ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

ROGER AMIS

An interview conducted on

June 12, 2015

Interviewer: John Klingemann

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

"War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present"

LEGAL STATUS: The oral memoirs of Roger Amis are unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 12, 2015.

Interviewer: John Klingemann

Transcriber: *War Stories* Staff

Editor: Carson Jones

The electronic file and complete transcript of this interview were processed in the Department of History at Angelo State University and are available at the Dr. Ralph R. Chase West Texas Collection, Angelo State University, San Angelo, Texas.

KLINGEMANN: And so, if you get to a point where you need to take a break, let me know and then we'll stop. And thanks so much for doing this. Really appreciate it. This is John Klingemann. I'm chair, Department of History at Angelo State University. I'm interviewing Roger Amis, and we're going to start off with a set of questions. It is Friday . . . 13th—

AMIS: Twelfth.

KLINGEMANN: No, twelfth. Excuse me. Friday the 12th of June, and it is exactly 2:01 p.m. Okay. Please state your full name.

AMIS: Roger Lee Amis.

KLINGEMANN: Okay. Can you give us your date of birth?

AMIS: November 16, 1945.

KLINGEMANN: Okay, and where were you born?

AMIS: St. Louis, Missouri.

KLINGEMANN: Okay. Tell me a little about your life growing up. Where did you grow up? How was it? Anything you remember in particular?

AMIS: I was born in St. Louis Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, November 16, 1945 . . . if I remember, approximately 3:15 in the afternoon. I was number seven of seven children . . . [exhales] Haven't thought about this in a long time. The first one was my brother Thomas R. Amis, born November 3rd, 1932. Tom and I were the only living, surviving sons. [Exhales] If you think about the time frame, we're talking 1932 to 1945. Child . . . survival rates at that time were not as they are now. So, losing children in . . . at childbirth or within the next three to four years after childbirth was common occurrence, although my dear mother, having seven children was enough. She lost the five in between either at birth . . . we had two sets of twins and one solo, and my brother Tom and myself.

I grew up in a foreign country around St. Charles . . . St. James, Missouri until about 1949. We moved to St. Louis, Missouri and my father was a police officer in the St. Louis Police Department for a period of time. In the '30s and '40s, became a plumber and then a sheet metal technician, eventually, with McDonnell Aircraft, prior to becoming McDonnell Douglas. My formative years were in St. Louis around Lambert Airport . . . At this time, I guess, Lambert International Airport. And then St. Charles, Missouri is where I went to grade . . . a major part of my grade school and high school. Graduated, strangely enough, in about the top twenty of the class purely because I had a girlfriend with a brain. And that was in June 1963. June 19, 1963, I entered the United States Army in the category . . . classification is airborne unassigned. I went to the paratroops and ended up in an artillery school and became an artillery surveyor. And that . . . They survey artillery positions for the artillery battalion headquarters so that each firing battery—A, B, C—are located specifically and those points are plotted on maps. We did that, similar to what surveyors do now; they survey a point on the earth's surface. Although we were

running an M2 aiming circle, a T-16 satellite, and a hundred-meter steel tape. I ran a security . . . I ran with security teams. I also ran with the actual survey team itself, being a surveyor.

Went to Vietnam in early June 1965. First Brigade 101st Airborne Division. Departed California for the Republic of South Vietnam on the *USNS General LeRoy Eltinge III*. It was a troop ship for World War II. There were about 2,000 to 2,500 of us on the troop ship. I was in . . . First I was in C Battery, 2nd, 320th, then I went to headquarters . . . Headquarters Battery because I was a trained surveyor and they needed a surveyor slot filled. Before going to Vietnam, they inoculated us for everything on the face of the planet and there was more than one time we went from the medic section back to our billets bleeding down both arms and both cheeks of our butt because the types of injections and inoculations we were getting. The *Eltinge* broke down in the Pacific about three times and we had just enough power for steerage and that was it. Went into Subic Bay, the Philippines, a naval base. Stayed overnight. Stayed there for about three or four nights. We weren't allowed out of Subic Bay Naval Base. They had the SPs, Shore Patrol army, military police, marine military police. I think they even drafted the air police from the local air base to come in and keep us confined.

KLINGEMANN: Why would they do that?

AMIS: We'd been on a troop ship for twenty-five days. Food, booze was high . . . it was like one and two, and two and one on the list of things to do. First was get off the ship. A lot of guys had to be carried back on the ship because they were blind drunk. I wasn't one of them. Although I did a couple of beers, I got back there on my own power. One of the interesting things, when we got into the South China Sea—I cannot document this although I've talked to some mariners that were there at the time, but—we picked up diesel submarine boats as escorts coming into the South China Sea. I know this for one reason: I was on deck one night about two o'clock in the morning and I saw a set of lights. I saw something come up out of the water. Nice moonlit night, then running lights appeared. There was basically no sound other than the boat's engines that were on the boat. And what in the hell is that? A submarine. And one of the officers told me to get the hell off of the . . . off the deck and get below where I was supposed to be. So, I just went to the other side of the boat and saw the other submarine. We picked up a diesel boat escort.

KLINGEMANN: Do you mind . . . Can I ask you why it was that you joined the Army instead of any of the other branches?

AMIS: At age fifteen, I was an adventurous kid and I got involved with some paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division. They ran a skydiving school and skydiving club. I got involved with them. And when I was sixteen, sixteen and a half, I was doing skydiving exhibitions and did that up until I graduated from high school when I was eighteen, and it just became something I liked doing. It was fun. There was an adrenaline rush. Step out an airplane at 12,000 feet and don't open your parachute until you're 2,500 feet above the ground, twelve to fifteen . . . whatever the time frame was. I forget. You got about a twenty-second drop. Twenty-second free fall, and that's . . . that's a rush. That's an adrenaline rush. And once you start doing things like that and become—I don't want to say desensitized; you just can't desensitize yourself to that—but you come to like that. And you like to push the edge and you like to step into the danger zone. It's wild. And once you go there and you conquer the fear—because there's fear—it's . . . oh, gosh. I

don't know how to explain it. It just gives you something additional. Once you walk on the wild side, it's there. You can never get away from it.

KLINGEMANN: So, when you signed up for the Army, you specifically wanted to go . . .

AMIS: I wanted to go to airborne school.

KLINGEMANN: Airborne school.

AMIS: The reason I ended up in the surveyor . . . in the survey school, in the artillery survey school . . . in high school, I took three years mathematics, three years of science, three years of English. Math, science . . . math, science, English . . . Gosh, I forget what the fourth one was. But I had . . . In the four years in high school, I had four and a half years of science. My senior year, I went back and took a physics course—college freshman physics course from Princeton—and it was given at seven o'clock in the morning by our physics teacher. So, senior year, I was going to school at 6:45 in the morning so I could go this physics class. And then I took math: basic algebra, geometry . . . plain as all geometry, algebra II my junior year; mathematical analysis, trigonometry, calculus my senior year. And then the math I needed for the physics class, for the advanced physics class, I was getting about two to three weeks before in the math classes, so it would dovetail right into the physics. And when I took the entrance exam to get into the Army, apparently my math scores were extremely high. I have no idea what they are. But I was told later, because I had the math scores that were so high, they put me in artillery surveyor because they needed the math skills.

KLINGEMANN: And you joined the military in what year?

AMIS: Nineteen sixty . . . June 1964.

KLINGEMANN: So, that's when Vietnam was actually starting to escalate.

AMIS: Starting to wind up.

KLINGEMANN: Starting to escalate. So, you fully understood that as a citizen of the United States, if you were to enlist in the Army, that the chances were that you would eventually be deployed, perhaps to Vietnam.

AMIS: In the back of my mind, I knew I was going to 'Nam. It wasn't in the front, but I just accepted it. Several months . . . Well, actually, this was last year. A friend of mine made a comment. It was Veterans Day or something like that. He thanked me for my service, and I . . . My response was, "My honor, my duty, my country." So, it was something I signed up to do. I volunteered for this. Three times I volunteered . . . reenlisted in the Army—and we'll get into that later—and went to Vietnam. And . . . go in late June, the ship pulled into Cam Ranh Bay. We disembarked there and we set up a small base camp at Cam Ranh and we were waiting. The advance party and the rear party from the 101st at Fort Campbell were there before us. The advance party was in there and then the rear party had stayed behind to close the barracks and everything down. Flew over, and then they all met us on the beach and they got us in trucks and

everything. And once we got off the ship—I want to say boat, but it was ship—we were told immediately . . . we already loaded the magazines and nobody could carry a magazine in the weapon until we hit the beach. And once we were in the trucks, sergeant said, "Lock and load."

KLINGEMANN: So, was that the first time in the military that you proceeded down that path? I mean, where you locked and loaded?

AMIS: Yeah, lock and load.

KLINGEMANN: When you . . . what was that first day at basic like for you?

AMIS: I . . .

KLIGEMANN: You're an eighteen-year-old kid . . .

AMIS: I was eighteen-years-old. We went down to the recruiters, the Army reception station in St. Louis, the recruiter took me down there. The recruiter was—oh, gosh—a master sergeant, Special Forces . . . Airborne Special Forces, and he was the one that got me in. He didn't lie to me or anything. Didn't give me any nonsense. He just told me what it was. And originally, I wanted to be a helicopter pilot, but I "didn't have the education for that." And it . . . I just said, "Okay, fine. I just want airborne," and got assigned what I got. And I got lucky; I got in the artillery. There was nothing wrong with that. The math skills I had did quite well. I ended up tutoring a bunch of guys in Advanced Individual Training, AIT, at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in the math. Because I was sitting in class and the instructor is instructing this stuff, and he's looking at me. He says, "Amis, what's wrong?" I said, "Easy. You go this, this, this, and this. And this is what you're going to get." And he said, "How do you know this?" I said, "It's simple geometry and simple trig." And I didn't say "simple trigonometry." I said, "Simple trig. Anybody can figure this out." And he's just looking at me and he says, "I'll see you after class." So, I became kind of a tutor for some of the other guys who didn't have the math skills to understand it. And I would sit there and talk to them, and show them, "Okay this is how. This is the easy way to do this. I'm going to teach you a little bit of algebra and I'm going to teach you the geometry part. And then we'll get into the trigonometry part. But don't let those big words mess with you, because it's just simple math."

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: "Because all math is is addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. And multiplication and division come out of the whole addition and subtraction." And he just looked at me like I was from some other planet because I could understand it. But, anyhow . . .

KLINGEMANN: So, that first day of basic . . .

AMIS: Okay, at basic, we were . . . We got to . . . We left there . . . We left St. Louis and it was like four o'clock in the afternoon on a bus. Got to Fort Leonard, Missouri. It was about a three-and-a-half hour, four hour drive away. So, it was dark. We get off the bus and line up. And we had the reception DIs, Drill Instructors, helping us out and assisting us with how we were

supposed to act. And it was not a friendly get down and get together. It was, "You will do this, this, this, and this. Keep your mouth shut. You don't know a darn thing." And we finally got to . . . got to bed at one o'clock in the morning. You get a cot and a blanket. That was it. They said, "You guys are from St. Louis. Yeah, turn over all your knives. No knives." This guy was walking around with a box and everybody, including me, had to take their pocket knife out and put it in a box and we couldn't have a knife. Later, they changed that and I got a knife. Always carried a blade. But it was . . . It was one of those things.

From then on, it was purely structured living from six o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. And even at ten o'clock at night, there was a DI running loose someplace. So, you were in that rack, in the bunk, or you were being counseled. After we got out of the reception station, got into the actual basic training company, things lightened up a little bit. They were on us consistently, but as long as we were doing what we were supposed to do, we got where we needed to be on time, into class, progressing and functioning as a basic trainee . . . I won't say it was easy but it was one of those things of . . . It wasn't hard. For me, it wasn't difficult. And the platoon sergeant and platoon leader found out that I was going to airborne class, ended up going to airborne school, so I was given additional assistance and training. That meant more running and more pushups, and more running and more pushups. I just looked at him like, "Well, why?" And he said, "To make sure you're ready for jump school. You have to be able to do this."

"Yes . . ." The first time I called a sergeant "sir," I was counseled about that. They weren't sirs; they were sergeants. They worked for a living. But it wasn't that bad. To me, it wasn't rough. It wasn't hard. It was just doing it and that was it.

KLINGEMANN: Were you an athlete in high school?

AMIS: Oh, no. Oh, I won't say I was an athlete or a jock but I did . . . I was on the track team and I was B-team, football reserve squad. I never played first string. I wasn't varsity.

KLINGEMANN: But you were athletic.

AMIS: Athletic to a point. I could run. Not a . . . I wasn't a sprinter but I could do distance really well. I was on the track team. I threw the discus because I didn't have enough speed or endurance for the distance, for the main . . . for the sprinters or the distance runners. I just didn't have it.

KLINGEMANN: So, basic was . . . The physical aspect, was it overwhelming for you?

AMIS: No, it wasn't. It wasn't that bad. It was . . . I won't say difficult, but it was a challenge. I just met the challenge. And they said it was red if it was red. If they said it was white, it was white. And if they wanted it round, it was round. The most memorable . . . besides the platoon sergeant, he was pretty cool. He didn't abuse us. He didn't yell and scream and all that stuff. If you got stupid and did something dumb, he counseled you on it, and it was kind of a private consultation in the boiler room. And usually, these guys were pretty big and pretty well-built, so they could carry out what they had in mind. Memorable people besides him was the company first sergeant. He was Filipino. Guy had to be about 5'9" or 5'10"—I'm barely 5'8"—and slender. But his voice, I had a hard time understanding because of the particular accent that he

had. I really had to pay attention to him. I couldn't just normally listen to him. I had to really pay attention because of the voice inflection and the accent. He was an extremely sharp individual. And the other guy that stands out, I still see his face. I have no idea what his name was. But I saw a pair of wings he had on, and they were glider wings from World War II.

KLINGEMANN: World War II.

AMIS: And he had two little stars. That meant he made two glider assaults. You'll probably edit this out. They had a pair of balls. They got big brass balls, like soccer balls. I mean, this guy's just . . . gosh. I thought I was good stepping out of an airplane but holy crap. But . . .

KLINGEMANN: So, you graduated from basic.

AMIS: Graduated from basic July . . . August. August . . . latter part of August sometime. Later part of August. Went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for advanced individual training as an artillery surveyor. Stayed there for four weeks, graduated. Actually, I was there six weeks. I ended up in the hospital because I had the measles. They put me back two weeks. I was in quarantine for a week-and-a-half . . . two weeks . . . a-week-and-a-half, then they put me right back in with another company, training company. And it was right back to the same thing. I was doing a tutoring thing for math, which is fine with me. It was easy.

Went from there to Fort Benning, Georgia by railroad train and they picked us up someplace in Alabama . . . Georgia? Georgia, and then bussed us to Fort Benning, Georgia. The guys were going on to jump school. Fort Benning was not just jump school. It was the infantry school. That's where everybody went through basic infantry for their infantry skills, their AIT. So, we had guys on the train going to jump school and then from their basic training companies, going to AIT infantry. I think the MOS was 11C. 11A, B, and C. 11B was infantry. Soon as we got off the bus, they said, "Okay, everyone going to jump school, over here. Everybody going to basic, over there." So, we had divided out. We were four companies . . . four platoons of airborne trainees.

Got into there . . . it was like a Saturday. We got there Sunday. We got in our billets, we got settled down. Monday, we were out on the . . . on the hard surface tarmac and marched off to our first class in jump school. First week was called "ground week," and once they turned us to a column to march, it was double time, and we ran everywhere. The only time we didn't run at double time was from the mess hall back to our billet. Once you step foot inside there, back outside, you ran. You didn't walk. And every time you saw an officer, you'd walk and say, "Airborne, sir." He'd say, "All the way." And then once he said that, you dropped the salute and you were running again. You did not walk. We spent a week in ground week. And that was the thirty-four-foot tower. They had us in a harness and . . . jump harness. We were learning to exit from a simulated aircraft door and once we jumped out of the tower, we were on a long suspension line . . . with the harness and the suspension line. And a long cable ran 200 feet . . . 100 meters . . . 100 meters to a berm about fifteen feet off the ground, and that's where they caught you. And you would get out of the harness and, immediately, you were given a rope that was hooked to the harness. You ran that harness all the way back to the thirty-four-foot tower. You got back in line, and you did this time after time after time after time until they were satisfied with you. If you weren't doing that, you were doing what they called a PLF, a Parachute

Landing Fall. And that was off of a four-foot platform into sand . . . or . . . into sand. And if it was wet sand, it was wet sand. And you had to land specifically correct.

KLINGEMANN: Did you ever see anybody get hurt?

AMIS: Turned ankle, turned knee. Not that much during the . . . That was the first week. The second week, we went to tower week. And there, we ended up going from what they called a 250-foot free tower. It was a parachute that went up in a frame. You got in your harness, hooked to the parachute, and went up 250-foot off the ground. The instructors would yell if you were ready and you'd say, "Airborne, sir." And you got a whole suspension line and risers that come up from the harness to the shroud lines up to the chute. And then they would tell you to pull the shroud lines away from the tower and "You ready?" And they cut you loose and you floated down to the ground. And you had to land correctly. We also had what they called "the wind machine." They have us in a harness with a parachute on, and they'd start the wind machine up. And it was to teach you if you were being dragged by the . . . in the harness in the parachute to release the parachute portion of it. The parachute would collapse and you would get up and go do your thing. We did that and had suspended agony. They put you in a harness and you . . . They hoist the harness up off the ground about three feet and then you practice climbing the risers to be able to control the parachute. You climb the right front riser, the chute would rotate to the right. Left front, rotate left. Climb the rear risers, backwards. And we actually tilt to go backwards. So, they would teach you. You get to do that. We call it "suspended agony." You could be in that thing for thirty-five to forty minutes. And you had to have it tight or else it became very uncomfortable. You talk with a soprano voice for a while.

At the end of that . . . at the end of the second week, we were running a five-mile run in the morning and it was a sand track. It was like a long . . . like a race track except we ended up running five miles on that thing. And we would have . . . we would be running in platoons and companies and so on. Guys would drop out and throw up and then get back up and start running again. And that kind of pulled a lot of people out. They just didn't have the desire or the drive to complete it. At the end of that, I ended up having to go to the medics because I had a lot of pain coming out of my right leg. And . . . went to the medics and they said I had shin splints. It's just small cracks in the shins. And it was like a Friday afternoon. They put a cast on me, kept me in another barracks until Monday morning. I went back, saw the doctor. They took the cast off and he said, "You're ready to go back to jump school . . . back into school? Or are you going to be put back or whatever?" I said, "I'm ready to go." He squeezed my foot and I didn't scream but it hurt. He said "okay" and signed a release and everything. Walked out, he said, "Are you lying to me?" I said, "Sir, I would never lie to you." And he said, "Get your ass out of here."

And on a dead run, I caught up with the company. We were going to do our first jump and I caught up with them. They looked at me and said, "Are you going?" I said, "Yeah, I'm going." He said, "Get in your chute." So, got into my chute. I got everything on. The first jump is what they call the "cherry jump." It was a Hollywood jump. That means we didn't jump with any packs or anything, just the main chute and the reserve chute in front. But it was everything else . . . the helmet, the jump helmet, the webbing on the helmet . . . everything was there. The first jump was out of the . . . the Air Force C-119 Boxcar, and it didn't get off the ground first time. We had to taxi back and try again. He could barely get off the ground the second time. We fool around for about two hours. And guys were throwing up. I'm sitting back there, "This is cool." It was like I could look out the door because the flying boxcar, it doesn't have a square back end. It

has a canoe-type back end, and there were doors right in front of this opening and they were on the sides and I was sitting across diagonally from a door. I could look outside like, "This is cool. I like this." We were running 300 feet off the ground.

KLINGEMANN: But you already had been skydiving since you were sixteen.

AMIS: I had already been skydiving. It didn't bother me. And these other guys, they were turning white. They were puking. And I'm over there going, "[Whistles] When is this going to get going?" And we got up and we just started to . . . I was the first guy in the stick. And the groups that are going out there called the stick and they line . . . hook up, get all the equipment checked and everything, and you stand there. The first guy stands in the door. I was standing in the door, and I'm going out further and further, and the instructor pulled me back and said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm enjoying this. This is cool. I like this." And he's pulling me back in and said, "You're eager, aren't you?"

"Yes sir. Let's get it on. Let's do it." The other guys behind me were shaking their heads. They didn't know what they wanted to do. This was the first time. This was the first jump. And we did the first one and they dropped us at . . . stateside non-combat jump was about 800 feet above the ground, and we made the first jump. It was great. It was just . . . everybody was falling out of the airplane, so it was fun. Got on the ground, picked everything up, got hooked back, and then the next day, we made the next jump. And I think it was the C-130 Hercules—and that was because it was faster—and we flew around for about an hour-and-a-half, two hours and they dropped us. This time, we were jumping with twenty-pound packs underneath the reserve chute, and it was that way all the way along; two through five, we were all with combat packs on—no weapons, just pack—and waiting there to give you the idea of what the jump was actually like and what was going to happen when you hit the ground. And the landing was never the same. One landing could be like stepping off the curb into the street. The next one could be like stepping off the curb into the street in front of a truck and you'd get hit hard. It depended on the wind . . . the type of drops zones you went into. It was . . . they were all fun. They were all interesting.

I graduated from jump school on a Friday. They bussed us. I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I'll be darned if I can remember how I got there. I think it was by train . . . I think. And got in there and got into . . . That was November of '64. Freezing . . . It was cold. I got into the reception station there. Two days later, they send me to the 2nd Battalion 320th Airborne Artillery, and they said they didn't have any surveyor slots open, so they stuck me in C Battery in the 2nd Battalion 320th. And I became a gun bunny, a can and cocker gun bunny. I was working on a 105 towed howitzer and eventually ended up driving the tow vehicle for it. It was a three-quarter-ton truck, an M39 three-quarter-ton truck. And uh I just towed those things around until we got ready to go to Vietnam and they needed . . . What they were doing is they took all the people out of the battalion that had less than a year or two served in the Army, and it left several spots in the survey platoon open. So, they pulled me out of the C Battery and put me in Headquarters Battery, and I deployed with Headquarters Battery.

KLINGEMANN: What did you think about whenever you got that news?

AMIS: That's what I'm here for. I signed up to be an airborne trooper and that's what it was. That's all it was.

KLINGEMANN: Did you get an official notice? Was it a telegram or was it just an invite, you know, something over the loudspeakers? Or how did they actually . . . or when you were in formation, maybe?

AMIS: We were in formation. We were told that we would be deploying. We knew . . . They wouldn't tell us it was 'Nam. We were going to be deploying and setting everything up to move to a different place. We knew it was Vietnam. Some the guys that I was with, they weren't the brightest things to fall off the tree. And I'm not the smartest . . . I wasn't the smartest guy in that block either.

KLINGEMANN: You were a mathematician.

AMIS: I was lucky. [Both laugh] I just got to where the numbers were neat, and it worked. And I'm not an accountant but I can work numbers. Even in flying right now, I can use all the whiz-bang stuff as a pilot. The GPS and all of this stuff, it does great calculations in a split second but I still go back and use the pencil and paper and the little hand calculator circular slide rule because I can work that with my hand, one-handed. I can work ratios and proportions on that. If I'm going to go a certain speed, I'm going to go a certain distance in a certain time. If I increase the speed, I decrease the time from the same distance. Okay. Fuel calculations are the same way. I can do them, basically, in the back of my head. But I can do ratios and proportions on the circular slide rule. It's . . . It's still math. I love it. I still got my original slide rule. No, I don't. That one got trashed. I've got an engineering slide rule that I picked up when I was in the Army. And . . .

KLINGEMANN: So, you guys knew that you were going to get deployed and you knew it was Vietnam?

AMIS: Yep.

KLINGEMANN: So, now, take me back to the beach, then, as soon as you hit lock and load.

AMIS: We knew we were there. And the smell . . . The odor was different.

KLINGEMANN: In what sense?

AMIS: It was a . . . We were right on the ocean. We were in a bay, and there was the odors from the ocean, the sea there and then the type of cooking that is done in Vietnam, the type of fires, the spices and all. And a lot of that was fresh, open-air stuff, so these odors from this would go into the air. And the . . . the odor from the place itself . . . and there's nothing . . . there's nothing derogatory about it. But I went back on my second tour, I got off the 707—a Boeing 707—walked down the gangplank, down the stairs. Halfway across the tarmac, I made one sniff. I'm back. And then everything kicked back. The survival instinct kicked back into looking around to see what's going on. What's happening, not just five feet away, ten feet away; a quarter mile away from me. And watching . . . We learned that the first time I was there was when I learned it.

KLINGEMANN: So, you were nineteen when you landed the first time?

AMIS: I was nineteen when I got there in late June. I turned twenty in November.

KLINGEMANN: So, here you are in a combat zone and you can't even buy beer, can't buy alcohol. You can vote.

AMIS: Not here. Not here in the States, but over there . . .

KLINGEMANN: Over there, you could?

AMIS: Over there, they gave it away.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, but here in the United States, you couldn't even buy beer.

AMIS: Well, on post, we could.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: We went to the . . . Obviously, the O Club, Officer's Club, was off limits to us. The NCO Club was off limits. But we had the M Clubs and, there, we could buy beer. You could buy hard liquor. You know, the hard stuff and all.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: And I had my first taste of scotch in one of those things and I couldn't figure out why anybody would ever want to drink that. It didn't taste like something I wanted to taste. And oh, my God, I paid how much for this and yuck. It was almost like turpentine or something. I don't know what it was. But some of my other buddies were much more, oh . . . much more worldly than me. "Oh, that's the greatest stuff in here. You got to try that."

"Give me a beer." [Laughs] That was it. But over there, we had beer. You could pick up beer. Hard stuff was not easy to get. Beer, you could get. There were several different kinds. There was Pam's. Uh Budweiser, I think, was over there. Coors was there, I think. There was some stuff from Australia. And then there was local stuff: Biere Larue, Tiger, Ba Muoi Ba 33. And these came in big bottles, too. You could drink one of those things and it didn't make any difference. With the temperature and the humidity, you sweat it right back out. I used to drink that, and it was a fluid. It went right in and right back out; you'd sweat it out.

KLINGEMANN: So, that first night in Vietnam . . . tell me about that.

AMIS: Like being in a horror show. You were scared shitless. Didn't know what was going to happen. Didn't know what was going to come out.

KLINGEMANN: Well, where did you end up?

AMIS: In a small base camp area in a tent. And luckily, it was before the monsoons and we had a perimeter set up. We set up barbed wire perimeters. There was a hundred-meter zone in front of the free-fire zone in front of us. So, we could see anything coming . . . hopefully. They had termite mounds over there. They were fifteen, twenty, thirty feet high. And to get those down, you had to either go out and get a pick and shovel. You spent all day on top of a termite mound with a pick and shovel, and you might get two feet off of it. It was like concrete.

KLINGEMANN: Oh my gosh.

AMIS: I'm serious. And we'd sit there, the sergeant or NCO would bring some beer out and we'd get water and beer, drink that and sweat it right out, and just go over behind a scrawny ass bush and whiz. And you'd still . . . At the end of the day; you may have two or three feet off the top of that thing. So, they said, "Well, we got to get rid of these things." We didn't have combat engineers to come do it. To come every place, it's not possible. You know, we had a finite number of those and they were used someplace else. And you got to clear your own zone in front of you, so one of them says, "How hard is this dirt to dig through? These things are going to take us a month to get through." And we just couldn't do it. It was just . . . there was too much. Like I said, it's like going through concrete. And we'd dig down under . . . we tunneled under the things. And I am no explosives expert, not in my imagination. And believe me, John, I have an imagination, a good one. I've gotten things that I've never even thought or dreamed of, and I ended up doing this. And we tunneled underneath the termite mound, built a shelf, put thirty-pound . . . thirty blocks of C-4 in there, put a quarter-pound block of TNT in the middle of it. Shoved a blasting cap and a fuse into it, backed out of it, and put dirt back in . . . tamped it back in. Basically, we made a shape charge. Got back out and yelled up and down the line for five minutes: "Fire in the hole." We set that thing off. That termite mound went 200 feet in the air . . . in pieces. It was raining all over the place. But we had a free shot. Two hours later, it was—boom!—going off all over the place.

I was walking through concertina wire in combat fatigues. We had big cargo pockets and the shirt had pockets all over. And in the cargo pocket, I was carrying four-pound . . . four blocks of C-4 in my right cargo pocket. Four blocks of C-4 in the left cargo pocket. Quarter-pound blocks of TNT in each of the shoulder . . . in each of the shirt pockets on the bottom. Fuses in the right top pocket and blasting caps in the top left. I was a walking bomb, and we didn't care. It didn't . . . Well, I won't say we didn't care. It just didn't . . . I didn't realize it. I realized later, if I'd have tripped, I'd have blown us all up because I had the blasting caps right over my heart. One round from a sniper, and we would have been gone. But we got rid of the damn things. And then the termite mounds . . . these were not active termite mounds. These were dead ones. They were not used. We took and used one of them. We cut the top of it off with explosives and then cut a standing spot and then the shelf and everything. We put holes down and put a roof over the thing and this was our bunker. You had to have an RPG to blow the thing up. We put a machine gun up there and then we had other bunkers of sandbags and stuff. But we were sleeping right behind these things, and that was my duty was to be up there. And we had these idiots that would come by and they would check us at night to see if we were awake. And they would creep along and we had little signals between one bunk and the next, and it was somebody whistled or something like that or. . . little whistle. They'd go "[clicking noise]" if somebody was coming.

KLINGEMANN: Oh.

AMIS: And you'd hear the sergeants come and check if we were sleeping. We cured them of that habit. They'd come up and they'd find nobody in the bunker. We were standing behind them with loaded M16s.

KLINGEMANN: "Who are you?"

AMIS: Don't ever do that again. Because instead of staying in the bunker, we'd sit off to the side and you wouldn't be seen. And so, if you're going to come talk to us, fine, but don't do this because somebody's going to get hurt. And out in my bunker, I had gotten diarrhea, and you couldn't make it to the latrine. There was no way. Because once you had diarrhea, you went. You went. I dug little cat holes. During the day, I dug cat holes, and I put a little thing around them and dirt and everything. And when I had to go, go over, go to the cat hole, do your thing, clean up, fill up. I told them, "Don't do this because you're going to fall in one of these cat holes. You're going to either break an ankle or you're going to get . . ." anyhow. So, we cured them of that. And then the battalion deployed north to Quảng Tri. I'd have to look at a map again. We deployed north into I Corps because we were in II Corps. And they got into a whole bunch of battles up there and they brought the rest of the group up. We closed down the base where we were at, we went north, hooked back up with the battalion. Got into a bunch of firefights, artillery barrages and stuff. And since I had been a surveyor, I ran security for the steel tape team, for the survey teams. And I was never trained on an M60, yet I'm humping an M60 and 200 rounds of ammunition.

KLINGEMANN: That's heavy.

AMIS: And it was OJT[1]. This is how this works. Oh, thank you. And plus, my M16, I had to carry. We did that and . . .

KLINGEMANN: You said you were in a couple of firefights already?

AMIS: We'd get into firefights and it was scarier than hell.

KLINGEMANN: What was the first time like? How was that?

AMIS: It just happened.

KLINGEMANN: Just happened?

AMIS: Yep. We were sitting on the perimeter of the fire support base where we were at and just got opened up on. And once it starts . . . if it's at night, tracers are going back and forth. AK tracers are green; M16, M60 tracers are orange. 12.7 white . . . 12.7 Russian is white. That's . . . 12.7 millimeters is 50 caliber, .5 inch—a half-inch—and they were white.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

[1] On-the-Job Training

AMIS: And you figure tracers, American tracers, are every fifth or every seventh round. The Russians were about the same, I think. Probably every fifth round.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: Scary shit. Because you see the tracer there, but what's in between it?

KLINGEMANN: But you know, that's interesting, Rog, because you say that it just happened. And so, your training kicked in?

AMIS: Training kicks in. Basically, it's let your buttons get in the way, because you got to get down. Got to get down fast. And generally, you don't know where it's at, where it's coming from. It could be some guy taking a couple of pot shots at you, or they opened up with AK-47s and machine guns. They had another machine gun over there. It was 7.62 by 54R Russian round, equivalent to just a little bit less than a 30-06. Still just nasty. And the same round they used in World War II. Nasty round. But its every fifth or every seventh was a tracer. And it's got a . . . I don't remember if that one had a five or six hundred, 650 round per minute rate of fire. First time I got shot at, I was sitting in front of a bunker. Brilliant nineteen-year-old here, and I was sitting in front of the bunker. And I was not as well developed as I am now, about 170 to 175 pounds, skinnier than a rail. And the firing port on the bunker was three to three-and-a-half feet long and about eighteen inches high. And not in the dead center, but off . . . well, dead center was the machine gun, the M60 machine gun, and that's where my M16 was. And somebody fired at us and I took . . . two rounds hit right . . . one round hit between my feet and the other one hit to the left side . . . to my left side about a foot away. And in . . . from my sitting position in a little chair I had built out of nothing, I went up through the gun port, the machine gun port and was on the inside of the bunker, and rolled back to a standing position, back up to where I could get to a gun. And by that time, little buggers had run away. They didn't want to stay and fight. Scared the living crap out of me.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, I bet.

AMIS: I was shaking. After it was all over, I was shaking like crazy. I couldn't do anything. I could hardly talk. Adrenaline was going through. You got the adrenaline shakes. And what happened was . . . "He shot at me."

"Where?"

"See? There." Your eyes are as big as tea cups, ears sticking straight out, white. Almost dead white. I was scared. I'll be the first to admit it. A guy tells you, "I was never scared in combat," in my opinion—in mine only—lying through his teeth or he's lying to himself. You got to have some kind of reaction to that. That is not a normal thing people want to . . . are expecting the first time. Now, the second time's a little easier. A little bit easier . . . maybe a fraction easier. After a while, you get to understand what's going on and you react better. You react faster and are more confident in what you're doing at that point. Saying completely, one-hundred percent, used to getting shot at in combat? No, I don't think anybody does.

KLINGEMANN: Was this a . . . this was just a part of everyday life?

AMIS: It was everyday life. We went north to I Corps. We deployed back south to a place called Phan Rang. P-H-A-N-G capital R-A-N-G. And the Air Force ended up building an Air Force . . . an air base there, and we provided . . . helped provide security with them and then we had our own fire support base. And I turned . . . my twentieth birthday was in November of '65, there in a long . . . my birthday was in . . . that evening was in a long GP large tent in our battery headquarters club and it was . . . the officers were in there, NCOs . . . everybody was there. That's where I had my twentieth birthday, and uh . . . the song was the Beach Boys' "California Girl."

And one of the things . . . and down around Cam Ranh Bay, we had a ROK, Republic of Korea, company next to us and we talked to the guys. Some of those guys . . . some of the Koreans spoke English, and we were talking back and forth. And I thought, you know, "Airborne trooper, I can go over and, you know, mess with these guys and be okay." Well, they are a different bunch, believe me. A completely different mindset. A ROK sergeant tells somebody to jump to attention . . . when he speaks to somebody, that person goes to attention. If they don't do it fast enough, they're on their butt. They'd knock them on their ass. I've seen it. And they are strict. I mean, they toe the line and they're a hard bunch. But they . . . when they weren't doing their thing, they were easy to talk to. And I would go over and work out with them. I thought I was pretty tough. They used to whoop my ass. They'd use me as a warm-up so they could go do their thing. I got my ass whooped I don't know how many times. They didn't beat me up or anything or break anything, but they bounced my ass all over the place. I kept being an idiot. I went back for more. I learned a little bit, but they were a hard bunch.

We ran into the same general bunch around Phan Rang, and they would come in and we would get the information, and they would tell us, "Do not go into this area." They'd give us a block area, because the ROK marines are going to begin clearing that area. And when they went through an area, they were . . . they were brutal. They were in there to do one thing, and that was to clean it out. There was only one group of people who ever beat the NVA or the VC at their own game—and that was in the French Foreign Legion and it was prior to Điện Biên Phủ in 1954— and they were Waffen-SS. Some of the . . . many of the SS troopers—both troops, NCOs, and officers—post-World War II made it out of Russia, out of Germany, into France, and they enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. Well, that cut off their background. That stopped right there.

Originally, they went into Algeria and then they put them into Vietnam and they found out that the tactics that the French Foreign Regular Legion was using weren't adequate. They weren't making it. They were taking too many casualties. They were getting . . . They were getting run over. And they started using the tactics of the VC and the NVA . . . were using, and they were feared by the VC. They . . . the Waffen SS would come in there and they were just like everybody else, but they . . . an entirely different mindset. And they would use the VC tactics against them. And they would get a convoy from point A to point B without being ambushed. If they were ambushed, God help them, because these people were . . . They were . . . They were there to do one thing, and it was to fight. It was not to win their hearts and minds; it was to fight. But the ROK marines were pretty rough. They were pretty tough and I had a lot of respect for them. They . . . They got in there and did their job.

KLINGEMANN: What was daily life in the camps? You know . . .

AMIS: It was pretty easy.

KLINGEMANN: . . . you'd have the firefights . . .

AMIS: You had the firefights.

KLINGEMANN: . . . but what was the remainder of the time . . . ?

AMIS: It was get up in the morning at 6:30, seven o'clock in the morning; get cleaned up; hit the mess hall; take care of your equipment. If I was out running with an FO team, a Forward Observer team, then we would hit the brush.

KLINGEMANN: So, you would actually go through the wire and out into the brush?

AMIS: Out into the brush and got to a point and we'd start looking for targets. I got . . . Me and a couple other guys got helicoptered into hilltops with a compass and a map. And said, "Well, you're here." And a radio. And we would set up our artillery spotting firing locations and what they call a "registration site." We'd give them . . . they'd fire a point. We'd give them a registration on . . . "This set of coordinates is this. You're at 200 meters high. Drop 200 meters. Left 500 meters. Fire one round." And then we would get them into this one spot, one geographic spot on the map.

KLINGEMANN: You'd be pinpointing the artillery.

AMIS: And from then on, they had a spot to fire from that was accurate. And we would see people a mile and a half away with binoculars, troops in . . . on march. We'd identify them as hostile by carrying weapons, by . . . by being male. Because you can pretty much tell . . . from a distance, you can still tell female and male. And no kids. I never dropped ordinance on kids . . . or females if I could help it. If I was being shot at, different story. But we would catch these people out. They'd be running a column, carrying supplies and stuff there. We'd just lay the artillery on them were they enemy combatants. And that was . . . That was a . . .

KLINGEMANN: These were three-man teams that you were on?

AMIS: I was solo.

KLINGEMANN: Solo. So, they would drop you . . .

AMIS: Me and another guy on another hilltop a mile away. We'd go in by helicopter. And this . . . These weren't the Hueys. They were Bell H-13s. And we'd be sitting in the helicopter. The pilot was on the right side, we were on the left side. He skids with the ground, he says, "Out," and that meant right then. He wasn't staying. So, I'd get out of the helicopter, pull my equipment out real quick—what little I had—flat on the ground, and he was off. He'd give me a minute, and I had to be out and away.

KLINGEMANN: So, you were there by yourself?

AMIS: There by myself. And then . . .

KLINGEMANN: How far from the base were you usually?

AMIS: A couple miles.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And they would call us to be ready for the helicopter to pick you up in thirty minutes. That meant get your stuff ready, he hits the ground, pack it up, get it on there, and strap down, because he ain't waiting. He will not wait. And later, I understood why when I became a little older and a little bit wiser. But that was a . . .

KLINGEMANN: Did you ever have any hairy experiences by yourself there?

AMIS: Not that, but we were on a mountain top one night—there was three of us—and we had them coming up one side of the mountain. So, we called artillery on the mountaintop, on the mountainside, and we rang them out because we could. You could call it accurate enough. And that stopped the advance from the bottom up. And we went down in the morning. We got out of there fast as we could. And . . .

KLINGEMANN: How did you know they were coming?

AMIS: Heard them. You could hear them talking. Hear them . . .

KLINGEMANN: Can you hear voices in the jungle at a long distance?

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: I've been in the Costa Rican jungle. I've been in the Mexican jungle, you know, the southern Mexican jungle. And . . . But you can hear the voices.

AMIS: You can hear it, and you hear the sound. The sounds change. And when people start moving through an area, animal sounds stop.

KLINGEMANN: Ah.

AMIS: Or you'll hear a loud flush of noise and then you don't hear any animal sounds. And then you start picking up on the . . . the movement and the sound that's not normal area. And it's . . . it's a feeling you . . . You start picking up the feeling and . . . Well, it's a feeling. I feel what's happening. What it is, you're taking in sensory reception of sound and movement, and differentiate those points from what normal sound was.

KLINGEMANN: So, this was part of your education process?

AMIS: Yeah, and it's one of those things you don't think about, but you end up acquiring. It . . . And it's an education process. You learn that. And if you learn it, you live, and if you don't learn it, you die. And luckily, we learned it. About six months . . . Eight months after I got in country, the battalion executive officer . . . his name was Major Lamp. We call him "Carbide." Obviously, carbide lamp. "Here comes Carbide." Okay. I was working on a jeep or something like that, and he says, "Amis, I need to talk to you."

"Yes, sir." You know, and this was in camp. "Yes, sir" [unintelligible]. Okay, no big deal. He says, "I'm being transferred to the headquarter support . . . brigade headquarters support battalion. Do you want to go?" And I said, "Well, doing what?"

"Well, you'd be a clerk."

"Well, sir, I'm not a clerk. I'm not a typist or anything like that. I can type but I'm not a corps typist." He said, "Well, what I need is a driver, a bodyguard. Somebody to look after my equipment. And you need to be . . . become a clerk typist . . . a clerk." I said, "Do I got to go back to the bush?" He says, "No."

"When do we go?" So, I went over to the headquarters support battalion and took all I owned in a GP large tent with a plywood pallet floor and mosquito netting and everything. It was great. And all I did, I was up at six o'clock in the morning and I went and put this guy's clothes out for him like a British Batman for a British officer, and got his laundry and put his poker winnings in his box and separated all his money out and kept a ledger of that. Did my clerk stuff, ran into town, ran errands for him. [Coughs] Excuse me. Basically, I was a bodyguard, driver, gofer until I returned to the States.

KLINGEMANN: So, your stress level went down considerably?

AMIS: Tremendously, except when I went outside the gate. When I went outside the wire into the local city, local towns, the . . . the stress meter went straight up because I knew out there, I was going to get hit. One of the funny things, we had an officer. Usually, officers came over . . . I was a PFC, a Private First Class, E-3. And so, obviously, I had no authority or responsibility or anything. But I was working with an FO, a Forward Observer team, because I knew maps, compasses, and stuff like that. And this lieutenant came in. He was taking over the FO team and . . . introduced him. They came and introduced him to us and all. And after all of the formalities were over, he said, "I need to talk to you guys." And we figured, "Okay, here it comes, Mr. Know It All." He's just our artillery lieutenant. He knows about compasses, and maps, and jump school. And he's been through artillery officer school and all this stuff. And . . . "Okay, here it comes. He's going to tell us how it's all done." He hadn't been in country a week, so he gets us all off to the side, he says, "Okay, I have 360 days to go. How do I stay alive?"

KLINGEMANN: Very Honest.

AMIS: "Well, what do you mean?" He says, "I have 360 days to go. You guys have been in this thing for six months now. How do I stay alive? I want to go home."

"A year from now? Are you bullshitting us?"

"No."

"Okay, when you're here . . . When we're here at base camp, you're the officer, and we say 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir.' Now, if we're near that wire, don't salute. Nothing. Once we're beyond the wire, I'm in charge." This is our sergeant talking. He says, "What do you mean?" I

said, “Okay, see all your lieutenant bars and all this stuff?” This was before we had the subdued insignia. We were subduing our insignia with magic markers. He said, “Okay.”

“When we hit that brush, when we’re out of sight, all this comes off, and no salute, no ‘sir.’ You keep your voice down. You’ll stay three people back. You’ll stay with me. We have a point man. We have a trio. ‘Tailing Charlie.’ You’ll be with a radio man and we will walk through this.” And he says, “Well, what do you mean?” I said, “You’ll die out there inside of ten days or get most of us killed if you don’t do what we tell you.” And he says, “I want to go home in a year. Teach me.”

KLINGEMANN: Did you find that that was rare with officers?

AMIS: We found that rare in the point that very few people . . . very few officers would use that approach. Some of them were there you know, he’s the officer, but he would look to the sergeant to do the leading. Kind of an informal “Okay, you’re in charge right now.” Not a “Okay, you’re it. I’m learning.” We saw very little of that type. A little bit of the . . . the nonchalant or the side look of saying, “Okay, you’re here. You’ve been here. Show me how this is done.”

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: And then we had a few that would come in and want to lead from the front and everything, and we go, “Oh, crap, we got to . . .” Then it was twice as hard, three times as hard, sometimes because you had to not only watch your backside and everybody else, but you had to watch him. Make sure he didn’t do something stupid.

KLINGEMANN: Babysitting.

AMIS: And that was it. And in some cases, it caused a lot of friction. And we came to, “I’m the lieutenant. I’m in charge. You’re the PFC. Who the hell are you?”

“I’m the guy who’s been here six and a half, eight months, and I’m still alive.” And it came down to that sometimes. And they would go to the company commander, or they’d go to the brigade commander, and the brigade commander would say, “Look, you don’t understand. These guys have been here. They know what they’re doing. Listen to them and learn or you’re going to go in a body bag.” And we got a lot of that, where they would come down and flat tell the brand-new lieutenant or captain that this is how this is going to be done.

KLINGEMANN: So, your life was basically boiled down to I have to deal with this person because it means my life, and your stress level was just through the roof?

AMIS: Yep. It’s . . . you’re watertight, and tighter than a six-string banjo on a Saturday night. I mean, you’re just . . . you’re just . . . anything goes. We’d have to tell these people, they would come in smelling nice, “Okay, that’s great for parties and stuff. Don’t wear that garbage out in the brush.” They’d start to peel out a cigarette. “No, no. Don’t do that. Those cigarettes smell different than those cigarettes.” The soap smells different. It smells nice and pretty, but that’s not the same soap that these guys use. And you can smell those differences in a jungle.

KLINGEMANN: Really?

AMIS: And I don't know how far or the distance or anything like that. It depends on the winds, and the humidity, and temperature, but you can smell those things. And I'll tell you about a different group later and I'll show that emphasis, and you'll understand it then. But we had to tell these people these differences. These were nuances that we learned, that we picked up. And it wasn't one of those lightbulb goes on, "Oh, okay. We'll use it like this." And that happened quite a few times. And finally, people would pick up on it, and it was just one of those things they did not have to relearn . . . or learn because somebody would pass it on to them. They didn't learn it the hard way. They learned it the easy way. When I became this guy's gofer, my stress level went way down. And I . . . kid in a candy store. I got away with a lot of stuff.

KLINGEMANN: How did you deal with the stress on a daily basis?

AMIS: I wasn't a big drinker. Never have really been. I can't drink. I don't have that tolerance. I drank two or three beers, and that was it. And that was gone. We had one guy in the tent, 5:30 or six o'clock in the morning, that was his first beer of the day. And he was an alcoholic. He had a case of Bud under his whatever it was . . . under his bunk all the time. And he had a big bag, sack of cans. I just handled it. You know, just absorb it, understand it, and adjust to it. Now, I can't say that that's what I was thinking of at the time. I didn't have that type of knowledge or background or experience to draw from. But that worked. And I couldn't quantify it or qualify it in any way. It just . . . I wasn't strung out tight. I was just relaxed a little bit. And at night, the stress level went up. I could sleep good, but I slept lightly. Anything moving, I heard it. I felt it. Out in the bush, I would sleep one hand down under my thigh like this and the other hand was like this.

KLINGEMANN: What was the purpose?

AMIS: This was a combat knife. This was another entrenching tool.

KLINGEMANN: Okay. So, the combat knife behind your head, the entrenching tool under your thigh. Okay.

AMIS: Yep. And entrenching tool's a nasty, nasty weapon.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: Russian Spetsnaz, that's one of their primary weapons, was an entrenching tool.

KLINGEMANN: Okay, was an entrenching tool.

AMIS: It's not the fold up like we have . . . or what we had in Vietnam. It was just a fold . . . fold flat. Now they got a fold flat and everything folds up nice and neat and light. Theirs is fixed . . . the fixed blade, and it has four edges on it. At least two, possibly three, of those edges are sharp.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And they learn how to use that thing. It is a wicked, wicked weapon for them. For us, it was a big, beating weapon. It was heavy. And even if you just jab somebody with the point and it's not sharp, it's going to cause some problems. This, it was always come up like that [gestures] and nobody would come up and touch you like this [gestures].

KLINGEMANN: They wouldn't touch you on the chest?

AMIS: No, they touch you on the foot.

KLINGEMANN: Touch you on the foot.

AMIS: It was like, "[Tapping noise] Time to get up," or [tapping noise]. That was when your eyes come open like this. Wide open.

KLINGEMANN: If they tap you three times . . .

AMIS: If they tap you three times, you're wide awake and your eyes are wide.

KLINGEMANN: Something's about to happen.

AMIS: Something's going on. They just tap you twice like [taps twice] . . . like that, it was time for you to get up, time to start moving. But if it was [taps three times] it was become awake right now, ready to fight. And it was just the way it was.

KLINGEMANN: So, you did that first tour and then you came back to the United States?

AMIS: Came back to the United States. I went to the 82nd Airborne Division, flew into . . . flew out of Cam Ranh Bay to Alaska, to New Jersey. And for the life of me, I don't remember what it was in New Jersey. Went over to Newark Airport on a 707 down to St. Louis. My mom and dad picked me up there. I had thirty days off, then I went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to the 1st Battalion, 319th Airborne Artillery, 105 Towed Unit. And for whatever reason, I don't know why, they put me in the Fire Direction Center, FDC. The Fire Direction Center is the group . . . or the . . . Yeah, the group that was in the battalion headquarters that takes the fire mission, the target location. They take a battery, firing battery, and then they will figure from that firing battery to the target an azimuth, a distance, and . . . and an elevation difference.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: We had what they called . . . this was before the computer thing. We had a horizontal plot, horizontal table, which was just straight across. You measured distance and azimuth off of magnetic North, and then the vertical plot, vertical table, was to give you height differential between the firing point and the target.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: These . . . because if you get a firing point that's low enough and a target that's high, that projectile has to do an air bursts or a ground . . . impact bursts . . . impact detonation on that, and it has to be at a certain spot. So, if you take the trajectory—this is a bad trajectory, but, anyhow—it goes up like this. Here, if the target's here, the round has to impact there and go off.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: If the target's down here, impact's here. This distance here and this distance here are two different things.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: So, this has to be computed. And we had, basically, slide rule type computers that did all this. And the math was set up in World War II by little old ladies who did an extremely fine job.

KLINGEMANN: But it was still pretty accurate, though.

AMIS: It was accurate. I mean, you could get a 105 projectile 3,000 meters away, and you could get within . . . If you did your work right, you could get within a fifteen meter . . . fifteen to 100 meters of your target. And sometimes, it was 200 meters off. Sometimes, it was 300 meters. But generally, a good gun crew and a good FDC could put it within ten meters of your target. And then your forward observer, your FO, would be able to adjust that by, "Drop fifty. Left fifty. Fire for effect." Just drop fifty meters, left fifty meters, and then put your rounds on target or fire, fire one round. And they would fire the round and you'd adjust that round to your target from there on.

KLINGEMANN: So, the forward observer was a very key person then?

AMIS: Very key person.

KLINGEMANN: Which is what you did?

AMIS: I ended up doing that, and I ended up working FDC and working as an FO when I was in the 82nd. Halfway through July . . . halfway through . . . about six months later, I was . . . my enlistment would be up in—'64 to '65, '65 to '66, that's two . . . '67. Summer of '67, my three-year enlistment would be up. In November of '66, I started thinking about my enlistment being up, and I didn't have any skills that I could use on the outside . . . outside, being in the civilian world.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: Okay, I can jump out of an airplane. I can call artillery. I can survey. But there's only two of those skills that I can't use, unless I go mercenary. And I thought about that but I thought, "Wait a minute."

KLINGEMANN: Was there a demand for mercenaries?

AMIS: At that time, yeah, in Africa.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, really?

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: They would contact you?

AMIS: They would, yeah. If you were getting out, they would put out feelers. But I didn't think that was a real good idea. For some reason, it was just not . . .

KLINGEMANN: What were they paying people?

AMIS: I have no idea, not at all. I never got involved. I never got contacted for it. I didn't look into it any further than it was a thought. And I just didn't think that was the way to go. And I needed something to do, something that would provide a living for me, and I didn't have any skills that I could use other than survey. And I really didn't even think of that, simply because I had been out of the survey thing for so long, for a year, year-and-a-half, and I wanted something that I could do. And I went down and talked to the reenlistment office and I said, "What do you got that's not airborne related?" And they gave me a bunch of things and they said, "Radar electronics technician." Okay, that's cool. Electronics technician. That means I'm not getting out and getting shot at. That means I'll be someplace fairly decent. And I said, "Okay, why? What do you got?" They said, "Radar . . ." It was Hawk Radar, pule acquisition, radar . . . Hawk Pulse Acquisition, radar . . . control central mechanic. I said, "Mechanic? What do you mean?" Electronics technician is what it was.

So, they sent me . . . I reenlisted in December of '66. Went to Fort Sill . . . Fort . . . Bliss in El Paso and went through their Hawk Radar Electronics course. And they took me through basic electronics all the way up to working on the full electronics system for Hawk Radar Missile System . . . missile battery. And that was a nine-month school and we had like thirty-five or thirty-six guys in the class. We graduated thirty. I was in the top five, and . . . because I threw myself into it and did everything that was right. But it was one of those things you learn the trade in school. And when you get to the radar unit, they teach you how to maintain the unit. And all this good stuff, in theory, is great, but then they had to learn . . .teach you how . . . you had to learn how to maintain the units. Halfway through school, I decided I didn't want to be an enlisted man anymore. I kept hearing helicopters go over. So, I applied for the one officer helicopter fight school battery exams. I took them. I scored high enough on them to put me in a good position for a flight school slot. I took the oral board. I went through . . . I took the medical . . . I took the exams. I took the medical and I took the oral board in El Paso. In November, I started flight school in Fort Wolters, Mineral Wells, Texas. And in December, went through what they call "pre-flight." And then January '68, we started actually flying helicopters, learning how to fly. And that was just winter in Mineral Wells.

KLINGEMANN: But what helicopters were you training on?

AMIS: The Hiller OH-23D Raven. We had three helicopters at the time that were training birds: the 23 Raven, H-13 Sioux, and the TH-55 . . . I don't even remember the name they had for that, but it was the TH-55. And we put . . . they had six classes going through at one time in different stages of training. And I was in the blue hats, the 3rd warrant officer candidate company. And I soloed . . . we started flying the first week of January. By the end of January . . . third week of January, I had already soloed nine hours of flight time. And normally, they wouldn't solo you on less than ten, but I was doing good. Screwed up again, and they wouldn't let me solo for another four hours. And from then on, I kept going, kept getting better. I wasn't the greatest one, but I could fly the helicopter.

KLINGEMANN: And this was in 1968?

AMIS: Nineteen sixty-eight.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: May of '68, we left Fort Wolters, went to Fort Rucker in Alabama. I went back to St. Charles, Missouri, married my wife on May 12. And that was a Sunday. I spent Sunday night with her, Monday night with her. Tuesday, I kissed her, packed my gear, and went to Fort Rucker, Alabama. And Saturday, the—that would be thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, eighteen—18th or 19th, she joined me in Fort Rucker, Alabama. We lived off-post in a twenty-eight-foot trailer. And it was six o'clock in the morning, I was up, ready to go. I had all of my uniforms ready. Went to the base . . . the fort. Went to the company area, and I'm ready to go. Eight weeks of instruments in Bell H-13Ts and then we picked up a month of transition into Hueys and was A, B, and D Hueys, then we had a month of tactics. And I was in the cargo . . . I was in the transport—I wasn't in guns—and I flew transport for a month. Graduated in September '68, and they, the Army, offered me a year in Germany because I had a ground combat tour. The day I graduated from flight school, we were discharged Wednesday night at 11:59. And at 12:01 on Thursday morning, we were called to active duty as warrant officers, W-1s.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: And they gave us our bars that day and we were in summer khaki uniforms, short sleeve shirts. That was on Thursday. On Friday, we had a commencement, the actual graduation. We were given our wings. And at that time . . . we were told on Thursday that we would be in dress green uniform. "You will wear all of your ribbons and everything." And I didn't have a lot of ribbons, but I already had some stuff, and I put it on there. And got up there, walked across the stage, got my diploma and my wings. And the commanding general at that time . . . I have no idea . . . No, he was the deputy commander warrant officer. Deputy commander at the aviation school at Fort Rucker: "Mr. Amis, you've been sandbagging, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir."

KLINGEMANN: What does that mean, sandbagging?

AMIS: I was prior service. I had spent one year in Vietnam. I had a combat badge. I had overseas bars on my sleeve for Vietnam. I had bars on my sleeve for years in service, 101st combat badge, and jump wings. At that time, I pulled out the actual jump wings that were pretty . . . chromed and everything. Yeah, I had those right at the top. And . . . "Sandbagging, weren't you, Mr. Amis?"

"Yes, sir." And they offered me a year's tour in Germany since I had a ground combat tour. I went to the headquarters company 39th Engineer Group Headquarters in Neu Ulm, Germany. A brand-new wife of six months, poor child.

KLINGEMANN: Where did you meet your wife?

AMIS: Actually, we were in high school together.

KLINGEMANN: Ah.

AMIS: And no, we did not like each other. It wasn't a high school romance. We . . . I won't say we hated each other; we did not despise each other, we just didn't like each other. She was a brain, extremely intelligent lady. At that time, she had a set of books . . . would carry five or six books in front of her all the time. She was always reading, always had her nose in a book. Just somebody I didn't get along with. I dated one of her girlfriends and that was probably the problem. I dated her girlfriend and she did not like me. So, when I was in radar school, my dad had a massive coronary and I went back to St. Charles. And he was in the hospital, and Genie was working as a surgical nurse in the same hospital. And we were in . . . My mom and I were in the hospital cafeteria, and her mother and her were in the cafeteria eating at the same time. And I looked at the gal. I knew her from someplace. And I graduated . . . She graduated in '63, a year ahead of me. And this is 1967 . . . Nineteen sixty-seven, so that's four years . . . three-and-a-half to four years. And I knew her from someplace, and I couldn't . . . couldn't identify her, and it was bothering me.

So, I'd look at her, then I'd eat something. And she was one of these things where I'd have my head down eating and talking to my mom, and she was looking at me trying to figure out who I was. And it was one of these head up, head down, head up, head down . . . Well, her mother went back to work. My mom went back to see my dad. So, I timed it so that she was getting up to put her tray into the tray rack. I said, "Hi, Genie. How are you doing?" She almost dropped the damn thing. So, we sat down there and drank iced tea and water and talked for about half an hour. And I said, "I need to go see my dad." And she said, "What's wrong?" And I went up to see him and we started dating. And went . . . It was downhill from there. We just stayed with each other. Wrote back and forth. Telephone calls. I went home from flight school in December for Christmas, and we talked about it. And I finally proposed to her, and she said yes, and we set the date. I said, "I'll be back in May." She says, "Okay, I'll set it up." So, we were doing this stuff by mail, by telephone. And I left Fort Wolters on a Friday night, headed towards Missouri, and I spent part of the night in Oklahoma. Got into St. Charles in the afternoon, just in time for the wedding rehearsal on Saturday. And then three o'clock Sunday, got married.

KLINGEMANN: Got married. Congratulations! So, you go to Germany . . .

AMIS: Flying CH-34C Choctaws for an Engineer Group Headquarters. We had a basic instrument rating, what they call a "tactical rating" because there was things that we couldn't do in helicopters that you could do in the airplanes. It was an instrumentation thing, and they just didn't offer it for us. Warrant officers were rotary wing pilots. So, I went to an officer . . . officer . . . Went to an instrument school over there and did the flight work with my own unit. And I did all of the bookwork and all of the light trainer unit . . . light trainer work with them in the school. And it was great because three-fourths of the time in Germany, you're flying instruments. The weather is just up and down. You can be bright sunshine in the morning, go to work, take off and go someplace, and come back on instruments, doing an instrument approach in your airfield. It was just . . . the weather went up and down fast.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: And you just had to be prepared for it. So, we would fly always on an IFR flight plan even though it was VFR outside. You could see for 500 miles, you know, you still always fly in this instrument flight plan. It was just easier because you didn't have to transition or anything; all of your fuel is set up, all your routes are set up, all your refueling points are set up for this type of flight. And it always worked out. And I just wanted to fly instruments over there, hardcore instruments, and it saved my ass a lot.

KLINGEMANN: Good training.

AMIS: It was excellent. I can't fault that one bit. Those people knew more than I did, so I opened my ears and shut my mouth.

KLINGEMANN: So, here you're in a different country now. You know when you were in Vietnam, you were there, right in your enemy's back yard. I mean, you were there. And then now, you're in Germany. And so, I'm sure that the conversations were different with the people that you had. I mean, you . . . Did you ever converse with any of the local Vietnamese when you were there?

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: What kind of conversations would you have?

AMIS: Oh, we didn't talk politics. We talked about how life was. "How you doing?" We just . . . we stayed away, generally. It was a common thing. We just . . . kind of an agreement. We stayed away from the politics, you know. "The VC are bad." Okay, I understand that. We need to get something done. It was a converse . . . it was a business thing. Mostly, it was me because I was dealing for the brigade headquarters, and the boss would send me . . . The major would send me in with a request to get stuff: to get equipment or something or buy certain things. And I had to go find it. You know, I had to learn to speak Vietnamese. And it was . . . I have a hearing problem, and part of it was jet engines, part of it was a medical thing. So that the tonal language . . . Vietnamese was a tonal language, and it's . . . You can say the same phrase two or three different ways, and then one way, the words are very nice an eloquent and a very nice thing to say. If you say it in a different tone and a different method, it could be an insult. And . . . depends

on the tones. And I had a hard time picking that up. Very hard time. Eventually, I did pick it up a little bit. I could [speaks in Vietnamese] very well . . . on maybe a third-grade level, a second-grade level. I could get along and they seemed to appreciate this, me trying and not making adverse comments about them, or their heritage, or their history. Because even I understood at the time that this country, this nation, had been under some type of foreign obligation or foreign occupation for 2,000 years. They were at war for 2,000 years. And they were under French occupation up until World War II, then the Japanese took over after World War II, were back under the French, and then Ho Chi Min came in and tried to unify the country, and there was a big split.

Well, these people are not stupid. They're very well-educated. Some of them are extremely well-educated. And even if they didn't go to a formal school, they had an education and they were very articulate sometimes. Very good businessmen for the most part. There was a mixture of Vietnamese, Chinese, Laos, Cambodian . . . and you could tell the racial differences between the Vietnamese, the Chinese, and Korean, Japanese because the different . . . Now we're getting into anthropology—and this is not my strong suit—but differences in skeletal formation. And the . . . the construction . . . construct of the face and the eyes. And that's all I remember. But you could tell the differences on a lot of it. And some places, I can't tell the difference with anybody, but I got along because I went in there with an open mind, I think. And it was not any extreme intelligence on my part. It was simply a matter of I needed to deal with these people. And they were people, just treat them like that.

KLINGEMANN: Now you're in Germany and that's . . .

AMIS: A different culture.

KLINGEMANN: Whole different situation.

AMIS: A culture shock. An eighteen-year-old kid going into Vietnam . . . culture shock here. I'm going to Germany, brand new wife. Now, she hadn't been out of Missouri except for going to Virginia Beach, Virginia once, and I take her—the poor child—I take her to Germany. So, we learned to speak German. And, yeah, third, fourth-grade level German. We got along. We could go into the economy, shop, travel all over the place. Wherever I flew to during the week, if I had the weekend off, we jumped in that little VW and we hauled it. We went there. And where you could buy American clothing or British clothing, we bought German stuff. It was less expensive. We fit in better. We weren't tagged as . . . "That's an American." A bunch of us used to . . . Genie didn't ski because she was pregnant, but we would go skiing on the weekend. Four or five of us guys would go skiing. And right at the end . . . I'd never skied before in my life except on water, and it was a disaster. And so, at the end of the skiing season—skiing season in '69, like March, April; right in there—"Hey, we're just getting ready to close the slopes down." It was at night, and we—three or four of us—took off and went to one of the little slopes about an hour-and-a-half away from home. And it was at night and they had . . . It was lit up and everything. Well, it was daytime but it was close to evening. So, we were skiing and coming back down, and they had these little stands there where they sell broetchen and schnitzel, and beer and stuff like that. So, we're standing there—and all of us were wearing German clothing, using German skis and everything—and this guy comes over and says, "You're American, aren't you?" And we

figured, "Okay, here it comes. We're going to get a bunch of crap." And we said "Yes, we're American."

"We didn't know who you were, but we heard you speaking English. We thought you might be American."

"Well, is there a problem, sir?" We were trying to just be kind and diplomatic. "Oh no, no. We thought you were a bunch of weird Germans because you didn't come over and talk to us. Well, we heard you. You don't speak like Americans do."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"Well you . . . Americans, they go the easy slope. They go where it's smooth. You go through the bumps, up and down. Go up and down the bumps like this. I mean, a washboard. You had the bumps, the washboards and things like that." And I said, "Well, okay. Fine. Why?"

"Well, Americans don't do that." And they thought we were just a bunch of snobby Germans. We wouldn't talk to them.

KLINGEMANN: Because you wouldn't talk to them.

AMIS: Well, we were dressed like Germans. And so, we get over, and it was terrible from then on. And we drank too much beer and ate too damn much. We're skiing . . . They finally closed the ski lift down because the clouds were coming; we were skiing through the clouds . . .

KLINGEMANN: Oh, wow.

AMIS: . . . coming down, and they finally had to shut it all off. And we . . . it was just us and five or six Germans. We just . . .

KLINGEMANN: Had a great time?

AMIS: Well, we were . . . were having too good a time.

KLINGEMANN: [Laughs] So, you spent the year in Germany?

AMIS: Yep.

KLINGEMANN: And then came back?

AMIS: Came back to the United States. I went to TAC helicopter school in Savannah. Hunter Army Air Field in Savannah, Georgia. And what they . . . place they call "Cobra Hall." Savannah . . . uh Hunter used to be an Air Force base. They turned it over to the Army. They shut it down a long, long time ago. Well, they had these . . . it was B-52 SAC base and they had these classrooms and they . . . Actually, buildings and they had vehicles with them. And these SAC crews would be sleeping there. And when they would . . . They would alert them with sirens and everything . . . lights go off. They would jump in these vehicles and they just haul straight to their . . . haul ass to their aircraft, and they would fire up and take off. Well, they had one of these buildings turned into a classroom, and it was called Cobra Hall, and that's where we had our first meeting with the AH-1 Cobra. Bell AH-1G Cobra.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: First two weeks were transition and the second two weeks were gunnery. Yeah . . . was there a month and we learned to fly. First, we learned to fly the front seat of the Cobra, because they wanted you to learn to fly the front seat first. And then they would transition you to the back. And it was a different airplane. In Germany, I was flying 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 feet above the ground, eighty to eighty-five knots airspeed. In the Cobra, they wanted us 100 feet above the ground and 130 knots of airspeed. And it was hard. I had a difficult time doing that. I had to force myself to fly low-level. I just wasn't used to it. I spent 200 hours flying in Germany way up high.

KLINGEMANN: Would you define . . . How would you define the Cobra? As what type of ship?

AMIS: The AH-1 Cobra was an attack helicopter.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: Bell designed the AH-1 Cobra from a . . . basically, a clean sheet of paper. They said as an attack helicopter, the first world . . . The world's first designed attack helicopter. I've got a certificate at home that says, you know, "Chief Warrant Officer Roger L. Amis is now certified in the world's first attack helicopter."

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: The Cobra was basically an H-1 Huey that they just made thirty-six inches wide. Put two stub wings, each thirty-six inches long on the left and right side of the frame to hold external ordinates. And we had four hoard points, two on each wing. We had a chin turret that carried a seven . . . 762 six-barrel mini gun and a forty millimeter grenade launcher. And a turret. The wings . . . the wing hard points could hold rocket pods for a 2.75-inch folding fin aerial rocket or a machine gun . . . main gun pod, 762 barrel six-barrel mini gun pod, in any combination they wanted. And you could select your ordinance from the inside, in the back seat. You could select the ordinance you wanted to fire. The co-pilot gunner in the front had a flexible sight that was locked up on the right front side of the cockpit area. It was unlocked by hand when we pulled the sight out, unlock the sight, pull it up. We controlled the turret and traverse, turn left and right, and then vertical traverse.

KLINGEMANN: That's a lot of firepower on there.

AMIS: A badass machine.

KLINGEMANN: That's a lot of firepower.

AMIS: It scared the hell out of people because it was designed to do one thing, and that was come in and strike, hit hard. And you could configure the aircraft up . . . we were . . . in school, we were just firing rockets off of one point, then we would fire the mini gun off the nose. And it

was an awesome machine. Dive speed . . . a maximum dive speed of 190 knots of dive with standard small pods on it or the machine gun pod. If you put the fat pods on it, nineteen tubes, it would restrict your dive speed, I think, to 160 knots because of aerodynamic requirement. But it still . . . a Hog Cobra could carry 3,000 rounds of mini gun in the left turret . . . left portion of the turret . . . left gun bay. Three-hundred rounds of forty millimeter grenade. The forty millimeter grenade had the same detonation . . . kill, wound radius power as an M26 fragmentation grenade. Kill radius: five meters. Wound radius: ten meters. Cyclic rate of fire: 300 rounds a minute of forty on . . . 150 rounds, first position switch. Second position: 300 rounds on the 40. First position on the mini gun: 1,500 rounds per minute. Second position: 3,000 rounds per minute.

I had . . . when I was in 'Nam, I had one ship that was configured with two mini guns. I carried 6,000 rounds of mini gun, and it was devastation. Pure devastation. Sometimes, it was just a lot . . . a lot of stuff. A lot of ordinance on targets . . . that was maxed out. Very few times we flew maxed because of the weather . . . heat requirement. Weather requirement . . . heat requirements were so high that it just degraded your power. We carried a lighter load but . . . some of those guys were damn good. And sometimes I could hit what I aimed at. Sometimes I couldn't hit a pole in the ass with a [unintelligible]. I'm serious. I . . . I . . . a couple of times, I put rockets at 3,000 meters out. The first round, direct hits. The guy in the ground says, "Cease fire. You're over with." You know, "Fire mission's over." Other times, I'd bore in too close. I got in like 700 meters out and I still couldn't hit shit. I went vertical on a target and I couldn't hit him. I mean, vertical: take it up, rotate it over, and go straight down on the target. I couldn't hit squat. Other times, I could bank shot something so bad it was . . . it was not even funny.

KLINGEMANN: So, you redeployed to Vietnam?

AMIS: Went back a second time, and I had . . .

KLINGEMANN: When was that?

AMIS: Nineteen sixty-nine. December 25, '69, I had Christmas with my family: my mother, my father, my wife, and my brand-new baby . . . six-month old daughter. Seven-month . . . eight-month-old daughter. I spent New Year's Eve in Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon. The first week of January, I went to Camp Eagle in I Corps 101st Airborne Division. They brought me in. "What do you want to fly?" I said, "I'm a Cobra pilot. I want to fly a Cobra." Said, "Okay." They sent me to Camp Evans about thirty miles north for a two-week indoctrination back in country. Weapons, tactics, becoming an infantryman, for two weeks. Came back out of that, I went to A Battery, 4th Battalion, 77 Aerial Rocket Artillery. We were flying AH-1 Cobras at Camp Eagle, and then . . .

KLINGEMANN: Were you guys the first ones to actually be doing that?

AMIS: No.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, they had already . . .

AMIS: They had already . . . the 4th Battalion 77th was in country 1968. They were flying Charlie model UH-1C, Charlie model Hueys, heavy hog configuration. And then 1969, they transitioned from the C models to the AH-1 Cobras.

KLINGEMANN: And then that's where you came in.

AMIS: That's when I came in.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: Got there . . . I was in and out of the hospital three times. The last time was the last time, and I was . . .

KLINGEMANN: Three times you were in the hospital?

AMIS: I was in the hospital . . . I was in the hospital ship for twenty-nine days.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, okay.

AMIS: First time, I went to the . . . the three . . . I forget what the evac hospital was, but they kept me in there. They cut me open, cut out the infections. Two weeks later, I was back with the unit flying again. The second time, the infections came back. I went onboard the hospital ship, *the Sanctuary*, for twenty-nine days. I finally begged them to get me off there because I was . . . It was either that or put me in a rubber room. I was going nuts. I had nothing to do.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: And . . . and getting well wasn't one of the things that I thought was something to do. It was . . . but they ended up putting me back on the beach and back to my unit. And I started . . . I was back flying combat missions. They came and asked me if I'd fly some maintenance test flight missions. Because they would bring in . . . ship in that had either paddle damage or had to have something changed because it timed out or something. So, they would . . . The maintenance unit would rebuild or replace the items . . . or repair it or rebuild it or whatever. And then they'd have to have a test pilot to fly it. Well, their test pilot . . . their number . . . the assistant maintenance officer rotated out. I said, "Sure, I'll fly it." So, I'd fly in both combat and maintenance test flights. And during the day, I'd fly combat missions. In the evening, at night, I'd fly maintenance test flight.

KLINGEMANN: Wow, that's a pretty rigorous life.

AMIS: It was something to do. When I got back on the beach, they had me doing that. I was there about three months. They made the mistake about putting me back. I should have stayed on the damn ship. I got some serious infections and they couldn't . . .

KLINGEMANN: So, yeah. You said the first time you had to go to the hospital, you got infections. What happened?

AMIS: The first time I was in 'Nam, I contracted something. I have no idea what it was. I . . . and what they call an abscess would grow up. And it did make a difference where you were at—in your back, in your butt, your leg, or whatever—the pressure would just . . . The thing would just grow. It was like a pimple on the inside and . . . It's an abscess. It grows up and it's got all kinds of crap in it. So, they would go in and cut it out. Well, they kept coming back and then . . . I think it was because of the environment. I picked it up the first time. It was dormant because of the temperature, the humidity type that I was in all the time. And so, the . . . the last time it got . . . I was going to the medics every day to get it cleaned out. They would open the stitching up, clean it out, pack it back with iodoform gauze, put a big Band-Aid over it and say, "Get out of here." So, finally got to the point where I developed some serious infections. There was no curing it. They took me to . . . back to the evac hospital, kept me there for a couple days. I went back, told them, "They're sending me to and Air Force evac hospital at Cam Ranh." I stayed there two weeks. They said they couldn't do anything for me. They sent me to Kamisu in Japan, to the hospital. I was there two weeks and they said, "We're going to send you back to the States." Okay.

KLINGEMANN: It was pretty serious then, I suppose.

AMIS: They got me back to the States, they cut me open, cut everything out, cured the infections because they cut all the infected crap out of me. I couldn't walk straight for a long time. I couldn't sit in one spot because the pain. And I got a week-and-a-half, two weeks off, out of the hospital to go see Genie in St. Louis . . . St. Charles, and I'd have to . . . I would walk down in Georgia—it was Atlanta—to get an airplane to go to St. Louis. And I could walk about 200 to 300 yards and I'd have to stop, and then take the pressure off the leg and stand there. And I had a time frame I had to make, so it was one of those things. It was either make the flight or put up with the pain. So, I put up with the pain.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah.

AMIS: And I got back home and then saw everybody. "Okay, I'm still alive, all in one piece." And it was no Purple Heart or anything like that. It didn't serve that. And so, I went back to the . . . Fort Gordon. It was . . . Fort Gordon, Georgia is where the special treatment center was, and they looked at me. They kept me there two weeks more and said, "Okay, you're out of here," and I went back to St. Louis . . . St. Charles, picked the kids . . . wife and kid up, and helped the family, her family, move to Birmingham, Alabama. And we got down there, I took an . . . had all . . . our personal effects in the Army were . . . crap, I don't remember now. Had one of the Army posts there, had that stuff sent up . . . sent to Fort Bliss in El Paso because . . . I had requested Fort Bliss because I had been there before. And went to the command headquarters at Fort Bliss—it was Department of Plans and Training at Biggs Army Air Field—and we flew support missions for Orogrande Range and McGregor Range. That's while I was at Fort Bliss.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And we were flying Bell Hueys OH-23s, H-13s. Had two . . . had one CH-34 and one VH-34. The VH-34 was, I think . . . was Eisenhower's. H-34. I got to fly that a couple times, and

then it got grounded because we over-sped the rotors. That wasn't my fault. It was an instructor over there. It was his fault.

KLINGEMANN: [Laughs] It was an instructor.

AMIS: And we had to take it out and run the engine up every month. So, I would take it way down to the other end of the ramp. Because Biggs used to be an air field on an air base, and . . . the other end of the ramp with nobody around. I'd taxi down because it was on wheels. I'd taxi down on the wheels, and . . . nobody around, I'd lift up to hover, and hover around a little bit, and then put it down. Then I'd taxi back down. I never flew it. I just hovered it.

KLINGEMANN: Just hovered it.

AMIS: The . . .

KLINGEMANN: Was it hard coming back?

AMIS: Yes and no. I didn't like leaving the people I was with because I had a good bunch of people.

KLINGEMANN: How many . . . I mean, you flew a lot of combat missions, didn't you?

AMIS: Not that much. I only picked up about 400 hours combat time.

KLINGEMANN: That's a lot, isn't it?

AMIS: But I flew a lot of maintenance time. We had guys coming out of there with 1,000 hours combat time but they were in the Hueys and slicks. And we were always . . . always on call. ARA was Aerial Rocket Artillery and we were a helicopter equivalent to a 105 towed battery, artillery battery, and we were called on a fire mission just like the artillery was. We would get a call "fire mission." That meant the two pilots—actually four pilots because there were two ship—would start running to the helicopters. And we had a requirement by our battery commander: you were at a hover and taxing in two minutes.

KLINGEMANN: Whew! Was that pretty quick?

AMIS: You were . . . You already went out, pre-flighted your aircraft, had everything set. The AC was in the back, copilot got in the front. Everything was set. We wore what they called a "chicken plate," and it was a ceramic steel mesh chest plate and it had a carrier. You flipped it over your head, two Velcro straps come around the front. You had a little pocket up front for the code book that you flipped over your head, and the code book went in there.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And you'd lay that on top of the . . . on top of the wing . . . on top of the inside right rocket tube. And then, the top went over the top of the wing. So, you just picked it up and go like this.

KLINGEMANN: Ah.

AMIS: And then you just, like this, slap, and then the pilot crawled in. While you were doing that, the copilot gunner was untying the tail rotor. And he had this long pole with a hook in it because the tail . . . The main rotor blade had a tab that came out and had a hook in it . . . It had a hole in it. And this hook went through the hole to hold the main rotor down, and you could tie it down. Well, he would unhook that and grab that rotor, and the . . . When you yelled "clear," he would throw . . . he would run and throw the rotor, so you already had momentum on the rotor.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, okay.

AMIS: You start . . . You broke the inertia.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah.

AMIS: So, that helped the start sequence. And you hit the trigger on the . . . the battery was on, the . . . the throttle was set. But I always ran it forward, back, and through the . . . the stop gate. And I would hit the trigger and then punch the talk at the same time. Because you're looking at temperature, clock, and watching the rotor speed, rotor, arc, and build.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And while you were doing that, the copilot gunner was running around on the right front, and he was crawling into the front. And he would strap down. He already had the chicken plate on, he would strap down, put his helmet on. When you got the start completed, he would grab the controls and say, "I've got the controls." You would take your hands off the controls. He would complete the start and run the . . . the engine RPM up to maximum of the operating. You're in the back going "click, click, click, click, click." Helmet on, plug it in. "Okay I've got the controls." He'd turn loose of the controls. He's getting clearance for departure, for takeoff. He's calling for clearance out of the airport.

KLINGEMANN: And this is in two minutes?

AMIS: Two minutes. He wanted you in a hover in two minutes, and it . . . Okay, at night he gave you and extra thirty seconds. He was a nice guy.

KLINGEMANN: He was a nice guy.

AMIS: But that . . . It was one of those things. And I had had people that were really good. And I found out and I learned that the reason that I was in existence over there was to work for the guy on the ground. I was a ground pounder at first, so I understand the guys on the ground thing. It

was one of those things. I'm working for that man on the ground. And my second time in the hospital, that morning, I had fired for these guys just coming into the hospital.

KLINGEMANN: Oh.

AMIS: One guy said, "I know you."
"Serg, we've never met."
"No, I know your voice."

KLINGEMANN: You've been there helping them out.

AMIS: And he said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "I'm bleeding out the ass." Okay. And they said, "Okay, we're going to take you first." I said, "No, take those guys first." They said, "Look." I said, "Them first. I'm not hurting. They're hurt. Take care of them." And, "All right guys, tell them." He says, "We don't move at night unless you fly. If the weather's crappy, we don't move." And these guys work. These were long-range recon teams.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: They were . . . And they were . . . They were loyal. And we were loyal to them. They called us, we went. If it was monsooning . . . Have you ever been in a monsoon?

KLINGEMANN: Yes. When I lived in Arizona, there was a monsoon season. Nothing what you see in South Vietnam, I'm sure. But in Arizona there's a monsoon season that lasts a month. And you know, it gets very, very hot, but then you have these torrential downpours and everything floods. And then the sun comes up again and just . . . Yeah, there's this shift that takes place there.

AMIS: The monsoon I remember—and I remember several of them—I flew . . . well, we didn't fly into the monsoon but if it was coming in, you got your . . . You got back and put it on the ground and locked it up fast. Or you went someplace else because you just . . . You couldn't fly through it. It wasn't safe. But my first tour over there, it was . . . We had a monsoon . . . Monsoon season started. Okay, fine . . . okay, fine. Big rain. Yeah, okay. Fine. I understand rain. Well, I found out a monsoon, you could run ten yards, thirty feet, you can be dry at the start of that run and be soaked by the time you got into your hooch. Everything is soaked. You're soaked to the skin. Nothing is dry. Socks aren't dry, your shirt's not dry, nothing is dry. And the water's just dripping off of you. And you take your equipment . . . You tear your equipment down, you clean it back up. You're looking for rust and clean it up. That was a monsoon.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah.

AMIS: You run thirty feet and you're soaked. And that goes on for three and four and five hours.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And it's the same thing day after day in the monsoon season. So, flying up in the highlands like we were up in I Corps, it was . . . a monsoon came? "Oh, crap. Here it goes."

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: And I used to fly . . . yeah, this stuff has been talked about . . . it's been written about, so I can talk about it. We flew what we called CCN mission. It was Command and Control North. And what we would do is fly deep penetration into Laos.

KLINGEMANN: These were the guys that had the patch with the skull on it.

AMIS: I should have brought one down. I didn't.

KLINGEMANN: There was a guy that was a priest in Alpine who had that stenciled into the interior of his green beret. And it said "CCN" and there was a skull with a beret on it.

AMIS: CCN is Command and Control North. CCC, Command and Control Central. CCS, Command and Control South.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: I flew for CCN. That's why I don't have any medals.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: All of our stuff was in Laos or North Vietnam.

KLINGEMANN: And it was supposed to be . . .

AMIS: It was a black op. I fly with a . . . We were requested by unit and by name. I was an aircraft commander for three or four months . . . three months, and I was only qualified to fly wing ship in a copilot position. I had to fly enough CCN missions to go to back seat, and fly enough backseat time to take over as number one ship on a CCN mission.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: And we would fly an hour, hour and a quarter in Laos. Or . . . I . . . I can't say for sure, but I think we hit North Vietnam a couple times.

KLINGEMANN: But this is what? Troop movements?

AMIS: CCN was supposed to be snoop and scoot. You went in, you looked and . . . you saw and you reported. It was basically, supposedly, reconnaissance. Not all the time, because we would brief with the . . . the Huey unit and then the team leaders . . . the team . . . the ground guys. So, their team was made up of two white boys . . . or two Americans. Two ground guys. And they

would have a team of anywhere from six to twelve people. Those other four to eight people were mercenaries. They were Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino.

KLINGEMANN: Mercenaries.

AMIS: Yeah, we used mercs over there.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: They won't admit it, and nobody will come out and say it, but those were mercs. I was talking about the . . . I made a mention to the fact that . . . odor. These teams that we would go in with or would go in . . . Say it was a twelve-man team. They would lock them down two weeks ahead of time before the insertion date for a mission, and they would stay together. They ate Vietnamese food. They drank Vietnamese beer. They smoked Vietnamese cigarettes if they smoked. And a lot of these guys would . . . they used Vietnamese soap to wash with. They used NVA weapons. They dressed in NVA clothing. The boots had special soles on them that were the same as the sole used on an NVA boot.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: They would use AK-47 SKSs, M1 Carbines. Because M1 Carbine was very prolific over there. The . . . And sometimes a lot of them used . . . had special silenced weapons. But a couple of the bases we would go in, we would try to fly the insertion of a team and then try to fly the extraction for the team, because we met and talked to the team-leads face to face. And we would go into a big room. And it was guarded—and these guys were not nice, the guards—and it was top secret, eyes only. No notes, nothing. You had a certain set of things you had to have, and that was it. No photographs . . .

KLINGEMANN: So, you were basically doing security, then, for the insert and the extraction?

AMIS: Yeah, there were four of us. There would be four snakes. Two low snakes take the slicks in. The slick was a . . . basically, was an unarmed Huey. Misnomer. They were carrying M60 machine guns on both sides, and they would go in. And we would fly in, we'd prep the LZ with what were called nails. And these were flechette rockets. They had 1,100 galvanized nails per rocket. And these were fired in pairs. And we would prep the LZ, the Landing Zone. What we would call "the silent prep." There was no explosions. And these nails would hit the ground in excess of 600 mph and would go through the basic armor. And they would leave little red spots because there was a red dye that would explode or would . . . it would basically explode when the . . . the armor package would go off. The nails were packed nose to tail like this, and you have a . . . a set of fins going forward and the other set of fins following it. Well, when they would open up like that, they would spread and . . .

KLINGEMANN: Oh, okay.

AMIS: And they glowed. You'd have a red puff of smoke when this charge went off to tell you it armed them and set itself up. It ignited, and you would fire these at a certain dive angle, a certain

speed, and you can get one per square foot for several football fields, depending on how many of them you fired. It was silent prep.

KLINGEMANN: You could neutralize . . .

AMIS: We did. I talked to some of those guys that they hit a . . . we hit an area, they slithered off. Because the slicks would hit, and they would be on the ground thirty seconds. And the copilot . . . or the first . . . the pilot was talking, and he was telling them, "One and two and three and four." And he would hit thirty. The pilot who was actually doing the flying was lifting off, and the command ship would be . . . "I'm light. I'm light on skids. I'm in the air." And you'd better be on his tail. It would be two Cobras coming in right beside him. And there were two high ships, so if we took anything from the ground, the high ships would come down and neutralize it. Well, we had one team that went in . . . because we would talk to these teams and find out what we did right. If we did something wrong . . . how we corrected it. And we became close in the . . . in the fact of they could depend on us and we could depend on them because we knew them. Well, one team slithered off into the brush, and they came up on this little encampment. And they watched that thing for two and a half hours. Nobody moved. And finally, one of the guys got brave enough. He pulled out of whatever and he slithered up and he touched this guy. And the guy didn't move. And he had little red pockmarks all over the place. He was nailed in place. They found one guy, he was back sitting on a log. Well, his shorts were down to his ankles.

KLINGEMANN: So, he was in the act of relieving himself.

AMIS: He was . . . he got relief. And it was . . . they said it was like being in a ghost town. You see the bodies, but nobody moved. And they checked everything and there was no equipment in there useable because these little red spots were all through it. These were galvanized nails about an inch and a quarter long with little fins stamped in them.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah.

AMIS: We called them flechette rockets, flechettes.

KLINGEMANN: The way to neutralize any landing zone.

AMIS: So, that happened. And then one of the reasons we started doing the one-on-one face-to . . . one-on-one, team face-to-face brief and talk to these guys was one group came in and they were in the A S`âı Valley just west of the Huế Phu Bai area that we were flying out of on the Laotian border, base . . . base of Tiger Mountain. And they were . . . it was at night, and these guys had to have been out like a week and a half. And they were . . . they were in bad shape. They needed to get out of there. They needed to resupply food and water and get back and get a beer or something. And I think it was more get a beer than anything else. But they . . . on the side of this one open area, they were all huddled up, and this big helicopter comes in. It lands, and the team commander says . . . He talked to this one other guy and he says . . . and he was Vietnamese. He says, "Go check it out." He says, "Yeah, I'll go check it." He goes running out there and he looks in there. He comes running back and he says, "Boss, I don't know that

helicopter. It's not one of ours." He says, "What do you mean?" He says, "It's North Vietnamese." He said, "Get out of here now." So, they got out. They ran. And it was one of the reasons we started doing the face-to-face meets and the voice links, because we would talk to them . . . talk to them . . .

KLINGEMANN: Oh, otherwise they would have been confused. Yeah, okay. That could have been very devastating for a team.

AMIS: And we had . . . had reports of Chinese commies or Russian helicopters coming down into Vietnam, cargo ships, and dropping people off, mostly at night. But we got launched on a couple times. Never could find them.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: Never found them. But I wanted one of those so bad. I kept a pair of . . . I kept several pair of flechettes on my . . . on my wing pods just for that.

KLINGEMANN: Just for that.

AMIS: Oh, God, give me one of those. I go back . . . the thing stenciled on the side of my helicopter, one of those Russian helicopters. Never happened.

KLINGEMANN: Let me take a break for just a second, Rog, so I can go get some water for you.

AMIS: Sure. Let me stretch out.

[Audio cuts off and resumes]

KLINGEMANN: Okay, this is interview part two with Roger Amis. And Last time we left off, we were talking about CCN and the relationship that you had with the units that you would . . . out on the ground, and . . . but go ahead.

AMIS: We were a tight group. We were together when we were with CCN. We would fly into the compound in the morning, stay with them, brief in the morning for whatever mission was coming up, and then stay with that team. And we were sequestered with that them; we couldn't go anywhere else. We had to stay right in that area. If you went to the latrine, you told somebody, "I'm going to the latrine. I'll be right back." You couldn't leave them. And . . . because you could be . . . you were subject to being called at a moment's notice. We would have . . . there would be . . . we didn't have . . . there would be a weather aircraft from the Air Force go over the target area or the route from the Huế Phu Bai area or from Da Nang to the target area and tell us what the weather was. And if the weather was conducive for us to go ahead and launch, and then our projected flight times to the target are . . . if we would be able to make it . . . make the insertion and then get back out before weather closed us in.

These were called covey, and they were Air Force O-2 Forward Air Controller aircraft. These were the Cessna Super Skymaster, push-pull civilian airplanes. They were militarized, and there were two versions of it. The A model was the forward air controller version. The B model

was the psychological warfare, psy. warfare, bird. And they had big speakers out the side and they'd drop leaflets and things like this. But we would have use of the covey aircraft for forward air controller work, and we would talk to them on the way in to the target. They would tell us if there was any problems, anything to look out for, or . . . "Turn right at the river where it forks and go north two miles. Then turn left and go back to the target area. Don't go down by the river." We also have a controller, an Air Force controller aircraft. If I remember correctly, it was called "King 6," and it was either a C-130 control . . . command and control ship that was doing . . . it was controlling aircraft into and out of the area. And it would be us going in on a low-level target run-drop, or it could be an aircraft—Air Force or Naval package—going in and doing a bomb run on an area. And . . . or be in control of a search and rescue type thing. They were like an . . . they were just like an air control system. They were just controlling. "You stay over here. This group stays over here. You guys don't mix it up." That kind of thing. And we would be talking to them consistently. Ended up going to our target area. If it was okay to go in, if it was clear—the weather wasn't bad—we would go into it, make our drops, escort the ships back out.

KLINGEMANN: How long would those teams stay in there?

AMIS: They could stay in there for two or three nights, or two . . . or three . . . two weeks, I think, was the longest I had seen them go in.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: This would be a twelve-man team, and it would be three Hueys taking them in. And these guys would be humping sixty, seventy, eighty-pound packs. And they were carrying their own food and water, ammunition, communications gear. Things like that. I've seen one team go in with four men, and they would be out two days, and they would just do one thing. They were looking at something. What it was, we never knew. And we . . . we weren't briefed on that part. We were just briefed to get them into one spot, put them in exactly that spot, and then leave them and go home, and then go back and get them at a different landing zone. And we would do what we . . . we call a . . . a "false insertion." We'd make approaches or . . . four approaches into different areas, and you really didn't know when the team was left off . . .out. It could be the third approach and we would do a fourth one just to confuse everybody. Because Hueys, you can hear them a long way off. And if we're flying high enough, you can see us. Pull people off of mountainsides and be in tall grass, shooting around them.

We had one team that was . . . it was a four-man team. And they were in contact. They were in grass that was four to six feet high, and we were firing right around them. And the team leader said he had contact with some people and he could see . . . actually see them four meters, five meters away from him. And he wanted to put a forty millimeter grenade around him. And I told him, "You've got a five-meter kill radius. I can't put that on you." He says, "Put it around me or I'm . . . I'm going to die." So, I ringed him. We got all four of them out and their packs were shredded with shrapnel. I told him, "Dig in. Here it comes." And I ringed him. I put about twelve rounds around him. And he didn't come up on the radio real fast, and we were worried about him. I was really worried about him. And he came up on the radio and said, "We're good. Come get us." So, we escorted a slick in and they jumped on. The slick . . . The slick comes in, he's just . . . his blades are just cutting the grass and the guys are jumping in. And he just rolled off the side, down the hill to get his airspeed, and we just followed him down. Talked to the team

leader and he said, "We're good." And we got back on the ground, and there were no ambulances coming, so I guess they were okay. And I talked to him later when I saw him. And their packs were shredded with shrapnel. One of the radios was . . . I remember the radio was useless. Weapons were okay. They were okay. I think a couple of them got nicked, but they would never say.

KLINGEMANN: Presumably, it saved their life.

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: Roger, did you ever lose any close friends in 'Nam?

AMIS: We had one Cobra go down. It had a lieutenant . . . It had two warrant officers on board. I knew them but they were . . . They were another section. And they lived . . . I lived on the second floor of this old marine hooch. The marines left Huế Phu Bai Airport, went south to Danang. So, the ARA unit moved over to the airport because we had better airport facilities. And they lived on the bottom floor and I was on the top. And they were both lieutenants. That's right. They were both lieutenants. And I didn't know them real well but the problem was that I ended up doing their equipment . . . or their personal property inventory. And that's kind of personal for both of them. I had two enlisted men with me from the supply office, and we went through every item they had, and it had to be inventoried. It had to be boxed up and identified and put aside for them.

KLINGEMANN: But you knew them?

AMIS: I knew them. And it was one of those things. They just got shot out of the sky. There was a big explosion. They didn't run into anything. They just got hit by something we think was an RPG, Rocket Propelled Grenade. It was just one of those things. Did a lot of . . . not a lot, but we did some security work. We were flying aerial security for . . . I think some congressman came in. They went up onto the DMZ and—because we were just short of the DMZ about twenty miles, thirty miles south—and we were flying security for them, and we got called to help out an urban . . . it was an urban ranger unit that had U.S. advisors with them. And they were taking a pounding from a couple machine guns and a mortar. And two of us went after it. The lead went after the mortar, and I was flying his wing. A machine gun opened up on him, on the lead ship, and we were . . . He was diving on them. I was following him about 1,000 meters behind, and I saw the machine gun open up. And I told him, I said, "Roll on the machine gun." I took on the machine gun. And it wasn't just a machine gun. It was a 12.7, and it was firing straight at us.

And I dropped down into the dive, I rolled off of one dive, and I remember I rolled into another on the machine gun . . . on the gunner. And it was a big pit. I could see the pit. I put two ten-pound warheads ten meters right of the pit. Second two . . . two-pounders . . . second ten-pounders five meters right of the pit. And I put the last two rockets I had on-board in the pit and then I pulled up and pulled in as max amount of power as I could. I was listening to three radios at once. I was listening to the lead ship, and he was okay. I was listening to the ground unit that was talking to him. And I was listening to an Air Force FAC that was high above us because he was going to come in and help out. And they were all three just in the headphones . . . in the helmet. And the copilot, I was asking, "Are you okay? Are you hurt or hit? Anything?" Because

I didn't feel anything, but I didn't know. And these tracers, the 50 caliber tracers, 12.7 tracers were coming by us. And even though . . . with a half-inch diameter, it looks like a soccer ball going by. It looks . . . You know, it's an optical illusion. But it looks big even though it's . . . it's this. It looks like this.

And you know that there's five or something in between there, and they were going right past us. And they didn't . . . completely missed the ship. Didn't hit the ship. And I was . . . I was back in about a fifteen-degree angle, flying, and I had as much power as I could pull in without over-temping and over-stressing the engine . . . over-torqueing the engine and they system. And we were climbing about 1,500 feet a minute. And I was sitting back there, and I had . . . the gunner's up in front of me and my tail's right at the pit. And I was just sitting there. I had my eyes squinted and I was . . . I was . . . I was tight. I was waiting for the impact. And we were starting to climb to about 9,000 feet, and I'm still climbing like crazy. I'm . . . I'm wound out. I'm scared. I know I'm going to get hit. The guy's going to tear my ass apart. And I just went straight up. And finally, this one guy says, "You hit him. You hit him. You hit him. You hit him." And I finally realized what radio I was talking to. It was the ground commander for the ground . . . Oh, what the hell was it? The advisor for the armaments. And he says, "You got him." I said, "Got what?" He says, "You got the pit." And it was like the weight was gone.

KLINGEMANN: Just like that.

AMIS: Yeah. Poof! And I just . . . I had the controls trimmed and I was at a climb. The gunner there up front, he says, "Roger." I said "Yeah"

"Quit singing," he said. "What are you talking about?" I said, "Quit singing."

"I'm not singing."

"Yes, you were."

"What?"

"Camelot." He heard . . . we talked later. He heard . . . on the last pair, it was "Camelot, Camelot, from far off lands I hear you call." That's when the rockets went off. And that's when I turned hard and made the climb. I . . . I didn't know I was doing it.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: We had one other time. It was really slick. No pun intended but it was . . . actual slicks were involved. We're called to this mountaintop. And there was a lurk team on the mountaintop. We had two armed teams hooked up there and they were . . . bad guys were coming up after them and it was all clouded in. And they had casualties. And they were trying to get a Huey up in there to medevac them up and get them out. And clouds were right down on top just like this, and there was about 500 to 600 feet of cloud between the cloud base and the site on top. And they were taking fire . . . or they were trying to get out and they were taking a little bit of fire. So, that . . . we were going in. We had four snakes . . . two snakes and three Hueys. And the Hueys would go up and we would . . . We would go into the cloud. Hueys would back off, we would go up into the cloud. And the gunner's got his turret active, and he's . . . he's ready with the mini gun. And we would go into the cloud—and we would go completely on instruments—tear up the cloud, and then come back down. And tear a big hole in it. And we'd come back down and dive out and come back around. And then the other snake would come in and we would slow down. We would cover him. And he would do the same thing. And he would come up and he would

come back out. And then we would get the . . . one of the slicks to come in and he'd go up into the hole. And he said, "I can't take any more. I can't . . . can't get anything higher." So, he would come back down out, and then one of us would go back up.

We were coming in with about forty knots of airspeed, coming up into the cloud and tearing it up. And it was . . . There was an explosion on our right front . . . about 1:30 to two o'clock, on our right front, about even with us. And I saw it, and time slowed down. I saw the . . . I saw the thing ignite and I just saw this ball erupt out. And I took and rolled the helicopter out. I split us out the bottom, down out of the cloud, and came back around. And when I did like this, I felt impact on the side and I felt impact on bottom. And I thought I had taken a hit in the transmission, the hydraulics control compartment. It was underneath the stub . . . underneath the stub wings, underneath the transmission. That's where all our hydraulics were. And I was sure I took one there. It felt like it. I felt it in my back and my . . . my lower back. I felt the hit. I knew I hadn't been hit in the front. And I knew I . . . I thought I had been hit in the back, underneath. And I rolled out, came in, I dumped the nose, rolled out, and made a split. A helicopter's not supposed to fly upside down, but I split us out the top . . . out the bottom, and then came back around. And I had the other ship come out. He said, "What's wrong?" I said, "I'm hit. I'm hit. I've taken a hit. I don't know what it is." So, I slowed back to about sixty knots of airspeed and he came to look at me. I said, "Am I trailing anything. Hydraulic fluid? Anything?" He said, "No, Amis. I can't see anything." And I said, "Okay, I'm going to fly straight and level. Come in close. Come in tight and check me out." He says, "I can't see anything . . . oh, crap! You have crap hanging out the side." And he didn't say what. And I said, "Okay. Am I dragging anything? Am I trailing anything?" He said, "No." I said, "I think I've been hit in the transmission compartment." He went down underneath me and he says, "Roger, I don't see anything." I said, "Okay. You stay here." Because I was lead, I think. Yeah, I was lead. "I'm going to go back to Phu Bai and take care of it there because I've been hit. "And he said, "Yeah, get out of here."

So, he went back and did that, and they eventually got the helicopter in there. They got the guys out. Unfortunately, one was in a body bag. They didn't get to them fast enough. I went back to the Huế Phu Bai Airport, and I called in, "I've been hit—I don't know what it is—so I'm going to put it on the ramp area." Because I would lock up the air strip. And . . . came in and set it down at a good hover. They came out and looked at me and said, "Looks okay. You're not dragging anything." I put it back in revetment. We had a piece of steel shrapnel hanging out the right side of the cabin area. The copilot gunner was sitting like this. His instrument panel's here, controls are here. In the Cobra, cyclic is here, collective is here. In the back seat, they're here. Normal helicopter thingy, but it's all up here. Right here was that shrapnel, about that far, sticking in the side. We landed there, and we went over that aircraft, the helicopter, almost with a magnifying glass. We checked the bottom of the blades. We checked leading edges. We checked the tail rotor. We checked anything, everything. We couldn't find the other spot where I was hit. I swear up and down I was hit. And that's the last time I saw that shrapnel. The . . .

KLINGEMANN: So, it was a pretty long piece of shrapnel.

AMIS: Army intelligence came in there. He took it. We found out later that it was shrapnel from a dud 105 round that had not gone off. And what they had done was they took a load of that damn thing up the side of a hill and they put explosives on it. When we came hovering in, they blew it up.

KLINGEMANN: So, the . . . okay.

AMIS: So, that's what I saw was the initial explosion, and then it looked just like this. It was just time slowed down.

KLINGEMANN: Slow motion.

AMIS: And Roger rolls it down, out the bottom.

KLINGEMANN: But you had . . . It was a big piece of shrapnel.

AMIS: You know, came back out and I don't know. I think . . . I don't know what they used on it. I think they just packed it with superglue or something. Or . . . what would it be? It's black and gray. J-B Weld.

KLINGEMANN: J-B Weld.

AMIS: It was that or they had something to glue and pack it in there.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, wow.

AMIS: And then painted it green.

KLINGEMANN: Painted it green.

AMIS: "Get out of here," you know. But that was one of the things that we just . . . We did everything we could.

KLINGEMANN: You were in the front seat?

AMIS: I was in the back. I was . . .

KLINGEMANN: In the back. In the . . .

AMIS: The copilot gunner in the front, aircraft commander in the back.

KLINGEMANN: And aircraft commander in the back. Okay. So, he could have actually taken him out.

AMIS: He could have taken him out, easy. Another split second, it could have hit right below me, right beside me. It could have been in the engine, in the transmission compartment, and the hydraulics compartment. Just anywhere.

KLINGEMANN: So, when you look back on you experience, what do you see as the biggest differences—difference or differences—between that eighteen year old that landed on that beach and—you would have been, then, twenty-four, twenty-five when you left? What was the biggest

difference? I mean, you . . . it was lock and load when you were eighteen. And that was, "Okay, we're in country." And then you come back a combat veteran, two tours in Vietnam, and you're a completely different person.

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: How?

AMIS: I'd like to say more intelligent . . . more mature . . . more thoughtful, less a risk taker. But . . . a lot of that is correct. But am I any more intelligent? I'm more mature now? Less of a risk taker? Now I am, because I've got a little bit of age behind me. Do I do the same things I did when I was sixteen-years-old? I had to think twice. A friend of mine wanted to go skydiving. And that was before he left . . . He was in dog school, Border Patrol Agent Dog School, and I was flying here on patrol. And he wanted . . . He knew I had skydived. He had seen some pictures of me. And I didn't talk about it all that much, and he said, "Yeah, I want to go skydive. I want to go skydive." So, I told him about the guy to see. He said, "Well, you come with me, and I'll do it." I said, "Okay. I'll come over." So, I drove over there, over to El Paso, on a Friday. Stayed with him and his wife that night. Went over Saturday morning to Santa Teresa and I bought flight suits for me and him because I wanted to jump in a flight suit. Because I didn't have the actual skydiving apparel and I had a flight suit. Big deal. And I went through all the training. And the guy that was doing the . . . running the skydiving operation, I had flown for him as a jump pilot and he knew we knew each other. And the only reason I recommended him is because of his safety culture, his look . . . his thing with safety. And he was extremely safety oriented and would not put up with any BS. None. He was ex-special forces jumpmaster. You want to go bad ass? Yeah, he could. He would enforce it one way or the other. But as far as his operation was concerned, it was the only reason I would even consider it. And I said I would do it.

KLINGEMANN: How . . . how old are you?

AMIS: Oh, gosh. Forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty. Right in there. So, we went over there and we did two static line jumps. And the guy's name was Bob Kearn, El Paso Skydivers, and he says, "Roger, I know you've jumped before. And I know . . . But you've got to go through the training." I said, "Hey, fine. Not a problem with me. Training is good. I want to, you know, go home with everything intact." And he said, "Okay. I just wanted to make sure." I said, "No, not a problem with me." I sit here with my eyes wide open and my mouth shut. Ears were open too. And I did it. But would I go do it now? I don't know. But back to the original question. Yes, there's a complete change. I had more responsibility. I had a wife and a child. It made me think a little bit more about my mortality. Because believe me, we went over there the first time, we were the immortals. We hung it out.

When I was back to the helicopter pilot, I did . . . I . . . I put it on the line. And was glad enough to do it because I knew who I was doing it for. I wasn't doing it for the politicians back here. I wasn't doing it for the brass. I was doing it for the guy on the ground. He was my justification for me being who I was. And it wasn't because I was the world's greatest helicopter pilot. Never was, never will be. Am I good? I'm damn good, but it was for them and them only. Those were the people I was working for. That carried over to the border patrol. Patrol agents

were the people I worked for. Not the chief. Not the deputy chief. Not the regional commander or whatever. It was for the guy on the ground. And it didn't make any difference whether I liked the guy or not, whether he was a good agent or whether he wasn't, or she wasn't. It makes no difference. I worked for that person on the ground, and I hung it out for them. If I had to do things like that again, it would be for the person on the ground.

More mature? Yes. A little bit more intelligent? I'll beat myself on the back and say yes. Am I going to hang the risk out? No, not without a real good reason. I don't have . . . I'm not as young as I used to be. I don't have the strength, the agility, the quickness. I don't have the reflexes I had when I was sixteen or nineteen or twenty-two. I don't have that eyesight. I don't have that hearing. I'm seventy years old. Well, seventy in November. So, would I go back into combat now? I can't, simply because the training would be six months to a year to train me to go back as an attack helicopter pilot. And even then, I don't know if I could qualify for it. As an instructor pilot? Yeah, I could go back and teach you how to fly helicopters. But to go back and to do all that again? No, I don't have that.

KLINGEMANN: Was it hard to readjust to civilian society when you came back?

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: What did you struggle with the most?

AMIS: The lack of regimentation. I was used to things happening a certain way, a certain time, a certain place. We just didn't have that. Even in the police department, there was . . . there was a lot of regimentation there. I mean, we had to do things a certain way, and they had to be legal and so on. But still, there was a lack of . . . I think, a lack of the supervision and the training that there should have been, even though we had what we had. And it was good for what we had, but it could have been better. Uh . . .

KLINGEMANN: How long were you in the police force before you actually went . . . ?

AMIS: Seven years and nine . . . seven years, ten months.

KLINGEMANN: Before you went into border patrol?

AMIS: Right.

KLINGEMANN: And at that time, you were doing crime scenes?

AMIS: I was a uniform patrol agent . . . or uniform patrol . . . uniform police officer on patrol in El Paso. I took the detective's exam. I went to burglary and theft as a detective. I spent several years there. Then I spent three months in the vice squad, working plain clothes in the street. Mostly South El Paso, picking up drug dealers, gambling, prostitution. Working that angle. Working the, oh, alternately sexual persuasion groups and prostitution. Because at that time, I still had a baby face, slender enough, hair was short enough. I put an old field jacket on, they would drop me down by the port of entry, and I'd stagger back north smelling like a . . . a bar. And I would get mugged until they found it wasn't a real good idea. And it was usually three

guys bigger than me peeling these people off of me and working that. And it was a good idea. They took me out of there and I thought I was going to be screwed, which I still think I was, but they wanted somebody back in. They had to get him out then put him back in. It was a good deal for me because I was drinking too much . . . because it was part of the job.

KLINGEMANN: Well, that's interesting, then. You were in a situation that was far more stressful in Vietnam, but you didn't drink that much. You come back, and you're at Fort Bliss . . . you're stationed at Fort Bliss, and then you actually get out. You're honorably discharged from the military, and then all of a sudden, you get into the life of police work and then your drinking increases if I'm reading you right . . .

AMIS: Yeah. Yep, it did. It did. It really did. And I would drive home . . . I was drunk. Well, legally drunk. Now, I wasn't [incoherent] all over the road but I was legally drunk and they were paying for it. And I was never a very good undercover cop. I looked too much like one. I sound too much like one, I guess. I was told, I guess. I looked too much like it, I sound too much like it, I acted too much like it. I didn't have the persona of what I was trying to appear. I'm not a good actor. So, it was not a good deal for me. And them taking me out of there was actually good for me. And at that time, I thought I was just being screwed. After two weeks in IDNR . . . Oh, talk about a scam. It was beautiful. It was a racket. All I had to do was learn how to take fingerprints and photographs. And I threw myself into it. Once I figured out what it was, it was a godsend. And it was fun. I could go to court, and they could never . . . They could never break my testimony on evidence. I never had any evidence thrown out. The case might have been thrown out, but it was not because of the evidence I took. Because I had note after note after note, and everything was . . . ah, the chain of evidence. The cover of the whole thing was perfect. And I learned. The guys taught me . . .

KLINGEMANN: Now were these petty crimes or were these major?

AMIS: It was major crimes and petty stuff, too. Burglaries, thefts, murders, assaults, shootings. Oh, crap, what else? Drug busts. Everything that I could get involved with as far as ID was concerned, I was in it. But I had people that taught me good, and they taught me the right way. And once I got it in my head what I was doing and how I needed to do it, I was . . . I was good. But it was because of the people that trained me. I took what they did and ran with it. But they were better than me. I'll be the first to admit that. But we had some good people in that IDNR unit.

KLINGEMANN: So, presumably, a lot of the guys you worked with were probably Vietnam vets too?

AMIS: Some of them were. My first partner in the PD in El Paso, who will remain nameless, was a marine. He was in Khe Sanh. He's got three scars where he was bayoneted. And he and I got along great even though he was a marine. But . . . but . . . and right out front, I have total respect for the Marine Corps because of the job they did. And I'll fight with them day and night, but don't get between us. You're a dead goose if you get between us. Because there's them and me, and then there's you or you. But we were . . . we worked together great. He was a 'Nam vet.

There were several others of us that were that way, and we worked okay. And you know, didn't have any problems with them.

AMIS: Stay in touch with them at all?

AMIS: I haven't seen them in fifteen years. Don't know whether they're dead or alive. He's running someplace. I don't know where.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah. You know, whenever you see the studies on vets that come back . . . and even today, there is a difficult time. There's a difficult adjustment.

AMIS: There is.

KLINGEMANN: Because you go from a situation where it's high stress. You're with your buddies, but then now, you're expected to come back to the United States and be a member of the PTA and be, you know, the good little citizen. And I don't know how you do that when you're eighteen . . . twenty-five years of age, and you come back and they expect you to just slide right back into that life.

AMIS: There's a real good example of this. Obviously, you know the T.V. show, *MASH*. When they left Korea, they came back to the States, and Klinger was the company clerk. And at that time, it was . . . in Korea, if you needed something, you appropriated it. Well, he did the same thing back in the States, and of course, he gets arrested and everything and colonel whatever bails him out. And then he turns around and says, "But that's what they had me do in Korea. What's the problem?" And the same thing with us. It was . . . We had to do certain things, and now, I'm supposed to be this perfect citizen. And don't take this wrong, but I was a hired, trained, paid, professional killer. That's what I was and nothing can change that. Do I have post-traumatic stress syndrome? Yes. I'm having it right now. I don't wake up in sweats anymore. I don't wake up paranoid, looking at the room and ceiling and wondering where things are at. I don't do that anymore.

KLINGEMANN: Did you do that for a while?

AMIS: Yeah. Yeah, that little thing I told you about. I almost knocked my mother out. That was something that I told them, "Don't do this," and she did it. She never did it again.

KLINGEMANN: She wasn't supposed to tap you on the chest to wake you up.

AMIS: No, not on the chest. Never. Never on the chest. I still got a combat knife at home. My dad and I modified it. I had two weeks leave before we deployed to 'Nam. I went out and bought a Puma White Hunter stag-handled knife. It had a nice finish on it. We cold-glued it. Re-dyed the sheath and everything. I've still got it.

KLINGEMANN: What do you think about when you see that? When you look at that stuff?

AMIS: Time gone past. It's not there. It's not now. I don't need it. Am I going to trigger out sometime and go wacky? Probably not, unless I am in the position where my life, my friends, or my family is a stake. And civilization's out. I'm no longer civilized.

KLINGEMANN: I'm sure it was very difficult coming back to the States.

AMIS: It was . . . the first time was bad because they were spitting on us, calling us "baby killers" . . . all kinds of things that didn't happen. Now, true atrocities did happen. I'm not sure Calley was . . . He took the hit for that. Now, whether he actually did it on his own or not, I don't know. I wasn't there.

KLINGEMANN: Now, you're referring to the Mai Lai Massacre.

AMIS: Yeah, Mai Lai Massacre. I don't know. I don't know if he did or not. The way the government and the military work, I think he was the fall guy. But that's just my opinion. I don't have any proof of that. We were . . . Well, I had one guy, he went through 'Nam. He . . . in firefights. God, you know, hand-to-hand almost, and he came out without a . . . Well, he came out with a couple Purple Hearts because he got scraped up and he got poked a few times but he came back with all of his working parts, like . . . everything. And he gets off the plane and got shot in the gut by a protester. Came up and put a .25 caliber in his gut. Luckily, the protester got dragged away by the MPs, or else he'd have been dragged away in a body bag. Those guys would have come unloose . . . unhinged. The rule I live by is the use of deadly force to protect myself if I am in fear of my life or mortal danger, protect my partner, protect an innocent. Otherwise, the weapons don't come out.

KLINGEMANN: It's a tough lesson to learn for an eighteen-year-old coming out of St. Louis?

AMIS: Eighteen-year-old kid out of a . . . a wonderful 25,000-person town . . . city. We didn't have any of that. We didn't have any . . . Well, we had the normal kid BS in the school yard . . . friction, yeah. We didn't have anything other than that. When things got bad, people pulled together. Didn't care where you came from or . . . you lived down on the river or you lived up higher in the city or you lived out in the country, didn't make any difference. You pulled together and took care of each other. And we used to go back and forth. That was all we ever saw. It's all I ever saw. But going in, that was a culture shock. One, I'm in a complete different land. I'm 3,000 plus mile from home. I don't speak this language. These people don't look like me. All I ever saw was . . . of Orientals was on T.V. The only thing I knew about the Japanese was what I saw on *James Bond* and you only looked twice. Those were some good-looking girls. I walked around outside of Camp Zama in Japan. They actually let me put civilian clothes on and walk around . . . No . . . Yeah, it was outside of Camp Zama Japan. I walked around out there and talked to people. That's the only thing I ever . . . I didn't know anything about them, what they did, what their religion was, what their thoughts on life were. I didn't know any of that. We had a little book on Vietnam and this is supposed to tell us everything. And we read maybe half of it. Here's a question for you: What do you think of when you see the . . . the swastika symbol from Nazi Germany?

KLINGEMANN: Yeah. And of course, I'm a historian so I know it's a Native American symbol also. But yeah, I think the first thing I would associate is something along the lines of Nazism.

AMIS: Okay, driving down a street, a dirt street highway in South Vietnam, you drive by a temple and it's got a bog fence around it, and you see a swastika in the rock formation of the fence.

KLINGEMANN: I've seen photos of that. And I think . . . is that a religious symbol?

AMIS: It is a good luck and religious symbol in Southeast Asia. Also . . . I'll draw it because I remember this. The one I saw . . . I've got to remember how to do this. I can't even draw the damn thing. Yeah, I can. Now, this is what I saw. I'm not a good draw . . . artist, but that's what I saw in the rock formation. It was a symbol and it was in concrete. Okay, if you look at the Nazi symbol on the vertical tail plane of the Messerschmitt 109, FW-190, HE-111, it is at a forty-five-degree angle.

KLINGEMANN: Right, the swastika. Okay.

AMIS: That's what I saw. And I was like, "Holy crap. What's that doing here?"

KLINGEMANN: "What is that supposed to be?" Yeah.

AMIS: So, it's a culture . . . a complete culture shock. Everybody was suspect. Everybody was . . . "Are they going to pull an AK-47 on us?" We were . . . We were on their turf. We didn't know what the hell we were looking at.

KLINGEMANN: And when you live that for 365 days in a row . . .

AMIS: And you come back, and we're driving home from the airport, going to St. Charles and the thing backfired next to us. I was not . . . I was under the dashboard. "Roger, come out of there."

KLINGEMANN: Is your father telling you that?

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: Was your father a veteran?

AMIS: No. He tried to go to World War II. But he was a street police officer in St. Louis, and he went down to the recruiter to enlist. He tried three times. The fourth time, the captain from the precinct that he worked for in the police department came down and said, "You come down here one more time, Amis, and I'm going to put your ass in jail. And the only time you're going to get out is to put your uniform on and go out and walk your beat."

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: He was pissed.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, I'm sure.

AMIS: He wanted to go do it. But my uncles went. My father-in-law was in World War II and post-World War II. He was . . . My father-in-law, Genie's father, was on the liberty ships going back and forth to England, taking cargo across. And that was . . . That was some bad ass duty. Those submarines, they were everywhere.

KLINGEMANN: How do you look back on your military service? What do you . . . What do you . . . how do you look back on that now, as you're almost seventy-years-old? You've obviously lived a fruitful life. You've been married for forty-seven years. You have a home. You live in beautiful Marfa, Texas. But there is a time in your life where you were put in the most stressful situation.

AMIS: I was put in harm's way. I put myself there. I volunteered for that. Nobody's responsibility but mine. Same thing with the patrol when I started flying on the patrol. I put myself there. No one else did. I can . . . There's nobody to blame for who I was and what I did, except me. I take responsibility for what I did. Did I do anything wrong? In my mind, in the mind of civilization as I understand it, no, I did not. Did I protect my buddies? Yes. Did I protect the Vietnamese that I was fighting with? Yes. Did I kill the people who were trying to kill me? Yes. Am I different person? Hell, yeah. I said a little older, a little smarter, a little maturer. Have I grown up? And this is not it. No, I'm still a child. Still a kid. I refuse to grow up. Okay, I'm going to show you something, and I'm not really bragging. What's it say in the middle?

KLINGEMANN: Let's see. Are you talking about the small print underneath?

AMIS: Yeah. The thirty-three . . .

KLINGEMANN: Right, thirty-three, yeah.

AMIS: I'm a thirty-three . . .

KLINGEMANN: That's right. You're a thirty-three . . .

AMIS: I'm a thirty-third degree Scottish Rite Mason.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: That's because other people seem to think I'm a good person.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, I would agree. That includes me.

AMIS: Did I earn that? They seem to think I did. Whether I think it or not . . . different story. Have I changed? Yes.

KLINGEMANN: How do you think your views have changed towards the United States of America as a nation?

AMIS: Politics has always been the same. We still have a political system, even though it is not the best. I have been around the world a little bit. A little, like a lot of other people. But we still have, I believe, the best political system in the world. I've seen others. I don't think they measure up. Could ours be better? Yes. Some of the things that our political leaders are doing, I don't agree with. And I don't see much use for them. I think that they shouldn't be where they are. Our political leaders should be looking at taking care of the people of the United States. The United States, in my opinion—and that's all it is—is not the police department of the world. We can't take care of everybody else. We spend billions and trillions around the world, and yet we have people walking the streets of major cities that are homeless and need to be taken care of. We've got veterans that have no place to go. People that are a thousand times worse off than I am on my worst day. And nobody's taking care of them. I'm very fortunate. For forty-seven years, I've had a very wonderful, wonderful wife that has taken care of me and kept me out of trouble. Put her hand on my chest and said, "Roger, you're okay." Unfortunately, they don't have that. And yet our country and our political leaders send billions out.

The United Nations is . . . was a good idea. Harry Truman did it and I'm not exactly thinking he did it right. He had a good idea but the United Nations is supported by the United States. We pay—what?—eighty to ninety-percent of its bill, and yet when they send money overseas, there's nobody really accountable for where it goes. It doesn't get to the people it needs to get to. It's lining somebody's pockets and it's wasted. We've been to places we don't need to be. The Middle East is a country that has been at some type of confrontation for the last 4,000 years that I can think of. And I'm going to use myself as an example. This white, white boy can't tie a towel . . . a towel around his head and go to the Middle East and solve their problems. They have to solve their own. We can't do it. We don't have the understanding of that culture in any way, shape, form, or fashion to solve their problems, and we don't need to be doing it. That's my opinion. And I'm not a historian. You know, bootleg historian. I love watching history. I love reading about the different areas. World War I doesn't fascinate me. World War II does because of the airplanes. Vietnam fascinates me because I was there.

Different societies: Egypt, Israel, Palestine, what we've got now. Then you got to look at Egypt 3,000 years ago. Mesopotamia . . . all through that area. Greece, what's now Greece, Turkey, Syria, and so on. My geography isn't all that great right there but those are rich, wonderful places that had fantastic civilizations. And a lot of it's gone down the tube and that history is gone. Genie would love to go to Egypt and look at the pyramids. We can't. It's just not physically safe to do it. I'd love to take her to Istanbul, Turkey and ride the Orient Express back to England with Agatha Christie and Hercules Poirot. If I ever get the money, I will do that. But those areas of the world: Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, all through there, we don't need to be there. And we're losing people. We're losing our best and our brightest. And we're wasting our money. We're wasting our future. And it's tried and true. It's an old thing. Our children are our future, and we're wasting them.

KLINGEMANN: You know, that brings up a great question. What if you had a young guy come up to you and say, "You know what? I want to fly choppers in the Army." What would you tell him?

AMIS: [Exhales] Even though what I said, I said, "If you got it and you want to do it, then go for it and do it. Do it one-hundred-percent. Be the best you can, because the only way you're going to walk out of the war is by being the very, very best you can: knowing how to use your equipment, knowing the tactics, and working together with your partners. That's the only way you're going to come out." And that's what I would say. And I would tell them the other side of the coin is you're going to have a possibility of dying. You're going to buy it . . . It's your choice.

KLINGEMANN: What would you tell . . . What would you tell a young guy coming back from Afghanistan after two or three deployments and he's getting out of the military? Because you were there in that similar situation. What would you tell him?

AMIS: First off, when you leave them military, find someplace that you can relax . . . that you feel safe. That you know in your heart and the back of your mind and to your very last iota of your own soul that you're safe. And then take a deep breath. And then come back . . . mentally, come back. Do some physical exercise. Something that burns you out, that you love to do. Run, climb, whatever. It doesn't make a difference. And work it out and find someone you can converse with and talk to that you're comfortable with when you're ready to talk. When you're . . . you are ready to lay things on the table and let it out, and not until then. And don't be forced into doing it. Be . . . Be circumspect about who you talk to. There are people who are not what they say they are or what they . . . what they say they are or who they say they are, and will use what you have against something, use it to your detriment. Find the people you can talk to. Find the people you are comfortable with and you know you're safe and then slowly bring yourself back here, mentally and physically. Learn to be able to walk down the street and not look four different directions every twenty seconds, and not be looking at rooftops. Not be looking at something on the side of the road. When you can take a deep breath and relax and then talk to someone. And if you can find a support group that you're comfortable with, then go for it. If you have to wait, then wait. People will say, "Well, Vietnam, and Afghanistan, and Iraq . . . war is war." Yeah, war is war, but there's different mechanics there.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: Afghanistan and Iraq are two entirely different places. All three . . . all those two are entirely different than Vietnam. If they were to use the same tactics in those countries as in Vietnam when I was there, they'd be dead in less than forty-eight hours. Conversely, same tactics we used, I'd give us forty-eight hours to live in Iraq, then we would be dead.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: Because the tactics are different. The people you're with . . . you're fighting against are different. Their mindset is different. The Vietnamese would mass attack on you but they weren't suicidal. Some of these people are suicidal. A large . . .

KLINGEMANN: That's an interesting point you bring up, Rog. That . . . Yeah, why? Why is that?

AMIS: It's their . . . okay, I'm not a . . . an expert on the Quran. I don't know anything about it that much, but it's their belief and their religion, and that's what they're using. They . . . they are using a corrupted version of the Quran for whatever reason that they feel is adequate. From what I have heard, and I am not a . . . I don't know anything but there's . . . Their version of the Quran, they do not preach that. And they're just using that as their method of saying, "Well, this is what God says. And by God, that's what I'm going to do. If you're not . . . If you don't . . . If you're not one of us, you're against us and we're going to kill you all."

KLINGEMANN: You think that the border patrol provided that structure for you? It obviously wouldn't be the same as the military but . . .

AMIS: They provided the same structure to a point. Not as much regimentation. I turned it off when I went home. When I went out of the office and got in my truck and left, it was over. In the military, you're not.

KLINGEMANN: It's twenty-four, seven.

AMIS: You're twenty-four, seven there. Even if you're back here in the States working out of Fort Bliss, or an artilleryman—an air defense artilleryman or whatever—you're still there. They can call you at 2400 at night and say, "Come to work," and you get up and go to work. And border patrol generally didn't do that. I had my two weeks off and I was gone. If I had my weekend off, if I had a long weekend, I could be in Dallas, and they could call me. "Well, hey, I'm in Dallas right now. I can't back there in two hours. It ain't going to happen." They tried that when I was in El Paso once, and I said, "Look, it's three hours to home."

"Well, can you get an airplane and fly back?" I said, "I'm not turning a sixteen-year-old loose with a credit card and a Lincoln Continental to drive back to Marfa. That is not going to happen. I can be there in three-and-a-half hours."

"Well, don't worry about it then." Well, I hustled back here and found out they did something else. But still, it's . . .

KLINGEMANN: Still a civilian, you know. It's not the military. I mean, yes, I understand that it's the border patrol but it's . . . It's more of a civilian organization.

AMIS: A civilian organization. They were trying to tell me it was paramilitary. I said, "I left the Army in 1972 in the first reduction in force. So, I am not in the military."

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: And that made a couple of . . . That made a chief upset but I didn't care. But it did . . . it gave structure. It gave me a job that I love doing. I like law enforcement and I like flying, and I could combine the two.

KLINGEMANN: So, you know, it's an interesting observation that just came to my mind about a lot of veterans that I know. That they come out of a high-stress . . . especially combat veterans, right? come out of a high-stress situation and they come to the United States. And you would presume that they would turn into folks that would want to paint for a living or do something

that's far away from that stressful life but they . . . a lot of them don't. They get like yourself. They get right back into it in law enforcement.

AMIS: They can't. They go right back into something exactly like that.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, the law enforcement. Why is that?

AMIS: I . . . I truthfully don't know. For me, my dad was a street cop in St. Louis. So, say I followed in his footsteps to a point, yes. My dad was . . . was scared that I would get into the border patrol.

KLINGEMANN: Really? He told you that?

AMIS: He told me. My mom told me that. And he . . . he . . . he wouldn't talk about it. My dad was Cherokee Indian. He wouldn't talk about crap. This thing? He wouldn't talk about this.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: His statement was, "When you're old enough, you'll . . . you'll know what to do." That was it. Period.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: You walk into the lodge over there, those . . . those walls tell you more about Mr. Amis than my father did. That's another story entirely. But why I did it, I don't know.

KLINGEMANN: Camaraderie?

AMIS: Yeah, and it was there, because I've got guys . . . Well, May 12—my wedding anniversary—I was in Las Vegas at a border patrol class reunion. That's where we were. Fifteen . . . twenty. Twenty of us gathered there. We do it every five years. We're the only class in the patrol that does it. These guys are spread all over the United States and we meet there. And we went through the patrol. We were in "la patrulla." We were in the same class. We were the 135th class at Glynco's . . . what we called "Glynco's School for Boys," Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

KLINGEMANN: Do you . . . So, you had how many years in border patrol?

AMIS: Twenty-two-and-a-half.

KLINGEMANN: Twenty-two-and-a-half.

AMIS: Four in El Paso and eighteen and a half here.

KLINGEMANN: And that's how you ended up in Marfa, Texas?

AMIS: Yep.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: The job was open. I found it and the job was open. I got in and I got it.

KLINGEMANN: Born in St. Louis, Missouri and then you end up in Marfa, Texas.

AMIS: But you know what? I can just fool everybody with this voice I got.

KLINGEMANN: [Laughs] You served your country since you were eighteen-years-old, whether it was in military or law enforcement. If you had to do it all over again . . . ? Hindsight's twenty-twenty.

AMIS: [Exhales] Probably, probably. But I would . . . If I had to go back with what I know now, I would be a little bit more devious. I would be a little bit more circumspect about what I did. I would be more open . . . not open-minded, but more open to what is going on and what is best for me and my family. A lot of what I did, I won't say it was . . . was spontaneous. Oh, what you would call . . . damn it. When you buy something just for grins. Impulse buy.

KLINGEMANN: Impulse buy.

AMIS: A lot of it was impulse and a lot of it was I . . . I just decided I want to go do that. And I don't . . . I think I would think a little bit more about it. In-depth thinking. Okay, what is going to be for me? And I hate this. This is going to sound bad. What is in it for me? What am I going to get out of this and what is going to be the end result? What is going to be the end result for my family? How can I make it better for them five years, ten years, twenty years down the line? I never thought of that. I thought about what I was doing. I thought about would it be better for us? But I didn't give it as much thought, in-depth thought, as I should have. Would I do it again? Probably. But it would be a little different. I would be thinking more than what I have.

KLINGEMANN: It's interesting that you said you can watch the History Channel or history documentaries . . .

AMIS: Documentaries and a lot of stuff.

KLINGEMANN: How . . . How does that . . . How does that work if you watch documentaries on Vietnam, especially documentaries where you have helicopters, or you have Cobras?

AMIS: Sometimes it's just water off a duck's back. Other times, I'll say, "Genie, find something else. I can't watch this." And she'll . . . She'll be looking at something and says, "I don't think you want to look at this."

"No, that's okay. I'm cool with this." Or it's, "Find something else. I can't watch it." Just . . . Just depends on the moment: what I'm feeling like, what the reaction is, how I'm feeling psychologically. Am I tired? If I'm tired, I'm susceptible to stress, that type of stress. Some people ask me, "The *Border Wars* thing on T.V., do you ever watch that?" I said, "Why?"

"Well, it's got this . . . " I lived it. Why? I was there. We see some of these things on T.V. that's about—generally about—this area. Okay, that's Mitre Peak. That's down at Big Bend. That's Mueller's and Big Bend. That's Amarillo up there. I landed up there once. There was a show, it's called *Bones*, and the . . .

KLINGEMANN: I watch that on occasion.

AMIS: Oh, okay. The big guy . . . oh, crap . . . Hodgins, and his girlfriend, they were on again, off again, getting married. Well, daddy is lead singer, plays guitar for . . .

KLINGEMANN: ZZ Top.

AMIS: ZZ Top. Well, he ends up down here. And he wakes up and he's got this big tattoo on his arm. The background is from over in the Big Bend Park area.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, is that right? I saw that episode.

AMIS: It's on . . . It's west of Big Bend Park, looking back in an eastward direction. I recognize that.

KLINGEMANN: You recognize it.

AMIS: Yes. At least I think it is.

KLINGEMANN: Did you ever have any close calls in border patrol?

AMIS: Yeah, a couple.

KLINGEMANN: Can you talk about them or are they still classified?

AMIS: Oh, no. It's not classified, no. We had some people in south-bound smuggling. There was nobody else around for twenty miles. No border patrol, no customs. And border patrol hadn't had anything to do with south-bound smuggling at the time. They were on the north side and they were hustling stuff across the river. I landed down there in a helicopter and got out, shut the helicopter down, walked over. They all flushed and went across the river, and I had one airplane 2,000 feet above, watching. I was talking to him on the radio, and I put a vest on and I walked over. Looked at them, they looked at me. I reached behind, took a . . . took a magazine, put it in an M16, slapped it, racked it, and held it like this. Said, "Okay, do we have a problem?" They said, "No, Señor." I said, "Okay, go on across the river."

KLINGEMANN: You let them go across.

AMIS: Let them go across. I had no authority.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah.

AMIS: But I was in the middle of something.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: One night, we were doing night vision training—and I was a night vision instructor here—and we were down on the river. And we were . . . We were going up-river and down by [unintelligible] area. And we ran around this one hill and came up on three vehicles. Four of them had mounted machine guns. And it was Mexican Army.

KLINGEMANN: Oh.

AMIS: So, I looked at that—and I was with another agent, another pilot—and I said, "Do you see that?" He said, "Yeah," and he had this question in his mind and I said, "Turn the helicopter immediately northbound. Go to maximum speed." And I have the controls. And I took us down to sagebrush level. I figured they can't shoot me down here. And we were going across the ground at about 100 feet at ninety to 100 knots.

KLINGEMANN: What were they doing on our side?

AMIS: They weren't on our side. They were on the Mexican side.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, they were on the Mexican side.

AMIS: And I wasn't going to get shot. I didn't know exactly who it was. I'm just guessing here.

KLINGEMANN: Right, you don't know who it is.

AMIS: And we ran up on druggies. We had a gun fight go over by Sierra Blanca, and I got right at the tail end of that. I come screaming through there at about 120 knots, about ten feet above the ground. Everybody goes "[gasps]" and I'm gone. I'm going two miles a minute. In thirty seconds, I'm a half mile away.

KLINGEMANN: Wow.

AMIS: In fifteen seconds. Yeah, whatever.

KLINGEMANN: So, the first time, there were . . . the first time, you said when they were crossing materials across the border, there were two of you? Two helicopters?

AMIS: No, one helicopter and one airplane.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, so you had like a spotter airplane?

AMIS: Yeah, I was by myself.

KLINGEMANN: Okay, I didn't know the border patrol had spotter . . . yeah, I did. Yeah, I remember now.

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah. So, you would work in tandem that way?

AMIS: Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: He'd spot on us all and . . .

KLINGEMANN: Oh, I see. So . . . But you were the quicker mobile. I got you.

AMIS: Yeah. Yeah, he couldn't come down. He was allowed down to 500 feet. But he was also a student getting his pilot certification. So, he had to stay 1,000 feet. He couldn't come down lower.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: He had to stay with the rules.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: But I was the one . . .

KLINGEMANN: But you could get down quicker.

AMIS: I could go do what I wanted to do.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: And that was . . . a lot of it was self-determination. You decide what you want to do.

KLINGEMANN: Right.

AMIS: But it was . . . this is a hell of a ride. Eighteen-and-a-half years here was a hell of a ride. We had one . . . I'll tell you one thing. And this is fun. They had a controlled dope load that came up out of Lajitas and followed it all the way up 170 to 118, and followed it north on 118 through the checkpoint. And followed it through Alpine. And they called me, and I had a super . . . well, I had a helicopter. They made me trade it for a Super Cub, and then they had turned north on 67th at the Y, on 90 and 67th.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, yeah.

AMIS: And they said, "We just turned north." And so, I got . . . I was in the Cub and the sun was right up in here, and they were going north like this. I got in between them and the sun so they could look at the sun and not see me.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, smart move.

AMIS: And I slid in and . . . I slid into them, ID'd the vehicle, confirmed the vehicle identification. We did it twice so I made sure. I slid back out. And I was running fifty-five to sixty miles an hour, just tracking that vehicle. But I kept the sun off my left side. He couldn't hear me and they can't see me. I followed him . . . long story short, I followed him to the Walgreen's pharmacy across from the hospital in downtown Midland. And the sun went down. And I had saw the vehicle, and I looked at it and looked at it. Okay, piece of cake. I pulled back to 1,000-foot, 2,000-foot. Stayed up behind the guy. And I turned my running lights off. The only lights I had on were the panel lights. And I talked to the guys on the ground and said, "I got this guy kicking. No problem. He can't go nowhere." And we went . . . They did a takedown. They got about 1,000 pounds of grass and two or three hundred pounds of cocaine.

KLINGEMANN: Good Lord.

AMIS: And five or six people, two vehicles. It was a good bust.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah, no kidding.

AMIS: I was orbiting over . . . at midnight, I was orbiting over Midland at 1,000-foot. And I said, "This is my . . . I can't go below this." I wanted lower. I wanted down in the fight, but I had to stay up there and keep those lights off. I was talking to the controllers at international airport, Midland International, and they were diverting the airliners around Midland. They wouldn't tell them why.

KLINGEMANN: Wow. They wouldn't tell them why.

AMIS: They . . . the captains were pissed. You could tell.

KLINGEMANN: Oh, well, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

AMIS: And I was down there. And I was at a discreet squawk code on the transponder. I called them about twenty miles, thirty miles west and I said, "I need a little assistance here." And I said, "I'm thirty miles west of . . . of Midland International right now."

"What we have, is that your squawk code?"

"Yes sir. We've got a little thing going. Can you give us a hand?"

"We'd be happy to." I said, "I'm running lights out right now. One thousand AGL and this is what we've got." And they said, "Sure." It was . . . well, I went to work at seven o'clock that day. I didn't get home until four o'clock the next morning.

KLINGEMANN: Good Lord. That's a long day.

AMIS: And being the idiot that I am, I flew home. I should have just stayed in Midland and crashed out at the fixed base operating airport but I didn't. Being an idiot, I flew home. But it was one of those things. And they said . . . went to the federal prosecutor for the pre-trial conference, and they were sitting at this long table, a long conference table. And he says, "I need to talk to these guys here and these guys over here." Finally said, "Who are you and what did you do?" I said, "Well, I'm the helicopter. My name is Roger Amis. I'm an airplane pilot for border patrol. I followed the targeted vehicle from six miles north of the Y between 90 and Highway 67 to the Walgreen's downtown Midland and to the takedown spot, finally, at so and so time, at this" . . . and blah, blah, blah. And he says, "You be here Monday morning at seven o'clock. I want to be talking to you." He said, "It was dark. How could you follow the vehicle?" I said, "The headlight pattern . . . I just followed the headlight pattern." One headlight was about ten-foot in front, the other was thirty-foot in front. It was like this all the way.

KLINGEMANN: [Laughs] That's where your mathematics came in hand.

AMIS: Hey, baby, you use the tools you got.

KLINGEMAN: [Laughs] That's right.

AMIS: But all of that crap came from the Army; all this training and everything, and it rolled right over to what I was doing on patrol. And you learn to work by yourself. You are self-sufficient. And if you haven't got it, you make it. If you can't make if, you find it. If you can't find it, you find somebody else to find it or you do it some way different. And that's just the way it was.

KLINGEMANN: Yep.

AMIS: The individualism we had as helicopter pilots . . . there was a standard portal in helicopter school. It says, "Through these . . . Through this portal marched the world's greatest helicopter pilots." No, "Through this portal will march the world's greatest helicopter pilots." "Through this portal will march the world's . . ." Something about the greatest helicopter pilots in the world. The end. And that's the way we started.

KLINGEMANN: Okay.

AMIS: That's what we saw every day, twenty times a day. "You are the world's greatest helicopter pilots." And that's . . . we believed it. Were we? Russians are damn good, so are the Germans and so are the Brits, but we thought we were better. Well, we didn't think it, we knew it.

KLINGEMANN: We knew it.

AMIS: Egotistical, but going back to one of your questions . . . would I do it again? If I had to, yes. My suggestions to guys coming back: take a deep breath, realize where you're at, find someplace you feel safe and somebody you can talk to . . . somewhere you can talk openly and freely. Just because a guy came out of 'Nam doesn't mean he's qualified to listen to you. He

doesn't know what you did. But you aren't qualified to listen to him. Two different wars. Mechanics were different, tactics were different, reasons, results were different. Is he any better than me? No. Am I any better than him? No. Would I do something to help? Hell, yeah, simply for that fact alone. And it makes no difference whether he's Navy, Air Force, Marine or Army. He's still a combat . . . He or she is still a combat vet.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah.

AMIS: And we . . . We, the country, are not taking care of them the way we should. I still get a little fidgety when someone says "thank you for your service." I start looking for what the reason is. Why are you talking like that? I know that they're being respectful but the time that I came back from 'Nam, people hated us. We were the worst.

KLINGEMANN: That's tough . . . tough to deal with, I'm sure.

AMIS: Going from . . . when I left . . . we got back to . . . we went out of Germany and went back to St. Charles. I dropped . . . I stayed with Diana and Genie for about a week, and then I went to Hunter Army Air Field in Savannah. And that was a hard time because it was still . . . it was 1969 and we were . . . they were having all kinds of stuff. And it was . . . you had to be circumspect about what you said and what you did. But once I got to Savannah, there's a big Army presence there, so not many people are going to say much of anything. When I came back the first time, though, it was . . . God, I didn't do any of that crap. I didn't know anybody who did. Were there mistakes made? Yes, on both sides. But those people had been at war for 2,000 years of some kind . . . under some type of subjugation, and I can understand. Ho Chi Minh had a real good idea, and if the U.S. had listened to him and had worked with him, then we would not have had a Vietnam. Because he went to the United States in '48, '49, and basically . . . I don't want to say "begged," but he pleaded with them to help him with the French and they said, "No, you're a Communist." That's it. "You're red and we're not going to be dead. So, you're going to die," and that was it. Ho Chi Minh was not a bad man. And a lot of the Vietnamese I ran into were really good people. Good, honest people, and they were just tired of being subjugated. And the French weren't all that good to them but that was colonial imperialism. The British . . . Anyhow . . . what else can I tell you? What else can I offer?

KLINGEMANN: Actually, we're good, Rog. If there's anything that you want to . . . If you have any photos or anything you want to share that we can copy, we would certainly like to do that. But you know, I think . . . This has been a great, great interview and I really appreciate your candor. You've . . . It's hard. I know it is. And for what it's worth, thank you very much for opening up like that because I know that's very hard. And . . .

AMIS: Am I still paranoid? Yeah.

KLINGEMANN: Yeah. It's . . . it's tough to deal with, I'm sure.

AMIS: But it doesn't come out unless it's needed.

KLINGEMANN: Right. I understand.