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SE: So basically, just kind of starting off, what area were you around?

LS: Mainly all areas because I flew a helicopter most of the time.

SE: Ok. You were in the…?

LS: I joined the Navy, but I served with the Marine Corps.

SE: I don't know why I'm writing this down. [Laughs] Where did you go to basic training at?

LS: San Diego, California. NTC[1], navy boot camp, and then Camp Pendleton for FMF[2] Marine Corps training.

SE: You weren't in the reserves, were you?

LS: No.

SE: No, ok. I didn't think so. What was your basic training like?

LS: Navy basic training was easy because it's the Navy – it's all schools. We didn't do any marching or anything like that.

SE: What about the Marines?

LS: Marines is a whole new story. We marched every day, we run every day, we learned to shoot, kill, a little of everything.

SE: Did you get drafted, or did you choose?

LS: I chose to go in the Navy but I had my draft notice in my pocket. They were going to draft me.

SE: Were you married before you went?

[1] Military acronym for Naval Training Center.
[2] Military acronym for Fleet Marine Forces.

LS: No, no.

SE: Weren't engaged, nothing?

LS: No. [Laughs] Sort of.

SE: Were you the only one in your family that went to the service?

LS: No, all my brothers went off.

SE: So did you guys all go over to Vietnam?

LS: Two to Vietnam, one not.

SE: And that was younger or older?

LS: Younger.

SE: Did it run in your blood - like your father and your grandfather, were they also in the service?

LS: Yes, both my grandpas, my dad, all my uncles, three of my aunts…

SE: Wow!

LS: Everybody in our family is military [laughs].

SE: What year did you go to Vietnam?

LS: 1967 and part of '68, and then again in '69 – '70, then again '71-'72, and then '74.

SE: Oh my goodness!

LS: Three and a half tours.

SE: So were all of your tours with the Marines, or was it split?

LS: One Navy, three Marines.

SE: What part of Vietnam? Because with the Navy, you're in the ocean, right?

LS: Yes. Most of the time I flew off carriers but I was also stationed in Da Nang[3], Saigon[4]… Bien Hoa[5]. Wherever there's a helicopter base, we just landed and take off again.

SE: And then Marines, were you more in the jungle area?

LS: No, most of the time I was in the air. I evacuated the wounded and went and got downed pilots…

SE: So basically, that was your mission, was to just get –

LS: Yeah, I was a hospital corpsman. Does that help?

SE: You were a hospital what?

LS: Corpsman.

SE: Ok, so you saw a lot of things…Did you have any of your buddies originally in your unit? Like you guys joined together? Like you and your friends, did you guys join together?

LS: Two of us went in together, yes.

SE: Did you guys grow up together, then?

LS: Yes.

SE: What are some of your stories that you're willing to talk about?

LS: Not a lot that I don't talk about, but…I guess most stuff we did, you know, pilots would be down and hurt, and we'd go pick them up sometime and have to do surgery on them there in the field. I was shot down twice. We always lost at least 30% of our people –

SE: Oh, wow.

LS: Most times when we were out. Mostly what I did, just patch them up the best you could and if we could, get them to a hospital.

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[3] Da Nang was the second-largest city in South Vietnam with a 1967 population of 143,910, and it was the headquarters of the South Vietnamese Army (Army of the Republic of Vietnam). It also contained a major US military base and port during the Vietnam War (Campbell).
[4] Vietnam's largest city, known as Ho Chi Minh City since 1975 (Kislenko).
[5] Situated about 20 miles north of Saigon, Bien Hoa served as a key U.S. air base during the Vietnam War (Bass).

SE: Like the landscape – when people come to Iowa, they build different senses and smells. Can you remember smells or the weather –

LS: Yes, an A-bomb, Agent Orange[6] [laughs].

SE: Were you in the Agent Orange, like were you…?

LS: Exposed? Yes, lots of times.

SE: I'm actually doing a research paper on Agent Orange.

LS: Well, does the government take care of me? No!

SE: Did you have anybody, I guess, sergeants – were you like a lower rank?

LS: I started out at E-1[7] and went to E-7 when I got out.

SE: In three and a half years?

LS: I was in ten!

