



Dale Hartog

Salt Lake City, Utah

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

Dale Hartog

Dale Hartog.

Interviewer

And where are you from originally?

Dale Hartog

I was born and raised in Ogden, Utah.

Interviewer

And you went to high school what years?

Dale Hartog

Graduated from Ben Lomond High School in '65.

Interviewer

'65. Were you aware of Vietnam at that time when you graduated?

Dale Hartog

Oh, very aware. I spent one quarter of college at Weber State. And the draft was in effect and I and three other buddies decided to join the Navy, get a jump on the draft. So we signed up and went to boot camp together.

Interviewer

Why the Navy?

Dale Hartog

Well, one fellow wanted to go into the Navy and I didn't give much thought about it so that's where we headed.

Interviewer

Had any of your family been in World War II or anything like that?

Dale Hartog

My father was a veteran. He spent a couple years over in China/Burma area.

Interviewer

When did you arrive in boot camp?

Dale Hartog

January 11th, 1966.

Interviewer

Did you have any idea you were going to go to Vietnam eventually?

Dale Hartog

No, no idea. I had no idea what was in store for me. It was a four-month boot camp, or excuse me, three-month, I believe we graduated in April of '66. And from there I was assigned duty at Naval Ordnance test station in Long Beach, California as a yeoman.

Interviewer

What does a yeoman do?

Dale Hartog

A yeoman types and keeps records. Initially I was aboard a torpedo retriever boat at the ordnance test station, it was a 72-foot wooden craft that had approximately half a dozen personnel and I was a seaman at the time and I was assigned one of these boats. We would go out of Long Beach and send sonar down so that the test torpedoes launched from aircraft submarines ships could hone in on our sonar. They were all dummy, they were checking guidance systems. Once a torpedo spent itself, we would locate it. It had an open stern and we would winch it aboard, take it back to Long Beach for reuse.

Interviewer

So were you an office worker guy?

Dale Hartog

I believe I spent three or four months aboard the boat. And then I was reassigned into the office.

Interviewer

So how did you get to Vietnam?

Dale Hartog

That was a year's tour. And one had the choice of three assignments, or picks, as to where you wanted to go next. And I was young and I volunteered for duty in Vietnam.

Interviewer

Why?

Dale Hartog

Because my dad was a World War II veteran and I wanted to serve my country and I wanted to be like John Wayne. I never told anybody that I had volunteered for Vietnam for 15 years afterwards.

Interviewer

Why?

Dale Hartog

They wouldn't understand. It was just during those years it was awful. You didn't draw attention to yourself. And I finally told my wife that I had volunteered. At that time, I guess I reached the point where it didn't care as much. But identifying yourself as a Vietnam veteran was not a good thing back in the early years.

Interviewer

So when did you actually arrive in Vietnam?

Dale Hartog

It was July of '67, first part of July of '67.

Interviewer

And when you got there, what did you see going on, where did you go, how did you get to where you went?

Dale Hartog

I was detached to the Seabees, I was regular Navy and I was assigned to duty at Da Nang combat Air Force Base in northern Vietnam. And it took us, it's a good 20 hours to get there flying. When I arrived the humidity just hits you like a hot dish rag. The first night there they rocketed the air base and I was under my bunk wondering what I'd gotten myself into. [Laugh] Very bad feeling. From there, I was in the transit barracks at that time and they assigned me to a Chu Lai combat base which is approximately 30 miles south of Da Nang. And from there I was assigned again into the personnel office or into a – the yeoman's office for the public works department of the Seabees.

Interviewer

Tell us what a Seabee is.

Dale Hartog

Well, a Seabee, he's almost first in right after the Marines. A Seabee will go in and construct buildings, construct runways and administer transportation, public works departments and so forth.

Interviewer

And Seabee stands for what?

Dale Hartog

I couldn't tell you.

Interviewer

I think it's Construction Battalion.

Dale Hartog

Well, it's CB, okay. Yes.

Interviewer

So you're in the engineers more or less. That's engineering for the Navy, isn't that what it is?

Dale Hartog

Yes, I believe it was. I served as a yeoman in I believe the transportation division.

Interviewer

Now when do you finally get there?

Dale Hartog

Well, that would be in the middle part of July of '67.

Interviewer

And you've been rocketed already your first day.

Dale Hartog

First day I was there.

