An Interview with Vietnam Veteran Tom DeLoe, Psychological Operations Specialist

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Historical Methods 300, Professor Birkner

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Carolyn Hauk: My name is Carolyn Hauk. Today is November fourteenth of 2018. I am currently sitting in CUB206 with Tom DeLoe and we're going to be talking about his life experiences and his experience with the Vietnam War. Tom, it's a pleasure to have you here. I guess we'll start with where you were born and when.

Tom DeLoe: OK. I was born in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania which is Franklin County, next door to the place we're having this interview right here—which is Adams County. I was born in 1946.

Hauk: Alright. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

DeLoe: I had a sister—a younger one. She was born two years later in 1948. Her name is Margaret.

Hauk: And what was your experience growing up as a first child?

DeLoe: Generally, being the first child, actually, is pretty nice. You know, a lot of expectations, because you are the first child, but on the other hand, it seemed like you get some privileges too.

Hauk: I understand that. I am a first child myself. So, what was life like for you at the time?

DeLoe: Well, you know I said I grew up in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania, but I never spent much time there. My father worked for a company called Uniroyal. They made tires among other things…He was assigned to be a manager of a rubber plantation in his early career. So, we moved to Malaysia and Indonesia when I was five.

Hauk: Interesting.

DeLoe: So, I grew up in those two countries.

Hauk: And how was that?

DeLoe: Well, it was certainly interesting in the 1950's to be in those two developing countries. We spent most of our time in Malaysia, but some time in Indonesia. In Indonesia, I went to a Dutch school and, in Malaysia, I went to a British school.

Hauk: Interesting. I don't know too much about the history [of those countries] at that time. Was there any political stuff going on in either of those countries?

DeLoe: Well, in Malaysia, the British had just defeated a Communist insurgency. When I went to a British school, a lot of the people that served us were former Communists that had been defeated and then were re-socializing. I went to a residential school. I didn't go to a day school. I went to a school where you slept there, you ate there.

Hauk: Interesting. What kind of students attended that school?

DeLoe: Well, they were mostly British, because this was a British protectorate. And it only got its status as a free nation in 1954 when it no longer was a protectorate of the British. Before it became a free nation, it was called Malaya. Then, in 1954, they changed the name to Malaysia. In Indonesia, I went to a Dutch school and that was a day school. And that was a challenge for me because they spoke Dutch.

Hauk: Oh, interesting.

DeLoe: Yeah. Luckily, you're a kid so you pick it up pretty fast.

Hauk: Could you still speak it today?

DeLoe: No. Unfortunately, you got to keep up with that kind of stuff or you lose it.

Hauk: To build off of that, did you have any trouble acclimating to either [country]. I mean, obviously there was a language barrier in Indonesia, but, in Malaysia, was there any trouble?

DeLoe: The only thing I can say to you, Carolyn, is that British schools are very disciplinary and they're very strict. They were very willing to use corporal punishment. So, in that sense, it was a

little tough for a kid growing up because the school was so strict. And any diversion, you were going to get caned.

Hauk: Oh, my goodness. Did you ever have that—

DeLoe: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Absolutely.

Hauk: Do you have any fond memories from living in either country?

DeLoe: Other than going to Vietnam, I really haven't been back. That is one thing I think I would like to do—is to go back and just visit those countries now, see how they changed. Yeah, I do have some fond memories of that time. The schools were tough, they were tougher than American schools. I came back here and started ninth grade—back in the States. So, I essentially spent most of my formative years out of the country.

Hauk: And, when you came back, was there any trouble acclimating back to living in America?

DeLoe: Well, let me tell you, as a student, it was fairly easy because [the schools abroad] were strict, but they also were very demanding academically. And there were strictures about studying. So, I thought, for the most part and in most things, I was ahead of my peers when I came back—particularly in languages and things like that. In other things, I might have been a little bit further behind. But what shocked me with American schools was how undisciplined the public schools were. And, actually, back at that time—compared to today—they were not fairly disciplined, yet.

Hauk: So then how was your life in high school?

DeLoe: Well, when we came back to the states, we settled in Connecticut—in Old Greenwich, Connecticut. So, I went to a large high school. I think there were five hundred people in my class. That was large in that day. I guess, that is pretty typical now. I settled in pretty well, got

some friends, joined the tennis team, the swimming team, and had probably a pretty normal high school experience. You know, I had a girlfriend.

Hauk: So then, what made you decide to come to Gettysburg?

DeLoe: Remember I was born in Waynesboro. So, there were relatives still in Waynesboro—which is only about twenty-five miles from here. I always remember as a kid, when we were driving around, we'd drive past Gettysburg and I'd look at the students out here. When you're a real young kid, and you're looking up at these young adults who are eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, I was in awe of them. Gettysburg was my first choice because I always thought it was a beautiful school and those were the first college students I had ever seen as a young kid.

Hauk: And this was the only school you were looking at, at the time?

DeLoe: Well no, I was looking at UConn, Dickinson, Davidson in North Carolina.

Hauk: But this was your top choice?

DeLoe: This was my top choice.

Hauk: What year did you come to Gettysburg?

DeLoe: 1964.

Hauk: So, campus life at the time. The 60's was tumultuous, right?

DeLoe: The 60's was tumultuous. It was still a heavily-oriented fraternity school.

Hauk: And were you in a fraternity?

DeLoe: I was in a fraternity. That fraternity is no longer here anymore. It's the economics department on Carlisle street, now.

Hauk: What was the fraternity?

DeLoe: It was Theta Chi. Geeze, what can I tell you? I was a pretty immature freshman. I had a lot of growing up to do. So, I was on special probation after a revelry fun time my freshman year.

I came to summer school and spent the summer here to get my grades up—which I did do. But, with such a lousy grade point average in my freshman year, it took me the next three years to get that thing up to at least a gentlemanly GPA, you know what I mean?

Hauk: I understand. And do you think that's because college was a new experience for you and you were excited to be here or because you spent so much time moving around, that it was hard to gauge what life would be like in college?

DeLoe: You know, I think it was just my first time away from home. I'm not going to make any excuses for it—I had a great time. But I just was probably not ready for prime time. When I got my special probation letter—which has you with one foot out the door—it kind of shocked me and thought either I'm going to have to buckle down or I'm going to have to reorient my whole life here. Which I think I did. The shock of that was pretty good.

Hauk: And what did your parents have to say about that?

DeLoe: You know, I thought they were pretty good about it overall. My parents were paying, of course, the tuition and everything. But I said to my dad, "Look. I could have done a lot better. If you give a chance this summer, I promise you I'll buckle down. I'll do what I need to do and I'll dig my way out of it." I thought he was pretty good about it.

Hauk: Just to backtrack a little bit—what was your father like?

DeLoe: He's deceased now, of course. He went to the University of Pennsylvania. He majored in business. He spent his career at Uniroyal. He was a guy who loved history—he loved history, particularly World War II. He was a World War II veteran. He would have been much happier as an academic, but he had a pretty successful business career, I would say.

