

**John DiBlasi
Veteran**

**Greater Capital Region Teacher Center
Joseph Anastasio
Interviewer**

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[00:00:25.18] JA: This afternoon is part of the grant entitled supplementary materials for [missing] in Vietnam war. We have the pleasure, and honor, of interviewing mister John DiBlasi. Mr. DiBlasi is not only a Vietnam vet. [veteran], but he's a well known school teacher at Albany high school, who claims that everything he is today he owes to his dog... Toto, is it? John, first of all we would like to thank you very, very, much for taking some time out of your busy schedule, [missing] I'm impressed. Now, let's start with just a little background. If sometime down the road, some genealogist was looking to put John DiBlasi into the family tree, you know what I mean?

[00:01:13.07] JD: I get it, [missing]. Okay, what would you like to know?

[00:01:18.10] JA: Just basically a little bit about your family background, maybe a thirty-second synopsis of how you got, you know after high school, how you got into Vietnam; up to that point where you drafted or volunteered.

[00:01:29.09] JD: Okay. Born here in Albany, went to school where my father was a physical ed. [education] teacher. From there I went to DI one year, I left there went to Albany high where I finished up, 1865. I went to Hudson Valley for... about a year and a half... I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was trading water at Hudson Valley. At that time, some friends of mine who I graduated with had already been saying it got difficult, we have been in college knowing that people who were good friends of mine were there... and some had already come back... the hard way. So, I dropped out of college and enlisted... in the army. Enlisted in intelligence. Military intelligence.

[00:02:37.07] JA: Is that a contradiction [missing]?

[00:02:39.18] JD: When I got into the army I was still young, I was about my sons age now, I was probably twenty. So, I went through basic training and instead of going to Advanced Individual Training, or AIT which they called it those days, I went to Fort Hillburn which was the closest intelligence post. I did the school there and counted Insurgency, really I had no idea talking about because I had no background in it. From there, I went to Fort Benning to jump school. When I was at Fort Benning my jump master taught me to go to Ranger school which I figured was a good idea at the time. Then out of Ranger school, I went back to Fort Hillburn, then I knew a little bit more about what they were talking about. I went to their war program there, they call it a war college, but it was not college, per-say. Mostly only young people. So by the time I left that school, I was up to two years here in the states, before I even left the states. So when I got into China (?) I pretty much thought I knew what was going on. [missing]. I was a little bit groggy (?).

[00:04:03.16] JA: Could you put a date on some of those events? Like when you graduated high school?

[00:04:05.27] JD: 1965 I graduated high school.

[00:04:10.25] JA: When did you enlist?

[00:04:10.25] JD: 1960... The end of 1966, near 1967. I was in China in 1968. Just after Christmas. It was, like... January 3rd, 1968... at the new year. I stayed there until August 15, 1968. And I was shot, and then evacuated [evacuated] out. So my anniversary is coming up. This will be the twenty-first year.

[00:04:40.12] JA: Did you formally enlist to Vietnam? You mentioned the fact that a couple of your friends were shot and killed prior to your enlistment.

[00:04:50.10] JD: No, I had talked to one friend of mine [missing]. He was home from the marines from his first tour and was going back for a second tour. He tried to explain to me what it was like over there. I have no frame of reference to understand what he was saying. Basically what I remember from that conversation is he said it's like cowboys and Indians. It's like playing cowboys and Indians.

[00:05:21.15] JA: [missing]

[00:05:21.15] JD: I was politically naive at that point. I figured that if my country says we go, we go. I didn't understand the ramifications and whatever was going under the surface of politics. I didn't know too much about it then. Just was not politically astute... in those days.

[00:05:39.04] JA: [missing]

[00:05:39.26] JD: No, like I said before, you know, I was growing up believing that this is your country. If your country needs you to do something than you should do it, you know, it's like payback for what they give to you. But that's always really what I thought. So I figured that if it was my time that I would go.

[00:06:02.22] JA: Generally, in '67, the protests were just starting, were you aware of the protests?

[00:06:09.26] JD: Yeah, they were just starting. Yeah, I was aware of them. I didn't agree with them. I didn't do anything for them or against them. I stayed... I tried to be objective about it because I didn't understand all of the facts. And I figured until I did I couldn't make a decision as to which side I wanted to be on, really... so I just let them ride. I was just outside of what was happening.

[00:06:42.00] [missing]

[00:06:48.15] JA: Okay, so you landed January 3rd, nineteen-sixty-eight.

[00:06:56.17] JD: Yep.

[00:06:57.10] JA: Do you remember your first impression of the country? Where did you land, and what was your impression?

[00:07:02.23] JD: I landed in Tan Son, Saigon. The first thing I remember is walking out of the plane and having this... wave of heat hit me... and, uh.... the smell of what I later knew to come as nuoc mong...

[00:07:19.03] JA: Nuoc mong.

[00:07:20.01] JD: Yeah, it was fish stuff...

[00:07:22.15] JA: Uh-huh.

[00:07:22.15] JD: And I remember that pungent smell hitting me. By the time I walked off the tarmac I was a mess of sweat... I thought it was going to be a long year. Um, going to the... going to... I don't remember what they call it anymore. Not a transfer station, but going to the place where... reception center or something like that... to orientate, go out there, to go out in the fields. We were driving into... to the the reception center in the back of a three-quarter pound truck. With five other guys who had just arrived at the same time. We hit the [missing], killed them in the street. Got [missing] in the street. The driver and the shotgun, the guy who was riding shotgun, they started laughing...

[00:08:17.01] JA: [Laughs]

[00:08:18.02] JD: [Laughs] We were like, what's wrong with this picture? So, you know, we called the MPs and the MPs showed up and they said go ahead, we'll take care of it... and we just kept going on the road. You know, that was probably the first dead person I've ever seen in my life and I had only been there for twenty minutes.

[00:08:38.17] JA: [Laughs] You must [missing] because if you were a January 3rd 1968 you were there...

[00:08:45.28] JD: Tet [Vietnamese New Year]. And I didn't know it.

[00:08:47.11] JA: It was Tet!

[00:08:47.27] JD: And I didn't know it.

[00:08:47.27] JA: Yeah! Oh, you didn't know when you got there?

[00:08:50.17] JD: Oh, no. Tet hadn't started until. No, I was not even transient when this whole thing hit the fan, so I didn't know it was happening.

[00:09:00.09] JA: Good timing, John. Good timing.

[00:08:58.02] JD: [missing] Within a week, to make a relatively long story short, within a week, I was in Hue. I had never even fired a rifle before... I mean, other than training, and I wasn't sure I even knew how to use it then... it was the beginning of a long three months.

[00:09:34.18] JA: [missing]

[00:09:38.21] JD: Well they all knew that.

[00:09:40.01] JA: Did the Americans?

[00:09:40.01] JD: Oh yeah they knew what was happening. They knew a lot now that I look back on it, in retrospect. They knew just what was happening. Because they were dealing with it... we had to [missing]... a couple days before... they blew up the ammunition down in front of [missing]. I saw everybody running, burning. The village across the street from Long Binh had since been burned [missing] village, for obvious reasons, so they were all pretty up-tight. You know, I was still pretty happy about [missing] These guys are locked and loaded, but now I'm looking for the dancing.

[00:10:23.00] JA: I know we talked about, before the tape started, war stories; that was the purpose of doing this. Can you just kind of in a general sense tell us what your duties were, your responsibilities, what basically you did while you were there?

[00:10:42.08] JD: Well, after... after Tet ended, and I had a regular... um, duty function, [missing] my job was to hire mercenaries [missing] and, uh, train them with modern weapons and take them out into operation. Sometimes on the border, sometimes in [missing], and stop whatever would come down [missing].

[00:11:14.09] JA: Did you know Laotian?

[00:11:15.17] JD: Heck, no.

[00:11:18.02] JA: No? How'd you do it?

[00:11:18.02] JD: I had an interpreter.

[00:11:19.19] JA: Oh, did you? Okay.

[00:11:20.29] JD: Which I could only trust through saying what I say.

[00:11:25.27] JA: Did you enjoy the job?

[00:11:30.03] JD: It was a good job. I mean, I wasn't primarily responsible, because by that time, I...

[PHONE RINGS]

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[00:11:43.08] JD: I thought that would be more interesting with what I was doing at the time. Which I didn't necessarily like. I don't think I should get into that. I didn't like the methods of some of the people I was working with. They were a little bit cruel for my liking.

[00:12:00.25] JA: Okay. Oh, you tell a good story about one of the functions you did, which I assume was on Laotian water, which was a recounting of the enemy coming at you...

[00:12:11.06] JD: That's right. My function was to keep intelligence records of people... types of weapons... types of vehicles, coming through the Ho Chi Minh trail, where my area of operations... which would filter down into Southern Laos, into South Vietnam, and then in and down further into Cambodia, to areas down near Saigon. I would come up with numbers which were sometimes twenty-five-hundred men, and forty trucks, and, uh, you know, a-hunnid-fifty mortars, and I'd see it interpreted later as two-hundred and fifty men, four trucks, and three mortars. When I started questioning things like that with my superior, I was more or less told to just do my job and that was none of my business.

[00:13:09.05] JA: Is that how you reacted?

[00:13:14.02] JD: No, I was highly... I was ticked off, to the point where he threw me out of the [missing]. So, I thought I could wind up in a lot worse places so I better keep my mouth [missing].

[00:13:22.07] JA: Did this change your attitude?

[00:13:23.19] JD: This is where my attitude began to change about the whole validity of what we were doing. By then, I was more aware of what was happening... here... not there. Because there I didn't even know what I was doing. I had no idea what any other units was doing anywhere. But I became more aware of what was happening in this country. Um... protests were beginning to... become the rule and the exception. And although I was beginning to form the opinion that, yes, this is all bologna, this whole thing is all bologna, and they are right to protest here... to end it... and try to win it, there are some other things that also helped me form that opinion... mostly with some Vietnamese, not all, but some Vietnamese would get into this... lack of the fight. I was kind of getting sick of watching my people fight their war for them. You know, if they want it, let them go get it and we'll help... That was the way, that was plan "A," it wasn't that we were supposed to fight it and every once in a while they'll help. When those things started happening I began to doubt everyone's reason for being there... So, I thought at that time the protests were probably valid in this country, it would be nice to get everybody [missing]. But I also knew that whenever the protests increased here, the flow of many materials would increase in the Ho Chi Minh trail, and we take a lot more casualties. When things stopped here and there seemed to be a resolve by Johnson, he increased bombing, um... our work had trickled down to, uh, practically nothing. That's when we would take R&Rs [rest and recuperation], because our work became [missing].

[00:15:22.06] JA: How did you pick up your [missing]...

[00:15:33.19] JD: Word of mouth. Word of mouth. I mean, Stars and Stripes will naturally tell you a biased view.

[00:15:42.28] JA: Right, right...

[00:15:42.28] JD: Most everything I heard, I heard from people who were just coming over; people who were more aware than I was when I was here, and who weren't afraid to [missing]. I had a good friend of mine, John Chandler, who was a [missing] officer, and, uh, one of the best officers I ever met, and, uh, he filled me in on a lot that was going on here, he and I talk a lot about [missing], he was [missing] officer. I was lucky. First thing he did when he became... well I guess you'd call him our platoon leader, our [missing], uh, he gave me a book on [missing] about global warfare, which I had until [missing] had it, a friend of mine, a student of mine, he was in the Marines in the time, who was preparing for something he didn't know why, I gave it to him. But he came back and he said that it helped him. I sure would like to get it back.

[00:16:49.27] JA: Were your feelings shared? Was that a general type of thing that was taking place following the attack?

[00:16:59.17] JD: Yeah.

[00:17:02.04] JA: Were there soldiers slowly but surely being turned off from the war after that?

[00:16:58.17] JD: Everybody was getting turned off. Everybody was getting turned off because we were... we were taking the casualties. We were... we were initiating the ambushes. We called the South Vietnamese for air support and they wouldn't let the planes go because they kept everything around Saigon. You know, the government was so afraid of potential [missing] they didn't wanna let anything go for the Americans, or even for the Vietnamese I suppose. So, if we couldn't get our own people which were... being used pretty thin... and we had to depend on the Vietnamese because we were supposed to be a joint operation, [missing], we couldn't depend on them, and when we realized that... and then when we realized that if we take a lot of casualties because we couldn't get air support, we would find out that evening or the next day that these planes weren't anywhere. They just sat on a field. You know, you start to get to a point where you say, well there's no sense in me getting killed for these guys, these guys don't care for themselves, you know, they don't care about themselves.

[00:18:16.16] JA: That's a common theme... [missing]?

[00:18:33.11] JD: Yeah, that's what I got. I'm sure as heck not gonna be killed for somebody who doesn't care enough to take a risk for themselves. That's stupid.

[00:18:45.00] JA: Who was your contact, and what was your contact like with the South Vietnamese? What did they think about the Americans taking part in Vietnam in '68?

[00:18:53.09] JD: [missing]. Just like the French, just like the Japanese, you know, although they liked us better than either the French, and certainly better than the Japanese. They liked us better than them but they thought we had no business there. You know, some of us, some of them liked us, because they knew they couldn't win the war themselves. But many people there have no knowledge of politics at all, you know, especially the rural people; the city people had politics, but...

[00:19:25.15] JA: How about the farmers?

[00:19:25.15] JD: Well, the farmers didn't really understand what was going on. All they knew was there... here's another occupation army, they don't belong here, not all Americans act as they should, depending on the situation, you know, you have some people who are drafted with very little education, put a gun in their hand, and they have a little bit of power, and they, uh, abuse the people, the common folk. And that's why so many people back in 1968, I was, you know, in college... because they saw in us maybe what the Chinese saw in the forces [missing], they were supposed to be meshing this course, they treated people worse than the Communists (?) did. I'm not saying the Communists treated 'em good or in some cases extremely good, but, in many cases the Communists would, um... help them, you know... tend their buffalo for them, or... [missing]

[00:20:33.18] JA: Received the document of supporting [missing].

[00:20:33.22] JD: Yeah. [missing]

[00:20:34.26] JD: We've got this down to a science. Yeah. Which is unfortunate because we're working with the same thing, you know?

[00:20:40.28] JD: Yeah, no, I think we do, it's politically feasible [missing]. Politics [missing].

[00:20:48.28] JA: Well, I remember the situation could've been a little bit different, you know, maybe not totally different, but...

[00:20:55.02] JD: Well, as far as the Arminian hostage situation goes, my personal feeling is that there's no... there's two people, [missing]. One is William Higgins, of course he was assigned to go there and be an observer. One is William Buckney [missing]. Those two people have [missing]. The other guys who were at American University who worked for [missing] who were assigned there too, you know, they were all [missing]. If they stayed for one reason or another, I mean, I really do sympathize with their cores. You know, but when we were told to get out... we should've gotten out. I'd like to see them get out of the country alive if possible, but I wouldn't count on it. I know the standard operation for military intelligence, which is if you're captured, you're dead. You know, that's it. [missing]. So don't expect anyone to come getcha.

[00:21:55.23] JA: I see that's our knack, sometimes back [missing].

[00:21:59.27] JD: Yeah. As long as there's a [missing] to go back in there. [missing]

[00:22:11.28] JA: [missing]

[00:22:11.26] JD: It's okay.

[00:22:12.23] JA: [missing] one of our [missing] of Vietnam [missing] or whoever, you know?

[00:22:22.25] JD: Yeah. Our Key (?) was so worried and knew the end was [missing]. And then he thought he could be next. I think the people got mighty upset seeing the way Key lived, Key lived well. But I've been to Saigon a couple times now.

[00:22:40.27] JA: [missing]

[00:22:46.13] JD: [missing]

[00:22:49.16] JD: You know; they saw the way he lived. They saw his mansion, in his country home, his pool... These people... They were... I can't say I ever saw anybody stunned. [missing] I mean he sure didn't live simply [missing]. But, uh... they always seemed to have something to eat. [missing]

[00:23:24.05] JA: Uh-huh...

[00:23:23.06] JD: [missing]

[00:23:32.09] JD: [missing] we canceled each other out...

[00:23:40.05] JA: So is it safe to say that [missing] changed the war, when you left the United States to when you came back?

[00:23:39.14] JD: I went in six months, I just wanted to get out of there. Hopefully alive if I could, you know, I just wanted to get out of there... I saw too many people get killed who didn't need to get killed... and, uh, good people, you know, they shouldn't have gotten killed... but got killed because of some Vietnamese [missing]. And then I began to get hatred towards the Vietnamese which I didn't wanna do. And, I know some friends of mine who worked on my advisor's team, [missing], started to get interchangeable. And I [missing]... they knew there were late nights where you couldn't sleep, you know, I slept only slept... you know, kept one eye open. Which you didn't know if these people

[missing] also from Laos, you didn't know which one of them [missing] and who were trying to infiltrate our own position... you can only trust as far as you can throw a moose. [missing]. It was always like; it was always like friction. You know, these people might be the real McCoy (?), or they might be, uh, [missing] Asians, something [missing]. So you always had to take everything you did... marginally... expecting the worse to happen at anytime... And that sort of [missing], you know, I mentioned, [missing]. It's, uh, [missing]... quite often gets out of hand. If you shoot at somebody who's shooting at you, you know, [missing], but, uh, [missing].

[missing]

[00:26:05.00] JD: I think that's why so many people are risking [missing] today.

Because [missing]. [missing] our country is a wonderful nation, but it's just not that simple. What I will say... call me friendly, and [missing]... and try to find the greater good. Sometimes you can't do it, it's not black and white, it's gray. Most of what I heard, we did, anywhere, was partly for revenge, partly for survival... mostly for survival...

[missing]...

[00:26:56.12] JD: Excuse me, I got to [missing]...

[00:27:03.08] JA: [missing] left the grand country South Vietnam?

[00:27:12.14] JD: Oh yeah... yep... uh... yeah I was one of the walking wounded. More or less... I had two bullet holes in me. I left there for Japan. My biggest worry was that I would get to Japan, they'd fix me up, and send me back. You know, I left on a MAC-V... hospital plane... I don't remember that whole, you know, the whole incident from start to finish. All I can remember is, uh, laying in the hospital, watching the ceiling spin around... smelling gun powder everywhere... somebody gave me a shot of morphine... I was wearing a sweatshirt, Cambodian pants, and sandals... and the guy said what's your name? I said I don't know. He said, do you know who you're with? I said I don't know that. So they were getting a little concerned... because if I didn't know, they certainly didn't know... and then another fellow who was in my team was also coming through on a stretcher... and he grabbed me... because he thought I was [missing], and he told him... he told me what my name was! Where we were, what had happened...

[00:28:34.19] JA: Must have been a scary experience...

[00:28:41.03] JD: Yeah it was real scary. Um, but here's an x-factor, my nurse was my head commissioner's wife. So she took real good care of me.

[00:28:46.05] JA: Uh-huh.

[00:28:50.18] JD: When I came to, and, well, when I first got to the hospital; that was kind of strange... it was a North Vietnamese... there were about five of us in those beds waiting to go into the operation room... operating room... and, uh, there was a North Vietnamese across the water, and I wanted to jump right in the [missing]. So, they called the EMTs [missing]. And, uh, the EMT kind of calmed me down, gave me a cigarette, [missing], stood there [missing]. When I came to I was in the 85th evac hospital. Stayed there for two weeks, and then was sent to the 106 general hospital in Yokohama. Stayed there for like, a month. And then from there... uh... to [missing] hospital, stayed there for [missing].

[00:29:52.21] JA: Just from a theoretical point of view... Normal procedure damage to replace [missing] individually as opposed to... did that?

[00:30:05.03] JD: I think that was a problem. Because nobody went over with anybody. You went over alone. You did your whole tour basically alone. You came back alone. There was... I mean there was certainly comradery while we were there, but it's not like you went over with a hundred-fifty guys and you're all coming back at the same time. Uh, as a unit, you know, you were over there by yourself... and the whole, [missing]. The whole experience takes on a personal thing that way, you know? It takes on... it's just you. When you got there it's just you, you don't know anybody, and you're in a strange place and people are trying to do you in and... when you leave it's just you. And you're leaving some friends that you met in the field who, uh, by that time are closer to you, you know, a family really, um... and you're leaving that behind...

[00:31:01.13] JA: Was there a reason behind it?

[00:31:06.04] JD: I can't figure it out. Does the military have a reason for anything?

[00:31:02.05] JA: I mean I've asked this question twenty times.

[00:31:10.10] JD: I think they're trying to sike us out. Everything is like an unfinished fish bowl (?). They just make you get out of there, and you don't know what happened to your friends until a few months later either when they turn up on the wall, or... when you know, they turn up at your door which is a much better way... and, you know, you just have to take another mirror after that... sort things out, and find out who made it, and who didn't... that's wrong...

[00:31:36.21] JA: Strange...

[00:31:36.21] JD: That's wrong... You're alienated...

[00:31:40.24] JA: Hopefully that's one of the things, if we ever have to go through this again, they learn from... You know?

[00:31:46.23] JD: Oh, I don't know... I know the army has gotten better lately. My cousin, who is now an army recruiter for the last fifteen years... says that the army has now taken over the British method... where you're assigned to a unit, that unit has a duty in this country, and in Europe, and, um, you're always assigned to one or two places. So that whoever rotates from Europe back to your base is that same unit and you deal with the same equipment, you know, and then you go there and that's a much better way to do it; and the Brits are good soldiers, they learned...

[00:32:22.25] JA: Just from a coach's point of view, it doesn't make sense... you know?

[00:32:26.03] JD: No, it makes no sense. It makes no sense...

[00:32:28.00] JA: It makes no sense what so ever...

[00:32:28.20] JD: [missing] a team who doesn't know what the rules are, you know, who doesn't know how to play with that team...

[00:32:33.21] JA: And yet this went on for pretty close to twelve years...

[00:32:35.09] JD: This went on... possibly... I mean that's the only way I knew it was...

[00:32:40.04] JA: I mean I talked to a guy who is a marine and he wanted the name of at least [missing] sixty-five large scale recruiters. [missing]. You know, they went in as a unit, but he was replaced individually, and since from that point on...

[00:32:55.25] JD: Right... [missing]

[00:32:52.10] JA: They didn't do it during World War II...

[00:33:00.03] JD: No, units [missing]...

[00:33:04.19] JA: Let me get your reaction to this... I was talking to one guy, and he said, World War II had a natural built in cooling period for soldiers coming back from the front. Just the nature of the transportation.

[00:33:13.07] JD: That didn't happen here.

[00:33:19.19] JA: Yeah?

[00:33:18.20] JD: It's amazing to me. I can't say it necessarily happened to me because I had a couple hospital stays before I got off the plane. But when I did get off the plane in Washington, I was with a half a dozen guys and because I was... no... I wasn't really at the time... it was my first sleep and [missing], so I was definitely cooled down some... I know friends of mine who were there since Thursday... who were on the field on Thursday and who were home on Saturday.

[00:33:52.17] JA: Right. That's insane...

[00:33:56.14] JD: Yeah, I mean the car back fired and they would jump over a hedge. You know, and some of us stubbed it (?). Yeah, it was insane. There's no interim period to what they call a debriefing period...

[00:34:09.08] JA: Right.

[00:34:04.25] JD: Yeah, there's no debriefing period. You're just here one minute, and you're expected to forget it all and act like a... you know... like a good citizen the next. I was talking to a friend of mine a couple of months ago... as a matter of fact they call him Crazy Harry... hell of a nice guy, great guy, but he caused a lot of havoc in [missing]. He was starting trouble in this particular place I was at... and, uh, I grabbed him and pulled him off to the side and started talking. And underneath him... jail, and everything, you know, he's lost his wife and his family... I feel sorry for him... but he could never get it back again... and he didn't know why... I didn't know what was going on, because I just didn't know what happened to him, because I can only think of what happened to me, you know? And I said, Harry, you lost your you (?), that's what had happened... you can't get it back... Something missing, you know. Something you can never fulfill in your life. And that's the pledge [missing]... and at that point he calmed down [missing]...

[00:35:31.23] JA: That's where something like that [missing]...

[00:35:31.05] JD: Yeah...

[00:35:34.02] JA: You know, [missing] for other guys [missing]...

[00:35:34.28] JD: Well, you know, it's tough for people to talk to people.

[00:35:44.07] JA: Uh-huh...

[00:35:44.29] JD: I mean, I'll talk to you for five hours, but... I can't really talk to you.

[00:35:48.09] JA: Right. Right. Oh, yeah...

[00:35:49.18] JD: You know what I mean?

[00:35:49.18] JD: I can't tell you the things that... that perhaps I need to tell, and talk about...

[00:35:54.25] JA: Yeah...

[00:35:56.14] JD: However, I can go on for a while because... we're friends, you know...

[00:36:00.07] JA: Sal... A guy named Sal, I can't think of his last name. He was so great. He looks you right in the eye, and he says to me, we can sit here and talk forever... and you can, intellectually, understand what I went through-he was talking about some of the problems he had with the war-but you will never, never, really identify with it.

[00:36:28.05] JD: You really can't.

[00:36:28.11] JA: You can't, no. So, by response to him, I think you and I can sit down and talk about what it's like to teach in front of a bunch of kids, and...

[00:36:32.13] JD: And they could never understand a common ground.

[00:36:40.04] JA: Exactly. So, we could talk about that for a little bit; that was a hell of a point that the kid made...

[00:36:42.03] JD: Well, what [missing] says, is that there's two kinds of people in the world... those people that have been to the front, and those people that haven't been. And you can't understand unless you have been.

[00:37:00.16] JA: I have to ask you the same question... was the Government aware of what was going on with these guys?

[00:37:08.07] JD: Yeah they were totally aware of what was going on, I think with all of the guys. You know... but they didn't know how to handle any of it.

[00:37:20.13] JA: Some guys are still paying the price twenty years later...

[00:37:19.25] JD: Well there are certainly some people who are... I think conversely there are some people who blame all of their problems on the world.

[00:37:28.19] JA: Oh, sure.

[00:37:28.20] JD: You know, [missing]. I mean, I know that there are a lot of people that have a lot of problems and a lot of [missing]. And those people need counseling. [missing]. I mean, conversely I know people who just can't make it... so it's a convenient scapegoat. A convenient out.

[00:37:56.01] JA: So, after you got back home, what was the general reaction to someone who came up to you and said, hello John, where have you been for the last couple years?

[00:38:08.26] JD: Well, let me tell ya, the first time I was in Albany, the first time I got back to Albany, um... but I met a fellow downtown, I just got off... a bus... I took a bus from Washington to here... because I didn't have the money on me at the time to take the plane... and I get off the bus downtown... and, uh... took a cab... got in the cab, and this fellow, I don't know what his name was, he was a nice guy... [missing] or something like that you know... and I told him I just got home from Nam, I was just out of the hospital... he parked his cab, we went to this bar over on Delaware avenue, we drank for about six hours!

[00:39:13.00] JA: That's fantastic, man. Fantastic...

[00:39:13.12] JD: Yeah, he was a hell of a nice guy. We went over and picked up his wife, and we went back over to the bar. By the time I got off the bus... I probably got off the bus about 4 in the afternoon, I got home at about ten-thirty; I had a real good time. Yeah, so that was my first experience... and he drove me around the city a little bit because they were just doing the mall, and [missing]. Yeah, I mean the only bad

experience I had was in, uh, Port Authority, about six months later... um... these people were calling me names when I got off the bus [missing]... these people started calling me names, and I was on [missing] at the time... um, they didn't know it, but I did. That I had, like, [missing], you know, so they started calling me nasty names and things. A guy grabbed me... you know... violence again... and, uh, he's grabbing me later down the stairs. They just kind of held me with them until the bus was coming back to Albany... [missing]. Nasty people... just nasty people...

[00:40:41.02] JA: You got back in August. Once again, you have a knack for timing, you got back in [missing] had just taken place...

[00:40:59.24] JD: Yeah, I thought that was kind of comical. [missing]. I always thought that was comical. [missing] when he walked in naked. They said, what'd you do that for? He said [missing], I thought that was great. To me it was like theatre! [missing]... It was a good laugh...

[00:41:34.18] JA: What was your feeling towards the protests after you got back?

[00:41:36.16] JD: Protests I didn't mind. You know, protests I figured, you're right, we shouldn't be there. Let's get out anyway we can... [missing]. Uh, what I didn't like, is, uh, in my own city, when state university had a protest and there were two guys flying a Viet Cong flag... down the middle of the street... uh, [missing] at that time, and, uh, we could've gotten in some very trouble. As an ex-Marine, we took the flag, threw it on the ground, stomped on it... spit on it... dared anyone to come and get it. [missing]

[00:42:22.16] JA: I remember those, I was doing graduate studies and they closed down the campus, [missing] the classes on campus.

[00:42:32.15] JD: I felt ashamed. I felt ashamed of my own people. You know? I figure a friend of my enemy is my enemy... I won't let anybody fly a Viet Cong or a North Vietnamese flag in my city! Not if I can do anything about it... and, uh, at that point I [missing], I really couldn't care less, [missing] didn't matter to me...

[00:42:55.07] JA: I don't [missing], but I remember the promise the university gave...

[00:43:00.23] JD: [missing]

[00:43:08.22] JA: Wasn't that August '89, [missing] second?

[00:43:14.06] JD: That's the day.

[00:43:19.12] JA: As a veteran, what do you see being the biggest concern of veterans in the next five to ten years?

[00:43:38.05] JD: Veterans in general?

[00:43:38.05] JA: Vietnam veterans specifically.

[00:43:41.20] JD: I don't know if I can answer that.

[00:43:41.02] JA: Okay.

[00:43:42.12] JD: Nah, I don't know what the biggest concern... uh... my biggest concern is... day to day... I don't know in general what the biggest concern is... I know they're all probably my age so they're not [missing] anymore... I know that those of us who had... hurt some people... that was something... now those things are beginning to take control of us... I know that personally. I've kind of [missing]...

[00:44:25.17] JA: At least one person I know who didn't go, right here, I'll tell ya [missing]... Loaded question... are there any lessons for high school students today?
[00:44:46.04] JD: For high school students... yeah, don't be sucked into any bologna... that they want you to go to war... make sure it's a declared war, and then fight it and win it and get the hell out of there... don't be sucked into anything that has a political venture. Do right by your country, but make sure to do right by you. Don't let them fool you. 'Cos I know there's not too many politicians on this planet... so if you're going to do it... do it right. I would seriously hate to see children go to South America... Central America... I would hate to see my son go to Central America. Because there are guys there my age, you know what they're doing... they're fighting guys his age. Which, for the guys at my age, they are babes in the woods. And they take a lot of casualties. A lot of them. You can't win a whole war... unless you are prepared to fight a contractive [missing] like they are, and fight a war on their terms. And I think every war from here on out... I hope there are none... but I'm sure that's not the case. There will be limited intensity [missing]... there'll be terrorists... and everyone else. That's the way it's going to be. And you better learn how to play the game... if not, then you're just going to die.

[00:46:19.27] JA: Any final thoughts before we shut the camera off?

[00:46:21.14] JD: Any final thoughts... uh, yeah... uh, [missing] like weeping for virginity. It doesn't work. You want [missing], talk about [missing]. If someone cannot talk to you... if you find that another country muses you, to all of you, then sometimes you have to speak to that. Business end of a forty-five... that's what they understand, [missing]... most people are playing games with us, and you can't reason... you can't reason with sick men. It would be nice if you could, but you can't and you better get realistic about it if you feel identical on a point of view that they can understand...

[00:47:10.29] JA: John, thank you for the interview.

[00:47:17.03] JD: You're welcome. I had a good time.