

**Margaret Gunderson  
George Baranaski (Baranski?) Jr.  
Sal D'Ippolito  
Hal Silverstein  
Veterans**

**Joseph Anastasio  
Interviewer**

**Greater Capitol Region Teacher Center  
Albany, New York  
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**JA:** As part of the Greater Capitol District Teacher Center Grant Title, it's time has come for supplementary materials teaching of the Vietnam War. We have the honor and the pleasure of being at the Veterans Center on Central Avenue this afternoon. Where we are going to talk to four Veterans of the Vietnam War. I'm going to have them introduce themselves. Let's start with this young lady on my left, please tell us about your experience in Vietnam.

**MG:** Margaret Gunderson. I was a Medevac Nurse [flight nurse caring for patients during emergency evacuations]. We were based at Cam Ranh Bay, South Vietnam. We would fly from Cam Ranh Bay up to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. On the way back we would pick up the wounded that had first come to the field hospital who were stable enough to be air evacuated down to Cam Ranh Bay and finally out-country.

**JA:** Thank you.

**MG:** You're welcome.

**GB:** I'm George **Baranski**. [correct spelling of name needs confirmation] I was with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry, the First Cavalry Division with the infantry. I carried a sixty caliber machine gun. Mostly, I think, in Bon Sanh, Vietnam, I'm not really sure about that. Our main objective was to fight the war, little did we know about it, but I guess that was it.

**JA:** What years were you in Vietnam?

**GB:** July 28, 1966 to July 28, 1967.

**SD:** Hi, my name is Sal D'Ippolito. I was in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 for about ten months. The jobs I had while I was there ranged from being a switchboard operator to a radio operator. I spent a little time with the 25th Infantry Division, for about a month. Then about four months with the 11th Armored Cavalry. My job with the Cavalry was to go out at night on ambushes basically.

**JA:** Sal, you were there when Tet Offense [one of the largest military campaigns of the Vietnam War] happened?

**SI:** Yeah, that's when I was with the 25th Infantry. They took me out to do street fighting in [3:00 unclear] and Saigon.

**HS:** Hi, I'm Hal Silverstein. I was in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970, for almost twelve months. I was a combat photojournalist with Admiral Zumwalt's Public Affairs Office in Saigon. I was mostly dispatched with the Brown-Water Navy [inland rivers between jungles] down in the Delta River patrol force.

**JA:** Thank you sir. Can we talk for a few minutes about your experiences after you left Vietnam and came back to the United States. What were your reactions with people when you came back and they said where have you been for twelve months and you said "I was in Vietnam"?

**SI:** I got a lot of different reactions. I was scorned by strangers. When I first got back and walked around with my uniform on, people asked "how could you do that?" I said "what do you mean how could I do that? I did something good." I got reactions like that and I got a lot of relief reactions from my family and friends. They figured when I left, that they would never see me again. This thing was pretty bad. And then I got pat-on-the-back reactions from some of my neighbors, and the older guys like the men who had been in World War II. They were proud of me.

From my peer group, people of my age who found their way out of going, for one reason or another, it was like they could not look me in the eye. It's hard to explain, it just made things more confusing. [Sal gets a little choked up emotionally] Confusion is the word I will use to sum it all up. It caused confusion in myself on how I talk about what I did. It caused me not to know whether what I did was right or wrong. It made me feel really inadequate and my self-esteem could not go anywhere. I could not understand what was going on, like the things they were saying on television and the media was not what was really going on.

The decadence of American society like the comfort, security, money, and the material things that everyone was taking for granted also caused bad feelings in me too. I wanted to grab people from riding in their Cadillac and limousines and say "hey, do you know what is going on?" you know? Two weeks ago I was in a jungle and guys are there right now." It caused me a lot of problems because I did not know what to think, or how to feel. What I did personally was to self-medicate myself and became a drug addict and killed my feelings.

**JA:** How old were you?

**SI:** I went over when I was nineteen and about twenty, twenty-one when I came back. Not a kid really, but I was young. So, that is basically the reaction that I had coming home. I had such confusion about what I did and what was going on. There was a whole section of my peer group that was protesting openly against the war and against the government. I wondered what is right and what is wrong and what side should I be on? Do I hold up with the guys that I served with or hold up with my peer group that was protesting. Who was right, who was wrong? I did not know.

**JA:** I don't know if there is any justification, but the one thing that I found out by doing this project was that things flip-flop. Today, the Veterans are much more accepted than people who opposed the war. Do you think that is true? That is what I am beginning to find out. I have had a much more difficult time finding people who opposed the war talk about it. In

fact one guy knew he would be on tape and said to me he did not want to talk because of the FBI records kept back then. He did not want to expose himself to anymore publicity than he had to. Did anybody share the same experience as Sal did when you came back?

**GB:** Basically, I just wanted to be by myself and let everybody leave me the hell alone. I felt then, and I feel now, that I don't need these people. Ten months ago, I started coming here and finding friends. I mean, these are my friends. I never really knew any combat veterans until I came here. Now that I know a few, they have become my friends. Right now they are my associates, I haven't yet accepted them completely, but hopefully, down the line it will come out to be that way. I have a lot of things I have to talk about with other people about things like this. I never talked to anybody, not my mother, father or my kids.

One night a couple of weeks ago I got drunk just to tell them a few things. The reason I had to do it that way was because it is the only way I could talk about it. The things that did happen and the next day Vince told me, you should talk to your kids. I went home and I sat there for forty-five minutes and I could not say anything. I had to be drunk, you know, that's life. They keep on saying "you have to change". But I think it should be, let everybody else understand. That is my feeling, let them understand. Why should I have to keep on changing? I have changed too many times already I think. [some laughter] I don't even know what the hell is going on after a while, I just start losing it. Like, you think about one thing, then it goes, then something else just takes it's place and that keeps bothering you and bothering you. I used to try and drown it out, but now I am learning not to do that anymore. Now I just don't get worked up. Sometimes I just come here, have coffee and talk with a couple of the guys. That keeps it down and then I can go home. Before, I could not go home, I had to just have that beer, but that beer was all night.

**HS:** Thank God for this Veterans Center.

**GB:** Yeah, It took me twenty-one years to find someplace you know. I did not even know this place was here. I got checked into the VA Hospital and [(@10:40 name unclear)] sent me here. If it wasn't for that, it is a long road out here.

**MG:** I came back a little different way. Not only was I a nurse, but I came back through the Medevac system. As I came through that system there was only one person that really realized what was happening to me. I came back as a psych patient. I was sick over there. I did not agree with the claim, but that was the only way I could come back. The one that was with me, he was real nice and talked to me like that. The others did not realize what had happened to me. Finally, I got back to stateside hospital, which happened to be the same base that I started out. They just called me "the sad one". They did NOT know what to do with me. I had to make my own way because they did not know. The longer I stayed there, the madder I got. I threw things and did things I would not ordinarily do because there was nobody there who would sit down with me and try to understand what had happened to me.

It would take two months for me to get transferred or two months to get discharged. All the doctor said to me was that they were overloaded and he would write something in my records

so I would never go overseas again. I was a flight nurse and he killed my career right there. I said "then discharge me", so he medically discharged me. I had to stay there another month and a half. All of them agreed that I could have been treated as an out patient, but because I was in the service, I had to be on the floor-I had to be on the unit. The saving grace was that they had a program where nurses could work on the floor and I was granted that. I was off the ward eight hours a day, and that is the only reason I kept it all together.

When I got home, it was like nobody knew I had gone to Vietnam. Nobody said, "oh you are out of the service, how are you feeling?" or anything like that. It just went on like normal life, like I did not even leave town, you know? It was only my father who had been through World War II who understood. They had called it "shell shock" back then. He would talk to me and like I said, he was the only one who could understand what was happening. So between alcohol, crying, just leaving people alone, going out and racing my car as I did lots of times because I was potentially suicidal - I thought that would be nice to hit that tree and that would be it, you would not have to worry about me. There was just no place to go. I left in June of 1970. I came back four or five months later. I had gotten terribly sick, to the point of passing out, with terrific headaches. I was so sick, I could not fly anymore. I was depressed, there was just nowhere to go. I told them I am suicidal, I cannot handle being sick all the time and that is why they sent me back. I finally gave up in 1984. I could not work anymore, and tried overdosing on pills. I was put in this VA Hospital here. I went home once, but still did not talk about Vietnam. I would not tell anybody where I had been.

The second time, there was a nurse who just sat with me and talked for an hour or two and that is when I finally admitted I had been in Vietnam. That is when I found out about the Veterans Center. I have been under psychiatric care ever since the 1970's, but it was not until I came here to the Vet's Center that I began making progress. I almost lost my marriage, my family. I ran away from my home because I could not live there anymore.

**HS:** I can relate to a lot of that.

**JA:** Like I said, I am not a veteran. What surprises the hell out of me is that no one in the government was aware of what was going on. Like John (name [unclear @15:46](#)) made a good point. The soldiers returning from World War II had three weeks to kind of talk to each other. They were doing the things, that for you, are coming ten years later. That is the thing that aggravates me, that nobody seemed to be aware of what was going on.

**SD:** They also fought in a quote/unquote "honorable war" that they quote "won" and we did not. They just wanted to put Vietnam out of their minds. I think I can see how that happened. I think that the government and society in general, expected the psychiatrists and the brilliant doctors who were the best in the world- would be able to cope with it. But they did not have the experience. They did not have the knowledge about Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. It had been labeled different things in other wars, like "shell shock". In World War I it was called "combat fatigue". They had different names for it.

**GB:** In Vietnam, they called it "battle fatigue"...right on.

**JA:** It amazes me that they take a soldier who just spent twelve months in Vietnam fighting, or whatever...

**SD:** Twelve months, or twelve days, you get at a level of intensity. Even in two days.

**JA:** Right, then in some cases within twenty-four hours they were walking down the streets of Glens Falls, Albany, New York.

**SD or HS off camera:** After intense fighting in the jungle, within nineteen to twenty-four hours they were worrying about finding an apartment. That's real tough for a nineteen year old.

**JA:** It doesn't make sense to me that someone along the way didn't say "look what is happening here!" Instead of the approach chuckle of a stereotyped "half crazed Vietnam Vet" in the early 70's and that seemed to be the approach everybody took towards it. I'm going to argue about your comment of "winning" and not-winning". [Not clear 18:10] historical interpretation says that you guys bought time which in the long run, was a successful war. India today is free, and a good part of Southeast Asia are free now because of what you guys did. So when people start talking about winning or not, make sure they are aware of that. But that is common historical interpretation, that is just not me.

**GB:** They sort of stated, "you are winning, you are kicking the hell out of them". I was in the Infantry, I think I was in base camp [base name @18:50] maybe four days in a whole year. The rest of the time, Michael and I went in the 101st Camp for two days. Once in a while you go up on the mountainside and guard artillery for two days, but you were out there always. After one hundred and sixty three days, after the year I came into California someplace and was all upset because I had a tie, and I did not know how to tie it, I just wanted to go home, you know... I was too embarrassed to ask somebody there because I'm supposed to be somebody, who the hell knows who, but I'm supposed to tie it and I'm afraid to ask anyone "tie my tie for me will ya?". Then it seemed like everybody wanted to take advantage of you. I got into a taxi, and the driver asked "got any good stuff?" I said, what is this, just let me go the hell home. When I got home to Albany, I didn't go home I went to a bar first because I had to have a couple of drinks before I had to face everybody at home.

**SD:** I'd like to ask you to clear something up I'm not sure about. Who invented the Domino Theory? Did the Communists announce that or did we?

**JA:** Basically, in the 50's under the Eisenhower administration. John Foster Dulles, the Secretary of State's basic concept was that if one country fell to the Communist power, then it would be the next country, etc.

**SD:** Okay, I agree with that theory, a little bit. But I don't think it is completely true. I believe the Vietnamese wanted their nation whole. To have their people control that area, which historically they have been trying to do and they have succeeded in their game plan. I say that they won the war by not allowing us to chase them out, to infiltrate us. They won the war politically on our streets with our own people and our own media. I say they won. They deserved their victory, they fought and sacrificed their people. They withstood horrible bombings and a lot of stuff. So how could you say we won when they won? We could say they won because we stopped the Domino Theory, which some politico invented way back then. Everybody may have thought, well that sounds good because they were scared of Communism...those were the Red Scare days, the Joe McCarthy days. That was bullshit and that is why I, any many others think and feel that the 60,000 guys whose names are on the Wall died for that bullshit. What the fuck for? Excuse my language...what for? I will take

exception when somebody says it was a “just” war. It was honorable the way I carried myself and did my job as well as the guys around me did theirs. But the rest was bullshit.

**JA:** But what they are saying is that the short-term goal, to keep South Vietnam democratic, was achieved.

**SD:** I take exception with that too, okay?

**JA:** Okay, but the long-term goal, if you want to call it that, of keeping Southeast Asia non-Communist to a large extent worked.

**SD:** I would take exception to that too.

**JA:** If that seems like it came out of the Vietnam war, whatever happened over there certainly caused

[unclear @23:05] There is that old saying that we were afraid of the Chinese. But looking at history, they would see that the North Vietnamese were as afraid of the Chinese as we were. The last time they invited the Chinese in, they stayed for one thousand years. So we are afraid to bomb North Vietnam because we were afraid the Chinese were coming. So that was bullshit, I agree with you on that because they should have known. If I know it, you just look at a history book and you cannot tell me Johnson and Nixon and those guys were not aware of it. North Vietnam did not want China in there.

**SD:** They have hated each other for thousands of years. I know that. Like you were saying, take a look and see that we did protect that country for a while. Well, we can protect any spot in the world with enough manpower, money and supplies. That is no great accomplishment. You can do that out of brute force. I don't know if it would do any good to describe the government there. It was an elitist minority. They were virtual dictators just like Marcos, Batista and all these other dictators. They are out of the same mold. Also, I think the Domino Theory was an illusion or a delusion.

**JA:** Any other thoughts on the justification of the war?

**HS:** I didn't call it a war, I was not into the politics

**SD:** I was very disturbed when I realized what was going on there. I became aware of it after I was there. My father served in World War II and I thought I was doing the right and honorable thing by joining the Army and going to fight for my country you know? I was very disillusioned when I found out I was just fighting for a few elitists and a few politicians and industries. It had nothing to do with the American people. The American people were just as much a victim, we lost our sons and our brothers. I had joined out of complete patriotism that I thought was right, that was the same as my father and all those other guys joined in World War II. Now I feel like I got ripped off of my youth and from a lot.

**HS:** I still feel I did not do the wrong thing by going.

**MG:** I feel like I did the right thing, and that I had a purpose and that I accomplished that purpose.

**GB:** I didn't even know where I was going, I got drafted, I went to Fort Dix and when I got

done with Basics, they said go to Fort Polk, Louisiana. I said, it can't be any worse. We got down to Fort Polk and the next morning they said "you better pay attention because in eight weeks you are going to Vietnam".

It was like, where the hell is this place, you know? I called my mother up and said "hey Ma, know where I am going?" she said "yeah, Vietnam". I said "how did you know?" she said "they used to show this on television about this tiger land in Fort Polk, Louisiana. It was jungle training for Vietnam and when you told me you were going to train there, I knew right where you would be going." It's like everybody knew where I was going except me. [laughter] Until about three months ago, I did not even know where Vietnam was, I just threw it away.

I have an eleven-year old daughter who had a world atlas and she said "let's see where Vietnam is." That is the first time I had seen it associated with it's location on the globe. I went to Taiwan, and when I looked that up, it seemed a long way from Vietnam, but it isn't that far. It was scary, I was twenty-two years old and didn't even care where the hell I was. Now though, I have a lot of catching up to do but it is just not coming out.

**JA:** Is that a common experience for you all? Were you aware of Vietnam before you went? Sal, you must have been aware?

**MG:** The name, but not where it was.

**SD:** Not really. The first time I heard of it, before I joined the Army I looked it up on an old map and it was called the Two Kingdoms of Siam at that time, so of course I thought of that play "The King and I". [laughter] It was almost on the exact other side of the world which made it an adventure of going around the world, you know?

**HS:** You thought you were going to meet Yul Brenner over there.[laughter]

**SD:** No, all that time I spent in my backyard when I was a kid trying to dig a hole to China -a neighbor came over and said with my Dad "you guys keep digging long enough you're going to dig a hole right to China!" We did that digging for three or four days after school. I figured, well this is a better way to get there, I'll take a jet.

**HS:** My first duty station was out in California with the [unclear @29:06] I was in charge of classified correspondence. I pretty well knew in advance what I was getting into. I was in New York City, Third Naval District Headquarters when I got my orders. I think I fought believing I was really going. I said to my chief in the office, well that's okay. I don't mind being on an aircraft carrier, or a cruiser, or a re-commissioned battleship. He said, "No, look closer to the orders." Well, you can put the ship in Saigon, and that is alright..In real short order I found out there was to be no ship for this fella. I knew what Vietnam was about to a good extent. I don't say I was well versed in it. And being in the 3rd Naval District in New York City in 1967-68, we were right in the heart of the "love" children, protesters and everything so I knew pretty well what was going on over here. But you just never really know till you get there. It was a whole different critter.

**SD:** I wasn't too aware, I was hardly aware of the protesting. There were very small write ups about it in the paper. I joined the Army in July of 1967, up until then, there wasn't much publicity about it. It was really suppressed. But by the end of 1968 when I came back; I was Medevaced too by the way, I went to Valley Forge Hospital, I'm telling you the thing was blown out of proportion. It was like already starting to split the country apart. Seeing that I thought, where the hell did I go, what did I do? Was it right or wrong and it caused me a lot of confusion. But it was really suppressed until the movement grew and they could not suppress it any longer.

**JA:** Yes, you are right, did you say you got back in July of 1968?

**SD:** No, actually September.

**JA:** After the Chicago convention in August...

**SD:** They had shot Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King, all kinds of crazy stuff going on in the country.

**JA:** I think the Chicago convention was when it really brought it home to most people. Can we talk about your feelings towards those Chicago protests?

**SD:** Well, how I feel about it... I think a lot of people were generally aware of the war being a rip off.

There was really no threat to us directly. This proportion of protest movement was genuine, that really saw it for what it was. The majority though went along to make a spectacle and to be accepted on one side or the other. A lot of people took on the role of being a protester just to have some kind of identity-just to be somebody. They had no idea of what was going on, all they could do was repeat the rhetoric. They could not explain why they were protesting. My feelings about it? [Sal takes a long pause] I have unresolved feelings, I have no idea how I feel about it.

**MG:** I saw the protests on television. I followed the news on what was happening. I didn't really understand why the government was involved in Vietnam. I had my feelings about people going to Canada. I didn't think that was the only answer and I didn't think that protesting was the only answer. I felt something should be done, but I just didn't know how to go about it. People should get together and talk about it. I've always thought if you want to attack the government do it through an organized method peacefully with letters and testifying and like that you know. I figured they had a reason to protest, but they way they went about it would not net them anything. All the energy they were using wasn't going to get them anything in return. If they did it the proper way maybe we could get out of Vietnam.

**SD:** Margaret, I have a question, when you talk about civil disobedience, do you mean when people make those big scenes?

**MG:** Yeah, most of the protesters that cause a big scene and block buildings or like that doesn't get you anything.

**SD:** I think its about the tactic though, I guess it proves that it works.



**MG:** Like forcing people to change their minds?

**SD:** Yeah, by making so much of a commotion that everybody has to listen, the media listens.

**MG:** Then I would say there are two ways of attacking and only one side was shown at that time. The ones that would come from where I'm looking at should have been active too. To press through like I say testifying, the laws and like that. So both sides are represented and one side would not be hated for what they are doing, there would be two different attacks.

**SD:** I understand what you are saying, but you can through all the right channels for only so long and when nothing happens, you just keep getting stonewalled I think civil disobedience is okay. I have a question because I have a thought now about us, about Veterans rights and Veterans Affairs, would we have been justified in getting together and doing some civil disobedience ourselves?

**MG:** I don't think that would net you anything except exposure. What are you going to do after you get exposure to the press to get the laws changed and get the money you want and like that? I think there are ways of doing it. I haven't gotten involved in the ways to do it, I just feel there are ways because it has only been in the last year that I have my both feet on the ground. I feel there are ways to do it, but I needed to get myself together first before I could do anything else. That is why I am here today because I want to do something positive now that I can.

**JA:** @36:40 Joe's question not clear

**SD:** It's good to learn from experience.

**MG:** Because it got a results before.

**JA:** That all goes back to the civil rights groups of the 1950's building on each other. We got into that a little bit today. Can we briefly talk about what you see as the major problems facing Veterans today, and organizations addressing them, like somebody said "thank God for this Vet Center".. Let's talk about some of the problems you see, maybe in a general sense facing Vietnam Veterans in 1988-1989.

**GB:** I find I have a hard time with Vietnamese and Chinese you know? They are all "gooks" and to me, we are the minority, they are the kings. I mean the government hires them before they hire Vietnam Veterans. We did for them and they come to this country and are better off than we are. You know where I am coming from now? How many Vietnam Veterans are out there that do not have a job? Now we have Vietnamese working in the post office. The federal government should hire that Vietnam Veteran before these people. I don't care if they were number one on the list, they should never get that damn job. I mean, they are like visitors here to me, but they have more rights than we do.

**JA:** Is unemployment still a problem for Vietnam Veterans?

**HS:** Oh yeah, for homeless Vietnam Vets that is one of the biggest things. Unemployment,

PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder], substance abuse -whether it be addiction or self-medication. I used to feel identically to the way George does. But after a lot of careful thinking, I have to think back to what we did to the Vietnamese as well. Some of the atrocities to the South Vietnamese. I don't mean necessarily war atrocities, but the way we treated them while we were in their country. I also want to say the reverse of that, that we were not treated very well ourselves. I find the most difficult thing for me now is to look at any one race or culture of people the same way I used to. I have a lot more understanding of people according to quote "class or category". I understand totally where George is coming from because I used to come from there. There is a lot more forgiveness in me now.

I remember when I was unemployed and I wanted to get a job with the state of New York. I was having a tough way to go with it. Then I would read an article in the paper with a picture of a Vietnamese fellow who was a computer operator with some state department and how he climbed the ladder and everything and it bothered me. It still does, but I put myself in their shoes. I remember too many things that I saw that were heart-wrenching and gut-wrenching while I was there.

**JA:** Do you think there is still some prejudice towards Veterans in general in the job market?

**HS:** Absolutely, Vietnam Veterans are a sexy item today, we are in vogue.

**JA:** I just want to say I'd use that quote "you are in -you are it".

**HS:** Yes, it's like "you're a Vietnam Vet, I'll hire you" [as he pats Sal on his head then Hal whispers "just don't tell anybody"] Yeah, there is a lot of that going on, not too long ago PTSD was "oh, my God" [Hal puts hands up as if to push away a person]. But now Vietnam Vets are emblematic of it. And we are doing a lot for the non-Vet PTSD afflicted person. The rape victims, the child-abuse victims, victims of natural disasters and airline crash victims...I guarantee you if there were people who were professionals and ready to talk to people from the survivors of the flight that crashed in Iowa part of that was because of the precedence set by Vietnam Veterans with PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for me is something very personal and when I deal with clients with PTSD, as a substance abuse person looking for help it hits home, I have a real good understanding of it.

**MG:** What aggravated me when I got back because I didn't want to talk about being in Vietnam, I heard a lot of people say about PTSD? Oh PTSD, I can't even say it right.

**GB:** I used to say "that shit" I didn't know what the hell it was.

**JA:** I have to look it up every time I type it, I can't get those initials straight.

**MG:** They used to say that it was a cop-out, that we didn't want to work. You did not want to work so you had Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome as an excuse. So I would not tell them I anything so I would not get plastered by them that I was just goldbricking, like they called it. I mean, I might be able to work three months or maybe five and then I would have to quit. But then I would go back because I did not have enough disability to live on. I would get out then have to explain that the VA doesn't want you to work if you are on disability, but then I said "how am I supposed to live?" They did not give me enough to live on. I just pushed myself and four to five months was my limit. Then I was out for maybe six months and then I would try it again. That is the way I lived. I heard it from a lot of people that PTSD was

just a cop-out. These people just want an excuse for the way they act. I just don't want to associate with those people.

**HS:** A lot of people say we carried that baggage before we went over. It's real hard to say when you look at Vietnam Vets that we all carried that same identical baggage?

**SD:** I don't think that is true, I had never been arrested. I had good marks in school. I did screw up in school later on in high school and I ended up quitting. But since I have been out of the Army I have been arrested about twenty-five times and I've done eight years in prison. Out of those twenty years since I have been in Vietnam and eight of those were spent in prison. What percentage is that? 40 percent?

**HS:** I hardly knew what beer was until I got to Vietnam. Then I sure knew everything in the book after that.

**SD:** Another 50 percent of that 100 percent was spent oblivious on drugs or drinking. I think that what we are describing is blaming the victim. We will put the blame on the victim. You had asked the question before about employ-ability. I'm a carpenter and I can get a job. In my trade they really don't reject you for a job if you are a Vietnam Vet. They figure, well maybe his is strong, you know. But they watch you like you are a live hand grenade or like you are a booby trap all the time. They do not watch other people like they watch you. They are waiting to hear that you went crazy.

**JA:** Are you telling me, that despite what the papers are saying that stereotyping of Vets still exists?

**SD:** That's right

**MG:** Oh yeah

**GB:** It sure is.

**SD:** Sal nods in approval. My first week on the job I was trying to chase a fly in the office. I guess I went about it a little too ardently and two of the ladies who worked there were real fearful thinking I was going to go off. They tell me now that they know me, but they were really afraid of me just because they knew I was a Vietnam Veteran.

**JA:** We are talking in August of 1989 there is still a strong stereotyping out there?

**SD:** This happened back in October of 1987 and I am in a three-piece suit with shorter hair than I have now. [laughter] The paper generalize it, yeah.

**JA:** You said before, the Vietnam Vet is "in".

**HS:** I would rather be recognized for having taken great strides in bringing about world peace in Vietnam. There are better ways to be recognized for being a Vet. I personally feel I went

from feeling, when I came home I thought I'm a Veteran, I did good, things are going to be alright. I found out, it took me two times because I was a little more stupid than I am now, it took me a bar fight and a fight flying over a cocktail table at a party that made me realize I don't need to tell people I am a Vietnam Vet in 1970. I submerged myself in drinking quite heavily. I was on a first name basis with every carbonated bubble that ever existed.

I didn't realize that I had any problems with Vietnam. I didn't feel that I was consciously stuffing it until back in early 1987 when I finally decided that I needed to address my drinking problem. I wasn't an everyday drinker and I was not a get-drunk drinker. But it was interfering enough with my life and had been for years and years. During the course of a rehabilitation program at the VA, the Program Director sat down with me and suggested that I take a look at some Vietnam Veterans issues. He said that they can't just address the substance abuse without addressing these other things. I said "no, no, no- I don't want anything to do with it." But I agreed to be screened for an in-patient five week PTSD program, a Vietnam Veterans re-adjustment program, and eventually I went through that. The sads, mads and glads throughout the whole thing. Bang the walls, hugging, crying and laughing. Reliving Vietnam in order to sort it out and make it a little bit more manageable. Coming out real raw, and again thank God for this Veterans Center for the last two and a half years for me. But only since two and a half years ago did I start addressing any Vietnam Veteran issues. I became aware of what was happening with it.

I did not self-medicate that deeply to take Vietnam away, so I don't know whether it is self medicating or alcohol addiction, or whatever. I'm just glad I don't do it anymore but my problems are far from over. But from two and a half years ago, I went from "yeah, it's okay I'm a Vietnam Vet-but I hate every civilian out there from when I came out of the hospital; to sort of getting a chip on my shoulder about it and now I'm sort of coming to an even keel. I am proud to have been there sharing something that is without a doubt the most poignant thing in my life. And knowing I did a phenomenal job while I was in Vietnam, that my stories and photographs sure helped a lot of the brown-water sailors down there. It did a lot for the home front and hometown news releases. I still get irritated sometimes. My friends are all Veterans from homeless Vets to professionals working in the state of New York. I have a lot of issues left to resolve. I went through two and a half years of group therapy here, I just left group about two months ago.

**SD:** You went through group therapy and still have issues?

**HS:** Sure, aren't you supposed to? They just taught me how to manage them now.

**SD:** You have my number right? [Sal pats Hal on his back]

**HS:** I do Sal.. [laughter]

**JA:** I don't know if you want to talk about problems, but I've often heard about the debt to the Veterans center, everybody saying "God Bless the Vet Center".

**SD:** You're asking about if we have problems now? I saw a couple of weeks ago that they are starting to set up base camps at the VA hospital in Albany. I think they were protesting about the budget cuts. I've been trying to get enough time to go up there and contribute to that since one of the worst things that could happen is cutting the medical budgets. I have

medical problems and thank God I can get some treatment there, you know?

**HS:** They have to, how else are they going to pay for the parquet floors in the waiting room?

**SD:** The parquet floor, or my benefits, what is more important? I think that is a threat that concerns me. I will testify that this place is great. I have seen this place help me and almost every guy who comes through here and gets involved with counseling and gets help. It saves their lives a little bit, you know? If it wasn't for this place, it would just be like it was back in the 1970's. Nobody would listen, everybody would isolate themselves. Vietnam Veterans have a problem isolating, we know that there is no one who understands us, nobody to talk to, back then anyway. There was nobody to relate to and no place to get together with people who you could relate with and you would feel isolated. And when you were isolated you would become vulnerable to become addicted to a thousand different things.

**HS:** You would be called a weirdo

**SD:** Yeah, I think it would be terrible if this place was ever canceled because of money.

**JA:** Basically, what is the Veterans Center?

**HS:** The Vet Center is a community-based, or actually a satellite type service-providing agency of the Veterans Affairs hospital. It is not the VA. It is run by a separate regional office. This Vets Center is part of the region run out of Rhode Island. To me it is a client, it is just different. You are not coming to the VA when you come here, you are not coming to hear bureaucratic bullshit. When you come here, you are with other Vets. And it is not just thinking of them as other Vets, it's just other people that you care about. They care about you, and the counselors are people you can talk to. They are professionals and they are friends. As George said, you can come by here and have coffee, you don't have to go into a counseling or therapy session. This is just a place, just to be, to where it is okay just to be.

**JA:** Does it basically serve Vietnam Veterans?

**HS:** Vietnam-era Veterans.

**JA:** Would it be attractive to World War II Veterans?

**HS:** Not being a staff member of the Vet Center, I can't answer that.

**SD:** I think we have a member who is a Korean Veteran. His symptoms and his problems were basically on par with the Vietnam Vets. He came to a couple of groups, solved a couple of problems and moved on. But these are a unique set of circumstances of the times that a World War II Veteran would not be able to identify with. They would not be able to relate to us. The key here is being able to relate. I can explain something to you, you can say you understand it, but you really don't know what I am talking about when I talk about certain things and certain feelings. Other Vietnam Vets, not all of them do, but out of a group you are going to find somebody who relates to you and give you some feedback. They will give

you their experience, how they handled it or say, hey I'm up against that too.[Hal shakes his head in agreement]. You know, coming back from war within twenty-four hours, the culture shock of this materialistic world we live in is different. There was no attack on Pearl Harbor that made everything righteous for this war.

**MG:** Here is another thing about this, that I wanted to bring up. I was attacked personally. I could talk just so long on certain issues, we would get to a block you know. I would be alright, I could go out to work but I knew there were still issues there. I wasn't comfortable, but with my counselor he understood. He would say, just stop by here or you can call any time. When things started creeping up on me and getting to be too much-I would call and get back into sessions again. I think I did that three or four times before I could actually talk on all the issues that I had because it was just too painful. I would just get to a certain point and it would be too painful, I just had to have time. And they would give you that time. When I would call back they never said, "well, we knew you should have been here longer". They told me, "yeah, we can fit you in here or there". Or if your life was crashing down around you, and I have done this a couple of time, I have come into the waiting room and said when there is a counselor available I sure would like to talk to somebody! There would be coffee, and other people to talk to, the time passes and pretty soon you get to talk to somebody and you go back to your life so you can handle it and you can go on. Up to the present, that has been the way my life has been. I thank God for this Vet Center and all their help.

**HS:** There are great people that I have met here, fellow Vets. Not him! [Hal points to empty chair where Sal was sitting, everyone laughs]

**JA:** Sal returns and Joe says "we're talking about you"

**SD:** You can talk about me all you want, see I have developed a philosophy where [@58:30 talking overlaps, unclear exchanges]! We just won the war for you.

**JA:** He made a great point because I can sit back and understand what you are saying because I taught for twenty years to seven and eight graders and to try and explain that, you can not identify with that unless you have done it. What you are doing is the same thing that teachers would do, I thought that was a tremendous statement about understanding what you can do. [ Hal nods in agreement]

**SD:** You know, a lot of the problems that we have, I am speaking generally of what I see with other Vets and what I hear them say about when they came home, what we have experienced in the groups is that they could not relate to anybody when they came home. They told people about things, they would look at you and say "oh yeah, yeah, sure" but it went in one ear and out the other. Other combat Vets from Korea and in World War II basically were the ones you had contact with like the older guys in the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] bars or your uncles, or whatever would say "yeah Johnny, you had a little shell-shock Johnny, you will be okay". [as he pats Sal on the back] " We're proud of you, it's in the past".

**HS:** Yeah, in a few more years it sounds a little more plausible.

**GB:** For me, I was alone, I had been married for about twenty years but I was still alone. We started out at Fort Dix about thirteen of us got drafted. Then we went to Fort Polk about five

of us and then to Vietnam -one. I got off the helicopter I think in the field-one. I came back, my orders I think there were like nine guys came back from one infantry. Everybody else was from something else, I didn't even know these people. I came back to this country and I was all by myself again. It was like I was always by myself, and I am still alone.

**JA:** One of the topics I bring up is exactly that. I thought, before I started this project that guys going to Vietnam are basically went by themselves. Then they came back by themselves. They did not go like in World War II when you had the whole company went over, you got to know the guys. You talked to them in the boat. Basically for Vietnam, the people got into a TWA (TransWorld Airlines), they flew in by themselves. They may have made some friends there.

**GB:** It's like you really did not know what the hell went on there. I used to say that I came home July 23rd, 1967 and I have this little whiskey bottle that says TWA on it. One day I was looking at it and it had July 28th written on it so I assumed I came home July 28th. But I used to always say July 23rd. Then I went and looked at some paperwork and it says the 26th. So now I'm saying what the hell day did I come home?

**HS:** Well, with the time zone change, and the nineteen hour flight.....

**GB:** I talked to a buddy of mine who was there a little longer, I said Tim, when did you come home? He said "sometime in October, I don't even know". I mean, you didn't even care, it was just get me the hell out! That was hell, that is what it was-hell. I would listen to the sixties music and give it to people and say this is from hell's jukebox, the Devil's jukebox right here. Sometimes when I play that music and I am in my van, I feel like I'm in a helicopter and I am on a mission and just cruising.

**SD:** Yep.

**GB:** Some people say "I don't ever want to get in that van with you, you might kill somebody." I mean, you just lose everything and just ride along. You're floating, you're on this mission.

**HS:** All I need is for "Light My Fire" [song by The Doors] or "Lighter Shade of Pale" [song by The Moody Blues] to come on the radio. One night I finished up with a group session here at the Veterans Center, I lived up in Ballston Spa off exit 12 at the time. I was in my Jeep driving for about three or four minutes with no other cars on the road. It was raining and I am a little south of exit 10 and I am envisioning myself back on a river patrol boat [PBR] going right up the river again. I had to pull off an exit early because it was just coming back. I was aware that I wasn't in Vietnam, but the problem was it was too good a feeling because a part of me still wants to go back. Not like in these therapeutic journeys, I want to go back and redo some stuff. Do it better.

**GB:** I have some of those same feelings, like there are answers to Bong Son but I don't even know what the questions are. If the answers are there, it would help me so much. Because I was there for so long, but I don't know about it. I do some place back here [George points to his head] and someplace down there [points to his heart], it's there. When I was with the First Calvary, we made a lot of air assaults. The biggest thing, the most exciting thing you ever feel is the adrenaline flow like coming into an LZ [landing zone] before you were prepping it with artillery shit flying all over the place. Now there are gun ships on both sides, you are coming in and the gun ships are blowing the hell out of this LZ. The machine guns

on your chopper starts going and I mean right now my adrenaline is pumping and I want to jump right through the ceiling just thinking about it. You could never imagine this you know? Down here they have the fireworks celebration, when they have the grand finale – that grand finale is nothing, that is nothing! [everyone laughs]

**SD:** People wonder why we don't get excited about a Sunday afternoon barbecue...

**GB:** You want to fly it is so great. I take a ride up the Northway sometimes, like Hal said, and I could feel at certain spots where the road is higher than the tree line and it feels like I am coming into an LZ and there it is, just sitting there and everything is going off exactly just like it was in Vietnam. And it is great, to me it is great but nobody can experience this.

**HS:** My wife wondered why I was so closed mouth when we used to make trips when we lived on the west coast in Florida, across Alligator Alley on Route 84 down by the Everglades. I didn't really know what it was all about then, I did know I was associating the images with Vietnam and always got into a weird mood, before I realized I was a Vet.

**JA:** You mentioned music before, that is one of the things I am doing is taking music of that time period that directly or indirectly relates to the Vietnam War and putting that together like an introductory piece.

**SD:** Oh I can't wait, are you going to have a little Creedence [reference to Creedence Clearwater Revival band] on there? They do that on Tour of Duty and on China Beach [two television shows], and all of the Vietnam movies.

**GB:** Some of that music makes you feel like you made your contribution.

**SD:** And proud

**JA:** I'm looking to use music that is specific to the Vietnam War like Green Beret and Barry Sadler

[Army Staff Sergeant who sang the hit song] and Billy Joel's "Goodnight Saigon" and some of the stuff that was against the war.

**SD:** Let me tell you about an experience I just remembered. I was home on about nineteen days leave, before I went to Vietnam, right after Thanksgiving. I wanted this green underwear. I didn't want to wear any white underwear so my mother took me shopping to J.C. Penney's looking for green underwear and we finally got some. So she is driving the car and I've got about two or four days of leave left and she started to get a little nervous about the day I am leaving. While in the car, the song by Country Joe and the Fish came on the radio with the lyrics "1-2-3 what are we fightin' for?" [I Feel Like I'm Fixing to Die Rag"] and I understand what they are singing about now, but at the time when he sang about "being the first one on your block to have your boy come home in a box" my mother went to pieces when she heard that. She smacked into another car and hit a pole. We sat there and she was crying and messed up for a couple of minutes. I had to promise her I would be good, stay in the rear, and stay out of trouble. Then I did the exactly the opposite.

**HS:** My father passed away about a year after I got back. But I just found out about a year and a half ago about how upset my parents were that I was in Vietnam. Up until then my mother had not revealed to me how upset she was. When I came back, it was like I had gone



away to the Adirondacks to over-night camp for six weeks. Homecoming was really fractious, my parents got jealous because I stopped to see my fiancée in Indianapolis before I came to Syracuse to see them. You know, that petty stuff. To some relatives I am still the black sheep in the family because I did go to Vietnam. My cousin got out and he became an Army officer at the Pentagon for two or three years. Other relatives didn't serve. Upper middle-class Jewish boys don't go to Vietnam because their parents have enough influence to get them out. My father did, but I chose not to partake. I knew that much, that when I came out of college that I did not try to get out of it. I was going to try to avoid the draft by joining the Navy because if you join the Navy you don't have to go to Vietnam. I did not know any better. No one said I was bright.[Everyone laughs]

I have three childhood friends, one is a hospital administrator in Boston, another is a leading attorney in Syracuse and the other is a stockbroker in New York. They did not have to go into the military. I look at them now with their families and how they have got it so together, I look at that emotionally and say "oh God, where am I? No children, just starting out in a new career a year and a half ago, and a real bad bout with the bottle for about seventeen years. If I use my intellect at all I think that my wife and I are very happy and maybe my friends are not that happy as they may appear with their Mercedes Benz and Corvette cars. I guess there is a little bitterness there. I don't blame the guys themselves, but I'm just wondering "how come me, how come I went through that?" Then I sit back and say, "yeah, but guess what- that was an experience I would not trade anyone for a million bucks. I have to say going to Vietnam, doing as well as I did there, it was the most admirable thing I have done in my life. [unclear @1:10:55] These last two and half years has been hell becoming aware of what Vietnam really was through groups bringing it all up and realizing "My God, I got through that, it did happen" I give myself a lot of credit.

**GB:** You do block it out. When I started coming here I said "I've got pictures and paperwork, but I have nothing else." It's like I wasn't there, but these pictures say I was there. You know, for all those years if somebody said I was in Vietnam, you were so Goddamn proud of being in Vietnam but you would not tell anybody. Or if you did, and they would say I was in Vietnam you would say "me too" and you would walk away. That was the end of it. You did not want to be with them, you did not want to talk about it. That is the scary part of it.

**SD:** Doesn't this go back to some of the confusion I was trying to explain before? I did not know whether I was right or wrong. I did not know whether to wear my uniform proudly or to hide in the woodwork.

**JA:** I think, to identify with what you said, I can identify with because my brother-in-law was over in Vietnam, received a Purple Heart-the whole thing. He knows I am doing this project, but to this day, will not talk about it. From the moment he got back he made it very clear, and he was there over twenty years ago. So that I can understand, over twenty-seven years later he will not talk about it and you have to respect his feelings. It is one of those family rules, do not talk to my brother-in-law about Vietnam.

**GB:** I know a guy in that same situation. He was saying he went to his sister's house and the show "Tour of Duty" was on television. His brother-in-law said "why don't you sit down and watch this with us?" He said "why? I was there." His brother-in-law said "you were there?", this guy was really surprised to hear his sister was so embarrassed that she didn't even tell her husband her brother was in Vietnam. You know? It took all this to tell him.

**SD:** Yeah, it is still alive and well in the world.

**HS:** My project assistant was a tail-gunner in a chopper in Vietnam said I was shot down twice but I really didn't get wounded until I came home. I still say to this day that my re-adjustment problems far surpass any kind of PTSD, maybe I'm still not willing to admit I have any PTSD, I don't know. That may be an issue in itself. I understand wholeheartedly what that person said - "I wasn't wounded until I came home." We thought there was hope when we were over there. We got out alive and we were gonna come back to a real good life.

**SD:** A new world.

**HS:** I'm glad I was not a black person, aside from being a Vietnam Veteran for all the shit they had to go through.

**JA:** Where do you see the future of the Vietnam Vet?

**HS:** I see VVA (Vietnam Veterans of America) growing into a very positive force politically in Washington. And I see, as they grow and the Vietnam Veterans numbers grow, and by that I mean a lot of Vietnam Vets that are out in the boonies and in a tent or in a shack are now visible on the streets. As we approach middle age our medical needs have to be met. We are a little more frail than we were when we were twenty-seven. Also, as with the World War II older Veterans we will pass along. I think our needs will be met as Veterans I believe because we will have a real strong force in the VVA. Where things will be in the future? I don't know, but I believe our popularity or the thrill of it all for the American public will pass with time. And that is sort of okay too.

**JA:** Is that when the healing process for the American public will finally be done when that does pass?

**SD:** Any process of healing is an individual process. My rate is different from Margaret's

**HS:** Can this tape be edited? Yes? Then fuck the American Public. That is my sincere feeling right now.

**SD:** The American Public is so unreal with their expectations and their reality and socially so out of tune with reality. For me to have believed that they would have to come to a healing term with me after all those years was an illusion. I have come to terms with the truth from our groups that we have to help ourselves. And more importantly, I have to help myself. Hal nods in agreement. And the American Public, like Hal said is just too decadent.

**HS:** We have each other. And I don't mean to over-generalize the public, there are good people you know what I mean? There are good people like yourself who are truly interested in this topic. There are truly good people who did go to Canada, (Hal looks to the camera)that you can say officially.  
[laughter]

**SD:** But the majority of people don't care.

**HS:** It's their right not to care. I mean, I'm not that into Girl Scout movements so why should somebody who is not a Vietnam Vet be into the Vietnam Vet movement? That is understandable but what sometimes gets to me are people who say that they are by saying "oh, good job!" but they don't really mean it. Apathy is the worst thing. I usually deal with an argumentative person, but it's the apathy that gets me.

**JA:** If it wasn't for him (presuming the man, Ray, taping this), I would be in that culture too. You know, other than intellectually teach about Vietnam in junior high and high school, I would have no awareness whatsoever as to what you are talking about.

**HS:** [facing and talking to Ray, the cameraman] But you have an open mind or else Ray could not have gotten to you.

**Ray:** I drove him crazy. I was the nut that lived next door to him [all laugh]

**JA:** We shared many cups of coffee. I did not know any other Vietnam Vets other than my brother-in-law. Living next door to each other for five years, you know you start to talk. He is directly responsible for this project. Without his introduction to this, I would be one of those apathetic people. Does anyone have any wrap up words or final thoughts?

**SD:** I have a couple of things on my mind. I hope that what you are doing is going to help educate students. I hope they don't take the good lives they have for granted. [Hal nods in agreement]. I hope they don't become apathetic and let the government do whatever their paranoia tells them to do. We could be involved in another Vietnam in Nicaragua right now if it wasn't for the Vietnam experience, so that is a plus, that is good. Something happened to me here last year, two times last year that was very moving, very positive. One time I was in a store getting some fast food and two young guys were there, about seventeen. They saw my hat which says Vietnam and said "wow, you were in Vietnam?" I said yeah. Their reaction was so different than anything that had ever happened to me. They said "Wow, we are really proud of you and respect what you did." That just blew me away [Sal states this in a very emotional manner]. I wanted to just start crying right there. I did not know what to say and just said thanks.

**GB:** People out there our age, they could care less. It's the young kids that want to hear about it.

I always say, why don't they don't teach this in school? Let them know what is going on, let them know where it is.

**HS:** The kids are fantastic.

**JA:** That is why I want to hit on more current problems. When I was talking about this project to someone I really don't want to hear about war stories, I don't think that is the purpose of this project. I think if kids want to hear war stories they can click on any television show they want.

**GB:** But they ain't seeing nothing.

**JA:** Yeah, I want this to be for high school kids that don't really know about Vietnam. When Jane Fonda went over there in April, they had no idea who Jane Fonda was other than she

was an actress.

The kids did not know what her relationship was with the Vietnam War.

**GB:** The thing I always say about war pictures on television is that they have to make them to make money. But don't even watch them. They build these people up who do all this shit, and it is not nothing. You don't get up after those fights when they yell "cut". The game is over.

**SD:** There was one good film, "Platoon" was good. Really intense though.

**GB:** I think I saw that because there is a guy in there that has the First Calvary patch on his shirt. I said, if he was with the 101st he would not be wearing the First Calvary patch.

**SD:** I think I know about where that took place because we went there the next day to try to cut off the retreating battalions that were headed to Cambodia. We tried to cut them off but they got away. I think I know when that happened.

**GB:** That movie was about the closest thing I have ever seen to reality.

**SD:** Yeah, that was the most realistic. Somebody who I went to see it with said "boy, that was so out of control". One word to sum it up would be "incompetent". I said no kidding! Everything just gets completely out of control. There was so much random violence, you know?

**MG:** I'm glad to know this video is for the schools because my son did not understand anything about what was going on. He was my step-son who came to live with us when he was eight years old, and my husband did not really realize it when I started showing behavior that they did not approve of. If information could have come through my son's school, at least he would have been understanding. Because my son and I had two years together with his father off on a carrier, I know I had to have time alone with my son for him to understand me. He does understand me more today. My husband is just beginning to understand me today as my son understood me a few years ago. I'm glad this is getting into the schools, it can help.

**SD:** Is this going to be for a history-oriented class?

**JA:** There is a ninth-grade course which teaches Vietnam from a global geographic point. I'm trying to make it more like a history class for the eleventh grade.

**SD:** What happened to us, is an experience of war history. What we are doing at the Veterans Center is history. In relation to what the students are going to see in the future its history and they can't do anything about this. But I think one thing, our hope is that you learn from this. That you are going to be the leaders some day. [Sal looks to camera] You are going to be the public and you can do something about the government you run so that you don't get people involved in unreasonable wars. If you do have Veterans from your wars, hopefully you will treat them with a little more respect in the future.

**HS:** And this will give you some conscious

**SD:** Hopefully.

**JA:** I want to thank all of you guys for this opportunity. [Joe asks Ray] - What do you think sir?

**Cameraman Ray:** Great.

END OF INTERVIEW 1:26:17