John J. Donovan
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[PAULINA C.]

CALCATERRA: So for the record, my name is Paulina [C.] Calcaterra, and I'm sitting in Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and it's August 7th, 2017. I'm joined by Mr. John [J.] Donovan, who will be sharing his experiences with me as part of the Dartmouth Vietnam Project.

DONOVAN: Mr. Donovan, thank you for traveling here and speaking with me today. I just wanted to start with some, like, background questions,—

DONOVAN: Sure.

CALCATERRA: —and ask you where and when you were born, if you want to tell me something about that?

DONOVAN: Sure, sure. I was born in April 23rd, 1943, in Boston [Massachusetts].

CALCATERRA: Okay. And what were your parents' names, and what were they like? What did they do?

DONOVAN: My parents' names were—my father's—I'm a Junior, so my father's name was John Joseph [Donovan], too.

CALCATERRA: Oh.

DONOVAN: But he went by the name "Joe,"—

CALCATERRA: Okay.

DONOVAN: —so my father's—everybody called him Joe Donovan. My mother's name is Bernice [Hobbs Donovan]. And they both grew up in the Boston area. My mother grew up in a place call Hull, Massachusetts, on the coast. And her dad was a policeman. My father grew up in Roxbury [Massachusetts], sort of like in the poor Irish neighborhood in those days, and

then—you know, my—my mother basically was a house- — you know, a housewife most of the time. My father was a—ended up being a contractor, selling aluminum doors and windows and, you know, doing remodeling on—on homes in the Boston area. He had his own business.

He—interesting character. In sociology they call him "the marginal man," because he was, like, the guy moving—trying—wanting to move from blue collar to white collar, and so his margin was to basically always act like he'd gone to college, even though he didn't get through high school.

So then—he unfortunately was an alcoholic that did stop drinking, but that sort of characterized my childhood a lot, of conflict that I went through sort of growing up in a household where my dad was a binge drinker and there was abuse and lots of things going on.

So that's a little background about my parents. They're both passed away.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: But my mother lived to be 100; my father lived to be 95, so—

CALCATERRA: Wow. Did you have any siblings?

DONOVAN: I have a sister, an older sister, who's three years older than me, and she lives in the Providence [Rhode Island] area and raised four boys, so—

CALCATERRA: And as a family, did you sort of talk openly about the alcoholism or abuse, or did you all sort of deal with it silently, or—

DONOVAN: Good question. Pretty much silently within the—I think within the family there were discussion about it, but there was, you know, I would say, enabling behavior. And to the outside world, it was pretty much people thought we were an ideal family, you know?

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So—so in some ways, it was more within the—in the house, and we sort of kept it to ourselves, because it was sort of in the ’50s, ’60s. It was sort of still socially—you know, the stigma attached to it was still there.

My father actually tried to stop. You know, he—he was a binge drinker. He went to A.A. [Alcoholics Anonymous] for a while, and then he did finally stop when I was in college, so—

CALCATERRA: What was the town where you grew up like, maybe politically or socioeconomically?

DONOVAN: Probably middle class. I grew up in Milton, Massachusetts, a suburb—do you know the Boston area at all, or no?

CALCATERRA: Not too much.

DONOVAN: Okay. Where are you from?

CALCATERRA: I’m from Long Island, New York.

DONOVAN: Long Island, okay.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So maybe, like, typical middle-class home in Long Island. And I grew up sort of on the—almost on the grounds of Milton Academy, a well-known sort of prep school—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —in the Boston area. So it was—I went to public high school. It was a pretty Catholic, Christian, Irish area with a lot of the Irish that moved—sort of socially upwardly mobile, moved from Roxbury to Dorchester to Boston, sort of like moving from the Bronx [New York City, New York] to Long Island, you know?

CALCATERRA: Mmm. Mm-hm. [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: Yeah, so that’s sort of what Milton—growing up there was like.

CALCATERRA: And was your family Catholic and Irish, or—

DONOVAN: Yes, Catholic and Irish.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: Both my parents were—both their parents had come from Ireland, actually, so they're second—they're first generation Irish-Catholic.

CALCATERRA: And did you—were there, like, open talks about the political events that were happening nation wide, in your family or in your town that you were aware of, or was it sort of an apolitical time thing?

DONOVAN: No, no, I think—I think that—ooh, that's a g- —I never thought about that. I think—well, I can't remember talking a lot about—my father was sort of involved [unintelligible; 5:39] time politics. I'd say they were more liberal Democratic than not, although I think my father was a racist, you know. It was kind of an enigma because he—he kind of—when it came to racial issues, particularly around black people, he would tell me stories about how he befriended the stable hands when he worked as a milkman, and they were black, and they became his friends, and they would invite him to his [sic; their] house.

And then when I was in college, I remember one of my best friends—I went to [College of the] Holy Cross, which is all—almost all white. I had a friend who was on the track team, who was black, and invited him to my house one day. My father came out and said, "Don't let him in the house. He can stay on the porch." [Chuckles.] So it was—

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: My sister claims that that was because my mother was the one who didn't want him in, but I think there was—having heard my father talk like that, I would sort of say that he—he had those same feel- —but there was two sides to him, you know?

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: Yeah, I would say pretty much Democratic, I think, in terms of—I don't remember extensive discussions about politics or anything, you know, really.

CALCATERRA: And what about in—in high school and in growing up in school? What sort of subjects were you interested in, and what kind of friends did you have?

DONOVAN: Growing up, for me, I think part of the impact of the, you know, childhood situation with the alcoholism was that I was at first kind of very shy, and my mother was sort of trying to protect me, and my father was more aggressive—you know, part of the thing. He was very demanding. You know, alcoholics tend to make rules and try to regiment things to control things because they're trying to control their drinking and trying to control people around them. And so he was pretty controlling. I think my mother basically tried to counter that, but the result of that was I was kind of—pretty much a wimpy kid, and I got picked on a lot, until I got into sort of high school and I started playing sports.

And sports became my kind of outlet to find some sense of my own inner strength, itself, you know? And so I ended up playing three sports in high school, and I was interested in—I was interested in politics or something? I don't—I don't know. I mean, I was interested in history, I think,—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —and politics, as I—as I look back on it. I think I went into college to—thinking—I can't—actually, I can't remember how I—I think I went to political science because I—I did think that was an interesting area. I was interested in world politics and not our government politics as much as sort of what—you know, how we were politically. My—my minor was in Soviet foreign policy and Russian—Russian history and stuff, so—

CALCATERRA: Wow! What a time to be studying that!

DONOVAN: Yeah. I mean, it was interesting because it was—you know, it's sort of like, kind of, unfortunately—and now with nuclear and atomic issues—I mean, we all—you'd get under your chairs [in school, in so-called "duck and cover" drills]

because there was—you know, it was a time when everybody was afraid of, you know, an atomic bomb attack from Russia, and so I think there was an interest there.

My professor—I can't remember [unintelligible; 9:25]—who was sort of my adviser, too, was a political science professor, but he was, like, basically—in those days, it was like the Red Tide, so that, you know, everybody was—we're all taught that, like, the Red Tide of dialectical materialism is going to take over the world. And, you know, you—you'd watch a movie, and there'd be, you know, the spread of, you know, the Red Tide through China into Vietnam, and that's the reason, in a lot of ways, we entered the war, was that fear that dialectical materialism and communism would—the goal was to conquer the world, which it was, to some degree. But—

So I think that is how in fact—I mean, if you look at the lead into the military, I was also in—in college, in—you know, in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps],—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —which I really joined—I wasn't particularly militaristic or, you know, thinking, like, I wanted to do this great service. It was more like I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I got out, and I said, *Well, maybe I'll go in the military for three or four years and then get to travel and figure it out from there.*

CALCATERRA: So you didn't at that point know if it would be a career in the military?

DONOVAN: No, no. And I wasn't really, sort of totally gung-ho for all the rules and regulations and military, you know, sort of discipline that sort of came with—came with it.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

So going back a little bit, how did you decide to go to Holy Cross, especially knowing that your parents hadn't gone to school? Was that something that you were, like, *I definitely want to go*? Or were you on the fence?

DONOVAN: Well, I think to my parents' credit, they always wanted me to go to college, you know, and I think they were sort of set that I would go.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: My sister ended up going to nursing school but not—you know, I think she was in a three-year program, but—so they were both committed to that, I think, so—and the reason I ended up in Holy Cross probably was when I was in high school, my father and mother both wanted me to go to a Catholic high school, and the Catholic high school there was Boston College High School, which still exists. And I had all—a lot of my friends that I ended up at Holy Cross with and that I knew were at BC High.

But I didn't want to go. I was, like, you had to take—get up at six o'clock in the morning and take the train into Boston, and it was all boys, and it was just loads of homework. It would have been a good education, probably—but I just, like, *I don't really want to do that*, you know.

So I took the entrance exam and flunked on purpose. I never told my parents about it. So then, "Oh, okay, gee, I'm sorry I flunked, but maybe I'm not smart enough." And so I could go—I really wanted to go to public high school, where I could be with my friends in—you know, in the community.

So that's what I did, and playing sports, I ended up being pretty good at football and got scholarship offers to, you know, Holy Cross and BC and Syracuse [University] to play football—

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: —and ultimately chose Holy Cross because I had a lot of friends that were going there, and it was a smaller program, in some ways, than the others. But it was a [National Collegiate Athletic Association] Division I—you know, very high-level football. So that's really the reason I ended up at Holy Cross.

CALCATERRA: So at that time, was football really a passion of yours, or were you sort of using the—your talent as a way to get to college and sort of—

DONOVAN: I was pa- —I mean, sports were a passion for me, and I think football was, you know—when I went in—I enjoyed high school football. When I got into college, I realized it was more of a business, where, you know, you had to win, and, you know, the—you know, in those days, it was—as you probably read about, seen *Concussion*, or if you've read some of those—

CALCATERRA: Yeah.

DONOVAN: It was, you know, hard-nosed football. And I'm lucky, sort of, I think, in some ways to come out of it with, you know, all my knees and head and body. So it was—you know, but at that time, it was, like, I'm full on.

But I also played hockey and baseball, so I played three sports, so it was kind of like—there was just—I mean, in those days, it was possible to do that in a Division I school. But that's sort of the reasons I ended up there and how—actually, hockey became more of a passion for me than football.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: But I ended up playing for four years.

CALCATERRA: Was it difficult to join the Naval ROTC at the same time, or—

DONOVAN: Yeah, you know, some ways it was, but, you know, one of the things that—the Navy ROTC was—I was really interested in the courses on naval history and tactics and things like that. But they had this other part of it, which was drill, which you had to wear a uniform.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: It was, like,—a march, you know, with a big gun and [unintelligible]. Like, *This is—if I go in the Navy, we're not gonna walk around carrying a gun, and I could learn to put on a uniform,* so I really didn't like that part at all. So part of

the reason—if you played a sport, you didn't have to go to drill.

CALCATERRA: Ooh!

DONOVAN: So part of it was, *Okay, if I keep playing sports, then I don't have to go to drill every Monday and march around and wear my uniform*. And that was sort of an aversion I had right away. So it was—you know, I mean, playing three sports—that was a lot of what I did, was, you know, playing and practicing. And then studying, so—but it was more like at the end of four years, I did get a commission—you know, this is an ensign, which is, you know, like a second lieutenant in the Army. You know, it's an 01. It's the lowest level of—of officer, which everybody goes in at.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: But I remember the commanding officer saying to me, "Well, you'll either be one of the best officers in the Navy or one of the worst. I don't know yet which."

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: I did okay in my classes, but they could tell I didn't have this military bearing.

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

At that time, when you mentioned sort of the professors talking about the Red scare and things like that, was that—did that translate into social life and the things you talked about with your friends within the Naval ROTC or with other friends?

DONOVAN: Yeah, I think a little bit. I think—I can remember the first protest about the [Vietnam] War. I mean, this was in 19- —I went to college from 1961 to '65, so the protests didn't really start till after that.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: But I think there was—I think in my senior year, there were one or two protests against the war. But I don't remember

participating actually, but some of my best friends were involved, and I think the general feeling was that we shouldn't be there. I think I had mixed feelings, because I remember we were sort of brainwashed into thinking that, well, you know, we probably shouldn't be there, but communism is going to take over all of Southeast Asia or in Thailand and spread further, so it's probably okay for us to be there. I mean this is, again, early in the war. We only had advisers in there. We didn't have, you know, hundreds of thousands of troops there at that point, so—but I don't remember any conflict about it with, you know, my friends at that point.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And with these protests, did you find that there was, like, a stark divide between the ROTC crowd and the protesters, or—

DONOVAN: No, at that point, it was really, like, very early in the process, so there wasn't any—there wasn't this—you know, like, later, as you probably—you know, if you're studying the history about that era, there was a lot of—you know, like, anybody with a uniform on was, like, "Why are you doing that?"—you know. And it wasn't—that wasn't the case. It was, like, "You know, you guys are with the ROTC, but the war is over here. We're gonna protest it." It was a very—fairly small scale at that point.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So there wasn't any real, you know, alienation or conflict or any condemnation of ROTC as a, you know, entity or, you know, separation with our friends.

