

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam War

Personal Experience

O. H. 1480

LEO H. DIVENCENZO

Interviewed

by

Darlene Pavlock

on

November 26, 1991

LEO H. DIVENCENZO

Leo H. DiVencenzo was born March 15, 1949 in Youngstown, Ohio, to Harry and Julia DiVencenzo. He is the second of five children (four boys and a girl) and has lived in the Youngstown area all his life. His family did little traveling as a child. He graduated from Liberty High School in June 1967 and volunteered his draft in November 1968.

He entered the U. S. Army and did his basic training at Fort Dicks, New Jersey. His advanced training was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Thereafter, he received his orders for Vietnam. Leo arrived at Cam Rahn Bay, then was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 92nd Artillery at Pleiku in the central highlands. He was a forward observer in his combat unit. Missions took him through the northern region and his unit patrolled Highway 1. He served a longer tour than most, one year and two days. Upon his return he was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas for his remaining five months in the Army. He is entitled to, but has never received the bronze star with three oak leaves, the purple heart, and the unit citation.

On May 9, 1970, a week after his return from Vietnam, Leo married Rosann Gillie. They have two sons, Joey age 20 who attends Youngstown State University and Leo D., III, age 16, who is in the honors program at Cardinal Mooney High School. They reside in Liberty Township, Ohio with Leo's parents. He is a mason and is involved in Aut Mori Grotto. He and Rosann bowl, camp and travel. He also enjoys woodcrafts. Leo has been on total disability since July 1979.

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INTERVIEWEE: LEO H. DIVENCENZO

INTERVIEWER: Darlene Pavlock

SUBJECT: Family travel, Army volunteer, Vietnam duty,
return to the States, adaptations to change

DATE: November 26, 1991

P: This is an interview with Leo H. Di Vincenzo, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Vietnam War, by Darlene Pavlock, at 1725 Sturgeon Drive, Girard, Ohio, on Tuesday, November 26, 1991, at 6:30 p.m.

D: You are a Vietnam Vet. People say, "You wear a hat, you're a Vietnam Veteran." They say, "Why do you wear that ball cap? I'm a World War II Veteran and I don't wear World War II..." Because you were in a designated war. You got a parade when you came home. You got recognized as being in a war, per se, what a war is. It's the same with the Persian Gulf. I had a nephew over there. So when he came home, he got a parade. Vietnam Vets, first of all, it's been twenty years now, and they're just now saying, "It was a war." That's the biggest thing that hurt us. It never, ever bothered me until two years ago. We went to the Wall for the first time.

P: Did you go?

D: Yes. There were about two hundred-fifty people there, and you couldn't even hear a pin drop. It was like walking at Arlington by yourself. That's when it hit me. You see fifty thousand names there and you say, "Wow, how did I get here and they got there?" That's when it blows your mind. You try to put everything in

perspective. I don't drink, or maybe I would be an alcoholic. So I carry a chip on my shoulder. I do that because they say, "What do you want? What is it that you Vietnam Vets want?" We want all of us to come home, number one. We were lied to. We were disgraced. We were humiliated. And we didn't get our parade. You say, "Parade, how insignificant." It's not the idea of a parade. It's the recognition. I did the same thing my father did. I put my ass on the line. My nephew did the same thing that I did. He put his ass on the line in the Persian Gulf. Yet, he got a parade. I didn't get a parade. So, some of us came back and went to the woods and are still there, some of us came back and drank, and some of us came back and took our anger out physically. It will never, ever die, until we die. When us forty-year-old Vietnam Vets die, then Vietnam will die. Until then, even if one of us are still living, it will always be there. No matter what anybody says, no matter how many walls they build, it doesn't mean a thing. We came back and we were delegated state compensation. Each state was supposed to pay Vietnam Vets a couple hundred dollars. Ohio never gave the Vietnam Vets their check. We didn't get low income housing, we didn't get special interest rates on automobiles. I'm sitting there and I watched the Persian Gulf War unfold on television from day one until day end, glued, around the clock to that TV.

I knew Schwartzkopf when he was a Captain in Vietnam, and he is a military genius. He showed you at the end where he wanted to go to finish it and Bush said, "No," and he made Schwartzkopf apologize. Now a book will come out later on and he'll tell you the truth why Bush wouldn't let him go. Just like Oliver North is telling you now that Reagan had no sense of mind. His mind was gone in the last six months of the presidency. Oliver North is telling you this, "I protected a man who couldn't remember what he did yesterday and he is running our country." When you arrived in Vietnam, you saw Sohio gas stations, AT&T. That's what we were there for. Just like the oil.

P: Not the other image that stood then.

D: Right. We weren't prepared. The French were there ten years before us. You think we would have learned something. We weren't meant to win it. We were meant to do exactly what we did and that was nothing. It just happened that I was born at the wrong time. Ten years earlier, ten years later, I would have missed it.

What gets me now, you say, "Well, if there's a war out and your boy wanted to go to Canada, what would you say?" I'd buy him a ticket. People say, "Wow, you aren't patriotic, you got no business being in this

country." But I fought for the right to be here. I fought for the right to say what I just said. It was just like during the Persian Gulf War, during January of that year, Lee Greenwood came out with "God Bless the U.S.A." They were playing it at half-time at every football game. Why? Who watches the football game on New Year's Eve? Eighteen-year-old boys, draftable, enlistable boys. That's a bunch of bull. So until we're recognized as, "Okay, we fought a war..." We didn't want the Wall. We didn't ask for the Wall. I didn't ask for the Market Street Bridge.

I was hurt physically at work, and in 1979. I can't work again. They put me on permanent total and they said, "We'll give you \$150 a week to live for the rest of your life." I was making \$10 an hour in 1979. So I called the V.A. today. I said, "I'm getting \$600 a month, I need some assistance." "That's too much money, we don't have any assistance." So you see, it's due for us. Don't let us hear about it. We don't want to hear about it. They don't want to believe people that weren't involved in Vietnam or didn't have family over there, don't want to believe Nixon reneged on a promise to North Vietnam about the MIA's. They don't want to believe that Reagan stopped the release of the prisoners with Iran until the election was over. They don't want to believe that Bush is Hitler. They don't want to believe that. They last person that said the phrase, "New World Order" was Adolph Hitler. That's scary. So you guys know, they say, "Well, you know, Vietnam Vets... You guys got a chip on your shoulder." Yes. We do.

