

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
VIETNAM WAR

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O.H. 1709

Vincent Darcangelo
Interview
By
Marc Hall
On
December 21, 1994

Vincent Darcangelo

Vincent Darcangelo was born on February 28, 1948 in Greenville Pennsylvania. His parents were Peter R. and Virginia Darcangelo. He attended Mercer High School in Mercer, Pennsylvania. In 1976 he graduated from the Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio with a Bachelor of Science in elementary education.

He entered the United States Air Force in April of 1967. In the Air Force he did duty as Military Police and saw service in Korea. On April 16, 1971, he was discharged.

Vincent Darcangelo is currently employed as a Veterans' training and employment representative. He is a member of several organizations including the Mercer County Vietnam Era Veterans and Mercer County Disabled American Veterans. His interests include sports and POW/MIA issues.

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MH: This is an interview with Mr. Vincent Darcangelo, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, Vietnam Veterans Project by Marc Hall. The interview is taking place at West Middlesex V.F.W. Post, West Middlesex, Pennsylvania. It is December 21, 1994 at approximately 7:15 P.M. Ok Mr. Darcangelo, I would like to begin by asking you a little bit about your background, where you grew up, parent's names, a little bit like that.

VD: I was born and raised in Mercer, PA, my parent's were Pete and Virginia Darcangelo. I grew up with one brother, I was the oldest, I had one brother and one sister.

MH: How did you come about to be in the military?

VD: Well at the time my parent's sort of, when I graduated high school I was a like a dork, I didn't know, I didn't have any sense of direction. I didn't have any sort of structure, I graduated high school in 1966, at the time the military was hot and heavy, the draft was hot and heavy, and my parent's, my father especially, really pressured me into going into school. So I started school and sort of like my heart really wasn't in it for me, I wasn't doing it for me, and it didn't work out. I wasn't ready for school. I didn't want to go to school, so I considered my options, and there weren't too many options. Because if you weren't in school, and you weren't married, or have a kid, you're going to get drafted. Instead of somebody else determining my future, I wanted to determine my future. I went and talked with all four branches, all four recruiters in the military. And I had scores high enough to get into the Air Force, which was my choice. So I enlisted for four years in the U.S. Air Force.

MH: What made you decide, why was the Air Force your choice?

VD: I looked at, well the Army and the Marines pretty much sleep in mud, sleep in tents

they build, they dig a ditch, and that's where they sleep. The Air Force has nice barracks and bunks and dryness, and Navy, you're not out on a ship for six months. So anyway what suited me was the Air Force. I think probably more than anything, one of my closest friends that I had going through school, right off the bat he went into the Air Force and I was, I communicated with him. We wrote letters and everything while he was in, and pretty much he really enjoyed it and basically because of what he told me, I used that as a referral, and I took his advice. So I think I was, that was probably the strongest factor in the decision.

MH: Can you tell me a little bit, in this area at this time, Mercer, PA, what was the attitudes towards Vietnam? Did you hear about it a lot? Was it in the news a lot? Talk about it a lot with friends? How did that work?

VD: Well I tell you, it was in the news every night, the six o'clock news, they had body counts. Vietnam was the first time a war was actually brought right into your supper tables. As family's were sitting down for supper they were seeing the actual trauma and horrors of war right on their TV sets. Yeah and everyday, of course Mercer County was hit very hard. We lost forty Mercer Countians to the war. Yes, everybody was well aware of what was going on.

MH: Was there any kind of fear than? You said you graduated in '66, what was the senior class attitude, a lot of them going out? A lot of them trying to get into college to avoid it or...

VD: Well I really think some of them chose to get married, some of them went to school to avoid the draft, that was a fact of life. I'm not saying they were right or they were wrong. I did what I had to do, and in fact to make a joke out of it when I decided I was not going to pursue college, my last day I said I wonder where I am going to be stationed a year from now? It came to be. I was in the military, stationed a year from then.

MH: Where did you go for your basics?

VD: I went to San Antonio, Texas, Lackland Air Force Base Training Center.

MH: Do you remember what the date was?

VD: April 19, 1967. We were up all night, at the time they had a train station in Youngstown. They sent me by train up to Cleveland, from Cleveland we took a plane to San Antonio. I'll never forget, we traveled all night long, we got there the next morning, and what was to become our mother, our father, and all things to us was the pleasant person with a smile, the training instructor was there to meet us and greet us, and in no uncertain terms he welcomed us to the Air Force. And I will never forget that. I consider my six, we had the basic training was six weeks, the most miserable six weeks of my life. They were, they treated us like shit. I mean there is a purpose to it. There is a very useful purpose to it, and I managed to

get through the six weeks okay, and then we were all expecting to get home after the six week basic training, but they assigned me into be a Security Policeman, and the Security Policeman School, just my luck, is right there in Lackland, also San Antonio, Texas. The course was already, the tech school was already filled up, I don't know if I'm going beyond what you want to know?

MH: I can always, I'll come back to, go ahead and keep on.

