

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the Oral History Program of the Washington County Museum and Century High School. The interviewees are Phil Barnekoff, Mary Ann Barnekoff, and Bob Orme. The interviewer is Kathryn Tobiassen. The interview took place at the Barnekoff's home on Thursday, May 25<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 PM.

• KT-

"In your opinion, at what point did students really become aware of the War in Vietnam?"

BO-

"Well, I think they were always aware of the war in Vietnam, but the thing that really brought it home was that when some of these graduates that I can remember in '71, '72, and '73, when they were drafted, went to war, and the next fall, they didn't come back, and we had a funeral, a memorial service at the high school for several of them. It really became a reality to them at that time."

MB-

"And I would like to add to that that the first class that I taught at Hilhi was the graduating class of 1969, and two of my students volunteered and voluntarily joined the armed forces, and one of them was seriously injured in Vietnam, lost both of his legs, he stepped on a mine, he was a medic. And when he came home, about a year later committed suicide. That was a tragedy of the war, and certainly his friends and people who knew him understood that."

PB-

"It's really, since really the involvement in the war actively in '64, a lot of the kids, as well as adults didn't understand the war. I mean, they knew it was going on, they were aware that we were sending troops, and that was escalating, but really after '64, when we really got involved, and when we got into sending a lot of troops, and kids started realizing that the draft at that time, you had to sign up. And so the schools had to organize sign-ups for kids that were 18 yrs. old. That's what really brought it home, we really were put in a position from the Selective Service Board, that we had to make sure, our job was to make sure every kid signed up. They automatically started

thinking that this was a big deal. Never before had the kids had to sign up, and a lot of kids were going as before mentioned, and a lot of them were injured and killed, very soon after going. I think also that kids then also saw that one of the ways to get out of the war was, besides going to Canada, which we didn't have much of, that we knew of, was to make sure you were registered for college. So we had a real push, at the same time they were signing up, also a big push to get registered for college, and try to get a deferment as a student, so that was one of the things that happened to the kids at that time, and when they started seeing these things on TV, see the thing about this war that's different from other wars is the media feedback. Probably doctored up a bit, but people being murdered and seeing them blown apart, every night you saw it, and you heard the numbers, and so it was much more, it came home much more rapidly than in past wars. Even Korea, didn't have that immediate feedback."

KT-

"So was, as far as the student response to the war, were there changes in the way they dressed, in the way their hairstyle was...?"

MB-

"I think that there were changes for both students and for staff. We went out and looked at the yearbooks today, and its reflective of the difference between the class of say 1967 and the class of 1970. And how the students looked and how the staff looked, and we recall when students first began to wear their hair long, boy students to wear their hair long, and in 1968 and 1969 that was an issue at school, and some students were suspended, almost expelled, I think, the one student, for wearing his hair long. We had a teacher, who decided to grow a beard, and the school board at the time said no beards, and so the teacher, instead of shaving the beard, shaved just his chin, and said he had long sideburns. But it was reflective of the mood of the country, and the rebellion against authority. It was later, it was probably 1971 before we actually saw what I would call protest against the war. The early things were more the reflection of what was going on in society, as people became more disenchanted with government, largely due to our involvement in the war."

PB-

"We talked about the dress, and we're all aware now that the dress code is very relaxed, but we used to have pretty strict dress codes. And one thing that happened to students was, they weren't passive learners. They didn't accept everything. Now we had to explain everything, give reasons for it, why, why, why? The overall look, not a grunge look, but it was sort of a rebellion to what they used to have to live by, those kinds of codes. Besides the long hair, the music changed, there was a lot of antiwar music, Simon and Garfunkel had a big song, 'War, What Is It Good For? Absolutely Nothing,' there was a lot of that kind of infiltration, and a lot of kids basically changed their view on their role as passive learners and became extremely active learners. There were two protests, in '68 there was a big protest in Washington, against the war, and in '72, the March of '72, there was a huge protest and a lot of kids, even though there weren't protests in Hillsboro, went to Portland for the protest. At that time we had closed campus, and that was another big issue, that had just come in, about checking kids out, and we did let the kids go, so they could protest in Portland, because it was a national protest, which had ramifications in all the big cities. Kids were involved, they got to go into the protests, and the big question was excused or not excused, at that time we did excuse them. They weren't actively involved around here, not a lot of outward agitation about the war, a lot of fear, I think, kids feared what was going on, and in this community, at that time was much more conservative, so there was much more support in general for the war. So you didn't see the California type of response."

