Jeff Danziger
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
February 11, 2025
Jack Zipper ’28

**JACK ZIPPER:** Hello everyone. This is Jack Zipper. Today is February 11, 2025, and I'm conducting this oral history interview for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. I am conducting this interview with Mr. Jeff Danziger. This interview is taking place in person in Berry Library on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Mr. Danziger thank you so much for speaking to me today.

**JEFF DANZIGER:** Well, I’m glad you’re doing it.

**ZIPPER:** Let’s begin. Where were you born and where are you from?

**DANZIGER:** I was born in the Bronx in New York City,[1] and I lived—we moved to Westchester for a while. And then, after college in Colorado, I moved to Vermont and lived there—off and on—New York and Vermont and Boston and other places, ever since. I now live in Brattleboro, Vermont.

**ZIPPER:** So you live in Brattleboro, Vermont, but you said you went to college in Colorado?

**DANZIGER:** I went to the University of Denver. And I think I went to class four or five times. Mostly I went out there to ski. And then I began working for a newspaper, both newspapers in Denver, and discovered that I loved newspaper work.

**ZIPPER:** And what years did you go to college?

**DANZIGER:** [Chuckles] ’60 to ’66. I didn't go straight through; I took off a few years.

**ZIPPER:** Tell me about your family.

**DANZIGER:** My father was in advertising. My mother was an artist. They both went to Cooper Union in New York, which at that time was free. They came from large families, and they both were artists. My father had had to make

[1] Danziger was born on November 14th, 1943.

some money, so he had an advertising agency in New York. He was a mad man as they—as the show now calls it. And my mother did portraits. They had six kids in total. I was the oldest. And there was always a lot of art materials around the house. So we all drew and did sketches, paintings and so on.

**ZIPPER:** And do you have any siblings?

**DANZIGER:** I said, yeah, there were six. I was the eldest.

**ZIPPER:** How did it feel to be in such a large household?

**DANZIGER:** It didn't feel strange then, but it—people had larger families then. But now you find very few people—well very few Americans have that many, that many children. But you know.

**ZIPPER:** And you got married, right?

**DANZIGER:** I was married after I got out of college, in ’66 I guess it was, and we moved to Vermont. And bought a house and 50 acres in Vermont for $8,500.[Chuckles] That's hundred with an H.

**ZIPPER:** Did you and your wife have plans for the future? What were you going to do?

**DANZIGER:** We wanted to live there, because neither one of us had came from areas where you had a lot of land. At that time, Vermont was basically—nobody wanted to move to Vermont. This was just the beginning of the hippie years, and everybody was moving up here. The house needed everything, and I had a job in Burlington [VT] and she had a job teaching in St. Johnsbury [VT]. And so we settled there.

**ZIPPER:** What was your job in Burlington?

**DANZIGER:** I worked for General Electric. I made movies for them, marketing movies for them. They made aircraft machine guns, the famous Vulcan gun [M61 Vulcan], if you've ever heard of the Vulcan gun. That worked for a while. And it had a deferment—from the from the draft. And after about a year, the deferment was pulled by my draft board, which was in Poughkeepsie,

New York.[2] And you could not change a draft board. And the draft boards—I thought, very unfairly—would draft people who had moved away from their towns, rather than drafting any of their local their local kids. Just a minute, you never found that reference to the guy Jack?

**ZIPPER:** No, I'll talk to you about that after.

**DANZIGER:** Okay, right, that's good.

**ZIPPER:** So, okay, so you—your draft board in New York terminated your deferment.

**DANZIGER:** They drafted me!

**ZIPPER:** And they drafted you. And when were you drafted?

**DANZIGER:** In ’66, I think it was.

**ZIPPER:** Drafted in ’66. And how did it feel to get drafted?

**DANZIGER:** I have never felt worse in my life. It was unfair, it was stupid. By that time in the war, everybody knew—certainly the troops knew—that we weren't going to win anything and that it was endless. Shortly after that, the Pentagon Papers came out and said, ‘Yes, that's right, it was unwinnable.’

**ZIPPER:** How did you feel going to the war, reading the Pentagon Papers, reading that whole cover-up, everything? How did that feel going into the going into that situation?

**DANZIGER:** The Pentagon Papers were a little bit after that. We sort of knew—the Pentagon Papers makes the point that you can't win a war of attrition against an Asian country. And that the Pentagon had known about that and kept it a secret for a long time. This was—what's it? Not Berrigan, but the other guy [Daniel Ellsberg]. So we sort of knew that too.

But the shock for most of us who were draftees was that it was terribly unfair, and the training was phenomenally stupid. In basic training, just as an example, we were trained in how to use a bayonet. I mean, nobody

[2] In his memoir, *Lieutenant Dangerous,* Danziger stated that his draft board was in Peekskill, NY. This was confirmed by Danziger in email communications

uses a bayonet, it was this leftover training from World War Two or the Korean War, and so we were running at things with a bayonet. Stupid. And plus, the rifles were— we started off with M14s [Rifle], which were then replaced by the M16 [Rifle]. But for a while, I, you know, was trained and taught how to use that rifle [the M14], how to take it apart and clean it. And put it all back together—and then never used it again.

**ZIPPER:** So we'll get to your training at Fort Dix [New Jersey]. But first I just want to say, how did the people around you, your family and friends react to you getting drafted?

**DANZIGER:** I can say that, for myself, I was amazed that I did what I was told. And my father had been in the Second World War in the South Pacific, and he said, 'you just have to be careful.' And you know, that's how the army operates: they're always making mistakes and assumptions that are wrong. You just have to be really, really careful.

**ZIPPER:** You say that you were you were surprised that you did what you were told. What do you mean by that?

**DANZIGER:** I guess I mean that a lot of people weren't. People were either dodging the draft, going to Canada, going to Sweden, or just disappearing. When you said you were going to get to Fort Dix—at Fort Dix, at one point, I had heard that from Fort Dix itself, which is a large basic training [facility], there were somewhere around 5000 men AWOL [absent without leave], and they would—they didn't go to Canada or Sweden. They went to New York City and disappeared.

**ZIPPER:** What was basic training like then?

**DANZIGER:** Basic training was—the only thing that was good about it was that it was really good physical training. You did get into shape. You had to, you know, low crawl, which is always handy to be able to do. You had to go along a ladder. You had to climb a rope. I was in reasonably good shape, so I didn't have too hard a time, but, for a lot of people, it was very hard.

**ZIPPER:** And you referenced in your memoir, *Lieutenant Dangerous*, which is something we'll come back to over the course of this interview, how everyone was getting sick with influenza and with all these other

meningococcal things, what was that like to be in this sick and miserable state?

**DANZIGER:** Well, it was—because we were in these barracks, we were all together. So if somebody got sick, then everybody got sick to some extent, and they would send you to the hospital for a week, to see if you got over it. They had no medicine. They didn't give us any medicine for it. You slept there. They'd wake you up in the middle of the night and check your temperature. But it wasn't real medicine. It was just, let's get through this.

**ZIPPER:** After—after basic training, you went to language school. Why did you apply to go to language school?

**DANZIGER:** Well, if you were drafted, you owed them two years. Which meant some training and then going into the infantry. And I just wanted to stay out of the infantry. And you could sign up for additional schools. And I'd always been good at languages, so I signed up for this language school, which turned out to be Vietnamese. A really useful language—there were no Vietnamese restaurants back then. You couldn't even—you couldn't even order anything in a Vietnamese restaurant! That was 47 weeks of training. And I thought, well, the war will end. Everybody was saying that. And I went to the Vietnamese language school, which was in Texas. I thought it was going to be at the Presidio of Monterey [California], which was promised, and instead it was in El Paso Texas, at Fort Bliss. Biggs Field [Biggs Army Airfield], which was okay, I suppose.

**ZIPPER:** You were at basic training—when were you there?

**DANZIGER:** When? Well, see, I was drafted—that was toward the fall and winter of ’66.[3]

**ZIPPER:** That was towards the winter of ’66. And then you went to language school. When was that?

**DANZIGER:** That was the end of ’66 and ’67.[4]

**ZIPPER:** And what was language school like?

[3] Danziger confirmed later in email communication that he attended basic training at Fort Dix from December 1966-67.
[4] Danziger attended language school from 1967-1968.

**DANZIGER:** Language School was taught by Vietnamese people in an old Air Force Base, part of Fort Bliss. It was six hours a day, two hours a night of language labs, roughly speaking. And it was a year with four weeks of leave, or two weeks of leave and travel time. So it was the better part of the year. And I was right, you know, halfway through that year, Lyndon Johnson announced that he wasn't going to run, and, you know, the war was going to end. Of course, it went on for another six years.

**ZIPPER:** In your memoir, you write how you and the other students staged minor rebellions against the constant flow of idiocy. What did you mean by that?

**DANZIGER:** The army doesn't really think things out. And when I say the army, I actually don't know who I'm talking about: whether I'm talking about the Secretary of Defense on down, or whether it was the current political schemes.

The best example: we were taught a dialect of the Vietnamese language. There's three basic dialects, north, central, and southern. And we were taught the southern dialect, which like American English, as you go south, gets more slurred and more difficult to understand. The people that we were supposed to be listening to on the radio to gather valuable military information, by the time we got there, were the North Vietnamese Army, who were from the north and spoke in a dialect that was almost—it was very difficult to understand. Nobody seemed to have made that mistake. All of our teachers were from Saigon, which is in the south, or France. So a mistake that size, of training people for a year to understand the language—which is hard enough on the radio—but to understand the language that was not the language of the people you were supposedly fighting against–it's a colossal mistake. We did point that out to them. We did. I certainly did, and had no effect.

**ZIPPER:** Ok. And then you and other soldiers, like Steven Shackles, you were kind—you were always staging these pranks. What were what were those like?

**DANZIGER:** The classes were boring, and so you—being a GI—you think of something that you have to do to keep yourself—we weren't allowed to read in the middle of the class. In the part of the building where our classrooms were, there were special forces guys and some other officers who were taking a

shorter course in in Vietnamese. [Steven] Shackles, who was a wise guy beyond anything else—I loved him dearly, and I don't know what happened to him—would conspire with me and some other people to go up during the breaks and stand near the other the Special Forces guys who were there. They were true believers. These were the Green Berets. And we would pretend that we were speaking Vietnamese very fast, a good deal of which we made up and they couldn't understand, just to drive them crazy. We would ask them, what does that—what does that word actually mean? Even though we knew that there was no such word.