Hauk: Did he ever share stories with you about his time in World War II?

DeLoe: You know, he really didn't. The World War II guys were even worse that the Vietnam guys, in terms of sharing stories. They came back and they put away their wartime experiences and went about going back into civilian life. And I'm sure a lot of them had a lot of problems. But, in that time, you didn't talk about stuff. You just sucked it up.

Hauk: And, as we know from history, there was a lot of pressure to move on...What was your mother like?

DeLoe: My mother was a homemaker. She died fifteen years ago. She was a very nice mother, and, unfortunately, at the end of her life she got dementia. My last ten years' experience with her was in a state of her mental acumen going down each year. Which was unfortunate because she was an intelligent lady and to watch that degradation was upsetting.

Hauk: It must have been tough. What was moving around Malaysia and Indonesia like for her?

DeLoe: She was OK about it. Actually, in a lot ways, she had it pretty good. We had servants.

Hauk: Oh, interesting.

DeLoe: She had cooks, she had housekeepers, she had a driver for goodness sakes. So, life was pretty good, in that sense. She didn't work while she was over there—she just raised us. I think she enjoyed that life. She kept a diary of it and I bring that out once in a while to read it just to see what she's thinking on any particular day.

Hauk: So, what did your sister think about Malaysia and Indonesia?

DeLoe: Well, she had more trouble with the schooling than I did. I don't think she liked the school too much, she thought it was too strict and she was constantly whining about it. And she didn't like the Dutch school, either. School was tough for her. She wasn't the greatest of students, either, which made it more difficult for her, too. I'm not sure that part was so good, but I think she was OK with the rest of it.

Hauk: I'm sorry that we're jumping back to Malaysia and Indonesia, but what kind of stuff did you do in your free time while you were over there?

DeLoe: Of course, it's summer year-round, because you're below the equator. I spent a lot of time with summer sports. I was a tennis player, I loved to swim, those kinds of things. Badminton is a big sport over there. The Malaysians are always in the Olympics [for Badminton]. It doesn't sound like much of a sport, but a hard game of badminton will really tire you out. Those are the things I usually did.

Hauk: Alright. And we talked about your high school career. What kind of student were you in high school?

DeLoe: In high school? I'd say I was a pretty good student. The way I remember, I was in the top fifth of my class. So, I was a fairly good student. Where I had my problems was with SAT's. My SAT's weren't that great.

Hauk: Standardized testing is not for some. It's understandable. So then, what was the college application for you like?

DeLoe: Well, the SAT's always gave me a heartburn. But I think I finally bumbled through to maybe get a thousand cumulatively. My grades were alright. In terms of competition, I'm not sure whether there was more competition then than now. I mean, this is a very competitive school now. Probably, I would not have gotten into this place today if I were to have applied.

Hauk: It's still a pretty high institution.

DeLoe: It's pretty competitive.

Hauk: How did your parents react when you found out that you were accepted to this school?

DeLoe: I think my dad would have rather had me going to UConn for financial reasons. But UConn just overwhelmed me at that time. It had probably twenty thousand students—it has probably sixty thousand now. But even twenty thousand, then, to me was just overwhelming.

Hauk: So, you wanted a smaller school?

DeLoe: I wanted a smaller school, for sure. I felt comfortable here.

Hauk: And when you found out you got accepted here?

DeLoe: I was happy. I didn't find out until fairly late, because I'm sure there were better students who got accepted before me, but I was very happy.

Hauk: Very good. So, when you were a freshman here, did you know what you wanted to major in?

DeLoe: No.

Hauk: Not yet?

DeLoe: I had no idea. I really had no idea. And I did not think about it too much. I was just sort of going along. I don't know whether they do this now, nut they had a lot of requirements. Your whole curriculum was just requirements.

Hauk: There were a lot of "Gen Eds"?

DeLoe: Yeah, is that what you call them now?

Hauk: Yeah.

DeLoe: OK.

Hauk: The rule today is that you take four classes. If you take a fifth class, you have to sign a petition so that you can take it. Was it the same back then?

DeLoe: What was the reason for that?

Hauk: Well the course load for each class is very heavy. So, that's why they try and limit it.

DeLoe: We did fifteen hours, which would have been five three-hour courses. It might have been sixteen, because I took biology and that was a four-hour [class].

Hauk: What did you end up majoring in?

DeLoe: I ended up majoring in Political Science.

Hauk: Political science.

DeLoe: Yeah. When I got to Political Science—finally, getting rid of all the requirements—in my junior year, it seemed like things just clicked pretty well then. I was pretty interested in government and international affairs. Things just fell in place then, because I was interested in the things I was doing. You could pick your professors a lot easier then, too. So, you could pick the ones that you liked. You weren't just slung into something. For me, it became a lot easier after that. The first two years, I found [to be pretty tough]. What year are you?

Hauk: I'm a sophomore. I'm still figuring out what I want to do, but in the meantime, I want to talk about you. So, your fraternity life. Did you rush a fraternity freshman year?

DeLoe: [Nods]

Hauk: OK. The rule today is you can only rush as a sophomore.

DeLoe: Immediately when you got on campus—your first semester. The first week, I think, was rush week.

Hauk: Yeah.

DeLoe: And then you joined a fraternity. The smart thing for me would have been to wait a semester and then worry about doing a fraternity. The fraternity was the thing that killed me. It was just too many guys with too many diversions that first semester.

Hauk: Understandable. But you enjoyed it nonetheless?

DeLoe: I really did. I have to say that my four years here at Gettysburg were extremely happy years. I met my wife here, too.

Hauk: When? Freshman year, sophomore year—?

DeLoe: Junior year.

Hauk: What was she majoring in?

DeLoe: Well, she was a townie.

Hauk: Oh, interesting.

DeLoe: She was a townie. Next year, we will have been married fifty years.

Hauk: Well, congratulations.

DeLoe: Thank you.

Hauk: So how did you meet then?

DeLoe: Well, it was a blind date. I had a friend. One of these big weekends was coming up and she said, "Do you have a date?" I had just broken up with somebody. I said, "No, I'm taking a break." She said, "Well, you know, I have somebody—a friend of mine who would like to go out. Maybe you could just take her out." So, we got together and that was history.

Hauk: So, you were together ever since you met her or were there moments where you had to take a break?

DeLoe: The only real break we have had was the year I was in Vietnam. The rest of the time, we have been together for better or for worse.

Hauk: To keep going with the Gettysburg track—What were you involved with on campus apart from fraternity life?

DeLoe: I did a lot of stuff in the fraternity and I regret that I did not do more for the school while I was here, to tell you the truth. I got focused on that fraternity and so I had various offices as I

went along throughout my time here. That included playing on the sports teams, being officers in the fraternity, and that kind of thing. My actual interaction with this school was not as great as it could have been. I imagine now that it is a lot more "school-centric" than it was "fraternity-centric." I get that feeling anyway.

Hauk: Right. We have a lot of clubs and engagements that you can get involved with.

DeLoe: Right. I think you guys do a lot more of that.

