

JOHN COLLINS USN –RIVERINE WAR -- '67 – '68

Speaker 1: ... school, and how'd you get to the naval academy? What happened? The of course this war. Give me the whole nine yards.

Speaker 2: To begin with, I was born in Washington D.C. in July, 1943, and I lived, up until my mid teenage years, in Washington, in north east. When I was a junior in high school or about to start my junior year, my parents moved out to Silver Spring, Maryland from where we were living. At that time, I was going to St. John's Military High School. They had a military program at that time, and I got into the cadet corps and was able to become what was called a regimental executive officer, which was the number two officer in the cadet corps. I had an uncle who got me initially interested in going to the naval academy and worked with the department in the navy. He was able to get me started in the process, who to contact, what paperwork I would need to fill out and all that, which went very well thanks to his help.

When I got to be a senior, I applied for the naval academy and went through the examination process and was very fortunate to get an appointment from the Maryland 6th District at that time, congressman. As things turned out, it all came together, and I was able to start in the naval academy in 1961. That first year was tough, I must say. I don't know how many times I thought I don't think I'm going to make it, but I said failure's not an option. I've got to get through this and do the best I can. As things turned out, I was able to go through the program for the four years.

When I graduated, I went into the surface navy, and my first ship was a destroyer escort. It was home ported in northern Virginia, later moved up to Newport, Rhode Island. I was on that ship for two years to start off with. Toward the latter part of the time I was there, when we came into New York City for the port visit, I got a postcard in the mail. It was assigning to me an organization I'd never heard of before, but it had a V in it, so I knew it was going to be Vietnam. Many of the young officers at that time would do their first assignment and then be assigned either directly into a Vietnam [affiliated 00:02:55] country or to ships going over there in the seventh fleet.

I made a phone call to find out what is this organization. My detailer, assignment officer, told me it was at the costal surveillance center along the coast, about halfway up through the country in south Vietnam. That went on until about the time I was discharged in the ship. I got a change of orders, and it was you're going to probably be going into river patrol boats, so you'll report out to the west coast, and you'll get your unit and all that after you go through the training

program. I went through that process. I flew out to San Diego, went to the counterinsurgency and basic indoctrination at Coronado, California, at the naval base there. This is where the SEALs are trained these days.

We had training on coastal survival there, and also they sent us up to Warner Springs, in California, which is near the Mt. Palomar Observatory, and we had the land portion of the survival training there. Then, from there, four weeks up into San Francisco Bay and [blay-ho 00:04:23] for the real boat training. When I got to California, initially, they said you're not going to be going to the river patrol boats. We're going to send you to the river assault force, but you're going to be on the staff. You won't be actually on the boats. I thought, okay, I'll accept that and see what happens. Did you want to?

Speaker 1: No, that's fine.

Speaker 2: I'm sorry [crosstalk 00:04:52]. Anyway, after going through training in California, flew out on a flight out to Vietnam, and the plane landed in the Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon. I got a helicopter flight down to where I was going to be assigned in the Mekong Delta and reported aboard the flagship. The task force commander was a navy captain and said generally you don't want to be on the staff. I'm going to assign you to the boats. He said you'll like that. I said, yes, sir. I was thinking, in my own mind, is this going to work out for me or what? This is going to be quite a challenge. It turned out it was great. I really appreciated the opportunity to do that.

From the very beginning, I had some really outstanding people that were my leaders. Of course, the men on the boats were really great, and they got me all oriented into the process. Within a week or so, I was out in charge of my first operation which was to support an army fire support base. We had boats that would go out and escort the army barges, and the army also had some large landing craft that they kept their gunners on and with their ammunition resupply on those boats. We went out and set up a fire support base, and [our frag 00:06:26] got used to doing that. I don't think I mentally trained up for going into a combat mission, which actually took place rather quickly after I got there.

