

Michael Avery
Dr. Steinbock-Pratt
HY341
28 March 2019

Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Michael Avery
Interviewees: George Bargman, Linda Bargman
Date: 10 March 2019

Q: Can you tell me your name?

GEORGE BARGMAN: George Bargman

Q: Alright, so when were you born?

GEORGE BARGMAN: 12/20/45

Q: Where were you born?

GEORGE BARGMAN: In West Bend, Iowa.

Q: And what was your family life like? How did you grow up in Iowa?

GEORGE BARGMAN: It was uh...I was growing up on a farm...a dairy farm...it was milk cows, and hogs, and horses and that sort of thing...uh we had crops of oats, corn, and beans...and uh it was not a big farm, it was a small farm...it was 180 acres... back then it was a good sized farm...

Q: I bet

GEORGE BARGMAN: ...but we all had to do it all by hand... and pick corn by hand...when you had got done, you had known you had done something...I don't know what else to say.

Q: Well how about your education?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I have a high school degree. I never went to college. Well I did, but I didn't complete it.

LINDA BARGMAN: 1 semester.

GEORGE BARGMAN: You're right... in fact, that's I dropped out of college to enroll in the Army.

Q: So, you enlisted in the Army?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yup.

Q: When did you do that?

GEORGE BARGMAN: That was in January of 1967.

LINDA BARGMAN: No, no, no, no...you graduated in 65. You joined the Army in 66.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Went from there to boot camp down in Fort Leonard Wood for training... onto armored tank school in Fort Knox. And then went overseas to Germany, and we were over there 18 months.

Q: When did you go to Germany, again?

LINDA BARGMAN: Germany...Bad Hersfeld, Germany.

Q: When was that?

LINDA BARGMAN: 67

GEORGE BARGMAN: 67 yeah... I was stationed on Bad Hersfeld, which was a town on the Czech border and trying to chase down people with M151 Jeeps... which was crazy because they had Mercedes and we had Jeeps.

LINDA BARGMAN: He was a border guard.

GEORGE BARGMAN: it was called a '5K zone what do you think we're in?' and it was *Loud*. I guess the survival rate was nil at that point for people in a 5K zone, because that meant the Russians would come right over with tanks and everybody would be dead. And she was there working.

LINDA BARGMAN: Who?

Q: When did y'all get married

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well we got married in 1966.

LINDA BARGMAN: no, 67. You joined the service in January, I was wrong, of 67. We got married on a 3-day pass.

Q: Oh wow!

LINDA BARGMAN: He was going from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri to Fort Knox, Kentucky. He had a 3-day pass. He had to bring his car home because he knew he was going to Germany, so we got married and 2 weeks later he was in Germany and I waited.

GEORGE BARGMAN: About a month wasn't it?

LINDA BARGMAN: I got there in July...and then we were there 18 months

GEORGE BARGMAN: It came down...name, rank, and serial number from the Pentagon that I would be going to Vietnam...and so I was there 90 days before I went...before I left.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, we got your port of call and we were home by Thanksgiving. We found out on one Monday that I was pregnant, and the next Monday he got his orders...and we got home...and we had Christmas together in you left...we drove you to Omaha, Nebraska about 3 days after the First of the year, and he flew out on a government plane to Washington state

because he was expected to buy his own airfare to get to Washington state...that's how coordinated the United States was at that time.

GEORGE BARGMAN: It was Seattle.

LINDA BARGMAN: Pardon...

GEORGE BARGMAN: *Seattle.*

LINDA BARGMAN: yeah, yeah, and you were there what? Just a week or so? He had lost his dog tags (laughter) I just remembered that. He had lost his dog tags...no left them at home. So he had to get new dog tags and he was off to Vietnam.

Q: What was your original reaction to being sent to Vietnam? Especially after the news that you were going to be a father?

LINDA BARGMAN: Devastating...

GEORGE BARGMAN: um It was devastating...it was exciting...I was nervous... um not knowing whether or not I'd come back...a lot of my friends from Germany were over there in the same unit that I went to in Vietnam, so it was good to see them...I was scared

LINDA BARGMAN: Especially at the rate that people were dying at that time.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well where I was located at, the Ho Chi Minh Trail came from Cambodia directly into our basecamp and that was a big deal. And so, the Ho Chi Minh...we bombed one road over there in Cambodia...said we didn't but we did. And nothing but equipment as far as we can see from the North Vietnamese.