P: Rightfully so.

D: Well, right or wrong, I don't know, but some of us do. I put my year in, and I did what I thought was right. They said, "Well, you came back alright." No, I didn't for the simple reason: a friend had two meanings. Over there, a friend would protect your back without hesitation, without asking what's in it for me, without anything. There was no racism. You slept with blacks, you ate with blacks. We didn't have black platoons like they did in World War II. We didn't have none of that. Then you come back here and they spit at us. They spit at us and they say, you "war-mongers". Well, we were drafted. Some guys went to Canada who thought it was wrong and I thought, "Well, it's a war, I'm going to go protect my country." But I wasn't protecting the country. That's the falsehood of this whole thing. The Persian Gulf, you're not protecting your country. The United States was never, ever in jeopardy. In the Persian Gulf, Vietnam... It's just like that. "We don't like the drug dealer in Cambodia." So what do we do, we go and take them out. What gives us

the right? What gives us the right to do this? We're as bad as Saddam. He wanted Kuwait, "I'll take Kuwait." So Bush doesn't like this guy, then you find out he works for Bush. And they say, "Well, you Vietnam Vets are crazy." Yes, because we look at it the way it is. We don't believe the patriotic bullshit that you've given us, because we've seen it from another aspect. They said, "Well, you guys are insane." So they said, "Okay, we'll form a group and give you psychiatric care. You can go to the V.A. Clinic and you can get psychiatric care, and you can sit in a circle, you can cry together, you can tell war stories." Then you come home and turn on the news and they hand you this bullshit.

See today's politicians, Bush and everybody, wishes there was never a Vietnam. They made a mistake and they want to sweep it under the rug. There's guys like me that won't let them. I get in the middle of family groups and she'll tell you. I tell them this is bullshit and they'll say, "We'll you're unpatriotic. You can't wave that flag." I don't like the flag burner, but I don't like the flag waved in my face either. Because I was lied to. I never met your husband. We just moved in. My mother is in a wheelchair. This was my parents house. We moved in to take care of them. We lived in Youngstown for twenty years. There was a Vietnam Vet a couple blocks down. A year before we moved in, he was at the kitchen table and blew his brains out. He had a baby born with no arms.

P: Were you living there?

D: Yes. We were living there. It was a disease. She was born with a disease and it was Agent Orange. He couldn't get any money, he couldn't get recognition. He couldn't take it anymore. He saw his wife off to work, saw his daughter off to school and blew his brains out. Who cares? The government doesn't care, that's one less person that they have to deal with. They don't want to recognize that they're Saddam Hussain. They don't want to recognize that. They used chemical warfare twenty years ago and now Saddam is using it and he's the bad guy. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying Saddam is a saint. Saddam is someone we built. We created him. They don't want another Vietnam. They didn't want that, so they said, "Okay, Norm, go in here and kick butt, do what you have to do, but only go so far." So guys came back from Vietnam expecting that they would go back to the world as a hero. "I got medals on my chest." No, it didn't matter. So, you needed a crutch. Whether it was booze, whether it was dope, whether it was beating up on your wife, it had to be something. So I carry it inside, and my fuse is about this small. I don't hit her. But I talk to her

about it. I say, "It's no reflection on you, it's just that I can't tolerate it." It will die with me. If you were to ask me what is it you want? I want my parade. That's what I want. If I didn't have any relatives here and I wasn't married, I would want to be buried at Arlington, because those were the guys that you trusted. I can't trust the neighbors. When we lived in Youngstown, the neighbors cost me money. Blacks let their houses go down, so your house was not worth as much as it could have been. So, you can't trust them. My dad left his wallet today at Giant Eagle on the counter, he wasn't gone ten minutes, he came back and it was gone. You can't trust them. In Vietnam when you were in a squad, anything you had... I could have my wife run naked or walk naked through that squad of men and nothing. You ate with them, you slept with them, and you killed with them. Everytime they died, one of us died, you died.

P: Let's start at the beginning. Where were you born?

D: In Youngstown.

P: You moved to Girard later?

D: Yes.

P: So you've always been from this area?

D: Yes.

P: When you were younger, did you do a lot of traveling with your family on vacations or anything like that?

D: No.

P: Just strictly a hometown boy?

D: Yes.

P: I bet your going into the service was a shock?

D: It was an experience. I went to Fort Dicks, New Jersey for Basic Training.

P: Were you drafted?

D: Everybody was getting drafted in 1967, 1968. I had a buddy who lived over here, his name was Paul Hake. He says, "Why don't we go down and volunteer our draft?" It's not an enlistment, but before the mail gets here, lets go and volunteer our draft and then we'll be together.

P: I never knew that.

D: So we did. We went down and we said, "Hey, we know we're going to get drafted, because we were in great physical health, we both graduated high school." We knew we were going to go. The recruiter's eyes lit up. We knew the letter was on the way. Everybody was getting drafted. So he said, "You guys will be together all through." So we went to Fort Dicks together, we went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for Advanced Individual Training, he went to Korea, I went to Vietnam.

P: You went right after your training then?

D: Well, I got a two week hold first. They wanted to check out my background, how I felt about serving with blacks and how I felt about this and that. Then I came home and went to Vietnam. I was engaged to be married. I told her, "Wait, if you're here when I come back, fine, we'll get married, if not, it wasn't meant to be." She was there, so we've been married ever since. Twenty-one years.

P: Gee, that is really something. Now when you went to Vietnam where did you go?

D: Everybody arrives at a place called Cam Rahn Bay. It's more like a rival departure area. Then, from there, you're dispersed. I went to Pleiku, it's in the Central Highlands and I was with the 1st of the 92nd Artillery. 1st Battalion, 92nd Artillery. We went to all the northern areas. We had to patrol Highway 1. You laid awake at night. North Vietnam was so talented with propaganda, with their loud speakers and then everybody says today, "Jane Fonda's exercise tape." See I won't let Jane Fonda's name be mentioned in my presence. Because Jane Fonda was "Hanoi Jane". You forget she went to North Vietnam, she ate with them, she sided with them that we were doing wrong, she cursed us. Hey, it wasn't my fault I didn't start this shit. Why blame me, but she did. I don't forget. Now, she wants everybody to forget she was known as Hanoi Jane.

P: You have pictures, that's great.