VD: Ok, so they put us on two weeks of what I call shit details. I was even more miserable than basic training, at least basic training you had a plan, you knew where you were going. We were in this PAT program, Personal Awaiting Training, well we weren't even in the school yet. We were waiting on this, two weeks we did this shit detail, miserable. Then we finally got in the tech school. Ok, we got a six week tech school, you're going to graduate, here you're going to get to go home on leave. Well okay, so now I've been there since April, six weeks, I went down there for six weeks, April now it's into June. We graduate from basic training. Now I'm into July, it's tech school, I'm finally in it. So we're going to be going home the end of July. Okay great, I'm homesick, right? Somebody makes a decision, what they were doing is sending these security policemen to a base for a year, then sending them to Nam'. All Security Policemen were going to Nam', and before they would send you over there, it's a combat situation in a combat zone, they would send you back to Lackland Air Force Base put you through this combat preparedness course, and it's basically a survival course, and you were taught hand to hand physical combat, all aspects of combat, just like being an Army Infantry man. So here I was again expecting a certain date, I finally get out of Texas, and it was pushed back again. So while I was there I had to go through the Combat Preparedness Course.

MH: Ok, can you compare your combat preparedness course to your basics? What were the differences?

VD: More specific. Basic training they would drill you and drill you, and everything had to be just right. If you didn't have a button on they would terrorize they entire barracks. And in barracks you were buffing and shining, and polishing, and white glove inspection, and all that stuff. When it got down to the actual combat preparedness course there was no BS, you had to, you virtually you had to qualify in M-16, M-16 machine gun. You had to tear them apart, put them back together. We had a simulated combat with that have the bunkers and the explosions going off all around you. You had to get through an obstacle course at night, like underneath, and you had live fire going over your head. And you saw the tracer rounds going over your head. So you had to (laughing) you didn't want to stand up.

MH: No.

VD: It was indeed, our own little taste of what combat, that's what the name of the course was; Combat Preparedness.

MH: In your first basic did they train you in weapons there ever?

VD: Yeah, I believe, yeah sure, we had to qualify with the M-16.

MH: Really?

VD: Yeah, we were out at the range.

MH: When you were in your first basics did you get to sort of choose where you wanted to go afterwards, or did they just assign you to the security thing?

VD: The tech school?

MH: Yeah. How did that work?

VD: When you went in, you were guaranteed a certain occupation. Now in my case it wasn't that way. I was guaranteed electronics, before I went in, and then through slots and problems I'd already, now this is before I went in, I'd already quit my job. I was supposed to, I'd had a job at an A&P store in Mercer, I'd given the two week notice because I was expecting to go into the military. I wanted a week to just blow off and have some fun. That's when they told me, the recruiter called me at home, and said "I'm sorry that slot is gone in electronics, I can't get you in there, however, there is a slot in what they call the general field, he said you qualified for the general field too. So if you want, I can't guarantee what you will end up doing, you might end up being a cook or a cop, or something like that." And I said, "well I wouldn't mind being a cop. So it's pretty much, I left myself that part of it, I had the opportunity to say no you promised me electronics and now you're weaseling out of it. I had the opportunity, but I didn't do it.

MH: Ok, can you tell me, a little more specifically, what a day was like in your tech school? From like when you woke up, maybe can you walk through it?

VD: Five-fifteen they turned the lights on, and the drill sergeant came in and terrorized everybody, if you weren't up fast enough they would throw you out of your bed, and throw your bed apart, tear your bed apart. Very hostile, and a lot of times, what you had to do, everybody helped each other to get through it, because you had to. They gave you more things to do than you actually had time for, so you learned the concept of teamwork early, right in basic training and in tech school. Then you got up and went in formation, of course, properly into the chow hall, as you were going through the chow line they were already watching you, looking at you, making sure everything is just right; every buttons buttoned, every I is dotted and T is crossed. Then, oh my, it seems like we marched and drilled all morning, then we would go to lunch and march and drill some more.

MH: The people training you, were they Air Force personnel or were they Army or...?

VD: They were Air Force.

MH: They were actual Air Force personnel. Were you the only guys in there, the security people, or were there pilots and other people?

VD: Well in the technical school we were all Security Policemen, we were all going through the same school.

MH: While you were in all your basics, from the beginning, what was their attitude towards Vietnam there? Did you talk about it a lot, was it a constant looming thing?

VD: We knew it was going, it was very prominent in the military. Some people were going to luck out and get Europe, some people were going to get other parts of Asia, other people, the majority, were going to end up in Nam', we all knew that. When we went, especially through the Combat Preparedness Course, that was the main topic. They were gearing you for Nam', and they even told us how many of us out of this many weren't going to come back. Your going to come back in a body bag.

MH: Why do you think they told you things like that? Was it to try to...

VD: So you paid attention. You damn well paid attention. Like when we were in the hand grenade throwing. We had one guy, good thing it was a dummy, cause when he threw it, it went about two feet, and it was just a smoke bomb, what it ended up being, but had it been a real grenade, you would have blown about ten guys up.

MH: That wouldn't have made him too popular there. (laughing)

VD: Well like I say, we knew when you were going through that thing, that you damn well better pay attention.

MH: Some of the standard questions I ask at this point is, you hear about this era, and all books and movies and stuff, and things that come up are drugs and race relations usually. Start with the drug question. Did you ever see any of it, was it there, what can you tell me about that?