Q: So, what was your job in Vietnam...your primary job?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Kill people.

Q: Were you more of on the ground fighting? Or were you more oriented toward logistics or something else?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Fighting.

Q: And you were...what was your rank, again?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Sergeant.

Q: So, you had people that...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Squad

Q: One? (misunderstood)

GEORGE BARGMAN: *Squad*

Q: You had a squad that answered to you, and you had people that you had to answer to...how was that? Being the middleman between, you know, your guys and some of the guys that were higher up?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well so, I had to protect them...from the NCO's that were above me because they wanted to put us on every shifty deal they could get...and dangerous missions...for instance, there were 5 of us out on one patrol...right into Cambodia...and we were not there...supposedly. And uh we were overrun with North Vietnamese...lost 3 of my guys...couldn't help it, but that's the way it was.

Q: How were your interactions with the...when you were trying to lobby for your guys... when you were trying to, you know, keep them out of harm's way...how would you go about doing that?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well we only had one contact...that was a platoon sergeant. And our company commander was a major and I didn't ever get to talk to him. It was uh me and the platoon sergeant that would go around and around and around with this bullshit they didn't want to send us on. And uh consequently I lost guys.

Q: Did you find this to be something that was typical among other groups?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes. It was told to me by other sergeants that it was the same way. They were protecting their ass all the time and put ours up...

Q: How would y'all normally involve yourself with the enemy? How would y'all engage? Would y'all try to do it at a distance? Would y'all try to get up close to them?

GEORGE BARGMAN: We were located in the Central Highlands of Vietnam and there was usually two places that we went: Kontum and Dak To. We sat up at the top of these hills, and it was a fight to get up there and after we were there for 3 days, they took us off the goddamn hill, which didn't make any sense. After we...guys got killed doing it and staying there...but it was better staying there than killing and getting killed to get back up there.

Q: Those orders came from higher-ups?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yup.

Q: Was there a lot of...was there more tension between you and the other sergeants and the higher-ups or was it between...

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, it was the higher-up sergeants that were assholes...excuse my French

LINDA BARGMAN: You're reverting back to your military language. Vietnam was very political. You probably figured that out.

Q: I actually have some questions about that...can you give me one example that you can think of in which political opinions or political decisions hurt the on-the-ground effort?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I think Johnson was president and pulled people back out of Vietnam...uh...Cambodia, at least that's what he said. We were there all the time, every day, no matter what he said. So...that's one example where I think if they had scaled up and said "okay we're going to do this" it would have stopped a lot of my people from dying because we were in Cambodia and if they had really...they sent us in there, if they had done it full blast why it would have taken care of the gooks. Sorry...that's what we called them.

Q: So, you and others were of the opinion that if we're going to be here, we might as well get the mission done?

GEORGE BARGMAN: yeah...I mean it was the same bullshit that was going on in Vietnam...when we go out and take these hills, and then 3 days later we're back off them. I mean, it doesn't make any sense at all.

LINDA BARGMAN: They had no-fly zones over Cambodia and...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Bullshit.

LINDA BARGMAN: well I know, but we were told that they were supposedly...there were times when...George talked about this...that they'd be out on...hunting or you know...on patrol and they would have to stop at an imaginary line and the VC would just cross it and if they get hit, well they get in trouble. It was awful. I mean, they talked about it on the news *all the time*. And it just...it was unfair...they really tied the Americans hands.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well...they tied our hands to the fact that most of them...and cost lives, and got killed, because you couldn't either go in it for them or we weren't there...

LINDA BARGMAN: Weren't there.

Q: So, what do you remember about the rules of engagement at the time?

GEORGE BARGMAN: (Pause) Rules of engagement...you're there, I'm there, I got a gun, you got a gun. That's the rules

LINDA BARGMAN: And your imaginary line.

GEORGE BARGMAN: ...There were *no* rules of engagement.

Q: When you were doing a mission...when you were in a battle what was your primary weapon?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I had 3 weapons. I had a sawed-off shotgun, a .45, and a... M1. That was it. The shotgun was used because it was a jungle.

Q: Right...which one of those three do you believe had the greatest ability to keep you protected?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Shotgun.

Q: That was because of the close range...

GEORGE BARGMAN: It spread out.