D: This is the closest I ever came. You come back here after you're in the boonies. You lay up on a bunk. It's really not a bunk, it's two by fours and a blanket.

P: This almost looks like a tent without sides.

D: No, this is a storage hut. Now I got up to go outside and a 122 hit. This is a 122 hanging from the ceiling. It's a rocket that the Vietcong lay across bamboo

sticks and light like a big firecracker. They have no way to know where they'll go, how far they'll go, they just aim it in our presence. So it hit out side, shrapnel came through right where we're laying.

P: There's a hole in the side of the wall right where you are sleeping.

D: I went out to have a smoke. See, it went through my wall locker, too. I would have been dead if I wasn't smoking outside. They don't bother you. You come back and this is the way we walk around. It's pretty much a protected area.

P: It seemed like it just from the way you were dressed and your hair is long, it was pretty lose.

D: We were cutting grass.

P: A lawnmower in Vietnam.

D: Everybody says... We had our bad times. These are Mommasons. Now you hire them to clean your hooch. They would shine your shoes.

P: Look at how small they are!

D: This is a woman who is fifty-some years old. They don't sit, they squat.

P: Were there little villages and towns here where you were? You just weren't out in no man's land.

D: No. This is Pleiku. This is a towed 155 Howitzer. It's a cannon. Our job was to bring these to the guys and drop ammo to them and run security. See, Sohio gas stations downtown Pleiku.

P: I can't get over that. I never knew that until tonight. I knew that there were American businesses in Saigon and in places like that.

D: See, you would see the sky like this and it would rain for six months. Then we got drunk after we came back from a mission and I painted my name on my jeep.

P: You painted pretty straight.

D: We had stencils. I had a little dog, Crash, and they wouldn't let me bring him back, because he had to be in quarantine in California so long, so they wouldn't let me bring him back. These are the bar girls, the Saigon bar girls. This here, he didn't want his picture shown, this is an ex-G.I. who ran the club.

P: He came back and ran the club?

D: He lived there. He didn't want no part of the world. He did two tours of Vietnam and went back. He probably died there.

P: Or he's still running the club today.

D: Oh, yes. This is more what it looks like, because you get your goody boxes and you get your cards.

P: This is all your memorabilia from home?

D: Yes. This is when we went out on Search & Destroy missions. This is what is called a WASP. It is a giant helicopter and it comes down and takes all our stuff where we're going to be, then we got to jump from it. This is Cam Rahn Bay here. When you're issued a stick like this, guys make it. When you're short...

P: I've heard that.

D: When you have under thirty days, you're a short timer, you're counting down. When a WASP comes in and picks us up, they never come all the way down. They'll pick us up, we'll go up a stream and he'll take us out where we got to go. This is Saigon. This is the road down to Saigon. See, we're all short-timers here. I can't remember anybody's name, not one of these guys, and you were together a year. I can't remember none of their names.

P: The other guys I've interviewed said the same thing.

D: I don't know why that is. My wife said it's a block. She says, "Well, you're going to block it out and that will be the end of it." We had Good Morning Vietnam, the radio station.

P: Is that what this is?

D: Yes. It's a TV antenna, but we used it for a radio. See when you come back from the bush, you wanted to make your area as much you as anything. See the TV?

P: Yes.

D: These are the goody boxes from home. My mom was great on sending those to me. Candies, cookies, anything that wasn't perishable. Model cars. This is a rat. It is a rat we caught. When you go to sleep, you draw straws. Somebody has to stay up and do rat patrol. That's how bad they were. You took the lead out of your M-16 bullet and you got a bar of soap and you

packed the soap in the round and you loaded it back to your rifle and your buddies would be sleeping and you'd see a rat and shoot it and it would hit with that wax and scream and then die. The only reason you did that, a bullet would ricochet and maybe kill one of your buddies. There is Rose's picture, her graduation picture. That was my crutch right there.

P: I was going to ask you what images you carried with you?

D: Bad things were Dear John letters. Now I lost a buddy with a Dear John letter. He came into the hooch and he said that's it. Here I am, a guy brought me down. Now this was one of my best friends and I don't remember his name. I'm leaving to come back to the world.

P: This is your goodbye picture?

D: Yes. I'm leaving to come back to the world. Here's how we took showers in Vietnam. These are fifty-five gallon drums and there is a pot belly stove that would heat this one and this one would be your cold water. You'd stand underneath it, stark naked and just took showers. That was it. That was comfort. You had a building that had a toilet lid and if you got what was called "Shit detail" you had to clean the shit houses. You'd do your thing there and you'd go in the back and there would be a big door with fifty-five gallon drums cut in half with diesel fuel. You drug them out and lit them. That's how you cleaned. See, everybody says in Vietnam that there were some decent party times. These are times like this that you partied like this for one reason; because tomorrow there may not be a party. When you went back out, you never knew.

P: This is when you came back to the field?

D: Yes. We partied everyday. These are what you called underground hooches where we have to dig and go in there and sleep.

P: Are these sandbags?

D: These are all sandbags that you have to fill. What we do... The FNG's fill them. Have you heard that expression from any of the guys?

P: No.

D: Well, it's a little vulgar.

P: Well, that's okay!

D: It's Fucking New Guys. They got the sandbags. So if

you were FNG's, we're all sitting there with California tans. It was 112 degrees when I left Vietnam. But it's not heat like here.

P: It's dryer?

D: Yes, and there is no humidity. What the Vietnamese people would do was eat bark off a tree because it had caffeine in it. It thinned their blood out. They'd drink ice coffee, that was the biggest drink in Vietnam. Ice coffee.

P: Did you get accustomed to that?

D: Yes. The thing I haven't had since I've been back is rice. I haven't had one taste of rice. I had my fill of rice, rice wine, rice cookies. When they sent you out on a search & destroy, you get hungry. I mean you can reach into a bag of raw rice and start eating it. That's how hungry you get.

P: We are so used to having everything, it's hard to imagine that.

D: When my nephew came back from the Persian Gulf and his father and I, that's Roseann's brother Bob, we're in Vietnam. He was with the 1st Cav. and I was with the 1st and 92nd. We came back and he never dreamt... His boy is a year older than mine, that he would have a son in a war twenty years later. He got out of Vietnam in 1970, his boy went to the Persian Gulf in 1990. He literally could not function. He lives in Lorraine and he has to drive back and forth to McDonald because U.S. Steel closed up. I had to go get him a couple of times. He'd stop on the turnpike and he just couldn't function. He knew what his boy was going through, regardless of the terrain. One was a desert, one was a jungle. What was going through his head was that he knew what his boy was going through. He was right a couple of times.