VD: It was there. I chose not to be a part of the drugs, others sometimes, like in the barracks situation, you would go knock on their door in the barracks and there would be a haze of blue smoke in the room, and you know what's going on. Of course you know just by association what they are doing. It's not a problem now in today's military, they have random testing, and you never know where, when or who. So therefore, it's basically the veterans, the people in the military now are clean, the majority. Every now and then, but while I was there, I saw, in fact, I ended up being, at one time a party to a deal, and I didn't even know it. A friend of mine, quote "friend", asked me to go downtown, this is when we were overseas,

and he asked me to go downtown with him, he had to buy a pair of shoes. We went through back streets and dark streets, and some grubby looking people he was connected with. So he came out with a shoe box and I said oh okay he got the shoes. So anyway we took a taxi back onto the base, and I didn't know why exactly he wanted a taxi, he kept the shoebox on the floor, and under me. He said here keep these under your feet. If there was ever a setup and a completely innocent person, I didn't know it. He told me later, and I never went down into the village with this guy again. But that shoebox was full of grass, which he shipped back to the States. He was sending boxes back to the States.

MH: In your security training...

VD: Oh the race thing, I'm sorry.

MH: Ok, well I'll get to that in a second, a question just popped in...

VD: Ok.

MH: In your security training did they teach you to deal with drug problems or anything like that, was like, the training was it more like police style duties or was it more like...

VD: I would say of my four years, three years of it was security work, where we were guarding an aircraft or where we were guarding a specific point, like maybe perhaps a bomb dump, perhaps a nuclear weapon, or an entry point into a restricted area. Now I did have one year of my military was actually law enforcement, and we were taught about contraband, we weren't really taught specifics about, well this is crack this is cocaine, you know this is marijuana, it didn't get in depth.

MH: Now move onto the race question. How did that work?

VD: There was racism in the military, in spite of all the consciousness that was brought to the surface due to Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement in the mid '60's. There was still evidence of racism in the military, and I've got to say, just like I did not fall into the trap of drugs, I also, I guess you can say it was an eye opening experience of me. I was brought up in a household where racism was, my dad would speak about this and this and this, blacks this and niggers that, and I was brought up that way, thinking. When I finally got into the military, I lived with these guys, I worked with these guys, and they did the same things I was doing, and they got through it the same way I was getting through it. There wasn't no difference. I've got to say it changed my attitudes from when I went into the military.

MH: Right. Did you ever see any problems, fights, things like that, was like I said, the movies are the things most people see and there's always, they make that point, that there was a division there and there was...

VD: You mean black white?

MH: Yeah, usually it's black white problems.

VD: There were problems, in other words when, especially overseas, there were certain clubs that were black clubs only, and there were certain clubs that were white clubs only, in other words the blacks didn't go into the white clubs.

MH: Where did you go, well let's say when did you get out of all your training? Do you remember the date?

VD: August 4th 1967, I got out of, I finally completed my combat school onto my first base.

MH: Did you get a leave?

VD: I got a leave, I..

MH: Did you come back here?

VD: I got about a two-week leave. I went to Mercer.

MH: What were the attitudes of the civilians towards you coming home from the military? Did you notice anything around here, with any problems?

VD: Well I looked awful funny, because now all of the sudden I had a short haircut, and it was a noticeably different now. It was definitely a turning point in my life, going into the military, and going through basic training, and going to tech school, going through combat school, and like I say you weren't the same, your friends weren't the same, and here these guys were running around with, the biggest problem, especially after coming back from overseas, when you came back from overseas things that you've seen and gone through, and now your friends that maybe are still going to college, and their biggest problem or concern is are they going to have a date for a dance on Saturday night. You can't relate anymore to them, and they can't relate to you. Very different, it's like you've gone on and surpassed them in a lot of ways.

MH: How about the other people, people in stores, gas stations, stuff did you ever get any kind of harassment or anything or any kind of attitude?

VD: No, I can't say harassment.

MH: Where did you go after your leave?

VD: My first base was in, I was stationed at a small detachment based in Atlantic City,

New Jersey, which I had pretty good duty. I was a security policeman there, the most notable thing that happened, I guess while I was there, Martin Luther King was assassinated. And Atlantic City is very black, Philadelphia is very black, and were right, Atlantic City is real close to Philly, and we were all called off leave, if you were on leave and put on alert status, we were working twelve hour days, they bolstered security, because we figured there were going to be riots, which there were all over the country, and a lot of the times, they targeted the military installations.

MH: Really?

VD: Yeah.

MH: Did you have any problems there?

VD: No, Atlantic City, like I said, we didn't have any problems at the military installation. It was little known, I bet Atlantic City didn't even know we were there. It was only a small detachment, we were a fighter interceptor squadron. We had about four fighters up there.

MH: How long were you there?

VD: I was there for about a year. I was there from August '67 until August '68.

MH: Where did you go after that?

VD: Well what happened is, everybody was going to Nam', like I said, and the order you got to your first base, they were giving you about one year in the States, twelve months, and then you were getting your orders for Nam'. You would get your orders about three months a head of time so you had plenty of time to prepare. And the order that you came, that's how the order of the orders came. I was next me and my buddy Marty Farabaugh from Johnstown, PA. We, believe it or not, we went through step by step together. Basic training, the first night of basic training, we're talking, there's this guy we hit it off right off the bat, this guy is from Johnstown, PA. I'm from Mercer, and we hit it off. We'd go through every step. Basic training, PAT, tech school, combat school, our first base was Atlantic City, New Jersey, and we know that we're next for the orders to Nam'. Then North Korea takes the spy ship, Pueblo, you may have read about it. Just like that. They called me off my post one day and said Darcangelo what did you do. I said nothing why? They said First Sergeant wants to see you right now. So I went and saw the First Sergeant. He said you are to process out immediately, you're going to Korea. You don't get any leave time, you get eight travel days. I got travel time, they give you, they allow you three hundred miles a day, and my departure was Seattle, Tacoma, Washington. So I ended up with eight days travel time, and that's another story there. So I did get to spend about a week at home, me and Marty both, we met at Pittsburgh Airport and flew out to Seattle, Tacoma. We got

to, we were supposed to go to Fort Lewis Washington, an army base, there was such a build up, so fast they got so many people so fast going to the same place, they didn't even have billiting for us. They had to put us up in a place called George Washington Hotel in downtown Seattle. Yeah so we stayed there for two days, and apparently it was a real expensive hotel, so they found this other place. This other place in Tacoma, Seattle and Tacoma are real close, so they put us up in this motel for a couple of days. They didn't have enough planes to take everybody to Korea as fast, so they had more people, they didn't have billiting, they didn't have planes, to take them. We had no idea how soon we would be in the States, when we were leaving. Of course you get your mind all set, and now your all ready to go, and now you don't know, you don't know. While we were there I had my first taste of the actual war. I had been kind of isolated from it other than hearing about it, seeing it. While we were at Fort Lewis we saw the people coming back from Nam'. We saw people coming back with no legs, and talking to them. We talked to them and they told us about their experiences. We saw things at the airport that weren't pretty.

MH: Were you glad you were going to Korea rather than, or...

VD: Well at the time, if you want to know the truth, I didn't expect that I was coming back alive.

MH: Really?

VD: I thought I was going over, that's the way I looked at it. So whether it was Nam' or Korea, I didn't expect to come back alive.

MH: Where did you go from there?

VD: I spent thirteen months in Korea, by the way me and Marty stayed together for the first two and a half years. When we were in Korea, when you're coming back to the States from oversees they give you a choice, they try and give you, they ask you two or three bases where you would like to go, what part of the country do you want to go. I wanted to go back to the East part of the country, and he chose to go to the West coast. He wanted a California base, and we each got our wish. They sent him to San Francisco, I think some base out there. They sent me to Bangor, Maine, so my last year and a half was up in Bangor, Maine.

MH: What did you do there?

VD: Security, more security.

MH: What kind of problems did you run into in Bangore?

VD: Really there were no problems at all. We just finished off our tour. I did my last year and a half. Like you say, when you go in as a nineteen year old kid, then you

come back from overseas now your twenty-one, you've had two years, you've done a hell of a lot. Your military experience is probably the most memorable and impressionable in your entire life that you go through. And now so I came back from overseas, I'm twenty-one I only have another year and a half to go, and basically you start preparing yourself for being a civilian again, and counting the days down until you are a civilian again.

MH: Ok go back and hit some spots as I think of them. When you got your orders cut to go to Korea, and you said you had a three month period, you knew basically you were going out...

VD: Well I didn't get three months, the people going to Nam' they knew well ahead of time, but in my case they said start out-processing immediately, you're going. I had like three days, they wanted me to get done in two days and I didn't get done by Friday. I had to wait for some reason for the following Monday before I was actually processed out.

MH: Was there any kind of refresher courses for the Combat Readiness or whatever or they just expected you to remember everything?

VD: Yeah which is absurd, because you don't remember it for a whole year.

MH: As a in Air Force security when you got sent, when you were going over to go to Korea, were you issued weapons or anything to have with you?

VD: No, not during transport, when you got there. In fact even when you were there and Stationed, every day we had to check in, you got a weapon, and you had to check in your weapon at the end of your shift.

MH: What kind of weapons did they issue you?

VD: The majority of the time, depending on what post you had, you carried an M-16. And other days depending on what post you had you carried a 38. So it either could be a handgun or an M-16. Some days you carried an M-16 and an M-60 machine gun.

MH: When you got to Korea, can you tell me what an average day was like there and your duties?

VD: It was sort of like the worst of both worlds. In the summertime you had the monsoons and the rainy season and the mud, and all the tropical weather and the tropical bugs. When we got there, here again you had that massive influx of people. They didn't have billiting for us in Korea either. We basically lived in a tent, I got there in August, which was the monsoon season. You would wake up in the morning, and your bunk was about this high and the rain was up about this high. So when you got off y our bunk, you're basically up to your knees in water.

Shower facility, they had one big mass shower for everybody for everybody to use. The bugs, we had these nets, that we had over our bunks to try and keep the bugs off. That was the summertime. Then in the wintertime it was frigid cold. Like I said the worst of both worlds. In the summer it was tropical, and in the winter, Korea is known renowned for its cold winters. And it was.

MH: Where were you stationed?

VD: Osan Air Base.

MH: Osan, do you remember where about in the country that was?

VD: Yes, about seventy miles south of Seoul.

MH: Ok.

VD: Seoul is the big capital city.

MH: What was the attitudes like there, especially concerning North Korea at that point. Was there a lot of worry they were going to try and come back across or...?