CALCATERRA: It wasn't so polarized at that point?

DONOVAN: Yeah, not at all. The '60s—yeah, it was sort of '63, '64, yeah. It was—you know, [President John F.] Kennedy was killed in '63, so it was—yeah, '63, '64, they were just sort of gearing up, and it was—it wasn't as big—there wasn't as—you know, we didn't have as many people there, so it was—you know. But there were some—you know, like, I had friends that were—I was not sort of—even though I was a political science major, I was not, like, you know, kind of rebellious. I was, like, sort of going on with my life.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And did you know of people who had gone from your community, from Holy Cross or from home, who had already started going and serving, or—

DONOVAN: No, in Vietnam or anything like that?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: No, I really don't—to my recollection, I don't—that's actually a good question. I don't remember anybody, yeah, to speak of.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And at the end of your time in college, when you were sort of approaching being enlisted and starting to serve, what were your feelings like about that? Were you, like excited or were you nervous?

DONOVAN: About going to military?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: I was actually kind of looking forward to it. I was assigned to an aircraft carrier, and I thought that would be interesting. I had done a midshipman cruise. They make you do, like, a month-long midshipman—you know, the Army [unintelligible; 19:39]. They still do it in the ROTC program. In junior year, you go into a month, like, being in the military, and—so I was on a destroyer, which is a small kind of attack—smaller attack ship. I really didn't like that. I didn't like being on a ship. I was kind of like, *This is too constricting.* And it wasn't something that I appealed—the aircraft carrier was different. Big ship, and kind of airplanes taking off and landing. And so I was kind of looking forward to it.

And ironically at the time, my girlfriend at the time—I had a girlfriend who was really a good woman, who's, like, at the end, she said, "Let's get married." And it was, like, at graduation, and I'm, like, "Whoa, I don't think I'm ready for that." And she broke up with me, which—at that point, which—you know, she was, like, *This is what I want to do*. And in that day, era, that's pretty much—people oftentimes married pretty quickly out of, you know, college or soon thereafter, we'll say.

So that was kind of—I really went into a kind of depression about that. *Oh, I made a mistake, and oh, I want you back*, but I couldn't see myself moving—I mean, her idea was, "Well, I'll go with you if you go to there." And I'm, like, "Well, I can't. I don't know if I'm ready for it." And I don't know if I was emotionally or anything as well, even though I loved her. So—so that was going on. It got to—

I was in Florida, Pensacola, on an aircraft carrier that basically was a training carrier for—for pilots who were learning how to fly. Navy pilots have to learn how to hit the boat, they call it, you know, to land and take off, so—

CALCATERRA: Were you talking to your parents much at this point about your decisions? Did they support you, or did they know much about your decision?

DONOVAN: I don't know if I talked to my dad that much about it, but—I mean, they knew I was, you know, going into the Navy.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: As far as my girlfriend went, I think—my mother was always very supportive and warm and accepting. I mean, she was really worried about me because I was kind of like, you know,—when I graduate, she breaks up—I think it was—I didn't have to report till, like, August, late August or September. And I was, like, so depressed I didn't leave the house—

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: —and, like, just stayed in the house, up in my room, and my mother would—she—my mother was really worried about me. And it was really, like, a very interesting dynamic because my heart was broken, I'm going away, so I think I was sort of torn between, well, it would be good for me to get away, but I had this other burden I was grieving for—you know, grieving with, still. So I—you know, to me, I think they sort of just accepted that I was going. And I think they were proud of me and happy that I was going. They weren't—

My father did not serve. He was—my sister and I were both born in '41, '43, so it was early in the war and he was able to get a deferment to work in a shipyard, building ships.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: That was his, you know, sort of wartime job other than going overseas. So I—I had an uncle who was in World War II. I was always interested in war—you know, like, war history and what—you know. And you hear stories from uncles and relatives who'd been in World War II, and I always sort of wondered, *What's war like?*

CALCATERRA: Yeah.

DONOVAN: And I think that's something fairly typical. You'll hear [it from? 23:18] others. But it was, like, *I wonder what war is like.* And then you start to think, like, *I wonder what it would be like if I went to war.*

CALCATERRA: At that point, did you have any understanding that you would be going to Vietnam specifically?

DONOVAN: Not—no, not at all. I didn't—it was kind of—it wasn't in the back of my mind at all, but when I got on board the aircraft carrier—I mean, I had really good captains who were in charge of the whole ship, and I had this opportunity to be, as an officer—a line officer is basically the ones that—that—that are—that are in—in line to basically operate the ship under way, which means, you know, you basically are in charge when the captain's not on the bridge.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And I became—within, like, 14 months I was an officer of the deck, which is what that—it's, like, the highest sort of responsibility of leadership you can—could get. Because I had, you know, good captains that were willing to, you know, train us and give us an opportunity to, you know, make decisions that are pretty important decisions.

So, I mean, at the end of 14—you know, I was—14, 13, 14 months—I'm, like, *What else can I do here?*—you know? And that's when I decided to volunteer for Vietnam. And I

can't remember—I don't remember—like, you asked a question—I don't remember meeting anybody that had been there, was telling me stories about it. It was pretty exotic and far away, in some foreign country in Asia which I knew nothing about.

So—but I was—my real reason, actually, was that I was, like, *Okay, wearing all these uniforms and playing silly war games and stuff is not much. It's kind of like playing a charade in some ways*, to me. I mean, obviously you have to practice, but to me it was, like, *Okay, if I go to Vietnam, maybe I won't have to dress up in all these fancy uniforms all the time. It'll be more laid back, and I'll—to be actually fighting in the war,* you know? So that's more or less the reason.

And the back of my—the other part of it was, you know, the Red Tide that—*Oh, I'll be—also be helping*—it wasn't the driving force, but it was in the back—like, you know, *I'll—I'll be helping to defeat communism. It'll be something new.* Because the Navy had not been in—I was assigned to—we volunteered for, you know, river patrol boats, which were, you know—which the U.S. Navy had not been in—you know, in riverine warfare, they call it, since the [American] Civil War. It was, like, this whole new area. Like, okay, you know, how do we do this? You know, the boats were new, and so it was just kind of like open book in terms of how to fight a war on the rivers in the south of Vietnam, because—

If you're familiar with Vietnam at all, the history—you know, there's the Mekong Delta,—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —which is, you know, the Mekong River with, you know, a bunch of different fingers of rivers coming out. And that's where I was assigned.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And specifically Mỹ Tho [pronounces it my-toe], if I'm correct.

DONOVAN: Yeah. It's pronounced ME-toe.

CALCATERRA: ME-toe.

DONOVAN: It's very hard.

CALCATERRA: [Laughs.]

DONOVAN: Vietnamese is a hard language to pronounce and speak.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And when you were being in—trained in the ROTC, you mentioned the interest in the strategy. Was that the kind of strategy they were discussing at that point, or were they sort of not yet prepared—

DONOVAN: Yeah, no, they—they had—I don't remember studying anything about Vietnam then or riverine warfare or anything like that. I remember taking history courses in, you know, the Civil War and reading about the, you know, Mississippi River and some of the river boats that they had, the iron-clad river boats and stuff like that, so—whether that was a direct thing or not, I don't know, but I think it was more the appeal of something innovative, different, foreign country, exotic, and *I wonder what war is like, and I wonder what I'll be like if I get in a war.*

CALCATERRA: And at that point, were you sort of proud that you had gotten to this point where you were pretty high up in the rank of the—the ship that you were on, and were you feeling camaraderie with the other people you were serving with?

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. No, I still—I felt camaraderie. I had good friends there. Probably the other part of it was that I started drinking then. I didn't drink through high school because I'm, like, *That's—that's a curse.* And then I started drinking, like, playing sports. And the Navy was a very alcoholic culture. It still is, to some degree, where people celebrate everything by drinking. You didn't drink on board ship or anything like that, but there was part of that. So, I mean, socially—social lubricant wise, it was fine. But it was more like, *Okay, I've done this. Time to move on and do something else.*

And then—so I had to extend, because I only had a two-year obligation, and so if you're a Reserve—you have—you have, you know, Reserve officers who are—only have to do two years, and then you have four-year—those that go to the Naval Academy or regular sort of Navy officers, and they are

required to do four years, which, you know, in some—in many cases, they get a free college education, and—but, you know, they sign up for a longer time. So I had to extend for a year to go to Vietnam, which is kind of interesting, because I could have gotten out, and I was saying, *Okay, well, I'm in here. I'm not ready—I don't really know what I'm gonna do next, and I'll extend for a year and go to Vietnam.*

CALCATERRA: And the draft was in '69, right? So you weren't—

DONOVAN: Yeah

CALCATERRA: —around in the time of, like, that controversy of—

DONOVAN: No, the draft was going on then. I think it was—yeah, I think it was before. It was going on. But, I mean, I went—I—as an officer, I volunteered, you know, to go in. And it was—it wasn't a question at that point. People didn't—it hadn't really hit the issue of whether you needed—you were going to go to Vietnam or not because it was still a fairly small conflict.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And so can you describe sort of the journey there? Did you fly out of California? What was your feelings,—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CALCATERRA: —like, on the journey?

DONOVAN: I flew—well, I went—I remember reporting—I remember being scared all of a sudden.

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: I always remember this because I left at, like, Christmas time, and I was home, and I went to a couple of parties down on Long Island and my buddies from college, and—around the New York area. And everybody's partying, and I'm saying, "I'm going to Vietnam." And they're going, "Oh, big deal. You'll be okay." And I'm, like,—you know. And they were just—nobody wanted to talk about it. More like they just –caught up in their own lives. And I can remember being a little bit scared and kind of like, *Okay, what's gonna happen here?* And expecting the people would be, like, "Oh, keep in

touch," and, you know, "Are you okay?" and—but I—I can remember that. They weren't that interested, you know.

CALCATERRA: Yeah.

DONOVAN: So it hadn't become—you know, like, it wasn't, like, "You're going to Vietnam," and, you know, "baby killer" or anything like that, like that happened later. Like, "Oh, that happened."

So I drove across country. I was in Coronado [California], where we started our training for about six weeks, and we had foreign language training, where I met the first Vietnamese person I met. There was a woman named Co Tung, who was—who taught us sort of rudimentary Vietnamese, and their customs and, you know, do's and don'ts of the culture. Sort of a positive effort on the Navy's part to kind of educate us before we went.

And then we went to California, near San Francisco, to train in the boats. And then we flew from there to Vietnam.

CALCATERRA: And when you were learning about the culture, were you sort of surprised because of what you had learned about communism in Vietnam, or what kind of stuff were you learning?

DONOVAN: Eh, it wasn't too much—there was some stuff about communism and, you know, more propaganda wise.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: You know, Hồ Chí Minh and the Red Tide and, you know, that the Russians and Chinese were supporting them, and—but it was more the—it was more like how do you interact in the country with the Vietnamese people, because you're going to be—you're going to be on the rivers, patrolling and stopping junks and sampans [flat-bottomed wooden boats] and inspecting them to see that they don't have contraband or enemy, you know, soldiers or anything on board.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So you had to have some understanding of them. And plus we were sort of in advisory capacity, so we were—you know,

we didn't want to alienate our—alienate our allies by being the Ugly Americans.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So that was—yeah.

CALCATERRA: And so once you were leaving there after your training, what were sort of the first days like? Were your expectations still intact, or were you starting to feel like you didn't know what you were—

DONOVAN: There was—a couple of things happened right off the bat. The first thing was that on the very first night that I got there—or first patrol I went on—we went on night and day patrols.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: I went out with a group of seasoned, you know, guys that had been there a year—for a year. And they took us out on this patrol, and—at night, and they were really trying to scare us. So first of all, they ran along the—close to the bank of the river at night, and like, *Whoa, this is scary!*

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: They were more doing it, I think, as much to kind of, you know, make us scared as anything else. And then we went into this cove, this small sort of bay area, and set up an ambush at night. We basically tied up to some fish stakes in the middle of the river and tried to be quiet. And they had a curfew on, so that meant that everybody had dusk to dawn curfew, so everybody had to be off the river potentially by then.

And so late in the evening, we had the radar running. They got a contact, and they lit it up with flares and searchlights. It was a couple of sampans, which are little boats that the local people, you know, paddle around in, and there were a bunch of huts in—small what we call hooches around there, so it was a little kind of a village area. And as soon as they lit them up, they just started shooting.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: And I'm looking at them, and I'm seeing there were women and children in there, and, like, *What are you doing?* And so they made—they just tried to paddle away as fast as they can, like anybody would, to shoot. And they got to the bank, and they ran up, and some of them were dead and some weren't, and I'm like—I was just completely—you can imagine, just coming from a civilian situation and, you know, you've never seen anything like this before. That was a hugely, you know, meaningful experience for me, and—because I said—you know, I mean. I mean, I won't give you all the details, but it was pretty bad.