Q: The spray on it. What kind of mode of transportation would y'all normally take?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Feet.

Q: If y'all were going over long distances?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Deuce and a half.

Q: How long would y'all walk for, carrying all your stuff?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Couple hours.

Q: How much stuff did you carry?

GEORGE BARGMAN: 65 pounds, at least, maybe 70.

Q: What was the climate change...climate shock rather of you being in Iowa going to...

GEORGE BARGMAN: This is a very hot, humid place...versus a place in the Midwest that is cold.

Q: Were you prepared for that change?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No. They don't give you any preparation.

Q: How did you adapt once you got there?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Took my clothes off. We wore t-shirts and pants and that was it.

Q: Did y'all have any training specific to being in the jungle...being in Vietnam?

GEORGE BARGMAN: We were sitting in an interrogation camp that said there was a gook out there hiding from us...away from us probably about 60 feet, and no one could spot him. He stood up, and he was 6 foot 2 (taps on table), that's how big he was, and we couldn't even see him. They had booby traps out the kazoo.

Q: How much time do you think you spent in Vietnam actually fighting the enemy?

GEORGE BARGMAN: 30%

Q: What do you think the rest of it was? Was it a lot of hurry-up-and-wait kind of thing?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Probably. Get to wherever you want to go and stacking bodies along the side of the road.

LINDA BARGMAN: He spent a month in Japan in a hospital.

GEORGE BARGMAN: That...doesn't count.

Q: When was it?

GEORGE BARGMAN: When was it?

Q: That you were in Japan for a month?

GEORGE BARGMAN: March...I think it was March...Wasn't it? Or February?

LINDA BARGMAN: February... 3 weeks after you got to Vietnam you were wounded. You got there during the year of the Tet Offensive.

GEORGE BARGMAN: That was...

LINDA BARGMAN: 67

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, that was...in March of 68.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, you're right, I'm sorry.

Q: Do you want to share about what happened that put you in the hospital?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No.

Q: Okay, how readily available was news at the time? like Domestic, American news?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Nothing. It didn't exist.

Q: So y'all had difficulties keeping up with, you know, life back home?

GEORGE BARGMAN: We didn't have the interest to do that. Our main thing was surviving, that's what we wanted to do.

LINDA BARGMAN: There were no cell phones, no computers.

GEORGE BARGMAN: I had...called her when I got the chance by radio, in Hawaii I think it was.

LINDA BARGMAN: That's where it went through. It went through Hawaii (laughter). He called me. He and I were in Hawaii...for a week, and it was in October, and they got one R&R for a week when they were in Vietnam, and that's the first I had seen him since he went over. And shortly after that's when I found out a lot of the stuff he was doing, until then I was kind of avoiding it. And then he called me a couple of months later he was due back in January of 69, and he called to tell me that if he re-enlisted...

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, if I stayed.

LINDA BARGMAN: If you stayed...yeah...that he could get out early and I told him "no" and he couldn't hear me (laughter) the guy in Hawaii said "she said 'no'" and so when he hung up, cause you'd have to talk and then say "over" and so when he said "goodbye" he said "I love you" and I couldn't hear him, and the guy in Hawaii said "he loves you" which was kind of embarrassing. Everyone who had a CB could hear it. (laughter)

GEORGE BARGMAN: ...nothing embarrassed me after Vietnam.

LINDA BARGMAN: No, no, me either really.

Q: When you're in desperate times with other guys you start to learn everything because you spend all of your time with...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Your life...you spend your life with that individual...or individuals. And there were 3 sergeants that were above me, that were very close to me and on a recon, they fought for me and my men not to do some of the things that we did, but...Vietnam... you do what you got to do.

Q: How was your relationship with others at the beginning of being in Vietnam? I know that you said you had a lot of guys that you knew from Germany that were there. Was there a lot more cohesion at the beginning than you'd imagine than with others?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Toward the beginning you were completely tied up with getting your stuff together and learning to survive. If you did not learn that you were one of the casualties that went to Japan. If you made it alive...which happened to me...it could have been a lot worse than what it was. But, then you had to go from Cambodia and fly on down to Cam Ranh Bay. From Cam Ranh Bay you go to Japan. What are you doing?

LINDA BARGMAN: Looking at that map. Vietnam Map

Q: So how long do you think it took before, you know, there was more cohesion in between you and others? And between anybody really? How long do you have to just be in Vietnam...