**ZIPPER:** And it, were there any other interesting pranks, or was that—

**DANZIGER:** I think that was the most memorable one.

**ZIPPER:** Did you—you said [in your memoir] that there was always a pecking order of hate. You always hated the officers and the officers always hated you. Did that apply to this scenario?

**DANZIGER:** Hate is probably the wrong word. You have a tendency to feel sorry for people you outrank, tolerate the people you rank, and really don't want to have anything to do with captains and above. Now—I did become an officer after a while. And I discovered that it—the rule was the same all the way through. I didn't like people who were majors.

**ZIPPER:** Do you think that justified your treatment of the Green Berets?

**DANZIGER:** It's a, it's a, it's a silly answer to a question that shouldn't probably even be considered. But yeah, it's true,

**ZIPPER:** And you ended up getting—language school was running out, and you still did not want to go to Vietnam. You didn't want to get deployed, but you couldn't go to Officer School. Why was that?

**DANZIGER:** In part because they were—I guess they were desperate for officers, and so they would give commissions. It was called direct commissions. If you had gone to college, and if you look like you could be a trainable officer. And you were put in with classes with ROTC graduates. So that's what I—I was sworn in in that and promoted to a second lieutenant,

**ZIPPER:** But you didn't—But you applied to get a direct commission. You did not go to Officer school [Officer Candidate School]?

**DANZIGER:** No, I didn’t. No.

**ZIPPER:** And why did you apply to go get a direct commission and become an officer?

**DANZIGER:** Truthfully, ’cause of the money. Officers, I think—if I remember the numbers correctly—I think, oh, lieutenants got $575 a month. I was—at that point, I was a spec five—specialist five, enlisted. And I think I only got about $170 or maybe $180 a month. And we still had a mortgage on our farm in Vermont. And my wife was—still lived there all the way through the war. She didn't join me.

**ZIPPER:** So this was—becoming an officer was to make the money and to support your family?

**DANZIGER:** Yes. And I also—there was another six months stateside officer training,

**ZIPPER:** OK, And then where'd you go for that officer training?

**DANZIGER:** I went to a number of places. It was, it was a common—they didn't really know what to do with people who had language training. And I think was occurring to them by that time that it was the wrong language. I went to—short period to Fort Holabird in Baltimore and Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland. That was about it.

**ZIPPER:** Tell me about your time in Baltimore?

**DANZIGER:** It was very brief. Baltimore—Holabird is a intelligence training, and I was going to switch from—when my commission came down, it came down in ordinance. About which I know nothing. And then it was going to be switched to intelligence and—but I don't know if it ever was switched, to tell you the truth.

**ZIPPER:** So you learned—you did ordinance training at Aberdeen Proving Ground—

**DANZIGER:** Yes, right.

**ZIPPER:** Which was in a different part of Maryland?

**DANZIGER:** It's about 30 to 40 miles north of Baltimore.

**ZIPPER:** And before going to your stateside assignment, yeah, at Fort Belvoir?

**DANZIGER:** Yes.

**ZIPPER:** You go to apply to journalism school at Columbia and Northwestern [Danziger chuckles]. And en route to your interview at Columbia, you get into a train argu—or you get into an argument with the conductor on the train. Talk me through that?

**DANZIGER:** You got—well, if you were in uniform on the train—this was the old Pennsylvania Railroad. If you were in uniform, you got half-price tickets. And so I took the train up to New York, and I was—the station in Washington you had to stand online to get your ticket and I was late. So I just got on the train, and the conductor said that he couldn't sell me a half-price ticket because all those had to be done in [the station]. And I just—he was ready to throw me off the train in some place in Maryland. And I refused to go. And I just, I'm not a fight—I'm not a fighter [unintelligible], I just said: that's it. Here I am sitting here in uniform, and this guy wanted to charge me full price.

**ZIPPER:** How did that exchange make you feel?

**DANZIGER:** I have often thought that Americans don't really care that much about their soldiers and their veterans. I mean, they—after Vietnam, the veterans did not get a parade. They didn't get anything. I think there was a victory parade of some sort held in New York about 20 years after the war, and it was kind of apologetic. So no, I just felt, what the hell am I doing this for? These people don't care.

**ZIPPER:** And you say in your memoir that you had like some perverse satisfaction from arguing to this guy [Danziger laughs]. Do you think this was indicative of, maybe, your thinking at the time? Of your kind of anger at the time?

**DANZIGER:** Yes, I wanted to go home. I wanted to take off the uniform and throw it in the corner and go back to Vermont and with my family. And I didn't want to

have anything to do with it. I had read a number of books by that time, I, of course, I had read *Catch-22*. I had read [*The*] *Good Soldier Švejk*. Have you ever—have you read that?

**ZIPPER:** No, but I know about *Catch-22*.

**DANZIGER:** *Catch-22* it's, you know, it's a wonderful book. And the humor of the idiocy of things that go on is very well done. And it's a confusing book, but the whole—the times were very confusing. America, essentially, as a background, was at war with itself. After ’68 we knew that it wasn't going to be a victory. It wasn't going to be anything. Well, in that case, what are we doing there?

**ZIPPER:** Did you find yourself to be in a catch-22 during this time?

**DANZIGER:** Huh! There's one line in *Catch-22*—and I've taught the book since. I was an English teacher after I got out of the Army. Where Yossarian is told, well, “they hate you.” And he said, “why?” Well, “Because you're Jewish.” And he said, “I'm not Jewish.” It says “It doesn't make any difference. They hate everybody.” And he wasn't talking about the Germans. He was talking about the American command.

**ZIPPER:** You're saying the American people just hated everyone?

**DANZIGER:** It was, it was everybody against everybody, yeah.

**ZIPPER:** That is—that's truly heartbreaking. I'm sorry that you had to—

**DANZIGER:** It's terrible, because I love my country. I mean, I really do. I think we're the best place on Earth. And how the hell we got into this thing. Plus, you know, you have to remember that [Claudia] “Lady Bird” Johnson, president's [Lyndon Johnson] wife, owned part of the largest construction company in Saigon—RMK [RMK-BRJ]. She was making money off the war, and other people were as well. There were endless examples.

**ZIPPER:** And how did you feel about that?

**DANZIGER:** Well, it’s not fair.

**ZIPPER:** And just for the record, you—when did you go to language school? You went to language school—

**DANZIGER:** ’67. Most of [unintelligible] Yeah.

**ZIPPER:** And then—

**DANZIGER:** And ’68.

**ZIPPER:** As you were an officer—that whole process of direct commission, then going to Baltimore, Aberdeen Proving Ground, where—when was that around? What dates?

**DANZIGER:** That was ’68. Yeah.

**ZIPPER:** ’68?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah. I had a—as I remember—I had about six months of training and then a six month stateside assignment. So by the time they get around to sending me to Vietnam, it was ’69 and ’70.[5]

**ZIPPER:** Okay, let's go back to your—before we get to Vietnam, let's go back to your state side assignment. What was your time like it at Fort Belvoir?

**DANZIGER:** I was given a desk job, and I sat there. It really wasn't anything. It was just being in part of a—Belvoir is the Engineer Corps. So they're, you know, intelligent people and the officers are engineers and logistics people. And I, you know, I enjoyed their company, but I really didn't have anything to do. And it's right south of Washington, DC. So you get to go up and spend time in the Smithsonian and in the botanical gardens.

**ZIPPER:** Did you find those, those visits to Washington DC, were healing in any way?

**DANZIGER:** Were what?

**ZIPPER:** Were healing?

**DANZIGER:** No, I had some family in DC that I spent time with.

[5] Danziger went to Vietnam in 1970.

**ZIPPER:** And you also took some pretty long drives to go visit your wife too?

**DANZIGER:** My wife stayed in Vermont, and we would go up to Vermont on weekends. I had a friend who was a cook, and he had re-upped [reenlisted in military service], and he bought a new car. Which was what enlisted people did. And we would drive Friday—drive like mad—from Belvoir all the way up to Vermont.

**ZIPPER:** How'd it feel to see your wife?

**DANZIGER:** See?

**ZIPPER**: How'd it feel to see your wife after those long drives?

**DANZIGER:** Well, we both were just putting up with this until this—until this experience stopped.

**ZIPPER:** And did you still hold out hope that the war was going to end before you had to go into Vietnam?

**DANZIGER:** I didn't care. I didn't care whether we won or lost. I don't— I just wanted to get out. It was…

**ZIPPER:** Tell me about— you're doing all this, and you finally get your orders to go to Vietnam. What was that day like?

**DANZIGER:** My brother [Caleb Danziger] and I were both on orders. My brother had not finished college, and he went to OCS [Officer Candidate School] to be an infantry officer. And he's one child younger than I am. He is very good natured while I am kind of sour and miserable. And I always thought that "God, he's going to get himself killed over there." And so we were both on orders, and you— they weren't supposed to send two brothers at the same time. And so they sent him back to Korea and they sent me to Vietnam.

**ZIPPER:** How'd that feel?

**DANZIGER:** I was—I thought at the time that I would get a safe assignment doing translations at some part of the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] headquarters in Saigon.

**ZIPPER:** So you didn't feel like you got the short end of the stick?

**DANZIGER:** Well, you don't feel one way or the other. My brother was an infantry captain, and he probably would have wound up—at least, I thought at the time—would have wound up in a more hazardous situation.

**ZIPPER:** So you feel justified, and kind of not being angry about that?

**DANZIGER:** I don't think justified, is it? I just, you know, we just wanted to—and I thought I would be out of the patrolling sort of action because I was a translator.

**ZIPPER:** How did it feel to be—how did it feel to finally get to Vietnam? What was that journey like?

**DANZIGER:** I think I made a point of it in the book. When you got off the plane, there was a sign that said, huge sign that said: “you have a friend at the Chase Manhattan.” Well, where is my friend now? But it did—felt awful. It was, it was hot as hell. It was muggy. And you sort of realized, Oh, good, a year of this crap.

**ZIPPER:** Why do you think you remember seeing that sign?

**DANZIGER:** It was pointed out by other people. It's rather famous that the Chase Manhattan was advertising, as you—to GI’s as we got off the plane. Ridiculous, you know.