VD: We had intelligence reports everyday they read to us. And being a security guard, a lot of times I worked the main gate. A lot of people didn't know it back here, of course Vietnam got all the headlines all the reporting. In Korea, about one a day an American was dying, was being killed, and especially the bases, the security people at the bases. They were sitting targets, they were out there letting traffic in or traffic out, looking for contraband, they would just pick them off every now and then.

MH: So it was sort of a guerilla type situation?

VD: Yeah, and it was, and we knew as we were letting people enter the base, there was a procedure for somebody going, they hired a lot of civilians, the Koreans, and we knew that one out of ten was a Communist, under cover, looking at this, they knew every little part of that base. The problem is, how do you know which one's the tenth one?

MH: Yeah. Did you ever run into any problems then, in security and that?

VD: Yeah, I ran into a couple problems.

MH: Really?

VD: Yeah. One night I thought I was going to get killed. I was on vehicular patrol, of course law enforcement is the thing, there was these Korean construction vehicles running all over the base. There was a certain part of the base where they had

their construction company. They kept all their construction equipment and everything, and this one vehicle had no lights at all, at night all the lights were out. So well I gotta tell this guy to get his lights fixed, we can't have that. So I followed this vehicle all the way to their construction sight. As we got out, as the guy got out, all of a sudden my jeep, I have a little jeep, my radio doesn't work. I tried to radio in that I was, where I was and the purpose I was pulling over a Korean truck what for. I was surrounded by about twenty Koreans. I mean they surrounded my vehicle. One of them put his hand on the door. That was the first time, and the only time, I actually took the strap off my 38. They saw me take the strap off my 38, I really, they sort of backed off, and I said well I'm only going to give you a warning this time to get those lights fixed. (laughing) So very relieved I got the hell out of there.

MH: So do you think they were just doing that to intimidate you because you were American police or...

VD: It worked.

MH: there was Communist working in there?

VD: Oh, I'm sure there were, of course there were.

MH: What else can you tell me about Korea? What can you remember any?

VD: I did a few things, well of course the base there is a lot of money on the base, American money, and the banks on the base they routinely had money runs sometime, and all the money had to go to Seoul to the main banks in the country. I did a few money escorts, where they locked me and an M-16 in the back of the truck, and we went to Seoul. I came back with, I don't know how much money was on there.

MH: Have any kind of problems with that, any incidents?

VD: No, no incidents. Basically they probably knew there was at least one or two guards in those vehicles.

MH: You stayed on the same base the entire time?

VD: At one point there was, we had an intelligence report once again, that indicated a huge force were coming to the South, and I was on a mobile response team. They had us on a tarmac of the runway in a bus waiting to get loaded on a plane. We had no idea where we were going, all I knew is we had our M-16's. We were going out, there was about twenty of us to meet this force. And all the combat training you tried to remember it.

MH: Now like that response force was that all Air Force personnel or...

VD: It was the security police.

MH: So like an auxiliary, sort of a back up kinda...

VD: Well I don't know about back up, we were there to engage, I mean that's where they were going take us to engage this force coming down. And for two days that's where we stayed, right on that. We were right there on the runway ready to get on that plane, not knowing where we were going to go, how big the force was, how many more of us were there, than the twenty.

MH: In general how accurate were your intelligence reports? When you got reports that something was going on?

VD: Every day we got them, and I would say they were pretty...

MH: They were pretty accurate?

VD: Pretty accurate.

MH: While you were there, in Korea, was the attitude towards Vietnam? Was there any thought of it still there, or was North Korea more of an overriding that you didn't really care what was going on?

VD: No there were a lot of people in Korea that had been to Vietnam already, or were going to Vietnam again. Here again we knew it was there, you were conscious of it the whole time. We read the papers.

MH: I'll probably just skip around here now, chronologically things. When you got out, when you finally became civilianized again, how were you treated as a veteran then? Traveling home, things like that, did you run into any problems or...

VD: As a whole, I think, things were different around here. I had met my wife and we got married, and on the whole Vietnam veterans were treated like shit. The VFW clubs, for example, at the time they were all pretty much run by World War II veterans. Don't get me wrong I have nothing but high regard for those guys, because I think every generation has their problems they have to deal with, and they'll step forward and do what they have to do, and the World War II veterans truly, I think saved world peace, world freedom, because the Japanese and German war machines had indeed intended on world conquest. Well these guys, it's like everybody's father, I think he tells you he had to walk a mile to school everyday and home up hill both ways. And these World War II people were in charge of the veteran's clubs, and a lot of the Vietnam vets and the people that really saw shit, they didn't have a place to go. They couldn't even join a veteran's club, because these World War II guys were calling us crybabies. Even people we have something in common with, we tracked the same trails they did, but the things that

were being said about the Vietnam veterans, there was just as many acts of heroism in Vietnam as there were in World War II, but they would hear about the acts of cowardness or Meli Massacres. Even our comrades, places where you would want to go to, and try and talk about your experiences, you couldn't talk to anybody, because these World War II guys were taunting, or calling names. So some VFW clubs didn't even want Vietnam veterans as members.

MH: Did they consider the Korean situation combat, as far as pay and everything went?

VD: Yeah there was a combat zone. When I got out, I joined Hickory VFW, I was an active member, not a social member. I was a real member, and Korea was considered a foreign war. I was awarded the US Expeditionary Medal for my Korea service.

MH: Question on the media. While you were actually in the military, I'm assuming you had access to news and short all that stuff, how did it seem the media was handling their version of things as compared to what you saw actually happening in whatever military situations or as you said when you talked to people coming back over and things like that?

VD: It was liberal slanted.

MH: Really?

VD: It's like the people in our organization and myself, I'm proud of what I do. At the time going through it, it was almost like, like these guys coming back from Nam', like is coming back from Korea. They didn't know if we were coming back from Korea or Nam', a lot of people were scorned. The people were indifferent to you. Some of them got spat on, some of them were told change into your civilian clothes, they're really hostile today. Really. You would be greeted with the baby killer things, and somebody pansy ass selling flowers would call you the nicknames and everything. Pardon the language, but some of my inner most feeling came out. They had a point, there was, the country was divided there was no question about it. There were those that chose to serve, there were those that chose to burn their draft cards, there were those that chose to go to Canada, there were those that evaded the military in one-way or another, and they just got tired of the war. Every night six o'clock news, seven o'clock news here comes the body counts. America just tired of it. Here again you go back, I hate throwing back to World War II, but in World War II you could see the pursuing armies, how much they progressed today, hey well we took France, we retook Italy today, you can see the progress on a map. In Vietnam you could fight for a hill or fight for a village, you'd maintain it you'd control it, then you'd leave, and then two weeks later here you are fighting again for the same damn position, same hill, more body bags, and over the time. Of course Vietnam War was the longest of them all. The American public tired of it, and I really think the protestors didn't realize what they were doing, these protestors, instead of supporting the guys that were going over there, making the

sacrifice, and the Vietnam veterans had to make every sacrifice just as much as in any World War II, any war you got to make sacrifices. These guys instead of supporting them, they were protesting the war, which hurt the effort encouraged the enemy, it gave them more ammunition for propaganda and more how do you say it resolve to outlast us. They knew we had problems inside. The problem is they took these protestors had them on film, and they assumed that was the attitude of the whole country. Which it wasn't of course. I really think the protestors thought they were doing something right. They thought they were doing good, they didn't realize the damage they were doing and what they were doing to the military person's moral.

MH: When you're in Korea, how did South Koreans treat you as American military?

VD: I'll tell you wherever there is a military installation there's money, there's big money. The average Korean, I understand, their monthly income was like thirty dollars a month, and that's what a couple hundred dollars a year. Now you get all of the sudden a military installation, wherever there is a military installation there's jobs, and there's big money, so they looked at us, I really think, although with disdain, with the handout from providing goods and services.

MH: Now when you're in Korea what kind of media were you exposed to? Did you get most of your news from America, did you ever have access to Korean media? Anything translated?

VD: Good question, good question. The information we received was all sanitized. We saw, and I hate censorship to this day. I despise censorship. We saw, the only access we had was the Stars and Stripes.

MH: Really?

VD: Occasionally, of course you had the local movie. I remember going to a few Korean movies, while I was over there. We saw pretty much what they wanted us to see.

MH: I was wondering if there was any sort of attitude to the fact that there were also South Korean combat troops in Vietnam, and here we are in Korea defending their borders and here they are sending their own troops out to fight somewhere else. Whether that was ever brought to attention or...

VD: We were aware that they were on our side over there.

MH: Let me flip this over. You were in during the first Tet offensive in '68. What can you tell me about that? How was that handled by the military news, things like that? Did it have any effect on what was going on?

VD: Well to us it was a great victory. All we heard, yeah we had casualties, we had

great casualties, but they had three times the casualties, and we're like all right we're shooting those yellow bastards. What I didn't realize at the time was the Tet offensive was probably what turned opinion on the Vietnam War and the Vietnam veterans. It ended up being a big moral victory for the Vietnamese, because they saw what happened in this country.

MH: But as far as your day to day what was going on, was there any kind of heightened readiness?

VD: Oh yeah we were aware. Some were getting sent over TDY, temporary duty over there.

MH: Actually at the moment that's probably all the questions I have up here. Is there anything, any stories you have, or anything we didn't cover? Anything you would like to say to end off?

VD: No. I don't know what to say, other than the Vietnam Veterans in general, as compared to other era veterans, I keep going back to the WW II guys. They didn't end up with some of the problems some of my comrades had. The average World War II vet when he was in the service was twenty-six years old. The average Vietnam Vet in combat was 19.2 years old. After the WW II guys were all done, and the fighting was over, they basically had a boat ride home and the average voyage home was twenty-six days. During that time, the twenty-six day voyage, they basically it was like a decompression unit. That unit when it went over it went over as a unit. They were all together, they fought, they all had the same experiences, every day, every battle they went through together. They came back together as a unit, and they were able to talk and put their experiences in perspective. The Vietnam Vet was known as an individual. He went over for three hundred and sixty-five days. On the three hundred and sixty-fifth day he could have been in the middle of the battle, and been airlifted out to go home. He could have been processed out, discharged, and back on his back steps on his back porch in seventy-two hour time. Now he, he hasn't had a chance to talk to anybody, he hasn't had a chance to put his experience in perspective. In other words yes I've been to war, I've been to battle, but those days are over now. I'm back to being a civilian I can't go around killing people anymore. The evidence of what ended up being symptoms of PTS, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, came out. What the guy did he couldn't talk about it, he kept everything inside, and he had what we call a numbing of emotions. In other words, here he was, if you want to call it the John Wayne Syndrome, most of our fathers were WW II Veterans, and we grew up watching John Wayne movies. And they were the heroes and the good guys, and they were always on the side of right, and they always got the bad guys. And that was me, I'm a good guy. And there was no question on what we had to do, and what the majority of us did. Then to come back into the country after making the sacrifices we had to make, and be treated like we were treated, and then to have the problems that we had to deal with. Some people have never recovered. Most of us, this is the problem, I think the media puts it into, for awhile there was a

tremendous amount of stereotype. Another crazy drug filled vet getting on with a gun, shooting people. For awhile that was the stereotype, and I really think what changed the attitude of this whole country was when we opened the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington D.C. That is now the most visited monument in all of Washington D.C. Like I say most of us, I think in our group I'm the only one with a college degree, I'm the only one that used the G.I. Bill, out of all of our members. Some of us stayed involved on certain issues, many of us it's not over yet. The POW/MIA issue is a major, I'm very big on that. What this country has done to the families, the POW and MIA families, it is unbelievable. And a lot of people, an acute pointed POW activist, like myself, and say your the one that's stretching out the pain for all the families that lost somebody over there. I say no if it wasn't for an activist like myself they would have got away with it. World War II there were eighty thousand MIA's, eighty thousand, it's like I don't know where the mothers were. Eighty thousand of them lost a son and never raised a peep about it. Korea was eight thousand. Vietnam, at the time, it was like twenty-five hundred and then over the years, depending on whatever source you're looking at, the number is now down to about twenty-one hundred. And what this government has done, every President from Nixon on down The Department of Defense, the Defense Intelligence Agency, there's proof that they were abandoned, there's proof that some were left over there alive. We knew it when they were signing the Paris Peace Accords, as late as 1992, we have evidence of live prisoners still in captivity. There were things that they were all taught, especially the pilots, if you get captured there is a code here, authenticator codes is what they were called, and of course we have the satellite observation, the satellite intelligence, and they would pick up the authenticator numbers, and a couple of people they did the authenticator number and no rescue. They were waiting to be rescued and still time goes by and nobody comes, so they finally get bold and stamp out USA or one guy did his name, Serex. Talk about giving up, these guys have never given up, they really believe we are coming to get them. And this country, in fact, they even, I really think somebody in previous mentioned the Select Committee Hearings.

MH: No. Actually we don't usually get this far into things but tell me about it.

VD: You want me to?

MH: Yeah.

VD: More and more proof kept coming out, that they got them, they're over there, they're still alive, '85, '86, '87, '88. More and more proof. And all of the sudden we start hearing that some of them were being shipped over to Russia, up to the Soviet Union, some were being sent to North Korea. You had the POW/MIA movement just picked up momentum, and people, there was a lot of screaming going on, especially from the National League of Families, the National League of Families. As more and more proof was coming out, the documents were being released. I like in the thing to, if you've seen professional wrestling, you've all see

the part where the referee gets the bad guys beating up the good guy, all the sudden the referee gets knocked out. Well the good guy comes up and he actually pins the bad guy for about ten seconds, and all of the sudden the bad guy has someone come up from the crowd and knock the good guy out, and he jumps on the guy. Just then the referee comes to, and counts out the good guy. Deaf, dumb, and blind, and this is what our defense and DIA, Department of Defense, every president has been deaf, dumb, and blind, and they can't possibly be that stupid or overlook these things, or mishandle, or be, or do sloppy investigations. There were times that things were just crying out for, to do a follow up, your this close, the trail's hot, go after him now! And every time the trail is hot they would turn they other way, and nothing was done, there was less of an effort. The issue finally came to head, they had to do something, because the whole country, I really think the height of the POW/MIA issue hit around 1991. They said okay we're going to have a Senate Select Committee Hearing, in fact in charge of the committee, were going to put Senator John Kerry [MA], himself a Vietnam Veteran, from Massachusetts. Of course the POW and MIA activist said we want Smith from New Hampshire, he's a, he's one of the POW/MIA advocates. So they made him vice-chairman, him and Grassly. So anyway, the committee comprised of nine members, everything came down to seven to two. There was credible evidence, credible eye-witnesses, credible testimony, it was overlooked, or if it did come out it was, they tried to bury it so it never came to the surface. Everything came down to seven to two votes. What Kerry did, I think, he convinced the Pentagon officials and the intelligent agencies, let us go into your files, let us prove to them that there is no such thing as a MIA or a POW alive in captivity. What he found out, his strategy backfired, because what he found, and evidence that did come out, it was undeniable. One of the things I brought with me was a copy of, I wrote write to the DIA, and asked for this one report. I think I brought it with me, here it is. It's from the Defense Intelligence Agency. A lot of this has been sanitized. If you want to read some of the stuff they admitted! This is a memorandum. This is the Brook's Report, is what it was called.

MH: Ok.

VD: It's a great element, it's not even, they sanitized most of it, so the really damaging parts...

MH: Ok, why do you think the government is doing this? Or what as an activist...

VD: Why?

MH: Yeah.

