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Q - J. Hanrahan

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Q. When did you go into the service?
A. I believe it was July of 1968 when I was drafted. July 11.

Q. Were you in school then?
A. No, I had just taken a job with Tennessee Gas Pipe Line at the time. I had been in school the previous semester.

Q. This is Morehead? You had been at MSU for a semester?
A. No, I had been there. Well, I'd started in 1963 right after high school, of course I had to pay my way through so I had a couple of jobs in between. But I'd been going to school from 1963 up through then. They offered me a full-time job so I took it.

Q. Well, why did they draft you then?
A. I guess because I lost my student deferment classification.

Q. Once you went out and took this job.
A. Yes.

Q. Were you aware that this might happen and took a chance at the time?
A. No. I don't know whether I was or not. The only thing I was thinking about was my career. I was probably aware of it, but that's one of those decisions you make.

Q. What did you think about going into the service at that time (1968), that was really the height of the anti-war feeling in America. Remember Robert Kennedy was killed that year and there was the big fight at the National Democratic convention that summer and then it was Nixon vs. Humphrey in the fall and Nixon's promise to get us out as soon as he could and all that. How did you feel about being drafted?
A. I had considered volunteering earlier in fact, I almost went regular army anyway. But no, my feeling wasn't a feeling of anomosity or anything like that. My contingent always has been that if we live in a country such as we live in then there's a price you have to pay and I felt that it was my duty. Of course at the time it's rather scary knowing that you may have to go in the Vietnam War and possibly be killed, but I wasn't probably too happy about it at the time but it was something I had to accept.

Q. Had you been following the course of the war and knew what was going on and so forth?
A. Yes. I'd been following it and I knew pretty well what was going on and of course the _____ at Kent University. . . I was in Vietnam when that happened (1970). You have mixed emotions about leaving home and stuff like that.

Q. Why did you think we were in Vietnam, what was your understanding?
A. Well it was a rather odd coincidence about that, do you remember Mr. Cutshaw? That was really kind of ironic because when I came back from Vietnam, you know you read the news, you follow it, you know how anti feeling everybody was about it, but when I came back from Vietnam, I got a thirty day early drop, because I had ninety days to reclaim my job under the veterans rights, so if I got a thirty day drop I could go to summer school and would like just a few hours getting my degree, so I did that. One of the courses I took was Current World Problems, under Mr. Cutshaw, it was really funny because we talked about it there in class and he really informed me as to why I was there.

Q. This was of course after you'd come back?
A. Right, this was after I came back. I'd heard what a hard instructor he was but I found him one of the most interesting and fascinating people I'd had courses under there because he was so well informed and interesting to listen to. I know now that it went as far back as 1947, Roosevelt really.

Q. Have you ever watched any of the series that was on television last fall?
A. I think I watched maybe one or two segments of it.

When we were over there we'd set around and talk about it a lot, but we probably took the opposite attitude, because if you're over there you're living it, you can't take a negative attitude, it effects your feelings your actions and all, so you've got to look at the positive side when you're actually encountering it. Of course, keep in mind that I was probably a lot luckier than most over there. I didn't play an active role in combat situations, I was exposed to several dangerous situations probably, but. . .

Q. What was you mos?
A. My mos was 11 Bravo, which is the ground _____ which is one of the worst mos'. That was my primary mos. I took training at Ft. Benning at Ft. Pope which is what they call little Vietnam, then under 11 Bravo. But I was sent to Ft. Knox for awhile and got into 71 _____, which is personel specialist.

Q. Was that because of your education?
A. Probably. There was a guy down there from Winchester, Ky., he was in charge of the office at the time and he was looking for somebody because he was short, getting ready to get out and serve up his enlistment and he needed somebody at the time to help him and I came through that day and he latched on to me. So when I got sent to Vietnam I told everybody I was the Radar of the 93rd VAC hospital because I was the company clerk of the 93rd VAC hospital.

Q. When did you get to Vietnam?
A. September of 1969

Q. Where did you come in?
A. I arrived in the country at Long Ben. I left the U.S. at Ft. Lewis and we flew to Japan via _____ Lines.

Q. Where is Long Ben?
A. That's right on the coast, I believe the Western Coast, it was right on the ocean.

Q. Would that be North of Cameron or _____?
A. I said Long Ben, excuse me, that was where I stayed that was inland that was near _____ air base. I flew in at Cameron Bay, I'm sorry. I flew in at Cameron then went to Long Ben.