Hauk: Compared to today, how was fraternity life back then? I heard at the time there were house mothers?

DeLoe: Yeah. There were house mothers. We had a house mother and, to tell you the truth in retrospect, [it is] good we did. I came back to the house one alumni weekend and this was the last time I entered the house which may have been mid-eighties. I don't remember the exact year. I walked in and the smell was overwhelming and the place was just an absolute wreck. It was the beginning of no house mothers. And I thought, you know, this is probably what happens when you don't have a house mother. So, I never went back.

Hauk: I'm just thinking about how to iterate the next question. The 60's, again, was very tumultuous. Was there a lot of activism going on around campus? What was the student body like at the time?

DeLoe: You know you'd be surprised. This was a very conservative campus at the time. Even though the 1960's were pretty tumultuous because of the Vietnam war and other things, Gettysburg was a pretty conservative campus. We did not have a lot of protests against the war. Most of the people were pro-war. Remember, I came in 1964. The turning point was around 1968 when the majority of the population started really questioning the war.

Hauk: And JFK was assassinated at the beginning of the—

DeLoe: 1963.

Hauk: Right. So, what was that like for you? You weren't at Gettysburg yet. You were a senior in high school at the time?

DeLoe: I was a junior in high school. Everybody, as you probably know, —it's sort of like 9/11 for you guys—everybody remembers where they were. Of course, I remember where I was when JFK was assassinated. I was in Dr. Buzzio's algebra class when the announcement came over the monitor that JFK had been killed. I never forget the algebra teacher, Buzzio's—and I still remember his name—response. His initial response was, "Oh my gosh. What's this going to mean for the stock market?" I was so angry at him for saying that. I thought, "is this what you're thinking about when our president just got killed? You're worried about the stock market?" So, anyway, that's what I remember.

Hauk: And then this was also in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. Was there a lot of activism about that at Gettysburg or during high school?

DeLoe: We only had probably two African American students on campus. One incident I remember distinctly which, I guess in retrospect, the school would probably be very embarrassed about today. During those fraternity weekends—those big weekends. Often times you would have a long-time girlfriend or whatever. Maybe you'd stay in some motel. OK? Well, one of the African American students that we had on campus had a white girlfriend. [They] stayed in a motel, the motel was raided. There must have been a hundred students that could have raided that weekend for the same thing. They kicked him out of school.

Hauk: Oh, my goodness.

DeLoe: It's not a good memory.

Hauk: What did you think about that at the time?

DeLoe: We all thought it was just blatant discrimination against a minority student. But Gettysburg at the time—I don't think they had a lot of experience with minority students. At that time, most of the students came from Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, maybe Maryland. Mostly, they were pretty rich, affluent, young people. It wasn't in their experience to know exactly what to do with African American students. I think they are much better today dealing with a much more diverse student body.

Hauk: I guess I can ask an even broader statement. What was your best memory of Gettysburg?

DeLoe: Oh, jeez. I think a very good memory has been meeting my wife here and the two years that we spent together, getting to know each other. That's a really good memory. I think both of us feel that way. We often times reminisce about our time here.

Hauk: So, she was a local around here—

DeLoe: Yeah.

Hauk: But she was not attending the college?

DeLoe: She was not attending the college.

Hauk: Was she attending another school or did she attend—

DeLoe: No, at the time, she graduated from high school. She was an army brat. Her parents were in England. Her father was stationed in England at the time. I think she wanted to come back to the States. So, she came back here and stayed with her grandmother. She was just working around town and so, that's how we got to know each other.

Hauk: And did you ever visit England to meet her parents or—?

DeLoe: No, I hadn't met her parents until we married.

Hauk: Oh, interesting! So, when did you guys get married?

DeLoe: We got married on March 8th, 1969.

Hauk: 1969.

DeLoe: I graduated in ’68 and then was married in ’69. So, maybe nine months later.

Hauk: And what were you doing after college? Were you into a job already?

DeLoe: Well, you remember the Vietnam War is going on.

Hauk: Yes.

DeLoe: OK. So, I became a senior and, at that time, they were drafting—drafting people. The lottery had not started, the all-volunteer force had not started. So, the way they were getting troops and soldiers was through the draft. In April of 1968—two months before I graduated—I got a notice from my draft board to get a physical up at New Cumberland Army Depot, which is right outside of Harrisburg. I went up there one day and passed my physical. So, I was eligible then for the draft. I graduated in June and then I got my notice in July that they wanted to induct me into the service. I contacted the draft board and I said, “Look, I got a job as a counselor up in a summer camp in the Adirondacks. I would like to spend a summer up there. I’ll go in in September.” They said, “OK.” So, I spent the summer in the Adirondacks in New York and then I went into the service in September of 1968. I didn’t really have time to get what you’d call a professional job or anything, but I had a great time up in the Adirondacks that summer.

Hauk: And was your girlfriend at the time—

DeLoe: Actually, she was going back and forth to England. I think, at the time, she was back with her parents for a while in England.

Hauk: So, how was summer up in the Adirondacks?

DeLoe: It was a summer camp for high school girls. So, I don’t need to tell you what a good summer that was. I was a lifeguard up there, I was a tennis instructor, and a counselor. It was a fun time.

Hauk: Of course, you knew you were going to the draft in September. Was that ever looming over you during the summer or did you just put all that to the side?

DeLoe: I didn't really quite know what to expect. I suddenly wasn't looking forward to it. You can fool yourself if you don't know what's going to happen. You can say, "Well it's going to be okay. I'm probably going to get assigned somewhere in the States and blah blah blah. Life will go on." So, I didn't worry too much about it, because I didn't really know what to worry about. You know?

Hauk: Was there a lot of press coverage that you followed?

DeLoe. Yeah. 1968, as you may be aware, was a very bloody year in Vietnam. I think, for a while there, five hundred soldiers were dying a week. And that was the time, also, that the public started to really question, "Should we be in this war? What are we doing there? What's our goal?" So, it was a time when we were coming to a real crescendo in terms of the whole operation of the war.

Hauk: Of course, you weren't looking forward to going. How did you cope with that at the time?

DeLoe: Denial. It was mostly denial. I really don't remember worrying too much about it. There was another counselor there who had been in the Navy and he had gotten out. He kept saying to me, "Look, Tom. Just don't take this too seriously." So, he was sort of sloughing it off. It was an, "Eh, don't worry about it, you'll be alright" kind of thing. I was willing to believe him.

Hauk: Had he just served in the Navy?

DeLoe: Yeah. He had gotten out. It was sort of [a transition] and he became a counselor in the Adirondacks, too.

Hauk: You left in September?

DeLoe: Yeah.

Hauk: And you were [in Vietnam] for a year?

DeLoe: Well, it took a while to get there. When you go into the service, the first thing you go into is something called “Basic Training” and that’s two months. So, my basic training was down at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and that’s where my battalion, which was maybe two-hundred soldiers—soldiers-to-be maybe you’d call it— did our training. I trained down there at Fort Jackson.