An outstanding commanding officer, who was a lieutenant, who got me settled in, I was replacing another officer who also helped me get established in what I was going. At first, I thought going out on night operations and all, this is going to be an environment I sure hope I can survive in because it really seemed like a difficult environment. As things go on, you get used to it. You adapt to the process of going out, landing the troops, providing gunfire support if you needed it and really getting to learn the environment, the environment of going up

narrow canals and streams. It was really a challenge in the sense that you're on the edge of your seat ready to react at all times, whether it be day or night.

Once an operation settled in, after the troops were landed and things got settled in, we would either provide floating support if the troops needed any fire support, or sometimes things just settled down, and we waited for the troops to accomplish what they were doing. They would usually sweep into a Viet Cong base camp area and try to clear that out or see if there was any opposition out there. Then you've got operations, probably about four out of five, there'd be either no contact or light contact, but the fifth one or so, that's when things got tough. You had to be ready for that right from the very beginning.

One of the things that we were able to do, once 1968 started, in January, that's just before the Tet Offensive, and that's when things began to heat up. I learned my environment real well during that period. I had a couple of changes in commanding officer. At the end of the [bullet 00:08:47] we had some rather challenging days. We would do things like escorting a craft that would go out to rescue other boats, sometimes setting up a fire support base, other times landing troops in various environments.

One of the more interesting early landings that I was involved in was right after a B-52 strike into a base camp area. In the middle of the night, it was really interesting to see all the shockwaves from the bombs going off. Then we followed-up and went into those areas. At that time, we didn't find too much at all, really. The enemy was either not there, or they had found out about it early somehow and left the area. Unfortunately, the third commanding officer I had, and this was only in a period of about four months, when I first got there, I was told to get him trained up. I rode the first monitor in the column of boats and did what was needed to get him trained up.

Then the first operation that he actually took charge of, we got into a heavy ambush, right at the beginning. Unfortunately, he was killed with a RPG rocket that hit the boat that he was on. I found myself having to take command with the approval of [more 00:10:24] senior officer, in the middle of this firefight. For then up through just about the end of the Tet Offensive, I was actually in command of the boats. We had three cities in the Mekong Delta that we were able to rescue and liberate, with the army primarily doing it, of course. We landed army troops, and they were able to go in and rescue the city of My Tho in the Mekong Delta. Then we went to Vinh Long, and then onward from there to Can Tho, which were the three biggest cities in the Mekong Delta.

In each one of those areas, we had significant contact during that period, roughly of about 90 days from the end of January, 1968 until end of April. This was

where I really had to perform as best I could. One of our concerns was to always try to protect the troops and the sailors on the boats as best we could. You had some areas where either if you came under attack, you responded right away, if you're in an ambush. If you were in areas that were not populated, we used to do what was called reconnaissance by fire. The purpose of that was to fire a number of rounds, and if the enemy were dug in in bunkers or something, firing those rounds might cause them to react. Then we'd be able to protect ourselves a lot better if we got the first shots in rather than let them do it. We learned a lot of valuable lessons as time went on.

Typical operation, we would have a column of about probably 13 or 14 boats. In the front of the column would be two fast boats, which were assault support patrol boats. They would do minesweeping in case the enemy had planted a command detonated mine. Usually they had the capability of doing it with a cable and be able to activate it from a bunker on the side of a canal. We would have these boats sweep through. Then the main column would come along right behind them. We had a monitor, which was our heavy fire boat, would be the next boat in line, and that would provide fire support if we needed it right away. Then we'd have, usually, three armored troop carriers which were converted LCM-6s and armored from World War II vintage.

There'd be a command boat that had the radio contacts. I could talk to our boats from the monitor I was on, which was usually up near the front. If I wanted to talk to the base or to the army headquarters, we had a squadron commander who could do that for us. He would give us the overall orders, and we would execute them. I would have to tactically direct the boats from there.

Speaker 1: Let me ask you a question, and I'll give you a chance to get a drink there.