SE: Oh yeah, ten. What were you during the war experience to Vietnam? Were you in the mid Es then? When you first were in to Vietnam, were you an E-1 in Vietnam?

LS: No, the lowest rated I ever was in Vietnam was a E-3. Then I made the rest of them while I was over there.

SE: Ok. How did you understand your unit's mission at the time? Like, how'd you feel about the mission *then* versus now looking back on it, reflecting back on what you had to do?

LS: We do a lot of stuff over there that was never known, I mean, we set up schools, hospitals, vaccinated kids, cleaned up their water…but nobody ever talks about that. But then when we'd come back to the States, they would slap us at airports, throw eggs at us, tomatoes at us, call us baby killers…That's when we just kept going back over because we knew who the enemy was over there.

SE: Was it sometimes hard to decipher, like with – I guess right now, we're reading the book My Lai[8]. And we're kind of looking back on that when it wasn't America's pride moment.

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[6] A powerful herbicide containing the deadly chemical dioxin, used by the US military in Vietnam to remove forest cover and crops. It was later found to cause numerous health problems (History.com).
[7] The Navy uses pay grades for enlisted personnel from E-1 to E-9 (the highest), and each pay grade corresponds to a rate.
[8] A company of US soldiers brutally killed over 500 women, children, and old men in the village of My Lai in 1968. The US Army covered up the massacre for a year, fueling anti-war sentiment and dividing the United States over the Vietnam War (History.com).

LS: You mean the massacre?

SE: The massacre, yeah.

LS: See, I never read that book, but a lot of that is what the journalist saw, but when you're in war, you have to kill. I mean, that's war. We would go on sweep and destroy missions, go into villages, and anything that had breath died. And then we'd burn it down. But it's not a massacre because they all had weapons, they had arms. Women and kids threw grenades, I mean, everybody over there at the time was an enemy. I didn't read that My Lai massacre book…see what they say about that…

SE: I will give the book when we're done discussing it in class, and then we watched some of the –

LS: Is that with Captain Calley[9], too, when he got…?

SE: And then is it Hugh Thompson?[10]

LS: Yeah, that's it. Calley got screwed.

SE: And see, and a lot of people don't think he did.

LS: He did! Here's the other thing - who's all going to hear this? I guess I should ask…

SE: Just my professor.

LS: A lot of times when we would do stuff, we would go back and be tried right then and there, and then we could never be tried again like Captain Calley was. Because Calley got shafted – he just did what he was ordered. So I…I don't know. Didn't read the book.

SE: He was a higher rank, wasn't he?

LS: He was only lieutenant.

SE: So there was somebody up above him.

LS: Lots of them! And officers – he was as low as you could go.

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[9] Lieutenant Calley was the platoon leader of the company that massacred the village of My Lai although they met no resistance. The army formally charged Calley, his superior, and six men from his platoon with the murder of the civilians in 1969, but Calley was the only one convicted. His trial divided the American public ("Calley, William 1943-").

[10] Hugh Thompson Jr. was the US Army helicopter pilot who halted the My Lai massacre, saving many Vietnamese lives. He landed his helicopter between the surviving Vietnamese and the US soldiers and pulled some Vietnamese to safety. His radio reports led to a ceasefire (Tucker).

SE: Did you know him at all?

LS: No, he was Army.

SE: Ok. I guess just…there was one other thing I wanted to ask you and now I can't remember…Oh! Have you seen the different movies that they made back in like 1968 and a few years after, like *Platoon*[11] and…

LS: *Platoon* is pretty true. Yeah, kind of.

SE: The depiction of it, for the most part?

LS: Oh, what was that other one? The one where the guy gets up in the morning and says stretch, says I love the smell of an A-bomb in the morning! And that was all pretty much bullshit, yeah. That's my opinion.

SE: I guess, the one with John Wayne in it.

LS: Oh, that was World War II, though.

SE: No, no. The one…I can't think of the name. [Flipping through pages] I'll find it in a second…*The Green Berets*![12] That one! It was another Army one.

LS: I never seen that one.

SE: You never seen that one? But you said that *Platoon* was pretty well…

LS: For what we did as a Marine, yes.

SE: Have you ever felt, as time goes on, that you guys weren't given as much respect?

LS: We got no respect.

SE: Do you still now, today, for the most part, for being a Vietnam vet?

LS: Yes, I still believe that we were treated wrong, and the government to this day don't like me because my wife makes too much money - I don't get any VA[13] benefits whatsoever.

SE: No matter what.

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[11] A movie from 1986 by former Vietnam solider turned director Oliver Stone, *Platoon* approaches the war critically, showing its brutality and violence (Sullivan).
[12] Directed by John Wayne, *The Green Berets* is notable for being one of the few films made about the Vietnam War while it was happening. The theme and message of the movie is supportive of the conflict and the U.S. government's attempt to stop communism (Kunka 295).
[13] The United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

LS: No. If I got divorced, I could.

SE: Did you see any race issues going on over there? I guess because during that time, they were dealing with the civil rights and everything back home. You had the hippies…

LS: The one time we come back from Vietnam, went to Camp Pendleton, we were 50/50, half black, half white. And we all made it back that year, and when we got to Camp Pendleton, the KKK Marines fragged[14] our barracks and killed four of the black guys.[15] So I mean, during the late 60s there was a lot of KKK in the military. But most of us that - I mean, when you fought together, there wasn't a color barrier. They watch you, you watch them. We had more problems with druggies not doing their job than blacks and whites. And that was both colors.

SE: Did you guys pay attention to all the different protests going back, like the anti-war protests?

LS: We listened to it like the guys that went to – I got stationed in Washington, and when you were downtown, they would offer you money and sex to leave your unit and go to Canada[16], and a lot of guys did it. And then later, I can't remember which president had allowed them back into the states[17], but they gave up their citizenship and went to Canada to get out of Vietnam War.

SE: Yeah, burned their draft cards…We've seen a lot of videos…

LS: There was a lot of that going on.

SE: So you were stationed in Saigon for a while. What do you remember from…? Because that was one of the bigger cities.

LS: Yes, but it's a bigger city. No, it was a big city then, but we just had our little area. It's hard to explain that war and the war today because there, you were in the bush more than in cities. I mean, you didn't really fight in the city because you were out in the remote areas most of the time.

SE: Is there like any more details to…Maybe any good times that you guys tried to make the best of the situation that you were in? Did you ever regret, while you were over there, wishing that you weren't in it as long as you were?

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[14] To deliberately kill, usually with a hand grenade (frag is short for fragmentation grenade).
[15] Northwestern College Archives has found no corroboration that this event occurred in national newspapers or from the Camp Pendleton Historical Society.
[16] An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 draft-eligible American men fled to Canada as immigrants during the Vietnam War. Many deserters also went to Canada ("Canada and the Vietnam War").
[17] President Carter issued a pardon for Vietnam "draft dodgers" in 1977.

LS: No, I never regretted going over there. And I think we were right being over there, except the government never let us finish it. That should have been different. I mean, there were times when we'd get too far ahead, and the government would stop air support, and we'd have to back off because we were getting – I don't know, we were doing our job, but it was getting over too fast or something.

SE: They wanted to make it last longer?

LS: But that war should have been – I mean, we should have won it, but they didn't let us.

SE: Did you have buddies? Were all of your brothers in the Marines or the Navy? Were any of them in the Army?

LS: No they were all Navy. They could all read and write.

SE: [Laughs] Did you have any friends that were in the Army?

LS: Yes, I had friends that were drafted.

SE: That were drafted and were in there and they actually had to trudge through the terrain?

LS: Here's the thing. Wherever the Army went to, the Marines had already been there. In Vietnam, the Marines went in first. And then the Army took care of it afterwards.

SE: So what were you guys told the reason that you were fighting in Vietnam? Because always in a war, there's different reasons –

LS: Communism.

SE: The spread of communism. That was what you were told?

LS: Mainly.

SE: And once you got over there, is that things that you saw?

LS: Yes, the North was trying to take over the South, and the North was communist and the South wanted to be democratic. But it's communist today because we left. But a lot of it was money for both – our government made a lot of money off Vietnam. Whenever the economy's bad, if we have a war, the economy gets better.

SE: Except for right now, I don't think it's working right now! [Laughs]

LS: No!

SE: I think we hit a wall.

LS: But it's a different kind of war now. I don't know if I could fight this kind of war.

SE: What do you mean by, "it's a different kind of war?"

LS: Well, like what I see now, what I talk to people now, I mean, it's like fighting downtown Sioux City. You get snipers and you get this and you get that, but you don't really know who's who. In Vietnam, the South Vietnamese would be on our side, then we'd get behind, so then they'd go switch sides.

SE: So they flip-flopped.

LS: Yes, so we just shot them all and let God sort them. [Laughs] That's what we did!

SE: We learned a term – and that was the whole thing that pretty much started the massacre at My Lai – was Pinkville[18]. And so, a lot of the Vietnamese that you met in the southern part, they kind of belonged, in a sense of a Pinkville, that they were partial respect to communism…Was it more just fear of…?

LS: It was fear. They did what they did to survive. If we were there to protect them, they'd want their rights. But if we got overrun a little bit, they had to go along with the North or they'd be massacred from both sides. It was all fear, and the government, they never could get ahead. Like one day, we'd have pink money. All their scrip would be pink color. So they would trade in their gold and stuff and get all this scrip, and then five months later, the government would say, ok, pink money is no good; only good money now is green. So they'd print up a bunch more money so what you already had was like Monopoly money, it was no good.[19]

SE: Really?

LS: Yeah, they'd change it all the time. That's why they all had like gold teeth, because gold never changed, but the money did. It was crazy! I mean, we sent home stacks of it to nieces and nephews, you know. It was useless that week! They'd just change…the government would just say, no, we're switching colors this month. If you have that color money, it's no good no more. So that kept them way down and poor.

SE: Were you over there when Tet Offensive[20] started?

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[18] The US soldiers called the My Lai area "Pinkville" because it was known to contain many booby traps and enemy soldiers (Ridenhour).

[19] Salmon is referring to Military Payment Certificates (MPC), which ranged from 5 cents to $20. Thirteen series of MPC were issued between 1946 and 1973. This currency is issued by the Department of Defense, and it could be converted to local currency when on leave and to American dollars when leaving an MPC zone ("Military Payment Certificate").

[20] In January of 1968, the North Vietnamese launched an attack on South Vietnam during an agreed cease-fire for the Tet holiday. The surprise attack is often considered a turning point in the Vietnam War; Americans began to lose their support for and belief in the war (Land).

LS: Yes, I was there during Tet, 1968.

SE: So you actually saw everything that happened during that time?

LS: Seen a lot of stuff during that time. I'm not going to talk about it, though, a lot of it.

SE: The feeling that you had, when it first happened, was it more of a surprise, or was it…you didn't know what was going on?

LS: Everybody knew what was going on, and it was a real hard time for us because we lost more people there during Tet because that was when they made their big pull to finish it. But everybody seen it coming, pretty much. But there wasn't nothing you could do about it, really, except just take care of yourself.

SE: The climate, how hard was that to get used to? The heat, the climate, coming from –

LS: It was wet all the time.

SE: We were told that it got about average rainfall of 6 feet [laughs] – that's taller than me!

LS: Yeah, I remember one time we'd been out for like 30 days – that's when I was in country – and a bunch of new people come in. But we had a lot of money, we didn't know what to spend it on, so I would give $50 for dry socks, military-issue socks, because your feet, you only have one pair, and they were always wet. I mean, new guys, for 50 bucks, they'd sell you dry socks.

SE: And that was like Christmas to your feet!

LS: But once they found out and got into it, they'd probably give you 100 to have their dry socks back! [Laughs]

SE: [Laughs] But then they weren't dry.

LS: Yeah, because there was a lot of infections and fungus and wet feet.

SE: And that had to deal with the terrain…

LS: Yes. We'd have hooches[21] and stuff, but we didn't have –

SE: Had what?

LS: Our hooch, our little hut where we lived. But it wasn't like they do now, I mean they live in barracks…

[21] Huts or simple dwellings, also spelled hootch (Dennison).

SE: Yeah, they build barracks now.

LS: Yeah. I mean, we had some barracks, but not really *barracks*.

SE: And then you had foxholes dug into the ground. Well, no –

LS: Well, everybody has them today – that's just for protection.

SE: Do you think the terrain might have helped the Viet Cong a lot better? I mean, before you went over there, did you get any training really, in that sort of…?

LS: See, active duty people were well-trained. A lot of our deaths over there were reserves, I hate to say it. But reserves in them days were not trained as well as they are today, so when reserves would come over there, we'd lose a lot of them.

SE: In the movie *Platoon*, they call them 90-day?

LS: 90-day wonders[22].

SE: Did you have any of those?

LS: Oh, yes. Every unit gets so many of them in with the regulars, but they as weren't trained as regular soldiers.

SE: Was it harder to get used to, like they're thrown in there, and they're not used to –

LS: No, they still manned a gun! I mean, they still did their job. They were there for more than 90 days.

SE: Yeah, but they only had about 90 days of training before they got…

LS: Yeah, which was bad, but…how can I put this? Reserves that train like in Le Mars…you can't give them the actual training that they need even today. I mean, that's why they go to California first, to the desert, because there's no way to make the same training here as what –

SE: We don't have the same temperature climate, nothing…And they went down to Mississippi for that, even though the climate there was completely different that they're dealing with right now [laughs].

LS: I know. But the desert was probably truer to any of them. You see, it was all different then. Like when I went to training, after Camp Pendleton, I went to

[22] US military slang for newly-commissioned graduates of 3-month Officer Candidate School or Direct Commissioning program.

Quantico, Virginia, to jump school[23], and then we went to what they call SERE school[24] – I don't even know if they still have that – ours was in the Philippines where you are like a prisoner of war. They treated us just like we were captured by the Vietnamese, even though it was our people. They didn't kill none of us, but they put us in cages, they slapped us around, and our mission was to escape. I mean, they just teach you that. But that was the atmosphere that Vietnam was actually like – we were in a jungle. So you were trained before you went in country in a jungle, so you knew what it was like.

And the other thing is, when we went to Vietnam, there was already guys that were trained. They'd already been there. Guys today, when they go, none of the old timers are still in that were in a war, very many. So everybody over there is new, they all had to learn together. Where, like, we had guys that fought Korea were fighting Vietnam, so they already been in a war, and they could teach us things faster because they actually had to kill and were killed, not just in a movie.

SE: They knew how you had to actually survive and what you needed to do.

LS: Right.

SE: When you got the newbies, the new guys that were sent over, "fresh meat." Were they treated differently?

LS: We didn't trust them first. I mean, they had to prove that they could do what they were supposed to do. If I was with a bunch of newbies, I probably didn't sleep, but if I had a couple old guys, I felt more comfortable. But after a week, there's no such thing as a newbie.

In them days, a way to get out was being conscientious objector[25] - I don't know how it is today. Guys would come over and say to us, we will not shoot, we will not do this, we will not do that. And some of them wouldn't, but if you put them out on a line at night and leave them there laying by themselves, by 4 in the morning, they'd come back for more ammo. They'd shoot every dog, cat…[inaudible]. But there was a lot of that, and that was just a way out. We had a lot of guys shoot their big toes off.

SE: Just to get out, or just on accident?

LS: Get out of Vietnam, just to go home.

SE: Did they ever get questioned for it?

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[23] Training for parachutists jumping out of helicopters.

[24] SERE is a military acronym that stands for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape. This program provides US military personnel with training in evading capture, survival skills, and the military code of conduct ("Survival, Evasion").

[25] A person who is opposed to serving in the armed forces and/or bearing arms on the grounds of moral or religious principles.

LS: Yes, but you couldn't prove if it was an accident or…I mean, it's pretty unlikely that if your gun went off and it shot just your toe off…

SE: But you could get maybe hit in the thigh, it might be a little bit more believable.

LS: Million dollar shot, so, you just let them go.

SE: And then did you ever feel like maybe it was for the best because you knew that their head wasn't there?

LS: Yes.

SE: And then it was harder to focus on – if they weren't doing their job, then you couldn't do your job to the full...

LS: Yeah, that's why we weeded them out right away. But once they made it in our little - I guess clique or whatever you want to call it, I don't know - but people you could trust.

SE: What class family was your family in? Were you like middle class, upper?

LS: I don't know, we were poor farmers…

SE: Because, I guess, when we looked at things about who majority of the ones that were getting sent over to Vietnam were more of your middle class and your lower class because the upper class that were going to college…

LS: Didn't have to go.

SE: That, and the doctors would sign a note for them saying that they weren't physically able.

LS: Yeah, and if they went to college, they didn't have to go over – they could get farm deferments[26] if their parents had a lot of farm and they needed them to stay home.

SE: But if you came from a farm family, then…not enough?

LS: [Laughs] No, we were *poor* farmers! I never tried to stay out; I grew up that when I got out of high school, if I didn't go to college, you go in the military. If you go to college, *then* you go in the military.

SE: So either way, the military card is in there, no matter what you do.

LS: Everybody should go in the military, I think, yeah.

[26] A deferment is a temporary exemption from induction into military service.

SE: But some people, they're not meant for it; they can't handle it. There's some…

LS: That can't handle it? Yeah, there is people that can't handle it…that's why I take medicine now! [Laugh] I do, for combat…what do you call that?

SE: PTSD[27].

LS: Yeah.

SE: Yep, Tom has that too. He doesn't have medicine for it, but you notice it. You definitely can see it.

LS: I've been taking it for forty years.

SE: Now, you got married after you came back for good, right?

LS: No. I got married the first time after my first trip to Vietnam.

SE: Ok. Were you dating her when you left?

LS: Yes, when I went to Vietnam.

SE: Right. So then after your first tour over there, then you got married. How was that?

LS: I was only home for…seven months, then I applied again.

SE: Was it harder for her at home?

LS: She was a military person, so…She was a Marine.

SE: Then I guess that works!

LS: But, no, it was hard, and that's why our marriage didn't work. We were married 7 years and I was gone almost 5 of them.

SE: Oh, wow.

LS: And then my head got screwed up…but I've been married a lot – facing my fourth.

SE: Ok. And it's just all from PTSD?

LS: Probably. Because I wasn't treated for it then, I mean, because I was still on active duty.

SE: Now, did the government help out with that at all?

[27] Acronym for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

LS: Nothing. We make too much money.

SE: Did you guys have to go through a debriefing every time you got back?

LS: Yes.

SE: What did you think of that? I guess, kind of like as a demo, kind of sitting and talking to a counselor…

LS: Yes, it's like me and you talking now, but you didn't trust the person, so you didn't tell them nothing. And you couldn't go home until you get debriefed, so you just played the game, did what you had to do, and got the hell out of there.

SE: Was it hard to get medical supplies in to the injured ones?

LS: No, not really. We had our supplies. The hardest thing we had was getting an air backed out.

SE: Why was that harder?

LS: Well, there was a lot of fire – it's hard to get helicopters in to get them.

SE: How many people could you hold on the helicopters?

LS: Lots.

SE: You could fit a whole lot on there?

LS: Well, it depends. I mean, we tied them on the skids in stretchers, we laid them inside.

SE: Oh my goodness!

LS: You did what you had to do! [Laughs] They still tie them to the skids now, in a basket. You can tie them to the skids – not under, I mean, up on the side or top of it. You're not going to land on them or nothing!

SE: [Laughs]

LS: I can't believe this is *history* already, jeez…I'm old.

SE: I know. I guess you look back and it's just like 1968.

LS: I should take the class and see what really happened over there…because I bet it ain't right.

SE: Because you went over there first in 1968?

LS: ’67.

SE: ’67, and then you got out in nineteen seventy-?

LS: Four. After the evacuation[28]. So I got out in ’75. We evacuated in ’74, I think it was.

SE: And had to get everybody out.

LS: Except we left them, all the South Vietnamese that worked for us. I don’t know if you’ve seen movies where they’re trying to fly on ships and stuff? Those were the people that actually worked for the government, trying to get to freedom before they got killed over there.

SE: Yeah, because actually in *Coming Home*[29], when he goes back over there to get his friend that stayed over there - they both thought that they got killed, but they didn’t, and he went back over there to find him –

LS: Oh, *Rambo*?[30]

SE: In *Coming Home*? No-

LS: I must not have seen that one. I don’t watch very many war movies.

SE: Well, yeah, we have to. But that’s when they were doing the evacuation of…and that was just crazy. People were running all over.

LS: They were flying in, landing on ships, yeah. Well, we stripped them naked and pushed their stuff over the side.

SE: [Flipping pages] What’d you guys think of the music that was created during the era?

LS: It was just rock and roll.

SE: Not all of it! I mean…

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[28] Evacuation began in 1973. The North Vietnamese/Viet Cong army captured Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, in April 1975. This event marked the end of the war. On April 29-30, Operation Frequent Wind transported over 1000 Americans and 5000 Vietnamese out of Saigon, the final American evacuation. However, many South Vietnamese that remained were killed (“Fall of Saigon” and Newsweek Staff).
[29] A 1978 American Vietnam War drama film about a young woman, her Marine husband, and a paralyzed veteran she meets while her husband is overseas (“Coming Home”).
[30] A film series based on the novel *First Blood* featuring a troubled Vietnam War veteran. The series consists of 4 movies from 1982, 1985, 1988, and 2008 (“Rambo”).

LS: You mean like Bob Dylan?

SE: Yeah, Bob Dylan, but I mean, the difference between the anti-war and then the ones that actually supported.

LS: We just pretty well ignored it.

SE: Did you guys have radios over there that you could listen to music?

LS: Yes.

SE: So you were able to stay up with the times of the new music?

LS: Yes, they played it all the time! Did you watch that movie with Robin Williams? When he was a disc jockey in Vietnam?

SE: No.

LS: *Good Morning, Vietnam*![31] That was true.

SE: That was true?

LS: Yeah, I mean, we had radios and…Bob Hope![32]

SE: Of course.

LS: He was there every Christmas! I'll tell you what he did - this is in My Lai - he was giving a show, and he was telling jokes, and we started to have an incoming, so we all kind of dug in and started moving out. We started hitting golf balls back at him, he just stayed right onstage. I mean, he was nuts, but…

SE: [Flipping through papers] Now I don't remember what I was going to ask you. Oh! Did you guys get to vote in the election?

LS: Yes!

SE: Even while you were over there?

LS: Yes, the same way you do now. What do they call that when you…?

SE: Absentee ballots.

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[31] A 1987 American comedy-drama about the Vietnam War, set in Saigon in 1965 and starring Robin Williams as a radio DJ ("Good Morning, Vietnam").

[32] From 1964-1972, stand-up comedian Bob Hope performed for the soldiers in South Vietnam at Christmas (Johnson).

LS: Absentee ballots! …I didn't vote.

SE: Why not?

LS: Because I didn't like either one of them.

SE: [Laughs] because either one was going to screw us, so why did it matter?

LS: They wasn't going to let us win either way. I think that, yeah, we could vote.

SE: They brought up the Geneva Convention[33]. What is your opinion on that? Because that was created after World War II, after –

LS: Vietnam never signed the Geneva Convention.

SE: *Vietnam* never did, but you guys had to. So you were expected to be nice to your prisoner of war, and they didn't. So that probably created some anger…

LS: No, because we didn't have people taking pictures and reporters and shit. I mean, we did a lot of things I was ashamed of, but…The guys today, the first thing they should do, every reporter who's over there, they should shoot the bastards. So nobody back here really knows what's going on. Because what you do during war, you do because you have to. And the Geneva Convention, now, they said, yeah, I guess we'd live by part of it. But we were the only ones that signed it, I mean, Vietnam never signed it.

SE: Because they have a whole list in there, of you have to basically treat them like almost one of your own.

LS: I know, but that don't necessarily mean that's what was done. I mean, I'll never get tried for it again now, but I mean, hell, I've them dropped from 2000 feet into a goddamn compound because there was nowhere to land, and just throw their ass out of the helicopter, they'll splatter and land.

Grandson: See you, grandpa.

LS: See you later.

Grandson: Take care!

LS: Remember, call!

[33] The Geneva Convention was a series of international diplomatic meetings that led to a number of agreements, in particular the Humanitarian Law of Armed Conflicts, a group of international laws for the humane treatment of wounded or captured military personnel (History.com).

Other person: I will.

LS: Alright.

SE: Was there any reporters that depicted your guys' stories correctly?

LS: No, not really. Because I come home for my grandpa's funeral in '68, and I watched the news that night, I come back from Vietnam, and they said, no troops had ever been north of the DMZ[34] yet. That's where they had to get me to come home for the funeral! [Laughs] But reporters didn't know what was going on. See you later, Al!

Al: See you, Larry!

LS: Because we didn't allow them to be with us, with our group.

SE: Did they argue with that?

LS: No, they had cameras, we had guns! No, we just didn't take them with us.

SE: Even though a lot of them, you know, it's the freedom of speech issue - you're afraid of what – do you think that maybe how they depicted your guys' story over there affected the views back home? Like maybe if they would've told the stories truthfully?

LS: Yeah, if they'd've showed all the true stuff, I think people would have treated us better. I mean, we did a lot of good things down there. It don't sell papers, so they ain't going to…Just like now they don't.

SE: They're in a war, so nobody wants to…

LS: I mean, they do a lot of good stuff now they don't ever talk about.

SE: Yeah, I do see that. Do they make you stop watching the news? I know like in our house, we don't turn on the news. We watch local news, find out the weather, that's it.

LS: I guess. I don't know, I never really thought about it, if I did or not. We used to watch some of it and laugh because we knew it was all…

SE: A lie?

LS: A lie, and they'd just make up what they wanted to make up.

SE: They see one thing and just…

[34] Military acronym for demilitarized zone.

LS: Yeah. I mean, they had some actual live footage of us killing people and us being killed. In them days you could show bodies, you could show this.

SE: Yeah, because I know we've seen a couple film footages of when the bodies were getting ready to be put on the plane to be sent home, and then them being taken off. And now they don't do that anymore.

LS: No, because the bleeding hearts…I better not, I'll let that go. [Laughs]

SE: Feel free.

LS: Oh, I don't know, they just...You just need to get rid of that. As far as I'm concerned, the only people who should be in a war are people that are fighting the war. All these other peoples need to stay out of the war.

SE: But then you'd have the civilian side saying, well, we deserve to know what's going on.

LS: Join up. Go over. At least I want to show them the truth, but they'll never do that. I mean, they didn't do it then.

SE: So why do it now.

LS: Yeah. That's why we were "baby killers" and…They knew we were soft-hearted, so what they would do is lay a baby on the road with grenades under them. We'd just run them over because if you wanted to pick them up, you'd get killed.

SE: Oh, wow.

LS: I mean, little kids tied with grenades all over their body, laying along the road.

SE: So they were suicide.

LS: Yeah. But the kids didn't want to do it, but their parents would do it to them.

SE: Was that ever hard?

LS: That's hard! But, I mean, if you didn't, they'd kill you. You did what you had to do.

SE: It was basically survival of the fittest.

LS: Yep.

SE: How was it to come home and eat real food? [Laughs]

LS: I mean, we ate real food over there, too. We had food, we had K-rats[35].

SE: You had what?

LS: Well, in them days, they called them K-rats – I don't know what they call them now.

[Unidentified woman: Rations, K-rations.]

SE: Oh! MREs![36]

LS: Yeah, whatever they are then, I don't know. Scrambled eggs and motherfuckers is what we called them [laughs].

SE: Was there a lot of drinking going on in your group? In movies and stuff, they depict them like there's beer everywhere.

LS: No, there wasn't beer *everywhere*, but there was some beer over there, yeah.

SE: My professor asked me and I'm just like, well our guys aren't allowed to have them. Like, they sell it at the PX[37] but they're not allowed to buy it or drink it over there; if they get it sent to them, they get in trouble.

LS: I don't know, the government used to give us bennies[38], white crosses[39] to stay awake and go to sleep, so I guess we could have a beer now and then.

SE: Is there anything else that…?

LS: No, that's about all I'm going to talk about [laughs]. Is that all you need?

SE: That is.

LS: Alright.

[35] Short for K-rations, individual daily combat food rations introduced to the US Army in World War II
[36] Acronym for Meals, Ready to Eat.
[37] Military acronym for Post Exchange.
[38] Benzedrine pills, the first pharmaceutical drug to contain amphetamine, a powerful central nervous system stimulant.
[39] Street name for the prescription drug Dexedrine, a form of amphetamine, named for the cross shaped on the top of the pill to divide it in quarters.

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