Dennis Stevens

Salt Lake City, Utah

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

Dennis Stevens

Dennis Earl Stevens.

Interviewer

And you were born where?

Dennis Stevens

Born in Salt Lake. Same day as Shasta the Liger. We were born on the same day, May 6th, 1948.

Interviewer

Of course, I remember Shasta. Half tiger, half lion.

Dennis Stevens

Still stuffed in there. When I die I want to be stuffed and put right by it in the zoo. Just kidding.

Interviewer

And you grew up in Vernal? Where did you grow up at?

Dennis Stevens

Two places. Kearns, and Oakley, Kamas Valley. That's where my family's from is Oakley.

Interviewer

And so where did you go to high school?

Dennis Stevens

Cyprus High School in Magna.

Interviewer

What was your life like in high school?

Dennis Stevens

Very athletic. I played football, baseball, basketball. Pretty normal upbringing.

Interviewer

When you were in high school, did you hear about the Vietnam War?

Dennis Stevens

Everybody talked about the Vietnam War and all the guys, we all had a draft number. Mine was pretty bad, it was something like a hundred-something, pretty low.

Interviewer

What does that mean when you get a low draft number?

Dennis Stevens

That means you get drafted sooner than someone with a high draft number.

Interviewer

And so you got this when?

Dennis Stevens

I think they did it in 1969, right around there.

Interviewer

And so you were out of high school at that time?

Dennis Stevens

Well, I graduated from high school in '66, went to Snow College a year and then I went on an LDS mission from '67 to '69.

Interviewer

And where was that?

Dennis Stevens

California. And when I got back from there, I went to the U and then went in the Army in 1970.

Interviewer

So did you graduate from the U?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, a few years later. I have a Master's degree and a bachelor's from the U. Social work.

Interviewer

You got a low number which means you're going to go. Did you wait for them to call you up?

Dennis Stevens

No. I volunteered for the draft and chose to go in so I could be home for Christmas before I went over. When you got drafted in those days you just figured you were going to go to the Vietnam. I volunteered for the draft and said, "Here, take me in August so I'll be home for Christmas."

Interviewer

Infantry?

Dennis Stevens

Oh, no. I just let them draft me. You don't know what your MOS is going to be. So everybody goes to basic and when you go to basic in those days you were either RA, US, or NG. NG, National Guard; RA, Regular Army; and US is a draftee. So I was a US, so we were just kind of one step above an NG at basic. And then when you're in

basic they pick your MOS for you.

Interviewer

And where did you go to basic?

Dennis Stevens

Fort Lewis, Washington for basic and AIT.

Interviewer

You got picked for infantry?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah. Out of the whole company – I think there was like 120 of us, I think 118 were infantry. I mean almost everybody went infantry. And if you were lucky, you thought you were lucky if you went like artillery that wasn't really all that lucky either. So there were two or three guys that went artillery. That's out of the guys that were US guys.

Interviewer

So you came home for Christmas. What was that like?

Dennis Stevens

It was all right. I mean I didn't mind basic and AIT. AIT is Advanced Infantry Training. But I didn't mind it because I grew up physical and I liked sports so I was in pretty decent shape. And I always liked guns. I'm kind of a gun guy anyway, so basic and AIT was okay. I didn't mind it. It was pretty challenging, but it was all right.

Interviewer

So this is Christmas of what year you come home?

Dennis Stevens

1970.

Interviewer

There was a lot going on in Vietnam at that time.

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, in fact, I had friends that were a year older than me, or two, that were coming back from Vietnam.

Interviewer

What were they telling you?

Dennis Stevens

They weren't saying anything. Yeah, they were pretty quiet about it. So I had no idea what to expect. I kept saying, hey, I'm going over there probably in January. And they just said, "Just keep your wits about ya." They wouldn't tell me anything.

Interviewer

So how did you actually get to Vietnam? How did you arrive, by airliner?

Dennis Stevens

By airplane, yeah.

Interviewer

Was it an airliner?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, it was an airliner. As I remember, we had some pretty stewardesses too, that were real nice to us.

Interviewer

Where did you land?

Dennis Stevens

It seems like we landed in Alaska to refuel. They wouldn't let us off the plane, I remember that. Some of us wanted to get off. They wouldn't let us off the plane. And then from there we flew into – what was the name of the place – Cam Ranh Bay I think is where we flew into.

Interviewer

What was it like when they opened that door?

Dennis Stevens

Well, of course, in Utah it was winter. When they opened that door it was just like a heat wave. I remember how hot and humid it was. Really hot.

Interviewer

When you got on that stair ramp, what did you see?

Dennis Stevens

I saw guys leaving, and I still remember the look in their face. Pretty scary.

Interviewer

What was in their face?

Dennis Stevens

Basically nothing. They just had that look.

Interviewer

Where did you go first?

Dennis Stevens

I went to Chu Lai, that's kind of in the north central, on the coast. And I don't remember a lot about Vietnam but I'm starting to remember more. But I remember our platoon leader, our LT, gave me the M-60 to carry. He says, "Hey, you're a big guy, you can carry this."

Interviewer

Tell everybody what an M-60 is.

Dennis Stevens

M-60's a machine gun. It weighs 26 pounds and it's got ammo that's in the belt. It's a pretty heavy gun. Anyway, he gave that to me and he said, "You'll be carrying this." And I said, "Okay." You know, I'd fired one in AIT so I knew it was kind of fun to shoot. And they gave me a rucksack and I said, "What do I do with this?" "You put your water and your C-rations in it and whatever else you can carry." And then you get on a helicopter.

Interviewer

Where does it take you?

Dennis Stevens

Out into the jungle somewhere. You sit in these helicopters and your feet dangle out the doors. There's usually at least six of us, three on each side. And there's a couple door gunners and stuff. You have no idea what's going on. But pretty soon you're coming in and they pop smoke. So you see the smoke down there and I didn't know what it was, but it was different colors, mean different things, as you know. And I think it was red smoke. And the door gunners said, "That ain't good." I remember them talking and saying that's not a good color or something. Anyway, it was a hot LZ.

Interviewer

What's a hot LZ?

Dennis Stevens

You're getting shot at. Getting shot at. That was my first day.

Interviewer

So tell us about that moment.