Speaker 2: An AK-47 round, yes, but when you got into the bigger weapons like your propelled grenades, there were two variations of those, the Russian RPG-7 and another one that was called the B-40, which was primarily introduced through the Chinese and given to the North Vietnamese and shipped down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The boats were armored in several ways. One was steel-plated armor that would stop a bullet, for example. They were reinforced around the outsides for that purpose. They would also have a layer of Styrofoam, which was probably about 9 inches wide. They would put what they called bar armor, which is like the reinforced concrete rods you put into concrete construction buildings. That held the Styrofoam up against the hull of the boat. That would defeat, hopefully, the rocket propelled grenades to a certain extent, unless they hit directly on a piece of steel.

Above that, we had the main weaponry of the boat. They usually had two 30-caliber machine guns forward and then the bigger weapons. They had two 50-caliber turrets and then a 20 millimeter turret on the top. It was like a pyramid, more toward the back end of the boat. Those were the main armaments to shoot offensively. Defensively, you were able to cause the enemy to not fire accurately by virtue of our own fire, or else hopefully the construction of the boat would defeat some of those more severe weapons.

The biggest threat for sinking was a mine attack because they had the biggest explosives. Like today, in Afghanistan, where you have a detonated weapon that has a lot of explosive power. The rocket propelled grenades were usually not high explosive, but they had the penetrating ability to burn their way through and then scatter shrapnel in a cone out, once they got inside a compartment in the boat. The biggest casualty threat was from the cone of high molten metal that would be sprayed out. That was our biggest threat overall.

Aside from that, a lot of times, there were just machine gun ambushes that we'd have to contend with. If the fire were accurate, they could certainly cause some casualties that way. That's why we had as much firepower as we could put on the boats in order to try and defeat that.

Speaker 1: What was your worst firefight out there that comes to mind?

Speaker 2: The worst one that I encountered was during the period when I actually commanded the river division. After the Tet Offensive was over, I got replaced by a more senior officer, which was the norm. I was just a lieutenant, junior grade. We had a fire fight in [Kin-wah 00:17:20] province in Mekong Delta on April 4th, 1968. I was in charge of the first column of boats to go up and make the landings of the army troops. We had requested an artillery prep. A lot of times, if you were going to go into a hostile area, the army had their fire support base, which we set up initially. They would fire 105 howitzer rounds into the area that you're going to make the landings.

For some reason, we couldn't get permission from the Vietnamese authorities to allow an artillery prep, so we went in. As we went up this river, all of a sudden, we got huge amounts of weapons fire from the area where the landings were supposed to be taking place. We had a helicopter spotter up above, and they were telling us that this was really going to be a hot situation, which it was. We had to try to get the troops landed where they weren't in the direct fire, but unfortunately, some of those areas turned out to be very dangerous when we landed the troops.

We had the most casualties on the boats themselves and the boat crew members of any of the other operations I was on. There were about four killed and probably about 10 or 12 wounded. I can't remember exactly what the totals were. The army also had fairly significant casualties that day, and that was very unfortunate. You had to do what you had to do. I had to go back and reinforce those areas by going back and bringing in more supplies and troops. We went through there, I think, three times total during that day.

Speaker 1: Were you actually commanding at that point?

Speaker 2: I had command of 26 boats at that time. I think we had probably 20 of them on the operation. There were some that were being in reserve or being maintained. That was really the most intense day that I had there, but we did that. We succeeded in driving the Viet Cong out of the area. After that, it seemed like once we got into May and June, beyond it, it seemed like the whole Viet Cong resistance almost disappeared. You'd get an occasional ambush, but it wasn't really as intense as it had been during the Tet Offensive period.

For an artillery mission, the army side of our command would have to get the clearance to do that. They had what was called 7th [Ar-vin 00:20:23] division, which were headquartered in My Tho. When we went out on operations and conducted artillery firing, we usually had to get permission ahead of time to do that. Especially since it was in an area that was not too far away from another town, the town of Ben Tre, which you may recall from the news back at that time, if you remember it, when an army lieutenant said we had to destroy the city in order to save it. You want to try to avoid situations like that. Most of that destruction had already taken place there a couple months before we actually went into this area.