Q. That was near, what did you first say?
A. _____, it was about 35-45 miles from Saigon going west or what they call highway 31.

Q. What was your first impressions getting into Vietnam, I suppose you'd thought about it alot, then here you are?
A. Probably like most everybody else, just totally scared to death. The night we landed they'd just had what they called a sniper attack on one of the field hospitals, there at Cameron and everybody was driving around with lights out and everything. We landed, got on a bus and nobody said a word, we drove for what seemed 2 or 3

miles and they let us out at an empty area, we couldn't see anything and then we walked for what seemed like a mile and we were at the back of an old plane a C47 transport plane and they loaded us all on, the tailgate of the plane lifted down and we threw everything on an old pallet, it didn't have seats or anything just old nylon netting that everybody sat on scrunched together and the major came back there and said boys I hate to tell you all this, but the air conditioner isn't working, of course we didn't know at the time that the thing didn't have air conditioning! It was really scary because they'd attacked a hospital wing and killed a lot of patients of course that kind of depressed us and we flew all night about 4 hours on into the night because it was late and we arrived at Ben _____ Air Base which was just out of Saigon

Q. Was yours sort of a MASH unit?
A. Right, it was a MASH unit, of course the way they had it arranged then ours was in 93rd VAC hospital and it was a 158 medivac helicopter unit was right beside us. I always laughed about it because a lot of the things that happen, when I came back that original movie of MASH that started the whole thing, was real to me of course they're not quite that zany, but it was a real situation for me because I was the company clerk of the hospital there.

Q. What were your duties?
A. Just taking care of the company personnel, all the records, duty rosters and stuff like that. 12 or 14 hours a day.

Q. Did that keep you out of danger?
A. Yes, because I didn't have to go out in the field. I didn't even have to pull guard duty. We were right on the perimeter of Long Ben, but it was one of the most secure areas because it had the _____ headquarters there. It was quite large.

Q. How was the war affecting you at that time, were you so protected in the job you had at that time that you didn't really feel the war?
A. No, we felt it only in a different way because we got to see all the results because of all the people that came in. And even though I worked in the company headquarters all my friends were involved with the people wounded and being brought into the hospital. We were constantly aware of the result of the war.

Q. Did you see these guys yourself?
A. Yes.

Q. How did it make you feel, what did you think about it all?
A. Well, it's very depressing and you have to, of course the more you're around the more you accept it. But when you're first exposed to it it makes you sick, you're depressed and you want to get away from it, but there's no way. You can because you're there for a specified period of time.

Q. Did you think it was all worth it, all the suffering and wounds and death that you saw? Did you ever ask youself about that, did that run through your mind? Did you determine that whatever the govt. was telling you to do you'd just go ahead and do it anyway, did you ever have any questions about what it was all about?

A. There were questions, but you see so many things and naturally you're an enlisted man, you're not entitled to privy information or anything like that, but you do form your own opinions and from the things you do see going on you see that it's, you begin to feel that it is a total waste and especially after, you know you talk to a lot of people that had been there, you were new in the country a lot of people had been there for a year, some had extended and been there two years and you hear some of the tales and whether they were fiction or fact you have to sort out, but there was a lot of doubt in my mind at time, but the main thing I kept in my mind was well you're here and you're going to have to make the best of it and try to survive it. I think that's basically what most people did, if you get it in your mind that it's no good, it's wrong it just makes the situation so much more dangerous for you. As far as being bitter toward the govt., there were times I wondered why in the world are we here, it's useless, it's senseless, because you could see time and again and hear people say time and again, they'd go out and actually with no purpose in mind, people would get wasted for no reason. It really makes you wonder. But you're caught, you're a pawn in the game plan, so what else can you do. You jsut have to withdraw in your own shell and say, well it's me and I'm going to survive. That's about the attitude I took.