GEORGE BARGMAN: 3 months.

Q: 3 months? Before you can start really...

GEORGE BARGMAN: When you feel like you can lay your pillows out and feel comfortable with what you're doing.

Q: Or at least as comfortable as you can I'd imagine.

GEORGE BARGMAN: *Yeah...yeah.* You cannot grow comfortable with what...not to include like so many of the idiots that were on drugs all the time. They used marijuana, not even thinking about whether or not they were going to get back. And some of that marijuana over there, along with some of the women sent you to a ship off the coast, and you didn't leave that ship.

Q: So, vice was a major issue?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes, it went on forever. I don't think that...they were young, they didn't think about those things.

Q: What do you think they were thinking about?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Having a good time.

LINDA BARGMAN: They didn't take it seriously.

Q: They didn't take *the war* seriously or...

LINDA BARGMAN: No, they didn't...They really didn't. I had a neighbor that was a helicopter pilot and his mission, most of the time he was over there, was to pick up these guys that got diseases and were so strung out on drugs that he hauled them to that ship and a lot of them never left unless they left in a body bag, because you get somebody on drugs and you go out on patrol, their going to endanger you and everybody around you.

Q: So, there's got to be accountability for everybody...everybody has to act as a team.

GEORGE BARGMAN: That sergeant that is in charge of that squad makes those men cohesive or not. If he doesn't, you end up with body bags. Period.

Q: so, you believed that your job was cohesion?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Kill

Q: Cohesion and kill?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yep.

LINDA BARGMAN: You and I have brain memory problems. You were in Vietnam in 68, we said 67, it was 68.

Q: I got 68. January 68.

LINDA BARGMAN: I thought we said 67 and I'm going 'Chris was born in 68 and you weren't there.'

Q: Was communication a major issue in between branches? From my understanding, the Navy did a lot of airstrikes from carriers. Were there good lines of communication between Army and Navy?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, there wasn't. We relied on Army pilots to take and hit our targets. We didn't talk to the Navy...it was worthless. They tried to make them all kinds of bullshit, but they were worthless. You couldn't depend on them. Nothing.

Q: Do you think it was an Army issue? A Navy issue? Or both?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I think it was an *Army-Navy issue* about communication. If they communicate properly, they can do the job. But if they didn't, you were constantly looking over your shoulder...wondering what was going on. You call in B-52 strikes a quarter of a mile from you, and they have 500 to 1000-pound bombs, and that lifts you 2 feet off of the ground. Now you tell me how in the hell they can do that without...because it doesn't hit the damn target. That went on all the time. You didn't know who was your friend, you didn't know.

LINDA BARGMAN: Well it wasn't the Navy... (Laughter)

GEORGE BARGMAN: No shit.

Q: Did you do any operations or missions with any of the local forces?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes...the um...what was his name?

LINDA BARGMAN: The mountain people?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yeah, the mountaineers. I mean there were 4 or 5 of them that were excellent. They were your friends and they did everything they could to make sure that you went back home, along with helping them.

Q: Was there a language barrier between you and them?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, they had many years of English and they spoke it very well, dealing with us. Usually they had one that was...dealt directly with you....

LINDA BARGMAN: Look at the size of those pictures compared to now...Damn, we're old.

Q: Did you see any detriments working with local forces? Any...did anybody find it to be something that they were opposed to rather than...

GEORGE BARGMAN: There were a lot of people that were against it. But the people who worked directly with them were not. They were for helping them, and them helping you

Q: So, who was against it?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Mid-range officers: Colonels, Lieutenant Colonels.

Q: What do you think that if they had known, it would change their minds about them?

GEORGE BARGMAN: They didn't have enough knowledge; the officers didn't have enough knowledge inputted into them from all the things that the sergeants were getting out of that...for some reason or another they couldn't understand that.

LINDA BARGMAN: They weren't in the fields.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well they had people telling them what was going on every time they turned around. I think it was political.

Q: You found that they were by and large great people to work with, is that a fair assessment?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes. Very good. And there wasn't one of them that was (unintelligible)...where I'd like to see some of those officers...That's why so many of the Lieutenants (unintelligible). Was someone killing them within their own group. That happened all the time. You put a Second Lieutenant out there and he ain't got a chance of ever coming out alive.