The Vietnamese had an ability to be able to do river crossings at night on [Sam Panz 00:21:19] and infiltrate into certain base camp areas, not really sure what their objectives were in holding an area that didn't really have any development or anything significant there, but it allowed them to maneuver freely in and out of this town that they had captured during the Tet Offensive early. The army did succeed in liberating that time, but it was done by air mobile forces rather than boats at that time.

There may have been some of that. For the most part, from my recollection, the navy and the army worked very well together in that environment. If I were carrying a rifle to a rice paddy and going out into some of those areas, I'd probably feel like I was doing the heavy lifting for what's going on. A lot of times the danger was pretty well equally shared in going out into the field and through the rice paddies was more difficult. I credit the army troops for doing that and

doing it well. I didn't detect any great sense of rivalry or envy between people on the boats and the people that were actually going out in the field. We did share the danger a fair amount of the time.

When we went out on a day's operation, you landed the troops. You were equally in danger getting to the objective. Once the troops were landed, they were probably in more danger for sure. At the same time, while we were trying to protect the flanks where they were operating and resupplying ammunition and things like that for them, we were sharing the danger, to a certain degree, at least. My overall feeling was that there wasn't any tremendous friction as a result of that type of situation.

There were three different elements to the navy's operations. In the country, I'm sure you've heard of the swift boats, and that was the coastal surveillance, coastal operations where they tried to prevent infiltration of supplies to the Viet Cong from the coast. In the rivers, you had the two elements. You had the river patrol force, which was called Task Force 116. They would go around checking and trying to control traffic flow in the river, sampan, making sure they weren't infiltrating weapons and things like that as best they could.

The river assault, which I was involved in, we were actually sent out to go into these base camp areas where the Viet Cong were known to have their base camps and try to eliminate as many of them as we could. There were a few towns in the Delta, south of the main ones, which were held most of the time by the Viet Cong. We would occasionally go in and go through one of those. We wouldn't go in and harm the villagers or anything like that, but you would go in and try to make sure the Viet Cong weren't in control there. They had a way of fading into the night and coming back after you left, so you couldn't always say that once I got there and secured that town it's going to stay that way.

Quite often, if we saw one that looked like it might be either a larger or possibly suspicious, we would stop them. I remember one evening, there were about 30 or 40 sampans that were coming across the main river. I reported back to headquarters, and they said this looks like it could be something out of the ordinary here with this many sampans. They had us check out several of them. We couldn't find any evidence of weaponry being infiltrated, but on the other hand, I still have a feeling that even though they had Vietnamese ID cards and things like that, I still have a feeling they might have been Viet Cong who were just moving from one base area to another.

When we would get our reports about the Viet Cong movement, usually they would tell us before the operation. On the night of such-and-such, a battalion of Viet Cong crossed Mekong River and moved into a certain province. That sort of

thing told you how they went from one place to another and set up base camps in certain areas.

Speaker 1: They'd literally move a battalion?

Speaker 2: Sometimes they would, but a lot of times, there were just so many different boats out there, and you didn't have universal coverage. You'd get good coverage where you were at that time. In the river patrol boats, for example, they were the main ones to try to detect that movement. Again, there weren't enough of them to carry all these areas at the same time, so it was possible. Some of the infiltration was probably not done in bulk. Some of it was probably one or two at a time till they got all the ones across the river that they wanted.

Not really. I think they had some intelligence that they were starting to amass in certain areas. We were sent out to an area that was far area from any of the towns or the mains cities. They had these cease fires during Christmas time and again during the Tet period, and they had the Tet cease fire. They told us we know that there's going to be some kind of infiltration going on, so we're going to send you out into a remote area that was northwest of My Tho, probably about 40 miles at least. We were just going to set up a base camp there for the period of the troops and see if there was any movement or if something came up we'd get called.