KT-

"Were teachers and staff teaching about the war as it was going on?"

BO-

"Yeah, they were teaching about the war as it went on, especially here in Oregon, it went back, one of the main commentators on the war was Senator Wayne Morris, of course, and he was the only one in the Senate at the time that voted against the Bay of Tonkin Resolution. And so, the war was very much in the Oregonian's minds as well as on the media and on TV. To take another look at the situation, one thing that the kids, some of the kids, most of them stayed away from Portland, it would only take one or two pretty sharp kids to go to Portland and come back, and at noon time they would have their own little rallies on campus and to get a lot of them going,

and that started to occur more and more and more. Some of the protest marches, some of them were sanctioned, and many of them were not, you'd find that they would be in the paper, on the first or second page, this group did this against the war, this group did that in protest, and a lot of those situations were difficult at school, because some of them, the sanctioned ones, we did permit them to go, but the other ones we didn't, and then we got into the problem of being at school or not being at school, and some of them were just looking for an excuse not to be in school. It was a difficult time for kids, they saw on TV what had happened that day, read in the papers, but yet it hadn't really happened to them, but it was coming close."

MB-

"I was teaching a course called American Problems or Modern Problems, and we taught about the war quite a bit, and the interesting thing, I think, was that there was debate, not everybody was against the war. Particularly when I started teaching here, it was probably the other way, people were not so much supporting it but they weren't against it. I think that each year as the war went on, and people became involved, the feeling against the war grew, and our students became more vocal about that. But we had debates in class, and it was a pretty emotional time for people to talk about the war."

PB-

"Another thing that kids saw that was interesting on TV were those big rallies in Berkley, California, and those types of things going on, those types of issues were, students were being shot by the National Guard at protests, and so kids got a sense that they had to be a part of it. And I imagine that there was a lot of infighting in families, where the kid would be against the war because they were on the firing line, and the parent wasn't, and they started to question patriotism. For a long time, while we were sending troops over, we always thought that we were winning. We never understood the guerilla warfare impact, and how to fight a guerilla war. We didn't understand their culture, which we still don't as far as fighting wars, we were very poor at understanding somebody else's culture. And so we always felt that we were winning, and it was sort of like Korea, but in 1968, what became known as the Tet Offensive, which is their Tet New Year. In '68 we thought we were winning, and they were moving back, the Viet Cong, and they all of a sudden counterattacked, and they really basically

slaughtered us, and just drove us back, so in '73 when we withdrew they had more territory than when they started back in 1964. And all of sudden people now started protesting against the war. They saw that we weren't winning, that it wasn't we were fighting for good and Ho Chi Minh was evil, that became sort of turned around, now we were getting beat, and we were getting slaughtered, so now there is a lot more outcry, against the war, more of 'what are we here for?', questioning why we were there, now there was the questioning attitude and 'do I go to Canada, what are the things I do to get out of this?' (Talks briefly about his own personal experience getting drafted and going to war) That's the big thing that's different about this war, different than other wars, we questioned why we were there. And really there were no good answers, why we were there, because, as you know, Vietnam sort of grows out of the French in World War II."

KT-

"So how much exactly of the changes that actually happened do you think could be attributed to the war rather than other issues that were going on at the time, like civil rights, for example?"

MB-

"I think its hard to separate the two. I think that its very difficult to separate what was happening with civil rights and what was happening with the war. Because they fed on each other, one group protesting the war, another group protesting racism, fed on each other's movement. I think that it created a climate in most communities, ours perhaps less than many, but in most communities it created a climate of that willingness to speak out against those things that before you hardly ever talked about. We had some specific things that happened on the Hilhi campus. I know we had some kids wear black armbands, but I can't remember exactly why that was."

BO-

"I remember that there were some student leaders, who assumed the role of leaders on campus, they held meetings several times a week, at noon time they would be in the pit, and they would have their causes and some of them would stand up and say the different things. As far as the civil rights are concerned, this was the first time that in one of the major wars that blacks really were involved to a much higher degree in Vietnam than they had been in any other war, and that really rode the truth home as far as civil

rights. They were there, fighting and dying just like everyone else, and their numbers, proportionately, were very high."