And it was—it was—and I just said, *There's no way that, you know, war—these are supposed to be our allies—what we can do is to justify this*, and they said—and so I asked the—you know, the experienced guys running—"Why did you shoot them?" He said, "Well, there's a curfew, you know, and this is a VC [Viet Cong] area. These are VC sympathizers." And, you know—and I said, "Yeah, but they're women and children, and why would we shoot them even if they are? This can only cause more conflict and more hatred towards us by the Viet Cong, by the people that live there."

No, they just ignored it and wrote out the after-action report, saying they killed VC instead of—you know. So it was—it was an atrocity—you know, of a small scale, but—and having been just—my very initial experience, it just galvanized me. I just said to myself, *There's no way that anything I do will—with my—when I'm on patrol with my men that I'll, you know, engage in, you know, hurting or taking advantage of civilians who are there,* you know.

CALCATERRA: Did you find anyone else you were serving with had similar opinions—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. Well, the guy—there was a guy, Lee [Shreve? 35:38], who was—ended up being my commanding officer later, was on patrol. I mean, he was equally horrified. And I did find other officers—not a whole lot that were very much felt the same way.

That led to, you know—sort of jumping ahead a bit, after a couple of months, I read a couple of books—you know, being interested in history, I said, *Okay, what's going on here?* There's a—there's—I don't know if you've read any of—if you're interested in Vietnam history, there's two books that were written by Bernard [B.] Fall, who's a—who's a French war correspondent and, you know, journalist. And he wrote two books. One is called *Two Vietnams* [sic; *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis*], and the other was called *Streets Without Joy[: Indochina at War, 1946-54*], which are really interesting books, which were written during the—you know, the Viet—Viet Minh war, post World War II up till, you know—you know, the French left.

And he—he kind of characterized, you know, what happened: why the French lost and, you know—and—and at the same time, you know, talked kind of openly about, you know, the effects of communism and—and the effects of the French. And I realized—what I realized from that book was we were doing exactly the same thing that the French had done and lost the war. He gave explanations of, you know, our counterinsurgency strategy that the French used that didn't work. He called it the ink blot theory, where you'd go in—same thing we did in Iraq and Afghanistan—we went in—go into a village or a hamlet and pacify it, you know, by basically making it safe and then trying to convince the people that we were their friends. And then from there you'd go out to outlying villages, and the idea was this ink blot would spread and—kind of like the Red Tide spreading the other way. And he went through very much clear detail why that didn't work. It's exactly our strategy, was this, you know, counterinsurgency strategy that we had—we were employing at the same time.

And at the same time, I realized that our allies, the South Vietnamese, were corrupt. They didn't really care about—they—all they cared about was, you know, getting promoted, you know, taking money from—you know, where they could from the American military effort, because we were pouring millions and millions of dollars in there already in aid to—to try to, you know, buy friendship with the local people.

So anyway, so that was—that was a whole moment of saying, like—so from there, I realized—I also realized that—

that because of the South Vietnamese government was so corrupt, that the people were basically kept as peasants. You know, most of the—the parts of the Mekong Delta was very rich—rich in cultural farmland—was owned by a few wealthy families, you know, in—in—in Saigon.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: And they really—didn't really care about the local people, who I—

The other part of it was I really got interested in the culture. You know, it was a very interesting kind of a Buddhist culture. People were very friendly, welcoming, and food was—you know, it's a wonderful country. In fact, I go back there every year, so I've been—I don't know if you saw that, but, I mean, I go back every year, and feel part of that is the reason that—that I found it a very interesting, you know, culture and people, who really do like Americans, for some odd reason. [Chuckles.]

CALCATERRA: So when you started having these realizations, did you feel like a sort of helplessness, or did you feel resolved to act differently, or what—

DONOVAN: I didn't feel helpless; I felt resolved. I felt—so I felt, like, *Okay, this is clear to me now, so my goal now is to basically do my job for the rest of the nine months I'm here, but not to get any of my men killed.* Not that I just, you know, avoided conflict or anything because at the same time, I'd been in a bunch of firefights and battles that had been successful. And luckily—you know, I'd been ambushed a number of times. But I felt—so that was the first thing, that I was going to do my job, patrol the rivers as best I could. We patrolled 35 miles of river, you know, and we—which was very ineffective, by the way [chuckles] because you had two boats on a river like, you know, the Connecticut River saying—stop anybody from crossing. Obviously, you know, when they're two mile—a mile away, you could do whatever you want.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So—so I basically—my—my resolve was to do as much as I could to, again, save civilians and also help, as best I could, the poor people that were—you know, poor rice farmers that were in the middle of this war, still trying to, you know, grow rice and, you know, fish and, you know, carry goods to market. All around you in the middle of this was—were, you know, were families, poor families.

So I did a lot of humanitarian work. We—we brought doctors into villages to help and dentists and things like that to do—you know, to help treat people who had illnesses and things.

CALCATERRA: And that's when you went back later with your project, or at the time?

DONOVAN: At the time. You know, I—you know, I was in the rivers, and we—the—the mili- —the Navy was trying to actually do humanitari- —we tried to prop up the government.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So we made it, like, we're bringing doctors in, like Doctors Without Borders and things like that. We're bringing them in, but—to try to make them see that the South Vi- —the South Vietnamese government was bringing them in, and therefore you should follow the South Vietnamese government and—you know, because they're trying to help their people. But it was really the Americans doing it.

CALCATERRA: Okay.

And what was it like working alongside those people maybe who had been there longer, who had these more, like, views that they couldn't help but kill civilians? Did you sort of engage with them and try and change their opinions, or—

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, it was—it was—my commanding officer, who had gone to the Naval Academy, and he was totally gung-ho to kill as many Viet Cong as he could. And get medals. And he—and I would try to talk to him. I'd say, "Look, you know, I"—his name was Don—I forget his last name, but—he was Don [Whit? 42:16] actually. And he was, like, "Oh, you know, I'm gonna get medals, and these VC are bad guys, and"—anyway, so—

and I just tried to talk to him. I said, “Look, it’s pretty dangerous out there. We’re really not gonna accomplish much by going and killing others.” And, you know, he was, like, gung-ho. And he basically ended up being killed along with the entire boat, in early May, like two months after I got there.

And I had warned him. I said—you know, I was on the river every day, and he would go out periodically and feel like he wanted to stir up some—you know, some action and fighting. Because part of the way you got rewarded by the Navy was how many firefights you’d been in., how many times you got—engaged the enemy. So he was always trying to go out and engage the enemy. And to me it was—I wasn’t going to engage the enemy unless they were going to engage us, because it was pretty hard to—you know, it was jungle, and you couldn’t really see the enemy most of the time.

So he went into an area that I told him not to go into. I said, “Look, Don, you really go in there. It’s dangerous. There are a lot of bunkers and, you know, there’s no real”—and he went into that area and got his entire boat wiped out.

So—and there were other situations that happened where, I don’t know, like the [U.S.] Navy SEALs [**Se**a, **A**ir and **L**and teams]. I worked with them. I’m very close to the SEAL community now, so I’m not picking them out, but they were there to do a job, which was to infiltrate and kill the enemy at night and—you know, like you—I’m sure you know they operate in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the intelligence was very bad, and so they would go in and sometimes shoot civilians by mistake or, you know, have an ambush, you know, compromised by civilians going by at night and they’d kill them.

So—so, yeah, there were conversations, I think, back and forth with some of the other officers and enlisted guys. And the enlisted guys—like, after my commanding officer was killed, the guys on my boat, the enlisted guys—they were [unintelligible; 44:28] were—because they lost their buddies—were revengeful, you know, so they were, like, “Let’s go shoot ‘em. Let’s go kill ‘em,” you know. And, well shoot, you had to manage this dynamic because they weren’t educated. To them, like, they were all enemy—you

know, the kind of rule of thumb amongst the Americans—Army and Navy—was—you know, because you couldn't tell the good guys from the bad guys—was they're all gooks. They're all enemy. They're all VC. So it doesn't matter if you kill one. They're all—you know, if they're—even if they're civilian, they're—you know, they're on the VC side. Which was not true. So—yeah, so there was some of that through the last months that I was there.

CALCATERRA: And you also felt the pressure to try and keep them all alive, right? Because you—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. And—and—I ended up being able to—I mean, you learn a lot as a leader when you're in that situation, that you still have to kind of—you know, you can't just go out there and float around in your boat and do nothing. You have to kind of be able to talk to them and—you know, and keep them motivated and teach them that that's not going to actually help, you know?

CALCATERRA: So at this time, were you operating under Operation Game Warden?

DONOVAN: Yep, yep, Operation Game Warden—

CALCATERRA: Okay.

DONOVAN: —was the—was the—there were two Navy missions. There was Game Warden and [Operation] Market Time. Market Time was, like, coastal patrol on the—along the coast—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —to stop, you know, traffic from coming in, enemy boats and things. And, you know,—and Market Time was—and our—our mission was in the rivers, inland, so—

CALCATERRA: And do you remember specific places or did you stay anywhere for extended periods of time that you sort of felt connected to? Were you moving around a lot?

DONOVAN: Yeah. Well, Mỹ Tho is basically where I go out to build houses,—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —so that was—that was the place that I really felt most at home. And later, I was assigned to another area, in a place called Ngã Bảy [pronounced nah BAY], which was—it wasn't a place I really enjoyed being. Mỹ Tho was—was a place that, you know, was kind of like an open, small city, so that, you know, you could—I mean, it wasn't like—you could go out at night and go to a restaurant, go to a bar, have a girlfriend, and— I took full advantage of that because it was, like—I was sort of like against the sort of regimen. It was sort of like part of my decision was that I was going to go native in some ways, that, you know, I was more associated with the Vietnamese people and their—you know, than the—you know, than I was with my own, you know, enlisted and officers, because a lot of them just looked at the Vietnamese as kind of lesser than—you know, they eat this food, they're unclean, and so they kind of like—you know, and that—

To me, I was, like, *Wow, this is a really interesting culture.* I learned the language, not fluently but—not as well as Professor [Edward G.] Miller, but I learned it well enough to converse. And I had an interpreter who worked for me, named [Nguyen Hoang] Minh, who is still living, actually. And that's a whole story in itself. But he was—when I found out that—when I went on the river to patrol, I couldn't speak the language. You don't know what—what people are doing, and you can't read Vietnamese well, and so he went with me on every patrol, and he was able to tell the good guys from the bad guys, and we became very close friends. And, you know, we would go out to dinner together, and I'd go to his house with his family, and—and—yeah.

And then—so. And then—and then when I left, I mean, I'd always wanted to find him, and when I went back on one of my trips in, like, the late 2000s, I found him. I don't know if you read the story. I found him, and he was still alive. It's a long story, how I found him, but—and—and sort of—he hadn't really talked to any Americans or hadn't been able to talk anything about the war since—for 40—40-plus years. He started telling me all these war stories about working with the SEALs, the Navy SEALs. And he gave me some names of contacts when I came back, who had been platoon leaders,

officers. And I got I touch with a couple of them, and they said, “Oh, Minh, Minh, you found Minh. He’s one of us.”

And that so that started this whole connection between him and the SEAL veteran community here. They raised money to help build him a new house, and they still send him money every—you know, every month now, and we brought him to the United States and did a documentary film.

CALCATERRA: Oh, which film?

DONOVAN: It’s called *Minh*—it’s called *A Bond Unbroken: The Story of Minh* [sic; *A Bond Unbroken: The “Why” of Minh*], M-i-n-h, *A Bond Unbroken*. I don’t—it hasn’t been released yet, but they’re—they’re looking to have it released through the cable network or something.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: Anyway, so—and—and so I have pretty close ties to the veterans, to the SEAL community in Virginia Beach, where their headquarters are, as a result of this relationship with Minh. But that was—that was my real connection, was in Mỹ Tho. And—so.

CALCATERRA: What was the response from sort of people around you or higher-ups when you decided to sort of “go native,” as you said, and make connections with—

DONOVAN: Yeah.

CALCATERRA: –people in the area?

DONOVAN: Yeah, I think it alienated me to some degree, you know, that they—a lot of them either—you know, some of them were apolitical, but they just said they were doing a job, and we don’t want to think about that. But others sort of—I mean, I had friends there, officers, but they weren’t sort of interested in the culture. I mean, every chance I got, I’d go out into the town and—you know, and mix with the people and, you know, be away from the base. And most of them just stayed on the base, you know, so that’s what sort of made it different.

CALCATERRA: Mmm. And did you sort of think that that helped you cope with this, like, very demanding schedule of the patrols and—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think it did. I mean, I—I was dedicated to doing my job, and when I'd go on patrol I'd stop in villages and talk to people and—yeah.

CALCATERRA: I know from your article in the *Boston Magazine* they quoted that you had gone on more than 200 river patrols and lived through some 50 firefights.

DONOVAN: Mm-hm.

CALCATERRA: So how did you sort of endure that stress [cross-talk] from day to day?