**ZIPPER:** Okay, so it was just like—it was just like, huge and—

**DANZIGER:** Well, they had had the sign in New York too, that their big bank in New York. And that was their sign that you should bank with them, because they were so friendly.

**ZIPPER:** But where, as you said, “Where is your friend now?” So then you—where did you go after you landed?

**DANZIGER:** There were a couple of things you—you were given some training there. You were gotten—they wanted to make you used to explosions. Some people are—for some reason, it didn't, doesn't bother me. But some people are completely destabilized by explosions. So they would show you—make you be someplace where there were explosions on artillery going out, artillery coming in, mortars, bombing raids and so on. To make you, make you inured, they thought

**ZIPPER:** To make you kind of immune to the to the blasts?

**DANZIGER:** Or to be able to tell whether it was our explosions or their explosions.

**ZIPPER:** And that was important. That was important to them?

**DANZIGER:** It didn't make any difference to me, but that's what they thought. And then, and you had to take also sorts of medical treatments and shots for various tropical diseases.

**ZIPPER:** Ok. So like malaria and things like that?

**DANZIGER:** Malaria and dengue and a variety of other things, mostly malaria.

**ZIPPER:** And you were assigned—you were an ordinance officer, and you were assigned. What was your first assignment?

**DANZIGER:** I was assigned to the First Cavalry [Division] and to a place up near the Cambodian border called Phuoc Vinh [Base Camp]. And I was there for a couple of months, and then we were assigned back down to Bien Hoa [Air Base], which is near Saigon. And then after that, I was assigned to the First Cavalry headquarters in—oh, I'm sorry. It was Tây Ninh up by the [Cambodian] border and Phuoc Vinh was where I was assigned later. And then in and out of various units the 11th ACR, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment for a while—that was an infantry unit. And then to the ARVN, to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam.

**ZIPPER:** Let's start at [Tây Ninh]. So you. You Your first assignment is there? What were you doing?

**DANZIGER:** Tây Vinh?

**ZIPPER:** Tây Vinh.

**DANZIGER:** No, no, we have to—Tây Ninh was up by the Canadian—was up by the Canadian border, oh Christ—was up by the Cambodian border. And we went to an operation called Rock Island East, and we went over the border into this place where the North Vietnamese had stockpiled all of this stuff for attacks against Saigon.

**ZIPPER:** You were also assigned to replace artillery tubes on fire bases. What was that like?

**DANZIGER:** The fighting was—they would send out patrols and they would—if they had a contact—which meant they met some enemy there, the infantry was supposed to pull back and call in artillery on where they thought the Vietnamese were. And they would call into the nearest fire base. Which was a place that they had made in the jungle, and they had somewhere around eight, eight guns, 105[mm]s and 175[mm] artillery pieces. And after a while, after they've shot a certain number of rounds, the tube of the of the gun gets a little bit bigger from the shock. And so it has to be replaced. There's also a shock absorber to take that—which has to be replaced. And we—the unit that I was with—the First Cav—would fly up there and fly to the wherever the fire base was and replace the tubes.

**ZIPPER:** But that wasn't a part of your job at Rock Island East during the Cambodian incursion?

**DANZIGER:** No that was a thing called the Parrot's Beak. You've—you'll find that. Nixon gave a speech about it—about this place where they had taken [laughs], taken all of this armament and ammunition, and amazingly, bicycles. Thousands of them that had been brought down from the northern part—North Vietnam. And they had—whatever they wanted, food or medical equipment or guns and ammunition was on a bicycle. Which was walked down—it was the length of California—would be walked down with all this crap on the bicycle. And then they didn't need the bicycle back, so they just left it there, you know, thousands of Chinese bicycles.

**ZIPPER:** And you took all those bicycles, all those munitions—

**DANZIGER:** They took a lot of them back. Yeah, I don't know what for. I guess they thought they were going to sell them to the Vietnamese. Vietnamese didn't want them. They didn't want bicycle. They had their own.

**ZIPPER:** You took all these things from—you took also weapons and other stuff from that supply cache. What did you do with those?

**DANZIGER:** I don't know—there was a dump, which—best word for it was. It was near Bien Hoa, near Saigon. It was huge. And it was called Long Binh. And there was the jail, the famous army jail for bad soldiers called Long Binh Jail—or, LBJ [laughs]. They had—they dumped it all there. There were mountains and mountains of crap. And I think they sold it to the to the Vietnamese junk dealers.

**ZIPPER:** You said you didn't go on patrols, but you end up going on patrols as—were you an ordinance officer when you went on patrols?

**DANZIGER:** Right, yeah.

**ZIPPER:** What were those patrols like?

**DANZIGER:** They were searching for—the great danger to—the weapon that was used against Army bases was the mortars. Which is a small tube, and it shoots these mortar shells close by. And so they would—I can't remember—we had one that's 82 millimeters. They had one that was 83 millimeters. So it was either—I should look this up. It was either that our shells fit in their tubes, or their—I don't, I don't remember the rest of it. But they were looking for—in the jungle they were looking for these tubes or the plate that went on the bottom. I don't know what it proved, but we never—I don't think we ever found any of them. And we'd go out on these patrols and—

**ZIPPER:** Tell me about the patrol where you and—you were with the Irishman/Venezuelan [Danziger chuckles], and you ended up not going out, or you ended up staying where you were?

**DANZIGER:** I wish I had kept track of things, but you just don't. I mean, he was very Irish, he had flaming red hair. And he was from Venezuela. I don't—why I remember this. And we would supposedly go out on cloverleaf patrols, which is that one—you had a central point, you went four loops, and it sort of looked like a cloverleaf. And I was out there for a couple of days, and I,

you know, said, “When are we going to do this?” And he said, we're not going to do it. And he had sort of—it occurred to me that he had sort of made a separate peace with the North Vietnamese, that you don't bother us and we don't bother you.

**ZIPPER:** You were confronting all this incompetence, it seems like, at all levels. From your fellow officers not—shirking patrols, to all the—to all these other things that at the top, how did you feel about that?

**DANZIGER:** The shirking of that patrol, that was the only instance I ever saw. There were people who really took it seriously. Officers and—who wanted to make rank and who wanted to go out and find the North Vietnamese and really didn't like—the North Vietnamese were an army, an organized army. Previous to that, when the war started, it was just the Viet Cong, who were local rebels and revolutionaries who wanted to get rid of the South Vietnamese government. Which was just so corrupt, it was unbelievable.

And they worshiped the French. I'm damned if I know why. But they wanted French wine, and they wanted to spend money on it. And they collected taxes, a lot of it from us, and that's what they wanted to do. Our teachers, very many of our teachers in the language school were French, Vietnamese.

**ZIPPER:** That's very interesting. So do you think that the French still had —. Were the French—did they still have a presence in Vietnam, or was it mainly they were gone?

**DANZIGER:** They were not only there, they were doing business. They—Michelin Tire Company owned square miles of South Vietnam where they had rubber plantations. And when we would go out to the rubber plantations, as I was telling in the book that—I now live in Brattleboro, and close by, although he's dead now, was a farm that was owned by the man [Ellsworth Bunker] who was the second to last ambassador [to South Vietnam]. Am I getting too far off?

**ZIPPER:** No, your totally fine. Keep going.

**DANZIGER:** Who—he negotiated a deal with the South Vietnamese government that the American army would not be allowed to fire artillery into the rubber plantations. And these plantations went on for miles. They were amazing

in that all the trees were planted in perfectly straight rows, and they had to be cut every couple of days, and the rubber sap would drip out into a little cup. And then the—there were women workers who would go along and collect the sap, which looked like milk. And they would take it to a processing plant and—which were all staffed by French people and French Vietnamese—and they would cook it up. And the rubber would float to the surface. And then it was treated, and it was shipped back. And every one of these bundles that went back said Michelin on the side of it. There was no question. I thought that was absolutely amazing.

**ZIPPER:** And the VC would hide in these fields?

**DANZIGER:** The North Vietnamese, by that time, were hiding in the field. The VC were village—villagers and—

**ZIPPER:** So the [North] Vietnamese Army, too would just hide there?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah.

**ZIPPER:** And would they ambush? Would they use that to ambush you?

**DANZIGER:** Well, the worst part of it was that we would have to go into the rubber plantations. Since we couldn't do it with artillery, we would have to go in. And the 11th ACR had what they call APCs [Armored Personnel Carrier], which are tracked vehicles. And they would drive around trying to find out where the North Vietnamese Army was. If they want to come out and fight. But fighting in between these trees was, you know, it was awful. It was too—I didn't like it. Let's put it that way.

**ZIPPER:** How did it feel to have to go on these patrols and not being—not under the cover of artillery fire, just because of a corporation?

**DANZIGER:** At the time I didn't know that that was the fact. Right now—I live in Brattleboro—and the farm was owned by the family—is owned by the family of Ellsworth Bunker. Who is one of the lousiest people in the world as far as I'm concerned. He's dead now.

**ZIPPER:** But how did you feel at the time having to go into these—

**DANZIGER:** I didn't know what—I didn't know why we were doing it. I said, you know, why not just, you know—the one thing that the North Vietnamese were afraid of was artillery. Which, as I said—somebody else told me this—it wasn't very accurate, but it was plentiful. We had a lot of it. They would just fire and fire and fire and hope they got something.

**ZIPPER:** Okay, I want to go back before you were a member of the 11th ACR, yeah. And, actually, I want to talk about your transition to Phuoc Vinh, [Danziger corrects Zipper's pronunciation], sorry [Danziger laughs] to Phuoc Vinh. To that base. Because you were at Tây Ninh and you seemingly were stuck there. But then you wrote a letter to Greg Aiken your—

**DANZIGER:** George Aiken.

**ZIPPER:** George Aiken, your Senator. Why did you write that letter?

**DANZIGER:** Mostly out of cowardice, because I thought that—in Tây Ninh we were mortared a lot, and I thought, what am I? I'm a—you know, I spent a year in language school. Why am I up here in this ordinance outfit? When I'm—you know, nobody in my unit spoke Vietnamese. We didn't have any Vietnamese. So I wrote a letter to George Aiken, and I said, I—this is bad. And surprisingly, after I got down to Bien Hoa, the colonel called me in. And he had a letter back from George Aiken.