P: That's unbelievable. Tell me about your basic training. What was it like?

D: That was scary. Did you see the movie Full Metal Jacket?

P: Yes.

D: That was my basic training. Oh, yes, my drill sergeant was identical. Choke yourself. His famous thing was if you screwed up, you laid on your back with your hands and your legs in the air, "I am a shitbird, I am a shitbird". See what they wanted to do, they have to take whatever personality you had and destroy it, then

they install theirs. What it does, it saves your life, for the simple reason, you act without thinking. Now, I see these rent-a-cops, these security guards, "I'll kill this black, I'll do this." No, you won't, because you got to think about it. In that split second that other guy will get you. So in Vietnam, the drill sergeants that knew you were going to Vietnam--most everybody did that was in basic training--had to learn to not question authority, not question an order. In other words, if you were saying, "Take this hill" and there were 100 before you just laying there dead, and you had to walk over them, you had to go. You didn't question it and you didn't think about it. So that was the purpose of basic training.

P: That's what you went through.

D: That's why I will never let my son go through that. He came to me, he graduated from Cardinal Mooney in 1989 and said, "Dad, I want to fly jets." I said, "Well that's alright, you can go to the Air Force." He couldn't because he has to wear glasses and it thrilled me to death. That's what you do and that's what basic training is about. You don't know what to expect. You're riding in a bus all the guys are screaming. We're going to Fort Dicks, New Jersey. How bad can it be to New Jersey? It's another thing. I don't know if you have this in your paperwork but it was the first time in the United States History that the U.S. Marine Corps ever drafted. They never drafted in a war before Vietnam, they never drafted since Vietnam.

P: I knew that they had drafted for Vietnam because Jimmy was drafted in the Marines as well.

D: Here's what they did. We went to Cleveland once for the paperwork and all that. We were in a line in our underwear and they said, "Count off one through four." I was like number two or three, me and my buddy. They said, "Okay, every number four step forward." They said, "Congratulations, you're in the Marine Corps." No one told us the Marine Corps was drafting. Because I would have enlisted to stay out of the Marine Corps. See, when you volunteer your draft, it's only two years. It's not an enlistment. You are a draftee. But you just beat the letter. That's all you did. The Marine Corps, that's the only time and they've never done it since. They said, "We only want a few chosen good men." The Marine Corps is excellent, don't get me wrong. I would never, ever put down a Marine, never in my life because their training is so much more intense than ours, but they drafted for Vietnam. They did something against their code. Up until then, they chose who they wanted. If you weren't Marine caliber, boy, you were out. You were no good. "Go to the

Army." If the Army didn't want you then the Air Force took everybody, the leftovers from everybody. The Air Force had it made in Vietnam. They had flush toilets, whatever those flyboys wanted, boy, they got.

P: I can remember Jimmy saying that when he was with them, he was in the Marines, and he had to guard them at one point, and at 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening they had an alarm and they rolled down their sleeves and they sat down and they had this gorgeous supper, like a banquet. These guys hadn't washed, hadn't had food for weeks.

D: I know because I had to run road support for them.

P: I was shocked at that but that was the reality of the place, unfortunately. I'd like to know more about your home images when you were there. Were you very homesick, did you think about it a lot or was it more so that you were busy that it was easier to keep it out of your mind?

D: Right. When you stop... You did everything hard. You fought hard, you partied hard and you cried hard. Then when you lost a buddy, you thought of home.

P: Did you?

D: Oh, sure because you say, "Well, am I ever going to see them again?" Because you're going through the brush and the guy twenty yards next to you is gone, just like that. We're talking and boom. "Now, why am I here and you're gone?" You ask yourself that. You can't thunder because the guy is after your ass, that's the split second you think of home and your gone. So you partied hard. Everybody did drugs that was in Vietnam. If somebody told me they didn't, they're lying. Everybody did speed in a liquid vial because you were afraid to fall asleep. Especially when you were first over there and you go out on your first mission. After that, you do not want to fall asleep. You're afraid. When we get ready to come home, they took us to Cam Rahn Bay. There is a couple hundred of us. They assigned you a seat number. United Airlines was flying into Cam Rahn Bay to take us home. They had the contract from the government. They said, "Well, here is your seat number." They were only going to call it once. If you missed you had to wait until they went all the way around again. So what we did was we stood by the PA system. We waited and we waited and we waited.

Coca Cola is my addiction.

P: Is it?

D: Oh, sure. I quit smoking five months ago.

P: Really?

D: Four packs a day.

P: Four packs! Did you learn that there or did you smoke before you went?

D: No, I smoked in Vietnam.

P: Did you?

D: Yes. I quit drinking the day I left Vietnam.

P: Did you?

D: I haven't had a beer since. But the reality. See, they were telling us... Here's an example: You're on a search & destroy, so to me, search & destroy, I searched and then I destroyed. That was a mockery. Say you located Charlie and there's a group of five. You couldn't kill them, they were the enemy. You couldn't shoot until they shot at you. You couldn't initiate an attack.

P: What did you do when you saw them?

D: Oh, we did. But you couldn't. You had to call in to TALK. TALK was your center of authority. For example, "Hey, TALK, I got five in the wire, I got five here." He'd tell you. "Let them go," or "Do this," or "Do that," or "Call in a strike." So my official title was... I was a Forward Observer. I went over and it was like... You know what the Rangers did in the Persian Gulf, well that's what I was doing over there for the Artillery Group. I was a Forward Observer, an FO.

P: Sort of like FU only a little different?

D: Right, an FO, and nobody talked to the FO's. The brass didn't give us no sass. We had guys wearing pony tails, we had guys wearing beards and they didn't give us no sass. Because your life expectancy was a month and a half.

P: That's a very dangerous, dangerous position.

D: But you had to volunteer for it. I didn't want to be hassled. I said, "I got to do a year, so what's the best way to do a year?" Another thing the older guys told you when you got there, "If you think about dying..." See here is a phrase a guy told me once. He said, "Anticipation of death is worse then death itself." So you don't think about it. You just get it out of your mind and go on with the program.

P: So, you volunteered for that position knowing that the life expectancy was the way it was?

D: Yes, but it would be clean. I knew it. I knew I wouldn't have to come back to the rear area and salute. I knew I wouldn't have to wear shined boots in Vietnam and there was a lot of that going on.

P: What did you do?

D: I did what I wanted to do. No one messed with us. There were three of us in a group and no one messed with us.

P: That's a nice power feeling.

D: Oh, it is, because you couldn't have been a Captain and I was a PFC. I was a Spec. 4 and I said, "Hey, what's happening?" They would let us go. We wore certain hats and no one messed with us.

P: That's interesting.

D: We'd partied hearty. We were a group. Now I can't remember them guys' names. So, did you block anything out? "Yes." If I could sit with a guy from Vietnam and he said, "Yes, I did this and this," And he could tell me every minute of every day of the year he was over there, there is something wrong with him, I would think.

P: That's understandable.

D: One thing I regret not doing, a lot of guys did is they kept a journal.

P: Did they?

D: Yes, they kept a journal.

P: And you didn't do that?

D: No. I think I didn't want to remember it. I think from the first day over. This is the first time... When Joey asked me first of all, I thought about it. I said, "Well, I've never ever sat and talked about it." I'd do certain things and I'd tell Rose, "Hey, this is... I'm getting..." When I was first married, a car would backfire and I would hit the ground. We'd be walking on the street and I would hit the ground. The 4th of July weekend, I'd sleep under the bed because... I'd have dreams. She woke me up one morning, I had my hands around her throat.

P: Three broken ribs, I understand what you're saying.

D: Is that right?

P: Yes.

D: Society doesn't understand. My dad is a World War II Veteran, he doesn't understand that. He doesn't have flashbacks. He was a tank commander. He fought with Patton. He told me, "You had a goal, you had a place to go, somewhere to get to, someone to get." Vietnam, hell, we had no goal. You had a year. That was your goal.

P: Were you there a year?

D: Oh, yes. I was there a year and two days.

P: Were you?

D: Yes.

P: So you actually were longer than most.

D: Yes. They said, "Well, if you do thirty more days, you get your early out and you won't have to do your five months back in the states." I said, "I'll do the five months." I came home and got married. A week. I got out of jungle fatigues and she had the hall rented, the tux hanging in the closet. So I asked for fifteen more days, and I had a forty-five day leave. They sent me to Fort Hood, Texas, a place that Elvis Presley built. I went home, and got her, and we flew back down there. We had five months of a honeymoon. I think it helped us because we were dead broke. Everybody there was dead broke. You had no status quo like you do here in Liberty. I think that's what helped our marriage because everybody was broke. So, she didn't expect... "Well, how come he buys his wife this and you can't buy me that?" So I think it did.

P: Was it a surprise when you came back from Vietnam?

D: I'll tell you what hurt me. I flew back into Youngstown, now this is when the Youngstown airport was booming. I left, looked out the window. My mother was in a wheelchair. She had a broken leg. My fiance was crying and my dad just saluted me. That's the picture I left with. When I arrived I called my mother and I said... We flew from Cam Rahn Bay to Japan, to Alaska, to Seattle, Washington. I left Vietnam it was 112 degrees. I arrived in Seattle, Washington, it was 45 degrees. We had jungle fatigues on, that's all we had. I want to tell you about a bone chilling... You get off the airplane, with this temperature control, and they

let you out, because they didn't have these gates, where you could walk through the gate into the airport. You got out of the plane, down the steps and out. You talk about a bone chilling experience. "Wow, geeze!" There is a lady standing there giving you a ticket. "This is for a free steak dinner." She worked for the USO. "I want to go home." They told us that we could get our class A's and our medals and everything would be issued to us. That was a lie. I still haven't got my medals. I am supposed to have a bronze star with three oak leaves. I never got it. Also, a purple heart because I had a piece of shrapnel... I never got it. Our unit citation, all the FO's had a special badge. I never got it. But I didn't care. You didn't care, you were just going home. So we all dove for the phones in the airport. I called my mom and I said, "I'm in Washington and I'm on my way home." So, she called everybody and said, "Leo's in Washington!" Everybody is thinking Washington, D.C. I was in Seattle Washington. So everybody went to the airport and they're waiting and waiting and waiting. So, everybody left. I arrive. Here I am. I said, "I'm Johnny come marching home again" and there's only three people at the airport. It's the three people you love most but yet...

So when Billy came home from the Persian Gulf, I made sure there was one hundred people at the Pittsburgh Airport. We had balloons. My son has a computer that makes the graphic banners. I had banners put up. The guys told us we couldn't do that and I said, "Watch me, man!" We had everything. It was great. He couldn't believe it. He was embarrassed. I said, "You'll never forget it, You'll never forget this, believe me." His father was crying, his father hired a limousine to take him back home. We all pitched in. It was great. It might seem so insignificant to you. . . Well, you were married to a Vet, so. But they are like, "What's a parade?" It's not a parade, it's the recognition. I put my ass on the line. I did. She'll tell you, the first year of our marriage was... I'm jumping. I'm hearing things.

P: What you are talking about here is the same thing.

D: You say stuff that you said in Vietnam. I arrived in Vietnam in Ben Hue, a little town, south of Pleiku. The first air raid siren I heard, I was in a bunk. I turned the light on. Then the light exploded right in front of my face. They guy shoots the light out, and he said, "You FNG, don't turn lights on!" So now I'm classified now. Here you are, you got your boots on your shorts and that's all and you're running for a ditch.

P: And not even knowing where you're running.

D: No, because you're new. Nobody maps it out for you because you are only going to be there for maybe a night and then you're going to go somewhere in-country.

P: You had your home base. Did you travel a lot?

D: Pleiku was our... The Air Force was in Pleiku, the Artillery Group was in Pleiku. Then we went to what we called LZ's. Landing Zones. So if an Artillery Group was on a landing zone and they were going to get up and run, they would bring the FO's in and we had to put the charges down the tubes. We had to destroy the pieces because Charlie's coming. Then you would see a whole unit disperse in the jungle. Maybe a month later everybody will be found.

P: Really?

D: Oh, sure. So that's why guys wear caps that say, "Vietnam Veterans", that's why guys wear pins. It's recognition. I think once they're recognized, I think that will no longer be. I really believe that. But until that day comes, they'll wear them.

P: You have a good point about it never coming.

D: No, it won't because then they would have to admit they were wrong and they're never going to do that.

P: When you came home and the images that you took with you and the way home was, and the home front, America, too, was so different from when you left. How did you feel about that? What did you think? When you saw your father and your mother and Rose at the airport when you left and that image you carried and when you came back...?

D: Nobody cared. Nobody cared whether you were back or not. Nobody cared.

P: Did you realize that right away?

D: Yes. But nobody cared. It was like... Excuse me. The Persian Gulf War, it was covered by television. That's what made it. But Vietnam Vets brought a lot of that hoopla, cheering. They made sure that this time, it was going to be done right. Her nephew, Billy who was over in Saudi, said that he had a couple Vietnam Vets over him and he said he stuck to them like glue. They separated fantasy from reality. They separated Rambo from "Lets get your head down before it get's shot off." See, I think that's what's wrong with the seventeen and eighteen year-olds that aren't in the

service. They just don't know. They can't separate that. They can't separate Arnold Schwarzenegger from reality. We had our Rambo's. They all died in Vietnam. We had our John Wayne's. They all died in Vietnam. The biggest joke to me when I came home was the movie of John Wayne in the Longest Day. That was a such a joke. Come on. The closest thing to Vietnam was Full Metal Jacket from the start to the finish. How his friend died in his arms. That's the closest thing to Vietnam. It was excellent. If you were overweight in basic training, you were ridden. If you were slow, you were ridden. It was nothing for a man taking his own life and shooting the drill instructor. That didn't happen in my platoon, but it could have. You could push a man just so far and he's going to snap. We had our G.I. showers. If a man didn't take a shower, you took him in there and you wire-brushed him. We had our soap parades. If a guy continuously screwed off and caused you push ups or caused leaves taken off of you, what you did, was you used your soap parade.

P: How did you adapt to the changes that you saw?

D: I don't think I ever have. I'm outspoken, I'm a non-conformist.

P: That's a way of adapting.

D: Then, that's how I adapted. I'm short tempered, ill-mannered, and a lot of things too. I still open doors, I respect a lady. See, today's guys, not because they want equal in the sex thing and all that, is that they don't know how short life is. They don't know how precious life it. Somebody goes and you're saying, "Man, I wish I would have done this." Well, it's too late. That's how I adapt. When I meet somebody I form an opinion. She says, "Well, you don't give anybody a chance." Well, there wasn't time. You were taught you had to make an instinct judgment. Right, wrong, or indifferent, you lived with it. You had to go with your instincts. That's what is inside of me. I haven't been able to let that go. I don't like big parties. I like the two of us.

P: I can tell. You have a very nice relationship. It's real obvious.

D: We like camping. Mostly we do everything together. We bowl together.

P: You went to Fort Hood together.

D: Yes. That was an experience.

P: Was that a shock from Vietnam?

D: Oh, yes.

P: Texas is hot, and humid, and dry, and desert.

D: How many were there of us? Sixty or seventy Vietnam returnees.

P: Really?

D: They wanted us to play war games with the recruits. Blue Army, Grey Army. So we all got with the guys that worked where you went and got physicals and we said, "Hey, we ain't going out there." "Okay, he was a Vietnam returnee." He gave you a profile. No sitting, no standing, no marching, no carrying. So you did C.O. duty. So when they went out to play war games, you stood behind a desk and you answered the phones. Because I wasn't going to do it.

P: That's what they wanted you to do after you came back?

D: Oh, yes. They wanted us to do war games and she had to starch my fatigues and I had to wear the crease down the center and I had to get up at 5:00 a.m. and salute the wind. When we say "Salute the wind." That's a phrase. You have to salute the flag when they raise the flag at 5:00 a.m. reverently. But you couldn't see the flag. It was on the other end of post. So you said, "We salute the wind." You heard the bugle, so you just... "Oh, it's in that direction...We'll salute." We lived off base. We had a little garage-turned-into-an-apartment. This guy had this garage and he put a wall in the middle and he had two apartments. Killeen, Texas, where all of these people just got killed, that's where her and I stayed.

P: Really, that's where you were?

D: Oh, yes. Killeen, Texas. Fort Hood, but the town outside. . . Elvis built that city block along post, our night club thing, inside the Fort for NCO's, not the brass, because he was an enlisted man. He was drafted but he was an enlisted man. He built a bowling alley. He built a little night club. There's the big plaque. It's all donated.

P: That's what you did the last five months of your tour?

D: Yes. I tried to play Army. Then I had about twenty-nine days left in the service and I walked around with a clipboard. You have to have everybody sign wherever you had been on post that five months, the library, the NCO club, the motor pool, the laundry. Everybody in

charge, you have to give to them to sign it. It's called clearing post. That's what you had to do. I'll tell you one thing right now. I don't know how many of these guys you interviewed said this, but I wish I would have stayed in.

P: Do you?

D: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

P: You're sorry you got out?

D: Yes. Right.

P: Why?

D: I would have gone to the Persian Gulf. I would have got a chance to do it right. Number one. Number two, I don't think I would have gotten as shit on because I would have been amongst my kind. It's like a black coming into a white restaurant in the 1960's. I would have been amongst my kind. So I don't think. You're dealt a deck of cards and you play them. You just go with the flow. We talked about it today in the van, we were coming back from Stambaugh's or something and I told her, "Hey, screw it." That's what I told her. I'm not going to worry about it no more. I found out I got a big ulcer, and I have polyps on my esophagus, and I have a sliding hernia from worrying. My son goes to YSU. He's going to be a medical lab technician and it's tough stuff. My other son is in Cardinal Mooney, he's in the HIP program which is an Honor's Incentive Program. That's all we got to worry about.

P: You didn't take very many vacations when you were young. You were from a small town, and then all of a sudden you go to New Jersey, which is not that far from here. So, it wasn't such a culture shock. But then to go all the way around the world, and then come all the way back to Texas, and then finally come back to this little farm. How did you feel about that?

D: That's where the camping comes in. I can't stay bottled up. I got to keep moving. She'll get on me. She says, "You've got a bad back and you're downstairs." I'm totally remodeling. That is why the house is all messed up. I'm remodeling the bathroom, putting a kitchen down cellar, putting another living room down cellar. She'll say, "You don't know." Well, I've got to keep moving. If you stop, you're dead. That's what you're taught. If you stop, you're dead.

P: I wonder if it's the time we grew up, the times we lived, that make that more so than a lot of other people?

D: Well, we had Kent State...

P: How did you feel about that?

D: I had mixed emotions. I felt that people have a right to through things. I still do. I felt that the people that shot them kids were insulted. They had the right to protect themselves. Bricks were being thrown at them. They had the right to protect themselves. So I was kind of torn. No one has the right to take someone's life, regardless. I mean in self defense, somebody comes in and you... You have a right. But a lot of the guys in the service, you'd talk about it and you'd say, "Well, them protesters..." Well, they have a right. They don't agree with what we're doing. Then when you were in Vietnam for a couple months you say, "Hey, what did they know that we didn't?" "What would have happened if I would have gone to Canada?" Now them guys that went to Canada, I don't hold any animosity towards them at all. I say, "Hey, I did my thing, right, wrong or indifferent, you did yours." I don't think I had the guts. That's what it was. My father was a Veteran...

P: It seems like it was forever at that time.

D: That, plus my father was a Veteran, and he did his duty. His brother went to Korea.

P: So you came from military people?

D: Yes. I came from people who were in the service. My grandfather was in World War I, so it was my turn. But you quickly figured out that was garbage. If they're here and they are in your yard, then it's time to be patriots. You go out and "Let's all be minutemen," if they come here. If not, leave me alone. Let's spend some money on us over here and forget what's going on over there. We never will. I told the guys not to enlist in the service because there won't be a war for another fifteen or twenty years.

P: You're right. It seems about every twenty years.

D: They have Hussain where they want him, they want to make Israel look like the bad guys because they don't want a settlement in the East. Now they're going to say, North Korea, now Bush is picking on North Vietnam. This guy is crazy. He is going to get us in a conflict with North Korea too. He says, "There is not going to be any D & Z Zones in the Persian Gulf." That's a lie, there is going to be one. It's just a way to make money. See big business right now is making so much tax-free money, it's unbelievable. You can't even

begin to comprehend this. So this is foresight of Bush and them-- to make money.

P: Very good point. Now you didn't volunteer for Vietnam?

D: No, my whole unit went. We didn't stay together. You go over there and there is different things that you could volunteer for. They placed me with an Artillery Group because that's what I took at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It was ironic because my father took training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He took tanks. When I was there they didn't do tanks, they did artillery pieces.

P: You were in the same place twenty-years later?

D: Yes. Almost. Thirty.

P: Gee. You probably look the same too. What major event stands out during your time in Vietnam?

D: If I had to pick... Flying into Vietnam and seeing the smoke. You see puffs of smoke as you are coming in-country.

P: What was that? Bombing?

D: Yes. It's bombing.

P: Almost when you say that it sounds like when the Indians had their campfires and you would see that.

D: Well, you didn't know what to expect because your drill instructor told you this, he told you that and you said, "How much of this could be real?" Then you get there and within twenty-four hours, reality sets in. You're going over this country and you don't hear anything. Then you start seeing smoke, then you land into a base and you see tow motors carrying ammo and trucks going and guys running. "Holy shit, I'm here, man. There ain't no turning back. Oh, what did I do?"

P: Is that what you thought?

D: That's exactly what I said. I said, "What did I do?" That's where the phrase comes from, "You're in shit now, bud." Did you see the movie, Good Morning Vietnam?

P: No, I think I've saw every Vietnam movie that has been out. My husband is military man, number one, my present husband. He is a movie buff. He is in the Air National Guard right now. He was in the Air Force Reserves and now he is in the National Guard. He transferred over to get his commission.

D: Is he a flyer?

P: He used to fly, but now he is more in maintenance control and things like that. He is also doing a lot of teaching around the country for them right now. He watches all the movies.

D: Is he a Vet?

P: No, well he entered at the end of the Vietnam era. He wasn't in Vietnam. He missed that. I think as a military man, that bothers him. Just like Persian Gulf. He was called up for that this year, but he didn't go there and that bothered him even though he was in the States. That's the training, that's the way they feel.

D: You think, "How can he love me and want to go there?" Maybe not, but most wives would think that. From basic training, that's his job. My brother is fighting there. That's your brother and he's over there fighting, and you're here. It don't make sense. I should be there. That's how I felt, glued to the Persian Gulf. I was glued to CNN.

P: Leo, do you have any guilt thoughts as to why you came back? Why did you come back and others didn't?

D: When I saw the Wall. I never thought that until I saw the Wall. If you ever get a chance...

P: Did you see the traveling one, too?

D: I've gone to D.C. before that day and never went to see the Wall. I've went to the Smithsonian, but never the Wall. We finally went and saw it. That is an experience. It's just a block of granite and then they have the statue of the Vietnam guys. Kids, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, twenty, maybe rubbing names. That's their dad that they've never seen or their brother. Then you wonder. "How did I make it and 50,000 didn't?" Then I ask myself that question more today now, than what I've been though. "Why was I spared?" I came home, I had a great job in 1979.

P: Did you? What did you do when you came home?

D: I worked for my dad for a while in the moving business. Then I went to McDonald Welding and worked my way up to welding foreman. I made good money. I haven't worked since. That's why I asked myself, "Why did I come home?" For this shit? More now. Then lately when I've been on the phone with the V.A. They opened this center on Belmont. It's a politician's joke. I went

up there. I said, "I'm a Vietnam Vet and I don't have any hospitalization because I'm on disability. I'd like to get all this done. He said, "Are you service connected?" I said, "No, I ain't service connected." "Well, I can't help you." I said, "Okay. I want an examination. Can you give me an examination?" "Oh, yeah, we can treat whatever ails you." I said, "Okay, give me an appointment." I went a month ago. You know when my appointment is? December 24th. Christmas Eve, 9:30 in the morning is my appointment.

P: From a month ago?

D: From a month ago. Okay, so this is... What is it for us? People say, "Look what their doing?" They are opening up a clinic on us. It's all a politician's thing. They took a bowling alley and they got a couple doctors and nurses and they threw them in there and they said, "Okay, just shut up now, we don't want to hear anymore from you Vets. Here, we give you a clinic." Okay, if you give us a clinic, why don't they help us? Why didn't they help your first husband? Why didn't they help the guy who blew his brains out? There is Agent Orange. Guys did handle it. It's real.

P: It sure is.

