camera after I got it with the military camera. After I'd shoot it with the DASPO camera, I would be sure and get one with my camera, because on my first assignment I took a picture... You know, in the book there's that picture the kid with the skull on his pup tent?

Sanderson: Uh, yes.

Durrance: Okay, well that picture...that's the Army... that's the one I got with my camera... with the army camera... the picture I shot first was a picture of the kid with the skull and behind him, you could see there was this big banner, because the camp was set up in a basin, with a big banner that said, "Camp Warrior." And so I sent... I shot that with the Army camera, then I just did the tight shot with mine, and I learned that that picture -- not surprisingly -- was not selected by the Army, so it got burned. And so, from then on, I made sure that if I wanted to end up with a picture, I would also shoot it with my camera.

Sanderson: That was actually one of the... one of the questions I was... when I was going through, that was about the infantrymen, 4th Division, Camp Warrior, and Pleiku.

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: What was some of the thoughts going through your mind when you were taking that picture?

Durrance: Okay, which one? The kid with the skull?

Sanderson: Yes.

Durrance: Well, what was going through my mind is this... is... we're, in combat, this is... it's kill or be killed, and the taking of trophies is a natural expression of that. That is part of what of the warrior creed, that is part that kind of stuff. I wasn't raised

that way. Most of us weren't. The vast, vast, vast majority of us were not raised that way. But we were trained, and they unleashed that streak of violence in the kill training, and basic training, as they had to... and that was... that's where it was expressed in a way that was the most graphic expression of the... that I saw of the fact that we were trained to kill. In all my two years of shooting in the Army is... that set it as nothing else did.

Sanderson: It's definitely a very, very powerful image on there. Did you know did you ever find out where the skull came from?

Durrance: You know, I didn't. I didn't, and that was a breakdown in my journalistic instincts. I was kind of, so shocked when I saw it, I just took the two pictures and that was it. I wish I had.

Sanderson: Definitely, it would've been interesting to find out.

Durrance: Oh yeah, love to have heard where the kid was from and stuff.

Sanderson : Now, in... during that time when you where in country taking pictures, did you ever have some of the officers from the units that you were with... did they ever try to micromanage you or say, "Hey, I don't want you to take this. You need to take this."

Durrance: No, no I never, it... sensed any of that. Rarely, was there an officer even with us.

Sanderson: Now from the... according to the roster that we have, you are from... you were with DASPO from 67 to 68 and--

Durrance: Uh huh.

Sanderson: --in the civic area, did they ever try to move you to the Pentagon, or over to the Panama Detachment during-

Durrance: No.

Sanderson: That timeframe there, like you're -

Durrance: No.

Sanderson: --you're in Hawaii your hanging?

Durrance: Yup, never a question.

Sanderson: And then, how many tours... well kinda going back when... what was your first impression of the villa when you first got to Vietnam?

Durrance: A whole lot better than barracks!

[Both laugh]

Durrance: No, it was a nice facility. It was terrific, we had a little terrace up on the third floor where we can sit and have a beer after when we got back from an assignment. No, it was it was pretty good digs.

Sanderson: Actually, that was one of... there was a ... we were talking with um... a Stewart Barbee, the other day.

Durrance: He is.

Sanderson : And, and...

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: And one of the things he would always do when he came back in the field, he'd go across the street to the bathhouse and go and get the massage and all that. Did you ever go over to that area, was that was that something that was very common for you guys go over that area or when you first came?

Durrance: I think I remember one time I went over once.

Sanderson: How many tours did... how many times did you go to Vietnam on a TBY [temporary duty assignment] order?

Durrance: Yeah, I think it was two trips. One in the fall of '67, and then in January... February of '68, even into March, 'cause I was there for the Tet offensive in 68, so I had a second trip there. I also went to Korea on one trip and I went to Thailand on one trip.

Sanderson: Now uh... getting into the... in '68, during the Tet offensive-

Durrance: Uh hum.

Sanderson: Where exactly where you at during that time frame, during the Tet offensive

Durrance: I was in Đà Nẵng the day the Tet Offensive erupted, and in fact the pictures at the back of the book -- of the burnt bodies and all that fighting -- most of that was taken the first day of the Tet Offensive. I was in Đà Nẵng and that... dawn

that morning I went and marched out through the little village, just off the base, and we followed an ARVN unit out into the patties, and after a while it just happened that a *Time* correspondent was a classmate of mine from college, and so the two of us followed this unit out, and then after a while realized -- when we came like that dead woman with a basket -- then they headed out into the the rice patties and we turned around and headed back. As we headed back through the village, it was eerily quiet. I mean just dead quiet and all. Then we... it finally dawned on us the ARVN or [rather] the NVAs [North Vietnamese Army] that the ARVN were chasing weren't out in the patties. They were in the tunnels right underneath our feet. And so we kinda picked up the pace, and without trying seem like we were alarmed and got back to the base as quick as we could. [laughs] it was a very scary, very frightening moment, and I... the truth is I didn't think that they were down there, but that's my guess, 'cause it was just deathly quiet.

Sanderson: And that would definitely be a little eerie. All of a sudden it's like, okay, something's up.

Durrance: Oh, yeah.

Sanderson: Make... definitely makes your heart want to skip a couple beats.

Durrance: Yes, no kiddin'.

Sanderson: During that timeframe, there's a picture of... you took of injured civilians fleeing from their homes during the Tet offensive.

Durrance: Yes.

Sanderson: Was that picture--

Durrance: Yup.

Sanderson: --taken in the same village or was that at a different area?

Durrance: I think that's the same... that was the same village. That was the village we were coming through. As we were going out, they were streaming in.

Sanderson: And that picture was taken during that time when you guys were...

Durrance: First day of the Tet offensive.

Sanderson: Who was... was it US military personnel that provided the medical care for 'em, or was it uh...

Durrance: I don't know

Sanderson: They're local, or not sure?

Durrance: I don't know. I'm guessing it was the US military that provided the medical, but I don't know that.

Sanderson: There's also another picture of ... it was with the 1st Air Cavalry LZ...

Durrance: Uh hum.

Sanderson: Quat...quin... Quảng Trị province... was that around the same timeframe, or was that a little... was that little bit later on?

Durrance: What... do you have the book, there? Can you tell me what page that's on?

Sanderson: Uh... I don't have the actual book, I just have the-

Durrance: Oh.

Sanderson: -print out of the pictures. I... it was-

Durrance: Okay.

Sanderson: He's an African American soldier, in the... and in the background-

Durrance: In the trench?