As it turned out, halfway through that cease fire, all of a sudden we were alerted that the city of My Tho had been infiltrated and captured, so we got called to leave this base camp area in the middle of the night and go back to My Tho. We went down this narrow canal, narrow river, narrow stream. We got ambushed as we were approaching the main river. We got through that without too much of a problem. From that point on, we had to go help out the major cities, and My Tho was the first one that we had to land a significant amount of force and the army. They were able to sweep through there and drive the VC out. As you were saying, the intel could have been better, it would seem, but at the same time, it wasn't entirely absent either.

We would usually have what was called the Second Brigade of the Army Ninth Infantry Division, and we'd usually have three battalions that we would land. They would have some forces that were kept back at the base or reserve.

Speaker 1: Maybe we're talking 12 to 1,500 men.

Speaker 2: Yes, probably at least 1,000, somewhere in that number. They would get reinforcements from other areas too. The Ninth Infantry Division had an air mobile division that operated north of where we were, and they had their main

troop base at a place called Dong Tam, which was near My Tho, but that base wasn't attacked other than maybe peripherally, and they didn't have any serious invasion by the Viet Cong into the army base there. We were able to [stay from 00:30:08] there and then rescue My Tho. I remember when we landed the troops at night, there was one northwestern quadrant of the city of My Tho that looked like it was all in flames. You could see the fires burning in the buildings and all from a distance.

Speaker 1: Is My Tho a smaller Vietnamese city? What would small be, 10,000, 20,000?

Speaker 2: Probably small would be at 10,000 or less. My Tho would be, I may not be accurate in saying this, I'm going to estimate there were at least 50,000 people that lived there. The Vietnamese had their own army unit there, and also, they had their own boat units there too. We were able to keep those from being overrun again through the efforts that we had to support them.

Speaker 1: That is what I'm asking. There were not these boats that you were on ...

Speaker 2: Let me explain.

Speaker 1: I want to make sure that the general guy out there trying to understand knows.

Speaker 2: Off the coast of Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin and south along the coast of south Vietnam, we had, on call, naval gunfire support from destroyers. If they needed to support troops on the ground or if there was an enemy positioned to be shelled and they could get close enough to it, they would use those as well as the air strikes if need be. In the area where I was, the only air support that we would have would be primarily from helicopters. Usually, if we were going up a canal or a small stream, we'd have a helicopter above us who could both provide reconnaissance ahead of us and fire support if we needed it from the air. That helped out a lot on numerous occasions. Navy also had Seawolf helicopters that did the same things. Sometimes we worked with them.

Once you got inside the coast, the swift boats typically would go ten miles or so up the main rivers, the mouth of the Mekong up towards Saigon. We would operate mainly all the inland waters from there. Toward the end of the war, they mixed them up more with the swift boats and the [PBRs 00:32:43] in the river [soft craft 00:32:44]. They would do ambushes at night and things like that. At that point, the war had wound down a bit too, so the main effort prior to the end was during the Tet Offensive. Our responsibility was, again, to support the inland areas, roughly from Saigon southwest all the down to the southern part of Vietnam, down to what was called the U Minh forest area. We operated periodically in just about all those areas.

As it turns out, it was interesting towards the latter part of my assignment. They decided that they were going to put all the officers who had been in the field to finish out their assignments for half the time on the staff. I was due to be transferred back to a staff, and we had a new commander that came in and a new officer to replace me. It was interesting. He said I don't want you to leave the boats because you've had the experience, so I finished my whole assignments in the boats there. Fortunately, the latter part wasn't quite as bad.

One thing I wanted to mention on the ships that we had, they could also provide fire support if we needed it. They had landed ship tanks or LSDs from World War II and 1950s vintage that were used both [to base 00:34:27]some of our troops. We could also use them, if we needed it, along the main river, for fire support, if we needed that.

Speaker 1: [We're these the barges inaudible 00:34:34]

Speaker 2: Yes, and we didn't use them in that mode. Mainly, it was from the pontoon alongside with boats tied up to the pontoon. When we would move from one location to another with the ships, that was another interesting evolution. I, a couple of times, had to be the escort officer with probably 75 or 100 boats to go down with the ships and, if we got ambushed, to be able to deal with it along the banks. The army had several types of artillery. They had mobile howitzer. They called them 155 howitzers. They were bigger guns than the 105s that we had on the army boats.

We would work closely with the army in coordinating artillery support when we needed it. It normally worked out very well. Once in a while, there'd be a confusion, but, usually, you could get them to cease fire if there was some kind of mix up. One occasion, we were landing troops, and there was a mix up from another location, and several 105 rounds went off just in front of our troops and boats. Fortunately, we were able to get them to cease fire until we got everything sorted out.

The main river, you might have a variation. You could have some areas it'd be 50 feet or so. As you get close to the shore, a lot of times it would be less than 10 feet. When you go up into the streams, you got to 25 feet, that was rare. Most of it was 10 feet, 6 feet, some number like that.

Speaker 1: What was the heat like?

Speaker 2: The typical day, it seemed like most days were 91 degrees Fahrenheit, for a high temperature. When you were in an area, like on the main rivers, you were far from where you could get shot at. A lot of times, that's when you relaxed and

didn't wear your flak jacket and your body armor. When you went into the small streams, you would usually go to [general quarters 00:36:54], as we said, and you'd suit up and put your helmets and flak jackets and your body armor on, if you had it. It would be hot and sweaty if you were in 90 degree plus temperature, but you'd realize that that was all to the good. It would protect you from getting shrapnel in a fair number of cases.

On occasion, but the rivers were always muddy. You didn't have a situation where you had crystal clear water anywhere. Especially when you got into the flood season, the monsoon season, it would be very brown, and there's a lot of debris in the water and all that. Even at that, they might dip down in the water once in a while, if they thought the need for it. Sometimes they had to wade through three or four feet of water to get ashore to where they needed to land if our boats couldn't get all the way in.

One was unusual. I remember one operation we landed the boat up on the river bank and on the stream. It was a small stream. This green snake dropped down out of a tree onto the boat. Our gunners [mate 00:38:13] on that boat who grew up in the Philippines, and he recognized the snake right away. It's a seriously poisonous snake, and he was able to dispatch the snake rather quickly. Other times, in the flood season, there would be rats that would be on debris floating down the river, and they would get onboard the boats when you were using an anchor or [mortar 00:38:35] alongside of the stream, if you were [inaudible 00:38:35] side of the stream. You had that to look out for.

Other than that, there wasn't really anything that I remember as being a particular problem, mosquitoes, of course, for malaria. You had to take malaria pills all the time. We did operate in an area where Agent Orange was used heavily, so hopefully not too many people had serious problems as a result of that, but there are, many people have had those problems.

Speaker 1: We had a doctor on our task force ... he said that it was common. They see those good 50-gallon barrels that Agent Orange was hauled in, and of course they'd cut them in half ...

Speaker 2: At the time, we had no idea that that was a problem. We operated in areas where the foliage looked like a forest fire had gone through. I remember watching an airplane delivering Agent Orange by air spray over some of the forested areas right where we anchored our ships.

Speaker 1: Was that a strategy to defoliate ...

Speaker 2: Definitely, in the anchorage where our ships would anchor and then our boats would come alongside, there was one area to the south, on the Mekong River bank, which was heavily foliated, palm trees and all sorts of thick foliage. We gave a fair amount of attention to that. Some of the areas that we operated in that were more dangerous, they also put a fair amount of that there. It seemed like that was the case towards the second half of the time I was in Vietnam, but very evident.