Dennis Stevens

You know, I don't remember a lot about it. I remember the door gunners were both firing M-60s above my head. It was real noisy, chaotic, everybody confused a little bit. I had no clue, and the door gunner said, "Just start shooting over there." So I did. I just started shooting into the jungle, the trees. And we lit in this rice paddy and the door gunner says, "Get out!" And look down and it was like about 20 feet to the ground. And we're all looking at each other like it's too far. But we got a foot and out we went into this rice paddy and it was just all muddy and ucky. Firefight didn't last very long. I don't even remember much about it other than it was just a bunch of confusion.

Interviewer

Did someone run over and start giving orders to you or telling you what to do?

Dennis Stevens

No. No. There were birds flying in, there were some that had already been there that had landed before us that were trying to secure the place. And when we came in, we kind of came into the middle of it. So no one was really

doing anything other than just – I didn't even ever see who we were shooting at. Just shootin' into this tree line. I never did see anybody.

Interviewer

Explain about the smoke colors and what the different colors mean.

Dennis Stevens

When a helicopter's coming in, the helicopter pilot looks for people on the ground, good guys, to pop smoke so they'll know what they're coming in to. And I don't remember what the colors all mean other than I think it's red, green, and yellow, but they know the good color in the bird. So the pilot of this helicopter knew that we were coming into a hot LZ. Of course the door gunners knew. Does that make sense?

Interviewer

One of the colors, isn't it a rescue, to pick guys up? Wounded?

Dennis Stevens

There were different colors, yeah. Sometimes you use different colors. It was explained to me, the bad guys of course had smoke too, the bad guys, you know, the dinks, the enemy.

Interviewer

Would they use that to deceive you?

Dennis Stevens

Oh, yeah. That's what I was told; that they would pop a color. If you used the same color all the time, obviously they would know too, eventually. I was told they changed the colors so that just the people on the ground and in the birds would know. Does that make sense? And I don't know what all the different colors. You got to understand, my job was pretty specific and pretty narrow and there was a lot of stuff that went on that I didn't know and didn't really care about. Do you understand? Right at that moment I just wanted to get on the ground, go to a safe space and place and not get killed my first day.

Interviewer

So what happens next after the firefight ends?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, firefight ends and I don't know, I think there were some guys that got shot. Anyway, birds came in and they left and stuff. It's all pretty confusing then, and even more now. But what I remember is your platoon goes and sets up a perimeter – every night we did this with trip wires and claymore mines so that your perimeter around you is secure. And then you take turns with guard duty. You do that every night. You pass the watch down to the next guy and then you hope you get your watch back if you started in the morning. But what I remember is I woke up in the morning and my fatigues were soaked in blood. And I thought, in all the excitement I'd been shot because there was a lot adrenaline and stuff. Well nobody told me about leeches. There's leeches everywhere in Vietnam and these leeches had got on me during the night and sucked away on me and when they get so much they just

automatically pop. Of course the guys that had been in country a long time, they had a good laugh about that because I didn't know. And I told our LT, his name was Ranger. And I said, "Hey, I'm soaked in blood." And he just laughed and he said, "Oh, that's just leeches." And so then the guys that had been there a while taught me that you tie off your fatigues here so the leeches don't know any further in your legs and stuff. That was my first night. It was kind of scary.

Interviewer

How close did you get to these people in this first unit?

Dennis Stevens

Well, when you come to Vietnam you come in really as an individual. So when I came to the 198th there was just me and one another guy that had been to basic and AIT. There was just two of us. Everyone else was total strangers to us. We were the new guys, NG's, or whatever. And so when you get there – I didn't know this until I'd been there a while – but if you're a new guy there, you're a big liability because you don't know what the hell you're doing, you see? So they kept their distance from ya. I remember guys would talk to me but not very much for a while. And really, I mean, I didn't know what I was doing. Nobody does when they first get there.

Interviewer

How long does it take you to acclimate to where you're competent enough to where you think you know what you're doing?

Dennis Stevens

Good question. I don't know if you ever do really because every day is kind of different. I think the first thing that you kind of come to realize, at least I did, is that there's so many ways that you can get hurt, that really you accept the reality that if it's your time to go, it's your time to go and there's not a heck of a lot you can do about it. I mean you can be safe, you walk in certain places, you're real safe on trails. You watch for booby traps. There's things you can do. You never pick up anything if you're out in the field.

Interviewer

Why?

Dennis Stevens

Because it could be booby trapped. One guy picked up a rice knife for example and it was booby trooped – for a souvenir. Those kinds of things. So you learn not to pick things up. You learn not to get around certain things. You're very cautious because your life really does depend on it. So you become very cautious. And you keep your wits about ya. A lot of people, they talk about all the Vietnam vets, how they're drug addicts and all that crap – when you're a grunt over there and you're out in the field, you don't do any of that kind of stuff. I mean we had our wits about us and we were all about business. Now when you're in the rear, which we were a couple days out of the month, then all hell went loose, we were pretty much out of control. But when we're out in the field nobody did drugs. No one that I did. Sometimes I think some of the guys smoked marijuana. Sometimes if we were really

good soldiers and got some good KIA's they would send cold beer out to us in a helicopter which is pretty good. But that's the only things I saw.

Interviewer

So tell us about a typical day.

Dennis Stevens

A typical day.

Interviewer

You said the most stressful thing was the waiting.

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, no one ever told me that. Nobody. You have in your mind, a picture of what it would be like. Like to be in a firefight you see the stuff on TV. You see war pictures as kids and that kind of stuff. But honestly, it's a very boring job, really, because it isn't all every day firefights. And honestly, the hardest thing about being over there was the wait and the anticipation because you never knew. So you would walk on trails, you'd walk all day, all night, 24/7 and that first shot could come any time. And it was unbearable at times, the stress. I mean we'd all have upset stomachs. I mean it was a horrible amount of stress. And when a firefight happened, when we'd actually be able to get in a firefight, it was a release; actually, it was a relief. It was like the adrenaline came on and it was very addicting, it felt good, we could do something. The wait was over. And it was actually a pretty good adrenaline rush to finally get into a firefight. Does that make sense?

Interviewer

You used a metaphor like a car wreck.

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, when I did counseling with vets and their wives were there, often times they couldn't understand why the stress 30 years go would be a factor now. And it's still kind of a mystery to me, isn't it, when you think about it? But I would explain to the wife, if somebody told you that you were going to be a real serious car accident within the next three months, or the next year, and it was a fact, and they didn't know when the car accident was going to happen or how bad it's going to be or where or what, how would you feel about it? Well they'd all say, "Well I'd be really nervous about getting into the car." And I said, "Well that's what it's like for a whole year for your husband, this vet here. That's what the stress is like. You don't know. You just don't know." Does that make sense to you? It's a way of looking at it.