And George Aiken famously said—what we should do. He was a senator from Vermont—old, white haired gentleman, very, very, very smart. He said that we should just say we won and leave. That was his solution for the Vietnam [War]. And it actually might have worked. I don't know how it would have worked.

But—so I wrote him a letter, and he wrote a letter back. And this colonel was angry at me for writing letters. The Army does not like anybody to exercise political control. They got in terrible trouble over that in World War Two. And so then they transferred me to this other place, this other place in the First Cav. And then I, they said, "okay, you want to use your language. We'll find out a place for you to use it."

**ZIPPER:** And you say [in your memoir] that you went to Phuoc Vinh, and then they just started assigning you everywhere. They were just trying to find new

ways to use you. What was that—what was it like to be reassigned all the time?

**DANZIGER:** I don't think they had a plan. I mean, I don't—they didn't know what to do. But if I went back to the base and I'm standing there, they would—they said, well, you should go to the—the overall plan was to get—and this was a Nixon thing—was to get out of the war by—

**ZIPPER:** Vietnamization?

**DANZIGER:** Vietnamization, thank you very much. And Vietnamization meant that we would turn it over to the [South] Vietnamese. And they didn't want it. They like to have the American army there. We had a lot of food, we had a lot of guns. We had money, and so. And we had air conditioning. And nothing in Vietnam was air conditioned. They didn't—they didn't have anything, but we did. And so they were going to—somebody had to explain to the Vietnamese Army, it's going to be yours. It took another six years before they finally went— it didn't take six years. I think it was since ’75 that they finally— the US pulled out. And in a pull out that was so badly planned. I mean, they were—if you've seen the leaving Saigon with the helicopter on the roof and pushing the helicopters overboard into the ocean. You know, it was a disaster. I'm sorry.

**ZIPPER:** No, it's totally fine. And you, you worked with the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] during this time of Vietnamization. What was, what was working with them like?

**DANZIGER:** The ARVN was a—Well overall, the ARVN, I think, knew that it wasn't going to be a victory. They knew that the North Vietnamese Army–which was well organized and supplied by the Chinese, and understood what jungle fighting was about. That the South Vietnamese Army was completely without the idea that they were going to win anything and so. And they knew that it was political, you know, they would have—something would go right, and it would be heralded, something would go wrong, and it would be buried. And, you know, and the two people who were fighting for political power at that time, Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky—Nguyen Cao Ky wound up running a liquor store in Los Angeles was rather [laughs], I don't know why, why that strikes me as funny, but—And I don't know what happened to Thieu, he probably went back in to France.

**ZIPPER:** And did you feel frustrated working with them? Then, if they weren't—if they knew—you felt frustrated?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah. I would—this isn't my experience. I would refer to you to—the best book written about the war is a book called *A Bright Shining Lie*. You probably read that. And he [author Neil Sheehan] talks about the fact that when the US Army had figured out they weren't going to win—that they were being used for political purposes—the whole spirit of doing anything for a lot of people just fell away. And they got rid of William Westmoreland, who was making this stuff up every day. And they put in [Creighton] Abrams, General Abrams. Who he knew that they weren't going to win and that it was going to be a political settlement that nobody was going to be proud of. So yeah, the general mood was: holy shit. What do we do? We have to get through this somehow.

**ZIPPER:** Did you [empathize]? Did you empathize or sympathize with John Paul Vann? The protagonist of *A Bright Shining Lie*—

**DANZIGER:** John Paul Vann is what *A Bright Shining Lie* is about. And he's not portrayed as a very nice person. But he was right—I think I can be corrected on this, but I think what he said overall was that you can't win a war of attrition against an Asian country. There's too many people. American can't win. We had five hundred thousand troops there at one point. And there was, you know, that—not only was there a billion North Vietnamese, there's almost—there's more than a billion Chinese who would have—And you look at the map, and you see that North Vietnam, their northern border is China. Well, they weren't going to allow a victory, you know?

**ZIPPER:** Did this generally frustrate you during the time?

**DANZIGER:** Frustrating is mildly—We were angry.

**ZIPPER:** How did that anger—did that anger manifest itself in your job as a soldier?

**DANZIGER:** Sure, yeah. The relationship between the between the officers and the enlisted men, especially in the infantry, was bad. And, I mean, they—fragging was one instance, but that didn't actually happen very often. But

just not wanting to do anything. And I—And people were still, you know, getting killed. And still was one hundred fifty American casualties a week.

**DANZIGER:** And it was, you know, as my friend said, it was shoveling shit against the tide. It was not you really—you didn't know what you could do. And you didn't want to be accused of cowardice because you were Americans. So was a lot of just waiting, waiting to see.

**ZIPPER:** So you were in a catch-22?

**DANZIGER:** Catch-22? It was catch-22. Yes, it was. And we had already—I didn't read it then, but I had read it over since. But I remember that people would write Yossarian on the walls and on the side of their tanks and APCs. And some of us knew what it was.

**ZIPPER:** You knew what it was back then—

**DANZIGER:** Sort of.

**ZIPPER:** But you didn't feel back then like you were in a catch-22 or did you?

**DANZIGER:** Wasn't exactly—it was just this gnawing, endless feeling that here we are in the middle of a war for which no one—Nixon continued the war because he didn't want to be a president who lost the war. Well, I didn't give a shit if he was a president that lost the war. Nobody did. You know that was his problem.

**ZIPPER:** You voted for Nixon, though?

**DANZIGER:** I did twice, twice.

**ZIPPER:** At the time, you seem to—you didn't really care that he didn't want to lose the war.

**DANZIGER:** The choice at the time was Hubert Humphrey. And Hubert Humphrey was—he had no plan to end the war. Nixon, at least, was creative enough to say he had a plan to end the war. It was secret. Even from Nixon.

**ZIPPER:** Did you believe in his secret plan?

**DANZIGER:** I didn't know what I believed. I mean, it was so confusing, and so—You wanted to believe that somehow you were miss—they were gonna miss you or something.

**ZIPPER:** It seems that you have a lot of instances, sorry, an incidence of military incompetence. Whether it be your general self-nominating himself for the Silver Star, or, you know, the clo—your friends refusing to go on the cloverleaf patrols. How did you confront that at the time?

**DANZIGER:** You just put your head down and say: “This tool will pass” and you try to be careful. And you would shoot—you would go on these patrols. And—especially in the rubber plantation—but you shoot at where everybody else was shooting, and hope that that you didn't get—I mean, in the rubber plantations, there were mines that were—that the North Vietnamese had placed. So that you're driving up and down in these APCs, and that they blew up underneath. Everybody was killed inside so you'd sit on top. And then they would shoot at you because you were sitting. I mean, you know, non-winnable.

**ZIPPER:** It was a lose-lose?

**DANZIGER:** Oh, and then the idiocy was going on. We had [laughs]—there was a radio station, a television station. AFVN [American Armed Forces Vietnam Network]. And they would play—they had people on there that were trying to make you feel, you know, good about yourself or something. And they had this one girl named something—Heatherton was her last name. And she would give little happy-talk speeches. She was cute. And they were just so irrational–That you would be sure to take your Malaria pills. You know, “do it for me.” Jody Heatherton [Davenie Johanna "Joey" Heatherton], I think was her name. I don't remember what her name was. Her father [Ray Heatherton] had been on children's television in New York when I was growing up. There you are.

**ZIPPER:** And she was trying to convince you to—

**DANZIGER:** In a little happy voice. “Hiya fellas.”

**ZIPPER:** Did you find that annoying at the time?

**DANZIGER:** Of course! It drove you crazy. And then they would play—the show that they put on religiously was Hee Haw, I don't know if you remember a television show called Hee Haw. You probably wouldn't I think it's off now. But it was really stupid country western music. And I hate country western music. Well, I didn't like it then, now I hate it. Anyway.

**ZIPPER:** Let's go back to your time with the ARVN. You—what was your role with them? What was your specific role?

**DANZIGER:** The Americans were turning over this stuff. Mostly vehicles and artillery pieces–105[mm]s for the most part. And then there was a kind of a fire direction thing, which I never really understood. And we were trying to get them to figure out how to use that. As I say, the artillery was very useful. I mean, it scared the hell out of the North Vietnamese. And they tried to train the ARVN—the South Vietnamese—in how to use it. And, you know, and they tried.

**ZIPPER:** You were facilitating the transfer of these vehicles?

**DANZIGER:** Supposedly. Except I didn't really know very much about artillery.

**ZIPPER:** You were filling out a lot of paperwork?

**DANZIGER:** Yes. You had to account for it. If you gave the South Vietnamese a 105 or 175 gun you had to account for it. And somebody had to sign for it. Well, they could sign anything. You know, they didn't care.

**ZIPPER:** And did you feel that was a little—How did you feel about all that paperwork and at the time?

**DANZIGER:** It was—a lot of the army paperwork is just idiotic. But they didn't care, as long as they had somebody else down the line to blame for where this thing was.

**ZIPPER:** Did you think it was idiotic at the time? Or was that—

**DANZIGER:** Yes. I knew it was idiotic at the time.

**ZIPPER:** And the ARVN—their families, the soldiers families, would live near you at Phuoc Vinh?

**DANZIGER:** They did. They lived near the ARVN base, and they would have little villages and these little metal houses that were made out of—it was very strange because at the time the beer can industry in the United States was switching over from cans that were made out of steel to cans are made out of aluminum. So they had all this beer can metal that had Budweiser and Schlitz and stuff printed on the side. And they sold it to everybody. And so the poor, little Vietnamese families were living in these shacks made out of American beer can metal that was—

**ZIPPER:** How did you feel seeing that?

**DANZIGER:** God Almighty. I mean, how would you feel? You feel this is stupid, you know, this is crazy.

**ZIPPER:** And how did you feel to actually see children—

DANZIGER: Right outside the base.

ZIPPER: Yeah, right outside the base in this active war zone?