When I came back, I asked for assignment ashore for a couple of years. At the time, when I came back, I wasn't sure I wanted to stay in the navy beyond my service obligation, which was four years at that time. I got assigned in the Pentagon, in the navy command center, and once I got there, I saw a lot of officers from World War II and Korea and all that and worked with them. I decided that this is something I really think I could do, and I would like to continue. I served for two years, in the command center, two years keeping track of ships' locations, a year doing that and one year as a operations briefer for the chief of naval operations. It turned out to be really an interesting assignment. From there I went back to sea and trained the starter school and went to destroyers after that once again.

It was very difficult, no doubt about it. Fortunately, when I initially came back, I didn't have anybody spit on me or anything like that. There was the climate of indifference. It wasn't like thank you for your service and things of that nature like we have today. The war protests were something that, certainly, we were concerned about having been through the operational environment in Vietnam. I could understand the view of people who were saying what's the outcome of this going to be. Even before I went over to Vietnam, there was a lot of anti-war effort going on.

You understand, in some way, where people are coming from on that, but, having been there, you can also appreciate what could have been a good outcome if it had turned out that way. In some ways, it wasn't all bad, the outcome that we got from it. We were able to cause the Soviet Union to over expended its resources and get itself into economic difficulties which eventually led to the end of the Cold War. I think that was one of the secondary benefits of what we did. There are a fair number of civilians from Vietnam and some military who were able to escape the country who were on the side of our effort. It was somewhat discouraging, after you put all the effort in, to see people putting you down and not seeing the way you thought about it. I could appreciate both sides of the opinion, situation at that time.

Speaker 1: Do you think that it was a ... had full control of the operations.

Speaker 2: For the most part, it would have been better. The president certainly has to be involved. If you're going to succeed in a conflict, the president has to give the orders from the top and allow that to happen. One of the problems that I saw was changing reactions, for example, [bombing halt 00:44:12] right when it was starting to do good. We could have accomplished a lot more if we allowed the bombing to continue, especially in the north. If we had said we're going to win this war, we could have won it. One of the things I have a problem with is counterinsurgency. If you want to be successful in counterinsurgency, you have to win the war first of all and then work with the people to get them through the change that they need to go through in the country that you're working with. We've never really solved that issue, even in the period here in the middle eastern conflict.

It is and it isn't. The main thing that I got coming back from having experience in Vietnam and, again, working with a lot of the officers who, at that time, were World War II vintage and Korean War vintage, I felt that what I had done was good. I felt that the result of what I did helped me to focus myself on what I wanted to do for the future. That was what turned me around to turning around to staying in and making the navy career, was the fact that, one, I could meet the challenges that I had to face, for the most part. It wasn't perfect by any means, but the lesson that I got out of it were that if you work hard and apply your abilities the best you can, you should be successful.

The thing that I feel badly about is that many of the young men were there and didn't get to live their lives the way I would have liked to have seen it. If you get seriously wounded or killed at a very young age, it's a tragedy for sure. For the people that might be caught up in the crossfire of the war, it's a tragedy for them as well. It really helped me to get myself directed and focused on what I wanted to do in the future when I came back.

Speaker 1: You must have been substantially older.

Speaker 2: I was 24. A lot of the men that I commanded were a couple of years younger than that, somewhere between 18 and 20. Some of the boat captains, who were usually chief petty officers or first class petty officers, they were probably a little bit older than I was at the time, probably as old as 30, 32 in some cases. They were pretty much in that age range. The majority were less than 22. I certainly appreciate that, and I really think this is a great effort that [and PT 00:47:31] and the other PBS stations has embarked upon to [bring 00:47:37] the lessons of the war and the experience to the attention of the American people. I think it's going to be a real benefit.

Speaker 1: Now that I's coming on 50 years, and I think it's really a war that ... years ago.

Speaker 2: That's right. I'm hoping that this will provide them with some background as to what it was like and try to focus their own minds on how we should perform in the future as a country as well as our military.

Speaker 1: Thank you. Thank you for coming in.

Speaker 2: Thank you.