

**DAN MITCHELL USMC LIEUT.**

**9<sup>TH</sup> MARINES '66 -'67**

Interviewer: Okay, Dan. Let's start at the beginning. Tell me about where you grew up. Where you went to school? How you ended up going to the Naval Academy, the whole nine yards. Just start from the beginning and then obviously tell me how it all culminated in this little Southeastern Asia country.

Dan: Right. Well, I was born at Union Memorial Hospital and grew up in Northwood essentially by where the old stadium was and then I went to the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute. One of the founding people there, a Lieutenant King was a Naval Academy graduate. The institution had a lot of connections in Maryland and I was a lower middle class roadhouse kid in Baltimore and I wanted to go to a really good school and the only one I could afford was the Naval Academy because they paid us. I did that and I joined the Naval Reserve between my junior and senior year in high school and went to boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Training Center and then I got an appointment. Actually, I think I got a reserve appointment because one of my best friend's uncle was a representative at the time that he got the principal appointment. In fact, I'll see him this weekend. We're going to the Navy - Duke Football game.

A bunch of us went down there. I played on the lacrosse team at Poly and four of us went to the Naval Academy and two guys went to West Point, which was kind of interesting. When I got down there, several things happened. The reason I went was I thought I wanted to be the first man on the moon and I say that a little bit with tongue-in-cheek but not completely. However, I get pretty serious motion sickness and I really liked leadership in the Marine Corps. To this day I like the Marine Corps. When service selection time came around I took my commission in the Marine Corps. We went to Quantico. All marines were going to Vietnam. We knew that at the time and in addition to that I thought that that experience in Vietnam would probably be the most significant event in my lifetime.

Now we've got all this stuff going on now since 9/11, which is equally as significant. The guys that are there now probably had the same attitude but I'm too old for this one. That one was there and I wanted to be part of it. I wanted to know first hand what it was all about so I went over there and replaced the first guy that landed. I went over in what, April of 1966 I think it was so that's how I got there. I was an O3 which is an

infantry officer and I got a rifle platoon and then we went from there. That's how I got there.

Interviewer: You told me when you got over there it didn't take very long even a matter of minutes before you had this ... I found that kind of interesting. Did you not say you were head of that rifle platoon in about 12 minutes?

Dan: Oh, yeah. All of us did that. It was certainly not unique. All of us went out there and you walked right in and we had what I think was pretty solid training. I had four years to get beat on in Annapolis and then the Marine Corps took us and they set us up. I felt prepared. I didn't think that was problem but yeah we walked right into it. I guess the guys ... How would you describe a World War II guy? If they put you in a landing craft and went down and you're out on the beach, you were there. Yeah, we were instantaneously if you will. My first assignment was the Da Nang Air Force Base. I can't remember if it was the air field and we had marines there. We had 84 marines there and F4s but I had a relatively easy transition.

There were other guys who went right out into the rice patties but it didn't make a whole lot of difference. The exposure was pretty much the same and within I don't know 7 to 10 days we were out in a place called Hill 55, which was maybe 10 miles south and west of Da Nang so that's where I started.

Interviewer: You obviously were mentally prepared, ready, eager I guess for this experience. Is that a wrong word to use?

Dan: Yeah, I think eager is not right. I wanted to do it but eager is an overstatement. Prepared is correct but you know when you're going there. What you're getting into and I don't think anybody is eager to go out there and get shot at.

Interviewer: Basically though it sounds like you had ... I assume you were about 23 by this point.

Dan: Twenty-three, yeah.

Interviewer: You had that sense of immortality that often accompanies young men of that age.

Dan: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about your ... When you first got into a ... Started mixing it up and you're out in the field.

Dan: Well, one of the things they tell you at the basic school and in fact I was at the Naval Academy this weekend and the kids are still running into the same thing. You really don't believe ... You have all this experience around you. Both the troops and the other officers and the mantra if you will, the thing they tell you is what's going to happen to you is you're going to go out there on a patrol or get in a combat situation and everything is going to stop and every eye in the rifle platoon is going to be looking at you saying what do you do now lieutenant and I didn't really believe that. None of us do. Well, when we got off the airbase and started patrolling regularly, first day, we just get shot at from somewhere and we were in a graveyard so immediately you go to the ground and behind the tombstone and lo and behold I couldn't find my platoon sergeant or anybody and every eye in the platoon is looking at you saying what do you do now.

That's the thing that snaps up and gets you first and then you just do what you do. We covered ourselves and moved people around. One of the things that was consistent in Vietnam they would never really engage. They'd shoot at you from a distance. You find out where they were. You'd shoot back, get some support of one form or another and then they'd disappear. Once you got through the initial onslaught, only now and then did you really have to maneuver a platoon like we did in the tactical schools at Quantico and places like that but for the most part they would shoot, try to inflict some damage and then they'd recede and you're lucky if you ever found anything. I did later on. Later on you get a certain amount of contact that you could really get your hand around so to speak but most of the time they just disappeared.

Interviewer: This is more of a guerrilla warfare system and we really had never fought a war like this. How long did it take to adapt and how did you adapt?

Dan: Well, you're right about guerrilla warfare and the book on guerrilla warfare was written by the British and I think it was Indonesia. I think that's the right place before us. What they tried to do was create what we called tactical areas of responsibility and the Marine Corps operate a little bit differently from the army so I'm not speaking about the army. I know a little bit but enough to be dangerous not enough to be [inaudible 08:05]. We got these large areas of responsibility and the ideal was to concentrate the population in protectable areas and then let the rest of the area be free fire zones so to speak. We would patrol those areas during the daytime in order to allow the population to go out and work the rice patties and that sort of thing and then at night we would try to get them back into these strategic enclaves I think was the term of art if you will.

It was not easy to do but that was the idea and then we would go out at night and patrol and anything that moved at that time was fair game and we'd shoot it. Sometimes you did, sometimes you didn't. As we go along there's some other things I can tell you about what happened on those night patrols and things like that periodically but that was the idea. The idea was to be able to protect the people, keep them from being terrorized, which is really what the VC were doing. Make it safe for them and then enable them to go out and work and make it safe for them when they were working. That's the idea.

Interviewer: Why did you say dusk is the most dangerous period?

Dan: Oh, because they can see you but you can't see them. It's just a hard light, literally physical environment. You would stand out on a horizon and you can't see anybody in the shrubbery and things around it so we would be very careful at that time of night and it made me nervous which I told you. Laurel, you can edit this I guess. Do you want me to?

Interviewer: Okay, just go. You don't have to make references to Laurel because-

Dan: I got it. Yeah, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: Just go ahead into just discussing that.

Dan: Tell you about that, okay. We were out on patrol. I don't know. I think I'd been up for a couple of days really and I lost a lot of kids, marines and so we were pretty nervous. We were setting up in a relatively defendable position. There was a kid on a water buffalo going around our lines and the children were not innocent. I had a lot of people hurt or killed by children. There was still enough American in us by this time that we don't want to shoot the kid but I also didn't want that kid getting anywhere that he could tell people where we were. We had been mortared several times over the preceding 36 hours or so. I got this young man who's in that picture. His name was Dennis [inaudible 11:09] and he was a dead shot. He could really shoot so I said Dennis shoot the water buffalo, don't shoot the kid.

We shot the water buffalo and we went and got the child and brought it in. What a disaster. The water buffalo was their tractor. It was like a piece of equipment and I say with tongue-in-cheek which we would not have done but to make the point, to illustrate the point, we should have shot the kid. We would have been better off shooting the kid than shooting the water buffalo and we ended up there for two or three days and the civic action people came out and we had them another water buffalo. It

eventually worked out and I'm glad I didn't shoot the child but it was not a fun experience if you will. That's why we did it. You were very vulnerable at that time. We're at the back end of several days where we just had a lot of people hurt. The helicopters were coming and hauling them out and I had enough so I didn't want to risk that night. Nothing happened that night whether that was the reason or not who knows.

Interviewer: It must have strike you. Here we are, these highly trained troops with all this technology from one of the world's two superpowers at that time and we're in the jungles going up against a third world country with people who are in little sandals made out of tire treads and basically just ... You must have been ... Where there times when you just kind of reflected on this incredible David and Goliath situation and yet these people were quite ingenious with the little bit they had.

Dan: Yeah. I'm not sure I agree with you about the technology part of it. The radio communications and things that we had were very primitive relative to the kind of stuff we had now. Those little drones that you could throw out there and go around corners and tell you what was around the bend. We were slogging through the rice patties just like they were. We had basically the same weapons they do. We had a lot of aircraft but air superiority in a situation like that is not worthless but it's next to worthless because an F4 Phantom can stay on station for maybe three or four minutes. I had one incident. This was one of the times that we actually did engage where I got a unit that was a significant size. We were able to round it up and actually capture the weapons and everything and a few people.

I had a Huey Helicopter support on that particular incident. The helicopters were worth something in isolated incidents but most of the time it was just us in the rice patties with M14s and them in the rice patties with AK-47s so it was sort of neutralized. I think that any time in any history you could do that if you're willing to disappear. You're not protecting any ground. You're not trying to protect the Strait of Hormuz or something like that. What you can do with the Destroyer or what you can do with air power or something like that because there were no front lines at all. Remember we had these tactical areas of responsibility. We were just trying to make the people safe from the terrorists. I lived in a village. I think it was 90 days. I tell people I didn't see another commissioned officer for 90 days. I'm not sure that's exactly right but it's close enough. It gets the point across.

We rented a cottage from these people. We provided them ... The rent was C-rations by the way and it worked because the dietary situation was

not real good with kids with running sores and I had two core man. We would feed them with the food. That stuff would clear up at least in that 90-day time frame and except for the language barrier I think the relationship with the people we were with was pretty good. We certainly liked them and we were safe there and they were too. However, when we left that village and I went back by there on patrol, maybe two or three weeks later, the VC had cut off the heads of the village elders and stuck them on posts on the corners of the village. We have the same kind of terrorism being rendered upon the Vietnamese population by the VC that we're seeing today. It's got to be very similar.

Interviewer: Was that common for a unit to take residency in a village that intimately with the people?

Dan: Yes, that's the way the Marine Corps worked. Remember I said strategic enclaves, that's what this was. That's what this village was. Was it 100%, no but that was the tactics that the Marine Corps chose to use and ICOR for the most part so lots of guys did exactly what I did. Periodically, they'd round us up. The reason we left that particular village was they round us up to go in some search and destroy mission or they think they had something we needed to do. An example is somebody got the ... I don't mean this as condescending. Somebody got the brilliant idea to make an amphibious assault in the Mekong Delta and so they took us all out of what we were doing and put us on ships and we did the rehearsals in the Philippines and then we went down there.

Speaker 3: Excuse me Ken, don't forget you're leaning in the shot when you-

Interviewer: Oh, oh I see.

Dan: At least it's not me, Ken.

Interviewer: Okay (Laughs).

Dan: Anyway, we made that assault in the Mekong Delta and it took us out of our "routine" if you will, which I don't think was a good idea for multiple reasons. First of all, they knew we were coming in, the intelligence ... How do I want to phrase this for accuracy? You couldn't keep anything secret whether it was because the Vietnamese forces that we were working with periodically talked too much or whether there were some other higher level penetration of what we were going to do I can't tell you. I was a lieutenant and a captain at [inaudible 17:49] but we made that amphibious assault. I was not on the first wave. It was virtually all by helicopters but when I came ashore we started going through some

school buildings and things like that. They had the date written on the blackboards of when we were coming so when we got there there was nobody there. I think we would have been better off to stay where we were "protecting" the rice patties but that's what they decided to do.

Interviewer: The whole ... I see so many crazy incongruent kind of things. This whole thing of search and destroy, going out, clearing an area, taking it for a period and then relinquish it and moving on and then later coming back in the same territory that you took six weeks earlier is now full with VC again. Did some of this just kind of drive you crazy? Did this make any sense? Was this any way to run a war?

Dan: It did drive you crazy. However, it was pretty successful when we stayed there and it was the only way to fight a guerrilla war because there are no fronts. It worked for the British. I believe in the long run it would have worked for us. It was tactically frustrating. How do I want to put this too? The situation here in the United States was so confused that it was debatable how much of that you wanted to deal with the second and third time. That was the frustrating part of it as opposed to this doesn't make any sense at all because it did make sense. The part that I think you just asked about is if we had stayed in those areas we would have been successful but then they pull us out to go do these other things. Now there's a bigger picture part of this that gets into what really happened to us there that I'll follow your lead on that.

Interviewer: I guess only because I've had some other people in this chair that ... For instance, the French were over there for 10, 20 years after World War II. Well, at least 15 years after World War II and had so many of the same experiences it was almost like we fell into the same pattern of behavior. I guess I remember seeing one fellow in the Wisconsin thing that said we set up over at Cu Chi, we're getting hit. We didn't know what was going on and then suddenly they find out they're sitting right out ... The base is right on top of a huge tunnel thing.

Dan: Right, right.

Interviewer: I said how our intelligence didn't know these tunnels were there. They were there for the ... They were the same tunnels that were under the French and yet we somehow had not figured that out. We were oblivious to [inaudible 20:55]. It just makes me wonder how we repeat so many of the mistakes that the French made.

Dan: My experience is just with the Marine Corps and ICOR and I think on balance we were doing the right things tactically. In the bigger picture, I

think we were ahead 44 to 14 in the fourth quarter and we just quit as a nation. Now, I'm okay with that. I understand the dynamics but just flat out objectively that's what I think. I think it was working and I think the proof in the pudding that it would have worked is what happened afterwards with the number of people who have ended up here and the number of people that ended up getting killed over there. We were ahead and we quit so I disagree with you to the extent that I think the tactics were pretty good. I spend a lot of time reading about what the French did. I never came to any real conclusions. I read Bernard Fall's stuff, Street Without Joy and it's hard to say what they did wrong. I think what we were doing in ICOR was working and I think had we continued with the program and we kept focused it would have been successful but in [inaudible 22:36] that came in we would have a lot fewer Vietnamese immigrants in the United States.

Interviewer: Just to add on this. I've had somebody in that chair say that in later years Ho Chi Minh admitted that that resumed bombing by LBJ, if it had gone on seven more days he would have capitulated. He would have surrendered.

Dan: That's right.

Interviewer: Of course this is wonderful 20/20.

Dan: That's all hindsight.

Interviewer: It didn't happen and he didn't quit.

Dan: Right. In the mid-'80s I read an article in the New York Times by their leading general. His name is Giap.

Interviewer: Who just died this week.

Dan: He just died this week. I have a little article in my briefcase that I brought with me here.

Interviewer: He's on front of the New York Times.

Dan: He was in the front of the Times and he said the Tet Offensive was a disaster. They were done and all we had to do was wait it out. I couldn't find the article before coming here. However, there was a note, Op-Ed or something like that by John McCain about Giap's death and he said exactly the same thing that had we kept going they were done. They were just at the end of their tether. We walked out of there just about

the time that it was all going to come to a conclusion. I'd say it's 20/20, easy to say that right now.

Interviewer: You mentioned something interesting about you had the M14s against the AK-47s. It was just about in '66 that this new horrendous weapon, the black rifle started appearing on the scene. Where you able to use the M16 and did it indeed inspire fear in the VC like it was reputed to have done.

Dan: I didn't. I had a AR-15. On my shoulder there's a shotgun because I didn't need to shoot. The troops were shooting. I wanted that if I get in real trouble. By the way I never pulled the trigger ever. We liked our M14s. They were more robust and had a bigger round. I didn't really like the AR-15. I don't think they ... I think the AK-47 was a better weapon period the end.

Interviewer: I read that book about Kalashnikov and I guess the famous saying don't deny [inaudible 25:06] was at some point there was a debate in the field that when the M16 made its appearance about that rifle versus the Kalashnikov, the AK-47 and apparently they had come into a village and the men were debating this and apparently there was some fresh graves, some VC that had been killed and the [inaudible 25:29], whoever was in charge said, "I'm going to resolve this argument once and for all. Dig that grave up," because it was customary to bury the man with his rifle and they dug them up and there was the AK-47 in the dirt and he said, "This is what this gun can do." The damned thing, they put it in there loaded with the body. He cocked it. It was full of dirt and the damned thing fired without fail.

Dan: Yes, believable.

Interviewer: That black rifle won't do that.

Dan: Won't do that.

Interviewer: Won't ever do that.

Dan: Yes, sir. Totally believable. Absolutely believable.

Interviewer: (Laughs).

Dan: Our M14s work they were fine but I would [inaudible 26:08] an AK-47 any day.

