

Stephen Landa '67  
Dartmouth College Oral History Program  
Dartmouth Vietnam Project  
January 26, 2018  
Transcribed by Karen Navarro

SCHNEIDER: Alrighty, so this is Walker Schneider ('19) with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, interviewing Mr. Stephen Landa. It is January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2018, and I'm in the Ticknor Room of Rauner [Special Collections] Library. Mr. Rauner is in Cincinnati, Ohio. We are talking over the phone. And, just before we really get off, Mr. Landa, I wanted to thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the project. As I said before, I am really, really excited about this interview.

LANDA: Well, and as I've told you, I am, too. I think it's a great project. I think it's a great undertaking. And I'm more than happy to participate.

SCHNEIDER: Awesome. Well, with that being said, let's start at the very beginning. So, yeah, I guess what I like to do is start right at the beginning. Where and when were you born?

LANDA: I was born on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1945, in Orange, New Jersey.

SCHNEIDER: Okay. And I see, then, you moved to Connecticut. Can you talk about your early childhood a little bit? What was that like?

LANDA: Sure. My dad worked in business in New York City, and for quite a while we lived in New Jersey, and he commuted daily. And then, when he changed jobs, we moved to Connecticut. I was in high school at that point, but I was in a private high school in Virginia, so it didn't affect my high school years. And then, my parents lived in Connecticut through the end of my Dartmouth years, and actually until I'd been out of the service and working for a couple years, and then they moved to follow job stuff for my dad. But, my growing up years were New Jersey through junior high, and then southern Connecticut when I was at Dartmouth.

SCHNEIDER: And what were the names of your parents?

LANDA: My dad was William "Bill," and my mother was Ann.

SCHNEIDER: And her maiden name?

LANDA: Longley (L-o-n-g-l-e-y).

SCHNEIDER: Fantastic, thank you. And did you have any siblings?

LANDA: I have a sister and two brothers. We're all still living.

SCHNEIDER: That's great to hear. Fantastic. So, Mr. Landa, you were growing up in the 1950s, which has reached a whole new level of import these days, as really what people think of as the quintessential American decade, I guess. What was it like to grow up in post-war American in 1950s America as a young child, where, you know, it's such a subject of discussion and debate right now? And what was it like living through that time?

LANDA: Well, I reflect and think about how I felt growing up. I mean, it was kind of like, well, most of my contemporaries lived similar lifestyles. I mean, it was fairly typical. My mom was a stay-at-home mom. My dad worked, was out of the house every day. Yeah, it was kind of a neat time. I think it was far enough past World War II, and at least until Korea broke out, and I don't remember too much about the late '40s because I was young, but I do remember when the Korean War started, but, I mean, there were other things going on. Harry Truman was President. The Korean War did start. And Eisenhower was elected. I remember Queen Elizabeth's installment on the throne of England, and she's now the longest living monarch. But I remember watching that on a black-and-white TV.

And then, because I lived around, you know, close enough to New York City, it was a wonderful time if you were at all interested in baseball, because the Giants, Dodgers and Yankees were all there. And, in fact, there were Dodger/Yankee World Series which were always exciting, and it was a real treat because when that was going on, we were allowed to listen on the radio in school, because they weren't doing World Series night games then.

So that, and then just, I did get used to living near New York City, which I think provided a number of advantages. My dad worked in Manhattan for quite a while. So we would go into the city and see things with him, be exposed to Broadway shows. He was in international business, so we met a number of the people that he did business with over the

years, and I think that had an influence on my growing up, because I was exposed to people from different countries, and we saw them, and they were welcomed in our home, and so, you know, I was exposed to different cultures, different ways of life. My both sets of grandparents lived nearby when I was growing up. So I interacted with them regularly and frequently, which I think was, I mean, it was a real treat. I knew them well. So that's—you know, it was kind of a very pleasant, peaceful existence.

SCHNEIDER: So, you mentioned that World War II seemed like it was far away and you don't remember it at all. Did your parents or grandparents participate in the war effort at all?

LANDA: Both sets of grandparents— grandfathers, served during World War I. My father was exempted from service from World War II, so no, he didn't.

SCHNEIDER: And why was he exempted?

LANDA: He was married and he had very, very poor vision, as well. And the industry that he worked in was deemed a priority, so he stayed working.

SCHNEIDER: And that industry—?

LANDA: He was in the textile business. But I did have— my mother's two brothers both served in World War II, as did— my dad had two sisters, and one of my uncles, his brother-in-law, also served in World War II. So they were veterans of World War II.

SCHNEIDER: And did you interact with them in that sphere at all, or was it generally dismissed? Or how was World War II handled at family gatherings?

LANDA: Well, it wasn't talked about much at family gatherings. I know my grandmother, my mom's mother whose two sons served, she had scrapbooks and pictures of them during the war which she shared with me. But it wasn't something that was talked about at family gatherings. I think that was my impression today when you read back is that the Greatest Generation, I mean, they did what they thought needed to be done and came home and resumed life and went to work or went back to school. And it wasn't something that was talked about regularly.

- SCHNEIDER: Interesting. Okay, so then you go to high school in Virginia. Can you elaborate on what it was like to go to a military academy in Virginia in the 1960s?
- LANDA: Well, I wanted to do that. I wasn't someone who's being sent away to learn how to behave.
- SCHNEIDER: [laughter] Ok.
- LANDA: As I was growing up, I mean, in the '50s the military was, you know, highly regarded. I think it was close enough to World War II that patriotism was still high. And as I was growing up, I was a history major at Dartmouth, I've always had an interest in history, and I was seriously considering a career in the military. So the high school that I went to actually was a military high school, and it provided another avenue to a potential appointment to the service academies. And I went there for four years, and clearly enjoyed it. The discipline part didn't bother me. I mean, you know, you figure out how to live in that atmosphere, and I did quite well.
- And actually, it provided some kind of neat things while I was there. I graduated from there in '63. In I think it was '59 or early '60, President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower was—I went to Staunton Military Academy in Staunton, Virginia—and he was visiting Staunton, and so he was going to drive through our campus, and we had lined both sides of the assembly area, and he was to drive through in his limo. And I was on the color guard, and I was the guy who carried the American flag. And so, when they were driving through, when he got to the colors, he stopped his limo and got out and came up and saluted the American flag which I was holding, which was kind of cool.
- SCHNEIDER: Yeah, that's super cool.
- LANDA: And then, we had a drill team, and I was on that. And I marched in President [John F.] Kennedy's inaugural parade. So, a couple of experiences that were really impressive to me at the time, and I still am very glad I had them.
- SCHNEIDER: So, if World War II wasn't really discussed in your household, where did this patriotism and desire to serve come from? Was it, were you a product of the system? Was

it an internal blossoming? What do you think made you so independently want to go to a military academy?

LANDA: I think there was— well, there was always a feeling in my family of pride in the country, a sense of service and that serving in the military was a thing to be proud of, and I think that influenced me. And then, I was a voracious reader as a kid, and I'd read a lot of biographies and histories of people. And, you know, I think all of that kind of came together. And, obviously as I got older, the draft was in existence and I knew I would have to register for the draft. But I didn't view that as an imposition. I felt that I owed service to the country, and so it was something I wanted to do.

SCHNEIDER: So, with regard towards service to the country, you were in a military academy during the Cuban Missile Crisis. What was it like to be a high schooler then?

LANDA: Well, actually it was quite interesting because as that heated up, the feeling on campus, I mean, it was a lot of loyalty to the US, and certainly some greatly raised apprehension about having a real confrontation with the Soviet Union, but then I think the spirit of patriotism saying, *Well, okay, if called, I would go*. But, very interesting to watch it, and to watch it transpire and then ultimately be defused. But, you know, definitely a feeling at the time of *ooh, this is a big deal, and if it blows up, I could well be called to serve*.

SCHNEIDER: So, in October of 1962, were you nervous? Were you excited? What was going individually through your head with regard to your personal potential future in a conflict?

LANDA: I wasn't nervous. I mean, it was just something that we watched with a great deal of interest to see, you know, what each day would bring in terms of the confrontation and how it was resolved. But, you know, not feeling like there was anything hanging over my head or *oh, boy, you know, tomorrow I'm gonna be out of here,*" or anything like that. Just watching with a great deal of interest.

SCHNEIDER: So, you talked about how Staunton Military Academy was a possible route to greater promotion or maybe a service academy. How did you end up choosing Dartmouth, then, out of Staunton Military Academy, and not a service academy?

LANDA: Well, Staunton was what was called an honor military school, which was designated by the Department of the Army in this case, and there were appointments available to cadets who had graduated from honor military school. So that was a potential source of an appointment to a service academy, in addition to the congressional ones. And as I got, you know, late junior year, and certainly into senior year and was thinking about colleges and so on and so forth, I also very much wanted to apply to civilian schools, which I did. And I applied to Dartmouth early decision, and I applied to Yale [University], and the University of Virginia, because I was not far from there, and then also continued to seek an appointment to West Point was the one that I was interested in. And interestingly, I actually got, I got the honor military school appointment, and I also got an appointment from my congressman, and I learned that in early December of my senior year in high school, and then I got my notification that I was accepted early decision at Dartmouth, like in the same week.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, man.

LANDA: So, exciting. And then it's like, *Okay, what am I gonna do here? And what do I do?* And I know—my father, I think, really wanted me to go to West Point. And, so I thought about it. I was like, *Okay, how much will I disappoint him if I choose another alternative?* But something led me to say, *Well, I know I have a service obligation and I can always do that. But I'm not sure that I want to go to four more years of military school,* so I settled on Dartmouth.

SCHNEIDER: And why was your father, you think, so set on West Point for you?