LINDA BARGMAN: Fresh out of the military academy.

Q: What was the closest that you got to an enemy?

GEORGE BARGMAN: (Motions to me)

Q: this close? As close as I'm sitting away from you?

GEORGE BARGMAN: (nods)

Q: And how did that affect you? Just at the time, mentally?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I was mad, and I killed him.

Q: Was that a... was that during a mission? What kind of mission?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I was on patrol, and it was a bayonet.

Q: That you had?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yeah.

Q: And do you think that that was something that was a typical experience among other American soldiers at the time?

GEORGE BARGMAN: All depended on how much they were on patrol.

Q: How would you describe patrolling? Was it something that...how would you describe it?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Like walking in grass that was that high (motions about 4 or 5 feet high) and not knowing whether the next step you took was going to be your last because it was a booby trap and after a while you just said 'to hell with it, I'm going to do this anyway and nothing is going to stop me.' And that's how you had to get, otherwise you wouldn't be able to survive.

Q: How often did you see local civilians?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Not that often.

Q: Did you have any experiences with them?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yeah. The only time I had experiences with them in the Army and if you get back to being where they weren't (unintelligible) you're okay. But (unintelligible) in front of you to have them do something for you...psh...not going to happen.

Q: Do you think that they saw you and others as protectors or as the enemy?

GEORGE BARGMAN: The enemy...That's what happened...to end what happened over there. When you lose 50,000 troops, something's wrong. But yet the President didn't think so

Q: Did you actually learn of President Johnson saying he would not run for reelection? I believe that was in March of 68.

GEORGE BARGMAN: No.

Q: So, you didn't...

GEORGE BARGMAN: No.

Q: What about the election of President Nixon...later that year?

GEORGE BARGMAN: What about it?

Q: Did you know about it?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes.

Q: What was the general feeling at the time about that? Did y'all have any conversation about...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Everybody was happy that he was elected. We didn't learn about how dirty he was until later, but we were happy about it.

Q: Was it more that he was elected or that Hubert Humphrey wasn't elected? Because he was much more anti-Vietnam War.

GEORGE BARGMAN: We were happy that Nixon was elected.

Q: Did y'all...What did y'all foresee from that election? Did y'all see...Were y'all hoping to see changes?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes

Q: What changes did y'all expect?

GEORGE BARGMAN: That we would get more rights as a military than what we had as far as in battle. We hoped that he would give us more...

Q: You wanted your hands set free from being tied behind your back?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes

Q: Did you find that supplying...supplies was an issue...getting things to and from where you needed them to be?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, because they used helicopters and pallets to bring it to...beer mostly. (laughter)

LINDA BARGMAN: You crack me up what you remember.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well when you're sitting there on top of a hill and can't get off of it...

LINDA BARGMAN: That's true...and good beer always tastes good. The tunnel rats probably thought that too when they got through tunneling in the ground.

Q: How much beer was there?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well, let's put it this way...more than you could uh...enough to float anybody.

Q: I'm sure that that was a popular thing...I'd imagine that was good for morale...

GEORGE BARGMAN: I mean uh...you'd open it up and pop and just explode.

Q: Good luck keep that cold, but a warm beer is better than no beer.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Warm beer is better than no beer...and to this day I can't stand it.

Q: Did you see any waste of resources? Other than what you had talked about in the past with the lack of communication between... um where targets are.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Are you talking about material? Or...

Q: Well let's go with material...did you see any waste of material resources?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Some...uh 10% maybe.

Q: Do you think that that was more of a bureaucratic issue or people on the ground actively misusing...

GEORGE BARGMAN: I think it was people on the ground.

Q: What about the resource of time? Did you see any time being spent? I know that y'all spent, what did you say 30% of your time was fighting, a lot of the rest of it was hurry up and wait.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Movement of one place to another.

Q: Any building?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, because there wasn't any building...Tents.

LINDA BARGMAN: You said that one time after you got back from Japan they had you shipping bodies out during the day before you go on patrol.

GEORGE BARGMAN: That was one where we were shipping people out from that day and the next day we're asked to...go on patrol. Not much sleep was taken over there.

Q: Can you tell me a little something about the differences between the day and the night? As far as what your concerns were?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I didn't know at that time that they had helicopters that wouldn't make any noise. I was back in the division base camp and had one fly right over me and it sounded like a whisper. That was really weird...to have something that big fly over the top of me...overtop of me...and all it sounded like was 'wsh wsh wsh.'