Sanderson: Hmm?

Durrance: He's in a trench?

Sanderson: He's walking along the road, and it looks like their moving according...

Durrance: Oh, yeah. That was up near the DMZ, so it was on that trip when the... when the Tet Offensive broke. It's probably before the Tet Offensive broke... but just before it.

Sanderson: Yeah, 'cause the caption has "LZ Stud." Was you guys... were heading towards that landing zone in that area?

Durrance: Okay, well. Then... Yeah I don't remember where LZ Stud was. It was a ... I'm not... I'm not so sure that was the Tet Offensive then... I do know the picture you're thinking of... just not hitting.

Sanderson: 'Cause there was also another one where you had taken a picture of an artillery man who was sitting next to... he was sitting on... you know, sitting on the tire holding one of the guns, and was looked like he was reading a letter from home.

Durrance: Right.

Sanderson: So looks like that would've been taken around the same timeframe.

Durrance: It most likely was... you just... oh... let me just... try swapping...I know the picture you're thinking of, but not hitting it. Oh, I know. There it is, yeah. Number 495. [pause] You know, what we should do... [pause] March of '68. 1st Air Cal, LZ Stud. Okay, let me take my... another computer and we'll try and look up LZ Stud...

Sanderson: Okay.

Durrance: To find out, 'cause I don't remember where it was

Sanderson: I want to say it was in the Quảng.... the Quảng Tri 'cause I... I'm trying to find it... but beforehand... but I could not find the exact position of it.

Durrance: Hold on, just got back. I didn't hear it, all right, say again?

Sanderson: Tried to find it myself but I was not able to.

Durrance: Okay, tell me again... we'll see if I hit it. I may or may not. [pause] It was north of Ca Lu, in Quang Tri province. It...here it is. Here's what it says: April 4th '68. Okay, that's about when I was there except it was... North of Ca Lu in Quảng Tri province. Let me just quickly look at the map. [pause] See if that's ... okay... here we are... yes that was up near the DMZ, 'cause Quảng Tri province is north of Huế so that was up near the DMZ.

Sanderson: Oh, okay. Thanks.

Durrance: Now we know that.

Sanderson: In... in.. during that time after you... get my bearings back quick now that we... kinda looking back so it would've been... you would've been at Camp Warrior in the... Pleiku first, then moved into the Tet area near--

Durrance: No, no. Camp Warrior was earlier. That was a different trip the trip into... the highlands was a different trip.

Sanderson: Oh, okay... was that... that was the first trip you had went on?

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: In the fall of '67, kinda?

Durrance: Isn't that how that's stated in the captions?

Sanderson: Actually, they have 1968 for the Camp Warrior.

Durrance: Oh ok then it was in one of those the second trip. I was in Vietnam, but I don't think it was the same time I went to... I would've done a second... a trip to the highlands and then a trip the up to the DMZ. It is a long time ago I'm not absolutely certain about this either... happily, I had my... had the carbon copy of my captions that shot, 'cause I shot all this stuff for the Army, of course, and so I had those captions and went off of those 'cause I didn't look at these pictures for nineteen years.

Sanderson: For nineteen years.

Durrance: Yeah, but after I came back, nobody was much interested in them cause the war was so unpopular. Nobody was interested in a soldier's story, so I just put 'em away. Forgot about them, and then after I... when Oliver Stone's movie -- *The Platoon* -- came out, I realized that the time had come to go back to them. It took me a week to even find them, and that's when I started printing them up and realized there might be a book here and uh and that was in the late 80s.

Sanderson: Yeah and that was... that did definitely start to bring back more quote on quote, not so much popularity as much... definitely opened a lot of people's eyes, and people started going back and relooking at what actually happened in Vietnam, versus--

Durrance: You bet... I mean, it went from, "the war that shouldn't have been," to "this was a war that we were in," and recognition had started to build at that point for what we'd done.

Sanderson: Now did that... do you... would that... now kinda looking back, do you feel that they ever used any of your pictures for a... any type of propoganda for... or later on, do you think anyone might have taken those pictures and tried to use them against you or the military?

Durrance: I... you know, Ed, I have no idea what they did with those pictures. I never saw a single one of them anywhere published. I have no idea what ever came of how they used them. Zero.

Sanderson: What was it like when you decided to bring your copies of the photographs together, and when you came out with your book?

Durrance: Well, it was very cathartic. It was obviously an important and traumatic chapter of my life, and so going back through the pictures brought back a lot of memories. Telling... sharing them with people in the book, and in exhibits that were... the pictures were exhibited in many museums around the world, and so, you know, it was... it felt good to share, and let people know what that experience was. To let them know where war lives, that it's inside of ourselves.

Sanderson: You did a very good job on a lot these photographs, looking back....

Durrance: Well, thank you.

Sanderson: Wow. When you were out there, what was the troop morale like? 'Cause some of the photographs that you have that... that we've seen...some of them somewhat stoic looks on the faces, and then some of them there's actually a couple of... one of the photographs was actually... I've chuckled a little bit when I first saw it. What would you characterize as the morale, like while you're out there?

Durrance: Well, I think by the time the Tet Offensive erupted in '67, we thought we were fighting the good fight. But when the Tet Offensive erupted, it was clear we had not won the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. I mean the Tet Offensive... in eighty-eight different cities, a battalion or more of NVA or VC came up out of the cellars of the city. You can't hide a thousand people in these cities without the people supporting it. Can't be done. And so, you know, it was clear we had not won the hearts and minds of people, and that the war would probably never be won. That there was very little chance that we could prevail, and so the moral certainly plummeted after that.

Sanderson: And during that time, what was... what did they try to do to boost troop morale, or was there any effort to try to boost morale during when it started to plummet?

Durrance: Boy, that's a good question, um I don't... I ... I don't... no answer really comes to my mind, and it just means I've either repressed it, or forgotten it, or never saw it, and I don't know what which that is. I just... no answer comes to my head.

Sanderson: All right. And the reason why I asked that was 'cause there's one... one of the pictures of-

Durrance: The guys next door just started up a motor. I think I'm gonna have to move inside.

Sanderson: Okay.

Durrance: Yeah, he's starting it up again. Hold on I gotta move... can you hear that?

Sanderson: Uh, yes.

Durrance: Retreat! [laughs] Let's see how they... I'm gonna go down in the basement, but the signal might be weak down there. We'll try.

Sanderson: All right.

Durrance: Basically some days it works and some days it doesn't. How are we doing?

Sanderson: We're doing pretty good. Definitely, it's coming out pretty well.