Interviewer

A typical day.

Dennis Stevens

A typical day. Well, a typical day doesn't start and end, it's all together, you know what I mean? You can't say well, I got up at a certain time and did this. But there's certain things you did every day. When you get up in the morning

and you haven't been in a firefight or anything, just kind of a normal day, you pack up your stuff; put it all in your rucksack. You just slept out – we had a poncho liner and a poncho that we slept under as a tent kind of a thing. We just slept on the ground. Some guys slept in hammocks but that wasn't very safe because then you're not on the ground, you're up off the ground. But first decision is who's going to walk point that day. That's the first decision you have to make.

Interviewer

How is that decided?

Dennis Stevens

Just amongst us. I didn't walk point because I carried the 60 but somebody needed to walk point. And guys took turns. There were some guys in the platoon that were better at walking point than others. You had to have good eyesight; you had to have a sense about ya, that you really were alert and watching. And when you headed out, of course, you keep a long distance between ya. You know, the guy walking point and then the second guy, there's a good ten yards between ya so you're spread out. And that kind of makes sense. If the first guy hits a booby trap or takes fire, particularly a booby trap or something, you decrease the amount of injuries if you're spread out. One of ways you learn to survive, I guess, is keeping your distance from people. Anyway, then you start out, LT, our platoon leader has a general idea of where we're going and what direction, he's kind of in charge. The guy carrying the radio. You have a medic that's there. Sometimes the medics in those days were conscientious objectors; they didn't want to carry a weapon so they would be trained to be a medic that didn't carry a weapon. Quite a few of them decided to carry a weapon after they'd been there a few days, you know, and they found out that it was probably wise to have one. But that's kind of the makeup of the platoon; about 15 to 20 guys, sometimes less, but right around there. Anyway, you just head out. Sometimes on a trail, sometimes you'd cut your own trail with a machete. That was actually the safer way to go. Then your chances of coming on to a booby trap were a lot less. And honestly, you just start out and your objective was to engage the enemy and most of the time it was them seeing us first. That's pretty much every day. Sounds pretty boring, doesn't it?

Interviewer

You're carrying an M-60?

Dennis Stevens
Carrying an M-60.

Interviewer

It makes you an important part of the group.

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, because when you're needed to you can lay down a pretty good line of fire. You can put out some fire with an M-60.

Interviewer

Does it also make you a target?

Dennis Stevens

Well, everyone's a target. There's some that are, I think, more of a target than others.

Interviewer

The radio guy?

Dennis Stevens

The radio guy. The LT, if they can decide. Nobody had their rank on their fatigues out in the field, so you couldn't say like there's the LT because he would have either captain bars or lieutenant bars on them. Nobody had their rank on their uniforms. Yeah, probably the radio guy or the 60 guy, the guy walking point were usually the first targets.

Interviewer

Did you take a lot of casualties?

Dennis Stevens

You know, yeah, but I don't remember much about it. Isn't that weird? And I think I told Sally when I was down at the vet center, a guy came in, Scott Longhurst who was with me in our platoon over there, and we were sharing photographs, of course they were all basically the same. And he had some photos of there when he got medevaced out because he'd been shot and I had totally spaced that out. I had totally forgotten about it. I'm in the photos, I know I was there. It's kind of weird. You forget about a lot of stuff. So not only don't I like telling war stories, I don't really remember a lot about that year. In fact, just to find out what units I was is in, I had to go to old letters that I had written to my mom and my girlfriend at the time. So on there I could say, oh, yeah, I remember I was with the 198th. But until just like nine or ten years ago, I had no clue. I don't know.

Interviewer

Were you aware of what was going on back in the United States? Did you have any contact, did you hear anything?

Dennis Stevens

We could read "The Stars and Stripes" every once in a while but we knew that was put out by the military so it was a little slanted I'm sure, but it was good reading. We'd get letters from home. My mom would write a letter and say, "Wow, we saw on TV that there are no American troops in the field. That the ARVN's – the Republic of Vietnam Army – they're doing all the fighting." And I remember reading that letter and I was right out in the middle of nowhere out in the field and I'm thinking, wow, there's some people back in the States that are getting sold a line of crap. We all knew that, the politics. We didn't talk a lot about it. Our main focus, honestly, was just to get out of there. And our LT, if you had a good LT, he would try not to put us in situations that he knew would be bad for us. So his goal, and all of our goals, was just to survive that place and leave. And we didn't talk a lot about the politics.

Interviewer

Do you remember your lieutenant, do you remember him very well? What was his name?

Dennis Stevens

His nickname was Ranger. His last name was Ladak, L-a-d-a-k, and I've gotten e-mails from him because through this website I've come in contact with some of the people that I was with over there. And he was a real cool guy, he kind of looked like Groucho Marx. There's photographs in my photos there of him. Really a cool guy. Really a good guy.

Interviewer

What made him so cool?

Dennis Stevens

Well, he wasn't a lifer and you know what the term "lifer" means. He was an ROTC guy, he went to college, he kind of got drafted like us. He wasn't a career type of a guy, he was pretty cool. We respected him because first of all he knew what he was doing, that he wouldn't do stupid things. So we respected him not by the fact that he was an officer – that didn't mean anything to us over there – but the fact that he had knowledge that would help us get out of there. That was more important. And then the second lieutenant I had there, I remember his name was Seaman, he was a nice guy too. He wasn't there very long because the unit shut down in May of '71, the 198th, it went back to the States and I got transferred.

Interviewer

Tell us about that charade of coming home.

Dennis Stevens

It was pretty interesting because we would hear rumors, and we did when I was with the 198th that we were going home, that our unit was going home. And so we were all thinking, hey, this is pretty good. Well I went in there in January and then May is when the unit went home. So from about the first part of April, we kept hearing that the unit was going home. We were all pretty stupid, I guess, we thought we were going home. And I remember we all got transferred to other units. It was pretty disappointing but we all kind of knew that it was too good to be true. We weren't going home. I'd only been out six months. And then I got transferred to the 1st Cav in Da Nang. That's a whole different ball game. Do you want to hear about that?

Interviewer

Yes.