LINDA BARGMAN: Did they use those in combat then? Along with the Huey's?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No... Well this was a Huey.

LINDA BARGMAN: Oh...I didn't know that Huey's could be that quiet.

GEORGE BARGMAN: They didn't use them in combat, no. I think those...to move people around at night. And if I hadn't been outside...almost stronger than a tycoon...I would not have seen that. Personally, I thought my mind was (whistles and twirls finger) making that nervous, but well I came to deal with it and I knew that's what it was. What was the question again? I forgot.

Q: Some of the differences between day and night? What concerned you more at night than in the day? What did y'all have to worry about at night that y'all didn't have to worry about in the day?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Infiltrators.

Q: What was that?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Infiltrators.

Q: Okay, and that was at your base?

LINDA BARGMAN: That's an infiltrator. (Shows picture of dead Vietnamese man)

Q: That was somebody that...

GEORGE BARGMAN: That was a gook.

Q: That had infiltrated in the night?

GEORGE BARGMAN: That's what one round of the AK-47 will do.

Q: How often did things like that happen?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Every night.

Q: Every night there was somebody who...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yeah

Q: And was it ever a coordinated movement? Or was it individuals?

GEORGE BARGMAN: What I heard in 1972, it was coordinated. They overran the basecamp...and you're talking about 4,000 Americans getting killed...all because they didn't put the right security in.

LINDA BARGMAN: Nixon didn't do any better than Johnson.

GEORGE BARGMAN: It wasn't that high up. I'm talking about company level crap, because you had some wishy-washy that didn't care, or didn't have the brains to care...that's what I'm talking about.

Q: So, when did you have a date that you were leaving Vietnam?

GEORGE BARGMAN: The day before.

Q: So, 24 hours? How did that feel when you got that news?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Amazed...Great.

Q: So, you packed up and shipped out the next day?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I didn't have anything (laughter)

Q: Packed up? (laughter) Where did you go after you left?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Pleiku, no that wasn't it...Cam Ranh Bay. Cam Ranh Bay to Japan. And 49 hours later I was in Seattle.

LINDA BARGMAN: In the middle of a blizzard.

GEORGE BARGMAN: And was on an Eastern Airlines...from there to Minneapolis, and I was the *only* person on the plane. Period.

LINDA BARGMAN: And then got spit on at the airport.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yeah...that person wished they hadn't done that.

Q: I was going to ask...how were you...how were the reactions from the airport?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Babykiller...Spit on all the time by someone who doesn't have the brains to come in out of the rain...let's put it this way...he has no front teeth left.

Q: And was this something that you had to deal with later on once you got back? Was this something that kept recurring?

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, because I was only going to go through it once...and that was in Seattle...Seattle or San Francisco...San Francisco I think.

Q: So, when was the first time that the two of y'all saw each other after you were in Vietnam?

LINDA BARGMAN: You took a bus...we had a sleet storm and my friends made it to the farm that my mom and dad lived on...and we were going to have to drive to Des Moines to get him...and no Fort Dodge, he got a bus from Minneapolis to Fort Dodge, and there was all this sleet and we skidded all the way there...or was it Des Moines...it was Des Moines...and that was the first time we had seen...

GEORGE BARGMAN: You had part of that right. I got to Des Moines and had a bus back to Fort Dodge.

LINDA BARGMAN: Okay that's what it was, and we had to make it to Fort Dodge. And in the year he was gone we had seen one another 6 days.

Q: That was...

LINDA BARGMAN: That was in Hawaii. He was a terrible letter writer. (laughter)

GEORGE BARGMAN: I didn't have time...

LINDA BARGMAN: Well I know... I would get maybe one letter every 3 months...so in that timeframe I never knew if he was alive or dead. And so, if I would go into town and I'd see a military officer I'd high tail it back to my mom and dad's farm because I didn't want him coming to see me. That's the big difference between then and now...now they have this...they have the cell phones. And yeah, the separation is great, but I don't think that people understand what the family goes through...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Im going to take a break.

Q: Okay, I can talk to you or pause it.