Q. I never will forget when I got back to the States, of course it was kind of
A. a fluke, from the time I left the what they called the 90th replacement center in Ben _____ you know it was probably two days, we didn't get any sleep, and by the time we got to Oakland California it was probably three days we
Q. hadn't had any sleep and then it took us a day and a half to process out. We
A. were just totally exhausted. I got a non-stop flight from Oakland to Atlanta and got from there on in to Lexington and it was fogged over so they had to take us to Cincinnati and we had to get a cab to bring us back to Lexington and I got back there and there wasn't a soul there. It was a lonely feeling. It wasn't like you see on TV and all these other things what a reception people got during the war, World War II, the Korean War, people just ignored, nobody seemed to care or worry about it. I think people had just gotten conplacent. Of course, the Media served such a bigger picture in the Vietnam situation than it did in those previous wars.

Q. What do you mean by that?
A. Well, there was so much better coverage and everything. The media put a totally
Q. different light on it as far as being able to show the American people what
A. actually was going on, you could get actual battle scenes, actual situations, where as prior to that all they really got was delayed information and news
Q. stories.

Q. Well if that was true, and they often about it being a living room war as it was on television every night, I often wondered why there was this indifference to the returning service men, this lonely feeling that you were not appreciated, you'd been someplace you didn't know where you were, you come back and you weren't
Q. even missed, how do you explain that?

A. I don't know, that's always been a mystery to me, I wasn't expecting anybody to come out and say hey I'm proud of the job you guys did, of course some of them did more than me. I did my job to the best of my ability and I think most people did. I can't change the job I had because that's where they put me, so that's where I had to be. I don't know, I've thought a lot about it, of couse the only peoples reactions I cared about were my immediate family's and they were all supportive and quite understanding about it. They really never expressed actually a feeling of graditude, you served our country and did something our country is all about, is making freedom for us and the rest of the world or for the people that desire the type environment we live in.

Q. They weren't expressing it?
A. Nobody was expressing it.

Q. When was it you got home, when did you hit Ft. Lewis Washington on the return?
A. I came back through Oakland California. That was in June of 1970, about the middle of June because I'd gotten about a 30 day drop to come back and enroll in school.

Q. Did you think coming out like that, one day you're in the service in Vietnam, the next day you're in the Cincinnati airport?
A. Yes, it was really strange, because after being over there awhile, the biggest thing to me, actually being over there, you didn't have time to think about what the American people were thinking about you at that time, because you were thinking about your own skin and if you had a job, you had a job to do and maybe that's good because it kept you from sitting there and stewing and forming these opinions in your mind that might have caused you to really lose your cool.

Q. Were you getting much of the reaction from home about the war? Or were you pretty well out of it over there?
A. Well, I was pretty well out of it. About the only thing we got were incoming rounds now and then and _____ _____ and things like that.

Q. I mean from home.
A. No, they really didn't say much about it, no input except they missed me and what was so really bad about it was my little girl was only three days old when I had to leave. Most of my news from my wife was about her and the kids, they never really questioned, of course my mom was probably more concerned than anybody, but really they never relayed anything they heard, they never questioned anything. I really wasn't too much about saying anything.

Q. Even though you had a little baby they still drafted you?
A. Well now I didn't have the baby at the time, I was in the service a year before I went to Vietnam. She was I think 3 days old when I left. Of course, I didn't want to tell her I was going to have to go and I didn't tell her until the day before I left. I wanted to wait until after she had the baby before I did.

Q. Do you ever talk about why we lost the war, do you ever think about it?
A. Politics.

Q. What do you mean by that?
A. You know, as you grow older, I was probably more fortunate than some guys over there because I was older, most of the guys were in the 19-21 yr. old range, when I got drafted I was 23 and when I went to Vietnam 24,25. So I was a little more responsible and not quite as reckless maybe as some of the other guys and not as easily mislead. But it was politics and as you grow older you begin to learn the games that people play.

Q. What kind of a game was it in this case, the way you feel about it.
A. I feel that the dedicated career people in the service and that is their job, their life, their hands were tied because via the news service and the American people nobody was really able to do their job, they were handicapped and I think if they'd let the American forces go in there and do a job such as they had to do in Korea or World War II it could have been over in short order. But when you go over there and just . . . The Vietnam govt. was so corrupt, from start to finish.

Q. That was your impression of it?
A. That was my impression of it, they were so corrupt.

Q. Where did you see that, personal experience or what?
A. Well a lot of it, I 've always heard you shouldn't believe any of what you hear, but after you're around it so long and you hear the same things over and over and over you know there's got to be some fact there somewhere. There's evidence of it because there were things like the GI over there were supposed to have available to him that he couldn't get, but you'd go out in the middle of no where and there'd be some Vietnamese with it.