Dennis Stevens

That's a mec unit, it's a mechanized unit. So we got transferred into there. And a lot of us from the 198th infantry got transferred into it. I was put into C-Troop, 1st Cav and my job there, I was in charge of an M-60, but we rode around on APC's – Armored Personnel Carriers – you probably are familiar with those – tanks. Diesel tanks, if you can imagine. You rode around on top and there was a .50 cal machine gun on top and there were tracks – we

called them tracks. A diesel, a big, loud, diesel engine on it. And usually there were a guy behind the .50, there was a guy driving it and all you would see is his head sticking out of the top because he had these things at the bottom, driving. And then he would sit on top of the APC and there was a hole in the top where you'd go down inside and there's where all of our ammo was and that kind of stuff.

Interviewer

Why would you ride on top instead of inside?

Dennis Stevens

Well, because if you ran over a landmine, it's better to get thrown off of it than blown up with all the ammo that's inside the APC. It's better to get thrown off – if you're that lucky. So I did that for like four months, rode around on APC's. I could never figure out – none of us – why in the world we'd be riding around in a rice paddy on these tanks, these tracks, because everybody could hear 'em within miles and miles. So we drew more fire, obviously. But it was nice not to have to walk everywhere, I have to say that. It was kind of cool to ride around on those things, but you always felt like you were just a target all the time.

Interviewer

What was your mission?

Dennis Stevens

At the vet center there was a lieutenant colonel that came in for counseling and he was a battalion guy in charge of a mec unit over there and we got talking and I said, "Hey, why were we over there, anyway, riding around on those tanks?" And he smiled and he said, "Well, when you're riding around on those tanks and you drew fire, what was one of the first things that happened?" I said, "Well, usually gunships would come in or artillery." He said, "Your only purpose was just to draw fire." That was it. We would ride around in rice paddies on roads or whatever, and our purpose was just to draw fire so they would know where the enemy is so we could get after 'em. So we really were just targets, that's what we were there for. We felt that way, but we didn't know that that was our mission.

Interviewer

That was '70, '71?

Dennis Stevens

'71.

Interviewer

That de-escalation is happening as well. So did you not have the support as well?

Dennis Stevens

Well, there's the part that the people heard about like in the States that we were winding down, that the ARVNs were taking over the war, we were training them, all this stuff. But then there's the reality of it, is it was just a bunch of crap, okay? The ARVNs pretty much were inept. You never knew if they were on your side or not. You never knew. Now some of the ARVNs I worked with were pretty cool guys, some of them had gone to the States to

school. One guy in particular had gone to Harvard, very bright guy; he was a lieutenant in the ARVN army. But you never knew. So really nothing changed. People were being told the ARVNs were taking over, but we all were just doing the same thing with less people. Sometimes you had to count on ARVN artillery which was a joke because they had no clue where to shoot, you couldn't depend on 'em. So it didn't work very well, obviously, because in '75 they lost the war.

Interviewer

Did they call it Vietnamization?

Dennis Stevens

I think that was the word. Vietnamization. At the time, it was an effort to turn the war over to the South Vietnamese Army. They would fight. And the idea was that all the American troops would go home. They would go home. Of course this was all political things in the States because all of the war protests, there was a lot of political pressure at that time. Yeah, there were units that went home but none of the soldiers did, we just got transferred.

Interviewer

Were you carrying an M-60 at that time?

Dennis Stevens

No. I had an M-60 but it sat on top of the APC. We had two M-60's and then a .50 cal on top. Had a lot of firepower.

Interviewer

I was told that half of the ARVNs wouldn't even fire. A lot of them were running the other direction. Did you witness that?

Dennis Stevens

You know, we worked an ARVN battalion when I was in this mec unit and we worked side by side with them. And I remember they cooked rice and they cooked some pretty good food. They would take our C-rations and make some decent meals out of them. So we liked them for that. But I remember waking up one morning and they were all gone. During the night they just left. I don't know why. Still don't know why. But we worked with them for a while and then poof, they were gone. I never did trust 'em myself, personally. I mean I would never put my life on the line, depend on them.

Interviewer

What happens after this mec unit, then what happens? Then you're with a whole other unit after that?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, the mec unit closed down, I think it was in October of '71, they went back to Fort Hood, Texas. They took, I'm sure, all the REMF's we called 'em. Probably heard that term. REMF's. That's what we called people whose jobs were in the rear, REMF's. Probably don't want me to tell you what it really means. You do? Rear Echelon Mother Fuckers. Okay? That's what REMF stood for. A lot of them went home but I got transferred to the 101st Airborne

Division up in Hue for my final two months. I'd had ten months in country. They didn't send me home, they sent me to Hue to another unit.

Interviewer

So what's it like being a straight-leg soldier being sent to an airborne unit?

Dennis Stevens

It was the same. I didn't jump out of any birds or anything. It was just a regular grunt unit.

Interviewer

They didn't care that you weren't airborne?

Dennis Stevens

No. They were glad to see us. Especially, I'd had ten months in country so they knew they didn't have to train me or anything.

Interviewer

Do you recall wanting to be home?

Dennis Stevens

You know, when I was first there, of course I missed home and I had a girlfriend that I left and came over here, and a family and I was close to my family. But after you've been there a while it's almost like you're kind of afraid to go home, in a way.

Interviewer

Why?

Dennis Stevens

Well, because you get kind of crazy over there. And I kept thinking about my buddies that were older than me that came back and they were kind of nutty when they got home. And I thought, you know, you're not really all that sure you want to go home. And there were guys that I knew that would re-up and extend for another year just because of that. They were scared to go home. I remember one guy, it was his fourth tour over there and they wouldn't let him re-up. He was scared to death. He was an E-7 sergeant, been there a while, nice guy. Had his shit together, really good guy. And they told him no, we're sending you Stateside and he was scared to death. He told us, he said, "I'll never survive with all those lifers back there." He just didn't feel like he could survive going back to the States. Seems kind of weird when you thing about it, but he was pretty scared about it. And I understood it. We all did. You just don't know what you're going to be like when you get home. I mean we all try to be just the same as when we left, we all think we can be that way, and we all try to come back and just plug ourselves in and be like we were before we left, but you know, in retrospect, none of us could do that. There's no way.

Interviewer

You said one of ways you survived in the field was to keep your distance from people.

Dennis Stevens

Physically and in some ways mentally.

Interviewer

And you said that's what you did when you got home. You isolated yourself. Talk about that.