LINDA BARGMAN: And I don't think...that's why I think that Wounded Warrior and these things are so desperately needed. Because we're lost too... you know? I had our son; my parents were there...he didn't even find out he was a father for 2 days because the Red Cross said death messages had to go first. And it was rough...we were 21 years old. We knew that...I never had a doubt in my mind he was coming back. I'm sure he had many doubts he wasn't coming back. But you know? You just go through it...as hard as it is. And sometimes when I look back on it, I think 'how did I do it?' He was wounded 3 weeks. He got there in January. 3 weeks later I got a letter from him telling me he was in Cam Ranh Bay, in the hospital, because he had been wounded. And a classmate of mine, that I grew up with, had just been killed on his third tour of duty as a Marine. His mom told us that he got home in December and she said that he wasn't *him* anymore. He was so into the war, he was a gunnery sergeant, and he was killed saving somebody. And...I...My husband never came back...not the man I married. And it took...it's hard on parents, it's hard on wives. It's all war is. It's that way today, but they can communicate. We couldn't do that, and that's the hard part. Of course, it's not any different than the Second World War and the Korean War...

Q: How hard was it to get a letter from point A to point B? Or from point B to Point A?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well, division is 30,000 people, and there would be one post office in the division. So, you can imagine how many people are dropping off letters and getting a response back...or return them...supposedly. And it never got anywhere.

LINDA BARGMAN: Well when you were in Japan, I'll never forget, I had sent...stupid me, 21 years old...had sent this package to him and it was a little box of chocolate candies, you know? In the little heart shapes. And I had sent him some goodies. I knew he had gone to Japan, but the government never contacted me because they gave George the opportunity 'do you want to call your wife? Or do you want us to do it?' well in 1968, that would have come Western Union. And so, the end of February all the mail, all the packages came back, and I remember freaking out once they came back because I thought 'where was he?'

GEORGE BARGMAN: A foxhole.

LINDA BARGMAN: is he dead? A foxhole? (laughter)

Q: When you got back, how were you received by your family and friends?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Great. All of my friends had saw me...said me I wasn't a babykiller.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, nobody did until...

GEORGE BARGMAN: And this was a small town. 512 people.

LINDA BARGMAN: Not very big...(unintelligible) Whittemore?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I'm talking about West Bent...Whittemore is probably...

LINDA BARGMAN: It was probably the same at that time.

GEORGE BARGMAN: No, it wasn't. It was at 275 maybe. So, it wasn't very big.

LINDA BARGMAN: Everybody was very...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Saying I got shot with a tank...my dumbass sister was one of...one of the ones that was selling that story in that part of town in West Bend.

LINDA BARGMAN: When he got wounded, they said he got shot by a tank...and this little old lady...I shouldn't say this...this little old lady...I was working in a beauty shop, and she came...gossiping in his hometown was really bad...and she came to me when she saw me get out of the car and said, "Linda, I'm so sorry to hear that George got shot by a tank." And I said, "Lady, if my husband had gotten shot by a tank, they'd be sending his body back in a black body bag in a metal coffin. He didn't get shot by a tank. Wounded, yes. Not by a tank." I said, "so peddle your little butt uptown and sell all your cronies that in the coffee shop okay?" She got mad at me. I never talked to her again.

GEORGE BARGMAN: She probably thought you were a bitch.

LINDA BARGMAN: Probably

GEORGE BARGMAN: ...which is well known. (laughter)

LINDA BARGMAN: (laughter) well I was protecting you.

Q: Well when you did get back, had you seen a lot of change in America before you had left and after being gone for an entire year?

GEORGE BARGMAN: The only change I seen is the welcoming committee that when I went through San Francisco...The hippies spit on you, called you babykillers, all kinds of crap like that. That wasn't there before. So, I didn't know how long it had been going on or anything...

LINDA BARGMAN: But see he had spent 18 months in Germany before too, so he had been out of the States for a while. I knew more about the hippie culture, having been there a year with him in Vietnam, so he came back to some real surprises.

Q: How was it for you? Seeing all these changes happen?

LINDA BARGMAN: It really upset me because he's over... we're young, I have a son, he's over there fighting in a War that nobody cared about, wasn't supported by a lot of people.

GEORGE BARGMAN: All those politicians...