LANDA: I think he was—as a product of living through the Second World War and the military being honored and well thought of, I think he was thinking, “Well, I will be so proud of my boy if he goes to West Point.” And, because, for example, he took me—you had to go do physical tests at West Point and go through a physical and stuff, and he took me. And he, you know, he loves the atmosphere and so on and so forth. So, ultimately, as I said, I decided on Dartmouth, and he, you know, I never heard a bad word or “oh, gee, you ought to reconsider.” He was very supportive. And I think he was very happy that I wound up at Dartmouth and graduated, and I think he was proud of that, as well.

SCHNEIDER: So, you then get to Dartmouth in the fall of 1963, and right away pretty much your freshman fall, you arrive on campus and John F. Kennedy, whose inaugural parade you had marched in, gets assassinated.

LANDA: Yes.

SCHNEIDER: In November.

LANDA: Yes. Right.

SCHNEIDER: What was going through your mind? Because you've had, so far in your formative years you got two crazy historical and interesting experiences, and to which you've had a very personal tie. So, what was now this assassination like for you?

LANDA: Well, actually, well, it was very disturbing, like I think it was to most of the country, I think if my history serves me at all correctly. I mean, there hadn't been an assassination of a politician for many, many years. And I think you have to go back to the early 1900s. And I can remember I was walking back from a class, and somebody passed me and said, "Oh, did you hear the President was shot?" And it was so, you know, kind of beyond my imagination. I said, "Oh, you mean President [John Sloan] Dickey?" who was the president of Dartmouth at the time. And he said, "Oh, no, Kennedy." And I said, "Oh, my gosh." And then, of course, you know, we were all glued to TVs for the rest of that week and weekend. I mean, it was shocking. And it just kind of left a hollow feeling, I think, that this could happen. It was, you know, it was a bit surreal. And then watching the events and watching [Lee Harvey] Oswald get shot by [Jack] Ruby on TV, I mean, the whole thing was very strange.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, it must have really impacted you, it sounds like, in terms of your outlook on the world. But, back to Dartmouth a little bit more specifically. What was freshman year like at Dartmouth? You've come from the most rigid of military academies, or not maybe the most rigid, but it's a very different lifestyle transition.

LANDA: Yes, very.

SCHNEIDER: So, what was that like?

LANDA: There was a clear, clear difference. Yeah, my life in high school was very regimented, time schedules, and everybody did them at the same time, and what you did, and we were required to get a haircut every week, and you had haircut inspections and, you know, all of that stuff. And to go to, *Okay, now I have more freedoms than I've ever had in my life, to make decisions, go to bed when I want, get up when I want.* So it was different. I actually, I do think, though, that by nature I probably was a pretty disciplined person, and then after the four years of high school, it was like, *Okay, I do have a routine, and it's the way I have to live.* So, you know, kind of, certainly not the rigidity, but carried with me the self-discipline probably to meet my obligations, and at the same time enjoy all the new freedoms that I had.

SCHNEIDER: Right, and you— I just looked you up in the yearbook— you got involved right off the bat in a bunch of things.

LANDA: Yeah.

SCHNEIDER: What were your most favorite activities at school?

LANDA: I played freshman football for a little while, and then I rowed on the freshman crew, started rowing on the freshman crew, and did that through my first year. Fraternities were on campus, but you couldn't rush until sophomore year. So, it was dorm life that was the social structure. I mean, so those were kind of my activities, that and going to class and doing my work. And then I did rush fall of sophomore year, and rushed a number of houses and wound up at Psi U [Psi Upsilon], and thoroughly enjoyed my experience there for the three years. Then I got— as that went on, I was president of the house my senior year.

I didn't have to do the first two years of ROTC because my high school time counted, so I didn't have that my first two years. I did start ROTC my junior year, and then Dartmouth had, you know, kind of the regular you go to drill and drill, or it's part of the Dartmouth lore in history, I think, there was a mountain and winter warfare segment of the ROTC unit, and that's what part I participated in. It was a lot more fun. So, for the drill, we'd go out and do rock climbing in the fall and spring, and we skied in the winter at the [Dartmouth] Skiway. So, it was a lot more pleasant than going and marching



somewhere. And so that was junior and senior year. Senior year I was the ROTC commander, student commander.

I started playing rugby my sophomore year and I really enjoyed that. There were a number of people in my house who played rugby, and they said, "Oh, you ought to come out and try this," which I did and loved and played through my junior year. And then, as I said, senior year I was president of the house and was the student commander of ROTC, and then late in my senior year, I was inducted into Dragon [Society], which was fun and some of the friends that I had who were good friends were also in Dragon, so it was kind of cool. And then, you know, my studies, and they kept me pretty busy.

SCHNEIDER: So, a couple of questions to unpack there. First of all, this mountain training of ROTC at Dartmouth. Was it specifically geared with an eye towards Vietnam? Did Vietnam have this looming presence over ROTC at the time?

LANDA: No. It actually was the— I think it was, you know, Dartmouth's history is so rich with skiing and so on and so forth, and had a number of graduates who were early members of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in the Second World War, which fought in Italy, up through the mountains in Italy. And the person who was in charge of that, Sergeant Major Brown [William R. "Sarge" Brown], had been in the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, so he ran that part of the program. But it was strictly aimed at rock climbing and winter warfare, with no relationship to Vietnam at all.

SCHNEIDER: So, were you thinking about Vietnam at all as a student?

LANDA: Late in my years. There wasn't that much going on. '63, you know, there were more advisors going in, but it was strictly advisors. There wasn't the heavy US troop presence until '65. And late, so as that started to gear up, there were discussions on campus and the beginnings of protesting, but nowhere near where it got to be in like '69 and '70. It was there, and it became more and more visible, and, you know, beginning, making me and I think others think, *Oh boy, there's something going on*, because the troop presence was building, and the draft still existed. I had a service obligation because of ROTC, so it wasn't draft driven. But, beginning to think more and more that, unlike lots of

previous years post-Korea, that my active duty service might involve combat.

SCHNEIDER: And what was your reaction to that?

LANDA: Just kind of like, *Okay, this could happen*. And beginning to wonder, you know, *Well, I mean, what's that really like?* I've seen the movies of World War II, most of which glorified it, and read a lot about how difficult many, many of the battles were and so on and so forth. So just kind of beginning to think of, *Okay, if that's the case, what will it be like for me, and will I measure up?*

SCHNEIDER: With regards, then, to watching this increasing troop presence, and this is in the back of your mind, *will I measure up?*, did you support the Vietnam War as a student, or I guess the buildup as a student?

LANDA: Yes, I did. I mean, I did believe probably in the domino theory, you know, which is, okay, if they start to fall, all of Southeast Asia's gonna go. And it was also at a time where the Cold War was very pervasive, and a feeling that, well, we do have to stand up for, quote, "democracy." So, you know, I didn't have bad feelings about it. You know, subsequently obviously as I watched history unfold and lived there and all that, and read what is now the history, you know, could things have been done better all throughout? Yeah, no doubt. And maybe they would have avoided them, I don't know. I mean, if you read about—there's some of the history and observations are, you know, Ho Chi Minh was first and foremost a nationalist. But he was a Communist. And at some point—well, and the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] during the Second World War had worked with him to resist the Japanese. And there's the school of thought that says, well, if we'd supported him, it might have been totally different; in fact, he was a nationalist. And I don't—you know, I certainly think that's possible. But at the same time, there were lots of bad things going on there, too. So, you know, hindsight's 20-20. You can always go back, and, *well, gee, could we have done this better?* Yeah, probably. But probably not... You know, I didn't question its rightness or wrongness that much at the time. I did feel that, based on what I knew, it was appropriate for us to be there.

SCHNEIDER: So, I also saw that, I believe you were on the rugby team then, speaking of Vietnam and *it was right for us to be there*,

I believe you were a classmate and on the rugby team with Billy [William] Smoyer ['67], who was the first Dartmouth casualty in the Vietnam War. Did you know him at all?

LANDA: Yeah, very well. Actually, he was a Theta Delt [Theta Delta Chi Fraternity]. I was a Psi U [Upsilon]. The two houses were on either side of the Episcopal church that's right on West Wheelock Street.

SCHNEIDER: They still are.

LANDA: And my roommate from my freshman and sophomore years was a Theta Delt. So we did a lot of things between the two houses, so I knew him pretty well. And interestingly, he and I went to Vietnam just about to the day at the same time. And when I first got there, I was in Da Nang, and he was a Marine who was also stationed around Da Nang. That was where the big Marine presence was at the time. And in Vietnam the service newspapers, *The Army Times* and *The Navy Times*, and so on... In the states they would talk about the number of people killed per week and so on, but they didn't mention names. And in the service newspapers, they published the names. And so, we'd both been there, I think, like six weeks, less than two months, and I happened to pick up the service newspaper and I saw his name. And we were right in the same area. So it was like, *Oh, boy*. I mean, it was quite a shock.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah. How did you react to reading his name?

LANDA: Oh yeah, it was very sad, and extremely sad. And one of the things that goes on, or at least did for me, and to some degree I think it is true for anybody who serves in a combat situation, as I got my orders and got ready to go and went through additional training and so on— there's interesting history there, too— but, you know, you think you're ready, and you probably think about, *Oh, yeah, I'm gonna go be a warrior*. And then emotions go, it's like, *Oh, crap! Am I gonna be able to stay alive for a year? and How scared am I?*

And when I first got in country, and I think it's true for most people, it's like you're scared of your shadow. And it depends on where you serve and what you were doing and so on. But, I'd had a lot of training beforehand. It's like, well, don't trust any civilians because some young kid or a woman will come up and offer you a Coke. Well, the Coke may have

shaved glass in it. Or they may just come up and pull a grenade out from their clothing and pull the pin and run away. So, you know, you're just real tight and twitchy. And then as you get into the routine, it's kind of like, *Well, you know, it's daily life* and so on. And then occasionally things happen which make it extremely real, like, *Oh, my God, this classmate of mine. I mean, we graduated about a year ago. And he's gone. And I'm in the same place. Wow.* I mean, it's a big deal.