**DANZIGER:** Well, you, you compare it to American children. And I—you know, these kids are—we ran over a kid with a with an APC, once in a village. And, you know, I wasn't there, but they ran and killed a kid. And was it was in a village. It was late in the in the afternoon. And the guy didn't see him, and he and he ran over him. And we went out there. I was sent to go out there to pay the family some money. Then, not much they—the State Department amazingly paid for these things because it was a civil war on paper. So they picked the kid up, and they took him to a helicopter, and they flew him off. And they told the family they were going to—he was going to the hospital. And he wasn't. And so then I had to pay them. And I think we paid them something like, you know, a couple of hundred [South Vietnamese] piastres or something. It was nothing. So, yeah, I felt…

**ZIPPER:** How'd you feel about that?

**DANZIGER:** Bad. It was terrible.

**ZIPPER:** And was this a typical thing? Did you have to confront civilian casualties very often?

**DANZIGER:** No, not, very often. Because I supposedly could talk to them [in Vietnamese]. I was some sometimes given the assignment to go out with the—to get some soldiers and we'd go out and see what happened. But we didn't want to go.

**ZIPPER:** Did you get in—during this time, were there any—did you get into firefights?

**DANZIGER:** No, not with that kind of thing. No, no, there wasn't anybody that—there wasn't the enemy. It was the villagers. They might have been—

**ZIPPER:** You still have the ARVN uniform?

**DANZIGER:** I do someplace. Yes, it's too small for me.

**ZIPPER:** How did it—how did it feel to still have this reminder of your kind of service way?

**DANZIGER:** I don't know why I kept it. I don't know why they gave it to me. It's just fatigues, you know, and it was too small back then.

**ZIPPER:** You're with the ARVN. And then you—do you get reassigned again? Do you—where do you go? Do you stay with the ARVN?

**DANZIGER:** The last assignment was to go north with this operation, the—they wanted to have the South Vietnamese Army go into the Ho Chi Minh trail up north and beat the hell out of the—and stop it. The Ho Chi Minh Trail was coming down from North Vietnam. And nobody wanted to do it. And the story is when they were doing this, they sent me, and I think six or seven ARVN interpreters—who could speak English a lot better than I could speak Vietnamese—and we went north. And when we got halfway up the country, we stopped. The helicopter stopped. And they—all except one disappeared. They had deserted. And the one guy—who I knew, who was kind of a friend—said, I'm not going either, and it's not going to be good and, you know, you should not go. And I, you know, "I have to go." And so he didn't go.

**ZIPPER:** We'll get to operation. Lam Son, I'm very interested in it. But before that—

**DANZIGER:** Lam Son II, I think.

**ZIPPER:** Yeah, Lam Son II. I think—it was you said in your memoir it was [Lam Son] 719. Before that, you worked a lot with North Vietnamese defectors, bringing in people who are defecting. What was that like?

**DANZIGER:** It was only about three of them that had come over, and usually it was because they were sick. They were they were malarial. And they didn't have enough quinine to treat it. Or they were wounded. And some of them—at least two of them were women. And they weren't exactly North Vietnamese soldiers. They were—they carried stuff, and one was pregnant and had the child at Phuoc Vinh base.

**ZIPPER:** And you wrote in your memoir about this one instance where you had a wounded—was it a [North Vietnamese] soldier? And your commander said to not operate on him with anesthesia—

**DANZIGER:** He was hit with a claymore mine someplace. A claymore mine was a bunch of little steel balls in a in a shaped charge. So he had been hit with 15 or 20 of these little few balls, and he was being operated on. And the commander didn't say—somebody else sent me over there and say, well, “listen, see if he says anything.” Well, he's screaming, you know, he's not saying anything [laughs]. And finally, they said they—we can't operate on him while he’s conscious. And they knocked him out.

**ZIPPER:** How did it feel—how did it feel to have to, to have to deal with this commander's like, seemingly ridiculous order to not put him under anesthesia?

**DANZIGER:** The order probably made sense to him at the time, you know, but he wasn't there. I know that. There’s blood everywhere, and there’s screaming, and, you know, this—you can get used to it. It is surprising. I mean, surgeons, I don't know how surgeons do it, who work every day, removing things and cutting into skin.

**ZIPPER:** Do you—so you were numb to all of that, the blood and gore of the war? By that time?

**DANZIGER:** I think what happens is you withdraw into, you know, the inside piece of yourself. And you don't know what to do. And you try to find a logic, an interior logic, which says, well, here I am, it'll be over.

**ZIPPER:** What was your logic?

**DANZIGER:** That was about it.

**ZIPPER:** And how did that inform your decisions during this time?

**DANZIGER:** I wouldn't say it informed anything. I just wanted to, you know, to stay numb is probably the best thing, you know. Plus you had to realize that essentially, the North Vietnamese—and now that we see Vietnam, they weren't communists. They didn't want Marxism. They just wanted to live, you know. And you could sort of see it then, but it was hard to—people were constantly yammering on about the commies and the commies and the commies and so on. And, good lord, you can now buy tires that are made in Vietnam. You can buy electronics that are made in Vietnam. They're capitalists, right from the right from the get go, right? So are the Chinese for God's sake.

**ZIPPER:** And you, you make a lot of notes about this in your—this same theme in your memoir, talking about how “the cure to communism is communism.”

**DANZIGER:** My father said that.

**ZIPPER:** Do you think that what—seeing these people, do you think that they were really invested in this war against the United States? And if so, why?

**DANZIGER:** It was a colony, and it was treated terribly badly by the French. The English were cruel colonial powers, but the French had them beat all over the place. The French—the French even had a truck-mounted guillotine. How you like that? For it to terrorize villages. And they would—I mean, is there, is there a more hideous colonial thing to do to a country than to—especially if you're French and you've already had your guillotine years.

**ZIPPER:** Do you feel like the Americans were acting like a colonial power in a way?

**DANZIGER:** I think they got sucked into it to a certain extent. And then the worst thing was that there was money to be made, often. A lot of money. And that

kind of clouded their—because the prospect that you're going to make some money. And they said, well, you'll make money, but you're fighting communists. Oh, well, in that case, I guess that's a good idea. No, it's terrible. It's a major human failing.

**ZIPPER:** So I want to go back to before the war. You're in the midst of the Cold War. And you're seeing all this anti-communist propaganda. What did you feel about communism? What were your opinions about it?

**DANZIGER:** Nothing. I didn't think about it at all. I was going to college. I was working for a newspaper, which I discovered I liked the work very much. I loved the people. I loved the I liked—city of Denver was just so much fun. God, it was a riot. I mean, nobody paid attention to anything. Everybody did whatever they wanted. It was an old gold rush town. And I didn't want to get drafted, I didn't want to have anything to do with it. But it was, you know, was thousands of miles away, and you know, was like car accidents. Okay, It happened. So? It didn't happen to me,

**ZIPPER:** You didn't get swept up in any of the kind of anti-communist purpose of this war?

**DANZIGER:** No, I didn't. No. I didn't really know what communism was. I still really don't know what communism is. I don't know what—I know it in precise it's a…

**ZIPPER:** If you felt nothing about the war in the beginning, as you're going through your year of service in Vietnam, your four years of service in the army, how do your opinions change?

**DANZIGER:** To today?

**ZIPPER:** No, just over the course of the war, how did your opinions, views change?

**DANZIGER:** I think it was if they wanted, if they wanted to be communist, if they wanted to be Vietnamese—which is what they wanted to be—why not just let them do it? What the hell did it have to do with the United States? I mean, we had, we had endless problems back in this country to solve during—while the war was going on. Then we had to go look overseas to find somebody to fight against. We had, you know, the race problems were at their height. We had Kent State. We had all sorts of disputes that

nobody—what is laudable about this country is that it's all sorts of different people who decide that if they're going to get anything out of life, they have to get along somehow. Which we sort of do. I mean, despite Mr. Trump, despite other people. But one way to make money is to set people at odds with each other. And I think that's what they were doing. They just realized that, you know.

**ZIPPER:** To go back to like Kent State and all these events in the 60s and the 70s, how did you kind of interact with them as a part of the army?

**DANZIGER:** I don't know. I don't remember that. I actually don't remember where I was in the training when Kent State. I don't remember, you have to help me with the year of Kent State. But it was, you know, it was, it was amazing, because it was about the most American place in America, you know. Dead center in Ohio. And kids that wanted to be dental hygienists and regular teachers and so on and so forth. And they get shot by other people who were in the Ohio reserves. It was madness.

**ZIPPER:** Did this affect you—did learning of this news, of Kent State, of all these other protests of the anti-war movement—did that affect you during this time?

**DANZIGER:** It didn't. And there were other things. I mean, you know, you look about the—I can't remember the guy's name, Norman [Morrison], the guy who set himself on fire outside the Pentagon.

**ZIPPER:** In front of McNamara's office?

**DANZIGER:** In front of McNamara's office, exactly. Norman, I'll think of it. He's on a stamp in North Viet—in Vietnam now,

**ZIPPER:** Really?

**DANZIGER:** Yes, yeah.

**ZIPPER:** That is super interesting.

**DANZIGER:** [While laughing] It is really crazy.

**ZIPPER:** And I guess going back to Vietnam now. You are a month short [one month left in service]. You are basically almost done, and you have to go on, as you say, this last assignment to operate—to assist in operation Lam Son. What was your thinking around the time of this operation?

**DANZIGER:** Well, I was—you had to spend a year in Vietnam. And I was short, as they said. I was down to not that many days left. So I wandered around this base that was up there. And I seem to remember it was called Firebase Matthew, but it wasn't. And it's amazing—I'm going to call it that because it's what I remember. Its my son's name [Matthew Danziger]. And then I—finally I reported in, and I—they said, “well, where's your interpreters?” They left. And guy got mad at me as I said, “They deserted. I didn't desert. I'm here.”

**ZIPPER:** How did you how did you kind of—

**DANZIGER:** How do I feel?

**ZIPPER:** How did you feel about all those desertions?

**DANZIGER:** They kind of made sense. I mean, they didn't want to go. And they knew that it was going to be—I mean, Lam Son in part—and a lot of this is stuff that I wasn't—They were supposed to fly the North Vietnamese—the South Vietnamese soldiers, into this area in Cambodia and Laos. And they didn't want to go. Well, you fly your helicopter, and you say, “Okay, get off. Here's where you go.” And they don't want to get off the helicopter. You can't make them. They all have guns in the first place. And after a while, the helicopter pilots just said, “No, we're not going to do this anymore.” So people were refusing orders all over the place.