Dennis Stevens

You know, the whole PTSD thing, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. I had the knowledge, I went to school and I knew basically what it was. It doesn't just apply to military; it applies to other people in car accidents and traumatic events in their life. But there's some things that really do happen in Vietnam that you learn that become an integral part of your system of survival. And it's literally stored in a different part of your brain. It's stored in there for your survival. And you do things in Vietnam to increase your chances; you're keeping your distance, for example, and always having a secure perimeter. You have a secure perimeter, you know where all your stuff is, you're organized, you keep your ammo and your weapon clean. You do all of those things and it's like air and food and water. It's on that same level, literally. And so when you get home, you can't just stop doing those things. So if you're stress level, or if you feel anxious for any reason, you know there's a part of you that just clicks in and you do those things. Keeping your distance. You go to a public place – I've never been able to go into a crowded place and feel comfortable. You just start feeling claustrophobic and you have no control of your perimeter, you see? It's all out of your control and so your anxiety level just goes higher and higher and you literally have to get out of those situations. And I've had panic attacks where I've been in the big Wal-Marts or the Lowe's, those big stores where I get back in there looking for things and kind of lose track of where I'm at and I look around and I don't see a way out. And you just have an awful panic attack, you've got to get out of there. You've got to get to a safe place. And that all really does stem from being in that kind of situation where you have to have your crap together. And it carries over. You keep your distance from people, you have your back covered. I've been in restaurants where I've tried to sit out in the middle and my anxiety level gets so high I have to go to the bathroom and throw up. I mean it's that intense. So you learn to sit where you feel comfortable. And in a restaurant you sit with your back to the wall. And that's the only way, really, you can feel like you can eat. Now that sounds kind of crazy, maybe, but I think most vets that have been in combat will have a similar story to that, that they just don't feel good in crowds and they do those things. You emotionally distance yourself, too. You learn not to get real close to a lot of people. You may have one guy, you know, over there that you're kind of buddies with. For me it was Paul Rup, he and I had gone through basic and AIT and we were in the 198th Infantry, so we were closer. And the other guy from Utah, Scott Longhurst, you know, we were kind of close because the three of us were from Utah. But you didn't get really, really close to people. You kind of kept your distance a little bit.

Interviewer

What were you hearing from home, by the way, from your girlfriend?

Dennis Stevens

I'd get letters and care packages. I'd get world food in the mail. World food is anything other than C-rations. But

they'd send care packages and it was nice, it was good. It was good to hear from home and I would write letters. I've read some of the letters I wrote during that time and they're kind of crazy as I read them now. I was a little bit nuts I think over there, because my letters reflected it a little bit.

Interviewer

Did you have any chance to recreate? Did you have any chance to go on leave?

Dennis Stevens

I don't think any of those good trips filtered down to us grunts because I didn't know many guys that went to Australia or Bangkok. I mean a few of them did. But we'd always hear about some guys in the rear would go on cool trips like that. Paul Rup and I spent three days at China Beach on R&R. I was three days off during the year, went to China Beach. It was nice. All I remember about it is we just sat around on the beach and drank as much beer as we could in the three days we were there. And even in the rear they got rocketed and mortared and people were running for cover and running for bunkers and stuff. I remember we really weren't all that concerned. We were there to have a beer or two.

Interviewer

You went on an LDS mission and you're drinking beer. Is that something you acquired in the Army?

Dennis Stevens

I'm a bad Mormon, what can I say. I went and I'm glad I went on an LDS mission, I felt it was my duty to do so, and it was okay, I liked going and I did my best. But basically I'm just a hell raiser really. I'm afraid I'm not that good of one. I try to be at times. I never felt any guilt about drinking beer.

Interviewer

Tell us about being short.

Dennis Stevens

Well, the longer you're there that means the shorter time you have left because it was a year you could go home. And the closer you got to that year date, the more cautious you became, and the more people kept their distance from ya because a lot of guys didn't make it even to the last day. So yeah, you'd be pretty nervous. And I remember being pretty nervous when the end of November hit because I knew the end of December I'd be going home. So yeah, you'd get kind of nervous, you'd think I made it eleven months, if I can just hang in there one more month I can go back to the world, I can get out of this place. And you're pretty nervous about it, you really are. It's really the first time you think about that you really do want to make it. Because prior to that you just accept that you're not. You know what I mean? So you're a little more nervous about it. I don't remember a lot about it.

Interviewer

Were you keeping a calendar or anything?

Dennis Stevens

No. Some guys did on their helmets. They'd mark the days off. I never did that. Most of the time I didn't even

know what day it was or what week or what month for that matter sometimes.

Interviewer

Back in the world with all of that going on, you had no idea?

Dennis Stevens

About home? No, we knew there were protesters. And of course that went on before I went over there in '71. You know, '69, I was at the U and there was all kinds of fun going on at the U in '69. And there were other places. There were a lot of demonstrations and stuff. It never occurred to me though, until I got home from Vietnam that those demonstrations were against us too. They didn't like the soldiers either. We were the object of a lot of the demonstrations and I didn't realize that until we got home. I thought they were just demonstrating against the government. But you find out quick that we, I guess represent the government because we were in the military, we were in Vietnam, and so a lot of the anger was directed towards Vietnam vets.

Interviewer

How did you find out quick? Tell me about that incident.

Dennis Stevens

Flying into San Francisco in the airport and seeing all the demonstrators there. We come in in our military uniforms and walk in and there are hippies everywhere. It was a total out of control thing. I mean hippies and people demonstrating. It was like, gee, well, welcome home. We're home. They didn't like us. They weren't saying welcome home to us. We just had to get out of their way. Some of the guys got spit on, yelled at and that kind of stuff. There was no "Welcome Home, Vietnam Vets." It was more like, here comes another bunch of crazy Vietnam vets home. And they were demonstrating against us.

Interviewer

How did you feel?

Dennis Stevens

Well, it didn't make any sense to me. I remember thinking well, we served our country. We went over there and did a job that nobody really wanted to do and we did it the best we could. And I felt kind of proud that I'd gone over there. I felt like I did my job. I didn't feel like any kind of war hero or anything, but I thought, you know, I went and served my country, I did the best I could. But you didn't get any thanks when you got home.

Interviewer

How did you feel, by '73, there were veterans protesting against the war?