Durrance: All right, well let's try it. I'm now down in my office. Okay, as we were.

Sanderson: Okay. Kinda going back like I was saying about the troop morale.

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: There's a picture of when you were at Camp Evens. It looked like...

Durrance: Yup.

Sanderson: There were a couple of pictures. Actually, there was a jazz group that you took a picture of.

Durrance: Yup, yup, yup.

Sanderson: And then, also, there was a pet... there's one, it was about the pet monkey and the-

Durrance: Yeah, don't you love that?

Sanderson: Enjoying the can of beer, you know. [laughs] That... I started cracking up a little bit when I saw that. I was sitting there... During that timeframe was more of... was it just more people were doing what they could to relax and enjoy themselves when they were not were not actively on patrol, or actively involved in operations during that timeframe?

Durrance: Yeah, it certainly... That they had down time, that's for sure at Camp Evans. They would work out of... Camp Evans was a big base. And so they would have R&R type things, there was a baseball game, and there was a pet monkey [laughing] and the jazz group and, there's also the... they were certainly handing out medals at that time, at which... you saw that other picture of the guy getting the medal, so yeah. I mean that we were trying to keep up normalcy as best we could out there, and it stood in stark contrast to the patrols and what happened on those.

Sanderson: And then, during that timeframe, would you have different soldiers approach you and ask for a photographs to be taken so they could...for you to take photographs of them to so they could send them back home, or was that something that you guys did--?

Durrance: Oh, sure.

Sanderson: Yeah.

Durrance: It would happen all the time. But we couldn't do it. We'd just explain to them: Look, this film goes straight to the Pentagon. We... there's nothing we can do about it. Well, what we would do is we take... use their camera and take a picture of them

Sanderson: Oh, nice.

Durrance: You know, happily do that.

Sanderson: So, you guys have quite a bit of uncredited photograph probably running around.

Durrance: Yeah, I'm sure we do [laughs].

Sanderson: I had an uncle that served in Vietnam, and it was one of those where...

Durrance: Yeah?

Sanderson: ... he had... he would send pictures back home of himself and nothing of anything else. Just more... to kind of... "Hey, I'm here. I'm still alive. You know, doing okay." 'Cause my grandmother would, like, "I want to see how you're doing," and she would always--

Durrance: [mumbles]

Sanderson: --request a photograph as much as a picture as much as she could with it.

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: And then, looking at it ... during that timeframe, how would you basically contextualize your service while you were out there? And what was it that you observed that others didn't, because of your role in DASPO?

Durrance: Rephrase the question, again.

Sanderson: Okay, well when you look at ... how would you describe how you observed the war by your role in DASPO? And looking through the lens of a camera, versus someone who would be looking at war through the iron sights of a weapon?

Durrance: Okay, the difference is that... there were two differences as a DASPO photographer. A, we saw all aspects of the war. We saw all four corps; we saw the generals; and we saw the grunts. So we saw... we had a much richer picture of the war than anyone in a single unit would have, but the profound difference is that we were observers. We were not taking lives. We were not killing people, and that's were so much of PTSD.... PTSD comes in, is the guilt over that. We weren't doing that. We were observers, and that's easier. A lot easier.

Sanderson: When looking at ... kind of looking back, what was the some of the... what was some of the pictures that you... or what is one or two photographs that you remember taking that, looking back, it... you kind of wish you hadn't of taken it, now that you can be objective... well, subject to the time, you had to be more objective in taking everything.

Durrance: No. There's nothing I regret taking. I was telling the story of war, and if I took a picture of it, it's part of the story. So, I have no pictures I regret.

Sanderson: Okay... and with that, what kind of... is there one picture or a couple of pictures that you that are... you would consider your favorite photographs that you took?

Durrance: Well, I think that... well, you know, I think the most telling pictures are the picture of the boots. You remember that?

Sanderson: Uh...

Durrance: Couple of boots, in the--

Sanderson: Oh, yes. Yes, I do remember. I don't have a...

Durrance: And the picture of the guy in the APC; the haunting look in his face. And the picture of the kid with the skull. [dog barks in background] And the picture of the women, the wounded women. That one's a very telling story. Those are the ones that come to mind, but I think most of all, I'm so glad I had the opportunity to have really taken a two year look at war. And, you know... so that I understand why it's... understand as well as we can... it still makes no sense, but I understand as well as we can where war lives, and why it's still with us, and why it will probably always be with us. And so it's the body of work that really communicates that message that insight.

Sanderson: One of the questions I always like to would definitely would like to ask: if, is... when someone comes to an exhibit featuring any photograph that you had ever taken, and that was used by DASPO or any type of photograph from that timeframe. What is it that you would like for them to take away from that photograph or from that exhibit.

Durrance: I would hope that the words that form in their mind are: Now, I understand,

Sanderson: And if you were physically standing there next to them, what would you tell them while they were looking at the photograph?

Durrance: I wouldn't. I would just ask them to look at the photograph. Let the photographs speak to them.

Sanderson: Outstanding. 'Cause a... definitely the photographs, they definitely speak for themselves on a lot of stuff. Looking, they always say a pictures worth a thousand words, guess there's quite a few of the photographs that you've taken that are worth a novel.

Durrance: [laughs]

Sanderson: Looking at-

Durrance: Well, you know what, it's interesting because only recently did I figure out that -- this has to do with my speaking -- is that what I've spent my life... I've spent my life as a visual storyteller. That's what I do. I tell pic... I tell stories with pictures. I'm not a visionary, I'm not a physicist, for sure. I'm a visual storyteller and that's what these pictures do, and so I certainly... I do use words when I use... show them in the... in my talk, and I talk about it, but ultimately if I were standing with somebody at a museum, as I have, I don't... I just, it... I don't really talk. I just let them look.

Sanderson: Nice... now ... and is that... Well, once you got out of the Army -- that was in '68?

Durrance: Eight, yup.

Sanderson: Did you go back directly to *National Geographic* or, during that timeframe, did you take some time off before you got right back into it?

Durrance: I was on... I got out of the Army in July, I believe. I know I was inducted in July, so I presume I got out in that summer of '68. Within weeks I was on assignment for *National Geographic* hiking the mountains of Romania

Sanderson: Nice, so what was that like? Going from being in Hawaii and being in the jungles of Vietnam and Thailand, and being in Korea, to now you're in Europe, and in the mountains were... what it was like going from one extreme to the other?