**ZIPPER:** So why didn't you refuse orders?

**DANZIGER:** You know, I did—I did it slowly and kind of as much as I dared, you know, but. It was confusing. I mean, there was a lot of confusion. I'm trying to convince you of what it was like, but Jesus Christ, you know.

**ZIPPER:** Does that remind you of when you were drafted? Kind of that same feeling that you—just like taking the path of least resistance?

**DANZIGER:** I think so. My, you know, my father had been in World War Two. And he had quit college to go and sign up. And I kind of felt well, you know, I can't refuse to do this. It's, you know— So I didn't. But now I look back, it's amazing to me that I did what I was supposed—I did what I was told.

**ZIPPER:** Your time is winding down while you're at—while you're participating in this [Lam Son 719] operation. Did you feel like in danger? Did you feel like in danger that—during this operation? Or were you relatively safe?

**DANZIGER:** That whole operation was a failu—a terrible failure. They didn't stop the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They bombed the hell out of it, and they didn't—And, you know, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was almost a mile wide, wide in some places. We weren't going to be able to stop people coming down. Plus the people were on bicycles.

**ZIPPER:** And so you're working on, as you call it, Firebase Matthew. What were you doing?

**DANZIGER:** I was there. I went over and talked to the to the ARVNs, who were there. And they, you know, they—and I sort of got the idea that they weren't putting up with it. They weren't going to do anything. It was going to—only a matter of time, and we had to go back. And there was plenty of talk then. There were—the Paris Peace talks were going on at that time. And a woman's name, who was the who was this, the main North Vietnamese [negotiator]? It was a Madam Nhu or something like that, or Nguyen Van Nhu or something. And she wasn't given an inch to anybody about anything.[6]

**ZIPPER:** So you were kind of just—you were just hanging around, maybe—not doing anything.

**DANZIGER:** I stayed with the ARVN for a while. And they really didn't have good bunkers. And they weren't being they weren't being mortared or shelled at the time.

**ZIPPER:** You just kind of—and then you kind of just let the time tick away.

[6] Danziger seems to be referring here to Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, the head of the National Liberation Front delegation to the Paris Peace talks during 1968-1973.

**DANZIGER:** Yeah, well, the guy was threatening—you know, it's, this is more about the army than anybody should think. But the—most of the officers were reserve officers, and reserve officers were in reserve units back in the United States. And a lot of them, their reserve rank and their reserve assignment wasn't what they did all the time. Some of them were hardware store clerks and executives, and they, they did it—they had to go one weekend a month, and then they had to go two weeks in the summer. But, but they did it because—I don't know. They want it to be important. They want it to be colonels, and they wanted to be—and then they get orders to go to Vietnam. And they obey the order because it seems interesting–more interesting than whatever the hell they were doing back in the States. But once they got there, they were disasters as officers.

**ZIPPER:** And you, and you worked with them in this operation?

**DANZIGER:** I was working—a lot of them were, were lieutenant colonels, seemed to be. And they, and they had had stateside training, which isn't, as effective. I don't know what they do now. I hope they've improved the situation.

**ZIPPER:** Did you feel like the war was interesting?

**DANZIGER:** What?

**ZIPPER:** Did you feel like the war was interesting?

**DANZIGER:** It is interesting.

**ZIPPER:** How so?

**DANZIGER:** Well, it’s noisy. There was something going on seven days a week, right? But, it's not peaceful. It's not pleasant. And you can be [laughs], you can have something which is interesting but not pleasant. I mean, car accidents are interesting. So, yeah, it's—it does have a tendency to keep your attention for most of the day.

**ZIPPER:** During this time. Did you have any—do you do R&R [rest and recuperation]? Or did you get that at all?

**DANZIGER:** I never got an R&R. And I could have gotten—R&R was two weeks in—some of them went to Hawaii, some of them went to Tokyo, some to—I wanted to go to Australia. Always wanted to go to Australia. I never got to go.

**ZIPPER:** Why?

**DANZIGER:** I would be reassigned to something else. And the first time I was—they were trying to decide what to do with me at Phuoc Vinh, and they sent me someplace else. They were promising an R&R with somebody else, with your wife. And then that—I don't know whether that actually ever happened. I can't remember.

**ZIPPER:** How did feel to be reassigned all the time?

**DANZIGER:** It sort of backed up the fact that they didn't know what to do with them. I mean they—somebody in the Pentagon said, “We need officers who could speak Vietnamese. Let's get some.” And they—so they made a program to, hired this thing out to language companies.

**ZIPPER:** There seems to be a real contrast between what the Pentagon wanted and what the realities were on the ground. How did you feel about that?

**DANZIGER:** The fact that Donald Trump was a draft dodger doesn't—is very bad. I think he's, you know, he's a cretin. And he puts this other self-proclaimed hero, whatever his name is, Higsworth, [Pete] Hegseth in as the Secretary of Defense. [pause] You don't want to think about it too hard, because it's part of the flaws of human nature to be—to do whatever is necessary to get through the day and to do. If somebody else suffers. Well, that's true.

**ZIPPER:** You didn't really care about what the Pentagon was saying?

**DANZIGER:** I didn't know. At the time I didn't know, And we had been through Korea, which we went there. And we're still there. And for what purpose? I don't know. But we were victorious in—according to our story, according to our version, we were victorious in World War Two, and you couldn't argue with it then. It was part of the propaganda. I watched all the old *Victory at Sea* movies.

**ZIPPER:** Going back to the operation, you—what happened? Your service was running out. So did you leave? What happened?

**DANZIGER:** I did. I had records. The curious thing was that there was no there were no internet, and there were no digital anything then. So you carried your file with you. And one of the most wonderful pieces of writing about the war is as my sort of friend, Tim O'Brien, which you've read, probably read *The Things They Carried*, and also *[In] The Lake of the Woods*. Did you read the Lake of the Woods?

**ZIPPER:** No.

**DANZIGER:** Oh, shit, man, that's it. Yeah, I envy you. It's a pleasure. But the guy [John Wade] realizes that he's in the unit of the My Lai massacre. And so was Tim O'Brien, by the way, Americal Division, 23rd? Anyway. And he realizes that, and he's running for office. He's a congressman from Minnesota, where— Tim was from Minnesota. And he had realized it then, and he signs up for another year, if they will make him the company clerk. And so they agree to that, and he goes through his own file and takes out—changes everything around. Names, dates and places. So that if anybody did look, he wasn't there during the My Lai massacre. It wouldn't have known anything about him. Read it. It's a scary fucking book. It really is. You know, he's—Lake of the Woods is a place in Minnesota, up by the Canadian border. And it ends in this wonderful, mysterious way where he goes out trying to find his wife. And she's gone off in a boat into the Lake of the Woods, which is just this endless islands, millions of islands. It's worth the read.

**ZIPPER:** Do you feel—

**DANZIGER:** It's also—I'm interrupting now—but it's also a book that has footnotes—it's a novel that has footnotes. And in the footnotes there are little explanations about My Lai and what happened. [unintelligible] Because O'Brien felt that people forgotten already, you know. And I think he's, I hope he's still alive, but he, anyway

**ZIPPER:** And did you—do you feel really connected to those books or *The Things They Carried* or *In The Lake of the Woods*?

**DANZIGER:** I have most of them. Yeah. *The Things They Carried* is a frightening book. His first book, Cacciato. *Going After Cacciato*, I didn't understand. It's written—it was written in a stream of consciousness sort of thing. But it's the book that made him, made him popular.

**ZIPPER:** But do you feel connected to those books?

**DANZIGER:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**ZIPPER:** How so?

**DANZIGER:** I interviewed, as I said, and now I interviewed Neil Shannon. I was at *The [Christian Science] Monitor* when *[A] Bright Shining Lie* came out, and he came through on a book tour. It was a highly celebrated book. And he—they assigned me to interview him because I was the only vet on the staff. And I said, well, “Mr. Sheehan, what do you what do you think the war means?” And he said, “they'll never be able to do that again.” And I said, Mr. Sheehan, “I think you're wrong.” And that turned out I was right.

**ZIPPER:** We'll  get back to that. Because I actually have a—that's very interesting what you just said. But you end up—so you have your folder, and you're in the middle of this huge operation. Right? And so you leave. Right? You leave, the operation. Could you have stayed?

**DANZIGER:** Yes.

**ZIPPER:** You could have stayed. Why did you leave?

**DANZIGER:** Why did I leave?

**ZIPPER:** What were you thinking?

**DANZIGER:** [Laughs] Not nice. It was terrible. But on the papers, there it had your, what was called your DEROS date. D, E, R, O, S. Date en route overseas. And people would make their DEROS calendars, checking off how many days until they got back. Some of them were disgusting [chuckles] calendars.

**ZIPPER:** Did you have one of them?

**DANZIGER:** No, I did not have one! But I knew the date, and now I've forgotten it. It was in April, May

**ZIPPER:** April of what year?

**DANZIGER:** ’70, ’71. Shit, I have my DD 214 [Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty]. I can show you that anytime.[7]

**ZIPPER:** It's alright. So then you, you're,—where do you where do you go to leave?

**DANZIGER:** Saigon.

**ZIPPER:** You go to Saigon?

**DANZIGER:** Well, Tan Son Nhut [Air Base].

**ZIPPER:** And then you're on a flight. And then where do you end up landing in the United States? What city?

**DANZIGER:** San Francisco [California]. Fort— no, it's Air Force Base. Geez, I'm sorry. I've forgotten. I have a—no, I have a old person's disease where I can see the name, I know the name, and I can't say it. And it was the big air force base in San Francisco.[8]

**ZIPPER:** So was anyone there? Did anyone meet you there?

**DANZIGER:** It was a plane. It was a contract plane full of GI’s. And it was dead quiet, nobody—they didn't allow any drinking, you know. I say in the book, there's—the army can figure out a way to make a bad situation worse if they have to stay up all night and staff it, you know?

**ZIPPER:** That must have been tough, but, once you landed, was there—was your family there, was anyone?

**DANZIGER:** No. My wife was in Denver with her family and our son. And I had to stay there and get additional travel.

[7] Danziger left Vietnam in 1971.
[8] Danziger later confirmed via email that he went to Travis Air Force Base, which is just outside of San Francisco in Fairfield, California.

