

Interview of Dale Greer

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Interviewer: UNINTELLIGIBLE when you were in Vietnam and I want to ask now about your experiences when you came back to the states. First I want to ask you about how you felt about leaving Vietnam. I know you mentioned your friend who came to visit you when he was wounded. What was it like leaving? Did you feel you were abandoning them or were you ready to go?

Interviewee: You know that is funny. You think that would be a question that I could answer right away. I'm not sure. Isn't that funny. I don't really remember what my emotions were. I think I was anxious to see my baby for one, but yet I think I did have mixed emotions about leaving too. Anita and I talked about that. As a reporter, I was a reporter in the sixties and it was a great time to be a reporter or a bad time, depending on how you look at it, but I spent probably three years where my life was in danger a lot, not only in Vietnam. I went to Vietnam with my head wrapped up. I had been covering Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and had taken a brick in the head and had a head full on stitches and when I arrived at NBC to report in Vietnam, they said "What happened to you?", and I told them " I got that at a riot in the states." They used to tease that Dale had to come to Vietnam to get away from all the violence in America. I think during that period, I look back on it now, your talking about how you change. I think I was an adrenaline freak. I think that they threw me in that sort of thing so much there for two years and I'm not a real brave person. I never was tough. I'm not a tough of brave person, but I got to be an adrenaline freak. I got to the point where I was in danger so much that I wanted that adrenaline. I was like a drug addict. I wanted that adrenaline rush. I wanted that rush.

Interviewer: The first time I ever saw you on TV was a big storm. I think a tornado or something and you were right in the thick of it. I don't remember. It was on wave TV and it must have been in 1969 or 70 because it was when Alan was in Vietnam. And

there you are and I remember thinking how you were just, I could just tell, you were seized by the moment. Of course who wouldn't be in a tornado? Its funny that I would remember the first time I saw you on TV

Interviewee: I think you need that. You get to the point were you want that rush.

Interviewer: Yeah you could see it.

Interviewee: I started worrying about that. When you get out and you've covered riots, protests and when I was in Vietnam and I think I finally realized that I did have a problem with that. Because rather than "Oh no" when it got violent. You start thinking "Oh boy". Its bad when you start liking violence. Yeah, I think I liked it.

Interviewer: So you covered some of the riots, antiwar demonstrations, and these kinds of things.

Interviewee: Covered Dr. King for several months. I was with him a lot of the marches and I covered riots and protests.

Interviewer: One of the things that we hear now from soldiers, my own brother told me this not too long ago as a matter of fact, when he came back from Vietnam he had been wounded very badly and he was on casual duty. They were with a transport unit and their job was to transport the 101st Airborne to various riot torn places. He said he was convinced that at the big moratorium that many of the kids, he called them kids, who were there to demonstrate had just come for the party, for the fun. That they were not really antiwar or anti anything. It was just sort of like to be there.

Interviewee: I think that is true. I think that is true of any situation like that. I think in television, we made a lot of mistakes in covering the riots and everything. I think we threw gasoline on the fire by showing up with cameras. It is interesting to watch a mob turn violent. You know these are nice people. These are just nice everyday people and to watch them just instantly, hundreds of them, turn violent.

Interviewer: That would give you an adrenaline rush wouldn't it? It is a very unpredictable situation.

Interviewee: A lot of them were there for the fun of it. I think that we advertised it for them. Like we would go on and say "Come up to the riot. Come out and throw a rock and hurt somebody. Have some fun." Finally, all the networks and television stations started having and making guidelines. We had never gone through things like that in this country before. We had no guidelines. It took a while and we made a lot of mistakes before we finally had some guidelines for that sort of thing. I worry about that today. We had time to think about a story. We shot film and we would come back and the film had to be developed and then it had to be edited by hand. Now it is so quick that they can go on instantly. I think we did a better job because just that little bit of time we had while that film was being processed. We had some time to get our facts straight, to make some phone calls, to get everything together. Now you watch television and all they do is "There is a fire downtown. Charles Johnson is there." and they come on and they say "Well, there is a fire and this is such and such building and we see the firemen moving in and now they are putting" and that is all they do. They don't really report anything. They just take you there instantly and I think there is a danger in that. I think journalism has hit an all time low. Maybe I'm just an old fogie, an old fuddie duddie, I think it has hit an all time low. I'm not proud of what they are doing. I think the media is terrible now. I think television caused the problem and rather than fighting it, newspapers want the advertising dollar, so they are joining the television stations. They are getting as bad as television stations.

Interviewer: Well I think it was certainly common-place to sensationalize reports of Vietnam in big national newspaper as well as in local newspapers. With the antiwar movement in Kentucky, I know that several of the colleges had some major disturbances. Morehead had its own disturbances, UK had several. Did your television station cover any of these?

Interviewee: Yeah we were at UK. I didn't cover it personally, but I remember when they burned the ROTC building at UK. U of L had some too. There was some trouble at

U of L . Morehead's were little or nothing compared to those. I think the biggest demonstration at Morehead was a very peaceful one and it was after the Kent State killings. That was nice. I don't remember how many, but there were a lot of kids out there. All they did was march quietly down to the President's house carrying candles. President Doran came out and did a wonderful job. He made a great speech. He came out and rather than telling them to go away or anything, he came out and I remember his speech was something like " I want to apologize for my generation. We have really screwed up and I am sorry that we have screwed things up so badly and you have got to straighten it out." I think that he was a very smart man. He was a very good speaker, won them over. He had them eating out of his hand until the time he left.

Interviewer: That is quite a story. Kiddy and I were at Eastern at that time and President Martin's approach was very different. He just sort of threatened us and told us that we better not be caught anywhere near a SDS rally of any of those kinds of things.

Interviewee: Well Dr. Doran was very conservative that way, but he was smart enough to back down. I remember one time he called a convocation and they were going to have a moratorium and not go to school one day. He threatened them and said " You better not do that." Then things got so intense that he called another convocation and said " Okay, you can have your moratorium and if you want to sit in the grass and sing folk songs and end Vietnam songs go ahead and do it and I'll come out and sit down and sing them with you." I think they depended on the media. We were so dumb we didn't see it until years later. It was almost like they would call up and say " We are going to have a spontaneous protest against the Vietnam War at 3:00 this afternoon." " Oh really, well we can't be there at 3:00." "Well what time can you make it?" " Well we can be there at four." " Okay, the spontaneous protest will take place at four." Without us, they had nothing. Dr. King when he first came to Louisville to march on Louisville, I guess it made sense that the place you would march, they wanted open housing laws, so you would march in the areas where there were no blacks. So he went out into the Brownsborough Road area, up

on the east side of Louisville, because that was where the blacks were not allowed to be, they were kept out of there. He didn't get much protesting because also, it was a socio-economical thing. Who are the people out there in the east end? For one thing they had education. Hopefully I am right on this, pray to God, most educated people are not bigots. So rather than getting a reaction, people were standing in their yards applauding him as he came by or holding up signs they had made saying " We love you Dr. King.", or joining the march. Well he didn't go back there anymore. That is not what he was looking for. So the next night he went to the south end. Now you have got low to low-middle class whites. Then he got a violent reaction. So where did he go back? He went back everynight to the south end where there would be violence. I asked him about that. I said "You are not non-violent. You are looking for violence." He said "Let me ask you something Dale. If I had marched in the east end the second night, would you have been there? No. So you are violent to aren't you Dale. You are looking for the same thing I am. The only way I can get you to pay attention to me is if I go where the violence is." I saw him do something that was very brave, I thought. Back on Vietnam, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: You alluded several times to observations about the race issue in the Army. Clearly by 1968 the Army had a major race problem, but some of the things that you have indicated would lead us to believe that in combat situations, race doesn't matter.

Interviewee: I don't think so. I'm sure it happened. I know all the racial problems they had over there. My perception was that famous saying, they made a documentary and used that and soldiers started it. " Same mud same blood." I think that was the way they felt. There wasn't any place for that over there, but there was a lot of it. I think really in 69 it really got bad. I think it may have been the attitudes of the kids coming over by then. I think that there were enough people against the war in this country then, that they all had terrible attitudes going over there.

Interviewer: You have a lot more experience interviewing than the ordinary person would have. If you were interviewing yourself and you had to come up with the critical

question that could define Dale Greer's Vietnam experience, would it be something that we have not thought to include in this interview?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. I think we have pretty well covered it. Of course I don't really, well I feel qualified to do what you are doing, but I wouldn't feel qualified to do a serious interview about Vietnam. I was just an ignorant little kid running around with a camera over there. I didn't know much. I think my Vietnam experience, just the little I saw and probably why I have even more respect for the men who served in the military over there, is that I will never forget it. It still obsesses me to this day. I think that is true of everybody. I think we have a whole generation, two generations I guess, of people who are obsessed with it. Everybody knows that because you can go to any party and let the word Vietnam come out and the women might as well go to the kitchen if they are not interested, because everybody who was in Vietnam is just going to talk about that from then on and everybody else can get lost. That is it, the party is over.

Interviewer: Myra MacPherson has written a book called The Haunted Generation, and I think that is a very apt name for our generation. We are haunted by that war. So the Dale Greer we have in this picture at 28 is sort of naive isn't he?

Interviewee: Oh sure. In Vietnam, I'm trying to think of what the Vietnamese for it was, they called me babyface. It meant either babyface or kindface. DIETRI. That was what the Vietnamese would say to me. DIETRI.

Interviewer: Do you remember the circumstances of the photograph?

Interviewee: Yeah, this was a place called "The oasis near the Cambodian border". See the LOACH in the background, I think that is what they were, yeah LOACHES. They were observation helicopters and they were flying. These guys are Cav and they are getting ready to go in and the LOACHES gave them cover from the air and reported what was going on.

Interviewer: Did you go with them?

Interviewee: No that time I didn't. For some reason, I'm trying to remember why I didn't. I was back at the basecamp listening to the LOACHES on the radio, but didn't go in with them.

Interviewer: Great picture.

Interviewee: I don't remember these guys. It's funny, I have great love and respect for these guys, but I was around and met so many people. I was teaching class last year and this man walked in my class. The door was open. He stepped in the door and I looked around and I said "May I help you?" and he said "Could I come in and sit in on your class?" and I said "Sure". I had no idea who he was. He came in and he sat down and we were talking about something and he said "Excuse me, may I ask something?" and I said " Yes sir" . He said "Weren't you a reporter in Vietnam?" and I said "Yes", and he said " Do you ever tell the students about reporting in Vietnam?". I said " Yeah, we talk about that.". He said

" Do you remember meeting Marine seargent UNINTELLIGIBLE ?". He told me where it was and I said " Yeah" and he said " That's me.". I said " How did you find me?" and he told me this long winded story. Finally, he had came to Morehead to see me. I felt bad because I didn't remember his name or remember him. I guess it was an experience to have a reporter with you. When you had a civilian reporter it was something very unique and they wouldn't forget it, but I don't remember many of the names. Roger RHETT I remember.

Interviewee: Well I really appreciate the interview. I think you have given us some information that a lot of people will be interested in hearing and that students, certainly not only our own students here at Morehead State, but especially them. I think they will be glad to get to research when we send them over there to the library on their special research projects. Hopefully, if this project sees print, they will read about it.

Interviewee: Well thank you, I enjoyed it.