Dennis Stevens

You know what, I've always believed that one of the things I fought for was freedom for people to do what they want. I never had any problems with guys demonstrating. Even fellow vets who felt passionate about we should get out of there. I never felt any animosity towards them. I felt like that's their right as an American and that's part

of the reason I was over there, I felt, was to preserve those kinds of rights for people. So me personally, I didn't take it personal, all these demonstrations. I just felt like it shouldn't be directed at us. But in retrospect, I mean who else would they direct it to? We were easy, identifiable targets that they could demonstrate against. There was a lot of angry people in our country in the '60s and '70s.

Interviewer

Talk about what you observed as a student on campus here at the U, the protesting movement here.

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, I came back, I got out of the military in '72. Went to Fort Hood, that was where I de-roast, that where I got out of the military. They tried to get me to re-up and I didn't. And I got an early out to go back to school. So I went right back to the U of U. And you know what? I had this belief – and I don't know where I got it – but I had a belief I could come back home and just plug myself right back into the U, go to school and just basically get the same life back that I had before. And so I didn't participate in any of that kind of stuff. I remember there were demonstrators and there were a lot of pickets, a lot of signs, and there was a lot of activity in that way, but I had an attitude that almost like I wasn't there, really. I never identified myself as a veteran. I never said, "Yeah, I'm a Vietnam vet." I through basically all my stuff away or gave it to my younger brothers; you know, fatigues and all that kind of stuff. And I just went about the business of going to school. I got married, started a family, just went on with life and basically just ignored that I was even there. Hardly anybody knew I was even a veteran. Not even my own kids knew.

Interviewer

So did you feel like you plugged in?

Dennis Stevens

I did. I felt like I was pretty normal, really. Other people told me I was nuts, but you know, I felt like I was pretty normal. I felt like I just came right back, went to school. I had some peculiar behaviors that made sense to me but made no sense to anyone else that hadn't been over there.

Interviewer

Like the things you talked about?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah. When I came back I went back home, I had two younger brothers and of course I was having nightmares all night. I'd hand my watch to the brother in the middle of the night just like I did over in Vietnam, you know? We were still doing guard duty in my mind, I think. But I talked to my brothers and both of them younger than me, they said they were scared to death. I was seeing dinks in the closet and handing watches to 'em and doing all kinds of stuff like that. I felt like I was pretty normal, really. But they all thought I was totally nuts. I thought I adjusted back just fine. Now my first wife, she doesn't think I was all that adjusted. She was very frustrated with me because I

wouldn't sit in certain places. And if she wanted to really get me the distance, if she started any kind of relationship talk, I was out of there, physically and mentally. It just rose the anxiety, and the stress would rise up inside of me. And that's pretty typical. There were things that, as I look back, were not all that healthy in relationships. And then I started having kids; I had two sons and a daughter. And I think I told Sally the one story, my son was 15 years old, a sophomore in high school at Uintah out in Vernal and he came to me and he said, "Dad, I have a history class and we're studying the Vietnam War," and he asked me if I knew anybody that had been there. And I said, "Well, yeah, me." He didn't know. He was 15. There was nothing in my house – the photos that I brought you folks, I had them hidden – there was nothing in my house that they would ever see that would show that I was a veteran. Obviously he was pretty shocked. He had no idea, and my other two kids didn't either. In those days it's something you did not talk about and you just didn't bring up the subject. It was an unpleasant subject. There were no welcome home parades for anybody. I came home to the airport, my mom and dad picked me up and as soon as I could, I got those fatigues off and put on civilian clothes, put them away, threw them away. And as far as I was concerned, that was the end. That was it.

Interviewer

Was that because of external pressure or was that an internal conflict or both?

Dennis Stevens

I think it's both but for me I think it was more internal.

Interviewer

Explain why.

Dennis Stevens

Well, I think it's part of your survival, again. I didn't feel comfortable telling people that I was a veteran. Now if someone asked me, if they came out and said, "Hey, did you serve in Vietnam?" I'd say, "Yea, I did my time over there." And then the next question you always got in those days was, "Well how many people did you kill?" So there was no purpose into bringing it up unless you wanted to bring those kinds of questions on yourself?

Interviewer

What would you say when someone would ask you that terrible question?

Dennis Stevens

Well at first I would just ignore 'em and walk away. And then after a while I told 'em that they were full of shit and to shut up. And then after a while I just said, "I killed as many as I could." I don't know what else to say. I just said, "I did my job." That's about the only way you could answer it. But it's irritating. So you don't bring up the subject because you didn't want to bring those kinds of things on yourself.

Interviewer

So why now can you talk about it today?

Dennis Stevens

Well, actually, working at the vet center, it put me in an environment where there were fellow vets there, most of them were Vietnam vets. And I ran groups, I did counseling, and I think for the first time I had a support group around me that understood. It was a safe place for me to say, "Yeah, I'm a Vietnam vet." And I remember the first group I ran – of course everybody introducing themselves and there was about 15 guys in the room, they were all Vietnam vets – and their first question is, "Are you a veteran?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm a veteran." And then you get the questions, the verification questions. "Well what units were you in? When did you serve? Where did you serve? What was your job," and all that stuff. And once I got through all that, the first night I said, "You know, I don't know." And I didn't. I said, "I don't know. I served a year over there. I know I was a grunt, but I don't remember the units I was in." And they all related to that. A lot of them said, "Yeah, we were at that point too. We've been there. You block all that out." So I had to go and read letters to find out what units and the next week I came back and said, "Yeah, I was with the 198th Infantry in Chu Lai and the 5th and the 46th." And I told them the units I was in. Well, I think for me, personally, I was, for the first time, with a group of people that really understood, that could relate to me, and I could relate to them. It was a real good feeling, actually, that first year because I felt accepted and they all had their stories. I wasn't ready to share any of my stories. I didn't want to do that, but it was a safe place. But in a three-year period of time, it went from a safe place to a very upsetting place for me personally because it forced a lot of stuff out of me. I mean I was having nightmares, there was weeks I wouldn't sleep for a whole week.

Interviewer

And you're a social worker.

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, you think I'd know better, wouldn't ya? But yeah, it was really a very discomforting place to be for me. But yet it was also good for me because it kind of forced me into dealing with a few things that I had never had to before.

Interviewer

Dinks? Does that stand for something?

Dennis Stevens

No, it's just a name we called the enemy. We didn't call them ARVNs or Vietnamese. We called them dinks. Gooks. We referred to them as dinks.

Interviewer

Did you connect to the Vietnamese people when you were out?

Dennis Stevens

No. In my mind, honestly, they were all the enemy. Every one of 'em. I just didn't have a very good attitude about it. It's a shame. I should've taken the time, maybe to learn a little bit of the language. I did just swear words and some stuff to get by, but you depersonalize the enemy. That's part of your training. In World War II, what were they

called? What were the Japanese? They were Japs. To this day you talk to somebody from that generation, they don't have that high of an opinion of the Japs, do they? And I think that's kind of the same thing. We depersonalized the enemy; they weren't Vietnamese, they were dinks. And it was them or us kind of an attitude. So no. The guys in the rear that lived in the rear, that were around the Vietnamese population more, they developed, I think, relationships. And we'd go in the rear and we could see that some of them had hooch maids or whatever and they seemed to get along better. And we never did. I didn't and most of the guys I was with, we didn't trust any of 'em.

Interviewer

Tell me about when you hear the sound of a helicopter. Does it affect you?

Dennis Stevens

There's some sounds to this day. There's a different sound to a Huey then there is to a helicopter that comes in into hospital here; a distinct sound of a Huey or Chinook or a gunship. Now about five years ago I lived in Eagle Mountain. You know where Eagle Mountain is? It's kind of west of Lehi. I lived out there and it's real close to Camp Williams. Well I'm out in my yard doing yard work and I can hear gunships. And I'm thinking I'm going nuts because I can hear gunships. And I look up and here comes five of them right over top of me from Camp Williams, gunships, one right after the other. It took me a month to get over that one. I mean that's pretty close and boy, I hit the ground. I thought shit, the dinks are here. I mean it put me right back to have a whole line of gunships go right over my house like that. And at times I'd hear M-60 fire from my house. When I first moved there I thought well that's nuts. Well, their firing range is just on the other side of the highway and it was M-60 fire. So we moved from there. We only lived there, I think two years and we moved. So there are sounds and there are things.

Interviewer

Fireworks?

Dennis Stevens

It isn't the fireworks itself, it's that thump that you hear before the fireworks and it's just a mortar. So yeah, I go to the fireworks and I tolerate 'em because my family always liked to go, but you'd hear that thump and then the explosion of the fireworks was pretty, but for me it's that thump that really bothered me. Because you'd hear that out in the middle of the jungle. It was a mortar. You'd hear the thump and then the explosion somewhere. You didn't know where. So yeah, fireworks to this day bother me. Some smells.

Interviewer

Like what?

Dennis Stevens

The smell of blood. There's a distinct smell of blood. I've had some medical procedures the last few years. I've managed to get prostate cancer from Agent Orange while I was over there, so I had prostate treatments at the hospital. And one of the things that kind of bothered me is there's a distinct smell in a hospital that's the same as

being over there. The smell of blood and urine, the combination or something. It does. It increases your stress level a little bit.

Interviewer

If every Vietnamese is the enemy, why are you there at all? As a whole, people that you don't like and they're the enemy, then who are you there to save or help?

Dennis Stevens

I was there to save myself and my fellow soldiers. I never viewed I was there for any kind of wonderful mission to save the people there. Never thought about that.

Interviewer

And was that a typical attitude at that time?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, I think so. The goal of being over there, at least for me, and I think most of the guys I was with, was to survive and get home and help each other get home. And I don't ever remember saying well we're here to save these people and to save democracy and to get the Communists out of this country. I think that was a level a little higher than what we were functioning on. Ours was day-to-day survival; let's try to help each other get out of this place. Does that make sense to ya? Like I said, I had a pretty narrow view of my job. It was pretty narrow.

Interviewer

Now along that line in 1975 when we pull out –

Dennis Stevens

We pulled out in '73. Supposedly.

Interviewer

But when we're leaving the embassy and you see it on TV. What went through you?

Dennis Stevens

Well, I heard for years that we lost that war. But I've come now to realize, researching and looking at things, we had the war won in 1973. We were kicking butt, but that's when we left from the Viet –

Interviewer

Vietnamization?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, that word, whatever it is. And the South Vietnamese Army was supposed to take over in '73 and they got their butts kicked by the NVA in '75. So as Americans we didn't lose the war, the Vietnamese lost their own damn war because they were inept. That's how I look at it.

Interviewer

But when you were watching, did you see it on TV?

Dennis Stevens

Yeah, I watched it.

Interviewer

What went through you when you saw it?

Dennis Stevens

You know, I think I was so emotionally detached at that time from all of it, I didn't have any feelings one way or another. It was like, well, they're finally getting the last few Americans out of the place. There was a part of me that wouldn't have mind being there. And to this day, if you talk to a lot of Vietnam vets, if they called and said, "Hey, we need an M-60 guy over in Afghanistan," I'd probably say, "Yeah, you could take me over there for a while. I could probably still handle it." You know? We're really a pretty patriotic group of people, basically. So yeah, I saw that on TV and my first thought was what the hell happened? When I left in '71, things were pretty much in control, I thought.

Dennis Stevens

That's a good question, Liz. Actually I read 'em because I needed to find out what units I was in. So these letters, I hadn't read them prior to that. So this was just like, oh, maybe eight or nine years ago that I had to find out what units I was in. So I opened a few of the letters and read 'em. These were addressed to my mother and some to my girlfriend at the time. And I read 'em and I thought they were so superficial. It was like, "Hi, I'm here, things are going great. I'll be home soon," you know, that kind of stuff; very kind of cold, kind of impersonal. I couple of 'em I read; I put some stuff in there. "We're in an area called Dragon Valley and it's kind of a bad place, we get shot at a lot here. I'll be glad to get back to a better place." And that kind of stuff. They were very cold and impersonal letters, even to my girlfriend. They were very distant. And I thought, you know, if a person wasn't over here and they were writing their girlfriend, it would be a little bit of lovey-dovey stuff like, "I love you, I can't wait to get home," that kind of stuff. But there was none of that kind of talk in the letters I wrote, Liz. It was more kind of like a weather report, really. It's like, "It's kind of hot here. Kind of humid. Send more care package." Because we got excited about world food. Do you want to hear all about that?

Interviewer

Yes.