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah...and it was so political and every night...*every night* on the news that's all you saw. And I'll never forget, maybe 4 months before he came home, I was sitting there eating supper with my mom and dad and this was a picture that they had out for...you may have seen it on the internet...they have this guy handcuffed, he was a Vietnamese, a North Vietnamese, and this person walked up and put a gun to his head, and I'll remember the bullet going through that side on going...they showed that on television. That's the kind of stuff you saw. You know? And you saw it every day. When you don't hear from somebody for 3 months...you just...Western Union, are they going to...you know? Have you ever seen the movie *We Were Soldiers*?

Q: I have not.

LINDA BARGMAN: Watch that. It's with...it explains a lot about that year, because there...Vietnam was so new and so unprepared that they didn't have ways of notifying wives.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Mel Gibson is part of that.

LINDA BARGMAN: Mel Gibson and Sam Elliott. And if you want to see booby traps that they used, watch *The Green Berets* with John Wayne. That was eye-opening to me. I was pregnant when I saw that one...he was gone.

GEORGE BARGMAN: You had probably that much sole on your shoe that was hard rubber (shows about a quarter-inch with fingers). And they had spears in Vietnam that had booby traps and you'd step on, and it'd go right through that shoe...And they'd call them '2 step' because 2 steps and you were down.

LINDA BARGMAN: But that movie is based on actual facts by the guy that lived it. He directed and produced the movie. He was a general, George?

GEORGE BARGMAN: 1 Star Brigadier General.

LINDA BARGMAN: It's an incredible movie.

Q: I was actually going to ask y'all if y'all are fans of movies and if y'all have seen of any movies relating to the Vietnam War? And which ones if you do which ones do you like? Which ones do you think are most realistic of being there?

GEORGE BARGMAN: None of them are really realistic.

LINDA BARGMAN: The one I hated the most was *Platoon*. I hated that movie. Or *The Deer Hunter*...Dear God. He wouldn't watch many of them...and I would watch a couple. Well I can't watch that movie without crying at the end...

Q: *The Green Berets*?

LINDA BARGMAN: It was a great film... *We Were Soldiers*. Well *Green Berets*...that was...I went to that one when I was still pregnant with Chris.

GEORGE BARGMAN: What was that one we saw in (unintelligible) before I went to Vietnam?

LINDA BARGMAN: Oh, that was the one with...that was our first movie we saw.

GEORGE BARGMAN: I can't remember it.

LINDA BARGMAN: It was Jeff Chandler. And it dealt with...it was a Second World War movie and it um...now if you hadn't have asked me I could have told you. Something about...I don't remember. And New Year's Eve we went to the movies before he left, and we saw *The Thin Red Line*, and that was another World War II movie...I thought, 'we shouldn't have seen those.' But in our time, there were a lot of movies, because so many actors, I don't know if you know this, but so many actors left their job and joined the military during the Second (World) War. And when he was in Vietnam, all the guys would jump on buses and go to Canada, so they wouldn't have to be drafted. Now there's a vast difference in being a patriot and not, and today...nothing against you...but there's a lot of young men who wouldn't put on a uniform. And... like Tillman...Pat Tillman from the Arizona Cardinals. And to think...he ended up killed by friendly fire...which is no big deal...I mean as far as friendly fire goes, but it just...and then when you see all these people out there, screaming and hollering about nothing, it's hard when you've lived what he's lived through. And our son thought it would have been wonderful to...and when 9/11 came around he was called up, and when the Iraqi War started, if he hadn't have been married, he'd have joined back up to go. But I guess the way we raised him...that's an old map...here's Pleiku right there, and Kontum, and then Dak To above it.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Our base camp was 5 miles south of Pleiku...and the Ho Chi Minh Trail comes there. I don't have my glasses on.

LINDA BARGMAN: What are you looking for? Let me get your glasses...There you go.

GEORGE BARGMAN: There's Dak To right there...Would you like to have this map?

Q: Um...I...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Can you turn it in to get extra credit?

Q: I can take whatever y'all are comfortable with letting me take... I can try to get it back to you.

GEORGE BARGMAN: No. you can have them

LINDA BARGMAN: We have another map.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Here is Pleiku, there is (unintelligible), Dak To, we got kicked off that goddamn hill I don't know how many times...but you can have that map...pray it won't fall apart.

Q: After you came back, did you have any issues or any problems reintegrating back into...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yes. How many times did I...did you wake up to me choking you to death?

LINDA BARGMAN: Or yelling "Vietnamese" at me. That was a lot at Fort Meade that last year. You...he was stationed at Fort Meade, