

Alexa Woell

Vietnam and Watergate

Dr. Ernst and Dr. Baldwin

4/23/98

Summary of Oral History Project:

Dan Tonietti, Tape 2

Dan Tonietti starts out talking about his feelings on how Hollywood portrayed Vietnam. He likes the movie "Platoon" because it showed a lot of the personal feelings of the soldiers. Though he hasn't personally experienced everything the movie shows, he still feels that it is realistic.

Tonietti said he would like to return to Vietnam to come to peace with his memories, but he doesn't think that he will actually ever get to go. He had heard from other veterans that it had helped them and he thought the government should organize a trip for all of them that wanted to go back.

He described how he feels about the war memorial and how his children reacted to it. He said that the memorial leaves a big impression behind with everyone who sees it, no matter if they are veterans or not.

He later gives his opinion about general Westmoreland and president Johnson and how he feels that the war was fought because of the interests of big business. Tonietti concludes by describing how he feels about the legacy the war has left behind and that he thinks it will be remembered for a very long time. He also raised the question about who were the real losers of the war, those who died, or those who have to live with the bad memories forever.

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ALEXA WOELL

DAN TONIETTI, TAPE 2

2/7/98

Dr. Ernst: Gosh, there is a couple of things I wanted to touch on after what you were saying, I don't- I have to think for a second. How do you feel about the way Hollywood has portrayed Vietnam?

I've always -from the very first war movie that came out about Vietnam which was "Green Beret" with John Wayne- some of the things in it were- the Vietnamese were lined up in rows- you could look at them one way and they'd all be lined up this way and that way . It just doesn't happen. I think at the time it was more of a morale booster. Some of the movies that have come out later on -my favorite- if I have to use the word favorite, is "Platoon". For some reason it shows a lot of the personal aspect of it, of course I like the Helicopter assaults were they use the theme song blaring out of the microphones from the helicopters. Did those things happen? I don't know that for a fact. Could they have happened? Oh yeah, I think they could have. Ah, I don't know if you could ever tell about a war situation and have the same people tell it the same way, everybody has a different aspect ..? . Mine is going to be different than somebody who served in the Delta or in the very north part of Da Nang or Kay Sang? I know people that have been there, theirs is going to be a different recollection, they'll tell what effected them at that period of time that they were there. Because I was there in '66 and '67 and part of '68 the mood would be different then than it would be in '69, in '70, in

'71 and '2 so that'sto do an injustice. I see a lot of things that I remember-Yes- that I remember happened that way that were said that way. Yes- some things I don't recollect but maybe that happened someplace else, so I can't say that they are not portraying it correctly. I think that they do it differently, I'm trying to think of the name of the, names have gotten me today, I'm just in a bad mood for names... The one that produced the 4th of July and he also produced JFK...

Dr. Ernst: Oliver Stone?

Oliver Stone. Am I going to call him a liar for producing it the way he did? No. The man was there. We have filtered out now into different aspects of society people who have served there in government- anywhere, as I said do I feel special -No. I don't feel special, don't want to be recognized as special, but I do want to be recognized as somebody different because my feelings of something I don't think was right to begin with - how it affected the people that were involved. No, not only on our side, understand I'm not going to be one-sided. But the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong, the children that are growing up now over there. Okay, we feel bad about it, we feel bad about it, how do they feel over there? They could care less. That's just their way of life over there. Would I like to go back? And I said I would mention this to you: Yes I would, yes I would. Because I think that what that would do (he becomes a little emotional), I think it would bury a lot of bad feelings -seeing body bags, seeing guys torn to pieces- it would bury a lot of it, it would settle part of my life.

And from what I've seen locally in some people and nationally in some people that have gone back there, they feel differently now. Maybe it'd be a good idea for the government to ship us all up again and take us back and let us walk around for a while

Dr. Ernst: Do you think you'll go back?

I don't know how I would except individually, you know and..

Dr. Ernst: A lot of them, there is a number of?..who do, I don't know how expensive it is, but..

Well, yeah, it'd be at least a thousand dollars, I'm sure.

Dr. Ernst: (laughs) I'm sure. Let me ask about your daughters, was that -how old where they, was it a good experience when you went to the wall with them, did they..?

They were relatively young, I think my youngest one, let me back up a little bit, it was dedicated in '82, I didn't make it in '82, '83, '84, '85; I think it was about '85, was the first year I went. My oldest daughter was roughly ten years old then and it didn't mean anything to her. My youngest one was just a couple of years old and of course it definitely didn't mean anything to her. She went with - when she was in - my youngest one, she went on a middle school trip to Washington D.C., she went there. So she was more older and my daughter, my oldest daughter, went as a chaperone. So they will tell me about how they feel about it. For some reason and I can't put this into words, but, but I have a feeling, why is it that the Vietnam memorial attracts more people than anything else? I think two reasons: for the older people because it's a place that's a mark in history that nobody liked. But for younger people it's a place where they see names, names, that's all that's on there is names of people who have died. When they see all these names, that sinks in to them. It's what my daughter told me, she said, "Dad you see

Veterans come there hugging themselves, hugging one another, excuse me, and crying. I said, "Amy that is something that you do when you get older." (gets emotional) This has gotten worse instead of better. But I can live with it better now because I am able to talk about it.

Dr. Ernst: That was kind of our hope with this project to see if it would be ?therapeutic? to talk about it; and I've been to the wall twice and I just remember a bit because I was younger it's so moving, you can't go and not....?

That's the exact words that everybody has ever said.

Dr. Ernst: Have you read ...? Macy's... book "In Country"? Have you seen the movie?

Is that Connie Stevens? Maybe I'm getting mixed up. She has something "in-country". Connie Stevens was over there, too. No, I'm not familiar with that, I'm that sorry.

Dr. Ernst: You ought to read it , he is a Kentuckian, the movie stars Bruce Willis. It's made in Kentucky, the movie is pretty good, every local bookstore can get you the novel, if your interested -it is wonderful. Think about it it's just a suggestion, we use it in class. Have you read any Tim O'Brian stuff? Are you aware of him? I'm throwing out a couple of things that you might enjoy. Besides of that, what did you think of William Westmoreland?

I saw him, I was within fifty feet of him. I think his intentions were good, extremely good, he was a very personable general. Have I ever seen him today? No. Would I like to talk to him? Yes I really do. I think his opinions if you get him away from a TV camera or writing it down on paper would be more honest. I think he never

saw any victory in sight. I think he was doing it -and here again is my personal opinion-, one of the kids said to me and I did not mention this, why do you think this war happened? And I said, I'll be honest with you I think big business inspired it, I think that we had a lot of new equipment at that time: M-16 rifles, M1, 5-1 tanks that were aluminum based that needed field testing. They needed a place to go to and test it and this was a coincidence that Vietnam was coming about at that time. I think big business kept it going because it kept a lot of people working for several years. Kept the economy booming. That's my honest opinion. That's my honest opinion.

Dr. Ernst: What do you think of Lyndon Johnson?

I've read a lot about the presidents. Kennedy was against it, for it for a while, but against it in the long run. I think that is one reason why Kennedy was killed. Because big business wanted to get in there and I think that they are knowledgeable about who killed him, and they know that Johnson would get the war going for them. Johnson was over there when I was there. I saw Johnson He was in ?Camron ? in '67, I saw him. How do I personally feel about him? I think he said one thing to the American public and did another. Okay.

Dr. Ernst: What about George Bush? During the gulf war, you made a good point about how we always keep going back to Vietnam, you remember Bush's remark how we now had gotten rid of the ghost of Vietnam?

I remember that, now that you mentioned it.

Dr. Ernst: Do you have any thoughts about that or comments?

No, I don't think, I don't believe that comment because the Gulf war was what ,48 hours long? Yes, they had a goal and yes they achieved that goal, but you're taking about

48 hours versus 15-16 years that we were involved in Vietnam. The ghost of Vietnam will never be erased. From now to eternity. It'll be referred to from now to eternity, because it divided this country like no war had ever divided this country. It'll take centuries, well I shouldn't say- it'll take a hundred years for all of us to die off, for the feelings to come back. Cause as long as even children who were children back in the seventies, they know about it now, they are in their twenties, thirties now, more like thirties, they know about it. Take at least sixty more years for it to totally wash out of our society. And you know who is the losers- I said this to the kids, who are the losers of this? The ones whose names appear on the wall or the ones who have to live with this? That is my honest opinion. And I had limited amount of field time but what I saw impressed me. Not to the best, I mean the worst. What about these guys that spend a year out there, did two or three tours. One was enough for me. It'll never be erased, not for a long time to come and I'm just grateful that I have the opportunity through my employer and now through you to tell what I recollect. And everything I have told you is the truth, number 1, I have no reason to lie about any of this. I'm a pretty honest person to begin with.

Dr. Ernst: I'm done if you're done.

I've said my piece.

Paula Keeton
Summary of Dan Tonietti Oral Interview with Dr. John Ernst
23 April 1998

Dan Tonietti, formerly from New York, now living in Kentucky, was drafted by the United States Army in early 1966 for service in the Vietnam War. Dan attended basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and received his Advanced Individual Training in Maryland. His mode of study was mechanics.

He was deployed to South Vietnam among the first wave of replacement troops to a support unit at Cam Ranh Bay in November, 1966. His tour of duty ended just prior to the Tet Offensive of January, 1968.

Dan is married and has two daughters. His marriage is shaky, a fact he contributes to the war. He says his wife believes he should just put the war behind him, and he does to a certain extent, but to him that should not include forgetting his experiences. Because those experiences were so traumatic, he is prone to talk about them. good

In fact, Dan does a teaching series in a senior high school annually. The benefits of his service are staggering. The history teacher is honored by having first-hand input of the war taught to his students, the students learn from Dan's "hands-on" experience, and Dan uses the series as an outlet for his long pent-up anxieties and sadness.

Postwar has been a struggle for Dan Tonietti. His oldest daughter suffered birth defects and other health problems that Dan fears are his fault because of contact with Agent Orange during the war. The chemical was used to defoliate thick jungles in Vietnam. Dan himself has recurring symptoms that he was affected by the defoliant.

Dan does not believe he will live an old age for a couple of reasons. One is intuitive. Another is from reading the obituaries, learning that other Vietnam War veterans are dying too young. Whatever may be the case, there are at least two things that Dan wants to accomplish before his death. He wants to make sure that he has done all he can to get the truth about the war out to the public. He also wants to be out of debt.

Transcript Summary

In the interview with Dan Tonietti, Dr. Ernst and Dan Tonietti began with Dan's enlistment in the service. Dan talked about his basic training and the different advanced training available after basic training. The flight to Vietnam and Dan's first impressions of the country were discussed. Dan talked about Cam Ranh Bay, where he was stationed and his job there. Dan was a wheeled and tank vehicle repairman, he had to make trips out into the field to repair machinery. Dan talked about the weaponry that was used during his time there. Living conditions were discussed, and the importance of mail from home. He talked about the realities of the war and having to continuously watch the Vietnamese people, in order to survive. Dan discussed what the weather was like, the rain and the heat. Dan told about the foods that he missed and the types of food he had in Vietnam, both at Cam Ranh and in the field.

Dan talked about the awards he received and did not receive. He talked about the return flight to the States. He told about calling his Mom from the airport in Tacoma, Washington and telling her that he would be home the next day. He told about his parents and brothers meeting him at the airport in New York. Dan mentioned how it took him a few days to adjust to the quiet of the States, after the constant noise of a military base in Vietnam. Dan discusses his and his families health problems and his shortened life expectancy associated with Agent Orange. Dan mentions the role race and religion played in his unit and the availability of drugs in Vietnam.

Dan gives talks about Vietnam at his local high school, so that the students can learn about the effects of war from a person who has been there.

Transcription Of Dan Tonietti Interview
February 07, 1998

By
Paula Keeton
And
Robin Blevins

For Dr. John Ernst

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Tape #1, Side 1: Interview 2/07/98 with Dan Tonietti.
Interview by Dr. John Ernst. Transcription by Robin Blevins
I: means "interviewer" and denotes those things spoken by Dr. John Ernst.
... denotes a pause in a sentence.

Tape #1, Side 2: (Begins page 11 of transcription). Interview 2/07/98 with Dan Tonietti.
Interview by Dr. John Ernst. Transcription by Paula Keeton.
Transcribers' notes: Those things in brackets, i.e., [], occurred during the interview but the transcriber felt they should not be omitted without advice of Dr. Ernst.
Finally, I: means "interviewer" and denotes those things spoken by Dr. John Ernst.

PART I. BACKGROUND

I: This is an oral history interview with Dan Tonietti, in Elizabethtown, Ky. on Feb. 7, 1998.

Dan: I'm Dan Tonietti, originally from New York State, now reside in Ky. for the last thirty years.

I: I'm going to ask some specific, some broad questions. I'm going to turn this off too, so if you get cold we'll turn the heat back on for a few minutes and we'll take a break. I don't want it picking up on the Mic.

Dan: Sure. Ok.

I: What conditions, or can you discuss the conditions under which you were drafted?

Dan: I entered service in the early part of '66, and at that time, the conditions if you have to say were good. Because as a child of a parent who had served in World War Two, we were always taught to believe that our country was right in everything we did. Brought up on John Wayne... all the glory things. My sister talked to me about... I had... well let me back up a little bit. I had gone for physicals three times before I was finally accepted, if you want to use the word. I think more hard up than anything else, because I was first rejected for heart murmur on two occasions and then the third time for some miraculous reason, I was ok. So the conditions, for the most part, were good. The one thing I have to emphasize is that, I was drafted with my cousin, who I'd grew up with and later on in years, he would commit suicide. He's one of the three people, that I had a large amount of time, that I grew up with that decided to end their life. So conditions were good, though my sister talked to me about being a conscientious objector and I thought about that. I made the decision on my own, that I was going to allow myself to be drafted. If it was good enough for my father, who was married at the time with my older sister, it was good enough for me to serve my country. So if that answers your question. I'll stop right there.

PART II. BASIC TRAINING

A. The Train and the Deserters

B. Advanced Individual Training (AIT)

I: If there's anything else you want to add don't, please don't, let my questions hurt you.

Dan: Ok, Ok. I can go through my basic training; it was good basic training, if you want to talk about that?

I: Yeah, go ahead.

Dan: I was drafted from New York state, where I'm originally from. Went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Took my basic training there with my cousin. Several people, we all were taken by train from New York City to Fort Jackson. Thousands of guys, some of them jumped the train on their way through certain cities. You could stand out the side and watch them jump off. So, I didn't, I guess I didn't know what I was getting into.

I: How did you feel about that, when you saw others leaving?

Dan: I figured, I had, I have no remorse about those, even today. I have no remorse about those who decided not to fight. It's... you can retrospect a lot easier today, at least I can, and it didn't bother me then, but I'll talk about that later on. Took my basic training in Fort Jackson; where, basically, in basic training you're taught the things to kill people. And after two months of that, you graduate and go to AIT, which is Advanced, either Infantry Training, which you're given an MOS, I believe, of 11b10 is an infantryman, or to go on to Advanced Individual Training, which I chose to extend my service by one year. So, I enlisted an extra year to go to school. I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, I took a eight-week... 11... 12-week course as an automotive... fuel and electrical automotive repairman on both wheeled and tank vehicles. In November '66 I got my orders for Vietnam.

I: Why did you choose the extra training?

Dan: I had no real direction in life. I'd never wanted to go to college; it wasn't one of my stronger aspects of my life. I did fool with cars a lot and I had a lot of interest in automotive, because my dad worked for General Motors for forty years. So, that's where my interest was, in cars. And I still have an interest in cars today, 'cause I do body work for somebody else, part time. But I don't have the thriving interest like I used to, as a younger person. So... took that course, with several other people, they, it was considered a MOS of 63g20, a fuel and electrical systems repairman on wheeled and tank vehicles, and I got my orders in November of '66.

PART III. THE FLIGHT TO VIETNAM AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I: Was your cousin with you the whole time?

Dan: No, we split at that period, right after basic training. I never saw him after that. That was the last time I ever saw him. I think we bid each other farewell at that time. Went on; took two weeks leave, I think it was after that. And approximately, by the first...second week of December of '66 I found myself in Vietnam.

How I got there was to fly from Fort Dix, New Jersey McGuire Air Force Base. We took what was called an Overseas National Airways, which was a, what's the word I'm looking for, contracted by the U.S. government and we flew from there to Tokyo, Japan... Anchorage, Alaska, Tokyo, Japan and on to Saigon.

I: Was this a commercial flight?

Dan: I guess you could call it that. I don't, I'd never heard of the airline before. I just think it was a military flight that all people going over there as replacements. My, the company I was going to serve in had already been there four months.

I: Was there, did you have flight attendants?

Dan: Yes a regular airline.

I: Now was that a stran... I've always found that to be strange, I mean I've seen that quite common but to go into a combat situation eventually probably or just going into a country where we're at war on that type of flight has always struck me as...

Dan: Well to me, it didn't bother me. I mean it's a whole plane full of guys in uniform with civilian waitresses or attendants, flight attendants. It took roughly twenty two to twenty four hours to fly. It was roughly twelve thousand miles and the last leg from Tokyo, you set yourself into realization that you're on the final leg and I remember that the plane became more quiet than it had been previously. As we were coming close to the shore of South Vietnam we couldn't see anything, because it was at night; number one and I remember seeing one lone light on the ground. We could see flashes off in the distance and as the plane landed, we had heard, I guess through a grapevine or guys were talking on the plane. Do not be the first one off because the snipers would get you.

I have to loosen my shoe; I have problems with my feet. As fellows began to stand up, the stewardesses went to the front of the plane and all of them had tears in their eyes. So, the reality check had really set in at that time. They knew, and I'm only guessing at this, they knew, they saw all these young guys, that probably a lot of them wouldn't be coming back. But those things don't sit in your mind as a young

person. The very first thing I remember was, stepping off the plane, was the smells. And I know you'll hear this, the smells, the stench of garbage, waste. You're ushered off the plane real fast, onto buses that had steel grates across the windows and you go through the village of Saigon, which, I can't remember the section it was, but we went to Bien Hoa which was a replacement station. And at that time it was somewhat hilly in the area, kinda like the rolling hills of Lexington, that's about the same recollection that I have and nothing but tents. So I realized at that time, you know, that nothing was permanent. So, like I say, this was the early part of our buildup. I stayed there approximately two days, was helicoptered from Bien Hoa to Cam Ranh Bay, which is on the South China Sea. For the most part, I'd, of course, I had never heard of the place, but everybody said, ah you've got it made, you've got it made.

Flight was roughly an hour, hour and a half, if I remember right, and we flew into the Air Force base at Cam Ranh, and at that point we were given our orders as to what company we'd be replaced, going to. Very scenic countryside and I spent a lot of time in Cam Ranh. That is not the only place that I went to. Cam Ranh is an island by itself that was attached to the mainland by a bridge. Beautiful mountains, beautiful skies, the people, the smells that sticks with me today, quite a bit. People with black teeth from eating betel nuts, what they call betel nut, you've heard of that, which are nothing but insects that they dry and chew on.

PART IV. CAM RANH BAY

Weather we can talk about the weather. Major factor for the most part, the weather is very nice 90 to 100 degrees where I was at. Where there was not a lot of trees and things, a lot of shubbery, temperatures in the summer time get up as high as 120, 130 with a certain degree of humidity, but not like in the jungles. The winter times, which are about November through February when temperatures get down to 60 you freeze to death.

Living conditions where I was at, for the most part was nothing, was sand, because all, just about the whole coastline, anybody that served along the coast and for several miles in, will have the same experience of sand. Insects like I have never seen before. Lizards like I have never seen before. I have a videotape, I brought with me, I thought that they may have a VCR here. Show you that I basically worked on the depo level as a mechanic. Worked on parts, rebuilt parts worked twelve hours a day, six days a week. That was standard, for a whole year or so. Pulled guard duty at night which, because you area maintenance person does not mean that you're not, you don't use a rifle, you pull guard duty at least once a month and it was for two hour shifts at night. And you were given two magazines, and at that time we used M14s, which was a very heavy rifle that was developed during the '50s, I think, as a replacement for the M1. But the infantry units used the M16.

If you need to interrupt me. I'm just going to tell you basically what...

I: If everything's going well and I'm doing my job right, I won't talk much.

Dan: Ok.

I: I'm marking off things I was going to ask you 'cause you're hittin' them.

Dan: Ok that's good.

PART V. ACTION IN VIETNAM

Our company was comprised of mostly mechanics, but we had a small weapons repair who did go out to the field, who did come back shot up. I did go out into the field on several occasions. You brought your toolbox, you brought your flak jacket, you brought your steel pot helmet and you brought your rifle. There's one question I will never answer. Even in the classroom when I tell the kids. It's never been asked of me, but I tell them that there's one question I'll ask of you or answer for you. There's nothing I won't answer but there is one that I will not. And that question is "Have you ever killed anybody?"

I: Want me to turn this off?

Dan: No I'm ok.

I: Without going into detail, can you talk about what it was like when you did go out?

Dan: You saw the realities of war. You saw the craters. You saw the bullet holes in the buildings, saw a lot of body bags. Several dead Army men, which I was in the Army, I don't know if I have said that so far.

I: No. I'm glad you did.

PART VI. LIFE IN VIETNAM

Dan: It's a reality check to live under conditions that they had to live under, do their job under, for the amount of money they were making. Because at that time you were clearing roughly, as a Spec 4, E4, I think I was clearing \$240.00 a month and that included \$70.00 combat pay. So there was money, if you had to use the word good, at that time was good. Because you didn't pay any taxes. And I shipped most of my money home.

Mail, so important. I wrote every night to somebody. And...

I: Who did you write to?

Dan: Oh family. I have a large, of course, being Italian; I have a large family. Wrote to cousins that I grew up with. Uncles and aunts and for the most part that was your attachment to the... home.

I: What types of things did you write about?

Dan: Basically, what we saw. I never wrote the ugly part. I wrote about the countryside, the people, the food, what we did basically. We worked a lot of hours; there wasn't a whole lot to say. I think I may have probably written maybe 2... 2 ½ pages on one side every night, to somebody.

I: Did you ever write to your cousin?

Dan: Didn't know where Eddie went to. I knew that Eddie was in Vietnam. I knew that my brother-in-law's brother was in Vietnam, but I didn't know where. One of the, two amazing things that have sat with me all these years is that, I was on the beach at Cam Ranh one day and I run into a fellow who had graduated the year before me. He was in a transportation company and of course the first thing I said was "What are you doing here?" and he said "What are you doing here?", you know typical things. And I haven't seen him since. One of the company commanders in my company was from my hometown. He had graduated with my sister four years earlier. Approximately July of '67 he come by to my, what we called hooches, which were nothing but wood frame buildings with large army tents thrown over the top and he was leaving and that was the last time I've seen him. But I have asked my sister what he's doing, he's selling used cars now. And I said the next time I come home. I do want to see him.

Food, didn't have...

PART VII. REALITIES OF WAR/CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

I: Can I go back and ask a couple of things?

Dan: Sure.

I: When you go out into the field, were you well received? Did you feel like you were part of the unit? 'cause I get, the sense you were part of a separate group that you all took rotation turns out in the field.

Dan: Yes. You watched, especially the Vietnamese, they were nice to you, by bowing all the time. And I tried to be nice to them, because that's what I'd been brought up to be. Be to people as they are to you. You watched them. You watched your vehicles. Because, at that time, they were takin' our own grenades, pulling the pins on 'em and then they take electrical tape and wrap the handle down with electrical tape and stick 'em in the gas tank. So that when the gasoline had ate through the plastic, it would blow up. At that period in time, the war, if you want to use the word, was good. Everybody was, we had a focus on what we had to do. We had to fix things. The war was going good for us at that time. Loneliness is a very, was hard on several of 'em. One of the benefits of the

company I was in that they come from Fort Campbell and they had already been together.

... went out into the field, the several times I'd been out to the field, you saw people that you didn't know. But because they had, you knew that they were Americans, whether Air Force, Navy, Marines or Army. Understand that there were Koreans, Australians, not in large amounts, but we did run into 'em and everybody got along. You knew that anybody that wore green fatigue, jungle uniform was a basically U.S. military person. You never felt, I guess one of the closest symbols to home when you saw the American flag flying. In a compound you felt at home, but understand that in Vietnam we were pockets of U.S. personnel. We never controlled a set area, we controlled the towns and the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese the countryside. So, we had small segments of the whole country, very small. And that was the difference in this war. Was that what we took by day, and I talk from the infantry part. What we took by day a lot of time we lost at night, and the next day we'd go back and take it again, and lose a lot of life. And this was the senselessness in my opinion, as the war drug on, drug on, drug on, that we never accomplished anything. But up to that period that I was there, it was still very positive. We heard very little about the demonstrations going on at home, very little. The Stars And Stripes was our closeness to home, of course was biased. It was, what was in the paper was what the military wanted us to see. What was on armed forces radio was what the military wanted us to hear. At home, the letters we would get from parents were starting to get negative. So, our feeling went from being very proud Americans to being not so proud, because it wasn't a good war at home.

I: What kind of negative stuff did relatives write about?

Dan: Parents would talk about the demonstrations they would just use the word demonstrations and I think my Dad asked me in a letter how I'd feel about these demonstrators choosing not to serve, and at that time I answered him honestly, I said "Dad I would spit on 'em." And that was my feeling back then. But understand we only saw one side. I saw the senselessness of human life gone to waste. Because you had to watch children, children have always an American soldiers, I'll use the word ally, we always were softhearted towards kids, and I was too, still am today, still am. We'd give 'em candy bars, anything, we'd give 'em anything we had, because we had the flow of food, we'd give it to 'em. And the people were always receptive, they'd say thank you. Our conversation was limited. They couldn't speak English too much and I didn't Vietnamese. I knew a few words, but we tried to communicate with pictures out of my wallet. Like I always carried my cousin, my first cousin picture with me. And I could never say cousin in Vietnamese, so there was always a communications problem. Like to talk about, maybe, Bob Hope if you want to hear about that.

I: Yeah, whatever.

Dan: The USO shows, because that was another, I saw two USO shows while I was there, and I've covered quite a bit, I've covered quite a bit. Got to see two Bob Hope USO shows. With just thousands of Americans there and I think we. I saw two shows. One during the day and one at night. And Bob Hope always managed to come at the Christmas time of year. And Bob always ended his program with everybody standing up and holding hands and singing Silent Night. So, even today Silent Night has a very special meaning to me.

I: Do you remember what the other USO, what the other show was? Were they both Bob Hope?

Dan: They were both in Cam Ranh, basically. Where I was at and it was called the "Safe Haven". For the most part, we didn't worry much about the Viet Cong infiltrating and causing problems. Though, the Military Police were always around. I remember Joey Heatherton, and I have to think awhile, Cab Calloway came one year whom I graduated with his daughter at Sleepy Hollow High School in New York. So, there was a family thing there, kind of. Nancy Sinatra, they're basically all I remember of who was there. But it was a closeness. It brought us closer to home.

Rain. The monsoon season. I knew how much it rained where we were at but because there was so much sand it all seemed to settle into the ground and I can imagine out in the hillsides, countryside's, you know it was hard to get around in those periods. Especially down in the delta where it was really swampy. Now that's basically everything I remember and if there's something I haven't, you want me to answer, I'll try to answer it.

PART VIII. THE FOOD

I: I've got a few more questions I can ask, several more. I want to go back to a few things. I stopped you when you were talking about the food, so you never got a chance to cover it.

Dan: Ah, the food.

I: I took you somewhere else.

Dan: Didn't have any milk, we had powdered milk, so I missed, milk was one of the things that I was always addicted to, and we didn't have that luxury. Everything was powdered eggs, powdered milk. We did have hot meals. We did have a kitchen, if you could use the word kitchen. It was a wood building. We did eat three meals a day. We were never hurting for food. On Thanksgiving, we had turkey, all the dressings. That was one meal a year that you had everything from General Westmoreland. You have a menu and everybody had the same menu all over the country.

I: What about in the field? What type of stuff...

Dan: C- rations, ate C- rations from World War Two, the dates are on 'em. That's how I knew they were from World War Two. And you look at the dates, and of course, C-rations are not the best tasting, but they fill your stomach. You had nothing cold. Everything was warm, warm soda, warm beer. You had all the beer you ever wanted. You could buy a case of drinks or beer for \$2.00 at the PX. Did buy a lot of electronic instruments, they were imported from Japan. And I bought a tape player, which I still have today. Have all my tapes that I bought from somebody over there. I bought a few individual gifts for my Mom. Always received packages from home with food, do remember that.

I: What type of stuff would Mom send?

Dan: Things that would take maybe a week of shipment. Italian foods, which I'll call jujulana, is an Italian candy which is made from sesame seed and honey and almond and it's all heated together and flattened out on a table approximately an eighth of an inch thick, and I really liked it. It was a durable candy, that the older it got the harder it got, but with the warm temperatures it kept it kinda warm and it never went bad. But milk and ice cream were one of the things I missed the most. When my company left, I hated to see them go, I hated to see them go. Course I was one of the first replacements. Lot of guys were coming in and I stayed an additional month, I volunteered to stay an additional month to help out.

PART IX. AWARDS AND "THE WORLD"

Awards. I will tell you that received a Meritorious Service award for dedication to service; was wounded but never received a Purple Heart, but that's fine, I can live with that. Very proud, when it was my turn to leave. I was going home. And of course the word short, you've heard that before, refers to how many days you had left in country. I was going home and that was important. I didn't tell you that when I left home, my Dad who I said served in World War Two, told me "Dan don't ever volunteer far anything." And I remember that to this day. But at that time, I said the war was going good. Anything I was ever asked to do, I did. When I left my company, I left a part of my life that matured me in ways that I wouldn't until my later years now. You boarded the plane and you had the same stewardess's that now had smiles on their faces, instead of tears. You could look at these guys who, and I brought my khaki uniform which was the same one I wore in Vietnam, you could look at their chest and if they had a combat infantryman's badge. You knew that they had seen a certain amount of combat, but remember we were all young. I went over there at 19 and I came back I was almost 21 and it was knew you accepted those things, you accepted everything you ever saw, smelled, touched, did. you accepted it because it was your job to do. But when I boarded that plane, I looked back and said that I was going home and home was more important than anything else. It was the driving force of your closeness to your parents. We flew out of there and I said then that I hope I'll never come back. I'll talk about that later on. Flew into Fort Lewis Washington it was raining

in January approximately January 15, '68. It was about 50-60 degrees there, 'cause it rains all the time in Seattle. Tacoma is where we flew out of. I got a ticket to New York City. Was going back and passed up my steak dinner, which everybody was entitled to, passed that to go home. And I had to sit in the airport with a bunch of other guys, who I didn't know. You just take up with guys, you take up with them. "Hey where you from?", "Where you going to?" that's the way it always was.

I: Is that bond they talk about, having been in country, is that real?

Dan: It is today. It still is today... I'll talk about that later. Call my Mom from Tacoma. I said "Mom I'm home" she says "Where you at?" I told her. Said I'll... said I'll be at La Guardia in the morning at a certain time. When we got on the plane, this is important, when we got into Tacoma we had our uniforms on, people looked at us. We were dark, I was dark. I get very black. My hair was red on top from the sun bleaching it. Because of the steel pot helmet, I can't wear a baseball cap today, I get headaches.

We flew into La Guardia, there was snow on the ground and the people looked at us, that's important. I didn't know how to take it at the time. They just stared at us. And as I walked up the tramway, from the plane to the terminal in New York City, I could see my Mom and my Dad and at that time I had two brothers, I only have one left now, younger brothers. And I saw my Dad. I didn't say nothing to my Dad. Mom was glad to see me, my brothers were glad to see me. My Dad, didn't have to say anything to my Dad. He knew pretty much, what I'd gone through. I was just glad to be home. First thing I did when I got home was, drink milk. I drank a whole half-gallon of milk. My Mom was always so good. When I was growing up, she was very conservative in her spending, that she'd always buy powdered milk and cut a half gallon of milk, which at that time was the biggest container, she'd cut a half-gallon of whole milk into three gallons of milk. And it was like drinking water sometimes, but I appreciated it. I wanted it, I drank, was glad to be home. Friends and relatives come over that day. That night, I couldn't sleep. It was dark outside, but I couldn't sleep, because it was too quiet. It took me roughly three days, and I think I dosed off, but it took me roughly three days to get used to the quietness of the United States. When you've been so used to shelling at night, lights flaring off in the skies, but one of the most important things that I remember was I was at home when the Tet Offensive started. January 29 and 30th, and I saw all those reports from Walter Cronkite, of course this was new to me, seeing the body counts on TV, and I felt, and I say this as a support person. I'm not so much, was not so much an infantry person, but as a support person, we were combat support. What I was, that when all this started happening the Tet Offensive was the, one instance that turned the whole tide of the war around over there as it did at home, but I felt like I had left myself over there when it started. And I went over a green, passive individual, ignorant to a lot of the ways of life, and I came back a man that had seen a lot of things that you'll never see again, experience things that you'll never experience again.

I stayed home for approximately, I think a month was leave time. I come to my permanent station, I asked to go to, because I had eighteen months left in the military, I asked to go to Italy. I wanted to go to Italy. And because I didn't have enough time or they had a different reason, I was sent to Fort Knox, here. And that's how I am here today. 'cause I decided to stay. We were one of the, all the guys that come into Fort Knox, went to Head Quarters Company of the Army material command at fort Knox, at that time. All the guys that come back were, basically, guys from Vietnam and we worked on tanks over here. And tested anything that was being tested. Anything that was new and being tested for field use, we worked on because we had the experience of being out in conditions that warranted if this would be capable of being used. I'll finish up my military with saying that I was, received a second Meritorious Award, Meritorious metal, good conduct metal achievement. I've a total of six ribbons, a unit citation award from Vietnam and a lot of memories. That's the end of my military time.

(BEGIN SIDE TWO OF TAPE #1 DAN TONIETTI INTERVIEW, 2/07/98).

PART X. REFLECTION ON VIETNAM

I: Let me think for a second...goin' back to Tet. You just missed Tet.

Dan: Yes. Just missed it.

I: Did you, could you tell anything was goin' on [it sounds like Dan chuckles here] at all...could you tell...and I...that may be...could you notice any shift in...

Dan: At that period in time, the last...December of '67 through the last two weeks of six...of...excuse me, the first two weeks of January '68, I was on the coast of Vietnam (where I was at Cam Ranh), and as far as noticing anything different, absolutely not. Didn't notice anything. But I'd grow to learn, here just a few years ago...uh...[burped]...excuse me, personal research that Cam Ranh was one of those bases that was shelled by the Viet Cong uh North Vietnamese. I have a chart over here, which I use in the classes to show the cities that were hit, and Cam Ranh was hit. To what degree, I don't know. I don't know. But I never saw any inkling of us losing the war. Okay? If that answers your question.

I: Yea. I was just curious.

Dan: Okay.

PART XI. THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I: Umm...You say we take so much for granted in the questionnaire you filled out.

Dan: Yes.

I: Mmh-huh. Can you expand on that or do you have anymore thoughts...or can you tell me that?

Dan: I don't mind telling you that and maybe, maybe ...um...my thinking is wrong. I think we get so accustomed to our way of living that we've been given so much...

I: {speaks while Dan is speaking, saying}... "Our rights"

Dan: ...in the US. The United States as a whole, we take for granted so much going on vacations, having a job, going out to eat, having a home. When I see poverty, I've seen it in Vietnam...I went to Mexico a couple of years ago on vacation and I felt it was very important for my wife and my youngest daughter to see how people...poor people live. And my reaffirmation is that the poor in this world are getting much poorer than they were even thirty years ago. I take...I'm grateful for everything, for the cars I own, the job I have, to my children: a lot of times, my wife, we have a lot of problems...just difference in characters, I guess.

PART XII. LIFE SINCE VIETNAM

A. HEALTH

B. HEALTH OF HIS CHILDREN

C. SHORTENED LIFE EXPECTANCY

D. PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE WAR

E. FLASHBACKS

F. REPERCUSSIONS OF THE WAR

G. THE VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL (i.e., "The Wall")

H. POSTWAR TROPHY

I've gone through a lot of trauma in my life in the last twenty years: loss of jobs, seizures (I've had a seizure), been to the hospital for kidney problems, for ankle swelling and I think as, I think, and I can't prove this, I'm still in veterans rehab to a degree on this, we were sprayed with Agent Orange. My oldest daughter was born without a poop-hole...we had to get her one made, which is a rare occurrence. She has scoliosis, which is curvature of the spine. As I said, I had my kidney to fail me, had ankle swellings, my face breaks out on occasion, especially in the wintertimes. I have to watch myself. I watch my kids more than anything else. I wanna know what sicknesses they have, ailments, because, because when you're a war veteran, the VA is responsible to you the rest of your life, and I do go to Louisville on occasion. I have to go through another physical here in, I'm gonna say the next six months...it's been six months since I been notified.

I want to say something honestly: I'm not looking for pity. I know, I seriously doubt I'll live to see sixty. I do wanna make sure that all my debts are paid off before then. What do I base that on? I base that on the obituaries that I've paid attention to the last ten years...ten years ago, guys in their thirties and forties, now guys in their fifties, that have served in Vietnam, I mean, it's in the obituary. That tells me my time is limited, and I know that. So, I think it's important, in my

own way, to tell about this stuff...that now I look at the war as having been wrong, though I'm not, I'm very proud for serving in the manner which I did. I believe in the United States, but this was a wrong war. It had no goal. We achieved nothing, that I can see today, other than, you have people walking out here that (a lot of them keep it to themselves) because and in my case, my wife doesn't want to hear it.

I: I picked up on that on the phone. I got off and I talked to my wife and I said, "Ya know," I said that, "Dan Tonietti sounds like he's very interesting to talk to," but I said, "I could tell that his wife, and maybe I was wrong..."

Dan: No, you're exactly right {Dan said this while Dr. Ernst was talking}

I: ...and I told my wife and she said, "Yea. Well. Maybe so." {chuckle}

Dan: You get mixed reviews even today as you did years ago: there were people who were against the war and there were people who were for the war. Tet changed that. That's why we had the demonstrations we did. And they were right. They were right. And I can honestly say that today: they were right. We had no goal. We never achieved anything.

I: When did you come to that conclusion?

Dan: [Long pause]...Within the last few years of viewing...viewing a lot of footage. Talking to a lot of guys; their personal opinions. I'm very fortunate to have...I have...there's footage on the PBS special Vietnam the television history. I'm very fortunate to be on that show and myself and my cousin Eddie Mackey getting inducted.

I: Oh. I didn't know that. Wow.

Dan: And I use...I've had our school system buy that series as a teaching aid for me and I use that in the classroom. When that camera panoramas these rows of guys, they come right across my cousin in the front and me in back of him. I stop it right there, with him. I'll tell you that in a minute. I come to that assumption here, like I said, from talking to guys that work within the school system.

I: Uh-hum.

Dan: That helicopters today still bother them and it does me. Went to a football...I can give you a recent instance: I went to a football game her at Central Hardin High School last fall and one of the local radio stations use...they go around to all the football stadiums with a helicopter, take footage

I: Right, uh-huh.

Dan: And it just so happens that this helicopter, it was dark when I was leaving, walking out in the parking lot and it's search light that's on the belly of the plane...I mean, it just all comes back. The slappin' of the blades in the wind, the same noise from the motor, it...it just put me back. I had to stop and hold onto a car...it put me back.

I: They call them the Friday night flights. They come in...

Dan: Yes. Yes.

I: ...do little clips from all the high school football games. Yea.

Dan: And that spotlight: as it took off, that spotlight come right across me and it...it...it just ...I had an eerie feeling. And as I've said, I've talked to guys within the school system, some who have combat time, and they will talk to me, but only me. Okay. Because they share the same feeling and like I said, we keep it to ourselves.

I: Yeah. So there really is that camaraderie, right?

Dan: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

Dan: It still hangs close today. Like I said, a lot of people don't want to hear about it: they were against it then, they're against it now. And I was in my own way against it then, but I did what I felt was right for me to do. But I see the senselessness of people getting killed, and I told you I was going to talk to you about my cousin.

I: Uh-hum.

Dan: Here a few years ago, my mom called me and the parallels in his life and mine were very similar: he had lost jobs, his marriage wasn't good. He decided to end his life and he committed suicide...and that's where I stop this picture for these kids. I said, "I want you to remember his face, 'cause I will tell you later on, he committed suicide." I have two classmates, and I brought their pictures in my yearbook, that I grew up with. They committed suicide. I'd went back to a class reunion...I don't know...'65...back in 1990, for my 25th. There sat this one fella in a wheelchair, and I said to this girl Barbara that I was very good friends with, I said, "Barbara, who's that in the wheelchair?" She says, "That's Jack Ryown." I said, "What happened?" said, "Dan. Didn't you know?" I says, "no." Said that he was seriously wounded in Vietnam. I walked right over to him. And I didn't know it at the time, but as I talked to him, he could barely had any voice. Now, this

fella, he was a three-letterman in high school, played football, played ice hockey, played baseball: three letters. Here's a hunk, just a hunk of a man sitting there, and he said, "Dan." I said, "Jack, what happened to you?" Said, "Dan, I was hurt with a land mine." And course, as he spoke, it was so low and so slow. I didn't know that there were several people behind me. He says, "You know. You know what I went through." Images of the past. Even The Wall today. I been there two times.

I: Yea that was one of my questions.

Dan: Been there two times. Both times, I walked up to it, shakin' as I'm shakin' now. It uh, it's emotional. Very emotional. I write to Jack: I want you to know that. I sent...he never writes back, but I do write to him from time to time. Walked up, shakin' inside: my kids wasn't with me the first time and course it's hard for people who don't have this experience to feel the closeness of what it stands for. After I thought that they had pretty much seen enough, I asked if I could be alone for awhile. And I stood there, I looked and I saw guys huggin' one another, people etching their names of family members. You could look at the history of it by the shape of ...it's in a V and of course, in the early years (and I think our first year was 1959), it shows the progression of dead guys all the way up to the pinnacle which is 1968. I would fall in that pinnacle to the left side and then from the pinnacle down to where we tapered out in '73.

It's emotional for me. It's a place that...it's like a magnet. It draws those who served with our men and women...men and women, army or air force or navy or whoever, to remember that we shouldn't let this happen again. And to this day, even our military moves are always thrown back to Vietnam because it was a mistake, and that's how I feel about it...it was a mistake.

I know I said my cousin killed himself, but the two guys that I was friends with killed themselves when I was young, and I worry about that. That, ugh. And obituaries bother me because, like I said, I know my time is limited. I just feel that inside of me, and I want to have everything paid off before I do die. I have a car that I bought back in '69 that was paid for with money that I had saved from my combat pay. I have that car today and my daughters, I said that it's going to them (because I do body work part-time) and I like old cars.

I: My dad does, too.

Dan: I told my youngest one, I said, "If you all do not want it," I said, "my one request is that it be donated to Vietnam Veterans in Washington, D.C. that has a museum." That is my last wish. Why? I don't know. I guess it just represents an era.

I: What kind is it?

Dan: '68 Dodge Charger, one that was in Bullet, a popular movie back in '68, and I wanted one then, and I got one, eventually.

I: Yeah.

Dan: So. Any questions you would like to ask me? That's my recollection of everything I can remember.

I: Are you okay?

Dan: Oh, I'm fine. Yea, I'm fine.

I: I want to go back to a couple thing in Vietnam.

Dan: Okay.

I: Anything I ask, you don't want to answer, you know you don't...

Dan: Yes, sir.

I: ...feel free not to. What did your unit look like, racially and...

PART XIII. THE MIXTURE OF RACE/RELIGION

Dan: I'm glad you asked that. We were a mixture of everything. We had basically, we had Polish or Pollocks, we had Cubans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians, Catholics, Jewish...every nationality there was: Mexicans; we had some college educated that had just got out of college and were drafted being there, so there was no (at that time), no large bulk of just being white or black. It was a good mixture, and I honestly say, when you're drafted, and I was drafted, I had no problems with that. Most of the guys were drafted.

I: Uh-huh.

Dan: They took the two years to do their time, get in, get out. Some of them took an early out, which meant that they had to go on to college and they only served a year and a half in the military. But the most, one of the amazing parts of my company was the Indian, and I can't remember what tribe he was from, but his name was Running Bear: that was his last name. We called him Chief, and he liked that. They allowed them...we had two of 'em...we had two Indians. They allowed them to let their hair be long where the rest of us had to have haircuts because it was part of their heritage. So, there was a mixture, good mixture.

I: Were race relations okay?

Dan: No problems.

I: No problems?

Dan: No, none whatsoever.

I: That same thing you just told me. I talked to a Louisville police officer, my brother is a Louisville police officer...

Dan: Okay.

I: ...and his older partner, he served on the Navy boats there, and he said the same thing, said they had a Native American and they called him Chief...

Dan: Yeah.

I: ...and he said it went that way...if you were Irish, then they gave you some sort of Irish name. There was no bigotry in it. That's just how they did it.

Dan: They did it. They called me, my last name being Tonietti, they called me Tony, which was the same name my dad was called when he was in the Navy in W.W.II. I just thought that's an interesting slang name.

PART XIV. DRUGS AND DISEASES IN VIETNAM

I: Were drugs a problem at all? Did you see any drugs at all?

Dan: Yes. Guys smoked marijuana constantly. They could get any drug they wanted. Was it widespread? Not so much for support people, though the guys had it. But I think as a war drug on and guys who got assigned to infantry units...didn't...what they saw...what they, if had just got there, they saw what they would be involved in for months on end because the difference in Vietnam versus W.W.II was the guys in the infantry did this every day of the week. They got to go on R&R, yes, but they had to come back. Some of them never come back. They chose to run away. So, I understand the drug situation. I understand why guys, there are 52,000 names on The Wall, but only 42,000 were killed in combat. The rest of them are from what was called fragging, O.D'd on drugs, or just conveniently lost themselves. Okay? I think there are people that conveniently lost themselves that are still alive somewhere. I do believe that.

I: Yeah.

Dan: I don't think they're being held as captive, I think they, of the 2200 that are supposedly still missing, some have changed identities because maybe their home-life wasn't so great.

I: Yeah.

Dan: Okay?

I: That happened with a friend of my sister's. Did you ever hear rumors of fragging? Was that a...

Dan: It was a new term that I remember while I was there. If you didn't like somebody, you shot their ass. Bluntly. Bluntly. You had the exposure to the weapons, and you shot them. So, uh, but I didn't see it personally. I heard about it and I'm sure that it happened more often as a war drug on.

PART XV. THE ROKs

I: Did you have any interaction with the South Koreans...the ROKs?

Dan: Not very much. Maybe I shouldn't tell this. This has to do with their sexual organ. They always would brag about how big theirs were, and it was my understanding that they used to get rocks that had holes in them and put their man thing through it to make them longer. Kids ask me in the classroom (because I brought this up) about SIDS, and I had to think a minute...SIDS...SIDS...SIDS...what is SIDS? A teacher who was a friend of mine said, "Dan. Sexually transmitted diseases." Oh, yes. I could talk about that. I said you had a variety; you had the clap, the drip, the crabs. I says, "I'll explain all of those to you." The clap, and I explained it to the kids.

I: Yea. Well, sure.

Dan: I talked about the bull-headed clap to them, explained how they broke it. Guys went "ooh" after I told them, so that...those things were around back then. They used diesel for crabs; pour diesel on your genitals to get rid of the crabs, and it burned them out. Not that I ever did. I never saw, never saw anything or any Vietnamese that really did anything for me.

PART XVI. "R & R"

I: Did you get to take an "R&R"?

Dan: Turned those down. No, did not. I turned one down. I did go to Sydney, Australia.

I: Can you talk a little bit about that?

Dan: Don't remember a lot about it. I was only there for like two or three days. All I know is it was so nice to have running water, (Ernst laughs here) conveniences that you were so accustomed to. I would stay two or three days and come right back. The bad part about it is, you don't mind leaving, but you didn't want to go back. But you had to, and that's how I looked at it.

PART XVII. MORE ON THE ROKs

I: Going back to the South Koreans a minute...they've got a reputation of being a really harsh...

Dan: Yes.

I: ...and even atrocities

Dan: Yes.

I: Can you shed any light on that for me? Do you know any?

Dan: Apparently, there's a lot of hate in them; anyway, between the South Koreans and the Vietnamese. The South Koreans would physically cut off the ears of Viet Cong and leave the bodies there so that North Vietnamese or Viet Cong knew that the Koreans did it. The unit was called the White Horse Division, if I'm not mistaken.

I: You're right.

Dan: I met with a few of them. Talked with them, but it was more on a mechanical end than anything else. They come into our shop loaded down with 50 caliber machine guns on jeeps, or on themselves. You know, they would always come in that way. So that's about my only contact with them, and what I've heard and what I saw in one circumstance...they would cut their tongue out, too, that's another thing, and stick it to their forehead.

I: They'd cut the Viet Cong's tongue out put it on...

Dan: Yes.

I: Wow. I'd heard they were tough...feared...

Dan: Yep. Never saw a lot of them but saw the Australians. There was one of the bush hat...and I collected (and I wish I could find them today), I collected all the patches that we wore over there as a army unit.

PART XVIII. MOST COMPELLING WAR EXPERIENCE

I: Sure. Is there one experience that stands out in your mind? I always ask it, and you may have already covered it. We always just ask, "What was the most compelling experience, or..."

Dan: For me, it was walking guard duty at night. You have a lot of time to think. You have to listen. You...you're taught in the Army night vision, which is using

what light there is, and your eyes, to watch for movement. And when we walk guard duty at night, or in the sand foxholes that we had, the noises...you could hear the lizards crawling around. There's snakes over there that you have to be real careful of. One of them is the bamboo viper. We called it the "seven-second snake" because seven seconds after it bit you, you were dead.

I: Wow.

Dan: So, walking guard duty is the one thing I could relate, extremely well to those that were out on patrol. Okay? I was not a combat soldier. We were combat support, so I kinda did both sides to a degree.

PART XIX. THE STUDENTS

I: I'm curious about your...what the high school students, what was...

Dan: Their reaction?

I: What made you do it the first time? I got a few questions: What led you to do it the first time?

Dan: Okay. Back about three years ago, I had a friend of mine who was a teacher in the school before I went to work for the school system. He was talking, I was cleaning computers, I think, and he come up to me. We just kind of got talking, he was a history teacher, and he said to me, he said, "Dan. You like history?" I said, "Yea, Mike. I really like history." I said, "That's one of my favorite subjects." He said, "You know what I always wanted was to get a W.W. II veteran to come in and talk to the kids?" And I said, "Mike, that's no problem. All you got to do is find you one and ask them."

I: Sure.

Dan: He said, "But you know what I really wanted?" I said, "No." He didn't know that I had served in Vietnam, I'd never said anything to him.

I: He wasn't playing you?

Dan: No. No. He wasn't playing me. He said, "You know what I really wanted was somebody who had served in Vietnam." So, I hesitated a second, and I said, "Well, Mike. Did you know I did?" He said, "Would you do it for me? Would you talk to kids?" I said, "Let me think about it awhile." And I did. I thought about it awhile, and I told him, I said I would do it for him. He said, "I've had no luck, Dan of anybody wanting to do this for me."

I: This was about three of four years ago?

Dan: Yea, about four years ago he asked me. So, he said, "What do you want?" I had to think about it at home, and to this day, I did it in three sections. I lay the groundwork in what I call "the before" which is the end of W.W. II. I tell kids, I use timelines, show them the major happenings up through those years. Where I was at in that period of time, actually when I was in grammar school...show them what it was like growing up through the fifties, what I did. Grow up with rock-n-roll; cars...I bring pictures of cars.

Then I get into "the during." "The during" is not hard on me. I show them, using that Vietnam series. I show them pictures of one of the senators who was against the war at the time, who's still in Congress today, and I have a picture of him today.

I: Who's this?

Dan: He's from Massachusetts, and I can't think of his name now, but there's two of them, and I can't think of his name. So, that's how it's kind of progressed. The living with, living with the past is the hard part on me. That year I did it for him, he was grateful for me doing it. Within a week, I got a flood, A FLOOD of letters from kids. They did this on their own, he said, "I didn't entice them into this." A flood of letters of comments, just comments from kids thanking them for doing that. The last two years, because a history teacher has changed (one retired and this other guy took in for him), he's...he has asked...last year was his first year of listening to me. Right after I got done doing it for him, and as I did, I had the same previous history teacher in there as a visitor, plus the present history department teacher...he come up to me after I got done. He said, "Dan. Will you do it again for me next year?"

I: (laughs and says, "Sure.")

Dan: So, I told him that I would. I try to change it around a little bit, so it doesn't become too acned for the teacher to listen to. Try to think of new things. This year I have sat down and thought about all the Vietnamese sayings that are in Vietnamese and all our sayings...I've listed all of those. What inspired me was one of the movies, which had been on several times, and I try to avoid some of them because I don't want to glorify a war. It's more of a personal relationship involved in this that I try to talk about. I'm at a loss for the name of the movie. In there, they started using words that I had long forgotten. I said, "This is a nice addition that I can put in."

I: Sure.

Dan: So, I wrote all of those down. So, that's how it got started. I only do it at one school and I've never been asked to do it anywheres else. I do it for the kids because it's hard for, I think, some parents to talk about it. I think that least after, especially the second session, I have kids come up to me and say, "My mom, or my dad., or my uncle...I told them that you were here talking to us about it," and

the kids start to do a little feedback. They'll come up to me individually and ask me some questions sometimes, but I think for the most part, number one: I enjoy doing it. I enjoy doing it. Is it hard? Yes, it's hard. It's very hard. Has it become easier in time? To some degree. The personal aspect of me trying to relay to them how my parents felt, how I remember seeing my parents, or living with the deaths of my cousin and some of my close friends from childhood...I try to relay that to them by showing them pictures out of my yearbooks.

I: Right. Boy, it brings it home, I bet.

Dan: Yea. And kids understand that.

I: Sure.

Dan: But it's...I don't say anything about it to my wife. She was still in high school while it, when I was over there, and she feels, I guess, let the past be in the past. That's the way I want it to be. I don't want to, I don't want to remember it, but in the same breath, I don't want to forget it.

I think if kids understand...what I try to do, and understand, I am not...I'm close to kids. What I try to do is show them that each generation has its share of problems. I said, "Take what I have lived through, and I'm still living through, take your problems, and see how your problems weigh up against mine." They understand that.

I: Sure. How much do high school students know about the Vietnam War?

Dan: The teacher tries to fill in the military aspects of it...the diplomatic/government aspects of it. I put the personal aspect into it.

I: What types of questions do they ask you?

Dan: The ones on AIDS, on sexually transmitted diseases. I try to hit all the things that I feel the kids would be interested in. You know, what was it like to be there? What did we eat? The weather? Show...especially my home eight-millimeter movies, the kids appreciate because they see me when I was twenty years old.

I: Sure.

Dan: See me at my height, standing up to people who about this tall.

I: Yea.

Dan: I could put history in its place by having taken this footage.

PART XX. HIS COUSIN AND GOD

I: Sure. Do you want to talk a little bit about your cousin, or is it too painful?

Dan: I'll talk about it. Yes, it's painful. Eddie and I, we were second cousins. Where I grew up, in Terrytown, New York, he lived around the corner from me. We had our, what we referred to as our gang back then, which were the group of kids we hung around with. We would play baseball, stickball, hide-go-seek. We'd take car jacks, and those were our machine guns. We'd go out in the woods and play army. Roughly about, I'm going to say late fifties, early sixties, Eddie moved away with his mom to Osening, NY, where Sing-Sing prison is at (if that rings a bell...Sing-Sing), and I didn't see Eddie anymore in there. So, when I got to see him on induction day, it was a reunion. Of course, we went through basic training together, and it was like growing up again.

Then, as I said earlier, when we went our own ways after basic training, he went to advanced infantry training, and I went to advanced individual training. That was the last time I saw him. Roughly, I had totally forgotten about Eddie: I thought about him, you know, as you do anybody that you ever grow up with, I thought about him from time to time, and roughly about '92 or '93, my mom called me, as I talk to my mom regularly. She says, "I gotta tell you something." Of course, I had experienced a lot of trouble as, like I said, with jobs and my marriage, and things just not going well. She said, "You remember Eddie Mackey?" I says, "Yes, Mom." I knew what she was getting at, that's the funny thing about it...just her tone of voice. Says, "Eddie took his life." There was that silence on my part, for a long time. She says, "Are you still there?" I says, "Yes." I said, "Can I ask what happened?" She said that his marriage had failed, he wasn't able to keep a job. Everything she told me was the same parallels, the same things had gone wrong with me. Had I tried to commit suicide, had I considered it? Several times. Several times. I saw no use in wanting to live.

I don't want to blame it on Vietnam. Understand that. I don't want to blame it on that. It's just that we had seen the bad parts of life, and with things not going well for me, I saw no rosiness to be had in my life. I remember one time I sat in the bathroom, after my wife and I were arguing over, I guess it was a foreman job (maybe it was a foreman job), and I had a knife. I had it right up to my chest. I had it right there. I had the point of that knife going into my chest, I'd already pierced the skin; whether I thought it or whether Jesus had thought it for me, the words that went through my mind were, "Dan. Think of your children." I put the knife down. Started seeking counsel, both through VA and with marriage counselor. Did it help? To a degree...to a degree. I always felt, and I say this to the kids, I always felt that I felt better, but the sky wasn't blue to me, even though it was blue. The days were cloudy, even though it was as beautiful with the flowers. So, I had turned back to the one thing that I had consistently been involved with, and that's Jesus. Prayed, did a lot of praying. Still pray today: to make my life easier; to help me get over the rough spots in the road, and I think my prayers have been answered. Not only am I still involved in church as I always have been, I got into Promise Keepers here within the last two months. I was able to start this with the school. For me, it's a way of, I won't use the word getting the pain out of me...there will always be pain, whether I talk about it or don't talk

about it, but helping kids to understand life. Life is not easy, but it's what you make out of it, and I think that's the whole point of my talk to kids, and hopefully, somehow making my marriage work. Marriages are not easy, they're not easy.

I: (laughs)...no, they're not.

PART XXI. ...SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Dan: Women are different than men. My wife seems to believe, I think, that I use Vietnam as a crutch. It's not a crutch, it is not a crutch, but how you take something out of your life that has affected it so drastically, it doesn't go away.

[Dan becomes emotional here.] It's in the paper constantly, well, not constantly, but it's always there, it's always being referred to because it was one of the darkest days in the history of this country. That period of time. It affected me because I know that people are the same now as they were back then. That's the correlation I see. I think we, as a result of Vietnam, we look at things a little differently. We're not as quick to jump into things. Can I stop a second? I'd like to go blow my nose.

Oral History Interview conducted with Dan Tonietti
Elizabethtown, KY
February 7, 1998
Interviewer: Dr. John Ernst

Dan Tonietti: I'm Dan Tonietti, originally from New York State; I have now resided in Kentucky for the last thirty years. OK? Good.

John Ernst: Um, I'm going to ask you some specific and some broad questions and I'm going to turn this off too so if you get cold we'll turn it off and then I'll, you know, turn the heat back on for a few minutes and we'll take a break but I don't want it picking up on the mike. Um, what conditions, uh, or can you discuss the conditions under which you were drafted?

Tonietti: I entered service in the early part of 1966 and at that time the conditions if you have to say were good because as a child of a parent who had served in World War II we were always taught to believe that our country was right in everything we did. Brought up on John Wayne all the glory things. Uh, my sister talked to me about, I had, well let me back up a little bit. Uh, I had gone for physicals three times before I was finally, well if you want to use the word accepted, I think more hard up than anything else because I was first rejected for a heart murmur on two occasions and then the third time for some miraculous reason I was OK. Uh, so the conditions for the most part were good the one thing I have to emphasize is that uh, I was drafted with my cousin who I grew up with and uh later on in years he would commit suicide and he's one of the three people that uh I had a large amount of time that I grew up with that decided to end their life. So the conditions basically were good though my sister talked to me about being a conscientious objector and I thought about that and I made the decision on my own that I was going to allow myself to be drafted and uh if it was good enough for my father who was married at the time with my older sister, it was good enough for me to serve my country. So if that answers your question I'll stop right there.

Ernst: Well I mean if there's anything else you want to add don't, please don't let my questions restrict you.

Tonietti: OK, OK. If, uh, during, I can go through my basic training it was good basic training if you want to talk about that. Uh, I was drafted from New York State where I'm originally from went to uh Ft. Jackson, South Carolina took my basic training there with my cousin and several people. We all were taken by train from New York City to Ft. Jackson, uh thousands of guys, some of them jumped the train on their way through certain cities, you could stand out the side and watch them jump off so I didn't, I guess I didn't know what I was getting into.

Ernst: How'd you feel about that when you saw others leaving?

Tonietti: I figured, I have no remorse about those even today; I have no remorse about those who decided not to fight. It's uh, you could retrospect a lot easier today, at least I can and uh it didn't bother me then but I'll talk about that later on. Uh, took my basic training in Ft. Jackson where basically in basic training your taught all the things to kill people, maim, and after two months of that you graduate and go on to A.I.T. which is Advanced either Infantry Training

which you're given at M.O.S. I believe of eleven B10, is it Infantry or go on to Advanced Individual Training? Which I chose to extend my service by one year so I enlisted an extra year to go to school which I did, when to Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland, I took an eight week, eleven, uh twelve week course as an automotive, well fuel and electrical automotive repairman on both wheeled and tank vehicles and in November of 1966 I got my orders for Vietnam.

Ernst: Why did you choose the extra training?

Tonietti: Well, I had no real direction in life. I never wanted to go to college, it wasn't one of my stronger aspects of my life. But, I did fool with cars a lot and I had a lot of interest in automotive because my dad worked for General Motors for forty some years so, that's where my interest was in cars and I still have an interest in cars today cause I do body work for somebody else part time. But I don't have the thriving interest like I used to as a younger person. So I took that course with several other people it was considered a M.O.S. of a sixty-three G-20, a fuel and electrical systems repairman on wheeled and tank vehicles and I got my orders in November of 1966.

Ernst: Was your cousin with you the whole time?

Tonietti: No, we had split at that period, right after basic training I never saw him after that. Uh, that was the last time I ever saw him, I think we bid each other fair well at that time. Uh, went on to, I took two-week leave I think it was after that and approximately by the first or second week of December of 1966 I found myself in Vietnam. Uh, how I got there was to fly from uh from Ft. Dix, New Jersey McGuire Air Force Base, we took what was called an overseas national airways which was, uh what's the word I'm looking for, contracted by the U.S. government and we flew from there to Tokyo, Japan, Anchorage, Alaska, Tokyo, Japan and on into Saigon.

Ernst: Was this a commercial flight?

Tonietti: Uh, I guess you could call it that, I don't think, I had never heard of the airline before I just think it was a military flight that all people who were going over there as replacements. My, uh the company that I was going to serve in had already been there four months.

Ernst: Was it, did you have flight attendants?

Tonietti: Yes, a regular airline.

Ernst: Now was that a strange, I've always found that to be strange, I mean that's, I've seen that quite common but to go into a combat situation eventually, probably or just going to a country where we're at war on that type of flight has always struck me as...

Tonietti: Well, it, to me it didn't bother me, I mean it's a whole plane full of guys in uniform with uh civilians waitresses or flight attendants. It took roughly twenty-two to twenty-four hours to fly, it was roughly twelve thousand miles and the last leg, excuse me, from Tokyo you set

yourself into a realization that you're on the final leg and I remember that the plane become more quiet than it had been previously. As we were uh coming close to the shore of South Vietnam we couldn't see anything because it was at night number one and I remember seeing one lone light down on the ground. We could see flashes off in the distance and as the plane landed we had heard I guess through a grapevine or guys were talking on the plane do not be the first one off because the snipers will get you. Uh, I have to loosen my shoe I have problems with my feet.

Ernst: Oh, make yourself comfortable.

Tonietti: My feet don't stink right now. Uh as the fellows began to stand up the stewardesses went to the front of the plane and all of them had tears in their eyes. So reality check had really set in at that time. They knew and I'm only guessing at this they knew they saw all these young guys that probably a lot of them wouldn't be coming back. But those things don't sit in your mind as a young person. The very first thing I remember was stepping off the plane, was uh the smell and I know you'll hear this, the smells. The stench of garbage, waste, you're ushered off the plane real fast on to buses that had steel grates across the windows and you go through the village of Saigon which I can't remember the section it was but we went to Ben Wa, which was replacement station, and at that time it was somewhat hilly in the area, kind of like the rolling hills of Lexington that's about the same recollection that I have and nothing but tents. So I realize at that time, you know, nothing was permanent. Of course like I say this is the early part of our build up. I stayed there approximately two days, was helicoptered from Ben Wa to Camron Bay which was on the South China Sea and for the most part I had of course I had never heard of the place but everybody said, 'oh you got it made you got it made'. Uh, the flight was roughly an hour- hour and a half if I remember right and we flew into, I gotta think, the Air Force Base at Camron and at that point we were given our orders as to what company that we'd be replaced going to. Ah, very scenic countryside and I spent a lot of time in Camron but that is not the only place that I went to. Camron is an island by itself that was attached by to the mainland by a bridge. Uh, beautiful mountains, uh beautiful skies. The people, the smells, that sticks with me today, quite a bit. Uh people with black teeth from eatin' beetle nuts, what they call beetle nuts, you've heard that, which are nothing but insects that they dry and chew on. Uh, the weather let me talk about the weather, major factor. For the most part, excuse me; for the most part the weather was really nice, ninety to a hundred degrees where I was at. Where there was not a lot of trees and things, a lot of shrubbery. Uh temperatures in the summer time get up at high as a hundred twenty, a hundred thirty, with a certain degree of humidity but not like in the jungles. Uh the winter times which are about November through February when the temperatures get down to sixty you freeze to death. Uh, living conditions where I was at for the most part was nothing but sand because all just about all the whole coastline, anybody that served along the coast and for several miles in will have the same experience of sand. Insects like I have never seen before. Lizards like I've never seen before. And I had a videotape I brought with me, I thought that they may have a VCR here, ok. Uh show you that uh I basically worked on the depot level as a mechanic, worked on parts, rebuilt parts, worked twelve hours a day, six days a week. That was standard for a whole year or so. Pulled guard duty at night which because you are a maintenance person does not mean that you're are not, uh you don't use a rifle, you pull guard duty at least once a month and it was for two hour shifts at night and you were given two magazines and at that time we used M-14s which was a very heavy rifle that was

developed during the 1950s I think it was a replacement for the M-1 but the infantry units used the M-16. Uh, if you need to interrupt me I'm just going to tell you basically what I have done.

Ernst: No, no, if everything's going well and I'm doing my job right I won't talk much. I was marking off things I was going to ask you cause you're hitting them.

Tonietti: Okay that's good. Uh, our company was comprised of mostly mechanics but we had a small weapons repair who did go out to the field who did come back shot up. Uh, I did go out in the field on several occasions, you brought your toolbox, you brought your flack jacket, you brought your steel pot helmet and you brought your rifle. Uh, there's one question that I will never answer, even in the classroom when I tell the kids, its never been asked of me and I tell them that there's one question that I will never answer uh ask of you or answer for you I said there's nothing I won't answer but there's one that I will not and and that question is have you ever killed anybody? Uh...

Ernst: Do you want me to turn this off for a second?

Tonietti: No I'm okay.

Ernst: Without going into detail can you talk about what it was like when you did go out?

Tonietti: You saw the realities of war. Uh, you saw the craters. You saw the bullet holes in the buildings. Saw a lot of body bags, several dead army men. Which I was in the army I don't know if I've said that so far.

Ernst: No I'm glad you did.

Tonietti: Uh, it's a reality check to live under conditions that they had to live under do their job under for the amount of money they were making because at that time you were clearing roughly as a SPEC-4 E-4, I think I was clearing two hundred and forty dollars a month and that included seventy dollars combat pay. So there was money if you had to use the word good at that time was good because you didn't pay any taxes and I shipped most of my money home. Mail, so important, I wrote every night to somebody and uh...

Ernst: Who did you write to?

Tonietti: Oh family, I have a large, of course being Italian I have a large family. I wrote to cousins that I grew up with, uh uncles and aunts and for the most part that was your attachment to home.

Ernst: What types of things did you write about?

Tonietti: Basically what we saw. I never wrote about the ugly part. I wrote about the country side, the people, the food, uh what we did basically- worked a lot of hours there wasn't a whole lot to say I think I may have written two maybe two and a half pages on one side every night to somebody.

Ernst: Did you ever write your cousin?

Tonietti: Didn't know where Eddie went to. I knew Eddie was in Vietnam. I knew that my brother-in-law's brother was in Vietnam but I didn't know where. The... one of the two amazing things that have sat with me all these years is that I was on the beach at Camron one day and I run into a fellow who had graduated a year before me, he was in a transportation company. And of course the first thing I said what are you doing here? And he said what are you doing here? You know, typical things and uh I haven't seen him since. One of the company commanders in my company was from my hometown also. He had graduated with my sister four years earlier. Uh, approximately July of sixty-seven he come by to my what we called hooches, which were nothing but wood frame buildings with large army tents sewn over the top. And he was leaving and that was the last time I've seen him. But I have asked my sister uh what he's doing, he's selling used cars now and I said the next time I come home I do want to see him. Uh, food... didn't have...

Ernst: Can I go back and ask you a couple of things?

Tonietti: Sure.

Ernst: When you would go out into the field were you well received? Did you feel like you were part of the unit? Cause I get the sense you were part of a separate group and that you all took rotation turns out in the field.

Tonietti: Yes. Uh, you watched especially the Vietnamese they were nice to you by bowing all the time to you and I tried to be nice to them because that's what I had been brought up to be, be to people as they are to you. You watched them, uh you watched your vehicles because at that time they were taking our own grenades pulling the pins on 'em and then they'd take electrical tape and wrap the handle down with electrical tape and stick them in the gas tank so that when the gasoline had ate through the plastic they would blow up. Uh, at that period in time the war if you want to use the word was good. Everybody was... we had a focus on what we had to do, we had to fix things, the war was going good for us at that time. Loneliness was hard on several of them. Uh one of the benefits of the company I was in that they had come from Ft. Campbell and they had a... they had already been together. Went out to the field, several times I had been out to the field, you saw people that uh you didn't know but because they had, you knew they were Americans, whether Air Force, Navy, Marines, or Army. Uh understand that there were Koreans, Australians, not in large amounts but we did run into them and everybody got along. You knew that anybody that wore green fatigue jungle uniform was a U.S. basically military person. Uh, never felt, I guess one of the closest symbols to home when you saw the American flag flying in a compound you felt at home. But, understand that in Vietnam we were pockets of U.S. personnel; we never controlled a set area. We had, we controlled the towns and the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese control the countryside. So we had small segments of the whole country, very small and that was a difference in this war was that what we took by day and I talked from the infantry part, what we took by day a lot of times we lost at night. And the next day we'd go back and take it again and lose a lot of life and this was the senselessness in my opinion. As the war drug on, drug on, drug on that we never accomplished anything. But up to

the period that I was there it was still very positive. We heard very little about the demonstrations going on at home, very little. The stars and stripes was our um closeness to home, course it was biased. It was, what was in the papers what the military wanted us to see. What was on uh armed forces radio was what the military wanted us to hear. At home the letters we would get from our parents were starting to get negative. Uh so our feelings went from being very proud Americans to being not so proud because it wasn't a good war at home.

Ernst: What kind of negative stuff would your parents...

Tonietti: Parents talk about the demonstrations. They just would use demonstrations and I think my dad asked me in a letter how I how I'd feel about these demonstrators uh choosing not to serve and at that time I answered him honestly I said dad I wouldn't spit on them. And that was my feeling back then. But understand we only saw one side. I saw the senselessness of human life gone to waste because you had to watch children. Children have always been an American soldier's, I'll use the word ally, we always were soft hearted towards kids and I was too, still am today, still am. We'd give them, you know, candy bars- anything, we'd give them anything we had because we had the flow of food, we'd give it to them and the people always receipted us, say thank you. Our conversation was limited, they couldn't speak English too much and I couldn't speak Vietnamese I knew a few words. But we tried to communicate with pictures out of my wallet, like I always carried my cousin, my first cousin uh picture with me and I never could say cousin in Vietnamese. So there was always a communications problem. Like to talk about maybe Bob Hope if you want to hear about that.

Ernst: Yeah whatever.

Tonietti: USO shows because that was another I saw two USO shows while I was there and I've covered quite a bit, I've covered quite a bit. Uh, got to see two Bob Hope USO shows with just thousands of Americans there and I think we. I saw two shows, one during the day and one at night and Bob Hope always managed to come at the Christmas time of year and Bob always ended his program with everybody standing up and holding hands and singing "Silent Night." So, even today "Silent Night" has a very special meaning with me.

Ernst: Do you remember what the other U.S. whatever the other show was? Or were they both Bob Hope?

Tonietti: They were both in Camron basically where I was at and it is, it was called a safe haven for the most part. So I didn't have to worry too much about uh people infiltrating and causing problems. Though the military police were always around, always around. Uh, I remember Joey Heatherton. Uh I have to think awhile Cab Calloway came one year who I graduated with his daughter at Sleepy Hollow High School in New York so there a family thing there kind of. Uh Nancy Sinatra. Uh they're basically all I remember of who was there. But it was a closeness, it brought us closer to home. Uh, rain, the monsoon season. I can, I knew how much it rained where we were at. But because there was so much sand it all seemed to settle into the ground and I can imagine out in the hillsides, country sides, you know it was hard to get around in those periods, especially down in the delta where it was really swampy. Now that's basically

everything I remember. If there's something I haven't, you want me to answer, I'll try to answer it.

Ernst: I've got a few more questions, actually I got several more. I want to go back to a few things. I stopped you when you were talking about the food so you never got to cover it.

Tonietti: Oh the food. Didn't have any milk we had powdered milk so I miss milk was one of the things that I was always addicted to and we didn't have that luxury. Everything was powdered eggs powdered milk. Uh we did have hot meals; we did have a kitchen if you can use the word kitchen. It was a wood building. We did eat three meals a day. We were never hurting for food. On Thanksgiving we had turkey, all the dressings that was one meal a year that you had everything from General Westmoreland than you have a menu and everybody had the same menu all over the country.

Ernst: What about in the field? What type of stuff?

Tonietti: Can, C-rations.

Ernst: Big change to there.

Tonietti: Ate C-rations from World War II. The dates are on them. Okay, that's how I knew they were from World War II. Uh, and you look at the dates and course C-rations are not the best tasting but they fill your stomach. You had nothing cold. Everything you drank was warm. Warm soda, warm beer, you had all the beer you ever wanted. You could buy a case of drinks or beer for two dollars at the PX. Did buy a lot of electronic instruments and they were imported from Japan and uh bought tape player which I still have today. Have all my tapes that I bought from somebody over there. Uh, bought a few individual gifts for my mom. I always received packages from home with food. I do remember that.

Ernst: What type of stuff would mom send?

Tonietti: Uh, things that were would take you know maybe a week of shipment. Italian foods, an Italian candy that's made from sesame seed and honey and almonds and its all heated together and then flattened out on a table approximately an eighth of an inch thick. Aw, I really liked it was a durable candy that uh the older it got the harder it got but with the warm temperatures it kept it kind of warm and it never went bad. But milk and ice cream were one of the things I missed the most. When my company left I hated to see them go, I hated to see them go. Of course I was one of the first replacements uh lot of guys were coming in and I stayed an additional month I volunteered to stay an additional month to help out. And um awards. I want to tell you that. Received Meritorious Service Award for dedication of service. Was wounded but never received a Purple Heart and that's fine I can live with that. Very proud when it was my turn to leave. It was going home. And uh of course the word short you've heard that before refers to how many days you had left in country. I was going home and that was important. I didn't tell you that when I left home my dad who I said served in World War II told me Dan don't ever volunteer for anything. And I remember that I remember that to this day. But at that time I said the war was going good. Anything I was ever asked to do I did. Uh, when I, when I

left my company I left a part of my life that matured me in ways that I wouldn't understand until my later years now. Uh, you got, boarded the plane and you had the same stewardesses that now had smiles on their faces instead of tears. You could look at these guys who, and I brought my khaki uniform which is same one I wore in Vietnam, uh you could look at their chest and if they had a combat infantrymen's badge you knew that they had seen a certain degree of combat. But all remember we were all young. I went over there at nineteen and I come back and I was almost twenty-one. And it was it was new, you accepted those things, you accepted everything you ever saw, smelled, touched, did. You accepted it because it was your job to do. But when I boarded that plane I looked back and I said that I was going home and home was more important than anything else. It was a driving force. Uh, of your closeness to your parents. We flew out of there and I said that and that I hope I'll never come back. I'll talk about that later on. Flew into Ft. Lewis, Washington it was raining in January, approximately January 15 if I remember right of sixty-eight. Uh, it was about fifty to sixty degrees there cause it rains all the time in Seattle. Tacoma's where we flew out of, I got a ticket to New York City, was going back and uh passed up my steak dinner which everybody was entitled to, passed that up to go home. And I had to sit in the airport with a bunch of other guys who I didn't know, you just take up with guys, you take up with them. Hey where you from? Where you going to? And that's the way it always was.

Ernst: Is that bond they talk about having been in country is that a real?

Tonietti: It is today it still is today. Because I'll talk about that later. Uh, called my mom from Tacoma and I said mom I'm home. She says where you at? I told her. I said I'll, excuse me just one second you don't have to stop it.

Ernst: We have a tissue over there...

Tonietti: I'm fine, I do this in class when I do it.

Ernst: It's good for the students to see.

Tonietti: Yeah. I said I'd be at LaGuardia in the morning at a certain time. But we got on the plane, this is important; when we got into Tacoma we had our uniforms on people looked at us. We were dark. I was dark. I get very black. My hair was red at top from the sun bleaching it. Because of the steel pot helmet I can't wear a baseball cap today. I get headaches. Uh, we flew into LaGuardia there was snow on the ground and but people looked at us that was that's important. I didn't know how to take it at that time. They just stared at us. And as I walked up the tramway from the plane to the terminal in New York City I could see my mom and my dad and at that time I had two brothers, I only have one left now, younger brothers and I saw my dad. I didn't say nothing to my dad. Uh, mom was glad to see me. Brothers were glad to see me. Didn't have to say anything to my dad. He knew pretty much what I had gone through. I was just glad to be home. First thing I did when I got home was drink milk I drank a whole half-gallon of milk. And my mom was always so good when we were growing up, she was very conservative in her spending and she'd always buy powdered milk and cut a half gallon of milk and at that time which was the biggest container, she'd cut a half gallon of whole milk into three gallons of milk. It was like drinking water sometimes but I appreciated it I wanted it drank. Was glad to be home. So glad to be home. Friends and relatives come over that day. That night and

you may hear this I don't know but I couldn't sleep. It was dark outside but I couldn't sleep because it was too quiet. It took me roughly three days, I think I dozed off but I think it took me three days to get used to the quietness of the United States. When you're so used to shelling at night, lights flaring off in the skies. But one of the most important things that I remember was I was at home when the Tet Offensive started on January 29th or 30th. And I saw all these reports from Walter Cronkite; of course this was new to me seeing the body count on the T.V. And I felt and I say this as a support person, I'm not so much as not so much an infantry person but as a support person, we were combat support what I was, that when all this started happening the Tet Offensive was the one instance that turned the whole tide of the war around over there as it did at home. But I felt like I had left myself over there when it started. And I went over a green passive individual, ignorant to a lot of the ways of life and I come back a man that had seen a lot of things that you'll never see again. Experience things that you'll never experience again. I stayed home for approximately I think a month was leave time and then I come to my permanent station I asked to go to because I had 18 months left in the military and I asked to go to Italy I wanted to go to Italy.

Ernst: I'm sure.

Tonietti: And because I didn't have enough time or they had a different reason I was sent to Ft. Knox here and that's how I ended up here today, cause I decided to stay. All the guys that come in to Ft. Knox went to headquarters company of the uh got to think of the name of it now, I done lost it, the Army Material Command at Ft. Knox at that time. All the guys that come back were basically guys from Vietnam. And we worked on tanks over here and tested anything that was being tested, anything that was new and being tested for field use we worked on because we had the experience of being out in conditions that warranted if this would be capable of being used. I finish up my military time with saying I received a second Meritorious Service Award- Meritorious Medal, good combat medal, achievement, uh I have a total of six ribbons, a unit citation award for Vietnam and a lot of memories. If you want to stop that's the end of my military time, if you want to talk about today's I'm open to what you want to talk about.

Ernst: Why don't we flip the tape over?

Tonietti: Are you close to the end?

Ernst: Yeah. Going back to Tet, you just missed Tet.

Tonietti: Yes, just missed it.

Ernst: Did you, could you tell anything was going on at all. Could you tell... and that may be... did you notice any shift?

Tonietti: At that period in time, December of sixty-seven through the first two weeks of January sixty-eight I was on the coast of Vietnam where I was at Camron and as far as noticing anything different- absolutely not. Didn't notice anything. But I go to learn here just a few years ago through my personal research that Camron was one of those bases that was shelled by the Vietcong, I mean North Vietnamese. Uh, I have I have a chart over here, which I use in the

classes to show the cities that were hit and Camron was hit, to what degree I don't know, I don't know. But I never saw any inkling of us losing the war. If that answers your question?

Ernst: Yeah, I was just curious.

Tonietti: Okay.

Ernst: You say we take so much for granted in your questionnaire you filled out. Can you expand on that or do you have any more thoughts or can you tell me that on you know...

Tonietti: I don't mind telling you that and maybe maybe um my thinking is wrong, I think we get so accustomed to our way of living that we've been given so much, our rights in the United States as a whole, we take for granted so much, going on vacations, having a job, going out to eat, having a home, when I see poverty I've seen it in Vietnam and I went to Mexico a couple of years ago on vacation and I felt it was very important for my wife and my youngest daughter to see how people, poor people live and my reaffirmation is that the poor in this world are getting much poorer than they were even thirty years ago. Uh I take, I am grateful for everything, for the cars I own, the job I have, my children, and a lot of times my wife. We have a lot of problems, just difference in characters I guess. Uh, I've gone through a lot of trauma in my life in the last twenty years, loss of jobs, seizures I've had a seizure, been to the hospital for kidney problems, for ankle swelling and I think as I think and I can't prove this I'm still in Veteran's Rehab to a degree on this we were sprayed with Agent Orange uh my oldest daughter was born with out a poop hole. We had to get her one made which is a rare occurrence. She has scoliosis, which is curvature of the spine. As I said I had my kidney to fail me, had ankle swellings, my face breaks out on occasion, especially in the wintertime. I have to watch myself, I watch my kids more than anything else. I want to know what sicknesses they have, ailments because uh because when you're a war Veteran the V.A. is responsible to you the rest of your life and I do go to Louisville on occasion. I have to go through another physical here in I'm going to say the next six months it's been six months since I've been notified. I want to say something honestly I'm not looking for pity. I know I seriously doubt I'll live to see sixty. I do want to make sure that all my debts are paid off before then. What what do I base that on? I base that on the obituaries that I've paid attention to the last ten years. Ten years ago guys in their thirties and forties now guys in their fifties that have served in Vietnam I mean it's in the obituary. That tells me that my time is limited. And I know that. So I think it's important in my own way to tell about this stuff. That now I look at the war as having been wrong though I'm not I'm very proud for serving in the manner which I did. I believe in the United States but this was a wrong war. It had no goal. We achieved nothing that I can see today. Other than you have people walking out here that uh lot of them keep it to themselves because in my case my wife doesn't want to hear it.

Ernst: I picked up on that on the phone, I got off and I talked to my wife and I said you know I said that uh Dan Tonietti sounds like he's very interested in talking I said but I could tell his wife and maybe I was wrong

Tonietti: No you're exactly right.

Ernst: I bounced it off my wife and she said well yeah maybe so.

Tonietti: You get you get mixed reviews even today as you did years ago there were people who were against the war and there were people who were for the war, Tet changed that. That's why we had the demonstrations we did and they were right, they were right and I can honestly say that today they were right. We had no goal. We never achieved anything.

Ernst: When did you come to that conclusion?

Tonietti: Within the last few years of viewing a lot of footage, talking to a lot of guys, there personal opinions. I'm very fortunate uh to have, I have there's footage on the PBS special "Vietnam the Television History." I'm very fortunate to be on that show and myself and my cousin Eddie Mackey getting inducted.

Ernst: I didn't know that, wow.

Tonietti: And I use I had our school system buy that series as a teaching aide for me and I use and I use that in the classroom. When that camera panoramas these rows of guys they come right across my cousin in front, me in back of him. I stop it right there with him, I'll tell you that in a minute. Uh, I come to that assumption here like I said from talking to guys that work within the school system that helicopters today still bother them and it does me. Went to a football, I can give you a recent instance I went to a football game here at Central Harlan High School last fall and one of the local radio stations use they go around to all the football stadiums with a helicopter, take footage and it just so happens that this helicopter it was dark when I leaving walking out in the parking lot and its search light that's on the belly of the plane I mean it just all comes back, the slapping of the of the blades in the wind, the same noise from the motor, it just put me back I had to stop and hold on to the car. It put me back.

Ernst: Yeah they call them Friday night flights they come in and do clips from all the high school football games.

Tonietti: Yes! And that spotlight as it took off that spotlight would come right across me and it it just I had an eerie feeling and as I've said I've talked to guys within the school system some who have combat time and they will talk to me but only me, okay because they share the same feelings and like I said we keep it to ourselves.

Ernst: So there really is that camaraderie?

Tonietti: Yeah, it still hangs close today. Uh, like I said a lot of people don't want to hear about it, they were against it then they're against it now and I was in my own way against it then but I did what I felt was right for me to do. But I see the senselessness in people getting killed and I told you I was going to talk to you about my cousin, here a few years ago my mom called me and the parallels in his life and mine were very similar he had lost jobs, his marriage wasn't good. He decided to end his life and he committed suicide. And that's where I stop this picture for these kids. I said I want you to remember his face cause I will tell you later on he committed suicide. I have two classmates and I brought their pictures in my yearbook that I grew up with uh they committed suicide. I went back to a class reunion, gotta think, back in 1990 on my

twenty-fifth, there sat this one fellow in a wheel chair and I said to this girl Barbara that I was very good friends with I said Barbara who's that in the wheel chair and she says that's Jack. I said what happened? She says Dan didn't you know? I said no. She said that he was seriously wounded in Vietnam; I walked right over to him. And I didn't know it at that time but as I talked to him he could barely had any voice, now this fellow he was a three letterman in high school, played football, played ice hockey, played baseball, three letters, here's a hunk, just a hunk of a man sitting there and he said Dan, I said Jack what happened to you? He said Dan I was hurt with a land mine. And of course as he spoke it was so low and so slow I didn't know that there was several people behind me, he says you know you know what I went through and images of the past, even the wall today I've been there two times.

Ernst: Yeah that was one of my questions.

Tonietti: Been there two times. Both times I walked up to it, shaking as I'm shaking now. It uh, it's emotional, very emotional. I write to Jack I want you to know that I sent a he never writes back but I do write to him from time to time. Uh, walked up shaking inside and my kids went with me the first time and uh course it's hard for people who don't have this experience to feel the closeness of what it stands for. After I thought that they had pretty much seen enough I asked if I could be alone for a while and I stood there and I looked and I saw guys hugging one another, uh people etching there names of family members. You could look at the history of it by the shape of it; it's in a V and course in the early years and I think our first year was 1959 it shows the progression of dead guys all the way up to the pinnacle which is 1968, I would fall in that pinnacle to the left side and then from the pinnacle down to where we tapered out in seventy-three. It's emotional for me; it's a place that it's like a magnet. It draws those who served, whether men and women, men or women, Army or Air Force or Navy or whoever to remember that we shouldn't let this happen again. And to this day even our military moves are always thrown back to Vietnam because it was a mistake and that's how I feel about it, it was a mistake. Uh, my two, I know I said my cousin killed himself but the two guys that I was friends with killed themselves when I was young and I worry about that. That and obituaries bother me because like I said I know my time is limited, I just feel that inside of me and I want to have everything paid off before I do die. And I have a car that I bought back in sixty-nine that was paid for with money I had saved from my combat pay, I have that car today and my daughters I said that it's going to them because I do body work part time and uh I like old cars.

Ernst: My dad does too.

Tonietti: And uh I told my youngest one I said that if you all do not want it I said my one request is that it be donated to the Vietnam Veterans in Washington D.C. that has a museum. That is my last wish. Why? I don't know I guess it just represents an era.

Ernst: What kind is it?

Tonietti: 'sixty-eight Dodge Charger the one that was in "Bullet", was a popular movie back in 'sixty-eight and I wanted one then and I got one eventually. So any questions you would like to ask me, that's my recollection of everything I can remember.

Ernst: Are you okay?

Tonietti: Oh I'm fine yeah I'm fine.

Ernst: I want to go back to a couple things in Vietnam and anything I ask you don't want to answer you know don't, feel free not to. What did your unit look like uh racially?

Tonietti: I'm glad you asked that. We were a mixture of everything. We had basically we had Polish or Polacks, we had Cubans, Puerto Ricans, American-Indians, Catholics, Jewish, every every nationality there was Mexicans, we had some college educated that had just got out of college and were drafted being there so there was no at that time no large bulk of just being white or black. It was a good mixture and I'll honestly say when you're drafted and I was drafted I had no you know no problems with that most of the guys were drafted. They they took the two years to do their time and get in and get out. Some of them took an early out, which meant that they had to go on to college and they only served a year and a half in the military. But the most I one of the amazing parts of my company was the Indian, I can't remember what tribe he was from but his name was Running Bear that was his last name, we called him chief. And he liked that. They allowed them, we had to of them we had two Indians, they allowed them because to let their hair be long where the rest of us had to have hair cuts because it was part of their heritage. So there was a mixture. Good mixture.

Ernst: Were race relations okay?

Tonietti: No problems.

Ernst: No problems?

Tonietti: No problems, none whatsoever.

Ernst: That same thing you just told me, I talked to a Louisville Police Officer, my brother's a Louisville Police Officer and his older partner he served on the Navy boats there and he said the same things. Said they had a Native American they called him chief.

Tonietti: Yeah.

Ernst: And you know he said it went that way you know. If you were Irish then they gave you some sort of Irish name. There was no bigotry in it; it was just how they did it.

Tonietti: Uh, they called me my last name being Tonietti they called me Tony. Which was the same name my dad was called when he was in the Navy in World War II. So I just thought that was an interesting slang name.

Ernst: Were drugs a problem at all? Did you see any drugs at all?

Tonietti: Yes. Guys smoked marijuana constantly. They could get any drug they wanted. Was it wide spread? Not so much for support people though the guys had it. But I think as a war

drug on and guys who got assigned to infantry units didn't want they saw if they had just got there they saw what they would be involved in for months on end because the difference in Vietnam versus World War II was the guys in the infantry did this every day of the week. They got to go on R and R yes but they had to come back. Some of them never come back. They chose to run away. So I understand the drug situation. I understand why guys there are 52,000 names on the wall but only 42,000 were killed in combat. The rest of them are from what was called fragging, O.D.ed on drugs, or just conveniently just lost themselves, okay. I think there are people that conveniently lost themselves that are still alive somewhere I do believe that. I don't think they're being held as captives. I think they of the 2,200 that are supposedly still missing some have changed identities because maybe there home life wasn't so great, okay.

Ernst: That happened with my uh a friend of my sister's. Did you ever hear rumors of fragging?

Tonietti: It was a new term that I remember while I was there. If you didn't like somebody you just shot their ass. Bluntly, bluntly. You had the exposure to the weapons you just shot them. So uh, but I didn't see it personally. I heard about it and I'm sure that it happened more often as the war drug on.

Ernst: Did you have any interactions with the South Koreans? The rocks?

Tonietti: Not very much. Maybe I shouldn't tell this, this has to do with their sexual organ. They always would brag about how big theirs were. And it was my understanding that they used to get rocks that had holes in them and put their man thing through it to make them longer. Kids ask me in the classroom because I brought this up about STDs, and I had to think a minute, STDs, STDs, what's STDs? And a teacher who is a friend of mine said Dan Sexually Transmitted Diseases, oh yes I can talk about that. I said uh you had a variety; you had uh the clap, the drip, the crabs. I says I'll explain all those to you. The clap, now I explained it to the kids. I talked about the bull-headed clap to them, explained how they broke it. Guys went eeeww after I told them. So that you know those things were around back then. They used diesel for crabs poured diesel on your genitals to get rid of the crabs and it burned them out. Not that I ever did it. I never saw; never saw anything or any Vietnamese that really did anything for me.

Ernst: Did you get to take an R and R?

Tonietti: Turned those down. I turned one down. I did go to Sydney, Australia.

Ernst: Can you talk a little bit about that?

Tonietti: Don't remember a lot about it. I was only there for like two or three days. All I know it was so nice to have running water. Conveniences that you were so accustomed to. I only stayed two or three days and come right back and the bad part about it is you don't mind leaving but you didn't want to go back. But you had to. And then that's how I looked at it.

Ernst: Going back to the South Koreans a minute. They've got a reputation of being really harsh.

Toniatti: Yes.

Ernst: And even atrocities.

Toniatti: Yes.

Ernst: Can you shed any light on that for me or do you know any?

Toniatti: Apparently there's a lot of hate in them, any way up through the South Koreans and the Vietnamese. The South Koreans would physically cut off the ears of Vietcong and leave the bodies there so that the North Vietnamese or Vietcong knew that the Koreans did it. The unit was called the White Horse Division if I'm not mistaken.

Ernst: You're right.

Toniatti: And I met with a few of them talked with them but it was more on a mechanical end than anything else. They come into our shop loaded down with fifty caliber machine guns on Jeeps or on themselves you know they were always coming that way. So that's about my only contact with them and what I've heard and uh what I saw in one circumstance they would cut their tongue out too, that's another thing and stick it to their forehead.

Ernst: They cut the Vietcong's tongue out and stick it on their?

Toniatti: Yes.

Ernst: Wow, I had heard they were tough and feared.

Toniatti: Never saw a lot of them but saw strays they always wore the bush hat and I collected and I wish I could find them today I collected all the patches that we wore over there as Army units.

Ernst: Is there one experience that stands out in your mind? I always it and you may have already covered it. We always just ask what was the most compelling experience?

Toniatti: For me it was walking guard duty at night. We have a lot of time to think. You have to listen. You're taught in the Army night vision which is using what light there is in your eyes to watch for movement and when we walk guard duty at night or in the sand fox holes that we had the noises you could hear the lizards crawling around and there's snakes over there that you have to be real careful of. One of them is the Bamboo Viper. We called it the seven second snake because seven seconds after it bit you you were dead. So walking guard duty is the one thing that I could relate extremely well to those that were out on patrol, okay. So I was not a combat soldier we were combat support so I kind of did both sides to it.

Ernst: I'm curious about what the high school students. What was there reaction? Well I got a few questions. What lead you to do it the first time?

Tonietti: Okay, back about three years ago I had a friend of mine who was a teacher in the school system before I went to work for the school system. He was talking I was cleaning computers I think and he come up to me we just kind of got talking he was a history teacher and he said to me he said Dan you like history? I said yeah Mike I said I really like history I said it's one of my favorite subjects. He said you know what I always wanted was to get a World War II Veteran to come in and talk to the kids. I said Mike well that's no problem I said all you got to do find one you one you know and ask him. He said but you know what I really wanted? And I said no and he didn't know that I had served in Vietnam never said anything to him.

Ernst: He wasn't playing you?

Tonietti: No he wasn't playing me. He said you know what I really wanted was someone who had served in Vietnam. So I hesitated a second and I said well Mike I said you know I did. He said would you do it for me? Would you talk to kids? And I said let me think about it a while. And uh, I did I thought about it a while and I told him I said I would do it for him. He said I've had no luck Dan of anybody wanting to do this for me.

Ernst: This is about three or four years ago?

Tonietti: About yeah about four years ago he asked me. And uh so he said what do you want and I had to think about it at home and to this day I do it in three sections. I lay the groundwork in what I call the before which is the end of World War II, I tell kids, I use timelines, show them the major happenings up through those years, where I was at in that period of time I show them when I was in grammar school, show them what it was like growing up in the fifties. Uh, what I did, growing up with rock and roll, cars I bring pictures of cars, and then I get into the during. The during is not hard on me. I show them using that Vietnam series. I show them my pictures of one of the senators who was against the war at the time who is still in congress today and I have a picture of him today.

Ernst: Who's that?

Tonietti: He's from Massachusetts and I can't think of his name now but there's two of them and I can't think of his name. So that's how it's kind of progressed. The living with the living with the past is the hard part on me and that year I did it for him he was grateful for me doing it. Within a week I got a flood a flood of letters from kids and they did this on their own he said I didn't entice them to do this. I had a flood and letters and comments just comments from kids thanking him for doing that. The last two years because the history teacher has changed, one retired and this other one took in for him, he has asked last year was his first year of listening to me and right after I got done doing it for him as I did I have the same previous history teacher in there as a visitor plus the present history department teacher; he come up to me after I was done he said Dan will you do it again for me next year. So I told him that I would and I try to change it around a little bit so it doesn't become too for the teacher to listen too, try to think of new things. This year I have sat down and thought about all the Vietnamese sayings that are in Vietnamese and all our sayings and I've listed all of those and what inspired me was one of the

movies which had been on several times and I try to avoid some of them because I don't want to glorify war. It's more the personal relationship involved in this that I try to talk about. I'm at a loss for the name of the movie. And in there they started using words that I had long forgotten. I said this is a nice addition that I could put in. So I wrote all those down. So that's how it got started and I only do it at one school and I've never been asked to do it anywhere else. I do it for the kids because it's hard for I think some parents to talk about it and I think that at least after especially after the second session I have kids come up to me and say my mom or my dad or my uncle I told them that you were here talking to us about it and the kids start to do a little feedback they'll come up to me individually ask me some questions sometimes but I think for the most part number one I enjoy doing it I enjoy doing it. Is it hard? Yes it's hard it's very hard. Has it become easier in time? To some degree. The personal aspect of me trying to relate to them how my parents felt how I remember seeing my parents or living with the deaths of my cousin and some of my close friends from childhood I try to relay that to them by showing them pictures out of my yearbook.

Ernst: That brings it home I bet.

Tonietti: Yeah kids understand that. But I don't say anything about it to my wife. She was still in high school while when I was over there and uh she feels I guess let the past be in the past and that's the way I want it to be. I don't want to I don't want to remember it but in the same breath I don't want to forget it and I think if kids understand what I try to do and understand I am not close to kids what I try to do is show them that each generation has its share of problems and I said take what I have lived through and I am still living through take your problems and see how your problems weigh up against mine. And they understand that.

Ernst: How much do high school students know about the Vietnam War?

Tonietti: The teacher tries to fill in the military aspects of it the diplomatic government aspects of it. I put the personal aspect into it.

Ernst: What types of questions did they ask you?

Tonietti: Uh, the ones on STDs on sexually transmitted diseases. I try to hit all the things I feel the kids would be interested in you know what was it like to be there, what did we eat, the weather. Show especially my home eight-millimeter movies the kids appreciate cause they see me when I was twenty years old. See me at my height standing up to these people that are about this tall. I can put history in its place by having taken this footage.

Ernst: Um, do you want to talk a little bit about your cousin or is it too painful?

Tonietti: I'll talk about it, yes it's painful. Uh, Eddie and I uh we were second cousins uh where I grew up in Tarrytown, New York he lived around the corner from me. We had our what we referred to as our gang back then which were the group of kids we hung around with. We would play baseball, stickball, hide and go seek, uh we'd take car jacks and those were our machine guns, we would go out in the woods and play army. And roughly about I'm going to say late fifties early sixties Eddie moved away with his mom to Oscine, New York where Sing Sing

Prison was if that rings a bell Sing Sing and I didn't see Eddie anymore in there. So when I got to see him on Induction Day it was a reunion and course we went through basic training together and it was like growing up again. And then as I said earlier when we went our own ways after basic training he went to Advanced Infantry Training and I went to Advanced Individual Training that was the last time I saw him and roughly I had totally forgotten about Eddie and I thought about him you know as you do anybody that you ever grow up with I thought about him from time to time then roughly about ninety two or ninety three my mom called me as I talk to my mom regularly and she said I got to tell you something and of course I had experienced a lot of trouble like I said with jobs my marriage and uh things just not going well and uh she said uh you remember Eddie Mackey and I says yes mom and I knew what she was getting at that's the funny thing about it just her tone of voice says uh Eddie took his life. And it was dead silence on my part for a long time. She said are you still there I said yes. I said can I ask what happened and she said that his marriage had failed, wasn't able to keep a job, everything she told me was the same parallels the same things had gone wrong with me. Had I tried to commit had I considered it? Several times several times. I saw no use in wanting to live. I don't want to blame it on Vietnam understand that I don't want to blame it on that. It's just that we had seen the bad parts of life and with things not going well for me I saw no roseyness to be had in my life. I remember one time I sat in the bathroom after my wife and I were arguing over I guess it was a former job me losing a former job, I had a knife I had it right up to my chest I had it right there and I had the point of that knife going into my chest I had already pierced the skin and whether I thought it or whether Jesus had thought it for me the words that went through my mind are Dan think of your children. Put the knife down started seeking council both through V.A. and with marriage counselor. Did it help? To a degree to a degree I always felt and I say this to the kids I always felt that I felt better but the sky wasn't blue to me even though it was blue the days were cloudy even though it was as beautiful with the flowers. So I had turned back to the one thing I had consistently been involved with and that's Jesus. I prayed, did a lot of praying, still pray today to make my life easier to help me get over the rough spots in the road and I think my prayers have been answered not only am I still involved with church as I always have been, got into Promise Keepers here within the last two months, was able to was able to start this with the school, it's for me it's a way of I won't use the word getting the pain out of me there will always be pain whether I talk about it or don't talk about it but helping kids to understand life that life is not easy but it's what you make out of it and I think that's my whole point of my talk to kids and hopefully somehow making my marriage work. Marriages are not easy there not easy.

Ernst: (Laughs) No there not.

Tonietti: Women are different than men and my wife seems to believe I think that I use Vietnam as a crutch and it's not a crutch it is not a crutch but how do you take something out of your life that has affected it so drastically and it doesn't go away. It's in the paper constantly well not constantly but it's always there its always being referred to because it was one of the darkest days in the history of this country that period in time. It's affected me because I know that people are the same now as they were back then and that's the correlation I see. I think we as a result of Vietnam we look at things a little differently we're not as quick to jump into things. Can I stop a second I'd like to go blow my nose?

Ernst: God there's a couple things I wanted to tell John after what you were saying. I have to think for a second now. Uh how do you feel about the way Hollywood's portraying the Vietnam War?

Tonietti: I've always from the very first war movie that come out about Vietnam which was "Green Beret" with John Wayne uh some of the things in it were the Vietnamese were lined up in rows and you could look at them one way and they'd all be this way and that way it just doesn't happen. I think at that time it was more of a moral booster. Some of the movies that had come out later on my favorite if I have to use a word favorite is "Platoon" for some reason it shows a lot of the personal aspect of it and of course I like the big helicopter assaults where they use the theme song blaring out of the microphones from the helicopter. Did those things happen? I don't know that for a fact. Could they have happened? Oh yeah I think they could have. I don't know if you can ever tell about a war situation and have the same people tell it the same way everybody has a different aspect. Mine is going to be different than somebody who served out in the Delta or at the very North part at Danang or Ke Sanh. I know people that have been there, theirs is going to be a different recollection they're going to tell what affected them at that period in time that they were there. Because I was there in sixty-six and sixty-seven and part of sixty-eight the mood would be different than it would be in sixty-nine and seventy and seventy-one and two. So does Hollywood do any justice? I don't know I'm not going to say that. I see a lot of things that I remember yes that I remember happening that way that were said that way yes. Some things I don't recollect but maybe that happened someplace else. So I can't say that they're not portraying it correctly. I think that they do it differently. I'm trying to think of the name of the and names have got me today um I'm just in a bad mood for names the one that produced "Born on the Fourth of July" and he also produced "JFK."

Ernst: Oliver Stone

Tonietti: Oliver Stone, right "Platoon" too. I'm not going to call him a liar for producing it the way he did, no the man was there.

Ernst: Yeah.

Tonietti: Okay. We have filtered out now into different aspects of society um people who have served there in government anywhere. As I said do I feel special? No I don't feel special don't want to be recognized as special but I do want to recognize be recognized as somebody different because my feelings about something I don't think was right to begin with how it affected the people that were... I'm not only on our side understand I'm not going to be one sided but the North Vietnamese the Vietcong the children that are grown up now over there okay. We feel bad about it we feel bad about it. How do they feel over there? They could care less. I mean its that's just their way of life over there. Would I like to go back? And I said I would mention this to you, yes I would yes I would. Because I think that what it would do it would bury a lot of bad feelings seeing body bags see guys tore to pieces it would bury a lot of it. It would settle part of my life. And from what I've seen locally in some people and nationally in some people have gone back there they feel differently now. Maybe it'd be a good idea for the government to ship us all up again and take us back and let us walk around for a while.

Ernst: Do you think you'll go back?

Tonietti: I don't know how I would except individually you know.

Ernst: A lot of them, you know there's a number of Veterans that do I don't know how expensive it is.

Tonietti: Yeah well it would be at least a thousand dollars I'm sure.

Ernst: Oh I'm sure. I'm going to ask about your daughters. How old were they and was it a good experience when you went to the wall with them?

Tonietti: They were relatively young. I think my youngest one, let me back up a little bit it was dedicated in eighty-two I didn't make it in eighty-two, eighty-three, eighty-four, eighty-five I think it was about eighty-five was the first year I went. My oldest daughter was roughly ten years old and it didn't mean anything to her uh my youngest one was just a couple of years old and of course it definitely didn't mean anything to her. She went my youngest one when she went on a middle school field trip to Washington D.C. she went there so she was more older and my daughter my oldest daughter went as a chaperone. So they will tell me how they feel about it. For some reason and I can't put this into words but I have a feeling why is it that Vietnam Memorial attracts more people than anything else I think two reasons for the older people because it's a place that's a mark in history that nobody liked. But for younger people it's a place where they see names names that's all that's on there are names of people who have died. When they see all these names that sinks in to them and that's what my daughter told me. She said dad you see Veterans come there hugging themselves hugging one another excuse me crying I said Andy it's something that you do as you get older and I said this has gotten worse instead of better but I can live with it now because I'm able to talk about it.

Ernst: That was kind of our hope for this project if people could be therapeutic and could talk about it.

Tonietti: Yeah.

Ernst: You know I've been to the Wall twice and it gets to me and I just remember a bit cause I was young but it was so moving. You can't go and not be moved.

Tonietti: That's exactly what everybody's ever said.

Ernst: Um, have you read Bobbie Ann Mason's book In Country? Have you seen the movie?

Tonietti: Uh is that Connie Stevens? Maybe I'm getting mixed up she has something "in country." Connie Stevens was over there too. No I'm not familiar with that I'm sorry.

Ernst: You ought to read it. Bobbie Ann Mason is a Kentuckian. The movie stars Bruce Willis and was made in Kentucky the movie's pretty good. But any local bookstore get you a novel if

you're interested it is wonderful. I think about it it's just a suggestion we use it in class. Have you read any Tim O'Brien stuff? Are you aware of him?

Tonietti: No.

Ernst: I'm just I'm throwing out a couple books you might enjoy. Aside from that um what did you think of William Westmoreland? Any thoughts on...

Tonietti: I saw him I was within fifty feet of him. I think his intentions were good extremely good. He was a very personable general. Have I ever seen him today? No. Would I like to talk to him? Yes. I really do. I think his opinions if you get him away from a T.V. camera or writing it down on paper would be more honest. I think he never saw any victory in sight. I think he was doing and this is my personal opinion.

Ernst: Sure.

Tonietti: One of the kids said to me and I did not mention this why do you think this war happened and I said I'll be honest with you I think big business inspired it. I think that we had a lot of new equipment at that time M-16 rifles, M-1, 5-1 tanks that were aluminum based that needed field testing that they needed a place to go to to test it and this was a coincidental that Vietnam was coming about at that time. I think big business kept it going cause it kept a lot of people working for several years, kept the economy booming. That's my honest opinion. That's my honest opinion.

Ernst: Along those lines what did you think of Lyndon Johnson?

Tonietti: I've read a lot about the presidents. Kennedy was against it, for it for a while but against it in the long run I think that's one reason why Kennedy was because big business wanted to get in there and I think that they're knowledgeable about who killed him and they knew that Johnson would get the war going for them. Johnson was over there when I was there I saw Johnson he was at Camron in sixty-seven I saw him. How do I personally feel about him? I think he said one thing to the American public and did another, okay.

Ernst: What about George Bush? During the Gulf War I think you made a good point about how we always were going back to Vietnam. Remember Bush's remark how we've not gotten rid of the ghost of Vietnam. Have you got any thought about that or comment?

Tonietti: No. I don't think I don't believe that comment because the Gulf War was what forty-eight hours long? Yes they had a goal yes they achieved that goal but you're talking about forty-eight hours versus fifteen, sixteen years that we were involved in Vietnam. The ghost of Vietnam will never be erased from now to eternity. It'll be referred to from now to eternity because it divided this country like no war had ever divided this country. It'll take centuries, well I shouldn't say that, it'll take a hundred years for all of us to die off for the feelings to come back cause there's a long even children who were children back in the seventies. They know about it now they're in their twenties, thirties now more like thirties they know about it. It's going to take at least sixty more years to totally wash out of our society and you know who are

the losers? I've said this to the kids. I said who are the losers in this the ones whose names appear on the walls or the ones who have to live with this? And that's my honest opinion. And I have limited amount of field time but what I saw impressed me I mean not to the best I mean to the worst. What about these guys who spent years a year out there maybe two three tours. One was enough for me. It'll never be erased I don't think for a long time to come and I'm just grateful that I have the opportunity through my employer and now through you to tell what I recollect and everything I've told you is the truth number one. I have no reason to lie about any this. Pretty honest person to begin with.

Ernst: I'm glad to hear that.

Tonietti: I've said my peace.