SCHNEIDER: I can only imagine. I think, therefore, let's start to move that into Vietnam and away from Dartmouth. So, you get commissioned the day before graduation, you said.

LANDA: Right.

SCHNEIDER: And then you move to Fort Sill, [OK] and then eventually Fort Knox [KY] for training. What was this training like as an officer?

LANDA: Well, the training at Fort Sill was my officer branch training. So, as an officer, you have to train specifically in your branch. And I was a field artilleryman, and that's based at Fort Sill. Well, interestingly, too, as I was finishing my senior year, I knew I had an obligation, but it wasn't clear when I would have to go on active duty, so I was interviewing with companies on campus through the placement office.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, interesting.

LANDA: And spring break my senior year— well, and some of them would say, "Well, you have a service obligation. We don't want to talk to you. And when you're done, come see us." And one of the companies that I was very interested in and actually wound up with was Procter and Gamble. And so, I questioned them, I said, "Well, you know I have a service obligation. Does that preclude your talking to me?" And they said, "No, everybody's got a service obligation. And we'll talk to you, and if you have to fulfill your commitment, you'll do that, and if anything, you are likely to be more valuable as you complete that." So, "oh, that's cool."

And, so part of my spring break I went to Boston for a final interview, and then went home, and they said, "Well, you'll hear from us," and so on. Well, I got back to Dartmouth at the end of spring break, and I had two letters in my mail, one

of which was from Procter and Gamble, saying, "We'd like to offer you a job, and you can start as soon as you want after graduation." And I thought, *Okay, that's fantastic*. The other was from the Army, saying, "You are to report for active duty" I think it was like on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July "at Fort Sill, Oklahoma." Like, *Uh-oh*. So I called P&G and said, "Well, I can't start and I gotta go do this." So I did.

And actually, between graduation and when I went to Fort Sill, I got married. So, it was a pretty exciting summer. So, my new wife and I drove cross-country to Fort Sill. And that was I think 11 weeks or so. And the objective is to have the officers learn every bit of how you run an artillery battery. So, we were trained on the guns and, just like enlisted people, you know, how do you load 'em, how do you fire 'em? And then a big part of it was to learn to be a forward observer, which is what 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants did. So, a forward observer travels with the infantry, and if there's a need to call in artillery, they call it in. And the school part was, so a big part was that, which was outside, and you'd sit on this ridge overlooking the impact area, and the gunnery instructor would say, "All right, here's your target," and he'd identify it out in that area. And you had to identify it on a map, and then call in the instructions to the battery, which you didn't see. And they'd fire a round, and then you would adjust it from there until you could hit the target. Well, it takes some doing to learn how to do that. So, and the whole class would be there, and I think there were probably 15 of us in my section. So, if you were really screwing up, the gunnery instructor would say, "Okay, Lieutenant Landa, you're dead. Lieutenant so-and-so, it's your mission." And then that person would take over and complete it.

And then you worked in the fire direction center, which is, now it's all computerized, but it was all manual. And you had maps and compasses and so on, so as you got the instructions from the forward observer, you'd plot them. And from that through some calculations that you do, you then give the commands to the guns as to what elevation to put on it and what direction they fire. And so, they get that, and the artillery is indirect fire. They don't see the target, or you hope you never do. So they do it by sighting on aiming stakes which are in the area around the guns. And some of those pictures that I sent you were of a 155 [mm] howitzer, which was what I had in Vietnam.

So you gain experience there, and then one of the exciting things was a thing called— if the round doesn't fire, which sometimes they don't— you load it and you pull the trigger as if it were, and it may not go off. And, so then it's like you wait, I forget, I don't know, a minute to see if it'll cook off, because it's hot in the tube. And if it doesn't, then you open the breach, the back of the weapon, where you put the shell in, and then somebody has to go around in front of the gun, and there's a long, it's a ramming staff that you'd skeet the round with, and it has a little basket on the front when you're doing this, and you put it in the front of the tube and push the round back out. And it's kind of exciting because you really hope that it doesn't decide to cook off when you're standing in front of the end of the thing. [laughter]

SCHNEIDER: Oh, man, yeah.

LANDA: On this round, so... So you do that stuff. Some of the— we also had to learn how to call in artillery fire on top of ourselves, for close-in firing. So, they would take us out in the middle of the impact zone by trucks, and they had bunkers, concrete bunkers, out there, and so you go into the bunker. And then you do the same exercise, so spotting something and identifying it, and then the coordinates and so on, and then calling in the fire. And the difference was that you were within a hundred yards or so of where it was going to explode. So, kind of interesting.

SCHNEIDER: Backtracking a little bit, just, well, I guess I'm surprised by your mentioning of your wife, because Dartmouth was all men at the time. So, just before we keep going into Vietnam, I wanted to backtrack and cover that, if you don't mind.

LANDA: Okay. I met her junior year. She was in school in Boston.

SCHNEIDER: Wellesley?

LANDA: No, she went to Pine Manor [College, Brookline, MA].

SCHNEIDER: Okay, and sorry, just for the record, what is her name, full name?

LANDA: Carol. We're no longer married, but we were for 25 years. And, so we met in college, and dated for a couple of years while we were in college, and then as I say, we were married two weeks after graduation.

SCHNEIDER: And then also, then, your roommate who was friends with Billy? First of all, what was his name?

LANDA: Charlie Hogler. He was a Theta...

SCHNEIDER: And was he involved in Vietnam, as well?

LANDA: No. He was on the tennis team, and he went on to grad school and got his MBA.

SCHNEIDER: Interesting. So...

LANDA: Deferments were still available if you were in school at that time. So, being in grad school, he still was eligible for a deferment.

SCHNEIDER: Got it, okay. Yeah, I just wanted to cover those quickly before we moved on. At this point now, you're still in Fort Sill. Do you have any inkling that you're going to be sent over to Vietnam as a military advisor? Or are you still very much in the mindset of you're going to be with American troops?

LANDA: That's what I figured. And as we finished there, there was a graduation ceremony and all that. And we had a cocktail party with our gunnery instructor, who we had invited to the party. And he was a neat guy. He had served in Vietnam, and was just back. And, so he came to the party and a number of my peers were married, and we had spouses there, and then those who weren't were there, too. We went to the officers' club and drank a lot. We asked him to speak to the group as the night was coming to a close, and he said, "Well, it's been great having you guys and I enjoyed it. Hope you learned what you're supposed to learn." And he said, "Now, you know, this Vietnam thing." He said, "It's not a huge war, but it's the only one we got right now, and you're probably all going." So, *okay*. And it was building. I mean, the troop numbers were going up. So that was how I finished at Fort Sill.

And then I went to Fort Knox, and I was a training officer in a basic training company at Fort Knox. So we were taking raw recruits first day in, and so on, and putting them through their eight or nine weeks of basic training, which was they learn the discipline and the structure and how to fire rifles and throw grenades, and all of that stuff. And I was there from

like early October until May of '68. And then, you know, I'd lived through a very interesting time.

I got my orders for Vietnam in February of '68. We worked a full five-day week, and then usually half a day on Saturday. So, actually my wife had invited her maid of honor to come spend the weekend with us, because I think it was Presidents Day weekend. And so I said, "All right, ladies, you sleep in. I gotta go to work for half a day. I'll be home for lunch." And I went to work, and in my company, there was correspondence for me, and so I opened it and it's like, *Huh?* You know, lots of places have acronyms and stuff. The service can do it fairly well. And so, there was a paragraph that was probably two inches high, and all I could recognize was my name and serial number, and the rest was kind of gibberish to me. But I did see "Vietnam." So, I gave it to my 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant and said, "Okay, 1<sup>st</sup> sergeant, can you tell me what this says?" [laughter] And he said, "Yes, sir, you're going to Vietnam. But first..." And it told me what my assignment was going to be, and it said I was going to be an advisor to a regional force, popular force unit, also affectionately known as Ruff Puffs and they are, they're like—I mean, ARVN, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, was kind of like our Army. And then, regional forces and popular forces, they got to be kind of like the small units that were in villages. So it's like, *Ooh, that's pretty scary.* So, I said, "Okay, thank you."

But, because I was going to be assigned as an advisor, I had to go to Fort Bragg [NC] for almost two months of specialized training. So I went home for lunch, and we had a habit of when I walked in—by that time I lived in government quarters, and when I'd walk in the door, the kitchen was right there, and I'd lay mail and stuff on the counter. And, so my wife said, she and her friend were there, she said, "Well, what's that?" And I said, "Ah, just don't worry about it." "No, no, no, no, what is it? What is it?" And I said, "Oh, it's my orders." And she said, "Oh, for what?" And I'd been going to a number of schools at Fort Knox. I went to chemical, biological and radiological school and some other things. And she says, "Oh, are you going to another school?" And I said, "No." "Well, what is it?" And I said, "Well, it's my orders for Vietnam." "Oh." So we went on about the weekend [laughter].



And I was to leave there in April to go to Fort Bragg. And, so I was getting ready to do that, and Martin Luther King was assassinated just before I was to leave. And as riots started in various cities, one of the things that we did, or had to be available for, was riot control duty. So, I was getting ready to clear Fort Knox to go to Fort Bragg, and I was put on six hour alert to go to Hartford for riot control duty. And it's like, *Oh, this is cool. Here I am set to be sent to war, and before I do that, I gotta go to Hartford, Connecticut, and maybe get shot at.* And there were planes flying out of Fort Knox regularly. Fortunately, I didn't have to go. So we cleared. I went home for a month before I reported to Fort Bragg, and then I went to Fort Bragg. And it was a... Go ahead. I'm sorry.

SCHNEIDER: Well, I just wanted to quickly go through that vignette you just painted of, you know, you get your orders, you put them on the kitchen, and your wife, Carol, so she just reacted by saying, "Oh"?

LANDA: Well, it was kind of like, you know, let's not ruin the weekend. [laughter] Yeah, I mean, I think I probably— I mean, there wasn't really much to talk about. And I really didn't want to ruin the weekend. And there was nothing that was going to happen that day anyway. So, it was kind of like, *Okay, we'll get to this.*

SCHNEIDER: And what were your personal thoughts? What were you thinking when you got those orders?

LANDA: Well, as I said, it wasn't totally unexpected. But nevertheless, it was like, *Okay, here it is. I'm goin'.* And the assignment to small forces in villages was quite scary, because they were— so I didn't wind up doing that, but I was an advisor, and they're like three or four person teams of Americans out living with Vietnamese. So you don't even have... And it's dangerous to be with an American unit, but at least you have a feeling of your peers, and you all speak English, and, you know, the taking care of each other kind of thing, and it's like, *Okay, if I'm part of three or four stuck out somewhere where there isn't American support, wow! That's gonna be a challenge.*

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, I can imagine. So, then you go home, and when you say "home" at this point is where?

LANDA: We went to my parents' house in Connecticut, in Darien, and spent time with them, and actually it was late April, early May. We went up to Dartmouth to Green Key. Like, *Okay, I might as well enjoy life, because I don't know how much more I got.* So I go back to Dartmouth and party a little bit. And because I'd only been out for a year, I still knew a lot of the fraternity brothers in the following classes, and so it's like yeah, *let's go back to Psi U and have a good weekend.* Which we did. And then, came home from that and headed for Fort Bragg. And I went unaccompanied on that one. I went by myself, because it was a temporary duty.

SCHNEIDER: So, what was the kind of curriculum and school of thought in military advisor training? How did they prepare you to interact with the Vietnamese? Because it's not like World War II, where you're working side by side with the British.

LANDA: Right. Right.

SCHNEIDER: It's a totally different culture.

LANDA: Well, it was an interesting, and really very well done... The morning was devoted to military subjects, and then also history and culture of the Vietnamese, so that we would be equipped to better understand and to live with them. So there was a lot of time spent on the history and their traditions and culture and those things, and then the military subjects were, I mean, there was more map reading and stuff like that. And then, one of the— we had to learn how to fire every weapon that we might come in contact with, because they had old World War II weapons. So I learned about bazookas and recoilless rifles and mortars and M-1s and M-1 carbines and knee mortars, and then also time on demolition and how to rig explosives and set them off, how to fire Claymore mines, and all of that stuff. So, those were all the morning, some of which were classroom, and then some were in the field on ranges and things like that, firing ranges.

And then after lunch we went to language class. And from the time you walked into the classroom, you spoke Vietnamese. And we had Vietnamese instructors. I had a very delightful young Vietnamese woman, Co Phuc was her name. And so, we spoke Vietnamese from like 1:00 until 5:00. And then you finished the day by a lengthy run, like a two-and-a-half mile run through the sand dunes of North

Carolina. And then, at night we all had tape recorders in our rooms, and practiced our language skills. So that was kind of the typical day.

SCHNEIDER: And what was the perception among your fellow military advisors in training, and among the United States military in general, of the South Vietnamese at the time, of ARVN? Was it positive? Was it negative? Was it tinged with racial prejudices? What was the thought of what awaited you guys over there?

LANDA: It wasn't racial prejudice. It was much more the reputation that they had was of not being very good. You know, they'd cut and run, they weren't dedicated, and so on. Which, by the way, I found out I was very fortunate in my ultimate assignment. The unit that I was with I would match against any in the US Army. They were fantastic.

SCHNEIDER: The 34<sup>th</sup> battalion?

LANDA: 34<sup>th</sup> artillery battalion. But the perception probably was, you know, not very good, not like Americans in terms of standing and fighting or that kind of stuff. It wasn't racial, though. I mean, it was more... Well, I don't know. It depends. You know, there were all kinds of nicknames. "Marvin the ARVN" was one, and of course, gooks and slopes and slant eyes and stuff like that. But, I mean, not in terms of hateful kind of stuff. It just was commonly accepted, "okay, they're different." Interestingly, too, because where I went to school was where the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne is housed, so it's a huge military post. And the school that I went to is the home of the Special Forces. And all of their training is to become indigenous with the people you serve with. So there was a huge feeling that that's part of what we were doing.

SCHNEIDER: Interesting. So you were preparing to be immersed in ARVN, and therefore and in these Ruff Puffs. When did you realize your assignment changed from being in the Ruff Puffs to ARVN?

LANDA: Actually, not until I got in country. And that's a whole... Even going depends on the time you went and so on, but... So I finished at Fort Bragg and I went home and I had, I think another week before I had to leave.

SCHNEIDER: And when was this? In 1968?

LANDA: '68, yep.

SCHNEIDER: What month?

LANDA: June of '68. And there are a lot of things that are very incongruous about Vietnam, one of which is, okay, I didn't go as part of a unit. The big units that went typically went by boat, but I was going as an individual for assignments. So I flew out of Kennedy airport [New York] on civilian aircraft to the West Coast, and to San Francisco. And then I flew out of Travis Air Force Base [CA] to Vietnam. But all of those flights were commercial carriers on charter to the government. So I think I flew over on Pan American, and, you know, kind of real weird. And actually, I'll back you up a little bit. One of the other things as I was at Fort Bragg was Bobby Kennedy was assassinated while I was there. And that, of course, was like, you know, *What...* I've now seen three assassinations of well-known Americans: the Kennedy brothers and Martin Luther King. It was like *wow*.

SCHNEIDER: Did you ever question the internal cohesion of the United States at that time? Like did these assassinations, as you said, it produces this wild factor of, you know, especially coming from the 1950s as you said which was a quiet patriotic time. Did it start to erode your confidence in the United States as a nation?

LANDA: No. As more was published or found about each of the assassins, all three of them were, you know, semi-deranged. They were extremists of sorts. I didn't view them as typical of the country, although having seen three in the space of a relatively short period in history, it's like, *what are we coming to here?* I mean, this is just very, very different.

SCHNEIDER: And do you feel that was shared by your fellow soldiers in training?

LANDA: Yeah, I think so. Part of the— I don't know, maybe one of the benefits of a Dartmouth education is, you know, we do think deeper than lots of people [laughter]. And me and my peers— you know, another classmate was lost after I got there, too, Duncan Sleigh— but I would say we were probably more thoughtful than many, many of the officers at that time, so more inclined to think more deeply about events. Because it was a mixture. I mean, there were still, before the volunteer

Army there were a lot of career officers, and you could almost say they were so indoctrinated, if you will, in that culture that I don't think they—they didn't benefit from a liberal education.

SCHNEIDER: Do you have any examples that you remember about this?

LANDA: In terms of those folks?

SCHNEIDER: Or yeah, in terms of, as you said, yeah, the difference in assessing these assassinations and thinking about the United States?

LANDA: Well, a lot of the military, especially at Fort Bragg, because the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and the 101<sup>st</sup> were always known as very elite units, as were the Special Forces. So, they are by and large very gung ho, you know, "Let's go. Let's do it. We're the best. Let's have at it." So I don't think they— and this is a generalization— but that was a very prevalent atmosphere; it was like, "We're the best. We're Airborne. We're gung ho. We've got a job to do." I mean, that was kind of the prevalent atmosphere. And then, on my part it was like, I thought about them, but I knew I was going very shortly and that I had a job to do, and so I didn't—that was probably more foremost in my mind. So, *I'm getting ready to leave my family and I may never see them again.* And that's a sobering thought.

SCHNEIDER: What was the departure from your family and your wife like then?

LANDA: It was very difficult. My dad was still working in Manhattan, and so he came out from Manhattan to Kennedy. I left kind of mid-afternoon. Then my mom and my wife and I drove in from Darien. Then we kind of stood around, waiting until my flight was called, and then that was pre TSA and everything, so everybody could be in the boarding area. And it was like, "Okay, I guess I got to get on the plane." And I was very choked up. I saw a family that I knew from home getting on the plane, too, and I absolutely just didn't want to talk to anybody. So I avoided them. I knew I could not talk to anybody at that time or I was gonna lose it. So I just found my seat and hunkered down, and flew to the West Coast.

SCHNEIDER: So, then you are in the West Coast, and then you leave for Vietnam, and you arrive in Da Nang, correct?

LANDA: No, actually, because I was MACV, I went in through Saigon.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, sorry, could you elaborate on MACV for the recording?

LANDA: Yeah. It's the abbreviation for Military Assistance Command, Vietnam.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, thank you.

LANDA: And, so the first, oh, week or 10 days, I lived in this little compound right in the heart of Saigon, and we drew equipment and did some mostly administrative things, because it wasn't until you got there that you drew jungle fatigues and your weapon and all that kind of stuff. And then, kind of more instruction during the day. And then, actually we were free to go out for dinner, evening meal, and some of that's like, we weren't allowed to take our weapons when we walked around in Saigon, and again that's the— you hear all these stories, and is some guy in a cyclo or a rickshaw going to drive by and bomb me or what? And then, obviously, it didn't happen. But we would go to dinner at the Rex Hotel, which if you read stuff about Vietnam, that's where a lot of the correspondents were and so on. And it was like being some place at home. They usually had a band. You'd get a good meal. You know, singers singing American songs. Most of those were Filipinos, and they did an amazingly good job. So, we'd do that. I was there for about a week, and then I went to Da Nang, which was my first assignment in I Corps. And that's where I met—it was during that time that my orders—or I got reassigned to the regular army Vietnamese artillery battalion rather than a regional force unit.

SCHNEIDER: Was arriving in Vietnam anything like you— was Vietnam once you arrived anything like you expected or had heard about in the military bases?

LANDA: Well, when I first got there, I was a little bit in Saigon, which was just a teeming, incredible, you know, traffic and horns and all that stuff. And then in Da Nang, it was kind of interesting, too, because that's where my artillery battalion was headquartered, and at that time they were the only 155 unit in I Corps, which stretched from south of Da Nang all the way to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. So we stayed there, and their headquarters was right adjoining Da Nang Air Base, and we were right next door to the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing.

And they had a little compound with a permanent building, and we would operate out of there, usually south of Da Nang, off of Hill 55, which was a Marine base. But, I mean, it was kind of weird in that when we were there, we usually operated during the week, and we'd be home on weekends. So, we'd go to the beach, my fellow Americans and I. We had two Jeeps assigned to us. So we'd load up with beer and go to the beach, and some great body surfing in the waves off Da Nang. And then you'd go back to work on Monday morning.

SCHNEIDER: So, a couple of questions about then arriving in Da Nang. First of all, did you then meet the two other Americans that were assigned to the 34<sup>th</sup> artillery battalion with you?

LANDA: Yes.

SCHNEIDER: And who were they?

LANDA: When I got there, there was a captain, and I was by then a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant, and the non-commissioned officers, the sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class, were there. Subsequently, the captain rotated home, and then they didn't replace him. I was the leader of the group. And then another sergeant 1<sup>st</sup> Class joined us. So, we were the three from, oh, kind of October, November of '68 until I came home.

SCHNEIDER: And what were their two names?

LANDA: Sergeant Rush and Sergeant Lacy.

SCHNEIDER: So, then you come into Da Nang in, you said November of 1968, which is right at the— you know, the Tet Offensive ended recently. What was it like to be in I Corps after the Tet Offensive, or in the immediate aftermath of the Tet Offensive?

LANDA: Well, the Tet Offensive had been February of '68, and I mean, that was part of my mental buildup to what I was going to do, because every night on the news, Walter Cronkite was broadcasting from Hue, reporting on the battle of Hue. So it was like, *okay*... And it was still pretty active. We would operate, as I say, off of Hill 55, which is south of Da Nang, but then we also— my first exposure to enemy fire, we resupplied a Korean unit south of Da Nang way out in the boonies, and so I don't think I'd been there maybe three

weeks and Captain Bird, who was the officer in charge when I got there, said, "Okay, here's the deal. When we do this..."—the helicopters were all American. They were Marine helicopters then that supplied this— and he said, "but they have to have an American on the ground or they won't fly."

So, the first trip... So, we've staged all of the resupply stuff, which was ammunition at Marble Mountain, which is in Da Nang, and then they would come in and pick it up there. But on the first trip, they took me in and dropped me in this outpost with the Koreans. And, well, when we were flying in, we got shot at in the helicopter, and so we got past it, and they dropped me, and it's like, *Okay, I hope this all works, and when we're all done with all our trips, they come back to pick me up, because I'm out here all by myself, I don't speak Korean, [laughter] I'm getting lonely already.* So, everything worked fine. I think I was there, you know, probably five or six hours until it was all done. And it was hotter than all get out. I mean, it is extremely hot in Vietnam during the dry season. Because I remember when I went— they picked me up and I went back, I think I was on the verge of heat stroke. I couldn't get enough fluids and so on and so forth. Anyway, interesting sort of experience. And we stayed in Da Nang, operating... Oh, and then, there was still a lot of activity. We were out on an operation at one point, and the air base at Da Nang got attacked.

SCHNEIDER: And when was this?

LANDA: That was probably late August of '68. And so, so we were told to come back into the city, and we started in, and that was probably my, it was my first experience... the VC [Viet Cong] and/or NVA, North Vietnamese Army had started attacking villages south of Da Nang, and they were pretty brutal. They killed a lot of civilians. And, so as we're driving in, on both sides of the road are bodies lined up, civilian bodies, children, women, and so on, and it's like, *Oh, boy, this is not nice stuff.* So that was my first experience probably seeing lots of bodies. So we went back in and, you know, things settled down. And then, as I say, I stayed in Da Nang for another month or so. And then, they formed a second Vietnamese artillery battalion, 155 battalion, and they would have responsibility of the southern part of I Corps, and my units had the northern part, so from July...



- SCHNEIDER: Until which...
- LANDA: I'm sorry, go ahead.
- SCHNEIDER: Well, I was just going to ask, the other Vietnamese artillery battalion, what were they? You were the 34<sup>th</sup> in northern I Corps, and who was in southern I Corps?
- LANDA: I forget the number.
- SCHNEIDER: Okay, no worries, I was just curious.
- LANDA: So, we moved our unit north. So we drove from Da Nang up to where our rear area was, which was north of Hue at a place called PK-17, which was from the French, it's Poste Kilometre-17, 17 kilometers north of the city of Hue on Highway 1. So it's a little village. That's where our rear area was, and that's where I spent the rest of my time when we weren't out in the field.
- SCHNEIDER: So, can you walk me through what happened when you were introduced to the 34<sup>th</sup> artillery battalion? What was it like to meet your Vietnamese compatriots? Yeah, what that experience was like?
- LANDA: They were very welcoming, very courteous. And I was of them. I mean, they were really very, very nice people, and they were very, very competent. And so part of our role was not just the work during the day, but we did celebrations with them, theirs, and really, you know, we lived together. So I got to know them quite well. And I enjoyed their culture very much, and I kind of, you know, I blended in. And that was truly a great part of my experience. They're wonderful people. I was honored to serve with the people that I served with, and they took pretty good care of me.
- SCHNEIDER: So, you formed more than a just professional bond with them. It seems to me that you really formed a friendship with a lot of these people.
- LANDA: Yes. Yeah. When we were up north at PK-17, we all lived in the same compound, and my counterpart, a Vietnamese major, his family lived with us in that compound, so I knew his kids. And a number of the other people in the battalion, Vietnamese officers and enlisted people, I knew quite well. I mean, we lived together.

- SCHNEIDER: Did your other two American MACVs that were with you, did they have a similar attitude towards working with the Vietnamese?
- LANDA: Yes, I think for the most part they did. I think I may have had more of a multicultural affinity than they did.
- SCHNEIDER: Because of your childhood with your father?
- LANDA: Yeah. And I mean, I'd been fortunate to be exposed to different nationalities, and thought they were wonderful, and learned new things. And, you know, I can go native pretty quickly, so... But they were very, you know, again, I enjoyed our counterpart. We did, obviously when we were in the field, obviously we depended on each other a hundred percent. But when we were in the rear, you know, we'd celebrate Tet, we'd celebrate—they would help us celebrate US holidays. So, you know, very different than the experience of an American who was just with an American unit.
- SCHNEIDER: And you said that the perception while you were in the United States wasn't as racist as much as it was an issue of incompetence. And then you mentioned that the 34<sup>th</sup> was incredibly competent. How did you come to this realization? And how did you feel during that?
- LANDA: Well, it was my unit, the 34<sup>th</sup> artillery battalion. I mean, when you go and start firing and see what they do, it's like, *These guys know what they're doing*. And then, we always operated jointly with an American unit, and when we were up north it was the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne. And they had full confidence in our unit. At various times we were called on to fire for them, not just their own artillery that was part of their organization, and they were totally confident. And then, the Vietnamese infantry unit that we supported was the Vietnamese 1<sup>st</sup> Division, which was typically thought of as *the* best one in the whole Vietnamese Army, and their commanding general took a huge stand during the battle for Tet, General Trun. And I met him a number of times, and he was a very, very serious soldier, and his division always did well. We were co-located with the 3<sup>rd</sup> ARVN regiment of infantry in our compound, and they participated in the Hamburger Hill battle along with the 101<sup>st</sup> and my artillery support of it. Very, very competent soldiers.

- SCHNEIDER: So, you get to PK-17, then. And you hadn't seen a ton of conflict in Da Nang. But then, according to the summary I received from you, you start to operate in the— and I might be mispronouncing this— the A Shau Valley?
- LANDA: A Shau [he gives the correct pronunciation] Valley.
- SCHNEIDER: Can you talk to me about kind of... Yeah, go ahead.
- LANDA: We had 18 155 howitzers in the battalion, so, three batteries of six each. But we had a battery near Hue, and then we had two- or four-gun emplacements all the way up to the DMZ. So, we would interact with— we lived close to Hue, but we went up to the DMZ to visit our battery there; there was one in Dong Ha, which is approaching the DMZ, Quang Tri, and then another, a village along Highway 1, there was one there. And they were always there. When we went to the field, we typically went to the A Shau Valley, in joint operations with the 101<sup>st</sup>. So, and the, quote, what's called a "prime mover," like, how do you move the gun? For 155 howitzers, that's a 10-ton truck. And we had them, but we always moved by helicopter, because there weren't roads going out to the A Shau Valley.
- SCHNEIDER: Right. And in the A Shau Valley, obviously you were in Operation Apache Snow, which we'll get to in a little bit, but were you involved in any other semi-major operations preceding Apache Snow?
- LANDA: Well, yes. I mean, we operated... we had operations, I mean, all the time. So, during the fall of '68 we were out there a number of times at different fire bases. In fact, we went out... The rainy season in that part of Vietnam starts in November, so typically operations calm down, because it's hard to fly resupply. But, for example, we kept operating, and we actually went out on an operation, oh, in like the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, and it was supposed to be a long one. I thought, *Oh, goody, we're gonna be out in the middle of the jungle for Christmas*. And Christmas Eve I got word that they were going to pull us out, and so they did. They came in and picked us up on Christmas Eve and we went back to our rear area, so I didn't spend Christmas in the jungle. So, that was, it was a very nice, nice thing. Our movement out there because of the weight of the guns, we moved by flying crane, which was the biggest lift helicopter in the inventory. It

looks like, kind of like a praying mantis. I think I sent you a picture once.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah.

LANDA: It's got this bubble in the front, and then there's nothing in the middle, and then the tail.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah, yeah, I was wondering what that was.

LANDA: That's a flying crane, and I think they're still flying today. But it can carry the biggest loads. And one of the other things that they would do, in that hole in the middle they could carry a mobile hospital unit, not that they did that for us. But, they would come in and pick up our guns and fly them out. And that was always kind of fun because when they'd come in to pick up, somebody has to stay in that— you rig the gun, and somebody has to stand on top of the gun, and reach up with the cargo bands, and hook it over a hook from the helicopter so they can pick it up. And those flying cranes, the prop wash down blast is so big that my Vietnamese counterparts couldn't do it because it would blow them off. They're much smaller physically than we are, by and large. So, typically I got the job of standing on top of the howitzer with the cargo hook and getting sand blasted. But then they'd pick us up and fly over the mountain ridge between the coastal plain and the valley, and drop you off.

And usually, the way you went in to open a fire base is, a small group would go in first, if it was a new one, and blow up, detonate, get rid of trees, and create a big enough space that they could at least bring in a bulldozer, and then that would clear off the top of the hill to create enough space to bring the guns and those things in. And that's the way we moved. So we operated sort of continuously, not as much during the rainy season. And then, in late March usually the rainy season is starting to break, and everybody's anxious to get back into full operation, the authorities are, so operations get much heavier then. So we started operations and we were out in the A Chau, and the weather had cleared one Saturday, so we started. And we get in there, and then the weather closed in again. And we couldn't get resupplied because the weather was so bad. And, I mean, it was like you were living in a cloud. And we'd get tested every day by the bad guys. I mean, they'd kind of watch and see what we were doing, or they'd do some sniper fire or whatever, and

you had to be very careful, so like, you didn't just kind of stand up and walk around, but had to be very wary of what was going on around.

And there's also, there's a lot of, I don't know, black humor stuff that goes on in wars, I'm convinced, at least based on my experience. For example, one of the things that, I mean, you looked kind of rough when you're in the field. There aren't bathrooms, so you pee in the woods, you dig a slit trench to perform your bowel movement and so on. And I always liked it when we— oh, in another piece of learning... And I'll back you up a little bit, I'm sorry.

When I was still in Da Nang and early on, the Vietnamese had a celebration, so we went and we're living it up, and all of a sudden I knew I had some severe intestinal stress, which is very common. So I asked them where the bathroom was. And they pointed to this concrete building, and *oh, great!* So I ran. *Yeah, I got to get there in time before anybody else.* And I pulled the door open and it's like, *Uh, there's no toilet here.* It's a hole in the ground with two little foot pedestals, because they squat; they don't sit. So anyway, one of the treats of working with an American unit was, this is a little crude, but they would always build a sit down shitter. So, they'd take apart ammo cases or whatever and build a very basic structure with a hole in it that you could sit on. *Ah, wonderful. I don't have to squat.*

And, so on this hill that we were at, there were some Americans, and so I asked one, I said, "Okay, well, where's the latrine?" "It's over there, sir." Well, they put it outside the wire so we didn't have to live with what was going on there. They said, "Well, so it's on the side of the hill that they bulldozed the top off." And I said, "Okay, great." And they said, "Well, if you have to go, make sure you tell us, and we'll cover you." I said, "What are you talking about?" "Well, we don't know whether you're gonna get fired on or not, so let us know." I finally had to go and I said, "Okay, guys, I'm going." You're down the side and your feet are kind of hanging over the open air because you kind of had to climb on it from the back, and so I'm saying, *Uh, this is great.* I look over my shoulder and there's two troopers up the hill, American, with a machine gun and a rifle, say, "Yeah, go ahead, sir." It's like, *uh, I don't perform that well in front of an audience, you know?* I mean, it's funny stuff that does go on.

Anyway, so we were there for quite a while. And then, I was supposed to go on my R&R, rest and recuperation, and meeting my wife in Hawaii. And everybody got an R&R, and it was done— the popular places, it was done based on length of time in the country. So, Hawaii was very popular because people who had families could meet them there. So I didn't get my R&R until nine months. And I was supposed to be going while we were stuck on this hill, and I'm thinking, *Now, this is wonderful. My wife's gonna have a wonderful week in Honolulu and I'm still sitting here.* And, so they finally figured out— they didn't like— they didn't fly at night, but they finally figured out that the clouds broke for a couple of hours like at 2:00 a.m., and because we'd been there so long, they started flying some resupplies. And one of the other teams that I was with, there was a Marine gunnery sergeant on that team, and he came and woke me up one night, "Sir, sir, they're gonna fly. You gotta get out of here." He was due to go home, and I said, "Well, how about you, Gunny?" I said, "You're supposed to go home." And he said, "Yeah. But not matter when I get out of here, I'll go home. If you miss this, you aren't gonna see your wife until you go home." So, I got on the helicopter and flew out, and then the next day left to meet my wife in Hawaii.

SCHNEIDER: And so this was, if my math is correct, which it very well may not be, this is January of '69?

LANDA: No, this was more like April, late March.

SCHNEIDER: Oh, wow. Oh, totally my math wasn't the best. Okay. So, the hill you were on in the A Shau was, because you guys numbered hills, what number hill was that?

LANDA: Actually, most of these were named. They were fire bases.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, what fire base?

LANDA: I think that one was Zon, (Z-o-n).

SCHNEIDER: Fire base Zon. And so, how was the week with your wife in Honolulu in the midst of a war? I mean, you've been in the A Shau encountering VC and NVA for months now, and on and off, of course. And then, all of a sudden you find yourself in Honolulu. What was that transition like?

LANDA: Well, again, it's like very different, and it's so quick because, you know, a day before I met my wife, I'd been in the middle of the jungle in Vietnam. And then I was in Honolulu. So, you know, it was wonderful to take a real shower in a real bathroom, and eat good food, and...

SCHNEIDER: With a real toilet, I assume?

LANDA: Yes, yes, yes, a hotel bathroom, the real thing. And, so we had a good week. The Army did that very well. You flew in, and they told all the spouses— where you met your spouse or family was called Fort Derussy, which is in the heart of downtown Honolulu, and so they had instructions for her as she was traveling that she was to be there at, I don't know, it was early in the morning, like 6:00 a.m. when we got in. And so, we flew into Honolulu Airport, and they bussed us down there, and we got a little bit of an orientation about how to behave ourselves while we were there, and the chaplain spoke to us and said, "Well, we hope you enjoy the time with your families," and so on, and then "you need to report back here in a week to go back." So my wife and I went to the hotel and I got cleaned up and we had a wonderful breakfast, and we saw the sights in Honolulu, went to— my dad did business with a guy who lived there, and he and his wife were very kind and toured us around Oahu. We saw Diamond Head. We ate at, again, good restaurants, and went to see Pearl Harbor, and just generally enjoyed kind of a tropical vacation. And then, you know, after a week she went home and I went back.

SCHNEIDER: So, you're back in Vietnam, and you're back in PK-17. I guess what I'm wondering is, while you're conducting all these operations in the A Shau, did you have any idea of the greater strategic importance of pressuring the VC and the NVA on the Ho Chi Minh Trail? Was that at all impressed upon you, or was it very much, you know, "Do your job. Don't worry about the greater plan."

LANDA: No, it was very common knowledge, I mean, that's what we were all about. And I Corps was the busiest activity for, well, from Tet on until I left. That was where the biggest action was, and it was pretty continuous. I mean, the Marine units that were up closer to the DMZ were always operating and being hit, and we were. Hue was still recovering from the Tet Offensive when the VC/NVA occupied the city for the month of February in '68. Still a lot of destruction to recover from.

But we knew that what we were doing was preventing the supplies from coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and preventing them to form their units so that they could repeat Tet. I was very aware of that.

SCHNEIDER: Interesting. So, that was not lost on you in the everyday misery of the war.

LANDA: No. No.

SCHNEIDER: So then, Operation Apache Snow begins when?

LANDA: Well, I think May 10<sup>th</sup> was when the operation, when they took the infantry in. We went in about a day or so beforehand at a fire base that had been occupied before and then abandoned, and we went back into one that had been occupied.

SCHNEIDER: And which fire base is that?

LANDA: I don't remember the name of it. I'm not even sure it had a name... And that was always interesting, too, because when you went into one that had been previously occupied, you really had to search for booby traps because the NVA owned the area, and they would booby trap things. And one of my sergeants who went in in the first flight, and then spent the night because we couldn't get more in there, when I went in the next morning, he was sleeping in a hole that had been previously dug, and I said, "Sergeant Rush, you're pretty lucky." And he said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well, you're sleeping right next to an explosive charge. Good thing you didn't set it off."

SCHNEIDER: Oh, my goodness.

LANDA: And he said, "Uh, yeah." So, so we were there, and we provided supporting fire for the infantry of both the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and the 3<sup>rd</sup> ARVN regiment who were participants in Hamburger Hill.

SCHNEIDER: And so you were in this fire base. I had assumed you, therefore, based on your earlier description of how artillery operated, you could not see Hamburger Hill?



- LANDA: Correct. It was over the next ridge from us. I mean, I knew where it was. But it was over the next ridge from where we were.
- SCHNEIDER: And so, obviously this is, I've heard of this as one of the quintessential battles of the Vietnam War, even before I started digging into the Dartmouth Vietnam Project more. Can you just walk me through what it was like to be there?
- LANDA: Yeah, well, the reason we operated in the A Shau was, I mean, that was, number one, where all the supplies came down on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and it was a rear area for the North Vietnamese. There were no VC at that point. It was all North Vietnamese Army. And they had hospitals there, and logistics centers, and everything else. And they would supply the troops that would go attack on the coastal plain and the cities in I Corps. So the whole idea was to destroy supplies, destroy them, you know, prevent that logistics route from funneling all the supplies and troops down into the South. I mean, that was the main reason for being there.
- SCHNEIDER: So, then, the battle begins, and you begin shelling Hamburger Hill, Hill 937, I believe.
- LANDA: Right. Well, it went on for days. For any combat assault, we would do prep fire in the area that they were going into, to try and eliminate any opposition that they were flying into. And then, as they operated and ran into trouble, they would call on us to bring artillery fire in on the targets and the resistance that they were encountering. So you'd go a long time when it was, you know, that picture I sent you the last one of me sunbathing. You'd go long periods during the day, and it'd be really quiet. Then something would heat up. We'd fire at night on known routes and known areas. So, it's amazing what you can learn to sleep with. I'd sleep in a hole underneath a 155 howitzer, which makes a pretty big bang, and I could sleep right through it.
- But, one of the things that was going on during that spring in all of those areas, the NVA would sneak up during the night through the wire and come into the area that we were— you know, come into the fire base, and blow themselves up and take you with them. So that was going on a lot, which was... you kind of slept with one eye open. And I can remember one night. I was lucky. I never got hit with some of that. I remember waking up one night, and we had a bunker, and

somebody was walking across the top of it. I could hear the steps. And it's like, *Oh, crap. I don't know whether it's a friendly person or a bad guy.* And we had a door, not a real door, but a curtain at the end of the hole. I said, *If somebody appears in that entryway, I don't care who they are, they're dead,* because they would spend all night sneaking up into the— they didn't carry weapons. They just carried explosives. Sappers they're called. And then they would throw, if you had a bunker, they'd throw their charge into the bunker and let it blow up. And, so fortunately, it wasn't one of them, I don't think, because they never opened the, you know, pulled the curtain. But it was a scary time because they were doing that.

And they did overrun a couple of fire bases during that time. One of the guys from the 101<sup>st</sup> that I worked with a lot and got to know quite well, and we were on some of the same fire bases together, I know I saw him after he'd been on one of those hills that had been subjected to that, and he was okay except that both his eardrums were blown because of the explosion. So, scary, you know, it's kind of like, *Oh, boy, hope we make it through the night.*

SCHNEIDER: So, speaking of that, and talk about backtracking, this is going way back. But, you mentioned that some of the training is you don't know of the Vietnamese who might be carrying a grenade, who might be offering you a Coke with shards of glass in it. But it seems to me that you implicitly trusted the 34<sup>th</sup> battalion. What did they do that instilled such trust of them in you?

LANDA: Well, the stuff about grenades and sodas and stuff, they were typically civilians walking around in civilian clothes who were VC, with... Yeah, very quickly after I was with my unit, I felt very comfortable that they were going to take care of me. And there was kind of a bad joke going around that if you were in a Vietnamese Army unit, the one thing you didn't want to have happen was have your American advisor killed. So, they took pretty good care of me, and I did of them. You know, we looked out for each other.

SCHNEIDER: Okay, so now back to Hamburger Hill. You're having these sleepless nights, or rather not sleepless, but these anxiety producing nights, where you're worried about these sappers coming at any moment. Then, when you're awake and firing,

are you targeting Hamburger Hill itself or are you targeting the surrounding area?

LANDA: Both. In artillery language, there's a term called H&I fires, harassment and interdiction. So, we would—sometimes it wouldn't be at specific targets, but it would be in an area where we knew there was an activity going on. It's like, *Okay, if I can't sleep, they're not gonna sleep either, because they never know when one of my 100-pound projectiles is gonna fall on their head.* So, I mean, a lot of it was H&I fire to keep them off balance, and in many ways protect our troops because if they were being subjected to that, they were more concerned about that than they were destroying our infantry units.

SCHNEIDER: Interesting. So, while you're doing this H&I firing, are you aware of the fact that the 101<sup>st</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> ARVN are doing these full on assaults up the hill?

LANDA: Well, those didn't go on during the night. I mean, everybody everywhere, the infantry, during the day, that's when you would do the assaults, or many of the operations were called search and destroy. So, Hamburger Hill, they knew from intelligence that there were concentrations there. They didn't realize until they got there how dug in they were. But a lot of our other operations, we would go into an area where there was known activity, and the infantry would just hike all day looking for contact with the enemy, and then getting into fire fights and killing them. And I think everybody's pretty much aware, one of the— this was not a war where people held territory, so one of the key measures became body count. So, our key measures, if you will, were body count, tons of supplies, weapons, and those things. And in the search and destroy operations, you know, they might find a hospital or stores of rice or weapons and those kinds of things. Hamburger Hill, once they determined that they were well dug in up on the hill, that's when assaults started to take the hill.

SCHNEIDER: So, this goes on for several days.

LANDA: Yes.

SCHNEIDER: How does it conclude for you, then?

- LANDA: When the hill was finally taken, it was taken jointly by a unit of the 101<sup>st</sup>, and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> ARVN regiment, which was the group that we supported, they got to the top of the hill, and as was fairly common, the North Vietnamese disappeared. You know, they would go back, and most of the time they were not looking for set piece battles. They wanted to inflict as much damage as they could, and then they would go away, and come back another day.
- SCHNEIDER: So, once you took Hamburger Hill, was your unit immediately then back to PK-17?
- LANDA: No, they stayed for three or four days afterwards, and then we pulled back to our rear area.
- SCHNEIDER: Were you as disheartened to hear as the American public was that Hamburger Hill was abandoned shortly thereafter?
- LANDA: No, not really. I mean, the objectives for most of the war was not to hold territory. It was to destroy supplies and their ability to prolong the fighting. So it was not at all uncommon to have an operation, have fire fights. This Hamburger Hill happened to be one of the biggest. But you didn't stay. You know, once you cleared the area, collected the supplies or destroyed them, you left and went somewhere else. Or, you know, maybe went back there at some point in the future.
- SCHNEIDER: So, do you think the controversy back home... Well, first of all, were you aware of the controversy of Hamburger Hill in the United States?
- LANDA: Yeah. Yeah. We started to become aware of it the farther along things got. And then I came home. That was my last big operation, so that was, I think it sort of officially ended on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May. And I had about 30 days left before I came home at that point. And, so I said, *You know, I'd really kind of like to take it easy for my last 30 days. I made it this far. I'd like to go home.* But I still did stuff, but nothing of that intensity. And then I came home the end of June of '69. And then, obviously, then I'm back into domestic US society and very aware of all the protests and everything. And again, I left Vietnam and came back through the West Coast again. And actually, the day I got back to the West Coast, we flew into Travis Air Force Base again, and then they bussed us into Oakland Army Terminal, and that day that I landed was

my last day on active duty. So I went and I had my physical, and I got my pay, and I was released from active duty.

SCHNEIDER: And was your wife waiting for you there?

LANDA: No, she was still on the East Coast. So then I went to San Francisco International Airport to fly east. And I was still in uniform, and that's when it probably really started to dawn me that I probably wasn't a very popular guy. You know, there were signs and peace signs and pickets and all that stuff, and it's like, *Okay*.

SCHNEIDER: Had you encountered this while in SFO and JFK?

LANDA: At San Francisco, yeah, coming home.

SCHNEIDER: Yeah. So, what was your initial reaction to, you know, you've just fought in this war and you've been with the South Vietnamese, and you come off the plane to all of these protest signs? What were you thinking when you encountered all this?

LANDA: Well, I think, first of all, it's maybe not nice or overly broad, but many of those people didn't know what the heck they were talking about. I understand they were against the war and possibly having to serve. I mean, nobody wants to go take a chance on getting maimed or killed. But, the generalities and, you know, "Well, you're all baby killers" and that kind of stuff was so dead wrong, it was unbelievable. Now, there were abuses. I mean, you know, My Lai and Lieutenant [William L.] Calley. I mean, things go wrong and emotions run high. So, and I'm in no way excusing the way they behaved. But, if you've been out in the field for three weeks, and you know, we would be out for two or three weeks, no showers, no hot meals, no... and you're getting sniped at all the time or fired at from a village, we had very defined specific instructions. There were "no fire zones," so you could not fire into those zones. Well, guess what? The North Vietnamese and VC figured that out, say, "Hey, this is a good place for me to hide, because they can't fire at me here." And, so they would fire at you from there. And, you know, if you started losing your friends and stuff, emotions run very high. Again, I in no way condone it or excuse it. I would never participate. It was wrong, wrong, wrong. But you can understand it.

But, by and large, there was more good done by Americans. I mean, we did a lot of civic action work, a lot of health care when we were in the rear. So it's like, "Okay, you're sitting here in the US and you heard this stuff and it's cliché. It wasn't that way. And you didn't live with my counterpart who wanted nothing more than to have his children live a better life than he'd lived." And so, I never— you didn't talk much. I knew I would be a voice crying in the wilderness. So you just shut up, and it's like, "But I know you're dead wrong."

And I have always felt, because I lived with Vietnamese, and respected and admired them, and I did fear that if we left them, there would be a lot of re-education and deaths, which there was, and I really felt like we kind of walked out on them. And that's kind of the other side of the story. And I mean, if you ever read a book called *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-1975*, by George J. Veith], it's the final demise, April of '75. And part of what resonates with me, if you will, when I watch Ken Burns or read some of this stuff, I've been to many of these places. So, the North, when they finally finished it all, came right down Route 1, and I lived just off Route 1, so I can say, *Oh, yeah, I know when they went by Quang Tri and Dong Han and Saigon and Da Nang, and I know exactly what it looks like.* And I do have regrets that, I think we left the Vietnamese in the lurch because of the politics at home, and I'm sad about that. I understand why it happened. You know, kind of the follow-up to that, which sort of bears it out, is— and it was nowhere near to the same degree, but look at Cambodia when Pol Pot took over, and the killing fields. And, I mean, it's a pretty rough society. So, I mean, those are some of the feelings. But again, given the time that I came home, I never talked about what I did. You couldn't.

SCHNEIDER: So, do you think— is that where, because I saw you noted that you've only recently begun to open up about your Vietnam experience. Is that why you just never, I guess, opened up about Vietnam, because you felt like you couldn't open your mouth, you'd be too criticized by the rest of society?

LANDA: Yeah. I mean, you weren't viewed as... I mean, in today's world, certainly there's distaste for Iraq and Afghanistan and so on, and I share that. But the people serving are not faulted. It's the government. And so, there's a lot of "welcome home," there's a lot of "thank you for your service,"

which is appropriate. I mean, we are a civilian controlled military. The politicians make the decisions, and send people off. And people who are in the service do what they've sworn to do. And that certainly was very different for a long time after I came home. The only people that you could talk to who might understand were people that you'd served with or who had been there.

SCHNEIDER: So, then, what has made you in recent years, and if you could elaborate on exactly how recently, what has made you decide to now open up about your experience in Vietnam?

LANDA: Well, a lot of time has passed. I think the realization and then what I described about the public not finding fault with the service people in today's world, Iraq and Afghanistan and other conflicts, it's like, okay, things have changed. And then, you know, in the last several years, that has carried over to say, well, the Vietnam War was probably a very bad thing and it was awful and we lost a lot of people, but we should no longer be faulting those who served, which I'm very pleased to see.

And then, I got involved in DUSA, Dartmouth Uniformed Service Alumni, and I think as a result of being involved with that, combined with these other things, I've opened up much more. I did talk to President [James E.] Wright as he was preparing to write his book, and did interview with him, and I have a lot of admiration for him as a historian, but also as—I'd read his previous book about those who serve, with the citizen Army tradition in the US, and I was really impressed at how well he described how those who serve feel, and he did it in *Enduring Vietnam: An American Generation and Its War*, as well. He also did some wonderful history background as to how it all happened. And so that, the fact that...

Well, what prompted me was there was a picture in the alumni news, not the magazine, of him with two North Vietnamese on top of Dong Nai Villa, and that's where I first learned he was writing the book. And, so I got in touch with him, and through his secretary and so on, I corresponded with her and then talked to her and said, "This is really interesting to me," because he was going to focus in the book on the first six months of 1969, which was some of the heaviest fighting in the war, and in particular, Hamburger Hill. And I said, "Well, this is really interesting because I was

there.” And he and I talked, and I think that was part of the beginning of... it was being examined as part of history.

And so a lot of the bad feeling and emotion was gone, and enough time had elapsed that the public was beginning to understand what it's like to serve, and unless you've done it... It brings out the best and the worst in people. You can't believe how primitively you can live, and still be kind of healthy. I lost 35 pounds while I was there [laughter]. And it also brings out the best. I would serve in joint operations with 18-year-old draftees, Americans, and you can't believe how they performed. And they took care of each other. They took care of me. They exhibited courage, selflessness, and I mean, that's kind of the rest of the story. And when you lump it all into “well, it was a bad war and you're all awful,” it's like, *eh, okay*. But all of that has faded.

I do feel now that there's a willing to listen to what I have to share, and it's grown over the last year. I'm very proud of my service. I would serve again if called upon. They wouldn't take me now, I'm too old. But, even little things. My kids knew I had served, but I never talked about it and what I did. First of all, they were too young to understand. But I can recall one of my daughters coming home and saying, “Well, it's Veterans Day and we're gonna talk about that in school tomorrow. And I know you're a veteran and I know you have medals. Can I take your medals to school with me?” And I said, “No, I don't think so.” Again, because it was just such a private thing until fairly recently.

SCHNEIDER: That's fascinating to me because in the era I've grown up in, the Vietnam War has been so detached at this point in, you know, the late '90s, early 2000s, and so, hearing you discuss this transformation has been actually very, very enlightening, and honestly, a little emotional for me, because obviously it's one thing to read about in a history book, you know, the disgust of the protestors. And I never obviously— I'm participating in this project— I never understood that. But it's an entirely different thing to hear about it in person.

LANDA: Right.

SCHNEIDER: So, I'm also curious about, regarding now the time that has elapsed in between when you came back in late 1969 and now, have any of you ever kept in touch with any members



of the 34<sup>th</sup> battalion in Vietnam? And (b) have you ever had the chance or the desire to go back?

LANDA:

Well, I haven't kept in touch. I don't even know— and I have wondered— I don't even know whether they're alive. I would very much like to go back and see the places that I was, and who knows? Maybe run into somebody. Because it is a beautiful, beautiful country, and the people are absolutely wonderful. And then, you know, at a very still formative age, I learned a lot about life there and its value. I mean, and I do reflect on this to myself and say, okay, I mean, you're a Dartmouth student, you're at Dartmouth, you're going to graduate and go out in the world. By the time I was 25 years old, and two years out of college, I'd been and served a year in combat and come home. And it's like, okay, if you think of today's world, and frankly, the world most of the time, you graduate from Dartmouth, then you go on to do what you're going to do, grad school, service, whatever. It doesn't have to be a part of your life. And that's okay.

But there is no doubt in my mind... I mean, I don't know whether I had post-traumatic stress disorder or not. It didn't become popularized or characterized until well after I'd come home. I had bad dreams for a while, silly dreams. I could not stand to be around a large group of people, because what you knew is if you were in a concentration of people, you were probably going to get mortared. And I did have dreams off and on for a while. I adjusted pretty well through re-entry. I also had a feeling that if I didn't die there, it was gonna take a lot to kill me. And I did go to work for Procter & Gamble. I drank too much. And a lot of feeling, as I say, it's like *hey, if they couldn't get me there, there's not much that's gonna get me, so I will test the limits*. And, you know, I've never delved deeply psychologically into, okay, did I have post-traumatic stress disorder. I mean, I didn't have debilitating if I did. I was fully functioning. I had a 38-year career with P&G. So I don't know. But, it's all, you wonder. I mean, it was quite an experience.

SCHNEIDER:

Reflecting now on your place in history as you said you did with President Wright, how do you feel— obviously, you feel great pride, but now that you're seeing a new generation such as mine and even younger than me learning about the Vietnam War from really what's beginning to be— and history's never fully objective— but what is beginning to be as close to as an objective perspective as we can get, how are

you reflecting on your role in the events that you participated in?

LANDA: Again, I'm very proud. I did watch— I didn't watch every episode of the Ken Burns documentary, but I watched a lot of them. And I can remember the first part was a lot of history, "how did we get here?" kind of stuff, which I think is important. And then they began to show, you know, pretty graphic combat scenes, and that really got to me. [pause] And I can remember thinking, *You know what? For the first time, people here, maybe you'll understand what it was like to serve. And it's amazing what human beings can do.* And so it was more of a just of a, you know, it wasn't fun, it wasn't easy, but a lot of very fine people did it. 50-some-odd thousand of them didn't come home. Others came home permanently injured. *This is what we did. So don't be upset with me because the politicians couldn't get it right, you know?*

SCHNEIDER: Right. Yeah, as having just taken recently a class on America during the Cold War, I think that is very much the consensus that is developing right now.

LANDA: Yeah.

SCHNEIDER: Which must be nice and cathartic for you.

LANDA: It is. It really is.

SCHNEIDER: So, Mr. Landa, I've so enjoyed our talk. Would you like to add anything more or do you want to broach any other topics that you feel right now you'd like to talk about?

LANDA: No. I appreciate the time. I think we've covered a lot of stuff. And I really do appreciate it. I wanted to participate in this. And I've enjoyed talking to you. It's getting to know you a bit remotely, and then your patience and time with me, I value very, very much.

SCHNEIDER: Well, thank you, and I valued it so much with you. I will now share with you that I'm actually a Theta Delt, so your whole discussion about that... and a history major.

LANDA: Aha. [laughter]

- SCHNEIDER: So, I was very, very intrigued to hear about your time at Dartmouth, and, you know, as a possibility of...
- LANDA: You know, one aside on that. So, I think it's an Episcopal church between Psi U and Theta Delt.
- SCHNEIDER: It might be Congregational now. I'm not sure.
- LANDA: Okay. I think it was when I was there. And, of course, Theta Delt and Psi U would party quite hard Saturday nights.
- SCHNEIDER: It's still true.
- LANDA: And we'd go back and forth and just walk across in front of the church, and we really did, the two houses got along very, very well. And reportedly, the minister one day, one Sunday as he's preaching his sermon, looking at the stained glass window over the altar and so on, says, "You know, Hanover's a wonderful place. But I have one question, God. Must I really love my neighbors?" The two houses.
- SCHNEIDER: [laughter] Oh, man. Well, they're still struggling with it today. I just had my sophomore summer, and I lived in Theta Delt, and you walk out on a Sunday morning and you stumble into the crowds of people moving into the church, and you just, you don't feel so good inside.
- LANDA: [laughter] No. You don't really fit with them, no.
- SCHNEIDER: Yeah, yeah, just for many reasons you don't fit with that crowd. [laughter]
- LANDA: Yes.
- SCHNEIDER: All right, well, Mr. Landa...
- LANDA: Again, I very much appreciate your time and, if you have questions or thoughts or whatever, you know how to find me one way or the other. And I do value this very much.
- SCHNEIDER: Well, I can tell you how much we value this interview. I've thoroughly enjoyed this. I really appreciated your insights. And I know with this being the value of oral history, now posterity will get to, as well. So, thank you so much for this.

LANDA: Well, and that's part of my interest in participating. So I look forward to the interview being up on the site, and being able to share it with my kids, who've gotten much more interested in my history. And my grandkids, who are interested, too. So...

SCHNEIDER: Well, I can't wait to send you that copy.

LANDA: Fantastic.

SCHNEIDER: All right, Mr. Landa, have a great rest of your evening. Thank you so much for this.

LANDA: Thank you, Walker. Take care.

SCHNEIDER: You, as well. Bye bye.

LANDA: Bye.

[End of interview.]