DONOVAN: You know, I think it was, like,—early on, it was—a good question. I don't know. I mean, I was young. I probably—I drank a lot, you know, so I'd come off patrol and I'd drink. I don't remember really being afraid in that sense that—until late. Like, what they call your "short time" or when you're near the end of your tour,—

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: —and you go out on patrol then, and you think, *Oh, my God, I wouldn't want to get shot now. I've come all this far.* But, I mean, I was very lucky. I think there's a lot of luck involved. But I—I sort of had this, you know, probably ego protection or whatever it was, sense that after a certain time, that *I'm not gonna get—somehow I'm gonna come through this, and I'm not gonna die*, which was probably just positive thinking on that part, but—and it didn't cause me—

Early on, I did some pretty stupid things that I would call pretty risky until I really realized that that was not going to benefit anybody, including my men. I didn't—and after this guy, Don [Whit? 52:50] was killed in the boat, I was really—part of my job is to protect these—these guys' lives who I'm working with, because when you're on patrol as an officer, you have two boats. There's, like, five guys in each boat on patrol. One boat covers the other boat as you always travel in pairs, and I—I'm the patrol officer, so when you're out there, it's like you have this little fleet that you're in complete

command of. You make decisions where you go, you know, during the day or night, and how you operate the boat is what determines, you know, whether—you know, whether you're going to be in danger or not, so you have to be constantly alert. And—yeah.

CALCATERRA: Do you feel comfortable describing some of the risky things that you did that you were referring to?

DONOVAN: Yeah. I mean, I think—well, I'm going—I made some friends with the SEALs, and I would go out on ops with them. I wouldn't actually go in on the ops, but I'd—I'd go with them on the boats. There were times we were—we were given strict orders never to leave the boats and, you know, not to go too close to shore. I would sometimes take a couple of guys and go across an island, on land. Pretty stupid.

CALCATERRA: Were you going to socialize or on missions?

DONOVAN: No, no, kind of going to kind of patrol or—

CALCATERRA: I see.

DONOVAN: —you know, kind of search through a certain area for—for the enemy, which was pretty stupid.

And then I—you know, I would go I to c- —you can't go into canals. Like, the rivers were really wide—like, you know, in some cases wider than the Connecticut there, but then there were narrow, you know, canals that were, you know, probably no wider than this room. And that's where the enemy was, and if you went in those canals, you were really taking a big risk because you couldn't see the—you know, it was [niva palm? 54:58] and—and jungle forests, so the enemy could hide and you couldn't see them.

And we were ambushed a couple of times going through narrow canals. And then I realized that, *Wow, this is*—you know, sometimes you'd be ordered to because it's part of a military operation, but, you know, in some ways you had—you had—you know, you could do that. And I did that on several—once we got—we got ambushed from both sides—banks of the river at the same time, and I'm standing, literally, on the bow of the boat, you know, with binoculars,

sort of watching and directing. And we get, you know, machine gun fire from both sides. And no one got hit on the boat. There were bullet holes in the boat and everything else, and all around me, but somehow I didn't get, you know, shot.

So there were things like that. I'm, like, *This is—this is not*—I wasn't scared after that, but those are some of the things I did sort of in the beginning, you know. And I think I got caught up in the fact that the guys would sort of say, "Oh, you're—you know, you're—I want to go out on a patrol with you because you get into the action and nobody gets killed." So it was kind of like they thought that I was—so I got kind of caught up in that John Wayne kind of thing. You know, John Wayne was like this, you know, action adventure, Arnold [A.] Schwarzenegger guy of the '50s, you know?

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So—yeah. So, I mean, I had—so I did a number of—had a number of incidents like that.

Another inci- —a very telling incident was when—at one point, we were assigned to a ship to patrol. We stayed on this, like mother ship on the river, on the—at the mouth of a river and patrolled up the river, so it was just like being back in the Navy again, which I wasn't too happy about. You had to wear a uniform every day, and, you know, you couldn't wear your battle fatigues and stuff.

And so we went on this—we brought a doctor into this village, and the guys who had been on the ship for a couple of months—and obviously there was no drinking or alcohol on the ship, and they got into the village, and somehow some of the guys were drinking, and when we were going back to leave in the afternoon—we had a doctor that, you know, treated people in the village—I realized the boat captain, who was in charge of the boat that—not I was on but the one behind me—was—had been drinking and was drunk.

So I gave orders that they should stay very close to me, and as it got dark, "Don't leave me, and don't let him drive the boat"—you know, to the other crew. Anyway, he took off

when I was delivering another, you know, Vietnamese navy guy to the vil- —to a village. He just took off, and I couldn't—I tried to call him on the radio. He didn't hear me. And then finally I get a call from him, and he's under fire. And I'm, like, "Where are you?" And he said, "Well, I'm a couple of miles from the ship," and he'd run the boat aground, on a mudflat, and he's getting ambushed from the—from the shore.

So I finally—you know, I get down to where he was, and I took a couple of guys and myself. I jumped in the water and sort of—sort of attacked the beach, not knowing how many enemy were there, but knowing that sometimes the Viet Cong, if you were aggressive like that, would retreat. Which did happen. They retreated. Nobody got killed. Got the boat off. Got back to the ship, and the commanding officer basically said, "Was anybody drinking? Were you drinking?" I said, "Well, I had a ceremonial glass of wine with the—you know, with the village chief, but that's—you know, I didn't drink." And he basically had me—you know, he tried to file, you know, sort of charges against me for dereliction of duty.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: Had me sent out of the unit to—back to Saigon and report to the command structure, and they were, like, going to, you know, get me, you know, arrested or dishonorably discharged, which actually didn't happen, but I was moved to another location, and finally the commanding officer—because I had a good record on the river, but I'd had a few other incidents of drinking and being out past curfew, so they—you know, they kind of knew I was a little bit of a loose cannon. So that was a very instrumental time as well, because I was, you know, waiting to either be reassigned or sent back to the U.S. or, you know, some other kind of military charge.

CALCATERRA: Were you separated from friends and community members that you—

DONOVAN: Yeah,—

CALCATERRA: —were close to?

DONOVAN: —yeah, yeah. My whole patrol group that I was with—was separated from them and—and from the group at Mỹ Tho, where I lived. You know, I was separated from them and just moved to another, you know, Navy base facility, where I patrolled the last few months. And that was relatively, you know, uneventful because it was— we were patrolling the main ship channel from Saigon to the South China Sea, and a lot of it had been defoliated, so in—in Vietnam—I don't know if you know, they had this Agent Orange, which basically would kill everything, all the vegetation. The only way they could sort of protect an area was to, you know, kill all the vegetation, and then you could see, you know, along the shore if any enemy were there. So this was pretty much—pretty defoliated there. So it wasn't—it wasn't as dangerous as the previous place I'd been, so—

CALCATERRA: At that point in the fighting and the action, did you have a sense of how the overall war was going? Had you heard news about things like the Tet Offensive that were going on?

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. Actually, I was there during the Tet—I was not in country during the Tet Offensive, but I was there, and I was on—I was on leave, on R&R [rest and recuperation], so everybody had to do a year, and then everyone was given a week vacation at one of, like, three or four different places, you know, paid for by the military, where you got a week off to leave the country. So I happened to be in Australia for that, when the Tet Offensive hit.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: And I—I remember coming back to go back to—you know, my leave was over. I came back, and they said, "Well, you know, you can—you can—you're going to be able to stay an extra three days. That's the good news. The bad news is because all the [U.S.] Air Force bases are under attack." So I stayed another three or four days. Actually longer, I think, because they—they flew us back to a place called Cam Ranh Bay, which was a big Navy base on the coast, and I stayed there for another week because where I was assigned was near Saigon, at Tan Son Nhut Air Base, which was the major air field. It's still there. And it was—had been taken over by—it was unsafe to land anybody there. It had been taken over by the—by the Viet Cong.

So finally I came back, so—and it was com- —sort of completely different then because everybody sort of started to realize that this is not—we're not winning the war, and that's sort of when all the protests came up, because even though we—you know, we kind of defeated them in—in, you know, the cities and towns, they had infiltrated at will, and basically we weren't able to stop them, you know, or the South Vietnamese government.

CALCATERRA: Was that the first time you had felt that way, that you weren't winning the war?

DONOVAN: Oh, no, I felt that way at the beginning, you know, early on. I go—I looked around. I said—in the Mekong Delta—I said, *There's no way that the Navy or the Army here is winning because we—you know, we don't have enough soldiers. We're actually creating more enemy soldiers than we are, you know, killing.* And it was very obvious to me early on that we were not going to be successful.

CALCATERRA: But Tet made that mainstream a little bit more?

DONOVAN: I think it—it mainstreamed to a lot of people. At that point, I—I don't know if I, you know,—you know, I knew the protests were going on in the States, starting to come on, but I—it wasn't, you know, until I got back that I, you know, really saw the extent of it.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. Can you talk a little bit more about R&R and maybe were you in contact with people back home throughout or at that point, and what was that experience like?

DONOVAN: Well, I mean, my mother saved all my letters and stuff, so I would write—I would write my mother back letters, and my father—and my mother was, like, you know, completely beside herself when I went to Vietnam. She was, like, "Don't go." You know, "How can you do that?" My mother probably suffered more than I did. And she went to church every day and was just—she always told me it was the most horrible year of her life. You can imagine, you know, the impact on my mother. My father was, like, "Oh, I knew you'd come back." He didn't worry about it much.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: So I would write letters back to my mother, like, “Oh, everything’s fine. We took a doctors [sic] here, and it’s”—you know, I didn’t want to upset them, and—but I had a couple of friends from college who were—we’d write about the war, and I sort of told them similar things that I told you, about, “I don’t think we’re gonna win this war” or “It doesn’t seem like we should be here. The South Vietnamese government is corrupt, so even if we are winning, you know, they’re not really the kind of government that we”—very much like Afghanistan in that sense, you know.

And to the Vietnamese credit, I mean, to—to understanding—they had been fighting in the south since the Secord World War, so they—you know, you—you couldn’t go in—you couldn’t go to any family without having them lost brothers and sisters—you know, similar to the north.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So they were weary, in many cases. By the time I got there—and even then, many of the good soldiers had been killed, you know, because if you’re good at what you did and you went into battle, you upped the chances that something’s going to happen. So, you know, I quickly could tell that the military was not really motivated, and they would do everything they can to avoid—I mean, if you read—if you—did you ever read [*A*] *Bright Shining Lie*[*: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*] by John Paul Vann? It’s one of the best books written about Vietnam, and it’s a biography of an Army major named John Paul Vann, who got out of the Army while he was there and became a civilian and worked for USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development]. And he basically figured out the counterinsurgency strategy that *would* work, and—

But in the book, he basically tells that [Ngô Đình] Diệm, who was our ally—you know, President Diệm, was trying to create—he told us he wanted to create democracy, but he really wanted to create a family dynasty, you know.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: And that was—and—and in order to protect the dynasty, he couldn't have too many of the South Vietnamese army soldiers killed, because that would turn them against him, so when—there was a battle called Ấp Bắc, which was early in—the Battle of Ấp Bắc was—was one of the signature battles, and he called all his generals into Washington—I mean, into Saigon and said, you know, "Go out. Do patrols, but don't get the guys killed." And so they were—so that quickly—once that word got out, you know, any army is going to be, like, you know, more fearful of—of engaging the enemy. So we would have these frustrating missions, where we'd go out with them or support them and they would, you know, go until they got in contact with the enemy, and then they'd retreat, so—

CALCATERRA: Can—

DONOVAN: I mean, I didn't understand all of that at the time. This was learning later.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: You know, I only read that book a few years ago. I go, *Oh, that makes a lot of sense.*

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: But the war is very complex. You know, as you might have learned from talking to, you know,—I actually met Professor Miller in Saigon in March this year. I hadn't met him before, because [chuckles] I didn't even know—I had heard about him here, but I was—I have a good friend who's an ex-Marine—because I go back and forth quite a bit. I know a lot of ex-pats and people who live there, and he happened to be there at the time, and he's—he's starting a Fulbright University [Vietnam] there, an American university the first one to be started in Saigon.

And he had been very instrumental in the [Kenneth L.] "Ken" Burns documentary [*The Vietnam War*] coming out?—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —in—in September? Which should be very interesting for you to see as well. In fact, they had a showing a couple of weeks ago here. Did you go to that?

CALCATERRA: Yeah, I did.

DONOVAN: Yeah, I was there, too.

CALCATERRA: Wow! We have to talk about that, but we [cross-talk] can't skip to that yet!

DONOVAN: Okay, we [can? can't? 1:08:11] get to that.

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: But Ken, I could tell, was right on, you know? And Mike Maheaney [sic; Michael K. Heaney] was also someone I know well, too. Anyway, but we could—there's a lot of angles to this war. Anyway, so Ed [unintelligible; 1:08:33] some conversa- —the main thing about the war that I learned is that there's no formulaic—there's so many—asymmetric warfare—there's so many dimensions to it—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —that they'll be writing about it for a long time because it's—it was a different war in different places to different people, you know?

CALCATERRA: And a lot of people don't even analyze the conflict before it with the French and—

DONOVAN: Exactly, hugely. You know, there's---there's a—what was the book? The French wars—it was, you know,—Ed knows the book. He says it's not the best book, but it was—it was written about the whole, you know,—the French engagement from a perspective of that leading into, you know, the American war. The Vietnamese call it the American War.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: They don't call it the Vietnam War.

CALCATERRA: Yeah. Did you ha- —did you have any knowledge of the French conflict from your training that you talked about [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:09:24]?

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, when I read the—the Bernard Fall books, he was French.

CALCATERRA: Got it.

DONOVAN: So I—that gave me—I did—that—that was eye opening because I saw—you know, I saw the continuity of the fact that we're doing th- —you know, we're—we're—we're trying to do the same thing—we're—except we're not—you know, we're not colonists.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: We're not trying to colonize the country, but we're coming in and occupying it, and one of the strategies we're employing in how are we integrat- —interacting with the—you know, with the Vietnamese people? And so it—it—it was very eye opening for me. You know, I think probably the most eye opening thing was that—and so it—it—and I don't think—maybe because I was interested in history or something like that that I sort of got that sort of sense of, you know, continuity and what the relationship was like, that—that I didn't think other people really bothered to think about it, you know.

CALCATERRA: Yeah. Did you also hear about the Mỹ Lai Massacre at this time, or was that after you had returned?

DONOVAN: That was after I got back. That was in '69 or something like that, I think.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So I—I got back in '68.

CALCATERRA: Do you want to talk about that, coming back and leaving Vietnam?

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, that was a big part of my life, too, because I came back—in the meantime,—everybody in

the military is assigned to a detail officer in the Navy, which is an officer who's in Washington [D.C.], whose job it is to help you with your career?

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: If you wanted to stay. At that point, they wanted me to stay because I—you know, I had medals, I had a good record, even though I had this other stuff going on, and they said that "you should—if you want to stay in the Navy and have a Navy career, you should go on a destroyer as a—you know, as an officer," you know, in charge of a division or something like that, or—and I didn't want to do that. The last thing I wanted to do was to go to sea again on a ship, running around the ocean somewhere.

CALCATERRA: Yeah.

DONOVAN: So I said, "The only way I'll stay is if you give me shore duty in—in Europe. I can go and travel—

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: —for a year, and then I'll get out. So they did assign me to—they gave me shore duty in Greenwich, Scotland, which is way in northern Scotland in some remote, pretty, dark and gloomy place. And I said, *Well, I'll be in Europe, but I*—it was, like, *I'm not interested.* So I—I said, *I'm gonna get out.*

So when I got to San Francisco [California], I got discharged there. And that started a whole saga of basically drinking and not working. I didn't really have any plan in my life at that point. So I get out. I had a girlfriend there, who flew for Braniff [International Airways], was a flight attendant, and so I just went and lived with her and drank and partied. And, you know,—so it was 1968, and in June of 1968 [the Rev. Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.] was killed, and then [Robert F.] "Bobby" Kennedy was killed in—and, of course, all the riots that came around—you know, the Watts riots against—you know, by—by African-Americans against, you know, the killing of—you know, of—of King.

And then—so it was a really this chaotic period, and the whole antiwar movement was building, and I just kind of like

checked out, so—a year later—you know, like,—so that went on for a year, and then a year later, I realized—I had no money. I had spent, like, 15 to 20 thousand dollars I had saved, which was a lot of money in those days.

And my girlfriend kind of broke up with me. I was homeless at that point, living in my car in San Francisco, and then—you know, and I'm, like, completely—I had gone to interviews a couple of times for a job, but most of the interviewers, like, for banks or something like that would look at me and say, "I don't think you're ready to work yet."

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: I had—I—I couldn't understand why. But, I mean, whether I had PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] or not is always an interesting question. I think there was obviously some after- —you know, after-effects of being in this intense experience and coming back. But I think it was more that I was just kind of rudderless. I didn't really have any sense of direction, and that's kind of what happens to somebody if they don't have any direction in their life, so—anyway, so that was, like, a low point.

And then—and then I got a job as a taxicab driver, and it was like a big step forward for me because I'd gone from being this, you know, decorated, successful naval officer—at the end of a year, I had no confidence in myself. I—I don't even like to hold a job, you know. So I drove a cab. *Oh, I can hold a job. I can earn some money here.* That was how far down I was.

Eventually, I came back to Milton and lived at home, because I had no money at that point, and got a job teaching school. Inner city—you know, inner city in Roxbury with, you know, underprivileged kids from the ghetto, which was, like,—that—that became my life, you know—you know, my kind of life line. I finally had a purpose other than the military. And here are these kids, needy kids that I can have an impact on, hopefully socially and academically, and that sort of started me on a road to a career, at that point, to education and teaching.

CALCATERRA: I have a lot of questions [chuckles]. Can I circle back a little bit?

DONOVAN: Yeah, you can—you can—you're doing a great—you ask good questions.

CALCATERRA: Thank you. And is there any time that you have to [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:14:59]?

DONOVAN: I probably have, like, maybe 4:15.

CALCATERRA: Okay, cool.

DONOVAN: And we could reschedule if you want to.

CALCATERRA: Okay. So one question I have is when you got back, were you immediately reflecting on what had just happened, or were you trying to sort of forget about it and not think about it, or was it sort of like [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:15:18]?

DONOVAN: When I first got back, one of the first sort of signature experiences I had was I went into a bar once when I got back, and there were some young people my age, and they sort of asked me, "Well, you know, what do you do?" You know, we were getting to know each other. I said, "Well, I just got back from Vietnam. I was in the Navy." And they go, "What? You were in Vietnam?" And I go, "Yeah, yeah, I was just"—and—and—it was some of the first civilians I met. They go, "But everybody's—well, you're a baby killer, right? You know, you kill babies, right?" And I go, "No, no, no." And I tried to explain all the atrocities we'd see on TV in your—and I'm, like, "No, no, that's not what we did. That's not"—I tried to explain, you know, what,—you know, that—that's not how people were. You know, I mean, obviously Mỹ Lai—there were incidents of that, but—but for the most part, there weren't—in the Navy, there weren't—there was abuse to some degree, but there weren't—it wasn't—not every—the atrocities were not as—as widespread as the media would have it.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: Remember, the media in those days were totally liberal. The media already was against the war from the time they got

there. So they were only—they were basically—were always trying to pick battles where we lost bodies—you know, Mỹ Lai. I'm not saying that there weren't atrocities. In fact, this film, the Ken Burns film, is supposedly going to—from what—you know, Tom Vallely and the people who made it told me that it's going to really show the number of civilian casualties and the fact that there *were* atrocities. Hopefully, they balance it.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: I mean, there are atrocities in any war, but anyway,—so that—that basically—so for me at that point, I'm, like, *Okay, I'm not gonna talk about this war.*

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: And I just sort of got on with it. I don't remember during that early period really watching the news much about it.

CALCATERRA: So did experiencing that really fierce antiwar sentiment—did that sort of complicate how you felt when you were actually in Vietnam, feeling very, like, much that the war was, you know, not going to go well, you didn't really agree with it, so were these intention, or did you just feel like the antiwar movement didn't really understand your experience at all?

DONOVAN: Yeah, I—actually, what Mike—Mike said the other night at—at that—was really what—I hadn't really thought about it before. It was kind of like I didn't get engaged. Like, he said the same thing. And—and it really was because I—there were guys that had died over there, and at that point, I—I wasn't supportive of the war, and I thought we should get out, but it was more like I didn't want to engage against those that were there, you know,—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —because they weren't there by their own choice at that point, in many cases, you know? So—so I did—I never got engaged in the antiwar movement. You know, I was—I would—I was basically against the war, and I would tell people that. You know, "We shouldn't be there. It's not working." And I actually felt, having read—you know, having,

you know, known a lot about communism and studied Soviet and foreign policy and history and stuff—I said, "You know, these people are probably better off under communism, because they have social—they'll have a socialist system, so this poor peasant is going to get his hectares of land that he can grow things on, and the government will, you know, protect the poor people," you know.

And actually to this day, it's still a communist government, and they're not doing that because of the corruption. I mean, that's why I build houses over there. It's ironic. The money doesn't filter down into the—you know, there are some really good, you know, government officials there, the people I work with, but—and the rest of it is a one-party hack system, and a lot of the money doesn't get down to the poor people. But I felt at that point that they'd be better off under communism.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: But I never got engaged in the—you know, in the antiwar movement.

CALCATERRA: And you mentioned the civil rights movement as well. Did you experience any racial tension within the military while you were there, or was that sort of something you felt the civil rights movement was, like, in America, that—

DONOVAN: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, it was pretty racist, I think, when I was there. Most of the guys that were on river boats were—were white. You know, there was actually a lot of—ironically, there was a lot of anti-Semitism, you know.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: You know, it was so—a lot of the guys that were on the boats and stuff were from the South, so there was—you know, there was—I experienced—I mean, I'm working with a guy now who's a Vietnam vet who was in the river patrol boat, and he—his name is John Fishman [Fishmen? 1:20:13], and I—and I—I didn't know him when he was over there, but he was I the same area as I was, and he's—I could tell that he was scapegoated just because he was Jewish.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: And they were—so, you know, it was—you know, the military—I don't know if it reflected—the Navy reflected the—our culture, but it probably did at that point. So there was a lot of, you know, blacks were treated like second-class citizens, for the most part, too. Yeah.

CALCATERRA: Mmm. And when you were coming home and talking about your experience in California, were you in touch with your parents still at that point, or—

DONOVAN: Yeah, good question. I came home, and basically I was so—you know, as I—as I spent more and more time drinking and not working, my—my—my sense of self was even lower. I mean, my girlfriend—and this is an interesting story. So two or three months after I got back, there was—they—I had a Bronze medal, a Bronze Star with a combat V. And they wanted to have this medal ceremony to present it to us. It was really—you know, it was one of the ways they politicized the war and tried to prop up a war they were losing by showing all these war heroes.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So, I mean, I was adamantly against coming back to Boston for this medal ceremony, but my parents were, like, "Oh, please come home. We haven't seen you, and we're proud of you, and why would you want to"—they couldn't understand it. I had—so I—I flew back and went to the medal ceremony. I can remember it was, like, I had to put my uniform on again and get a haircut. I'm, like,—it was—it was in the newspapers, and it was, like—[Snaps fingers.] And I'm, like, *This is*—to me, it was just total, you know, false publicity, "fake news," shall we call it. [Both chuckle.]

I mean, it was true, but, I mean, they were basically trying to—you know, when you're—when you're fighting a war and you're losing, you're trying to—you make more heroes out of people and do the body count and the whole thing that we were doing. It—it's a way of sort of in some ways changing public opinion.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So I did go back. My girlfriend flew out. We drove back out to California, and I just kind of checked out there. And my parents came out, like,—we had been there for, like, nine months, and I—you know, I wouldn't answer phone calls or letters and stuff like that. And I was living at that point—I had moved out of San Francisco. I was living in Lake Tahoe. And at that point, I didn't have a job. Well, actually, I didn't have much money at that point, and I got a job in a casino in Lake Tahoe, as a security guard. And my girlfriend got a job as a blackjack dealer.

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: And, you know, I mean—I so it was—and my parents came out to visit me. They found out where I was, and, I mean, like, I don't even—they drove up there and found me on the street—I mean, because they were looking for me. They—"Do you know this guy?" And—because I didn't even tell them where I was. So it was really hard on them. It was, like, what's—they couldn't understand what had happened to me, you know. And so it was really hard on them, I think, for that year. Even when I came back to live at home, it was hard because I was still drinking at that point, even though I was sort of beginning to get my life back, you know.

CALCATERRA: What was that like with your father and his own problems with alcohol?

DONOVAN: I don't think they really realized that I drank that much at that point, because I'd come home. It was kind of like they looked the other way. It wasn't until later in life, when I sort of realized that I was an alcoholic, that—that I had a drinking problem, myself, that I would tell [unintelligible; 1:24:01], "I don't think you were," because they didn't really see me, you know. I didn't—I don't think I told them much about what happened when I was living out there other than the fact that I didn't work or anything. Irish families don't talk about stuff a lot.

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: Like, the Ital- —you grew up in an Italian sort of family, or—

CALCATERRA: Yeah.

DONOVAN: Italians talk about their feelings and stuff, right?

CALCATERRA: My parents are also a psychiatrist and a psychologist, so—

DONOVAN: Oh, that's good.

CALCATERRA: So I don't think I'm an average family kind of model to—to understand.

DONOVAN: But [cross-talk; unintelligible 1:24:33] more educated, but someone of my friends is a therapist. Sent me an article once on, you know, a study that had been done comparing Irish families to Italian families.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: You know, Irish families tend to isolate, don't talk about stuff. You know, they—they segregate into small groups. They'll come together for, you know, certain holidays, but they're not like the Italians, where everybody kind of interacts and for the most part are more, you know, open about their feelings and emotions, and—not the fact that everybody—people—you know, if they're angry, they'll yell at each other and talk it through or something, you know?

CALCATERRA: Mmm. Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: Anyway, but—

CALCATERRA: So you didn't tell them much or they didn't know much about the alcohol. Did you tell them anything at all, or did they ask, about what happened in Vietnam?

DONOVAN: No, no, not too much, no. I didn't want to tell my—I didn't tell my mother. I don't know if I ever really talked to her about that. I don't think so. My father, on his deathbed—my father was very self-absorbed. He was sort of a narcissist. That was his—it was kind of like a latter-day Donald [J.] Trump in a way. You know, it was very much about himself. I mean, he had a tough childhood, and so it was—everything was sort of reflective of him, so he didn't really—

I mean, I remember telling him, like, the last—when he was sort of dying the last few months, I told him the stories about the Navy and my—you know, my—"Oh, I didn't know that," you know?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So, no, I didn't really talk. You know, when we came back from the war after that sort of incident of telling people about it, you didn't really talk to anybody. You know, like, I came back here, and when I moved up here and I worked—I worked at Dartmouth for a while, you know, in the outdoor programs. And I—I had friends that I'd meet around here, and we'd—they [unintelligible; 1:26:30] my age. We'd go running or buddies and work together. And we—we didn't realize till after a year or two or at all that we were Vietnam vets.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: So it was—it was quite common then that people just didn't talk about it. And I left it for, like, 40 years when—before I went back to Vietnam in late '90s—I mean, I didn't identify as a vet at all or—you know, it was just not something that people identified with. I mean, that's what I did, and I moved on with my life.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And I know in the Boston magazine article there was a story of you in California running into another person I think from the Navy and not really wanting to talk to?

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. That was my—I—it was my commanding—my executive officer on the aircraft carrier, of all people, who was a wonderful guy named Commander [Thorne? 1:27:07]. And I walking down the street. It was sort of like one of those, you know, moments, low-point moments, when I was living out of my car, and I looked kind of long-hair and bedraggled. And he goes, "John, how are you? I haven't seen you. How was Viet-"—because I had been on the ship, went to Vietnam and came back, and he hadn't seen me since.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: "How are you?" and—I mean, he quick- —he was a really wonderful guy, and, you know, he was always interested in, you know, my well-being. He says, "Are you okay?"—you know. "Oh, yeah, I'm doin' fine. I'm just here—you know, I'm looking for—I'm getting—I'm interviewing for a job, and I'm good," you know. And he could tell right away there was something wrong with me, and I can remember being—like, when I saw him, I didn't—he was, like, right—"John!" I mean, like, I was trying to go by like this [pantomimes movement], you know? And it was really—it was a kind of important moment because I realized how low I felt about myself, you know, and how I could contrast that from where I—when I'd left, you know.

CALCATERRA: And so even amongst other military people, you didn't feel like you could talk to them and relate with your experience?

DONOVAN: I—I probably could have, but people just—it wasn't what we did in those days. You know, there wasn't any—because—that the whole sense of—you know, as you've probably read, was that anybody in the military was—you know, was considered to be—you know, there was a taint on it. So if you had been in Vietnam, it wasn't something that you talked about.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

So why don't we jump ahead, sort of, to your special education interests. How did you—what gave you that idea to look into that, and how did that start?

DONOVAN: Yeah, because when I was teaching school—I mean, I walked into a classroom. My father actually helped me get a job teaching. I had no certificate. I had no educational, you know, training at all. And I walked into a classroom in Roxbury, inner city, with a classroom—fifth-grade classroom, which was, you know, a third black, a third Hispanic, and a third Irish-Catholic white poor kids.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And I walk—we walk in the classroom the first time. The principal took me in there, and the kids were—there's two—

they have two girls on the floor, you know, pulling each other's hair out, fighting.

CALCATERRA: Oh, wow.

DONOVAN: And so—so basically what I learned was these kids have emotional issues, and I decided that that's what I wanted to do, was to get my master's in special education so I could work with emotionally disturbed kids,—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —which, you know, many of them had because of their childhood of abuse or that kind of stuff. And so that's—so that's why I started studying for my master's and trying to understand,—you know, that's where I got interested in how people think and human behavior, which has been a big part of my life—you know, if you—if you head into that area.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: I'm really interested in how people think, you know, and what's functional thinking and what's not.

CALCATERRA: At that point, were you still struggling with alcohol and things like that, or were you—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. I was still drinking. I was actually—I started playing rugby for a local club in Boston, and drinking is a big part of that culture, so I did drink. You know, I was—functionally—you know, I was drinking, but, I mean, I could still—I did my job and got up and went to work. It wasn't like I had been before, where I wasn't working at all, you know.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: But—and I still—yeah, I did drink.

CALCATERRA: And I know that you ended up in the Outward Bound hurricane island experience.

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah.

CALCATERRA: How did you transition from your special ed classroom experience to that sort of work?

DONOVAN: Well, after—so—fast forward a little bit. So I'm going to get my master's. I get my master's in, you know, special ed, and I get a teaching job on Cape Cod, and then—as special ed teacher. And then I taught in a—you know, in an intact—you know, a classroom where these kids were—couldn't function in a regular classroom. And I went to high school in Provincetown High School, and I taught middle school and then high school, and I—you know, I was in high school, teaching there. I was coaching and teaching—coaching hockey and—and teaching in the high school. I had a couple of kids that went to Outward Bound, and they came back afterwards, and they were different. They really, like, weren't, you know, as—they were sort of delinquent kids that had been in problems, and they'd really kind of straightened out. And I go, *What's this Outward Bound?*

And that's when I went and did a course and went on to become instructor. So when I first worked in Outward Bound, I was working with underprivileged kids, with—you know, mostly I worked with—you know, worked with kids who were gang leaders from New York City and inner-city kids.

CALCATERRA: Mmm. And at that point, how often did you think about Vietnam? Were you thinking about it every day? Were you [cross-talk; unintelligible; 1:32:15]?

DONOVAN: No, I think I pretty much left it behind, I think probably when I left San Francisco. You know, I don't think I thought about it too much then.

CALCATERRA: I mean, I watched the news. I remember being, you know, ac- —activated by, you know, 1975, when—you know, when th- —finally lost the war, going, like, *Wow, what a waste* and, you know. But I felt for the poor people in South Vietnam, who were being overrun by the communists because I knew it wouldn't be good for *them*,—

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: —even though the government, I didn't support. I felt for the people that were there, who, you know, had to endure the

reoccupation. So—but I don't remember thinking much about it. You know, I just went on with my life, you know.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: But I didn't go out and say, "I'm a Vietnam vet." You didn't, you know, wear any, you know, clothing—I wasn't in the VA [U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (Veterans Administration)] system, so I didn't go to the hospital here, which I do now, but at that point—so I wasn't around other vets.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And there weren't people you stayed in touch with who you were serving with?

DONOVAN: No, not really, no. I mean, there were none. I mean, I basically just boom, went on.

CALCATERRA: Okay.

DONOVAN: Literally—yeah.

CALCATERRA: And how did you end up at Dartmouth?

DONOVAN: My first wife—her—her dad went to Dartmouth and [Amos] Tuck [School of Business at Dartmouth]. And they had moved up here to retire, so I was—we were living in the Cape. It was before we had kids, and we said, "That's not a great place to raise kids. It's nice, but in the summertime it's tourist-y." And so when we came up here, we just fell in love with the area, so we moved up here in the late '70s, and that's when—because I was working at Outward Bound, in experiential outdoor education. I applied for a job here and was—it used to be called the Outdoor Affairs Office [sic; Department of Outdoor Affairs] and now it's Outdoor Programs [sic; Dartmouth College Outdoor Programs Office], so I was the assistant director of—there for four or five years.

CALCATERRA: What was that work like? What kind of stuff did you do?

DONOVAN: Well, it was interesting because I was [unintelligible; 1:14:18] brought in because Outward Bound is very well structured, safe, outdoor program with a very good record and history.

And because I was an instructor and sort of part of the National Safety Committee—one of the reasons I was hired was to put rules and regulations into the [Dartmouth] Outing Club.

CALCATERRA: Wow!

DONOVAN: Because all the clubs had—they were, like, the insurance—you know, the business office—the insurance people were, like, "Oh, my God, we can't"—this stuff we were doing—you know, the bicycle club didn't wear helmets. You know, the climbing school didn't have any instructors that were trained in safety or emergency procedures. There was no First Aid training for—or anything available for—you know, for freshman trips.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So I was brought in to put law and order—

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: Which was not well received—

CALCATERRA: Oh, no!

DONOVAN: —by the—the Outing Club was a bunch of, you know, young people who were, like, used to doing things on their own. They were pretty good at it, but, you know, they were, like, "We—what do we need *you* for?"—you know?

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So I had to really—it was—it was a good education for me because I had to kind of bond with the k- —you know, I did a lot of hiking with them, and, you know, running and outdoor stuff, with the, you know, the Outing Club leaders and Cabin and Trails [sic; Trail] guys—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —and women. So it's a good exper- —I really enjoyed it, you know.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And did you also work with Greek life? I think I saw a few articles that we have here—

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah, yeah, you did some research.

CALCATERRA: [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: Well, what happened was they—David [T.] McLaughlin [Class of 1954, Tuck 1955] as president, and he basically eliminated—you know, he—he cut out the Outward—there was an Outward Bound program here—

CALCATERRA: Wow!

DONOVAN: —that operated out of [the William Jewett] Tucker Foundation, and they had a Live and Learn term, and he—he—he canned that program, and he eliminated my position because he was after cutting the budgets and everything else. So—but I was hired by business manager's office and then—and part of my job in the business manager's office was that—at that point, they were basically looking at the fraternity system here. And you know, the faculty, like today, voted 90 percent to eliminate fraternities back then, even.

CALCATERRA: Mmm. Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And I became part of a movement of other faculty administrators that wanted to abolish fraternities. And at that point, there were no sororities—two sororities, but they didn't have houses?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And the woman were natur- —rightfully saying, "Well, look, if that's—[if] you're going to have your social institutions, why can't we have ours?" And I'm, like, "This is the time to do it because if we end up with sororities over here and fraternities over here, we're gonna"—I mean, I don't know if you're in a sorority or anything or—

CALCATERRA: I'm not. [Chuckles.]

DONOVAN: —or how you feel about it, but—I mean, I—and I—I've been around the system here for a long time. I work with athletes

and do mental training with them, so I'm around the frater- — I know all the fraternities. And they're great, you know, guys.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: But it's just the structures—I don't believe in a co-ed education it's—you should have single-sex—you know, you should have discrimination by sex in the major org- — institutions.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: I mean, people can choose to, you know, live in, you know, women's or men's groups or in transgender, but I don't think it should be, you know, this legal situation.

Anyway, so I was assigned to basically work—and McLaughlin came in and said, "The problem is the fraternities—we need to just upgrade them. If the physical plants are better and they're—you know, we go back to eating houses and everybody wears a coat and tie and has dinner on Fridays and, you know, then everything will—you know, we can keep the fraternities."

So I was assigned to write, with the Interfraternity Council and the dean's office—I worked with one of the other deans to develop minimum standards for all the houses, for cleanliness and, you know, physical plant and all that kind of stuff. So that's how—and it was very controversial. It was an interesting project because you had to work back and forth about—you know, with the—the budgets of how they ran fraternities, and so—

And also I got involved with the—one of the first things I did—actually interesting—that's when I realized I was an alcoholic. I came here to work, and I saw all the drinking on campus. I'm going, *This is ri-* —I mean, in those days you could have open containers walking around campus—

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: You could see—you saw people drunk on campus quite a bit.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: You know, they couldn't walk downtown, but you could—you could have an open container and, you know—and it was just a tremendous amount of drinking. So I get involved—there was a professor here in the education department. He's a professor named Barnes Boffey. He was a wonderful guy. And we—and we started this alcohol peer counseling training program. It's one of the first ones in the country, which now they call Peer Support or—I don't know what it is today. I think they still have some program like that.

CALCATERRA: I think they have something called BASICS also? [Transcriber's note: A program attached to the Student Wellness Center at Dartmouth College].

DONOVAN: Yeah.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So that was a forerunner of that program, and we basically would train students who were, you know, dorm—in each dorm—volunteered—would come, and we'd go through this training—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —to help them intervene if there were, you know, students on their floor that were starting to have drinking problems or, you know,—so in—in that process of learning that, I realized I was an alcoholic. I'm actually teaching the course, and I realized at that point that I had a drinking problem. And—and that's when I stopped. I stopped, you know, drinking sort of back in the '80s, for the most part.

So—so that—that all tied into my feelings about fraternities and saying, "Look, I'm—you know, fraternities are okay, but when you put a bunch of guys together in college in a place that's oriented around drinking, it's not gonna be a good outcome" for coeducation, for, you know, gender issues or for alcohol.

CALCATERRA: At that time, what was it like to try and stop drinking? Did you feel like the drinking was connected to Vietnam at all, or were you just sort of—

DONOVAN: For me, or you mean—

CALCATERRA: For you.

DONOVAN: No, stopping drinking was—you know, it was—I [sic] was a blessing. It was, like, I mean, I sort of—if I hadn't have done that training—like, here I am against alcohol abuse, not realizing that I'm an alcoholic, because, you know, I certainly knew what an alcoholic was, but in—in this training you sort of went through these, "This is what the steps are," you know, and "These are the things that really point to someone being an alcoholic." I mean, I was a functioning alcoholic, but, you know, I was definitely an alcoholic.

So whether I—yeah, yeah, I—I tie it to Vietnam, but I think one of the first things you do if you realize you have a drinking problem is that you own it. You know, you don't blame it on the past or anything like that. And I still—I don't think my drinking problem is related to PTSD or anything or being alienated when I came back. It was just more—just—you know, it was just my way of dealing with, you know—my way of—of really shutting down my emotions and, you know—and anybody—if anybody starts drinking, you can become an alcoholic if you drink [chuckles], you know. So you just become—you become an addict. And I realized the only cure for being an addict is to stop.

CALCATERRA: At what point at your career did you start getting involved more with wanting to go back to Vietnam and thinking about—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah.

CALCATERRA: —the humanitarian work.

DONOVAN: I mean, it was late. It was in the—it was—actually, it was in the late '90s. I was work- —I—so I went from teaching and—and working here at Dartmouth to starting my own consulting practice.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: [Organization, not? 1:42:12] consulting. And I had a client that was doing a training that—you know, that I was going to work with in Malaysia.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And, the—Penang in Malaysia. And I looked at the map, and I go, *Well, that's Southeast Asia. Maybe I'll go back to Vietnam.* So I got this idea that I'd go on this business trip and then I'd go to—to go Vietnam. So it led me to actually remember some vets that were here that were Vietnam vets locally, and they put me in touch with—with a guy named Jan [C.] Struggs—Scruggs in Washington, D.C., who—who actually built the Wall, the Vietnam Wall [sic; the Vietnam Veterans Memorial]. And he's still actually the executive director, founder of the Vietnam Memorial Foundation [sic; Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund]. And—and he was running—he was setting up an economic development trip to Vietnam that was mostly all CEOs and senior executives of companies who had been Vietnam vets.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: So it was sort of—to go to Vietnam and—this was in the late—when Vietnam was starting to basically do the same thing that Russia did. They called it *Đổi Mới* [pronounced *doy moy*], the opening up of—of their economic system to a free market enterprise system. So I went over there, and that's when I first—that's when I first went back to Vietnam.

And the first time I went back, I went, like, two weeks before the—you know, the delegation came. We went—we met in Hanoi. But that was a, you know, pretty instrumental time in sort of healing and bringing back to Vietnam. So I went back, and I went to Saigon. There were very few Americans there. I went right down on a boat to—to Mỹ Tho, where I had been stationed during the war. Stayed there for a few days. I did some memorial services for Vietnamese people that died and for, you know, my commanding officer and stuff. I visited their—you know, their sites of the ambushes. And that was just something I really wanted to do.

And I—I cried every day. I cried every morning when I'd get up, and I'd say, *Why am I crying?* I couldn't understand, because the people were incredibly friendly,—

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: —even though they didn't speak English. And I realized—what came to me was: *They forgive us.* You know, because we abandoned the country, and I think—in back of my mind, I felt like, you know, we abandoned them and their people, and we destroyed their country. And—and I think part of it was the healing. For me, it was just to be touched by their, you know, forgiveness and generosity.

CALCATERRA: In—in 1968, when you were leaving, do you think you could have ever imagined coming back, or did you know yet that you would want to come back, especially because you had had—

DONOVAN: Yeah. Funny, I never really thought about it.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: I didn't have anything against it, but I never really thought about going back, and it was before people actually thought about, I think, going back. There were some vets that stayed or had gone back, but very few.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So I think it was just almost like—but I must have, at some level, but I can't remember exactly what motivated—it was, like, *I'm gonna be nearby. I'll—I wonder what—what it would be like to go back.*

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. Did friends or family around you have any reaction to your idea to go back?

DONOVAN: Not really, I don't think, at that point. I think I was single, because I went through a divorce. I mean, one of the things that happens when you are either drinking or have some—when you have PTSD—now, one of the things that gets affected is relationships. You know, one of the reasons I did

well in Vietnam was because I grew up in an alcoholic family, where I was used to conflict, you know.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So I was used to aggression and conflict and being unsafe in a situation, which I think prepared me emotionally to be able to go to war and shut down my emotions, which is what you have to do. But then you come back, and part of what happens is—I work with veterans now, a lot, from Iraq and Afghanistan, and I've been working with them for 30 years—is—one of the—one of the things that happens is they shut down emotions enough so they can't really connect to their wife or their loved ones because they have been protecting them, you know, during war, because that's what you have to do. You know, you see atrocity or something happen, you wake up the next day and you have to go back to work again.

So—yeah, so it was kind of—I think—maybe in the back of my mind it was more like curiosity, but also because I had not—like, a lot of Vietnam vets that I meet—you may interview some—they're, like, "I'd never go back," you know. "It may be nice, but I'd never go back" because of association.

It was more like because I had a positive image of the culture and the people that I was, like, *Oh, it would be interesting to go back and see what Vietnam is like and to revisit the country and the people that I—whose culture I really, you know, was interested in.*

CALCATERRA: And was visiting the thing that really sparked this interest in going back more and also connecting more with your identity as a veteran and talking to other veterans?

DONOVAN: Yeah, I think so. I think once I went back—and came back—so I'm on this—you know, so after I spent a couple of weeks there on my own, you know,—I mean, I went—one of the things I did while I was there is I went to this other province, where I—most of the enemy soldiers were and we fought against in the most sort of dangerous part of the—the area. And I went to—I went to the People's Committee headquarters [chuckles]—you know, the communist

headquarters in this—and I said, "I'd like to meet an American soldier who was here, and I'd like to meet some of the guys I fought against, the Viet Cong."

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: So finally, I met a guy who spoke English, and I went to meet—I was invited into the—into the, you know, the veteran's home, and this guy walks out, who was this guy, General [V? 1:48:06], and he was the general—he was a colonel at the time during the war, and he's the guy that I fought against during the war.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: And he was very fel- —friendly and welcoming. He didn't want to talk about the war much, but he wanted to talk about economic development and could I help them build some factories to grow—you know, to—to, you know, to process fruit for fruit juice. So, I mean, so one of the things that happened is that I was able to reconnect with, you know, some of the—the Viet Cong soldiers.

And in two thousand—another time—I went back. There was a navy historian, who interviewed me once for a book that's called *The Brown Water Navy*—no, it's called *The*—it's actually called—it would be interesting—it's called *The*—[makes thinking sounds]—*War in the Shallows*[*:U.S. Navy Coastal and Riverine Warfare in Vietnam, 1965-1968*].

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: And it's by a guy named John [D.] Sherwood, and it just came out in the last year. [Transcriber's note: It was published January 20, 2016.] And he interviewed me for the book. And then—and then we kind of became friends, and I said, "If you really want to write a war about [sic], you should go to Vietnam and interview some of the enemy soldiers and get their perspective." So I abled [sic]—when I—on one of my trips, I brought him over with me, introduced him. I made contacts with General [V? 1:49:21] and—and with—you know, one of the other provinces, with veterans. And so he spent, like, a week there, interviewing them about the war

and their relationship to the Navy, which was very interesting for him.

And so I—I've had the chance, actually, [to] meet and interact with a number of the—you know, of the enemy soldiers that we fought against. Very touching, and—you know, they're much more forgiving, in some ways, than we are.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: You know, it's surprising. But, I mean, on the delegation, with all these, you know, CEOs and stuff, we landed in Hanoi. One of the first visits we had was to go to the veterans' home in Hanoi—you know, that's in the north. So we—we were all a little bit nervous. We show up in a van, because nobody had ever—they had never met many Americans there before. And they're all dressed in their communist uniforms with, you know, the stars and red stars and hats on, just like you'd see in the—in the movies. And they're all lined up on either side of the stairs as we walk in to meet them. And we don't know what's going to happen. We walk up, you know, and—and they all bow.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: You know, they just bow. And then I started crying right away. It was just so touching, you know. We went in, and then they—we had interpreters, and they kind of went around, and everybody introduced themselves, and then they were all—you know, "We're very glad to meet you. We're—you're our guests here. We know you're fellow soldiers like us." And at the end of it, this woman, who was a war hero—

See, in—in Vietnam, in the north, they—they not only, you know, celebrate the—the soldiers but also the volunteers. There were hundreds of thousands of women that were young, and men—mostly women, who basically carried the bombs on bicycles on the Hồ Chí Minh trail, and—and they honor them. You know, they're—they're treated like they're war heroes, just like the soldiers.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So this woman got up, who was a Vietnamese colonel, and she sang this song about—it was a love—you know, it was a love story about a man—a boy who had gone off to war and his girl who'd [sic] left behind, and at the end of the war, they find each other.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: And we were saying, "What is that song about?" And finally they did, and everybody—I mean, to me it was just really emotional because it was—they were likening that analogy to us.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: You know, two people who had been lovers to some degree came back and found each other again. But, I mean, a lot of the vets that I was with on this—you know, one of the guys was the CEO of State Street Bank, and the other guy was Christos [M.] Cotsakos, who founded E-Trade [Financial Corporation]. You know, these—these are big—another guy, who—one of the founders of America Online.

Anyway, most of them were, like, still, "Okay, well, they're still Viet- —they're still"—you know, they were—still had the old feelings that—it sort of separated me a little bit from them because they were already, like, "Well, they're still Viet-"—you know, we wanted to give them all of this demining equipment, which—which means—because there were a lot of mines that we left there. And they were, like, "Well, we're not sure about that." And they were, like, "Why don't they just take it?"—you know. And—because basically the Vietnamese people don't work that way. They're—they're not direct. You can't—you know, the Asians don't go up and you make a decision by just shaking hands and here we go. They—you know, they kind of have to approach it from the side and get to know you better.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So there was still a lot of that. But it was—it was very touching to go back and—and even today—when I go back today—like, I go back on a regular basis, at least once a

year—we don't even talk about the war. They—you know, most of th- —they're very—most of the people are old, you know, in their 70s or 80s. Occasionally, I'll have a conversation with them, but most of the young people weren't even alive during the war.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And they just know you're Americans. But they—they don't talk about the war, really.

CALCATERRA: And I know, like, now, with this whole Ken Burns documentary coming up, there has been this trend of, like, Americans talking about the war more. Have you seen anything like that in—in Vietnam, where veterans speak about their experience from either side and there's—or was there a similar sort of silence around it?

DONOVAN: With—with, you know, Vietnamese veterans?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: You know, it depends, I think. My friends, like Minh—I go over there—we don't talk—we talk about the war once in a while, but not as much, I don't think. I think there's going to be some—I think after this Ken Burns film—because, remember, the Vietnam—a lot of the population of—a lot of the Vietnam soldiers were fairly conservative. And to this day, many of them feel like "we would have won the war if we did this or that."

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: And that "we were right in being there." You know, there's a lot of them—I don't know—maybe officers, but a lot of the enlisted guys, you know, still believe that—they want to believe they didn't—they weren't fighting in vain, you know. But I think the Ken Burns film is going to actually show how inept we were and kind of tell stories about the casualties and things that'll make us not look so good, which is going to, I think, bring this up to the surface again with the conservative, you know, right. And—you know, many of—many of the guys are from the South and West, and so it's going to be interesting.

But I think—yeah, I still think there's that—and I'm very careful with my vet friends that I know, not to mention the fact that, you know, that we really didn't do—you know, we didn't—we weren't effective there and that, despite the fact that your service is well appreciated, you know, we couldn't have won the war. We weren't going to win the war, unless we, you know, dropped a nuclear bomb or something, you know.

CALCATERRA: And was your trip back, that first trip back—was that the first time you really were with a group of other veterans, sort of like acknowledging—

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Actually, it was. It probably was. That's exactly—that's interesting. Good observ- —it *was* the first time I was back with a group of veterans again.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And since then—I probably don't hang around with too many Vietnam vets. You know, I know a few of them: Rusty Sachs. I don't if you're—I don't know who you're going interview here, but there is a few around here.

CALCATERRA: Yeah, we—Rusty—we watched him get interviewed for training, actually.

DONOVAN: Oh, right.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: Rusty's old school. I mean, he's another guy that's still—a former Marine. See, we go to the high school here every year, and I work with a nonprofit here that worked with veterans, and we go to the high school and talk to the high school kids about—about the war.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And my message is, like, I talk to you but I'm not going to, you know, tell war stories and stuff like that unless you ask me. It's more like—yeah, so Rusty's—yeah, so there's just all different perspectives, you know, of folks that have come

back, about our effectiveness. I mean, Rusty sort of always identified with the war, as a veteran. And he was one of the guys that actually I talk to that got me to Washington to meet with this delegation to go—

I went—let me see, you got to talk to—and I've known Rusty for a long time, but I hadn't really thought of him much as a vet.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And he's still well connected with some of the veterans community, and has been, you know. So it's a sense of ownership to—sometimes people go fight—fight [in a] war. It's not the same with Iraq and Afghan- —with these vets today, the post 9/11 [2001 attacks] vets?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: Most all those guys going over knew that they were fighting in a war that was not winnable,—

CALCATERRA: Wow. Okay.

DONOVAN: —whereas here, it wasn't till the very end that I think, you know, people felt like they were fighting in vain. Unless you were a minority, like ethnic—you know, black. You know, there's a lot of black guys that fought in Vietnam, and they were, you know, pretty much against it from the beginning and towards the end of the war, you know?

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. So you find that working with these post-9/11 veterans—does that feel like you're getting some sort of healing or using your experience—

DONOVAN: Yeah.

CALCATERRA: —positively?

DONOVAN: Absolutely, absolutely, because what—what—what I—what I do when I—I'm actually working on a nonprofit startup now in Virginia Beach, with Outward Bound, with an active duty Navy SEAL, and—and we're—we're trying to set up a—a continuum of support for soldiers coming out, who are on

active duty till—till they leave because, you know, my experience—that I tell them this when I work with them—is—of veterans—is that, you know, if you don't have a plan and a vision for your life, and a life plan, then your chances of effectively reintegrating are going to be challenged if you've been in combat.

And so that's really a part of why I do this work. And—and these soldiers coming back have the same challenges. They've been deployed multiple times sometimes in combat, and they either get PTSD or reentry issues that make it challenging for a lot of them.

CALCATERRA: Do you feel similar criticisms of, like, the way our strategy is in these conflicts, or are you more focused only on helping veterans?

DONOVAN: It's hard not to do both, but, I mean, when I work with the veterans, I try to be careful not to get into politics with them about whether a strategy of—you know, what we're doing in Iraq and Afghanistan—it activates a lot of these guys again—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —if you start talking about it, you know. I mean, most of it's, like,—what I tell them is things like, "You're not—you're not a soldier anymore; you're a civilian." It's different than we were in the draft, because in the draft you were a volunteer army that—you got drafted and you had to go in. Now, when they take people into the military—rightfully so, in some ways—is, "You're not a civilian anymore, you're a military person."

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: "You're structured. You live like this." And these civilians just walk around with their, you know, smartphones all the time, talking about, you know, TV shows and—you know. So there's—there's a—the bias against civilians oftentimes amongst the military coming up today. But—yeah. So it's—you know, it's—it's sort of interesting that we have—and it's sort of under the radar, too, because, I mean, do you know any—do you know any vets, post-9/11 vets, or family?

CALCATERRA: I know some people in military academies, preparing to go.

DONOVAN: Yeah.

CALCATERRA: But not veterans.

DONOVAN: But that's—that's it, because, you know, like, we have this—you know, most of the—the veterans now are from rural areas, very few from urban areas, from the South, from the West and stuff, so it's—so because we don't have a draft or anything, there isn't this, you know, generational thing where, you know, everybody knows someone who's been in the military.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So it's sort of harder for them in some cases to adjust because—I mean, there's—there's some here. I mean, I don't know if you've met any. There's this Posse [The Posse Foundation Scholarship] group here, right?—of post-9/11 vets. I think there's a couple of cohorts here now already, of a dozen vets in each class.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And do you feel sort of—when you're doing this work, does it ever feel re-traumatizing for you or triggering, or does it feel removed from what you experienced?

DONOVAN: Good question. I mean, I actually had a flashback a few years ago when I worked with a group in Florida, doing Outward Bound courses. You know, some guy fell overboard, and there was blood on the boat and stuff, and it was—it was, like, *Whoa! That's kind of like*—and it was the first time I really—I don't feel like I have, you know, any recurrent stuff like that, but this was one where I think it was this kind of association, you know. But otherwise, no, I don't—I think it's—you know, I think I'm desensitized enough by trips there and everything that it's not—it's not an issue. I mean, I don't—yeah.

I mean, even when I go to Vietnam and I go on the rivers and I'm in the same areas, I don't antic- —I mean, one of the ways you deal with PTSD or any of these kinds of—you know, any trauma in the past is you desensitize it, you know? So—

CALCATERRA: And how do you feel being outspoken now about your experience and, like, with this *Boston Magazine* article? Like, how does it feel, knowing that your story's out there and retelling it and things like that?

DONOVAN: Yeah, I—it's—some of the vets that I know were like—won't talk to me, the Vietnam era vets because—there were a few, but a lot of them do. I don't know. I think it's worth—I think it's—the lessons that I've learned are worth sharing with the current generation, so, I mean, do I go out and talk to groups about it? Not really. There's—there's a—there's a group in Boston I was going to—I was scheduled to talk to but didn't work out, called Veterans for Peace,—

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: —which is a group of post-9/11 veterans who are interested in sort of what, you know—asking the questions you're asking about, you know, conflicts and why we [sic] in conflicts and what does that have to do with our culture and that? We as veterans have a right to—should be going out there and talking about—more vocally about, you know, peace and why—why we shouldn't enter into these conflicts again. So—but—it's a pretty good cause, but I haven't really—I've been more focused on the vets.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. How did that *Boston Magazine* article come about?

DONOVAN: Interesting. While I was in the—Minh, the Vietnamese interpreter I told you about—when I was in Virginia Beach—the guy who wrote it, the journalist, reporter, is a guy named Mike Hixenbaugh, and he writes for the *Virginia Beach Sentinel* [sic; *The Virginian-Pilot]*, which is the newspaper there. And he was in Vietnam with us when I went back with—to shoot this documentary film with some of the—the SEALs that were—worked with me, and the interpreter. And he was there with a film crew. So he basically—we got to know each other, and he heard my story and said, "I think I can make a story out of that.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: "And I can make some money on it." [Clears throat.] So he sold it to *Boston Magazine*, and it was sort of like around the 50th anniversary of the—the—the start of the war, which I think is where we are in this era now and why this, you know, documentary is coming out. It's sort of like 50 years later.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So—so I didn't really get any—some—I didn't really get—I got a few comments from classmates and people that had seen it. I don't know if it's that well—you know, I think *Boston Magazine* is more of a younger group that reads it for what's hot and going on in Boston, you know? So some of my classmates from college and stuff read it.

CALCATERRA: And what were their reactions?

DONOVAN: Mostly positive. I mean, most of the guys that I went to college with are sort of pretty much liberal, and Holy Cross was sort of a liberal institution in terms of, you know, its approach.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So global, you know, global conflict issues.

CALCATERRA: And did you personally like the way the article portrayed your experiences?

DONOVAN: Yeah, it was pretty good. The one thing that was a little off is that sort of—it said a lot about, like, I did this—I'm going back to Vietnam now because I'm trying to exorcise the ghosts of the past,—

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: —which is really not—I mean, I went back initially to kind of, you know, see what it was like, but it wasn't like I felt at that point I had to, you know, kind of revisit some things to—to deal with, you know, demons. So I think—and I told Mike about it. I said, "That's a little spin that I think you're interpreting here that isn't true. I know it's a thread you wanted to carry through because it makes a nice story, but

when I go back, I'm really focused in on, *Okay, how can I help these families?*"

You know, I've actually changed the approach with—we build 10 or 11 houses a year. I work very closely with the government, which is good, too, because we're building relationships with them, even though it's a socialist-communist government—

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: —which I don't always agree with. But my focus is on, *Okay, how can we, you know, create upward social mobility?* So I found out that rather than just building houses for them, because they have issues around, you know, lack of money—because they only make two or three dollars a day—that—and they have healthcare issues. They can't keep their kids in school because they need to take them out to work. So we're trying to provide financing for them now to keep their kids in school. So we're only working with families.

It's amazing. You go out in these—you go out in these poor farmland areas, and some of these parents are just like—they're dedicated. They want their kids to go to university. And they're not educated, themself. And it's sort of [an] interesting kind of—and then you'll go to another house, and they're, like, "Oh, I"—they don't really focus on it. You know, they're self-absorbed.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: So we try to focus on family structures where the parents really care about education, because that's the only way they're going to get out of the poverty cycle, is that next generation goes to university. We've got a few that are already in that situation, so we know they'll be able to take care of *their* parents in their older age and, for the most part, be able to, you know, get a job where they can—you know, they're not going to be poor all their life.

CALCATERRA: Mmm. And do you build relationships with the people who you're building houses for?

DONOVAN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, as much as I can. I go and interview them and—you know, they select the homes, and I go and interview the people, and then—it's interesting, because I'm really actually trying to teach them, as well, how to make sure they take an interest that I'm taking [an] interest in them about, you know, taking care of their—you know, their families or kids.

I mean, one house I went into last year—there's older grandparents, and I said—and they had three kids, and they're the young kids. I said, "Well, whose kids are these?" They said, "Well, they're—they're my children's. You know, my—my daughter"—or "my son and his wife." And I said, "Where are they?" He said, "Well, they just left the kids with us." And I'm saying, "Well, that's—you know, in our country, that's called abandonment, you know? And the government comes after them."

But when I had the government officials there, I said, "You know, you should get these parents—I mean, because these—these grandparents can barely survive, themselves, and they've got to take care of these three kids. And they're doing a good job at it. You should get—find out where they are, get them—you know, if they're out with their kids, then they should—they should basically provide support money for them." So—so there was a kind of social work aspect to it.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm. And who are you working with? Are you working with other Americans to build the houses and things?

DONOVAN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, basically what I—they build the houses. We—I provide the money, which is sort of like seed money in some ways because they—they keep asking for more money for the houses, but I only give them a thousand dollars.

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So oftentimes, people will—in the neighborhood will come and work. It'll buy the materials, and they'll actually do the building, which is good because they have more ownership in it.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And sometimes locals will give them a piece of land. And all the lo- —what I like about the project is they go to the local villages, and they'll say, "We're gonna build two houses here. Who do you think needs a house?" And the local people, who are poor people, themselves, will say, "Well, that person—they really have had a hard time, but they're hard workers. They should have a house."

CALCATERRA: Mmm.

DONOVAN: So it's really kind of a nice, you know, democratic way to approach it.

CALCATERRA: You're not just throwing it wherever—

DONOVAN: Yeah.

CALCATERRA: —someone will take stuff.

DONOVAN: Yeah.

CALCATERRA: Mm-hm.

DONOVAN: And now I've learned, in the last couple of years, to focus more on—because there are some district chiefs or some, you know, chairman of the people's committee who's there that are—that are not just interested in moving up through the party structure, that really care about the people, so I'm—I've got a district that I'm focused in now where there's really a good leader there, who cares about the people, and we're just trying to concentrate to build houses in that area, so—

CALCATERRA: And where do you usually find the money for the houses?

DONOVAN: I just raise it locally. I mean, I have friends that give a thousand dollars here and there. I'm not great at fund raising, but I'm able to raise ten or fifteen thousand a year, which is not a whole lot, but it's enough to build relationships on the small scale, so—

CALCATERRA: And do you think you'll keep going back indefinitely?

DONOVAN: At this point, I'm actually trying to think of how I would trans-—transition this over to someone else, but I partner with another—so it's a physical agent that I work with because I don't have a nonprofit, myself. There's a group in Washington, D.C., that I just visited a couple of weeks ago that are all Vietnamese-Americans, that are all dentists and doctors and professional people.

CALCATERRA: Wow.

DONOVAN: And they—so they basically are—they're going to send some doctors and dentists over to work—to this village with us, and this community area. So I'm hoping I can eventually turn it over to them and they can continue the homebuilding project. But at this point, it's only the second year I've worked into it. But at some point—so that's pretty much taking most of my time, starting up this nonprofit for veterans and building the homes in Vietnam.

CALCATERRA: Mmm. Well,—

DONOVAN: Well, I have to—yeah.

CALCATERRA: Yes. Thank you so much for your time. Is there anything you feel like we didn't get to talk about that you want to talk about?

DONOVAN: I think we pretty much covered it. You asked really good questions.

CALCATERRA: Thank you!

DONOVAN: I think you're really—if this is your first time, I think you're—you know, you're bright, intelligent, you listen well,—

CALCATERRA: Thanks!

DONOVAN: —and you—yeah—and you absorb and associate really well, so you asked me some pretty interesting questions that I hadn't even thought about, that no one's asked before.

CALCATERRA: Thank you so much!

DONOVAN: Like, “What’s the relationship between your education and, you know, the war?”—you know. So—no, so good. So keep—how many interviews are you going to do? Do you know?

CALCATERRA: I think I might do another—one or two more in a future term because this term’s almost over.

DONOVAN: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, anything I can help you with is—would be—I'm happy to—I’m glad you’re doing this work.

[End of interview.]