D: They're in the Seattle, Washington mountains. There are guys living there. It's real.

P: It is. I know there are two men I'm not able to interview because they're so sick. They're our age and they're dying.

D: From Agent Orange?

P: Yes. The doctors aren't saying that's what it was. These men know that that's what it is. They have no doubt in their mind.

D: She bugs me and she says, "I want you to quit smoking. Please quit smoking." Because she has an uncle who lost a lung. She had a mother who died of cancer. But then you look at it from my point... I did quit smoking. You look at it from my point of view and then you ask yourself... I enjoy it. It is an enjoyment that I get. I have my family, but personally, they kicked me down for twenty years. I'm tired.

P: Well, we have hit all of the questions. You did great. Now, is there anything you'd like to add that I didn't ask? Is there anything that I didn't cover?

D: They said that this information will be available for other people. I don't want what I say altered.

P: Oh, it won't be. What they'll do is after they type it up they'll send you a copy and you'll get to look it over and if there is anything you want changed, you can do that. If you would like to add anything you can. That's the purpose of it. To go down for ages to come.

D: How can a psychiatrist help a Vietnam Vet if he wasn't in Vietnam? You see. So if I say something that is going to offend a doctor or a politician or somebody else, I don't want it changed. I said it. You got a beef with it, talk to me about it.

P: That's the way it should be because that's the only way they're going to learn.

D: I know. I don't know how your husband now feels about Vietnam Vets. A lot of people would like to see us gone.

P: He doesn't feel that way, but I understand what you are saying. I do know that.

D: They don't want the hat-wearing people around no more. They don't want to be reminded of the mistake they made. You see. My grandchildren will look at this and they'll see. They'll see.

P: I forgot about that. When Jimmy died, most of his pictures were gone. He had destroyed them before he passed away in some of his episodes.

D: A lot of guys will burn them thinking that, "I can burn the memories."

P: I never thought of it that way.

D: That's what they do. They say, "If I can get rid of this then I can let it go. I can let go of this thing that is choking me." I keep it in wonder. "How come I can't remember the names? Why?" It's a block. If I remember the names maybe I'll flip out. Maybe I won't. Maybe I'll be more at ease with myself. But I don't know. I can't remember one name. But you are welcome to tape this if it will help.

P: Yes. This is going to be good. This is perfect. It is interesting that you can't remember them. But when you do I don't think you'll flip out, I think you'll have more peace.

D: They're voices. They're faces without names. I want to put them together. So I keep this. It's ragged, that's how many times I've looked at it.

P: No, it should be.

D: And it's mine.

P: No one can take it away from you. That's your whole experience, not just the pictures, it's all there.

D: Then you say, "Well, how I want to end this, I want a parade." That's what we want.

P: Your own parade.

D: Right. I don't mean in a sense of like the parade I said earlier. I want recognition that I did the same thing that my nephew did. I did it because they told me to do it. That's all.

P: Thank you.

D: Hey, my pleasure. You listened. That meant something to me. You picked Vietnam. You could have picked anything. Vietnam is a tough subject because there are no right or wrong answers. What I say cannot be disputed or cannot be agreed with. It's mine. I also would like to know are there any more? Is there, after twenty years? Could there be? Why didn't we pay for them? Why didn't we bring them home? What happened? It will always haunt us. There will always be movies, whether they're in good taste or bad taste. Full Metal Jacket was done in good taste.

P: Apocalypse Now. That was a trip.

D: That one bothered me because I took trips up river, with the smoke and Agent Orange. There were so many before that I laughed at. Everybody say, "You got to see Apocalypse Now!" I said, "Get out!" I said, "Okay and then I'm into it." Then I see the Orange haze and going up on the rivers, the dope and people flipped out.

P: Did you have flashbacks after that?

D: Certain things. I can remember one of our convoy vehicles. It was a group out, you might remember them, Led Zeppelin. So they spelled their name L-E-D. We spelled it L-E-A-D. That was the name of the side of our truck. Everything became personal. Just like putting your name on a jeep, because you didn't know how long. You knew you had a full year, but you didn't know am I going to get thirty days, sixty days, ninety days. Just like I told you, anticipation of death is worse than death. So you learn, "I got it now, man, it's mine." You can't touch it. So I think I'm possessive now. When we first got married, I was insanely jeal-

ous.

P: Were you?

D: Oh, yes. Because you're afraid to lose it. I'm jealous to this day. You look at yourself and you know what you did. Whether you're proud of some of the things you did in Vietnam or whether you're not, you know what you did and that's what you got to live with. So you got to make them right with yourself. If you go around and say, "Well, I killed this family and I was wrong." Then you sit at the kitchen table and blow your head off. But you have to say, "Hey, I did it to survive. I did it to make it back."

P: No one can judge you with what you did.

D: Lieutenant Kally was crucified and anybody with an ounce of sense knows a lieutenant doesn't make those kind of orders. Someone told him to do it, but they needed a scapegoat. Just like Oliver North. Like I told my dad when they were crucifying Oliver North. "Bush was head of the CIA." It's going to come out in history books that Bush was behind this, and Reagan had no brains.

P: They won't talk about it now. It always has to come ten or twenty years down the road.

D: Another thing I lost was, that I lost the friendship of my youngest brother. I went in the service when he was two years old. I come home, I got married and I moved to Youngstown. So he never knew me all them years. So I'm back home now, he's here, we don't know each other. He's twenty-six, I'm forty-two. We don't know each other. When he was in grade school and high school, they had a thing on Vietnam. I felt ninety years old. He looked at me like an ancient warrior from World War II. I wanted to go to class and tell it like it was. Not the way it was written.

P: He didn't have you come?

D: Oh, no. They're embarrassed to tell it like it is. Anybody, no one wants to hear the truth. No one.

P: I know I've had people look at me and say, "Why did you do that?" That's old news, or we're tired of hearing it. Derogatory comments.

D: I know, because you are doing a study on Vietnam.

P: Yes. Then, on the other hand, there's been a lot of people, everyday people, that have really been accepting to this, and were interested in it and wanted to

talk about it. They keep asking me different things now. If I tell somebody what we talked about I won't use your name. I just say, "Well, one person told me this, or one person told me that." "Really, well tell me more." I was surprised at the interest after getting the initial derogatory comments from different people. It has worked out real good. Well, thanks again.

D: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW