

## Vietnam War Impact on Hillsboro Series

Interviewers: Kathy Bui and Mike Smith

Interviewees: Tim Delsman and Bob VanderZanden

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Kathy: What was your life like before the war?

Bob: Well, let's kind of thin it out a little. We both graduated from high school in 1965 and I went down to Oregon State in fall of '65 and Tim went to Portland Community, right?

Tim: For the first year.

Bob: Then he transferred to Oregon State. Because I was given to too much beer drinking, I did not finish without a sojourn of adventures. In other words, I flunked out.

Tim: He made me his little brother at a fraternity house. I tried to keep up with my big brother and the same thing happened and I ended up going to the service. He was smart enough to get back into school. So we were at an age where things were pretty care-free.

Bob: In '67 I went to Portland Community and Tim finished at Oregon State. Then I went back to Oregon State and Tim went into service right after that.

Tim: I enlisted in '67 and went in '68.

Mike: And you said care-free...and that was like generally...

Tim: We were younger and weren't concerned with things like what we became after we grew up.

Bob: We were both very conservative people too. We were not part of the war movement or the anti-war movement.

Mike: Were there movements in Hillsboro?

Bob: I never saw any parades or anything.

Tim: At Oregon State, there was and that was the closest thing that I kind of saw. Wednesday they would have a demonstration and I was ROTC and I would wear my uniform and I would march right down through the middle of them on purpose. But the people carrying signs were against the war and they were outnumbered five to one by the ones supporting the war. And that was in '66, '67.

Bob: You would have found it entirely different If you had gone to University of Oregon. Where there was a much more liberal campus, they were much more in tuned with protests and all the rest of it.

Tim: And I don't remember a single protest in Hillsboro.

Bob: No, at the time Hillsboro was more conservative in nature than even Oregon State University.

Mike: Did you here conversations around town, not big protests, but people's ideas of the war?

Tim: They were mostly talking about people that were in, like oh...so and so is in the service or so and so is gonna go in the service or is over in Vietnam or something like that.

Mike: Nothing about the motives of the war?

Tim: No, it would be more in support of like oh your son's over there or oh your brother's over there or something like that.

It wasn't even pro or anti war. It was more about who you had a personal relationship with, whoever it was that was over there.

Bob: Yeah, I would say. Generally that at least in the frame of reference I am familiar with. Everyone was very much in support of the war.

And I guess not about the war itself, but in support of the government.

Tim: Of the people in the service. I don't think it was necessarily not in support of the government, I think it was because now it was like you either support it or you don't. Back then it was like you support your government but more so you were supporting the people in the war.

Bob: You just didn't want to be, our families are world war two people and world war two people; you supported your government and that's where it ended right there. You supported their efforts and your country. It was a very patriotic time. World War Two was. My father-in-law, he served in World War two in the European Theater, and was a bombadeer on B-17, and he is a big supporter of what the government did. My father, he was not part of the military, but his two younger brothers served in World War Two so that group of people are extremely patriotic or had been extremely patriotic. My father-in-law is still alive, but my father is deceased and my uncles are deceased. They supported the government and they supported what the government wanted supported, that was just the way they were and so if you take that kind of background and throw me in there, well my first thoughts are going to be well I support the government, I support our military, I support the people that I know who are in that military. It's very natural and even when I went to college and started talking to people down there from different backgrounds, my first reaction was: I have to support... I am patriotic and I will support our government, I will support what we are doing.

Tim: And I think that people, our age, and by our age, I mean people just a couple years behind us is not our age, the people our age were not the rebellious ones that made the news it seemed like we...  
It was an honor your mother and father type thing. It was like where your parents influenced you a lot and you went that way. But just like two years behind us, there was a radical change for some reason and those people would almost do things the opposite of the way their parents...or the opposite of the adults. So I think the adults influenced us and people maybe a year behind us. I don't know what happened but just two years behind us, a lot of those people got in...

Bob: Drug culture. When like Tim says a couple classes behind us at fraternity parties they did not drink beer they all just smoked dope or something. Not when I was around, nobody touched the stuff. That was just a huge demarcation, the class of '67... '69. Things like that was so much different from our class. I mean we were the last...

Mike: What about the older classes?