Durrance: It was a pretty... It was very sharp... It took... When we first started hiking, I was... I found I could connect with the beautiful landscapes we were hiking through, but found it very difficult to connect with the people I was trying to photograph. I was just locked down, and fortunately, about a week or ten days into the trip, we crashed at a ridge in there. Below us was this spectacular Moldavian cloister called Sucha Beskidzka, where the mother superior greeted us and ushered us into the kitchen. And her cook had a fire crackling in the stove, and as we looked over at the aroma of an omelet rising, the mother superior asked each of us to tell her a little about our lives, and I blurted out, "I just come from the war in Vietnam." Silence. There was a long silence, and then, with understanding in her eyes, she looked right through my eyes into the core of my being, and with her understanding opened up that door, that cell door, that had locked up so much of the Vietnam experience. And then, she said very simply, "Boys, we're going to have a service tomorrow morning at seven o'clock. You're welcome to attend." Well, entering that chapel was like stepping back in time. I mean, we're surrounded by shafts of light and murmuring of prayers, the scent of candles burning ... and it was in that chapel that day, thanks to the mother superior, that I was able to kind of open up, and again connect with people. And from then on, was able to continue photographing, but it was tough. It was a tough patch.

Sanderson: There's one of... and you stayed with *National Geographic* for seven years, or was it eight?

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: For seven?

Durrance: It was... it was seven and a half, actually.

[Both laugh]

Sanderson: And in that timeframe... during that timeframe was it more... you did more landscape photography, or was it a combination of both landscaping and--

Durrance: Well, the *Geographic* ... it was...a Geographic photographer had to be a universal photographer. We had to shoot landscapes. We shot people at homes; we shot sports; we shot industry; we shot cultural events; we told the stories of places and people, and that meant shooting all kinds of photographs... all of those kinds of photographs, so we had to be all-around-photographers.

Sanderson: It was stated -- not only on your website, but also the *National Geographic* -- that you're considered the most versatile photographers of your generation. What do you--

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: --think about a statement like that?

Durrance: Well, I think it's a nice compliment. I think it's probably true.

Sanderson: What are some of the things that you do, that most people do not do, when they're trying to, as you had stated, tell stories through photographs or visually?

Durrance: Mm-hmm. That's a wonderful question Ed, what I try and do, is I try and ... did you ever read any books by Carlos Castaneda?

Sanderson: [negative sound]

Durrance: He was really before your time. I'd be astonished if you had... Anyway, Carlos Castaneda wrote stories about a Mexican seer. A guy named... forgot his name. A Mexican shaman, and he connected to the world with an umbilical cord like... beam of energy that came from his stomach and reached out and connected with the world around him, whether it was people, places, or things. And that's what I try and do as a photographer, is to connect with people, places and things in a very visceral way, and then to use graphic elements in the picture. The light; the line; the shape; the color; the texture, to tell a story... to tell the story of that place, at that time, in the same way that a writer would craft a... in a similar way as a writer would craft the description, you know, using... you have to have a mastery of English grammar to write clear prose. Well, in the same way you have to have a grasp of the graphic tools in order to make a clear statement with an image. And the difference between communicating visually is that when you look at a scene, you could take in the whole look with in an instant, whereas

when you're writing something, you describe it as it moves through time, and when you combine the two you get a very wholesome, powerful story.

Sanderson: All right... now... 'cause it... that definitely helps to bring ... I'm gonna have to... you said it was Carlos Castaneda?

Durrance: Castaneda, yeah.

Sanderson: Castaneda, I'm gonna have to check that out in...

Durrance: And the seer's name was Don Juan.

Sanderson: Don Juan.

Durrance: Don Juan, yeah. But just look up Carlos Castaneda.

Sanderson: Definitely have to do that, sounds very... sounds very interesting. You know, always liked to read books about stuff along those lines. So--

Durrance: Yup, yup.

Sanderson: I'm a huge Marcus Aurelius fan. Yup, and looking at it for what it is and sometimes... you know... and it's like this insight.

Durrance: Well, okay.

Sanderson: Yeah.

Durrance: Here ... we not only look at things for what they are, but what else they are because, just as we can have metaphors in literature, so we have visual symbols in photography and art. For instance, well the obvious picture is the kid with the skull. I mean, the skull is obviously a very clear symbol. If you know the picture of the guy in the APC-

Sanderson: Mmhmm.

Durrance: Go back when you... when we finish, go back and look at it, and see if you don't see the horns -- like a Norse warrior -- that are coming out of his head.

Sanderson: Hmm.

Durrance: There's some pipes that... they look... they look like horns coming out of his head, and most people don't see that, but they sense it, and so they sense... 'cause when we... we photograph a ladder... Okay, on a... I photographed a

ladder once on a storage tank. It's a ladder on a storage tank, but it's also a symbol of climbing up to a... higher to climbing up the ladder of success; climbing up the ladder of knowledge; the climbing up. We do process these things for what they are and what else they are, but rarely consciously. But the more the more literate you are, visually, the more aware you become of the symbols that artists and photographers are using to communicate their stories.

Sanderson: I can definitely need check that out.

Durrance: Yeah that's not out of, Carlos Castaneda, that's out of me!

[Both laugh]

Sanderson: Kinda going into that, that was, looking at your website and you looking back after you were... you'd done photography of landscapes, golf courses, and all the... in... what, in your career over the last few years, you've moved more moved into public speaking and you're--

Durrance: Mm-hmm

Sanderson: --talking about how you teach people how to unlock their creativity, and unlock their potential and creativity, in others. Do you think that-

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: Over the years that you've... spending that time of capturing the different... essence in visual records of life and death and inhuman and in geographical sense, do you think that has helped you to learn how... to learn how to be able to teach people how to unlock that?

Durrance: Yeah... I think there's no question. And what I really am doing is... we're all storytellers. You're telling stories by putting this exhibit together. We all tell stories and, what so many people are unaware of is the power they can bring to their stories by combining photographs or paintings or visual images with their stories. It adds a whole 'nother dimension to it, and again, that's because with the pictures you can see the whole of it at an instant, and with the words you can move it through time, and it makes for a much richer story, no matter what story your telling. Whether you're a businessman telling the story of your products; or a guy telling a girl the story of his life. Whether it's a photographer telling a story to an audience, it just makes for much richer communication or... what I really am devoted to now is helping people use images to communicate their stories to whoever they're speaking to, and obviously, my life as a photographer has prepared me for that. I'm simply... it's another way to use this body of images I've created in my life to help other people tell their stories.

Sanderson: And kind of tying back with your DASPO experience, is this something that you... that you learned while you were a member of DASPO that helped unlock even more potential?