**ZIPPER:** You went to Denver?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah.

**ZIPPER:** But your son was born while you were in service?

**DANZIGER:** Uh huh.

**ZIPPER:** How did that feel to not be able to witness the birth of your child?

**DANZIGER:** No, no, I was there when he was born. I went back on leave to Denton Vermont, yeah.

**ZIPPER:** Okay, so how was that?

**DANZIGER:** We were in Texas. And we were in a place called Goodfellow Air Force Base, which was in San Angelo, Texas. Dead center in the middle of Texas. And it's a moderate sized town. And then at the last minute, I sent my wife home to Vermont, because we didn't—stupid—we didn't want [laughs], we didn't want him to be born in Texas. We wanted him to be born in Vermont. I don't know what— it makes no sense.

**ZIPPER:** So then you went on leave, and then you were there when—

**DANZIGER:** I went on leave after that. And he was born. And then I went back to—

**ZIPPER:** How did it feel to not be able to see him—

**DANZIGER:** Grow up? [Zipper and Danziger talk over each other] As a baby?

**ZIPPER:** Yeah, as a baby?

**DANZIGER:** I mean, you know. Comparable to what a lot of other people in this world—in this country—put up with, it wasn't that bad.

**ZIPPER:** What were you feeling at the time, not being able to see him?

**DANZIGER:** I don't know how I felt. I just—I was sort of a—the concept of having severe feelings because something bad is happening to you. The survival feeling is I'll get through it. I'm not going to do anything, I'll stand over to

the side and let the world go by. I think that's your feeling. You don't want to get active about and crazy about things.

**ZIPPER:** And you think that the survival feeling was something—

**DANZIGER:** Of course.

**ZIPPER:** Do you think other people had it?

**DANZIGER:** Other people did have it, and a lot of them had it. And we—and I knew them, and we would talk about. And I said, you know, let this go by. I had many of friends in particularly the language school—because it was so long. And it was on the Mexican border, was El Paso.

**ZIPPER:** And you would also, right after the war, you would you adopt an orphan of the Vietnam War/

**DANZIGER:** Yes.

**ZIPPER:** What's her name?

**DANZIGER:** Her name is Kim. Of course, they're all named Kim. And she is from Cambodia. And she was adopted in '74, '75,[9] something like that. And she is now 50 years old. She's my favorite person. My son died of cancer a couple of years ago. And she's studied nursing, and she's now taking care of my first wife, her mother.

**ZIPPER:** And why did you adopt Kim?

**DANZIGER:** Actually, more than me, my first wife wanted to do it. And she had friends in Vermont–there were a lot of adoptions done because we're close to Canada. When the plane landed with all these infants from Cambodia and Vietnam. God, there must have been like, 20 or 30 Vermont families up there to pick them up in Montreal.

**ZIPPER:** And your wife's your first wife's name was?

**DANZIGER:** Jan.

[9] Kim immigration papers confirm that she was adopted and moved to the U.S. in 1975.

**ZIPPER:** Jan. You had two children then?

**DANZIGER:** My son was born, and then—he was a banker. And he was, he had cancer. And in 2016 he died.

**ZIPPER:** I'm sorry about that. But did you have other children?

**DANZIGER:** No, that's all.

**ZIPPER:** What was your relationship with the anti-war movement when you got back?

**DANZIGER:** Nothing.

**ZIPPER:** Nothing.

**DANZIGER:** The only way to kind of make up for the time is to pretend it didn't happen. Of course, I haven't. I've tried to write about it three or four times. I've written two books. But it was helped by the fact that a lot of Americans didn't care, didn't want to talk about it.

**ZIPPER:** How did it feel when the war ended [in 1975] and the US troops pulled out? And how did it feel seeing that after you had left?

**DANZIGER:** The two instances that stay in your mind–first of all was the famous photographs of the people being lifted off the roof of the American Embassy. A building I had been to. And actually, I never met Ellsworth Bunker, but I heard him talking in the other room [laughs]. He was a shit! And also that when they were taking helicopters and bringing people out to this—the aircraft carrier. They pushed the old—the helicopter that had come out. They didn't know what to do with it and they needed the space. And they just push it over the side. There's a movie [*Last Days of Vietnam*] made by RFK Junior's niece [Rory Kennedy]. About the last days of Saigon. It's worth the—

**ZIPPER:** When you heard about the fall of Saigon, what were your reactions?

**DANZIGER:** It's terrible. I mean, no. I didn't care so much. Saigon was a pretty selfish little place. It took care of itself. And it was poor and people begging everywhere. I was down there twice. I had to go down to try to get a—this

North Vietnamese artillery warrant officer who we had captured, who had been wounded. We had to—by the rules we had to turn him over to the South Vietnamese army. But he stayed with—in my in my room for about a week and a half in Phuoc Vinh. And then I was supposed to go down and get him. Why am I telling you this? What was the original—

**ZIPPER:** My original question was what are your reactions to the fall of Saigon?

**DANZIGER:** Well, Saigon's a beautiful—I've been back.

**ZIPPER:** You've been back?

**DANZIGER:** Yes.

**ZIPPER:** How'd it feel going back?

**DANZIGER:** It felt very weird and very strange. It's not touched by anything. They're all in business. They're all building houses. They're all working hard. We went to Hanoi, and then we drove down this long road down the coast. I went with a editor from the paper who was a reporter then

**ZIPPER:** Which paper?

**DANZIGER:** For *The Monitor*, [The] Christian *Science Monitor*. He then went on to be a managing editor of the *Washington Post* [Cameron Barr]. He retired a few years ago. Just recently.

**ZIPPER:** And did you visit any other places?

**DANZIGER:** We went to Phnom Penh [Cambodia]. And we went to—I got to go to the orphanage that my daughter came out of. She, surprisingly, has almost no interest in going back to Cambodia

**ZIPPER:** But did you visit any of the places that you—Phuoc Vinh, Tây Ninh,

**DANZIGER:** No. no. Phuoc Vinh I don't think it's called Phuoc Vinh anymore. Tây Ninh is still Tây Ninh. Tây Ninh is the heart of the Cao Dai sect, the Cao Dai religion.

**ZIPPER:** Interesting. So you didn't visit any of the places that you had had served at?

**DANZIGER:** No, a lot of them have changed. I mean, Phuoc Vinh is a golf course [chuckles].

**ZIPPER:** Interesting. So then let's go back to just after the war. You become a teacher in Vermont. How did—what was that like?

**DANZIGER:** I came back and I needed a job. And a friend of mine knew that they were hiring at this new school: Union-32 it was called [U-32 Middle & High School, East Montpellier, VT]. It's still called that. And I became an English teacher for about 10 years.

**ZIPPER:** How was that?

**DANZIGER:** It was fine. It was interesting. I mean, it's a good job. You get to stand up and, you know, talk about books and introduce young people to Shakespeare, and to all the other things. And that's an amusing thing to do.

**ZIPPER:** And then, after your job as a teacher, you went to *The Christian Science Monitor* as a cartoonist?

**DANZIGER:** First I went to—I was with the Rutland paper [*The Rutland Herald*] in Vermont. And then I went to New York, and I was with the *New York Daily News*. Which is, a rough inner city tabloid paper. And then from there, I went to an open job at *The Christian Science Monitor* in Boston, which was slightly different newspapers, different [unintelligible]. And I was there 10 years, 12 years. And then I went just syndicated on my own. But I always stayed with the Vermont paper.

**ZIPPER:** And did you—do you think your Vietnam experience motivated you to pursue cartooning or to do anything like that?

**DANZIGER:** In a way. We all—as I said, my parents were both artists. And they like to draw, and I love to draw. I don't know if I care one way or the other that strongly about politics. I mean, I'm not conservative in the political sense, but I'm a pretty careful person.

**ZIPPER:** How do you think your experience as a Vietnam veteran has informed or, like, inspired your cartooning career?

**DANZIGER:** If you don't do something about the politics of your country, you wind up in some goddamn war someplace. The leadership—particularly in, I guess, in all forms of government—is for people who are in charge to try to start a war so that they—their control is increased.

**ZIPPER:** And do you think you—whenever you do cartooning, you're trying to check those powerful people?

**DANZIGER:** Yes, if you can. Or at least to make a joke out of it. To make it seem. Cartoons are usually—political cartoons are usually things that where there's no photograph. And we try to introduce what it might have been like. But, yeah, make people see.

**ZIPPER:** To make people see what?

**DANZIGER:** What a described scene was like. Whether it's a scene in Gaza, or whether it's a scene in the army or in a recruiting office where the recruiting sergeant is lying. Or whether it's a scene—it was not exactly New Yorker cartoons. But it's—and you know, cartooning is now—for some reason—is back in the news. My friend Ann Telnaes quit the *Washington Post* over drawing something which was insens—actually true situation of Bezos bowing down to Trump. And they wouldn't print it and she quit. Well, good for her.

**ZIPPER:** Let's go back to that conversation with Neil Sheehan.

**DANZIGER:** Yeah. Okay.

**ZIPPER:** How do you think you have seen the United States replicate your Vietnam experience in all these other wars? How have you felt about that?

**DANZIGER:** I don't know why we do it. I mean, I know that there's a money to be made, and I suppose—but you know my father, he was in advertising, and he liked his wisdom to be short and quick. And he said that the United States has two great allies in this world, the Atlantic and the Pacific. Why do we go and do these things? I don't know. Why do we have air force bases in Turkey? Why do we have air force bases in the Aleutians? Not

the Aleutians. But why do we do this? And why are we in this, in this constant dispute between these people?

**ZIPPER:** Do you think your Vietnam experience has helped you to criticize these other wars, these other conflicts?

**DANZIGER:** It gives me a little bit of authority, you know? Of course, a lot of people think that the Vietnam veterans were crazy because the movies always portrayed—the worst movie in the whole subject was *The Deer Hunter*. If you come out of *The Deer Hunter* and you were convinced that the Vietnam veterans are nuts and that they played Russian roulette and that they were suicidal, and so on and so forth. That's not—most of it's not true. Nobody watches it anymore, but—

**ZIPPER:** Are you angry at that depiction of Vietnam veterans?

**DANZIGER:** Yes. I think Michael Cimino, who was the director. I don't know if he's still alive, actually, then he made another movie that was a disaster, and I don't think he can get arrested these days.