Hauk: And how was that? I know, climate-wise, it’s always hot down there.

DeLoe: Carolyn, I was always happy that I gotten that reprieve in the summer because, yeah, it was September, but it would have been horrible in July. So, yeah, it was hot. What they do is, physically and mentally, try to break you down. They break down all your perceptions of civilian life and turn you into a soldier. That’s what they do in terms of “basic training.” It’s hard physically, it’s hard mentally, it’s long days.

Hauk: So, what was the routine like, from the start of your day—which was probably really early—to the end of your day?

DeLoe: Up at 4:30, 5 o’clock maybe a two-mile run, breakfast, then, whatever you’re doing that day—whether it’s out on the rifle range, whether you’re learning how to survive in a jungle environments. Maybe learning some infantry tactics. Maybe out learning how to throw a grenade. Could be a variety of things. Lunch-time. Same thing, back in the afternoon. More training along the lines of whatever thing you’re doing that day. Then, maybe dinner. Then you clean up the barracks for some sort of inspection later that night. Then probably in bed around 9, 9:30, 10.

Hauk: And what was the camaraderie like at the time? Was there a lot of fraternization?

DeLoe: You know the drafts scooped up a lot of different people. I remember that battalion as just a hodge-podge of different kinds of people. You had people that were college graduates like me right down to gang members who had been drafted out of inner-city Detroit, that were ending up in the army, and everything in between. Farm boys, guys from the "hollers" of West Virginia. So, it was a whole bunch of different people, all thrown together. The way I remember, most of my compatriots were, for some reason, from either the Connecticut—where I was inducted—or the Pittsburgh area. A lot of those Pittsburgh guys had been up against a judge in court and they had said, "Either go to jail or go in the service." And they picked the service.

Hauk: Interesting.

DeLoe: So, you can imagine what some of these guys were like.

Hauk: Yeah. Was there anyone you knew who was training with you? From home, from Gettysburg?

DeLoe: No. Nobody that I had known previously. No.

Hauk: Did you bond with a lot of these guys?

DeLoe: You were only there for two months and then you disperse. While you were there, you bonded pretty well because you were dealing with a pretty harsh environment. But after that, we all went our separate ways. I ended up going to what they call "Advanced Training" in Baltimore. There was a fort there called Fort Holabird. My training there was in Army Intelligence.

Hauk: OK. How long did that last?

DeLoe: Let's see. I went there in November and then left in either late February or early March in 1969.

Hauk: OK.

DeLoe: And then, from there, I got orders to Vietnam.

Hauk: What kind of training was involved?

DeLoe: Oh, there?

Hauk: Yeah.

DeLoe: The training there involved intelligence analysis. In other words, it was the idea of trying to identify enemy troop movements, trying to define [the location of where] of enemies were, what kinds of surveillance you could use to find that kind of thing out. Some of the technologies they had there weren't that great. Now, they're much better. They'd take photography, for instance. You'd learn from the photography to pick out various buildings based on shadow and things like that. It was, for the time, fairly sophisticated training.

Hauk: And did you have a choice to go into this training or were you assigned that?

DeLoe: I was assigned that.

Hauk: Did you discover you liked intelligence?

DeLoe: I was happy that I was not in infantry training. All things being equal, I was pretty happy to be assigned to [Advanced Training].

Hauk: Remind me again what month you left for Vietnam.

DeLoe: OK, so, I finished up there in February. I had fifty people that were in my class at Fort Holabird in Baltimore. I would say forty-five of us were assigned to Vietnam and I was one of them. The other five were assigned to either Germany, Korea, places like that. I think maybe one guy got a state-side assignment. The rest of us were assigned to go to Vietnam the next month. So, I left for Vietnam in March of 1969.

Hauk: And you said you married your wife that April?

DeLoe: Well, I married her just before I went to Vietnam. So, in March, I married her.

Hauk: What was her reaction?

DeLoe: I guess, by then, we sort of knew that I was [going] to Vietnam. It was sort of anti-climactic when I got the orders; when we decided we'd get married before I left. I'm not sure in retrospect, that was the greatest idea.

Hauk: Would you have done that after you came back?

DeLoe: Yeah. Now that I've thought about it, I probably should've done it afterwards.

Hauk: Why would you want to do that versus before you left?

DeLoe: Well, a couple reasons. One is, as an example, just this last weekend we had the Vietnam memorial thing here at Gettysburg. Sue Hill, who is a friend of mine, graduated from Gettysburg. Her husband went over to Vietnam and was killed. So, as I think about it, Carol—my wife—could have been a widow early in her life.

Hauk: Yeah, that's understandable. What was she doing while you were training?

DeLoe: She was working here in town. She lived over here, along Carlisle Street. I think she was waitressing up at the Pub. That's where her job was.

Hauk: At the time, how did you stay in touch with her?

DeLoe: The only way to do it then was letters. There was no e-mail, there was no texting, there was no skyping. There was nothing like that. So, we wrote letters—if not every day, every other day we tried to keep in touch.

Hauk: For some people, that hardly can happen since they're so busy with training and then actually being on the fronts. So, it's nice that you guys stayed in touch during all your training. So, you left in March.

DeLoe: Yeah.

Hauk: Late March?

DeLoe: I think it was mid-March.

Hauk: Mid-March? OK. I guess I'll ask what was your first task there.

DeLoe: Let me just back up and say it kind of takes a while to get to the point of where you're assigned. So, let me just go through a little bit of that. You're going to Vietnam. I left from Baltimore and went to—I think— Fort Ord, Washington State. I flew into there. And there, they process you in terms of giving you uniforms that are going to be for tropical fighting. They give you a little bit of orientation there in terms of what you're [getting] into. Then we flew from there to Saigon. Actually, it was a place outside of Saigon called Bein Hoa. There, you stayed for a couple days and they figured out where they were going to assign you. So, I was assigned to the Southern port, fortunately, of Vietnam—a place called Mekong Delta. So, I went down there and I met up with my unit.[1]

Hauk: And you were doing intelligence while you were down there?

DeLoe: You see, in the service, you may have some sort of specialty. In my case, I was an intelligence analyst. But then they have the needs of the service in a warzone and the two of those may be very different. I did nine months in Vietnam before I did anything even approaching intelligence work. What I became was a radio and telephone operator. I was assigned to a unit that was a psychological operations unit and we went out with Vietnamese troops. The idea was that we would engage the enemy and then we would broadcast to the enemy to give up. So, in the middle of a firefight, if you can even imagine this, we would be broadcasting to the enemy to drop your weapons and give up.

Hauk: Huh.

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[1] DeLoe served in the 5th Psychological Operations Battalion in the US Army Vietnam (USARV) under Lieutenant Charles Carnevale.

DeLoe: Yeah. Crazy. Absolutely crazy. So, I met up with this Lieutenant who ended up [becoming] my superior. He was briefing me on what we were doing and he said, "You'll be my radio/telephone operator." [This] basically meant, "Could you carry a thirty-pound radio on your back?" That's your communications back to headquarters. So, if you engage the enemy in a firefight and things are really bad, then you could call the air support. You've got to be able to read a map and you have to be able to read it when you're under very stressful conditions—like when you're being shot at. The other thing he said was, "the way we conduct operations is: we will go from here to here to here." And I remember saying to him, "Well, Lieutenant, doing that is very predictable. The enemy is going to realize that and they're going to ambush us." He said, "Yeah, that's what we want. We want to be able to broadcast it." I thought, "Oh my God, I'm really in a bad way here."

Hauk: Did they ambush?

DeLoe: I was in several fire fights, yes.

Hauk: What was that like?

DeLoe: Harrowing, frightening. [There was a] great feeling of helplessness, but you couldn't be helpless because you needed to be on that radio. You needed to concentrate on trying to do your job. So, it never got easier. It was always difficult, but I guess it could have been a lot worse. We were assigned to a Vietnamese infantry unit and, generally, the Vietnamese didn't like contact with the enemy. American forces were much more gung-ho in terms of getting contact with the enemy—much more so than the Vietnamese. It could have been worse, but it was bad enough.

Hauk: Do you think being in contact with the enemy was crucial? Did that help with determining where the next move was or, like the Vietnamese thought, would it be better to just not have any contact with them at all?

DeLoe: Well, I could give you more of my thoughts on some of this. By now, I had read about it enough, and thought about it enough, and talked to enough people who had been to Vietnam, that I had come to the conclusion that this war was something we shouldn't [have been] involved in at all. So, I'm over there, but my heart and soul are not in this thing. I'm just trying to get out of there alive. You're going the motions, you're trying to do the best you can to stay alive, but I had no [illusions] that this action that I'm doing is helping anybody. When you go into a small country like Vietnam and you overwhelm it with our military force—it's sophisticated, it's large, and [enormous]—you're bound to be thought of as an invading army. One of the things we were trying to do in this psychological operations unit was change the hearts and minds of these people. But their hearts and minds weren't going to be changed by what they considered an invading army. Our job was sort of stupid, in a lot ways.

Hauk: Is that what you think NOW or has that changed [over time]?

DeLoe: I thought that then and I think [it] now. My thought hasn't changed during that. We weren't going to change any minds. We tried to get the enemy to give up and come over to our side, but we did very little of that, we accomplished very little.

Hauk: I was going to ask if intercepting their radios and their telephone calls and telling them to drop their arms and weapons was persuasive enough to get them to do that.

DeLoe: Well, listen to some craziness as I went along. And it even gets crazier. So, I was out in the field—what they called the field—for nine months and that really was hard living— very hard living. We were out on operations. When we were back at base camp, we lived in a tent. The Mekong Delta is just—I don't know what to say to you. It's hot. It's heat like you've never felt before. There's the Mekong River there; that's where you'd bathe. It was filthy. It was leech-infested. It was snake-infested. It was jungles. It was just horrible. So, that's how I lived for nine

months. I had dysentery the whole time because the food that we ate was just not clean, not what Americans are used to. The water was dirty. It was just an awful existence. But, finally, I was able to get out of the field and into a desk-job. They needed somebody to do intelligence work and I had that background. A colonel had asked to get me out of the field to a do a job in which you would take intelligence reports—[with]a map [behind you] —and the intelligence reports would say where the enemy was located and you'd plot that up on the map. At the end of the week, you'd send your plots to Saigon and they would load up planes with leaflets saying, 'Why don't you come over to our side?" And they would drop these leaflets in the plots that you had given—in terms of where the enemy was. It made some sense until you figured out these people couldn't read.

Hauk: They were all in English?

DeLoe: No, they were in Vietnamese. But they couldn't read Vietnamese, either. These are the kinds of jobs that you'd have. What a joke. But you went through the motions.

Hauk: You try to do what you can.

DeLoe: Yeah. You have to do what you can.

Hauk: So, how long were you working in intelligence?

DeLoe: That was my last three months of my year-tour. I worked gaining those intelligence reports, plotting the stuff on the map, and then shipping those targets to Saigon…

Hauk: Altogether, you were there for [nine months or twelve]?

DeLoe: It was nine months in the field, assigned to that Vietnamese infantry unit. There was my lieutenant, myself, and two other guys. We were the four Americans assigned to this Vietnamese infantry unit. I did that for nine months and then for three months, I was in that office job in a

town called Can Tho, which was also in the Mekong Delta, but it was the largest city down there. There, I had a bed, I had three good meals a day, and I finally got rid of dysentery.

Hauk: Were you close with the other guys and the Lieutenant?

DeLoe: We, as the four [American] guys in the field, were very close. I'd love to find those guys today. I did find the Lieutenant last year. He lives in Tampa, Florida now. So, we had a lunch together and reminisced a little bit. He remembered some things that I didn't remember. One of the things he remembered, which I had forgotten, was the closest we ever came to [getting killed] or captured. We were in a small village one night. We were asleep at two o'clock in the morning when a VC battalion came through the village. I slept through it. That's why I had forgotten it. But [the Lieutenant] was up, watching those guys go through the village and just hoping that nobody fired a weapon or made a noise.

Hauk: There was no firing?

DeLoe: No. We were lucky. We were very lucky. There were close calls like that and in firefights, too. I was very lucky I [was never] injured. Actually, my Lieutenant wasn't and the other two guys that I served with. All four of us came back.

Hauk: Were there any struggles with communicating with the Vietnamese infantry that you were working with because of a language barrier? Were some of them proficient in English? Were some of your guys proficient in Vietnamese?

DeLoe: There was always the language barrier. We had interpreters. There were cultural differences, too…We were there for a year and they were in this war for the long-haul. So, my Lieutenant—who was a gung-ho kind of guy—wanted to engage the enemy and he wanted to do all this stuff. And the Vietnamese were kind of reluctant. As you can understand, because they weren't there for a year. They were there for the long-haul. They weren't anxious to get involved

in all these firefights. They were, in my mind, a lot smarter than we were. They realized this war wasn't very winnable. They realized that their government wasn't very good. So, they didn't have a lot of the regular Vietnamese soldiers. I don't think they had a lot of hatred for this Communist insurgency. So, they approached this thing in a different way than we did. I understood their point of view more than my Lieutenant did. But he had a constant butting of heads with his counterparts.

Hauk: I understand. If you can't rally behind an idea and if you're fighting for a long time, then surely, it's hard to have a strong drive at the point of the war. So, how could you tell that they were weary?

DeLoe: It was interesting with them. They'd go through the motions. They'd say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah…." I can't prove this, but I think that they probably knew that maybe the enemy was over here [gestures in one spot], so we'll go over here [gestures in a different spot]. Since there was such a language barrier and such a cultural barrier, we may have not known that they knew that kind of thing. There were times it just screwed up and [those were] the times when we ended up in some firefights. The communication may not have been as good. They may have run into units they didn't realize were out there. I do think, in retrospect, that kind of dichotomy existed.

Hauk: Do you think—and this could apply to any Vietnamese infantry regiments—that they were grateful that the Americans were getting involved or indifferent?

DeLoe: You know, you had two kinds of perspectives. You had the upper echelon of Vietnamese society in the side we were fighting on. They may have had a lot of vested interest in keeping that government going. There was a lot of corruption. They may have held high positions in that particular army and in that particular society. If the Communists took over, their situation could go from good to very bad quickly. They themselves had a vested interest in keeping Americans

there as long as they could. But you get down to the average Vietnamese soldier, or even the guy working in his rice paddies somewhere just trying to feed his family. I think, that's what he was worried about and that's what the soldier was worried about: trying to stay alive, trying to keep their family alive, and who ran things in Saigon. That really was why we could never win that war. It was because the people down there had been at war for centuries. They had watched all sorts of people come and go. So, they thought the Americans were going to come and go and there was no reason particularly to hook up with them

Hauk: Do you know roughly how many firefights there were while you were in the field?

DeLoe: I would say we got into a couple a month. Some of them were worse than others. Sometimes it was just a sniper. You'd be walking along and all of a sudden one guy from maybe two hundred yards away would fire at you. The [North] Vietnamese soldiers were not great riflemen. A lot of them needed glasses and they didn't have them. So, thank goodness. Lots of times their sight wasn't so great. Sometimes, we'd laugh. There was a sniper that we knew. We never caught him, but he was always in the same place every time we went by and he never hit a thing. That might be one of the firefights you're in. Which is sort of a nothing burger. There was one where we were ambushed at night and that one was deadly.

Hauk: Was there a lot of casualties within the Vietnamese infantry you were with?

DeLoe: Yeah. You had firefights, but, remember also, you're walking as an infantry unit. There were a lot of mines and a lot of booby traps. Often times, what would happen was the guy who was walking point—which was the first guy in a line of soldiers—might step on a mine and blow himself up. Well, you're not in a firefight but you just lost maybe two or three people to a mine or a booby trap.

Hauk: Did you ever come across a mine that you knew was there and [avoided it]?

DeLoe: They gave you training on identifying those things. Remember, I told you it was so hot there. I'm walking with a thirty-pound radio, a fifteen-pound rifle, maybe some other stuff that I got—some grenades, water, food. So, here I am; I was 135 pounds at the time. With this dysentery, I couldn't keep food down. I'm already an emaciated guy and I'm carrying all this weight in humidity and a jungle and it's 90-some degrees. Maybe for the first mile, you're looking for things. Believe me, Carolyn, there were days where I would have been happy to be in a firefight just so I could lie down. I am serious. I was so tired and just felt like I couldn't go on. And I thought, "Why don't they start a firefight? Why don't these guys just start firing at people, so we could lie down?"

Hauk: How many miles a day were you marching on average?

DeLoe: Usually, we'd go out for a day and we'd be doing operation where it would be five miles. Five miles doesn't sound too bad, but it would be five miles where you'd have maybe a colonel up in a helicopter saying, "Well, go over here, go over there." And the path might be here, and if you just go the five miles, it'd be okay. But there was jungle on both sides and these jungles would be very thick with vines. "Well, go on over here and check out this!" You felt like saying, "Goddammit, you get off the helicopter and you get down here!" And, of course, you couldn't say that. The five miles might not sound [like] so much as an average, but when you're carrying all this stuff and you're cutting down brush, it's awful.

Hauk: And obviously, the climate could not have helped.

DeLoe: Well, you know how it can be here in the summer?

Hauk: There, it's much worse.

DeLoe: It's much worse there.

Hauk: Since you were there for nine months, were there any seasonal changes? What is "winter" like for Vietnam?

DeLoe: There is no winter, obviously. The only difference is they have a rainy season and a dry season. I never found much difference between the two. [In] the rainy season, you'd get these fifteen-minute torrential rains and then, fifteen minutes later, the rain has stopped and it was bone-dry again. The main thing you had to be worried about was your feet being wet. You know, you get trench foot and when you went through these canals [and] this Mekong River and its tributaries there were all these leeches that would grab onto you. When you got out, you had to pick off these leeches. If you pull them off, the claws would stay in there. I smoked Marlboros at the time and you put the lit end of the cigarette on the leech and then it would fall off…

Hauk: With all that downpour, did you every worry about equipment getting wet?

DeLoe: The radio was pretty resilient. It didn't need to necessarily be dry. The main thing you had to worry about was needing to clean your rifle constantly. You didn't want that thing to rust. So, you always had to put rain gear over it to make sure the barrel of the rifle didn't get water on it. Same way when you're in those canals. You had to keep your weapon dry.

Hauk: Right. So, you hold it up.

DeLoe: Hold it up!

Hauk: So, you had a gun with you at all times?

DeLoe: Oh yeah.

Hauk: Did you ever have to use it?

DeLoe: M16. Oh yeah. Sure. Sure. Now, I don't think I ever hit anything. You just fired randomly because you hardly ever saw the enemy. You'd get in these firefights and you wouldn't know where these things were coming from necessarily. You'd hear shots and you'd

have a general idea. Forget this broadcasting stuff. We hardly ever got around to that because it seemed so useless and ridiculous. My job, I always felt when those things started, was to be next to the lieutenant with the radio, with the map, so that we could figure out where-the-heck we were so that, if we couldn't get out of this situation, then we could either get a helicopter in to helicopter us out or we could get some sort of fighter jet in to strafe where they thought the enemy was. We needed to give them the coordinates.

Hauk: Has a case ever gotten that extreme where you had to be helicoptered out of there?

DeLoe: No. We never got in a firefight where we couldn't get out. We did have fighter jets come over a couple times and fire into some areas where we thought the enemy was. Now, we retreated a lot. In other words, you'd get in these firefights and we'd just knock off. Just leave. I was always happy when we did that.

Hauk: Well, sure. I can understand why. Did that happen often?

DeLoe: I said we'd be in some sort of contact once or twice a month. That could include somebody getting blown up by a mine, maybe that crazy sniper that I was talking about. The other end of the continuum was a coordinated attack where you really did have some hardened troops that knew what they were doing. There weren't any front lines, so you could be attacked essentially anywhere. Obviously, in the rural areas and the fields, it was much more likely than when I was in Can Tho and home base. The only time in Can Tho I had a problem—in those three months, my last three months, where I was in that office job, I would go to a—I guess you'd call it a coffeehouse—every night after dinner. And I'd go because of a couple kids there that I had gotten to know and I'd play with the kids, have some coffee there, and just kind of wrap up the day. I did that every evening around six o'clock at night. I'd run every night for a good while. One of the rules is that you never are predictable like that. For some reason, one

night, I had something else to do and I didn't go. The coffee shop was blown up; it was blown to bits. The reason I heard later was that they wanted to blow me up but also the owners of the coffee shop were not paying their taxes to the Communists. This was retribution and those two kids were killed, too, which was really too bad. So, their parents were killed and the kids. What happened was a motorcycle went by, threw a couple grenades in and, yeah.

Hauk: Did you see a lot of other civilian casualties like that?

DeLoe: Lots of civilian casualties. Lots. You know, lots of times it was what they called "collateral damage." They're going after the enemy, but civilians were in the way. The weapons weren't as precision-guided as they are today. There were lots of what they'd call collateral damage in that war. I think they estimate that maybe a million Vietnamese were killed in that war.

Hauk: Wow. How must that have been to be targeted by the enemy [often]? How was that?

DeLoe: In the Mekong Delta, where I was, there weren't many Americans. There was one American infantry unit, but I wasn't assigned to it and it was North of us. The few Americans that were South of that infantry unit—there just weren't many. One thing that they did say in the Mekong Delta was that immediately when you were down there and if you were American, you had a bounty on your head. In other words, any Communist soldier that killed an American was honored. There weren't any Americans, so, you couldn't blend into a cast of thousands. There were only a few of us there. Most of us were Advisors to the Vietnamese units. So, for instance, my first Lieutenant that I had come up with this scheme to find and kill the enemy where a plane would go over and broadcast. There would be this plane in back of it that would not have any lights on it. You'd do this all at night. The plane would be broadcasting here. Shots would come up and you'd see the shots because they'd be tracers. The plane in back had this huge, high

velocity machine gun that shot thousands of rounds a minute. This plane in the back would swoop down and just decimate an area. The Communists found out that my Lieutenant had come up with this scheme and it was immediately a huge bounty on his head. When [American forces] heard that through the grapevine, they got him out of the field and I got a new Lieutenant.

Hauk: And what happened to the first Lieutenant? Was he reassigned?

DeLoe: He was reassigned. I think he went to Saigon. Then he didn't have too many months left until he was able to go back to the States. He got out of the field that way, because, if he stayed much longer, he probably would have been killed pretty soon. They really wanted him.

Hauk: Wow.

DeLoe: Yeah, wow. You know how bucolic this campus is and how nice it is. All of this was a huge shock to me. I could have been, in June of 1968, on a nice campus like this, walking around on green grass and nine months later, been plopped in this God-awful place. It was just a shock––terrible shock.

Hauk: I can't even imagine.

DeLoe: Luckily—hopefully, knock on wood, you'll never experience [it].

Hauk: After you finished up your [time] in Vietnam, you came back to the States. Did you come back to Pennsylvania?

DeLoe: Well, I had a year left in the service. When I came back, my wife and I moved to Fort Bragg, North Carolina where I was going to finish up my service. I worked at Fort Bragg which is in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Hauk: What did you do there?

Deloe: What did I do there? We had a unit that monitored the Mid-East. So, we'd get in intelligence reports from operators like CA analysts and State Department analysts. We'd take

that data and we coded it in a way of putting it in a computer and [retrieving] it when people asked for certain things about the Mid-East. For instance, they might want to know all about the Palestine Liberation Organization. Well, we'd coded things in a certain way and put it in a computer so they could retrieve everything that we had on the PLO. That's what I did for my last year in the service. It was kind of crazy because everybody was back from Vietnam. Everybody hated the Army and wanted to get out, but we were stuck with anywhere from a few months to a year 'til they could get out. They were angry that they fought in the war. They were angry that they were still in the service. It was sort of a frustrating time for all of us.

Hauk: And, your wife. While you were in the field in Vietnam, were you corresponding with her then with letters?

DeLoe: Yeah. To the extent I could. If I was out in the field, you couldn't write a letter. But when I got back to the base camp, I wrote a letter. She wrote more than I did. She was very good about writing at least three or four times a week.

Hauk: That must have been nice—

DeLoe: That was nice.

Hauk: To have a connection back with the States—

DeLoe: Oh, it was great. That was so nice to be able to read something that was just mundane and commonplace. There was a world out there that was so different than the world I was in. It kept me sane.

Hauk: Was there any restriction on what you could say, what you could put down on paper?

DeLoe: I don't think so. I don't think anybody monitored my correspondence, but I don't know. I guess they could have, but nothing that I know of.

Hauk: How was getting acclimated to the States after Vietnam?

DeLoe: Well, I was at Fort Bragg. That was a frustrating time. There was a North Carolina State University extension on base there. I thought, "You know, I'll take a graduate course with the idea that I'd go to graduate school after this." My grades weren't the highest in Gettysburg, but I thought if I do a few graduate courses and get some decent grades, that will help me out getting in to graduate school. So, that's what I did for that last year. I took a couple courses, which was helpful. My wife was also very helpful in terms of helping me re-acclimate to civilian life. But I was pretty angry—pretty angry about the whole situation. The draft was a very unfair system. Generally, rich people got out of it and middle and lower-class people got caught up in it. Only a few served and lots of people got out of it and you saw those lots of people every day when you were back. All of that created a tension in you.

Hauk: Sure. So, did the classes help?

DeLoe: Classes helped a lot because it got your mind off of military service and back into whatever course you were taking at the time. Also, it was a great equalizer. People on base would go in there to take a course, but you could be sitting next to a general. All of a sudden, you don't have to call him sir. You're just both students, which was kind of nice. The Army is a very hierarchical organization and you got so sick and tired of calling people you didn't respect "Sir." Going into a course diverted your mind. After I got out of Fort Bragg, I did go to North Carolina State University. I got a Master's Degree and that was very helpful because I could get back on a campus, I'd get back on my own schedule of what I wanted to study and what I didn't. I didn't have a boss, which helped. I sort of took it real slow in terms of trying to re-acclimate to civilian life again.

Hauk: Sure. And what was your Master's in?

DeLoe: I got a Master's in Public Administration and my first job was with North Carolina State Government and I worked there for about three and a half, four years in Raleigh, North Carolina. That was good experience. We settled down into married life and I acclimated back into civilian life. Some of the people I worked with were veterans, too, so, we were able to touch base with each other. It was not a popular war and the soldiers were not popular, either. Soldiers were considered a big part of the problem and radical people would have said we were baby-killers. So, you tried to kind of slip back into civilian life and not advertise at all that you were a veteran. Just try to leave that part of your life behind. It was just easier. It was better to just do it that way.

Hauk: Did you find that a lot of veterans felt the same way you did?

DeLoe: Yeah. I think a lot of us were pretty bitter about the whole experience. Some more so than others and some had a lot more trouble acclimating to civilian society. I was lucky I had a lot of support. First of all, I had a college education, which really helped. I was lucky enough to get a decent job after graduate school. I had a wife. I also had my father and mother still alive. So, all of those things, I think, helped me a lot. I had a lot of places that I could communicate back into society with a lot of people that would support me. Lots of people didn't have that. They came back to very little and no support, in terms of civilian society or the Veterans Administration.

Hauk: Did some of the people you knew or your friends from Gettysburg end up going to Vietnam?

DeLoe: Yeah. Several of my brothers in my fraternity ended up serving in Vietnam. In fact, this last weekend, several of them came back to campus here to dedicate the memorial out there. There's a bond there that you have, not only with your fraternity brothers, but the bond that you served together in Vietnam. There's soldiers here in town that were in my fraternity and in

Gettysburg. Two of the names on that plaque were people that I knew. One of them was my roommate my sophomore year and one of then was in my class at school. So, I knew him, too.

Hauk: And who were those guys?

DeLoe: One was Dan Whipps. Dan was my roommate my sophomore year. And the other was Steve Warner. If you went over to the library recently, you might have seen Steve's photographs. He was in my class at school. He was a history major. Smart guy. One of the smartest guys in our class. He ended up going to Yale Law School, where he was drafted. [He] went to Vietnam, got a really cushy job at Saigon in the press office, but he was not the kind of guy to sit in an air-conditioned office. So, he went out into the rural areas a lot, visited the infantry troops. With a couple weeks left in his tour, he was over by the Cambodian border and was shot and killed.

Hauk: That's a tragedy.

DeLoe: Yeah.

Hauk: Did you and your wife have kids?

DeLoe: We have a daughter. She's grown now. She lives in Texas, now. She and her husband just moved to Texas, so we're missing her a little bit.

Hauk: Did you ever share your Vietnam experience with her while she was growing up?

DeLoe: You know, not a lot. The problem I have with dealing with Vietnam is I've tried to put a lot of that out of mind, because what I end up with, Carolyn—maybe, fifty years later I'd be OK—I had a lot of nightmares and a lot of psychological issues. For instance, after talking about this, I'll probably have some nightmares.

Hauk: Oh, no. I'm sorry.

DeLoe: That's why I told Mike Birkner I wasn't particularly interested in doing this. But, it's okay. I haven't talked about it in a long time, it may be fine. I remember, when I get together

with my buddies, we usually talk about the funny stuff. For instance, I slept through a motor attack one time.

Hauk: I mean you must have been exhausted. I can understand sleeping through an alarm, but—

DeLoe: Right. So, lots of times the war stories you tell are sort of funny. I don't think my daughter probably knows a lot.

Hauk: She never asked?

DeLoe: Well she might ask, but then I'd go on to some funny sort. I guess there are veterans that are sort of fixated on it and they'll spend hours talking about it. It's just not the way I am. I never was much of a soldier and I never pretended to be. As far as I'm concerned, I'm glad to be back in civilian life and I'm glad to put that in the back of me.

Hauk: Well I'm so glad you came out today. This is very insightful.

DeLoe: Thank you very much.

As General William Tecumseh Sherman famously said, “War is Hell.” Though the Vietnam War was a century and a world away from the American Civil War, these words still ring true, perhaps even more so for this complex conflict that did not garner the same support from citizens as previous wars had done. Vietnam was an exhausting, costly, and drawn-out campaign that ultimately did not end in victory for the U.S. Like most events in history, the Vietnam War experience varied greatly among those involved. My objective was to capture one perspective of the war through a personal interview with a Vietnam veteran, as well as some understanding of the long-term physical and emotional impact of the experience. In doing so, I planned to explore his childhood and time as a student at Gettysburg College, his service and reintegration into society after the war, and reflections on his post-war life. In retrospect, what is the true cost of war?

I had the honor of interviewing Private Tom DeLoe, Psychological Operations Specialist, U.S. Army Retired, for this Oral History project. As I learned during our conversation, DeLoe

had a rather unconventional childhood abroad due to his father's career in Uniroyal, but his time at Gettysburg College proved to be a wonderful, all-American collegiate experience. DeLoe was by all accounts an educated, determined young man with big plans for the future. Unfortunately, those plans were interrupted in the summer of 1968 when he was drafted into the military. His story is unique to the Vietnam narrative since he served in the lesser-known Psychological Operations Battalions, fighting alongside traditional corps, using words instead of weapons in attempts to convince the enemy to surrender. While I was enthralled by DeLoe's story, there were obstacles that made the interview challenging, the foremost being his reluctance to revisit this part of his life at all.

At the start of the interview, DeLoe stated that talking about Vietnam would be difficult and very painful for him. He requested that we limit our time to at most two hours; in fact, he insisted upon it. The value of an oral history lays in the honest and gritty detail of what is conveyed, not an antiseptic anecdote of an event. This takes time and it takes trust. For example, the documentary *Shoah* recounts the Holocaust through personal interviews between director Claude Lanzmann and survivors, bystanders, and perpetrators. In one particular scene, Lanzmann interviewed a survivor of the Treblinka extermination camp Abraham Bomba. As a barber before the Holocaust, Bomba was given the inhumane task of cutting the hair of victims before they were sent into the gas chambers. Lanzmann asked Bomba to cut hair in a local barber shop in the hopes of jogging his memory at Treblinka. At one point in the interview, Bomba stopped his story saying that he is unable to go on. Lanzmann said, "You have to do it. I know it's very hard. I know and I apologize."[2] Lanzmann recognized how Bomba's story would speak to the inhumanities of the Holocaust. Bomba's story would be invaluable in comprehending the

[2] Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film* (Da Capo Press, 1995), 107.

inhumanity of the Holocaust. Bomba's courage and that of others prevent a sugarcoated revisionist history of the Holocaust; however, his story could have easily remained buried inside. The ethical question here is where to draw the line between obtaining priceless, detailed perspective and inflicting further personal trauma? I had outlined objectives for the interview and a list of questions to keep our conversation on track. I had not anticipated resistance to the interview altogether.

As we began to discuss his time in Vietnam, I could immediately sense his discomfort in recalling certain memories and his growing emotional distress. Every word was scrutinized and edited before being spoken. He was clearly more comfortable sticking to facts. I recalled my grandfather's experience as a Purple Heart veteran of World War II, how for years he did not speak about the war but gradually, over time, he shared stories of the people with whom he had served. At some point remembering had become more important than forgetting, though some memories will always remain his alone. As our discussion progressed, DeLoe began to respond to questions in greater detail. I sensed that he had resolved to share some of his experience and wanted me to get things right. I proceeded with caution.

While I maintained control over the direction of the interview, the process was different from any of my prior experience. It took some time to establish a flow and some semblance of rapport. Concerned about time constraints, I missed a few opportunities for follow up questions and later had to backtrack. I eventually learned to alter the pace and revise my questioning on the fly, especially when DeLoe gave more detailed, more candid responses. Then it became an exercise in listening to my subject, observing facial expressions and changes in stature, tone and tempo; guarding him and earning his trust. I discovered the usefulness of a silent pause in eliciting further response or providing a respite from bad memories. Like the interview between

Lanzmann and Bomba, my interview with DeLoe had turned into a question of ethics. Is the value of some types of oral history worth the painful cost of obtaining it? It is an easier point to argue outside of an interview, to be sure.

As I became more comfortable with my questioning, I began to understand that oral histories require a careful balance of structure to keep the interview on track and flexibility to allow the subject to revisit a time and place, reflecting on all aspects of the experience – the good, the bad, and the ugly. They require patience, collaboration, and most of all, trust.

Bibliography:

Lanzmann, Claude. *Shoah: The Complete Text of the Acclaimed Holocaust Film*. Da Capo Press, 1995.