Durrance: Well I was... I was... I mean, I was clearly motivated by the desire to tell the story of war, and that's why I fought so hard to get into DASPO. And what I worked so hard at while I was in DASPO, you know, for the Army... be able to tell its story with the pictures, and for me to be able to tell my story -- my experience -- tell the story of my experience of war, and to seek what's universal in... I was trying to say: this was not my story, but this was our story, of the guys of our... my generation. And the war we experienced and that... what I realized is that it's universal. That war is that essentially unchanged since -- as I've mentioned earlier -- the Peloponnesian War, two thousand years ago. So, it's all one of the same cloth that we're all... it's all about the storytelling. It's a vital part of our existence as human beings.

Sanderson: Are there any specific pointers when you... when you're doing these talks that you teach people?

Durrance: Yeah. There are basic three ideas that I'm trying to convey, and the first idea is to use the visual and the logical faucets of your mind, which we've talked about already. The second is to connect with people from other walks of life. People who can broaden your vision. People whose experiences are different than yours. And the third is to journey into yourself, to that quiet place where your core values live, to be sure that you're harnessing your vision to those core values, and that, overriding all of this, is the vital importance of perseverance. That we just have to keep at it. To keep chugging, and without perseverance, there's nothing.

Sanderson: Wow... very... that was a very poignant... very poignant statement ... now look at-

Durrance: Well, thank you.

Sanderson: Yeah, now... kinda opened my eyes a little bit just now ... it's like, "wow." That was-

Durrance: [laughs]

Sanderson: And this ... yeah wow... kind of looking back at that, is it one of those that is... that one in the last fifteen years with all the different reunions that DASPO's had, has that been kind of like a core reason why you've been a part of a couple of the reunions?

Durrance: This is my first reunion.

Sanderson: Oh.

Durrance: It's the first one I've been to.

Sanderson: Oh, this one.

Durrance: It's my first one, yeah.

Sanderson: Hmm...

Durrance: My first reunion with the DASPO, yeah.

Sanderson: Outstanding.

Durrance: But it's kind of a reunion year. I mean it's also my fiftieth reunion at college.

Sanderson: Ah, nice.

Durrance: Yeah, so it's a reunion year, and I'm very much looking forward to seeing the guys.

Sanderson: Have you kept in contact with any of them over the years, or--

Durrance: Well, I... I certainly... a bunch of them came to the opening of the show. The *Where War Lives* in Washington, a bunch of them came to that. But Bryan Grigsby -- who's had a similar career as a photo journalist -- and a couple of the other guys over the years, but not a lot.

Sanderson: But definitely ... probably good... fun for you to sit down and meet him...

Durrance: Oh gosh, yes.

Sanderson: And see everybody again, and, well, pretty much meet them again, 'cause I mean this-

Durrance: Yeah

Sanderson: Some of them... I mean it's almost a full... it's a lifetime between then and now.

Durrance: Yeah, really. Yup.

Sanderson: Wow, I'm starting to run out of questions here.

Durrance: Well, that's... we're sort of running out of time, too.

Sanderson: I did want to ask one question though, after-

Durrance: Mm-hmm

Sanderson: --being at *National Geographic* for all those years, why did you and your wife decide to branch off and do your own thing? Or did you... was it just more you wanted to... you wanted to branch off and do what it was more that you wanted to do, versus stay at *National Geographic*?

Durrance: No it wasn't it... wasn't that at all. It was... it was all about I felt like my growth curve was just tapering off. I was going to yet another country to shoot essentially the same pictures. I just didn't feel like I was growing as a photographer, and so I thought I would branch out, and so I started... I spent three years traveling around the world photographing annual reports, but I ended up being away one time... I photographed in like forty-five different cities in ninety days, and I thought, "Jesus, I can't live like this." And I thought, "Well, I'll go into advertising, which pays even more and I can buy my own time to work on personal projects." Well, that isn't how it works. The... the advertising assignments came when they came, and didn't come when they didn't come, so I didn't get any control over my time at all. But they were exciting adventures, and then... and it just... I realized that again... well, two things: One, I was... ended up doing a lot of cigarettes advertising which I just couldn't do, just finally. I just couldn't do it, anymore, and so my wife and I headed out into the national parks, and that... just that... business didn't work out very well, and so... but I ended up photographing golf courses when there was clearly demonstrable need for photographs, and so I ended up doing that. Still do a little of that, but mostly I'm speaking now.

Sanderson: Hmm.

Durrance: But mostly I'm now speaking using the pictures to help people tell their stories.

Sanderson: I'm sorry... definitely sounds like... so interesting, hearing your story from when you started off as a... basically being raised in the photographic world, and then kind of evolving--

Durrance: Yes.

Sanderson: --Into becoming a photographer yourself, and then now...

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: Going into from a visual arts to a speaking art so-

Durrance: Yeah, using the pictures.

Sanderson: Well, what did your mom and dad say aboutwith how everything has kind of... how your career has evolved over the years and 'specially--

Durrance: Oh, I think they were very... I think they were very pleased with it.

Sanderson: Was there any... there's time when you would send photographs home and they'd like, "Well, you should've done this." Or-

Durrance: No.

Sanderson: -critique your work as well?

Durrance: No. [laughs]

Sanderson: That's good... 'cause sometimes parents like to, like "Hey, good job, Son." "Hey, why would you do that?" You know. [laughs]

Durrance: Oh happily... I'm happy to say: No, they didn't. Although, it probably would've helped. [laughs]

Sanderson: They... sounds like they had they both had story... story careers in journalism, as well?

Durrance: Oh, yeah. Well, yes they did.

Sanderson: Outstanding... well... I have... I have actually ran out of questions. Was there anything--

Durrance: Okay, well that's good.

Sanderson: Was there anything that you would like to add that you felt we might have missed?

Durrance: No I think that's... we covered it pretty well, Ed. Well, see, you had good questions!

Sanderson: Thank you, Sir, I greatly appreciate that.

Durrance: Well, thank you.

Sanderson: So... and now what we do is I'm go ahead and end the interview at this point. What we will be doing is, we'll take this and transcribe, and of course they'll take it in the audio booth and... doing kind of editing and that they might need to do, and then what we do is we'll have this transcribed and there might be a few of the.... Well, there's gonna be a few of the excerpts that we'll go to put into the actual walking... the walking tour, the exhibits where the audio aside, and what we do also on that is that we will also be sending you a transcript of the interview. So that's one of the jobs as well, of... where we actually type out the interview itself. So we... definitely be sending that out to you, and if there's anything that, going back and looking at it, if you want to take something out, you can take something out. If there's something that you'd like to add we can definitely, add to that, as well, 'cause I know.