VD: Because this has been ,there is a lot of career diplomat's career, military people that have hidden the secret for years and years and years. And they still have a career to worry about, a retirement to worry about. If they come forward and admit the truth, there would be egg on a lot of people's faces. This goes back for years and

years. There is too much, there was seventeen hundred, what they call the Live Sighting Reports Issues, first-hand reports and second-hand reports. A second-hand report would be if I saw a POW in captivity and told you about it. I'm a second-hand report. If you see one, you're a first-hand report. People that saw, in captivity, Americans, they would give you polygraphs, they would take your testimony, they would then try to correlate it with other people, gee I was up there about that same time, in the same province, yeah I saw a couple guys that same day too. Now they've got a correlation, a cluster is what they call it whenever they have a correlation. They've had seventeen hundred first hand reports, first hand eye-witness reports, people that passed multiple polygraph tests. Some of them have called, even been called a credible witness. Credible witness, yes he's given us information, it's correct, we know it's correct. As soon as you talk about the seventeen you saw down here a month later, all of the sudden it's a fabrication. And they have the power, they have the magic wand, they can put a stamp on it, as long as you're talking about what they want you to talk about, oh he's a credible witness. You talk about something they don't want, oh it's a fabrication. Boom! The proof we have, or that there has been, of the first-hand reports, we have the intercepted radio signals that the intelligence agencies had. You've got the satellite observations, all these things, it's undeniable that up until, about '92, there were lives ones out there. I can't say for now, from this point, I haven't heard too much about it. I want to show you that one photo I have, because I actually have a photo, oh here it is. From USA Today. You can see what they do, their taught to do a walking K or a walking X, so to speak. What you do for K, is you do it either frontwards or backwards, but on the K you do a little (noise) like that, or the X. You do a little (noise), that's the duress signal. That's the distress signal. This guy you can see the overgrowth, you can hardly tell that's a K or an X. The guy finally gave up, well they're not seeing it. He finally printed out USA. There were other observations, 52, in other words the entire crew of a B-52 went down. They had stamped out in great big letters 52. Other ones like Serex, one guy he did this code, 72-TA-88. And that was, he stamped that out. Finally nobody came, he says I know they are going to come they're just not seeing this. So he stamped put his name S-E-R-E-X. There's another guy named Mathis. There have been twenty of these codes, see their given an authenticator code, they're taught this in their training. If you get captured E and E, escape and evasion, in other words they didn't want a rescue team to go into a trap. So they gave them this authenticator code, in other words your going to do a 72, a TA, and then whatever year it is. That's what this, they have twenty, twenty that they have found. The problem is, the agency that teaches these people, the pilots and the crew members over there, about these authenticator codes they don't see the photos. And the people that do see the photos, the satellite observation, they don't know anything about the codes. You talk about deaf, dumb, and blind. How can this happen? How can this be? We're talking about the greatest nation in the world, with the greatest resources for intelligence in the world. It's not deaf, dumb, and blind, it's by design. It's policy.

MH: I think it's just a matter of they're waiting long enough, they figure in another ten years...

VD: They're all going to die.

MH: They'll all be dead.

VD: We're all going to die, and all go with our problems.

MH: Then it's no longer a problem rather than.

VD: That's right. And they wait long enough, we're all going, it's all going to go away. That's why there are those of us that are involved in the issue. We are going to see to it, they're not going to go away. The people like Bill Clinton and Jane Fonda, it's my wish that they never forget, and they're reminded every day what they did. I don't know if you know exactly what Jane Fonda did? You know she went over there she made of course the radio broadcast, she made something like eighteen of them. She also put on a North Vietnamese uniform and hat, and I've seen films of this, it's not hearsay. I've seen it on film. She put on a North Vietnamese uniform and stood at an anti-aircraft machine gun, laughing, and moving it in, a very machine gun that was used to shoot down an American pilot probably. Bill Clinton not only did he, the country was divided, I can understand the protests. People had legitimate points of view, that was their point of view, the war is wrong. I'm going to try and stop the murder and the maiming. I'm going to protest against it. Bill Clinton even went to another country. He was a very special person in Russia. Bill Clinton organized protests all over the world against the United States military. As far as I'm concerned it's treason, and he should be treated that way, and tried. Both of them should be tried.

MH: That's all I have for now, is there anything else you'd like to add on to the end or... anymore issue?

VD: If you have any questions at all about what we do, or what, or if I can do anything for you, I'm sure you've seen the cooperation from our group.

MH: Oh yes, it has been wonderful.

VD: And the shame of it all, the shame of it all, back to the professional wrestling scene. What happens when this referee all of the sudden wakes up, and he counts down the good guy? There's thousands of these fans screaming at him, how can you do this you dummy, didn't you see what happened? What I just told you about the POW and MIA issue nobody is screaming, nobody gives a damn. There're are very few of us that do give a damn, we do everything we can to keep this in the limelight. We're having, once a year out of protest. They signed this Paris Peace Accord, about January. The week of January 20th through the 27th 1973. Every January 27th or thereabouts we have a twenty-four hour vigil in protests of the Paris signings. I don't know if anybody told you about it? Ok, the Vigil. We've got the coming up January 27th and 28th. I believe that starts on midnight the 27th, if you'd

like to come up and take...

MH: Yeah I was actually planning on it. Well I thank you for your time.