Q. Such as what?
A. Well the classic example was Coke.

Q. These Coke boys?, I've hard about them.
A. You'd go out in the middle of anywhere and they could offer you a coke in a bottle and all you'd get was an old rusty can. Cigarettes, anything you wanted and the black market as far as money was concerned was quite flourishing. Of course a lot was hearsay because I was confined considerably to Long Ben area.

Q. Did you ever get back off the line as it were?
A. Yes, I got to make several trips to Saigon and we used to get out to go. . .

Q. What was your impression there?
A. Well, there were some nice areas but then there were some very poverty stricken areas just like in any American city really. The thing there most of their structure have walls around them and you drive through the street and they throw their garbage in the middle of the street, of course you get on the inside they're fairly nice. Of course I didn't get to see that many. I saw the President's Castle, they had all the armed guards and the machine gun.

Q. There seems to be a lot of resentment by guys who were out on the line as it were compared with the soldiers that were back in Saigon and so forth, it's as if it was two different worlds.
A. Well, I imagine it was, that's why I say, of course I can't question that, that's where I got sent that's what I had to do. But I had a lot of good friends out in the field, guys that would come in.
Q. Do you ever [illegible] about trip to Lost the war. Do you ever think about it?
Q. I'm thinking of you as one that was right in the middle of it there, you were part of it in your particular job in that MASH unit, where as the guys back in Saigon and other places didn't even know the war was going on.
A. Oh, yes, particularly with the Air Force, they got the best of everything. Their living style compared to ours was just 180 degrees apart. But there were people in Saigon and Long Ben and places like that that probably had it made, but that never really bothered me, because all I was thinking about was getting my time in and getting back. [illegible] games that [illegible]
Q. Just survival?
A. Just survival, that's the only thing to bring it down to. I had a particular friend who was a sergeant _____ and he'd been over there, he extended and he'd been wounded and bad enough that they sent him back to the states and he recovered and volunteered again and he married a Vietnamese girl. That's why, talking with him, he was an honest guy, I knew him well enough and why should he lie to me we were buddies and I got to know him pretty well. He had such a hassle when he tried to leave and he wanted to bring her back to the country because they had a child. And you hear a lot about the Vietnamese American children what a bad situation it is, but here was this guy that really, really tried to do the right thing and all this red tape and everything involved wouldn't let him.

Q. Was he from Kentucky?
A. No, he was from PA originally. And he'd tell me things and other people would and after you get to know people you can pretty well tell if they're B.S.ing you or not.

Q. Did you ever read anything about the war any books on it or anything?
A. No, I haven't read any.

Q. Have you seen any of the movies about the war?
A. I've seen a couple, The Deer Slayer and . . .

Q. _____?
A. I've just seen the preview of _____. I wanted to go see it but I never did get a chance to.

Q. Did you talk much about it or is it just something in the past?
A. No, for me it's just something in the past. I don't really care that much to talk about it, because nobody seems to want to so I just make it a closed subject. It's a part of my life, Well a guy I'm working with right now was involved in the Korean conflict, he and I have been talking, just comparing notes as far as how his time over there was and how mine was. Really the situations are similar it just wasn't the animosity of the American people against that particular conflict like there was in Korea, comparing Korea to Vietnam.

Q. Do you belong to any of the organizations, like the American legion?
A. I joined the American legion, but I'm not active in it because of my work, but I get literature from them all the time.

Q. Do you ever see any of the guys from Morehead that were around your time in Vietnam?
A. No, not really, that's kind of an odd situation too, there weren't really that many from the Morehead area, my age. I do know 3 or 4 of the guys around here but we never compare notes or anything.

Q. Did you belong to the Vets Club?
A. No, not after I came back because I went to summer school and one more semester at night and finished up. I really haven't been back around it that much. It was kind of strange too, do you know Dr. Newton, I went back and had a design class under him, well I walked in his class I really don't think, because he didn't realize how long it had been, he looked at me and said where have you been.

Q. How long was the time?
A. Two years later, I really liked Dr. Newton. But he looked at me and said where have you been? Of course my answer was Vietnam, in the service, he was quite surprised, he remembered me but he couldn't figure out quite where I'd been.