Interviewer

And what are you thinking? How long does it take for you to get to this assignment from the time you land on the ground?

Dale Hartog

Well, there's no public transportation in Vietnam so you have to go out to the air base and bum a ride to wherever you want to go so that's what I did. Take your duffel bag or your C-bag and go out to the airport and ask around and climb aboard a helicopter or a small aircraft that's going your way. And you land and then you thumb a ride to the base. That's how I arrived. [Laugh]

Interviewer

What was your first day like there, what did you see?

Dale Hartog

Well, gosh, it's hard to say my first day. There were barracks, couple rows of fairly large barracks, double-deck barracks. And there was a church, a chapel. A fairly nice base. Seabees would, you know, of course, build themselves a pretty nice place to stay.

Interviewer

Were you given a weapon?

Dale Hartog

No, sir, no weapons.

Interviewer

Did that bother you?

Dale Hartog

It sure did. We would have air raids during the night. The siren would go off and depending on the seriousness we would either walk or run to the bunkers. And crawl into the bunkers, scoot the rats out, sit there in your skivvies and wait. Nothing happened. They don't announce another siren, they just let it wear out. And if you feel you're safe you go back to your bunks.

Interviewer

You were there during Tet?

Dale Hartog

I was there during Tet, no weapons of any kind. Of course from July to December to January 31st we'd always have alerts and an occasional firefight outside the perimeters. The helicopters would come in with their guns. The Tet

Offensive, at that time the United States had a truce. Well, they had a truce for the Tet holiday, giving them a break, I suppose is what the reason was. But the night of the Tet we were in our bunks and I believe it was around two a.m. they opened up, the Viet Cong opened up and shelled, rocketed, mortared the ammunition storage, the ammunition bunkers at the combat base. And I was about a mile away, maybe less than a mile, removed from it. But when the ammunition went up, it was the most god-awful sound, roar, boom. Brightest lights you've ever seen in your life. Just the concussion knocked the screens off the barracks and the lights down. We were still in our bunks because we hear the friendlies, the Vietnamese shooting their rifles for the Tet holiday. We thought nothing of it until this happened. And you never saw a bunch of Seabees and sailors run to their bunkers as fast. Just scared the holy crap out of ya.

Interviewer

So you're running in the dark then?

Dale Hartog

Oh, yes.

Interviewer

How far did you have to run to your bunkers?

Dale Hartog

I would say 50 yards. Half a football length.

Interviewer

What did you see in that 50 yards?

Dale Hartog

My buddies running along with me. In addition to flashes. .50 caliber rounds going over the barracks. I assumed they were .50 caliber rounds. And got into the bunkers and we figured – or I figured this is it. 20 years old. And I didn't think I was gonna see another day. I didn't know what was going on outside. You could hear the commotion, you could hear the ordinates. The flashes. You didn't know what was gonna be thrown in at ya, if it was a hand grenade coming in after you or the gooks were gonna come in at ya, or for ya. That's what gave me PTSD.

Interviewer

So this was that intense?

Dale Hartog

Oh, heck yes. I still have a startled response to this day. If I don't know where the noise is coming from, a loud noise, it just scares the dickens out of me. I worked at Hill Air Force Base and I worked in the transportation as a heavy mobile equipment mechanic. And when they found out I was jumpy they would grab a garbage can lid and walk up behind me and drop it on the floor and watch. [Laugh] I was that jumpy.

Interviewer

And so this is the first night of Tet?

Dale Hartog

This is the first night of Tet

Interviewer

They're all celebrating Vietnamese New Year – when did you guys finally know this is more than a celebration and not just firecrackers?

Dale Hartog

I'm lying in my bunker or I'm sitting in the bunker. The reason I was in the bunker was because of the ammo dump going up.

Interviewer

So you're lying in your bunker?

Dale Hartog

Well, we were just lying in our bunks and we could hear the small arms fire in the village. We assumed it was Regular Army, the Republic of Vietnam Army. Because we could hear some yelling and shouting and laughing to my recollection. And quite possibly there might have been another alert or siren prior to the actual event of which there becomes so many that you become numb to it. It's like crying wolf, you just lie there, you just let it pass until you get blown out of your bunk, and then you run like hell.

Interviewer

Did you hear anybody say anything? Were people yelling at each other in your room or what?

Dale Hartog

No. Just everybody was up and gone. Nothing was said, just ppwww.

Interviewer

So you knew when those big ammo explosions happened you knew this was not a New Year's celebration?

Dale Hartog

Absolutely. Yup. It was not a New Year's celebration when the ammo dump went up.

Interviewer

You're in the bunker now and what time of night is this?

Dale Hartog

To the best of my recollection it was around two or three a.m. in the morning.

Interviewer

So it went all night long?

Dale Hartog

All night long from that time on till the sunrise and then you got up and then I believe we walked back to the barracks, got dressed and reported to our duty station.

Interviewer

Did it die down at dawn or was it still going?

Dale Hartog

It died down at dawn. As transportation we were in charge of the off-loading of supplies; ammunition and cargo. There was a ramp that the big LST's would come in to, we would offload 'em and transport the ammunition to the dumps. That night there were three buddies that were driving bombs to the ammo dump when it went off. And that morning we had to report them missing in action and they finally straggled in, their trucks had been caved in from the concussion. And I can remember one fellow saying when it hit he climbed out of his truck and found the closest bunker and dived in on top of a bunch of Marines. But I have photos of those trucks with the door panels completely caved in with 200-pound bombs stake bed that never detonated. Takes quite a bit of force to detonate 'em unless it's direct. And that day I believe it was just chaos, we didn't know what to do. And it's when I realized that we needed some personal weapons. There was nothing, nothing that came to our defense. They were all busy elsewhere. And the base was situated on a peninsula and we were at the point of the peninsula with concertina wire, ten feet of concertina wires between you and the South China Sea. And you have hordes of the VC coming, breaking through the perimeter and getting in. The only chance you'd have is to try to climb ten feet of concertina wire and swim. So I wrote to my father, I believe the following day, telling him of the experience and that I sure wish we had some weapons in which to defend ourselves. At that time my dad thought we did have weapons; a .45 or a rifle. And he was aghast. He immediately wrote the secretary of the Navy, the Secretary of Defense, all four – two state senators and the representatives here in Utah – explaining the situation. You know, when he was in China/Burma they always have a .45 or a carbie. And he explained that in Vietnam there's no rear area, was the reason why we didn't have weapons is because we were considered a rear area and a support troop. And that caused a hornet's nest, I was called into a lieutenant and interviewed about how I felt and I told him, I says, "I'd sure feel a lot safer if I had a personal firearm." And it took about a month as recall. It's pretty vague. I guess the decision was that we would create a reactionary force and that there was about a dozen of us that received M-16s, ammunition, flack-jackets and a helmet. And every time the siren would go off we would meet at a pre-positioned spot and then we're sent along the perimeter to help or to protect ourselves. And this worked out fine. I remember at one occasion where I was on the perimeter overlooking the jungle close to the ramp, and I had to spend all night there all by myself. There was a load of two-by-fours there at the supply. And I was sitting behind that, and it was pitch black, but yet you could see the jungle, the leaves, and so forth. In your mind's eye, you could see them creep – the enemy, the CV – creeping up, crawling through the jungle. And you'd swear, you'd just swear they were coming. Scared the daylight out of ya. I wore my safety on my firearm just about out. I was never so glad to see the sun come up that day.

Interviewer

So were you ever hit by the Viet Cong?

Dale Hartog

We lost one individual. What the heck was his name? Peterson. I believe he got it right there from the reactionary force.

Interviewer

Back to Tet for a minute, how long did Tet last for you? There was that first day but what happened after that?

Dale Hartog

The initial attack, as I recall, lasted that night. And it's vague to me as to what happened the next night. I can't recall. As far as I know it was calm. But then after that we would have the alerts and form. I remember being assigned to the – going aboard an LST transport ship to the stern of the ship with three other fellows and kneeling and watching the bay for the enemy to come up.

Interviewer

What were your officers telling you?

Dale Hartog

Nothing. Nothing.

Interviewer

Can you say the officers weren't telling you anything.

Dale Hartog

The officers didn't tell me a thing, didn't tell us anything, didn't give us any encouragement, they kept to themselves. At that time there was fragging going on in Vietnam. Men reached the point where they didn't respect officers and hand grenades were tossed into officer's compounds and quarters and so forth. They were afraid. I don't think they wanted to rile us and likely so. We were at the point where we were giving a damn, we didn't care. We wanted to get out of there because we could see politically how it was going and it was every man for themselves. I remember one night, there must have been a dozen of us piled aboard a jeep, a little jeep. And we had been drinking and carrying on and we went over to the officer's quarters and honking our horns and yelling and telling them to come on. [Laugh] There was not a soul, nothing was mentioned, nobody came out. I shouldn't say this, but that's what happened. You just reached a point where you didn't want to play anymore, you know? It was maddening.

Interviewer

And yet some guys said they had amazing officers.

Dale Hartog

No, they were good. They were good. I had no problems. We didn't have any problems, we were just cocky, I guess. We were just trying to... I don't know what we were trying to do exactly. [Laugh] But it reached that point where you didn't care.

Interviewer

How far were you through your tour when you hit that point?

Dale Hartog

Oh, gosh, it didn't take long. I would say from – I entered the country July and it was probably September, October where we realized that we were being restrained, we couldn't fight to win the war. All the news back home was just crazy.

Interviewer

How did you know that in service though?

Dale Hartog

Oh, you get news programs. The United States Radio Network. "Stars and Stripes," "Navy Times" that you would get. They did not keep anything from you.

Interviewer

So you felt that way months before Tet?

Dale Hartog

I did. We all did. It was all politically motivated, politically operated. We could've kicked their butts, but the politicians wouldn't let us and that's what – and then at that point, you just figured well, I'm gonna get out of this alive, I'm all for myself. And after Tet, with the turmoil going on in the country, you know, Martin Luther King was assassinated in '68, Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated when I was over there. Two assassinations and the rioting and you know, we didn't know what kind of a country we were coming home to, if we gonna go home.

Interviewer

Plus you had a presidential election at that time too.

Dale Hartog

Plus the presidential election.

Interviewer

Were you old enough to vote?

Dale Hartog

When did we receive...? Was it 18 or 21, Adrian? Adrian I think it was 18 that we could vote.

Dale Hartog

Did I just think they just allowed us to vote at 18? I'm not sure. I'm not sure about that.

Interviewer

Right around then when it changed.

Dale Hartog

Right around then. Couldn't drink. Couldn't drink. If you were underage you couldn't drink.

Interviewer

Did you find a way around that problem?

Dale Hartog

Oh, yeah, sure. That was the entertainment after work. You got to the point where you skipped dinner, went straight to the enlisted men's club and drank beer, ten cent beer, about 80 degrees, the beer was so warm.

Interviewer

Did you get out in the country at all? Did you meet any Vietnamese? Did you see any of the culture? Did you see a bigger picture than your little peninsula?

Dale Hartog

Yes, we got into the little village at Chu Lai often. As a supply depot we would have pallets, old lumber, stuff like that. We would load the lumber up into the trucks and take it into the village. And they'd just go crazy over this wood. The villagers were just friendly, just fun. And the villagers, we would employ them on the base also to sweep up. Some of them did clerical work. One fellow that I became dear friends with, his name was Mr. V, and I believe he was about my age, maybe just a tad older, he was an interpreter. And we developed a very good relationship. And I often wonder what happened to him and all those people that I became friends with over there.

Interviewer

Exactly how much time were you in Vietnam? What was your tour?

Dale Hartog

One year.

Interviewer

Did you start keeping a calendar?

Dale Hartog

You'd better believe it.

Interviewer

Can you say that again?

Dale Hartog

You'd better believe I kept a calendar. It was a picture of a naked woman in the shape of the country of Vietnam. And it was all blocked off. And every day you would pencil it in.

Interviewer

Do you remember getting short?

Dale Hartog

Oh, yes, absolutely. That was the thing to do was start getting short. I didn't take any R&R, that's rest and relaxation – they give you a week to go over, fly you where you wanted to go. I was gonna save my money. But towards May, I broke out in hives from stress. At least they said it was hives. I have a feeling that it might have been caused by Agent Orange that I blame my diabetes on this day, that it was cloracne I think it's called. It comes just right after contact with Agent Orange.

Interviewer

Where would you have come in contact with it in your work?

Dale Hartog

In my work? Every Sunday, not every Sunday, most Sundays we would take a break and go to the beach. There was a beach that all the services used and the South China Sea was a big deposit ground and we distilled our own water, we used the water from the ocean, from the river that went out to sea. I drank it, I swam in it, I showered in it.

I recall barrels that was used to – it was an herbicide and they would use it to kill the vegetation along the perimeters.

Interviewer

Were you shipping any of this in your transportation battalion?

Dale Hartog

To the best of my knowledge, I don't know. I'm assuming so. The name of the operation was Operation Ranch Hand. And they sprayed millions of gallons, they just had C-130s next to each other just spraying the jungles with this stuff. General Westmoreland in charge of the war, his son died of Agent Orange.

Interviewer

Can you talk about that 200 feet of film that means a lot to you, can you describe it?

Dale Hartog

I bought a little Kodak movie camera, Super 8 movie camera while I was over there in the exchange. And I took 250 feet of film of life in the barracks, taking pictures of the guys climbing around in the barracks, outside of the barracks, taking pictures of us at the beach. Lots of footage. I remember I took my camera aboard a river patrol boat that took us out to the USS Sanctuary. I had some eye strain. And it was out a way off shore.

Interviewer

Is that a hospital ship?

Dale Hartog

At the hospital ship Sanctuary. And going aboard I had my eyes checked and they said they're just strained. And I'm off on a tangent – when I was aboard the ship, I saw the blind leading the blind. I saw guys pushing guys with no legs. I couldn't believe it. I was... why am I aboard this thing? It was just incredible and get me off this ship. I had it easy.

Interviewer

Was that a turning point for you?

Dale Hartog

It was probably one of them. Poor guys. Poor guys. And I almost felt ashamed that I was not in their capacity, that I was not on the front lines. I felt that I wasn't up to their standard. Made me feel real bad.

Interviewer

Do you still feel that way today?

Dale Hartog

Not so much anymore. What I went through is enough to scare the crap out of anyone. Whether it was on the front line or behind the lines. I believe the emotion is about the same, if not worse being unarmed and getting scared to death.

Interviewer

How long did you have to go when you were on the Sanctuary?

Dale Hartog

Oh, my gosh... it must have been, oh, boy, I can't tell you the time. It was during the monsoon so it would've had to have been... oh... close to March, maybe April.

Interviewer

So then how many months to go at that time?

Dale Hartog

July. I had about three or four months.

Interviewer

So you're getting shorter?

Dale Hartog

I was getting short. Yeah. As I said, I broke out in hives and so I decided take R&R and I flew to Australia, to Sydney, for a week's leave. And enjoyed the city. And on May 25th of 1968 I turned 21 in a very nice bar. [Laugh] Twenty-one years old.

Interviewer

What was it like to get back on that plane from Australia?

Dale Hartog

That's the crazy part, you go spend a week in civilization and then you voluntarily get back aboard the aircraft and fly back to the war zone. It's crazy. Crazy. But we did it.

Interviewer

The second time you arrived there on an airline, what's the difference?

Dale Hartog

Well, you know what you're doing. As I recall, you learn the ropes. Once you arrive at Da Nang Air Force Base you go out, find a ride down to Chu Lai.

Interviewer

Are you watching any new people come in at the airport at that same time?

Dale Hartog

Oh, yes.

Interviewer

What are you thinking about them?

Dale Hartog

Oh... you just said oh boy have they got something to learn.

Interviewer

And what did they call those guys?

Dale Hartog

I don't know if there's any specific names. Newbies.

Interviewer

Some guys say they were called NFGs.

Dale Hartog

NFGs, yes, it could be. [Laugh]

Interviewer

What are you hearing from home in the news at that time? That's a volatile year in the United States.

Dale Hartog

Oh, yes, absolutely. You know, like I said, we didn't know what kind of a country we were going back to with assassinations and riots and so forth. It was crazy.

Interviewer

Are you listening to any kind of music to get you through it? Radio or do you have anything in the barracks?

Dale Hartog

You have your own radios, little portable transistor radios back then and usually tuned into the Armed Services Network. You could listen to... the fellow, the "Hello Vietnam" Adrian Cronauer or whatever his name was. And they would play all the '60s music, popular music. And occasionally you'd tune into North Vietnam and listen to their propaganda and how many men they killed. Made you feel real good. But it was quite interesting to listen to their take on what the war was like, and what was happening.

Interviewer

During Tet, it practically wiped out the VC. Did you see a change in the enemy? More NVA, less VC?

Dale Hartog

They expended themselves. I don't know if it quieted down so much, we didn't have as severe attacks, we didn't have as many alerts. Like I say, it wasn't as bad as that Tet, that first big push.

Interviewer

But were you aware of the change?

Dale Hartog

I was not aware of the change at that time. I wasn't aware. As far as I know the war was still active and still ongoing and just as dangerous.

Interviewer

Did you have any close friends there?

Dale Hartog

Oh, dear friends. I still keep in contact with two or three of them today.

Interviewer

What are their names?

Dale Hartog

Dennis O'Leary from Maine. Randall McGordon from Meridian, Idaho. Bill(Backstat? 46:29) from Florida. Ryan Osteen from Florida.

Interviewer

And what made you so tight?

Dale Hartog

Just brothers. You're just bond. You just live together for a year. You get to know 'em when they're down, when they're pouty when they're... in a funk, you just learn to leave 'em alone, and they learn to leave you alone when you're depressed.

Interviewer

You're getting short. Tell us about that, close to leaving. What's it like to leave those guys behind?

Dale Hartog

Really hard. Really hard. A lot of 'em extended for six months and I couldn't understand why, but they did. Some of them did. But it was really hard to leave 'em behind. Really difficult.

Interviewer

Can you say that again and explain why?

Dale Hartog

Well, the men you are with, you bond to. You become a band of brothers. And you get to know their nuances, their idiosyncrasies, and you get to know 'em. And when it comes time to leave, when your tour is up, it's just a bugger to walk away from 'em not knowing if they would come back.

Interviewer

Tell us about your last day there?

Dale Hartog

Well, my last day in Vietnam I had flown from Chu Lai to Da Nang, one was waiting back in the trench at the barracks and I believe it was a Sunday. And there were two or three of us that were leaving and we opened up the enlisted men's club around noon and we closed it around one a.m. I was smashed. And I was in the shower and the

security come and pulled me out of the shower and put me in my bunk. About an hour later they woke us up to get us ready to go home. That was my last day. Never had a worse hangover in all my life, 18-hour flight home. [Laugh]

Interviewer

What was it like when they closed the door?

Dale Hartog

I was ready. I was ready. I had had enough.

Interviewer

On the aircraft.

Dale Hartog

You know, I think we were all so darn tired we didn't have much emotion, to tell you the truth. They were commercial airlines, World Airways, I believe they were and the regular stewardesses. But I don't think there was much emotion, to tell you the truth. I didn't have a lot of emotion. You might edit that out as far as closing the bar down.

Interviewer

Oh, we've had much worse, believe me. That's nothing. And it would be interesting to know how many people went to alcoholism. Have they said?

Dale Hartog

I've been sober for 14 months.

Interviewer

Congratulations. I remember the military that it was an alcohol culture. They encouraged it. They were issuing our officers so much alcohol as a ration.

Dale Hartog

Yeah, a bottle a month or something like that. The way you had an enlisted man's club, it was fairly large, it was thatched, open, tables. The USO would come and have shows. And we'd sit there and drink beer until I believe it was 9 or 9:30.

Interviewer

Did you go to any of the big USO shows?

Dale Hartog

I saw Bob Hope and Raquel Welch.

Interviewer

What was that like? Tell us about that?

Dale Hartog

Well, they were quite small from where I was in the audience. We made quite a party of it. Sat there and had cheese and crackers and some drinks and watched the show.

Interviewer

How far were you from the stage?

Dale Hartog

Gosh, couple hundred yards probably.

Interviewer

How many people were there?

Dale Hartog

Thousands. Some of them had scaled the telephone poles, they used the lifts to raise people up above the crowd to watch the show. It was a lot of fun.

Interviewer

Is that the same show where she was wearing a mini skirt and red panties?

Dale Hartog

Very possible. I have a picture, a little small picture, I don't know if you could blow it up, but they're there.

Interviewer

And could you tell how Bob Hope changed at least for that hour or two? Did guys feel better?

Dale Hartog

Oh, yeah, it was something from home that you could relate to. Bob Hope coming to see you, it was a nice honor, I thought.

Interviewer

When you see films today of Vietnam, what comes to you?

Dale Hartog

I get in a funk. I get depressed, I get just – it just really sends me down. "Apocalypse Now" and "Born on the 4th of July" they bring back a lot of memories. Up until those shows came out, one could not describe the horrors that took place over there. Once those movies came out the public realized what the GI had gone through. It was quite an eye opener for 'em.

Interviewer

Can you close your eyes and still see Vietnam?

Dale Hartog

Oh, absolutely. You better believe it. In fact, you can go on Google Earth and you can zero right in that peninsula, there's nothing there anymore, it's all gone. But you can pick out where your barracks was and where your office was.

Interviewer

Have you done that often?

Dale Hartog

I've done it a couple times. Yup. I'd like to go back. I'd like to go back. I would love to go back and see the people and see how it's changed.

Interviewer

Why?

Dale Hartog

They're friendly. They're just so nice, the mama-sans and the papa-sans were good people. The kids, the children were so fun. Where are they now?

Interviewer

If you could give one message to people about Vietnam and your experience, what would you say?

Dale Hartog

Well, I wished we would have followed through. I wish that politicians, the gutless politicians would've just let their generals have at it and force them back to the border like they did in Korea. That's what should've been done.

Those poor people that got re-educated. I feel really bad. Really bad.

Interviewer

We have a refugee community of Vietnamese and we've interviewed several of them. These kids are now adults and they're talking about the war. Did you know we have a refugee community here?

Dale Hartog

No, I don't believe I did. I don't remember, I don't recall.

Interviewer

What would you say to them because they were the children?

Dale Hartog

Well, I have been asked in my – I've ran across Vietnamese immigrants and they ask me why. Why did you leave?

Interviewer

Have you been to The Wall?

Dale Hartog

I have.

Interviewer

What was that like?

Dale Hartog

All those names. Couple of high school buddies that are on there. My good friend Bobby Crowley grew up with. It's incredible. All those people, all those kids. Never should've been.

Interviewer

That one year has stayed with you for so long. What is it about that year that you just can't forget?

Dale Hartog

I guess being afraid of dying at the age of 20 years old. That made me the most worried, scared. Here I am, 20 years old and this is it. I had so much to look forward to.

Interviewer

Yeah, I would think that that kind of fear would have a lasting imprint.

Dale Hartog

Yup.

Interviewer

Did your buddies feel the same way?

Dale Hartog

I don't believe we talked about it much, about how we felt. I guess we just, through our actions, our quietness, our moods reflected on how we felt. We didn't get into anything really personal. Like I say – well, of course they weren't married or they weren't engaged, they didn't have a sweetheart back home, they extended an extra six months of which I could not believe that they did, but they did.

Interviewer

Something you'd like to talk about or mention?

Dale Hartog

At some point you know, I praise... I have so many friends over there, or had so many Vietnamese friends over there. That you reach a point where you get mad at 'em because you're over there, I guess. And you become callus. One incident, it was funny at the time but I think it told the story of how we felt. As transportation and supply we had access to caskets, galvanized caskets. And one Sunday afternoon we took a – well, let me go back. We used the caskets for water, we'd fill it full of ice and water and take it out to the drivers, transportation that's doing the deliveries. And we got the idea of grabbing this old papa-san and throwing him in the casket and we told him we were going to take him to the ocean and throw it in. And we wrangled him in and closed the lid and drove around the compound a couple times. It was empty, there was no water in it. We opened up the lid and he was out cold. He was out cold and when he woke up he was so damn mad. And we thought it was funny at the time. [Laugh] It was.

Interviewer

Do you see the metaphor of taking a casket? What was the water and ice?

Dale Hartog

Yeah, it was just water and ice.

Interviewer

There's a real – symbolism here.

Dale Hartog

Just a galvanized lined casket. Used it for water. [Laugh]

Interviewer

How many caskets were in issue? How many were sitting there?

Dale Hartog

I don't recall. I don't recall. I have another incident where they were short of personnel and they wanted volunteers to take ammunition to the bomb dumps so I volunteered. And I went out to the ramp, supply ramp and they loaded my 67 international two-and-a-half ton state truck with Howitzer rounds. Two pallets tall. And it was up to me to lash 'em down. I tried. [Laugh] As tight as I could and I got in the truck and I drove off of the ramp and there was a corner and I was going too fast and I lost the whole entire rounds, went into the ditch. And the only thing I could do was walk back to the supply ramp and this chief petty officer met me and he says, "Hartog, you go to the barracks!" [Laugh] At he say I didn't have to clean 'em up while he was mad. There was one time when I did make it successfully to the ammo dump on another night with a load of rounds and at that time I smoked and I put the cigarette in wrong and lit the filter. It went poof like that and scared the holy bu-Jesus out of me. [Laugh] Crazy stuff.

Interviewer

Thank you.