**ZIPPER:** Why do you feel so offended by those depictions?

**DANZIGER:** Because they're—they are so persuasive!

**ZIPPER:** How so?

**DANZIGER:** Even the Hollywood pictures, they don't let the facts get in the way of a good story. Going after—what's the one? Ryan, Private R—

**ZIPPER:** *Saving Private Ryan*.

DANZIGER: *Saving Private Ryan* would lead you to believe that the army would not send siblings to the war. And that's why they had to go and get Private Ryan, because his other three brothers, or something, had already been killed. It's not true. They had no such policy ever existed. Made a good movie, but they didn't, they didn't mention the fact that—not so much

**ZIPPER:** But that policy got your brother sent to Korea and you sent—

**DANZIGER:** We knew it, yeah [laughs].

**ZIPPER:** I guess there is a little bit of truth?

**DANZIGER:** And it's a very good movie as far as movie making is concerned. It's—the landing on the Brittany on—

**ZIPPER:** Omaha Beach

**DANZIGER:** Omaha Beach. Jesus Christ, I can't watch it!

**ZIPPER:** When you see war movies these days, do you—how do you feel about them?

**DANZIGER:** Some of them are good, some of them are just stupid. I probably will never go to see—there's a very good Australian movie about Vietnam, and I can't remember it. *Hamburger Hill* was a very good movie. *Full Metal Jacket* I think was pretty good. I don't remember any of the other ones.

**ZIPPER:** That's all right. I guess so you said during this interview how you were surprised about how, like obedient you were–going to the draft and doing all these things. But to me—as an outsider looking in—you weren't that obedient in the army. You pull—you applied to language school to get out of the infantry. You got a direct commission. You defied orders, you shirked orders. You pulled pranks with Steven Shackles on the Green Berets. That doesn't sound to me like an obedient man. How did you go from being so obedient to doing all these things that weren't necessarily that?

**DANZIGER:** That's a very good question. But there's a survival tactics, which—where you want to look like you're doing the right thing so nobody will bother you. And or you want to get ahead within the system you find yourself in. And the army is a system. And as somebody said, soldiers aren't paid to think, but they do it anyway, you know? And that's the problem! If you have a bunch of soldiers—

I look at some of these things, and I see what—the Russian army, for example, the Soviet—with the what's left of the Soviet Army. And they knew that Putin was establishing this war with Ukraine. What was it like? 400,000 of them just left, and they had to import soldiers from North Korea. And they've gotten 40,000, 50,000 North Korean soldiers when

brought over. Well, who told them to do that? You know? Kim Jong Un? Yes, well, he did that. But you look at these situations and you wonder, what are they thinking of? And then I sort of know what they're thinking, you know.

**ZIPPER:** Do you empathize with the soldiers?

**DANZIGER:** Yes. God knows what North Korean—I guess anything is better than North Korea. And also, they have your family, and they have your life. And they and they know it.

**ZIPPER:** Do you empathize with soldiers in general?

**DANZIGER:** Do I what?

**ZIPPER:** Do you empathize with soldiers and veterans in general?

**DANZIGER:** Well, you know, in New York, there's Fleet Week every [year], and we always buy them breakfast. These are sailors, right. At a coffee shop there's a three or four sitting around a table having breakfast, and we always pay for their—

**ZIPPER:** Why do you do that?

**DANZIGER:** It just makes me feel better.

**ZIPPER:** About what?

**DANZIGER:** In Vietnam, we never felt that the country was behind us. And we never felt that—we never felt that we had the backing of the government. We were expendable.

**ZIPPER:** So you feel like—does that still apply—

**DANZIGER:** You feel that you should do something. You should say something positive, you know? And buying breakfast, that's nothing.

**ZIPPER:** You still feel like that applies to the soldiers today, that their country doesn't—

**DANZIGER:** It should. And of course, they're not draftees. These are guys that have enlisted. And their Marines and so on, who have enlisted because they wanted to be. I was curious that you have to enlist to be a Marine, even back then. I think there were some Marines drafted, but not very many.

**ZIPPER:** But do you feel like this country does not care about their soldiers still?

**DANZIGER:** I don't think there's any evidence that they do. Or they do, they do a little bit. I wouldn't go to see a Vietnam movie. I wouldn't go to see a Vietnam—anti-Vietnam movie now. I probably won't read it. Read about it. And it's not that I don't care. It's that this is—it's like gravity. There it is. You're gonna deal with it, sorry.

**ZIPPER:** So you think that people become desensitized to all this violence and war?

**DANZIGER:** You know, people do strange things with their own minds in order to be able to get through the day. And part of it is to figure out a way of dealing with the—the misery of Gaza and what. We give the Israelis guns. God help the Israelis. But they've turned into something—as a New Yorker and growing up I thought Jews did what? What did Jews do? They were doctors, lawyers, they played the violin, they read books, and they edited newspapers and so on and so forth. They didn't shoot families. They didn't drop bombs on families. Well, it turns out they do! And it's all made in USA. I don't know how they do it. I don't know how you I don't know how you deal with people. When you look at the photographs of what people that we have helped have done to their own people. I don't want to get into Israeli, Gaza, because the Palestinians aren't much better, but they will concoct the reasoning they think that—.

**ZIPPER:** And then just going back—

**DANZIGER:** I have a lot of Jewish relatives and they're endless on the subject.

**ZIPPER:** And I just want to go back. Thank you for sharing that. I just want to go back to this kind of idea of obedience. Do you think like—what changed over the course of your service to kind of motivate you to defy the army and not be this obedient person who just took the path of least resistance.

**DANZIGER:** I sort of wanted to get what I wanted. Which was to go home and to live in the peaceful hills of Vermont and teach Shakespeare to farm kids.

**ZIPPER:** So going home, was that motivation?

**DANZIGER:** Oh, of course! Absolutely, to get away with it. And you come away with that desire, plus a new appreciation of the of the of the United States and whether we are—well, whether we are our country, and whether we are—what are we? If you're a New Yorker like I was—and I knew nothing about the South, I knew squat little about the Civil War, I didn't know, I never had been to Texas, you know—and then all of a sudden you're put face to face with these people who were—they're your, they're your fellow countrymen. And they're either stupid or they're prejudiced or they're miserable or they're destructive. And Jesus Christ, wouldn't you know what?

**ZIPPER:** So you think that your time in the Army made you more empathetic person, or made you more knowledgeable?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah, it's annoying. I think about it every day.

**ZIPPER:** What do you mean?

**DANZIGER:** And I talk about it too much, and I write about it too much.

**ZIPPER:** The war?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah.

**ZIPPER:** Why?

**DANZIGER:** And that whole attitude of who are these people that wanted—who are these people that get into the American government. And then what do they want to do? Well, some of them were decent people. George Aiken was. He didn't serve in the Second World War. And I thought why? Why didn't George Aiken? Why wasn't he in the Second World War? He felt this way. And now I know why he didn't. Because he was a farmer. Farmers weren't drafted. [While laughing] I didn't know that. Did you know that farmers aren't drafted?

**ZIPPER:** No! But why is that important? Why is the knowledge of that important to you?

**DANZIGER:** It is—it forms your idea of the country. And forms your—the way you deal with other people when you meet them. And some of them have been very supportive, and some of them have not.

**ZIPPER:** Supportive in what way?

**DANZIGER:** Of what I went through and what I did. And was I a good teacher because of that? And I think I was. Because I would become the nice Vietnam kids—I mean, Vermont kids—who didn't really have a bad life, they had a nice life. And then you think about kids in Vietnam who were being shelled and bombed and run over with tanks and having their parents hauled off, you know? And you didn't feel sorry for them.

**ZIPPER:** The Vermont kids?

**DANZIGER:** Yeah, no. And some teachers did feel sorry for them. Some teachers would go at the job of teaching as if they were trying to improve lives and get involved in families and do the right thing and do—play kind of psychological games. And I didn't do that, and I think it made me a better teacher, and it made kids learn. Maybe they didn't like me quite as much. Anyway.

**ZIPPER:** The experience kind of reframed your thinking? Reframed the way you see our—the American people, children,

**DANZIGER:** For a while. It did for a while I was miserable.

**ZIPPER:** What do you mean?

**DANZIGER:** When I first got back, I was—didn't want to talk to anybody, didn't want to have anything to do with anybody. And then I got better.

**ZIPPER:** With time? With time, you got better?

**DANZIGER:** I think so. I just gave up a feeling. I felt sorry for myself. I had a very good friend who got out of the draft because he had been wounded and—not wounded. He had been, yeah, in a high school football problem [injury], and he wasn't drafted. Well, you know, the hell with him! The hell with football! What do you mean? I didn't play football.

**ZIPPER:** You were miserable. Do you still feel like—

**DANZIGER:** No, that went on about two years.,

**ZIPPER:** Okay, so you're—you think you've come to terms with, with your time at Vietnam?

**DANZIGER:** It is terms. And it's also you have to survive. You can't go on like this. You have to, what do you want to do? Do you want to feel miserable all your life? Or do you want to —

**ZIPPER:** Is there anything about your Vietnam experience—

**DANZIGER:** That was good?

**ZIPPER:** No, that has affected your interaction with the Upper Valley, with Vermont in any way other than your teaching, other than?

**DANZIGER:** Not this place. I mean, it affects my journalism, I guess.

**ZIPPER:** How so?

**DANZIGER:** If a situation evolves that is—where a politician or somebody just is behaving in any way like people did back then, you know what it is. You have a good bullshit detector, and you can—and you either turn away from it and disregard them as a just next crop of idiots and—or you attack.

**ZIPPER:** So your time in Vietnam gave you a bullshit detector?

**DANZIGER:** It also gives you the authority, you know, to say something. Not really. I mean, you could—you can say something. People will shut up—in part because they go, “Well, he's crazy. He was—it's a war wound.” There's nothing you can do about that.

**ZIPPER:** Well is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you would want to discuss?

**DANZIGER:** I don't think so. You said something about Sheehan.

**ZIPPER:** Yeah, we discussed. I thank you so much for sharing your experience. This has been an honor and a pleasure to interview you today. Thank you so much. And to all the listeners, thank you for listening and have a wonderful day.

[End of interview.]