Dennis Stevens

It's kind of interesting. When you're over there, you eat World War II C-rations mostly, out in the field. The biggest thing you could get, if you got a pound cake in your C-rations, that was better than money. You could trade that pound cake for about anything. So we all looked for the pound cake first. But that's what we would eat. And we'd warm it up in our mess kit – I don't know what you'd call it, our cup thing – and we'd heat it up with C4 which is weird because C4's an explosive that we'd use to blow things up with. Well, if you lit it on fire you could heat your

food with it and it wouldn't put out much of a flame. A lot better than building a fire. Anyway, we'd get pretty excited about world food and we'd get care packages in the field and they would have things like instant oatmeal which was a real treat over there. Just things like that that people in the States, in the world, took for granted, we'd get pretty excited. So in a lot of my letters, it was, "Hey, thanks for the food, send more. Send more cookies." The homemade cookies would come, they'd be all crumbled, but we didn't care. And they'd be gone in a matter of seconds because of course we'd share with everybody in the platoon. Now when we got to the rear a couple of days a month, the first place we'd go would be the PX to get world food. Now world food was a hamburger fries, and a milkshake. And you can't imagine how good that tasted after a month or two of just C-rations. It was really good. And nothing could deter us from that. I mean we'd stand in line for an hour for a hamburger. And I remember one other time – this is when I was in the mec unit in Da Nang – we got in the back of a deuce and a half truck and went into Da Nang to the Air Force base. Now the Air Force base, it was like being world. I'd been in Vietnam about eight months. We sat men's john and flushed the toilet – three or four of us – and flushed that toilet and watched it for about an hour. We were intrigued to see a flushing toilet. We hadn't seen one, you know, forever. And we got entertained by that. Does that sound pretty weird?

Dennis Stevens

It would, it was pretty good to see a flushing toilet after a while. It was pretty neat to see. Because we hadn't seen one; even in the rear there were no plumbing or anything like that. Not where I was at.

Interviewer

When you were out in the field, how long were you out there?

Dennis Stevens

Almost a month. Three weeks. Usually we were in the rear two or three days. And when you're in the rear you just kind of resupply, get clean fatigues, resupply yourself. If you were lucky you got a new rucksack, but most of the time you didn't. And we just partied. You were either a juicer or a head in those days. If you were a head, you smoked marijuana, if you were a juicer you drank whatever you could find. Probably the same way today, I don't know.

Interviewer

You told me a story about your commanding officer.

Dennis Stevens

What made him such a good LT? Yeah, when you're over there, you have the guys who were lifers who have a different attitude about things than the guys who were drafted or if they're an officer it was through the ROTC or something like that. LT Ranger – that was his nickname – had an attitude that his first mission was to get us home. And to this day – and I've got e-mails from him – to this day that's what he's most proud of, is that he got most of his fellers home. And when you're out in the field, some of the guys, some of the LT's, I guess though it was a John Wayne movie and they would try to get grunts to do stupid things. Sometimes we had to do stupid things because

we were forced to, like in a firefight and that kind of stuff. But LT Ranger, he said, "Look, we're going to go into a place here, it's kind of a bad place." He'd warn us and his goal was to get us home, not to make rank or to get a medal or anything like that. And so we all respected him for that. Now the question, how does that carry over into civilian life? Well, to this day, if I'm in a job, employment, and somebody is my boss and they're jerks, they're assholes about it, and they think that I should respect them because of their position, they don't get my respect. Do you see what I'm saying? But if I respect them because of their knowledge and how they treat me, then their position means nothing to me. That's more important to me and that's a carryover, I think, from Vietnam. You respected people not by their rank – that had nothing to do with it – but by the knowledge they could bring to get you out of the place. And that's why LT Ranger was such a good guy. We all respected him.

Interviewer

What is your thought process when you said go ahead and draft me?

Dennis Stevens

Well, yeah, my dad was a World War II veteran in the Navy. I had two uncles that served, one in the Marine Corps in World War II and one in the Army. And I had other relatives. My grandfather served in World War I. So I had a part of me that felt that I should serve my country. And I had friends that I went to high school with that had gone to Vietnam and two or three of them didn't make it. They had died over there. And I had other friends that came back. And so I wanted to serve, I really did. I felt like it was my duty to serve and I wanted to. But I didn't want to serve for six years, I only wanted to serve for two years. So I volunteered for the draft. So I knew that the most I would serve would be two years and I could pick when I went in. So yeah, I went in because I wanted to serve. I was pretty patriotic. And I always knew I would. When I was on the LDS mission people of course would ask me, "Why aren't you over in Vietnam?" And I said, "Well, because I'm here, but the day will come when I'll most likely be there." I always kind of felt I'd end up there. I don't know why, I just always thought well, I'll end up there someday.

Interviewer

So do you still feel that same sense of patriotism today or when you got back?

Dennis Stevens

I do more now than I did when I got back. And I think part of the reason is that the VA system has treated me really well. I go to the VA hospital for everything and they take good care of me and I like going there. And I've taken advantage of the benefits that are there for me because of my service. So I don't have any bad feelings about serving, I feel good about serving. If people view me as some kind of hero, I'm not that; I'm really uncomfortable with that. I'm just somebody that got drafted, I went and did my job the best I could and I was lucky. I survived I came home. And I came home with some things that I'm not all that excited about. There's been some challenges because of my service but I don't have any regrets at all of serving.

Interviewer

I thought it was interesting that you said when you came home you thought you were normal. Other people said you weren't. There are many people who won't talk to us, it's too painful.

Dennis Stevens

And I was at that point until just two or three years ago. I wouldn't talk to anybody about it. And if somebody wanted me to talk about my experiences over there, there's no way. There's no way. I had a hard time just identifying that I was a Vietnam vet, let alone talking in any kind of detail about it. So yeah, I came home. The thing of it is, I came home right around Christmas time, just after Christmas and of course it's winter here, snow everywhere, it's cold. And those days, literally, you're in the field one day, you go to a bigger city in Vietnam like Da Nang or Cam Ranh Bay, one of the bigger cities. And within a matter of a day or two, you're home. It's that fast. And in thinking back on that, they should've given us some time somewhere else to kind of help us adjust because one minute I was carrying a rucksack and an M-60 and in a matter of less than a week, in a matter of just days, I'm at the Salt Lake Airport home. And I'm brown, tan as can be, and of course everyone else is white from winter. So I stood out. I mean I played a lot of basketball and so I got right back into playing basketball. I was in real good shape being over there, but I was brown and stood out. People knew I was there just to look at me. But if anyone asked me, unless it was a real safe place to be and I was talking to someone I trusted, I wouldn't admit to it.