Durrance: Okay, great.

Sanderson: 'Cause we're definitely pulling all stops... pulling out all the stops to make sure that we're good to go, and we want to make you guys proud with this exhibit and we want...

Durrance: Well, we're looking forward to it. Appreciate that attitude.

Sanderson: No problem. 'Cause, like I said, looking back it's like, "Wow," it's kinda just like, can... we do... we have enough room to put all... it's almost kinda like, if it was up to me, we'd go basically, "if there's a blank wall there'd be a picture," but I'm like- [both laugh]. Unfortunately, you can't do that too much, 'cause then you just overwhelm your audience, and I've seen museums do that sometimes, were you just walk in and, "Whoa. Way too busy, way too busy." It's like--

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: Yeah, so we definitely want to make sure that we represent what you guys want us to represent, and to show the world that you guys were part of the group that is a specialized group, that has... we haven't done since then... but at the same time you guys, as you stated, were able to tell the story of war through a picture.

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: That believes that you were able to capture stuff that you can't talk... or that you can't really say, but you can see.

Durrance: Yeah, that's great. Hey, listen, are you using the prints that... are you using my pictures... are you using pictures from the *Where War Lives* exhibit or from the DASPO files?

Sanderson: I think the DASPO files... I'd have to talk to Kat and have Kat talk to you about that.

Durrance: Oh. I would love to chat with her, if you would have her do that.

Sanderson: Oh definitely. Will do. And I will make sure that we get the number... well, your number to her and have her give you call up.

Durrance: Okay.

Sanderson: I believe she's talked to you before. I'm not sure if... Kat Latham

Durrance: No, I don't think so.

Sanderson: Okay, but I will definitely, 'cause we have the book, and also there's a letter inside the book that--

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: Right, so what I'll do is I'll talk to Kat and have her give you a call, and then --

Durrance: Okay, great.

Sanderson: --to make sure that -- if there's anything additional that you might want to add to anything -- that you're credited with... that's definitely something that we can we can make sure we get in there, 'cause...

Durrance: Okay, great.

Sanderson: So, well, Sir, greatly appreciate your time, and thank you for talking with us, and I'm sorry we ran over a little bit.

Durrance: That's alright.

Sanderson: It's gonna be an absolute honor and pleasure to meet you, when you do... when you guys come up this way.

Durrance: Looking forward to it.

Sanderson: Outstanding. Thank you, Sir.

Durrance: Alrighty, bye-bye.

Dick Durrance

September 23, 2015

Part 2

Interviewed by Edward Sanderson

Transcribed Eric Bradach

Edited by Eric Bradach

(Interview starts at 1:49)

Sanderson: Today is September 23, 2015, and I'm Edward Sanderson, oral history intern here at the Pritzker Military Museum & Library in Chicago, Illinois, and today we have the pleasure of speaking again with Mr. Dick Durrance. You were with DASPO [*Department of the Army Special Photographic Office*] from 1967 to '69.

Durrance: '67 to '68.

Sanderson: '67 to '68, and during that time, you took a lot of iconic photographs that's going to be part of our "Faces of War" exhibit. Thank you for coming out and actually agreeing to sit down and talk with us again this time in person—and it's actually great to meet you in person. We're going to have you read a soundbite from what we did during the interview. It was a good soundbite that we thoroughly enjoyed. They've been having a lot of fun with the different interviews, especially with yours, some of the stuff that you said, just very poignant. So we would like to put that in audio tour as well as, we'd like you to comment on some of the photographs that you do have that is part of the exhibit. So if you wouldn't mind doing that for us, we'd greatly appreciate it.

Durrance: Now this is not going to be video? You're not going to see this, right?

Sanderson: No. They might throw in like a clip.

Durrance: Yeah. Yeah. One senses that the feeling of guys that I photographed in the Vietnam War, in spite of the fact that they had M16s, helicopters... that those feelings were not so very different from the feelings of those fighting in the Peloponnesian Wars some two-thousand plus years ago. So, do you want me to describe the pictures?

Sanderson: Oh, yes. If you wouldn't mind starting out with... starting with the monkey with the beer and going on.

Durrance: Okay. I came across this extraordinary scene at Camp Evans of a monkey, a pet monkey, that somehow had nabbed a Budweiser, and he's having a wonderful slug of beer. And what it reminded me of is the fact that... that... here are these soldiers in inhuman tasks seeking a way to find their humanity, and the pets were a wonderful way for them to reconnect with the humanity that is in all of us... to reconnect with the humanity that is in all of us.

Sanderson: And when you saw the... what were some of the other thoughts, comical thoughts of you... seeing the monkey with the beer?

Durrance: Well... it's a great visual gag. [Laughter] But it tells a larger story that was expressed at Camp Evans, the big base camps that men would return to after going out on patrols—terrifying patrols—that they could come back to and try to live normal lives. And I have a picture of a jazz group: four or five guys: a piano, a trombone, drums... just jamming in the middle of this dirt road, surrounded by tents. And on the other side of that road I saw kids playing—I don't know if it was baseball or softball, I forget—but one guys taking a mighty, mighty, swipe, obviously thinking that "Mickey Mantle's got nothing on me." You know, so they could go back to their American world in this very foreign and very strange place...

Sanderson: And then...

Durrance: And then we have a picture of a soldier on a Huey, a UH-1 D? last moments before being inserted into the jungle into God knows what. And Lao Su? **(6:55)** once said, "The eyes are the window into the soul." Well, the eyes are also a window into the emotions, and you could just see in soldiers' eyes the off-the-charts anxiety that preceded an insertion into the jungle, where as likely hot, the landing would be hot, hot lead pouring into the choppers and into the guys. So it was just extraordinarily tense. That was not Lao Su, though. The eyes are the window into the soul has often been said. Well, the eyes are also the window into our emotions. And this picture I have of a—of a grunt, soldier, tensed up as we're about to be inserted into the jungle, where the anxiety is off the charts... Okay, then here's a guy reading a letter from home. Sometimes, we felt really close to buddies, and other times we felt utterly alone, and I think there was no lonelier day than the day that the mail came from half way around the world because in that moment—hearing about the life that's so far away—we felt just terribly alone out there in the middle of the jungle. And these firebases or the patrol camps or even on the basecamps.

Sanderson: Why did you take a picture of the guy?

Durrance: Well, the look... in the photograph, we see the one guy sitting alone on the wheel of the howitzer reading this letter from home facing toward us, and behind him, we see another fellow looking over the jungle canopy from their hill-top firebase. And it just

expressed for me that the loneliness of being in a place so far away for so long doing something that was just terrifically dangerous.

Sanderson: It's definitely... that's actually one of our favorite pictures.

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: Yeah. Here you have one guy reading a letter from home, feeling like someone is taking the time to write him, where his buddy is standing behind him looking out wondering if someone is writing him a letter from home. It's definitely one of those... very nice pictures. It's probably one of my more favorite pictures of the exhibit.

Durrance: Oh, no kidding. It's very evocative for me too. And one of the things that struck me—I'm just picking up on your thought there, it's a good one. One of the things that struck me when I came across this guy sitting down and reading a letter from home is that behind him, there was a guy, who did not have a letter. He did not have someone reaching out to him, underlining the loneliness of living in a warzone so far away from home. A loneliness that soldiers since forever have known, felt, and lived with... And here's the "I'm walking" picture of an infantryman with the 1st Air Cav [Cavalry], carrying an M60 machine gun, on a road approaching an LZ [landing zone] stud in Northern Vietnam. Well, this picture of this soldier up in the northcentral mountains was with the 1st Air Cav, as they were moving from one base camp to another, reminded me of the fact that we spent a lot of time on long lonely walks going from point A to point B: eating dust if we're on a highway, getting bit by bugs if we're in the jungle. We spent a lot of time walking... Okay, then we have the pictures taken of the civilian casualties on the first day of the Tet Offensive: three women, followed by two other women...

Sanderson: And there was—you said in a part of a story you said in our last interview of you and a civilian news cameraman—had walked—I think you said it was the same village, and you guys realized, "Somethings not right here," and you quickened your pace to get out of there. And I think that you said you either took it before that happened or after.

Durrance: No. No. Okay, this picture was taken shortly after sunrise after the first day of the Tet Offensive, after the village had been overrun by the NVA [North Vietnamese Army], and then they had been pushed back out by the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] Rangers, and a friend of mine, Bill Wilhour?, who was a classmate of mine in college, he was working for *Time* magazine and I was shooting for DASPO. As we were walking out, we saw these women, this flood of people, including these women coming in who had been injured in the fighting. And, you know, I assume it was the ARVNs or our guys, who had bandaged them up because further on we would see the civilians who were killed in the fighting as well. So Bob Wilhour—excuse me, I said Bill but its Bob—Bob and I pushed on through the village and toward the rice fields. When we got through the village we could see it's just going to be a long slog, a long slog through the rice patties. So we turned a head back to get some images on the way to where they were going.

When we got to the village, when we'd seen these people going through, we suddenly realized, there's nobody in sight. It was dead silent. We're trying to figure out what's going on. And when it dawned on us, the reason it was so quiet, was that the NVA were not out in the rice patties, the NVA was right under our feet in the tunnels. And it was a very eerie, absolutely terrifying feeling. I've never walked so lightly and so fast to get back to the base. [Laughter]

Sanderson: How many times did your feet touch the ground, so to speak? [Laughter]

Durrance: As few as possible. How many times did my feet touch the ground? As few as possible. [Laughter]

Sanderson: That's kind of where something happens and you go to jump and hit the ground once or twice just to keep going. [Laughter]

Durrance: I guess that's it for these. Were there some other things you wanted to...?

Sanderson: Was there—looking back, you know, I was re-listening to the interview, was there anything that you specifically wanted to add that maybe you'd remembered?

Durrance: No. I don't remember the interview. So I'm not sure what I said. But you have that, you don't need video of that? For the audio anyway.

Sanderson: No. One. I did want to ask you two additional questions. During that time, I know when you get done with DASPO, you started to work for *National Geographic*.

Durrance: Immediately. Within two weeks, yeah.

Sanderson: Now, was it one of those that by the time you got done that you had decided to get away from—that *National Geographic* could go more into the civilian world of taking more landscape photographs? Because I know you and your wife started your company where you were, you know, taking pictures of golf courses and national parks.

Durrance: Well, the sequence of events... was before I went into the Army. Before I was at DASPO. As a college student, a group of us in college had put a canoe trip together to paddle the Danube River. And we thought, "Well, we might as well see if the *Geographic* is interesting." So we contacted the director of photography, and incredibly enough, we were college students. But he was interested in our story because he couldn't get his teams into Eastern Europe because of the Iron Curtain that was drawn across between Western Europe and Eastern European countries of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania... but we had student visas. And so, the director of photography loaned us six cameras, gave us four-hundred rolls of film, and said, "Boys, I want you to shoot, shoot, shoot." Well, we worked our bibi's off and—but I was a beginning photographer. I [only] shot twenty-five rolls of film in my life at that point. But I knew I wanted to be a photographer. We worked really hard and we came back with enough

pictures for them to fill a forty-seven page cover story that was selected by the readers of *National Geographic*. It was one of the most popular stories they'd published that *National Geographic* that year. So we had a relationship established with the *Geographic*, and then, when I was about to be discharged from the Army, two of the guys from the Danube trip had organized another expedition. This time to hike the Carpathian Mountains of Romania from the Russian border to the Danube and asked me to join them. So as soon as I was discharged from the Army, I was immediately on an assignment. Another assignment for *National Geographic*, which then led to a staff position. And I spent seven-and-a-half years, circling the globe, going away for two or three months at a time, two or three times a year, to photograph in the far corners of the world. It was a fantastic way to see the world. But after seven-and-a-half years, I felt like I was gonna go to another country to shoot essentially the same pictures. So, with two friends of mine from the *Geographic*, I resigned my position and we set up a company to do audio visual shows, where we could use narration and music and move through pictures. And it was very exciting, but in the process of doing that, I found out what people paid photographers to shoot corporate annual reports. They pay \$1,000 a day. And so, I got attracted to that, and by then end of the third year of shooting corporate annual reports, I spent in the period of three months, I photographed in forty five different cities, and thought to myself, "There's got to be a better way to make a living than doing this." And that's when I went into advertising, and I spent twelve years traveling around the world doing global advertising campaigns. But in the end, by that point, my wife and I decided to go into photographing the national parks, and we spent three years traveling around to the national parks in a Volkswagen camper with our cat "Mokie," photographing the parks with panoramic cameras. It was a wonderful experience. But the business model didn't work real well. Basically, we were just a little too early. So I knew I loved to shoot landscapes and I was out playing golf and I looked up and said, "Wait a minute. This is a beautiful landscape. Maybe there are golf clubs that would like beautiful photographs of their courses." And there were. So I switched from doing national parks to doing golf courses because... I was born a scratch enthusiast in the game, but the wonderful muscular control I have over a pair of skis was nowhere to be found on a tee box. [Laughing] But I loved being on golf courses and photographing them.