MB-

"And of course, in Hillsboro at that time, we were basically a Caucasian community, we had very few minorities, I think maybe we had one black student, and that was a foreign exchange student. So we were a white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant community in a sense, I mean Catholic, Mormon, and whatever too, but we were a white community, so we didn't see that actual racial tension so much in our community at that time. But like I said, I think it was all tied together as far as, you know what you read in the paper, students were very interested in what they were reading in the paper, or in Time magazine and seeing the pictures. And as we had people come back from the war, such as Terry Hagg, the young man who committed suicide, as those people returned from the war, the talk increased. I think for me one of the saddest things about this was that these kinds of tragedies, I had another student, probably I think that graduated in '71 or '72, and he went to Vietnam, he came back, he wasn't wounded in Vietnam, but he also committed suicide, and he couldn't live with what he had seen, with the terrible deaths and atrocities that he had seen and his father was a doctor here, and so we saw, as those things began to happen, I think that whether it was civil rights happening in Alabama or whether it was civil rights happening in Portland, students were now more in tune to that."

KT-

"What do you know about the draft, the whole law or what was going on with that?"

PB-

"The initial draft when the war began, and up until 1970, was that you had to register for the draft, and you were classified. And, you could be classified for a variety of reasons, but if you were a 1A, that meant that you were draftable. And everybody who was 1A after a while, after the Tet Offensive was drafted. And a lot of my friends went into the National Guard, they had that choice that they could get in, and so a lot of my friends did that and they didn't go to Vietnam. Those kids registered, went, and some people, who had some kind of debilitating illness, or whatever, they could get out for if they had kids, or if they were in a critical industry, or so

forth, but most people my age didn't get deferments for college, even though they tried, and I was teaching, and it didn't make any difference, once I got in, and if you made it to 26, by the way, you escaped, and I was 25 so I didn't quite make it. Once I got in, then in the very near future, they changed the draft to a lottery system, and that was if you were classified as a 1A, or were draftable, then your birthday was selected and if you were say January 8<sup>th</sup> for the first one, then you were number 1, and of course then you were drafted. I think my number was 250 or so, so I wouldn't have been drafted if I had had another six months, but then it changed, and it went from after the war, from a drafting status to a volunteer army. So the quality of military people went up, because they were taking everybody, and if you take everybody you get what you deserve, and there were a lot of problems with the intelligence of people and their ability to function in a military environment, and so that really changed after the war they went to a civilian army and so the draft went away, and the quality of the people in the army went up because it was their choice rather than being drafted."

BO-

"Another thing that goes along with this is that I have a twin brother, and we both had the same draft board but we lived in different areas, and I was drafted and he wasn't. He got a deferment, and he was teaching and I was teaching but in different communities, and we were the same age, of course, and he stayed and I was drafted and a week before I was to go to camp, or to boot training, I was able to enlist in the National Guard, and I was in for six years at that time, and it was frustrating, what was good for one wasn't the same thing for anyone else, and it was almost like Fate, really, and I never did get a number, because I was a couple years older."

KT-

"So were there any young men who openly resisted the draft, or ran away from it, or...?"

PB-

"I am sure that young people, I know a lot of people that I knew from high school were heavily into the protest movement and one of the things was to try to go to Canada, and that was an issue, out here, even though I am sure that kids resented it, I didn't hear any outward, I mean there was fear, they hated the war, but I didn't see or hear much of kids leaving school and

PO running to Canada. They protested, but I just don't think at that point in our community, versus Portland and some of the more liberal areas, that there was that kind of response, I think they rallied, they learned about it, they saw what was going on, they protested about it, but I maintain, and this is a guess, that most of the kids that were drafted, probably went, and some of them even enlisted, because that was the thing to do, and remember, the war, they believed in the cause. And when Nixon said 'a just and honorable peace,' or whatever it was, that became the big cliché, which of course it wasn't, because things had changed. War is never good, war solves nothing, but people thought of World War II as a justifiable war, they saw Korea as protecting our outer boundaries, even though it wasn't, and then Vietnam came, and all of a sudden we learned a lesson, that we weren't always right, that we weren't the policemen of the world, and we made mistakes, and we were in the wrong place. And so that changed, I think that was the biggest change of this country was we were now looking at how we could justify what we were doing to people. And of course the Nixon doctrine said we would never get involved in Southeast Asia, which of course, that went down the drain, and we did get involved, and we are still feeling the effects of the war, and how to deal with cultures that we don't understand. If you look at the Middle East, we are having the same problem, where we don't understand the culture or how to deal with issues that arise out of them."

BO-

"One thing, to go along with that, we were really fighting a people, they didn't have an organized Navy, they had no Air Force whatsoever, they didn't have a uniform that they put on every day, they had a gun, they had a package of rice, there wasn't any system of support as far as health, hospitals, and food in the field for them, but yet they had shovels and they had tunnels and they were winning. And we had a huge Air Force at the time, and a huge Navy, we had a massive support system, and food and munitions and supplies, and we were barely holding our own."

KT-

"So how were the returning veterans treated when they got back from the war?"

MB-

"I think some of them were treated like Terry Hagg was, as a hero, and as a tragedy but as a hero nevertheless, but I think that if you speak to them after the fact, and it may not be that it was so noticeable immediately in our community, but if you speak to them after the fact, many of them feel that they never received a hero's welcome, and yet they did what their country had asked them to do. And I think that if you go back to Washington DC and you see the Vietnam Memorial, and you read the history of how the memorial came about, that's exactly why that memorial is there, because those Vietnam veterans, I mean you would talk to them and they would have tears in their eyes, because they felt that they went off and fought for their country, but they didn't come home to a hero's welcome. They came home to a country that was divided on the issue of whether they should have even been there or not, and increasingly the tide was turning that they shouldn't have been there. And of course, I am sure you have heard about Senator Kerry, and what has come out about his role in Vietnam, well, those things were surfacing, gradually, and I don't put the blame on Kerry or any of the other men that were there, it was that kind of war where the enemy didn't wear a uniform, and you didn't know who it was, and we saw it was atrocious, the result was just terrible on both sides."

PB-

"One thing, besides the resentment of why we were there, we also learned for the first time that we could be as malicious as the enemy. We always thought that the enemy was always malicious, they were slaughtering us, well we found out, through the My Lai massacre, that we also had brutalized civilians, and I think one thing that we still never have learned is that war, that's one of the things that comes with war, that's why war is bad, you can't assume that there's rules for war. And civilians, if you look at the number of people killed during a war, in the military, versus total number of people, the majority of people killed during a war are civilians, and so, now we could see that, we saw the death of those people, we saw the trial, of Calley and all these people, and so, war took on a different meaning. And so when these people came home, they didn't get any awards like the GI bill, you know after World War II, there was nothing. They came back, there were no jobs, nobody cared about them, and they weren't supported because now the war remember was negative. Why are we there? Are 38,000 people, young people, killed versus 400,000 or so wounded, and maimed, and what for? It didn't have any meaning to the country. I am sure some people felt it

was justified, but the longer the war went, and finally ended up, at the Treaty of Paris, pulled out, and we got nothing out of it. We didn't win, we actually lost, and in this country, to lose a war is a different feeling. And so these people lost, so they come back, and they aren't heroes because they didn't win, there is no noble cause, matter of fact we went over and brutalized a people, in their country, for no reason, if we weren't there what was that going to do to us, strategically, and of course, we are still fighting through those people, the Cold War, which is still going on. I think that Ho Chi Minh, who we supported during World War II, he was fighting against the Japanese in Indochina at the time, and we supported him, because he was the person that was stopping them. And after the war, after the French, then he became 'Communist,' driving the French out, the imperialists. So all of a sudden, Communism became a negative, and anyone who was Communist, we were against. We supported dictators, everybody else, but if you are Communist, we were against you, and so Ho Chi Minh, who we did support, now became our enemy. And basically the country, most of those people in that divided country at the time, supported him."

MB-

"Just to say one more thing about the people returning, the large number of African Americans who were in this war, probably they had the worst time of anyone when they came back, because not only were they not heroes, but they came back to a country that still hadn't fully enfranchised them. They were still not recognized as full, worthy citizens, in much of the United States. And so, they had kind of a double-whammy, so to speak, to have been in the war and not returning as a hero, then to return to the same old civil rights issues and discrimination, and prejudices and biases that were there before they went."

KT-

"Was there anything I haven't mentioned yet that you would like to tell about?"

PB-

"I think you've covered the bases, and a lot of things in those periods of time, change and even though you're involved in it sometimes its hard to see the forest for the trees, and I think that a lot of things have changed because of the war, and civil rights, and they are all tied together. And one

thing that didn't really reflect in Hillsboro but it may have, which happened, I was in Portland, and went to school, we had kids drafted, and going in as early as '61, and many of my friends, in '61, '62, were dead before I even graduated. And one of the things is we had a lot of Oriental people, one of my good friends was name Grant Hinjoji, had a big article in the paper a while ago, and he had to go over, he was drafted, and you can imagine, the conflict, going to a country where you look not only like the enemy, but also like somebody on your own side, and he ended up getting killed and not returning. So that was another issue, of the Oriental, in an Oriental country, and so there is a lot of mental battles going on, I am sure in their mind. But, it got escalated in '68, and that's why we talk about it, people were being killed, of our friends, in '61 and '62, so we, when I came out to Hillsboro, and it hit, it had already hit some of the older people because the war had been going on since Eisenhower started sending in people in the '50's. So I think that the changes that happened in that war are still around, we are still fighting that war, as you know, you see Kerry, and those things are still coming out. So that war probably had a bigger impact on society, not necessarily positive, as any war, because it changed how we think about war, how we perceive ourselves, and the world, and people now question. And one thing that we said that, the biggest things for us as teachers, I had to explain everything to those d--- kids, 'why is that?' and most of that, when we were teaching, was current events, we didn't understand a lot of what was going on either, how we got there, so we were learning. It was current events, we were exchanging views, and teachers, the liberal teachers, were talking about getting out, and the conservative teachers were saying 'oh, no' so there was fighting in the Social Studies department, and I tell you, there were the liberals and the conservatives, you wave the flag and I'll take the flag and burn it, so it wasn't just kids, it was society as a whole, and before there was no, the other wars you know, unified front, waving the flag, that changed. I think that still we question now, where we are at, and is that where we want to be."

MB-

"I think for me that, and I agree that it started long before the late '60's, when I was in college, many of my friends were drafted and some came home and some didn't. I have never been able to go to a movie on Vietnam. I have seen tons of movies about World War II and movies about World War I, and the French Revolution and everything else, but I have never been able

to go to one of the movies made about Vietnam, and I don't think that I ever will."

BO-

"Looking back, listening to what's been said, one of the things that they say that you get out of a war is you get lessons, and far too often we don't take the time to really delve into the lessons, and one of the things that comes to my mind is that regardless of whether its Republican, or Democratic, administrations, the last ones or the present one, but we really have to take a strong look and respect toward the other nations. We're looking at China right now, this project could be a project of two kids sitting here twenty years from now, wanting to know how we got involved in China. We don't know what the future is, we could be looking at the Arab-Israeli thing, that could end up with all the Arabs and all the nations against Israel. We don't know where that's going to be, in your future reflections you have to take a look and respect and take a long, strong look at something before you really decide, and be interested in the news, take a look at it, all the time, because its there."

PB-

"One last comment with that, I think we have learned, if you look at Kosovo and those places, the thing you always hear, whenever we go, or think we are going, or send troops, 'we don't want another Vietnam,' an entangling alliance, see you always hear that, 'we don't want another Vietnam.' So we do reflect, so we just don't say go hell-bent for election and run in with our troops, because we have learned that military power doesn't necessarily mean you win. Because, when you are fighting on somebody else's land, they have the advantage, they have the home-court advantage, and we have learned that, we would watch the bombers napalm a whole jungle, the bridges would disappear, within a week, the bridges would be back, the trails would be open, and they would be re-mined, and one thing that we learned, as a military policeman, was, and we didn't learn it for a while, was when you went out in the morning in Vietnam, on a trail, you never came back the same trail. And you can understand why, because once you went out, they would mine it, and that took us a long time to learn those lessons, because we were sort of naïve about how to fight guerilla warfare, we never understood that, and so we were at a disadvantage. We still don't know how to fight a guerilla war because we figure that air power and naval power and napalm will do it, and it

didn't work. So I think one thing that we have learned and maybe its not a complete lesson is that we have learned that we don't want to be back in that same type of situation where we are entangled in something that we can't get out of. Because, see, we couldn't get out, till finally somebody had the guts, somebody like McCarthy, or McGovern, the people who said 'we've got to get out, we're wrong,' and that's when Nixon, of course, sort of had to fold and throw his cards in, and suck them up. And so, a big lesson for this country."

MB-

"Speaking of the withdrawal, it was also hurting us economically, understand that, that's something that we haven't talked about, the effect on the economy was noticeable everywhere, you have probably read about the strike? Well, that was directly related to, believe it or not, the economy, of the state and the nation, and teachers had never gone on strike before, but now money was tight everywhere, and the economy suffered, from, that was a drain, we couldn't have guns and butter, as the saying goes, we simply couldn't have guns and butter, and we were pouring huge amounts of money into that war, and not doing what we needed to do domestically. And the morale was very low, so that was perhaps another lesson that we learned."

KT-

"All right, well, that concludes this interview."