Bob: More so I think than us at least. We would related more to the older classes by far than those behind us. We had a friend who served in Vietnam...Pete Zurker. Three four years ahead of us, and he served in the '65...so the year we were a senior in high school, he was in Vietnam and he was I would say an ultra-patriot. He was there because that was what he was supposed to do.

Tim: And I think Dale was there about the same time. And he was the same age same times and both of them in the marines and it was just...

Bob: Gung-ho to the ground. Then you went over in '69, January '69. Crystal and I got married in '68.

Tim: I was able to be in the wedding...come to the wedding party.

Bob: But then...so...Tim got to go over then, and I think there was a huge difference between those people who fought in Vietnam in '65 and '66 than those who got over in '69.

Tim: Yes, because '68 might have been when they had the most number of casualties. '68 and '69 was when they had, by far, the most casualties. But also it was like stuff at home...woodstock I think was in '68 or something like that and that was like ..it built. But the people who enjoyed going to something like that... they were different from those I associated with. Hillsboro was not like that kind of movement.

Bob: It was about then that you could feel the difference in that area. In the mid to lat '60s it was pretty much like what we talked about...most people that we knew

supported the war. Nobody wanted to go over there and fight unless you could find someone to replace you. But you did what you had to do...that's what it all boiled down to. But in '69 '70., somewhere in that frame, is when all of a sudden then discussion changed and people were saying I just want this to be over...there's no way to win...it's going on too long, there is not definition to win. When you came home the feeling wasn't the same.

Vets reading

Tim: I never even wore my uniform when we came home. When I was in the service I wore my uniform, but I wasn't home all that much. Hillsboro I don't think ever became a place, I never ever experienced anyone spitting on me or calling me a baby killer. And I know of guys who did experience that. But not in Hillsboro. What changed was that people were not against it but we were not for it. Hillsboro did not become anti...

Mike: What would you guys say about the draft? Did it affect Hillsboro much? Did you ever hear people avoiding going to war?

Bob: Not in the group of people we were in. Nobody wanted to go. When I flunked out they took my...Spring of '67 was when Oregon State said they didn't want me to go there anymore. So I thought well...ten days later I'll be getting my draft notice...that was the way it was then...so I thought I'll go down and enlist. I'll beat them to the punch so I'll get a change to select something. So I went down to enlist and we started going through the papers and I realized that one of the things you could get out of the was for was asthma, and I had been having asthma since I was four. So I called my doctor.. and he says that he'll right me a letter instantly. So I never had to worry. That's not uncommon...people would take every legal means to stay out of the draft. A lot of them joined the reserves.

Tim: Yeah, the reserves and the national guard. 80 to 90 percent of the guys we knew ended up there. There wasn't that many reservists going over to Vietnam. It's not like we were getting out of going but a lot people didn't go. I don't know a single person who burnt their draft card. If you were not to have that card...you needed to keep that card and protect it. It became a really anti-war thing to burn your draft card...people would do it in public to express their opinion. I don't remember what the penalty was though.

Kathy: What was a like during the war?

Tim: Over there?

Kathy: Yeah.

Tim: there was a lot of people who went and came back, but it also seemed like there was an awful lot of people that didn't. I don't know how to explain that...I was trained in the infantry, but when I got over there they put me in the combat engineers. We would do things like build defensive positions...like clear trees so that we could bring in large guns or make landing zones for helicopters. The actual fighting I was not involved in... some of it I was involved in when the fighting came in to the areas where I was, which was more of a defensive type fighting.

Mike: After the war, would you say that anything changed?

Bob: there was a progression. Early in the war, people were in support of their government and they felt strongly about those who went over there to fight and i think that that was a fairly universal feeling in the areas. This was a conservative little town. Back in the fifties and sixties it was very much an agricultural town and as it became places like tektronix opened up, it became more and more urban. It had more manufacturing kind of jobs. and now with until and all the rest of them, it was very much that way. People of the land, farmers and cattlemen, were very conservative. But as time went on...

Tim: It was ten years.

Bob: And I think it was somewhere in the sixty eight sixty nine range is when things really were in the state of flux. Society was changing an awful lot and I think the societal change really sponsored the war change more than anything.

Because the drug culture and the free-love kind of thing...It was a very much a drug kind of culture and hippy culture. There was huge division between parents and older people and this young group of people saying that's all bogus and let's move on. By the time you got....the war wasn't going that well either...it was not like world war tow where we were trying to defeat an enemy that was out trying to take over your country. It wasn't that kind of thing it wasn't a threat to your home...so as time went on, you could see the futility. There was no sense of how they could win this war. And so even the rock solid people, the ultra conservative people, they started wondering where this was going to go...wait a minute, they keep sending our boys back in boxes...where's this gonna go. I think it was back in 1970 when Nixon first ran for president. He promised to get us out of Vietnam and that was the first thing that got him elected. People were going- look we'll support you guys but you gotta bring it to an end, you cant just keep it going this way. And so from 70 to 74, everybody was going- it's good, it's finally over. That was kind of the sense of what I had. Places like Eugene and San Francisco..I don't even know of a large peace rally in Portland, do you?

Tim: I can't really remember specifically but I think it was that way a little bit. It was very low key compared to the ones that made the news.

Mike: Would you say that there were any organizations where people got together to send things to their sons in Vietnam?

Tim: Definitely. There was...I know the unit that I was with which was a hundred and first, they got lots and lots of packages and there would be notes in there from children and notes in there from mostly veterans organizations, like ladies organizations. It was like a ladies group who would get together and they would make boxes. I was constantly getting boxes and stuff, and a lot of the other guys, were also from their families. There were things you might needed like baby oil and stuff, packages of salt and pepper, packages of Swiss hot chocolate and stuff like that.

Kathy: Did people continue sending that stuff throughout the whole war?

Tim: See I got there in sixty nine, and it was still happening when I was there and what happened afterwards I don't know and that was at a point where the center of that change, which was about half way through i guess.

Bob: We knew a lot of guys who went to the war in the early part of the war. I don't know very many guys who went in the later part of the war. I knew a bunch of guys who went in even before I was in the college age.

Kathy: Any interesting stories that you may want to add?

Tim: Yeah I've got one. There was another family that we did horses when we were in high school. The oldest son enlisted in the marines to be an officer. S when I got home in January of 70 they had a great big party in that apartment. It was very crowded with people with ranging ages, even really old people, some people drinking and some not drinking. We had a lot of the same friends so most of the people there knew both of us, there was about 150 people there , it was really a warm thing for this family member. That's the kind of stuff that I remember experiencing when I was in the service and at home, which I wasn't very much during those three years i was in the service. I don't remember any kind of negative military feelings expressed from the people I knew. But again they were more of a conservative slant and...Hillsboro was very rural back then. It was a whole lot different.

Bob: My wife, Crystal, had two sisters and one of them was very opposed to the war. But that was about the only people that we dealt with on ...but even then their view of the war...we both got along well. Her husband was in the service. His last year of college...He was really opposed to the war they were both really opposed to the war, But close to his graduation he joined the military to avoid going to Vietnam. He joined a reserve unit...a National Guard unit out of Eugene so that he did not have to worry about going to Vietnam. Even though our views were entirely different it wasn't a big issue it wasn't like we were after each other

or anything so you see a lot of things on television those days where there was a kind of a real adversarial relationship between people, but we didn't see that around here.

Tim: We didn't want to split families...it would cause so many problems. that kind of stuff was only on television.

Bob: There was a strong connection with the anti-war movement and the generation and the drug culture all were kind of connected and then there was just us good old straight on the other side you know. There was a lot of that. Its probably not a big deal difference with what you guys find in your school now. I will be the first to admit that a lot of guys were very serious about not going to war, and it would not matter how they would do that...

Tim: That was more in the end of the sixties and the 70's. I don't know of anybody staying out of going until up about in '67 or something like that. But there wasn't still that many Americans over there as it was. '68 and '70 was when there was the biggest number of Americans over there. There was such a huge change in society from '62 to '69. Where in '62 everybody still had the old world war two syndrome and Korean War syndrome...like you have to serve in the military, you have to do your duty. Its an honor to be in the military and be involved in battles. And by '69 and '70, you couldn't find anybody who felt that way. Hillsboro was a much simpler town. It as very much small town up until '80s when it started to grow. We remember there was only one high school, Hilhi.