- Interviewer: How long were you out in the bush?
- Dan: I was out for 13 months. We went to the Philippines to rehearse for that amphibious assault, which was maybe two weeks but I spent the first period as a platoon leader and then I ended up with a rifle company. There were two of us that were pretty young but we had been out there a lot and had a lot of experience. I had a rifle company with 250 guys, an Amtrak and a tank for the better part of three months then we got more captains. I spent the whole time with a rifle battalion with the 1st battalion, 9th marines from start to finish. At the back end somebody took some pity on us, the guys who had been there that long and you didn't want to get shot in the last month you were there. That was not a good idea. They let me go visit our wounded guys as we got close to the end, which was very gracious. It was interesting because I got to Saigon and some other places that I really did want to see and it was not sightseeing. I don't mean to tell you was that glib if you will but it was better than being out there every day. I had maybe three or four weeks at the end where I got some relief.
- Interviewer: Describe Saigon in '66.
- Dan: A lot of French architecture, run-down. A lot of people living under corrugated sheets of metal on the streets. Serious poverty like nobody in the United States understands at all and there's a very distinct odor about third world countries that's a combination of poor fuels burning bamboo and that sort of stuff and dung. You could see where Saigon at one point was probably a pretty place. It wasn't a pretty place because of the way people were living and the nature of the destruction in the architecture. Then I get to Cam Ranh Bay, which is the Air Force which is a whole different ... It looked differently than we did.
- Interviewer: Excuse me, [inaudible 28:38] action are you back?
- Dan: Uh-hmm (affirmative).
- Interviewer: Okay. I guess when you were obviously spending that kind of time in the field, you knew that the enemy had to obviously use resourcefulness other than those AK-47s. They used all kinds of booby traps, et cetera. How did your men fare and how well did you prepare them for what they were going to encounter this rifle?
- Dan: Yeah, the booby traps were the biggest problem. I would say that 60% or 70% of my casualties were from booby traps not from anything else,

maybe more than that as I think this through with you here. You learn not to go through narrow areas. Sometimes you couldn't avoid it. I expect one patrol at night where we had maybe four of those kinds of incidents where you'd hit a tripwire. Where you couldn't get through a particular area. They were a huge problem and it was a constant state of anxiety and you just learned to live with it. You almost became fatalistic and the troops did too, the marines did too. We all knew what we were dealing with.

Everybody had the same exposure. Officers, the troops, the marines so you just did it and if you came back you came back and if you didn't you didn't. I don't mean to [inaudible 30:12] or to minimize that but that's how you dealt with it. After I got out of a hospital you feel invincible. It's really an interesting psychological phenomenon.

Interviewer: Tell you what I'm going to [inaudible 30:29] thing is.

Speaker 3: Are you ready Ken?

Interviewer: Okay, uh-hmm (affirmative).

Dan: You want me to wait.

Interviewer: No, go ahead.

Dan: We were out on an overnight patrol and we were all tired.

Interviewer: I'm sorry [inaudible 30:42] thing is just the [inaudible 30:44] technological break up here.

Dan: It's all right (laughs). Okay, I'm used to that.

Interviewer: (Laughs).

Dan: I grow trees for a living. Can they die (laughs)?

Interviewer: Okay.

Dan: We were out on an all night patrol and I had a lot of people. It was a bad patrol. Everybody was tired. This is probably 7:00 in the morning or something like that. We were hustling a little more than maybe we should have. The platoon had stopped and I was in the middle and I wanted to know what was going on so I headed up to the front and just about the time I got there one of my marines stepped through a barrier

across the road, which he shouldn't have done. When he did that, it was a booby trap, some kind of ... I'm not sure how big it was but it was big enough to get a couple of us. He lost his leg from the knee down. I got hit in the head, in the shoulder, in the stomach, in the leg, none of which were critical but all of which appeared to be relatively serious at the time. Then the helicopters came and got us all and took us to the hospital. He of course was gone and I got out of the hospital probably three weeks later and was back out in the field.

What I was telling you about that is it's really interesting. Invulnerable is not the right word but some sort of fear about that goes away in an odd way that it's hard to describe to you unless it's happened. From then on I just didn't really care. I cared but it was not a barrier to performance from that point on. I tell people today kind of with tongue-in-cheek but I think I'm serious is it's really important at 23 to learn that you're going to die because it affects the rest of your life and most people don't have that happening until they're in their 50s or 60s. From that standpoint it was a positive influence on what happened to me for the rest of my life but that's how I ended up in the hospital. Turned out to not be a big deal. I had blood shooting out of my arm about this far so that got my attention good. That was all.

Interviewer: It's funny my father is still alive. He's 91. He'll be 92 in a few weeks and he used to ... He didn't talk about much about World War II but I of course ... A, you didn't have to worry about it and now I'm beginning to understand it and I think I'm hearing this now.

Dan: That's exactly right. That's the attitude and whether you create that as a defense mechanism or whether that's ... I'm not a psychologist. I have a degree from the Naval Academy and was a marine but that's the end of it.

Interviewer: Obviously, we know the marines consider themselves sort of a special group as opposed to those army guys.

Speaker 3: Hey, who invited all these gremlins?

Dan: [Crosstalk 33:45]. (Laughs).

Interviewer: How did that ... I don't want to use the word superiority complex evolve with the marines but there always was this mindset that they were superior to those other branches. How did that represent itself when you were dealing and fighting alongside those other branches of the service?

Dan: I never fought alongside with the other branches of the service.

Interviewer: No army? You didn't run into army units?

Dan: Well, no.

Interviewer: You didn't coordinate any efforts?

Dan: Uh-uh (negative). We were totally ... That was a Marine Corps theater. Marine Corps had ICOR and the army had the other two cores, two and three, which were moving south. As a general comment, I'm extremely fond of West Pointers. Those guys are really good. In a lot of ways they're better trained than I think my guys are. The army's much bigger and therefore it has units that are not quite as selective but the Army Rangers and those guys First Airborne, those guys are every bit as good as any Marine Corps unit. It's the size. If you can keep it small and exclusive, you can engender that and I think the army guys and their elite cores, the Special Forces guys, they have the same thing. I don't think there's any difference at that level.

Interviewer: It was because the marines were really the first in there. This is '66. Your first I guess was protecting the airport at Da Nang.

Dan: Yes.

Interviewer: Then of course there was Ia Drang, right? That was the first big battle that was the Marine Corps.

Dan: Well, the first one that I really know about that was on the serious size was Khe Sanh and my guys left where we were at the back end. We were up along DMZ, north of way. When I came home my guys went to Khe Sanh and that was the first sort of serious almost World War II like encounter that the Marine Corps got into that I know about. I may be missing my history but that was the first one.

Interviewer: That was when the North Vietnamese regulars came into the-

Dan: Correct, that's right.

Interviewer: Do you believe that was a diversion by North Vietnam in preparation for Tet which followed literally weeks late to actually draw off some of the troops?

Dan: I never thought about it, I don't know.

Interviewer: That's been a theory that I ... Just a diversionary battle.

Dan: I don't know.

Interviewer: Would you look back on ... You were over there one tour?

Dan: I was one tour, right.

Interviewer: By the way, go ahead and now tell me ... You said that they ... What did you say? Didn't you say they wanted to ... They had the papers all ready for another.

Dan: Oh, I had a set of orders back. I was shocked that they let me resign, the Marine Corps. I really was. Most of the navy guys got extended, my classmates. They got extended for a year or so but they let us out, several of us. They said there was no support here and I looked at that and said, "Well, I don't think so," and they let us go. I had a set of orders back. I was a captain by then and as I said a little bit earlier the Marine Corps was leaving so who knows whether I would have had to go back out there or not but my tour had been relatively successful. I think I had a good strong background and a real good start in the Marine Corps but without the support at home I wasn't interested. I've done enough.

Interviewer: Describe what was life when you came back. The country was embroiled in this controversy of whether we should even be there and protesters. What was your reaction to all that?

Dan: I didn't have any trouble at all when I came back. I was early on ... Remember now, I came back in 1967 and some of the really nasty stuff didn't start until '68, '69 and by 1970 I was out of the marines. When I came home, I came through Los Angeles. My wife picked me up at BWI Thurgood Marshall about five in the morning and they had a couple of parties for me. My brother-in-law was an IBM salesman and he got all his guys together and so I had a pretty positive reception when I came back. I did do some speaking. Went around and spoke at a couple of colleges and to some Rotary clubs and things like that. That was pretty interesting and had some very pointed questions to ask and my stock answer was I'm a Marine Captain. I'm not the Secretary of State so I ducked them. I was happy to talk about the tactics and the things that I felt I had real expertise about but the politics it wasn't personal for me. I had a support network around me of people and I never, never experienced any real offensive behavior.

Interviewer: How did your Vietnam experience affect your later life, your career?

Dan: I had a huge amount of responsibility as a 23-year-old, 22-year-old and I think that's steered me towards things to do in life that were ... Where there was a lot of responsibility and where I was in charge and we had all these times there with no other officers and I get used to making my own decisions and that sort of thing. I'm in business for myself and that's the fun end of how it got there and that's the back end of where I am. In between those courses or road that you went through. I think that was the biggest single thing aside from the fact that I learned I was going to die and I said I'm not going to do things that I don't like doing. When I came back to Vietnam I said if it doesn't work I'll go find something else and had the initiative to go do that as a result or those experiences over there. That's a pretty big impact if you think about it. When I got out of the marines I went to work for IBM and very quickly it led me out of there. Now I'm a small businessman at 70 and I'm not going to retire.

Interviewer: Any health legacies from your experience or exposures? Maybe Agent Orange wasn't even a prevalent part of that in those early years.

Dan: I'm in really good shape. I however had heart surgery and I'm in the Veterans Administration System, which is pretty good by the way. I think anyway. I'm told that there's a direct link between some heart problems and Agent Orange. I didn't have a lot of exposure but there were some. I haven't done anything about it. That's another story. I'm told that I should and the reason I'm told that I should is if I would have another heart problem with the Agent Orange connection, the government will extensively take care of that and my wife keeps bugging me to go do it but I haven't. I have no lingering health effects at all. i don't think anyway.

Interviewer: When the country really ended up collapsing in '75 and [inaudible 41:56] came down and basically united the country, as you're looking at that political situation then, what was your reaction after having been so intimately involved in trying to "liberate" the south from the northern terrorist.

Dan: My reaction was all the people that came here and all the people at surrounding areas over there that were murdered afterwards and if my facts are correct and I've read a lot about that, I think it's a shame we quit. Is it a disaster we quit? No. Am I pragmatic about where things are and what you can and can't do? Yes. It just is what it is but I didn't think for a long time, I still don't today. I don't think it was a waste of time. I

just think that we were ahead and we quit and if I had enough authority I wouldn't have done that because we never lost. The John McCain article that I have in my briefcase basically says we never lost anything tactically or in a battle and we got beat in the war because we just quit and Giap said "to McCain" he said, "You were an honorable foe." I've never heard that before but I think that's right and that's the way I feel about my marines and that's the way I feel about the American effort. I think we were doing the right thing and just didn't have the patience to finish it off and okay with that. It's all right.

Interviewer: Have you any desire to revisit the country these decades later?

Dan: You know I almost did. I have a guy I play lacrosse with in school who organized a bicycle tour across Vietnam and I almost went. I'll tell you why in a minute. I got another guy who was a four-star marine general that we worked together after we got back from Vietnam at the Naval Academy Prep School in Bainbridge. It was in Bainbridge at the time. He organized a trip that was a little too formally organized for me but he talked to me. Let's go Dan, come on, let's go and I didn't. Now, [inaudible 44:16] I don't want to fly that far. It's a 13-hour plane ride and it's too much. I had a curiosity but not enough drive to really make it happen. Bicycle trip was really cool. The guy told me that trip was really cool. In retrospect I might like to have gone on the bicycle trip but not the other one. It's a pretty place. Of course you've never been.

Interviewer: I haven't been there, yeah.

Dan: It's a pretty place. There were beaches right off of the hospital where I was that were world class beaches and I'm told that some of them are developed. I don't know that that's true but you could see the potential there for some really, really interesting things and Hue was ... There was a fortress in Hue that I would love to go back and see but I like architecture and I like antiquity and this thing was really neat. I'm not going to do it. It's too far but yeah I've had a little bit of [inaudible 45:18] just never pushed the button.

Interviewer: In Hue by the way, was Hue mostly destroyed in that siege?

Dan: You know it was still pretty much intact when I was there and I don't know. I haven't seen any photographs of what happened to the citadel. It was a neat looking citadel. It was black, very wide walls with a moat around it and I would love to have had an architectural tour but we were bypassing it and hoping not to get shot at on the process, excuse me.

Interviewer: I guess a final summary. When you suddenly encounter somebody and they learn that you were over there and they want to know particularly a very younger person, what are your reactions when you think back on this journey of your life? Obviously, I think you've had a lot of positive experiences, a lot of things that changed your life, your viewpoints forever. I guess really its been all ... Can you say it's been all good from what you did go through over there?

Dan: Yes, but I'm a pretty positive person. Some people say Pollyanna. It's not right but ... You said when young people ask me? I'd say I think what I just told you a little earlier. We made an honest effort. We were ahead of the game and we just walked away. I try to portray that as a ... Something for them to watch out for. Now, I'm still not confident why we got involved there in the first place and that's a serious question. When I went on that speaking tour and when I came back that's why I try to stay away from the judgmental parts and just tell people how it was. Inevitably, you would be asked and whether the Gulf of Tonkin was contrived or not, whether the domino ... The domino effect proved to be somewhat correct in what happened in Laos and places like that after the fact, which is why I say we quit instead of withdrew because I don't think those things would have happened if we had run the complete route but we did and that's where we are.

My friends, the lacrosse player from Poly who went to West Point, he was one of the founding members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. He talked to me when I came back. I did not join that movement but I sort of stayed neutral. I wasn't positive either. I wasn't ashamed. I wasn't really proud. I was happy with my own performance but that was in the end of it as far as that goes. I was afraid that the story wasn't correct but I'll tell you because I've since talked to a couple other people. I have a memory of standing on the deck of the Iwo Jima before this amphibious assault and General Westmoreland came on deck. He would come and talk to the junior officers. The comment I remember making to him was general there's no light at the end of this tunnel.

I thought some of the things that were being sold to the press were inaccurate because you could see that. If you were in the infantry in the front line you knew then ... Remember I was there in very early parts that that was going to be a very long effort. It was going to be a 10 or 15-year effort. I got convinced later on that that 10 or 15-year effort would have been worth it but we didn't do it and that's where we are. Those are the facts so that's what I tell young people. When they ask me about that and then there's the personal side which we've talked about a little bit and

then there's the political side, which the first part I have a lot of expertise. The second it's just opinion. Mine's as good as anybody else's and not any better than anybody else's.

Interviewer: I did hear one thing that was strange and I was very surprised. I heard it on [inaudible 49:52] a few weeks ago when we were out there talking to ... Interviewing some vets like this. The one guy said, "Well, the weirdest thing for me when I came back was I've tried to join the VFW and my father was a World War II veteran and decorated. He was a member of that. I went to this club and I started getting [inaudible 50:14] from these World War II vets saying, 'You guys are the first guys who lost a war. You guys did all that other stuff over there. We heard about it. Drugs, baby killing and all that stuff.' They actually gave this guy such grief that he ... Then his father who was a prominent member of that club stood up and basically told all these other VFW members, "You should be ashamed treating another veteran like this with this kind of remark."

The fellow said it did improve after his father made this case for his son but he said, "You know, at that point, they were starting to form their own Vietnam Veterans of America Chapters and so to hell with them," and they formed their own chapter out in Cumberland, which by the way happens to be the largest chapter in the state. When he told me this story I had not heard of this. Did you ever run into anything like this with other veterans of other wars?

Dan: No. First of all, we weren't baby killers. I don't know where that myth ever developed. We were pretty careful. Where we started this conversation. My marines were really good with the Vietnamese and my core men actually help their children. I feel very comfortable with that aspect of what we did. Now, we were trying to concentrate where they lived and therefore some of the abandoned places you either destroyed or something happened with them. Where the people were, the relationships I thought were pretty positive so we weren't baby killers. Anybody says that I just ... I [inaudible 51:53] at all. I wouldn't [inaudible 51:59] that but I will tell you that I also ... There's something for me off putting about the VFW and I can't put my finger on it and really wasn't ... I never got interested in that sort of thing. My follow on have been with the guys I served with and that's the extent of it.

I run into marines here and there or army guys here and there. I have a classmate who was a Riverine who was in the navy who's the real deal. He's got two or three Purple Hearts and a Silver Star and the whole business. We talked about those guys. I talked about it with those guys

but I've never been interested in standing around the bar talking about ... Most of the guys who did ... This is not going to come out right, Ken but I'll tell you anyway. Most of the guys that stand around the bar and do that kind of stuff never got shot. I'm sorry. I apologize for that so get you a little bit of the attitude. You have to forgive me for that.

Interviewer: Sort of mission creep that [crosstalk 53:02].

Dan: You know, it's all right. I was with a guy two weeks ago. He came to the navy as a football player. He was a [inaudible 53:13] lacrosse player like I was too. We both took our commissions in the Marine Corps and he's the real deal, this guy is the real deal. He got over run and then he slit open the stomach of some animal, a cow or something like that and hid in it for about 36 hours or he wouldn't be around today. We just sort of pass over those things and smile at each other and move on so I'm not a VFW guy. You have to let me off of that one. I'm sorry.

Interviewer: That's quite all right. Dan, I want to thank you for sharing these stories with us.