Sanderson: Outstanding. And looking back, when you were in Vietnam, I've heard some people say that if they'd not have to be there because of the war, they would've loved to have gone there as a tourist because I've heard that the landscape—even in some parts where it was marred—were still almost out-of-this-world beautiful.

Durrance: Well, yes, it was. But I have to say that when I was there, I knew I wanted to be a combat photographer, and I was fortunate enough to be assigned to DASPO. So I was there to photograph the war, and that what I was looking at... I wanted to try to understand why it is that war is still with us... and I was able to do that. I understand it,

and what I came to realize... that war, just the urge to fight, simply is a part of our human nature. And it's not much likely to change—irrational as it is.

Sanderson: I definitely hear you on that one.

Durrance: Yup.

Sanderson: War is sometimes good for business but bad for humanity.

Durrance: Yeah. Well, yes—that's true. But what I was saying was that I realized is that I did learn where war comes from. It's best captured by a quote from Albert Camus, "And now I know where war lives. It lives inside of us." And that's why my book was titled, "Where War Lives."

Sanderson: And that's been a... well, actually, I myself have thoroughly going through the book—looking at it. Awesome pictures. We actually, I think we actually put it out for sale.

Durrance: Oh, yeah. I think I sent Becky about thirty copies for sale.

Sanderson: Yeah, it's definitely, hopefully we can spread the readership, so to speak.

Durrance: That'd be great. I would love for people to experience what we experienced. I was just fortunate enough to... photograph from the moment, I photographed my two years in the Army. I photographed from the induction station through basic training, where I was just lucky enough to have a company commander, who allowed me to photograph as I went through it. And then I got assigned to DASPO to photograph combat itself.

Sanderson: Nice. It was... Very few people could probably have been able to be the actual be the ne to photograph from day one pretty much almost there entire career.

Durrance: I may be the only one who has ever been able to do it.

Sanderson: 'Cause I know when I went through boot camp... [Laughter] forget about it. Yeah, you're lucky if you got any kind of extra benefits or be able to do anything outsideof that very strict regimented schedule.

Durrance: Yeah, I was just very fortunate to be in a situation where I could do that. I mean, I even took a picture as we were being sworn in. And didn't get beat up for it.

Sanderson: Right. [Laughter] Because normally they're like, "What are you doing?"

Durrance: Oh, yeah.

Sanderson: And especially back in the... when you were in the more so... there were very few rules of what the drill sergeants could do. Where by the time I came in, they had some rules, but there was that very fine line that they can step over. So nowadays, a whole other ball game.

Durrance: Yeah. Yeah.

Sanderson: Hmm. I'm trying... because I know we covered a lot during the actual interview because it was almost a three-hour interview.

Durrance: It was substantial, yeah.

Sanderson: Because I know we were on the phone for quite a minute.

Durrance: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Sanderson: So that was pretty much all the main questions I had for you. Unless there was anything specific that you wanted to add.

Durrance: No, not really.

Sanderson: All right. We really appreciate you coming back out and, definitely, being here. I hope we did you guy's justice. I know all of us have been going around trying to do what we can. We've been kind of walking on egg shells, not in a negative way, just kind of like, "Okay. Are we doing you justice? Are we doing DASPO justice?"

Durrance: Well, thank you. Thank you for that effort. It's an interesting story to tell.

Sanderson: Oh, definitely.

Durrance: I think it'll be interesting for people to hear.

Sanderson: There's only one unit like that... we got to talk to Edgar Lewis Lewin, and eventually, he wound up being, you know, the civilian head at the Pentagon. And even asking, when I asked him if it was one of those, why didn't we ever recreate DASPO? You know, later on down the road. And he was like, "You know, at the time, future times didn't really call for it. Whereas at that time, it was needed. But they tried to recreate it as much as possible." And now, especially with all the services, all the service school is all integrated for all the services. So now, when an Army or combat photographer goes to class, they're sitting next to a Navy Photographer or an Air Force photographer.

Durrance: Oh, that's interesting. I'd never... that makes a lot of sense.

Sanderson: So now, everyone is getting the same training. Whereas before, everyone did their own thing. The Army did their thing, the Navy did their thing, the Marines did there's, the Navy did there's; now, everyone is coming together.

Durrance: Oh, that's good. That makes sense. Yeah.

Sanderson: And they're actually getting credit. Everything is posted, they actually credit the person. Whereas in your time, it was owned by the Pentagon. They were lucky sometimes. We were talking to Carl Hanson, a lot of times, you were lucky enough to see if it just said

“Army photographer.” A lot of times it didn’t say that. So, you know, you’d have some of the civilian news agencies take it and say it was theirs, you know. But now, they actually credit it by name.

Durrance: That’s terrific, yeah. I’m so glad of that.

Sanderson: Like on Army-dot-mil or Navy-dot-mil websites, and when they show any of the pictures or even... the Navy would have an all hands magazine... if there’s any type of photograph, they always credit that photographer. So, you know, it would have been nice had they’d done it for you guys. Some of the pictures that you guys took... like Ted Acheson, you know, when his photograph became a stamp, Carl Hanson’s photograph, they used on the cover of books. You know, you’d probably had your pictures pop up here and there.

Durrance: I’ve actually never seen any of the Army versions.

Sanderson: It’ll be interesting to see—go through all the pictorial stuff and go, “Oh, yup. Yup.”

Durrance: Well, I’m going to be doing an interview with the National Archives, doing an exhibit of Army—military photography in a couple of years. And, you know, they’ve given me the information of where to go and look for it because I actually never knew how to do that. Do you know what the email—or the URL is to see the military photographs? The DASPO photographs?

Sanderson: Oh, for here?

Durrance: Yeah.

Sanderson: Or for the...?

Durrance: No, no, no. Not for this museum. For the Army Archives.

Sanderson: Not that I’m aware of off the top of my head. I’d have to find that out, but I have the URL for the Vietnam unit over at Texas Tech [University], where we got a lot of the research for this based off of. Like with the DASPO roster and all that.

Durrance: Great.

Sanderson: Well, if there’s nothing else, that’s pretty much all that I had.

Durrance: Oh, terrific. Okay.

Sanderson: I greatly appreciate it.

Durrance: You bet.

Sanderson: Thank you.

Durrance: You bet.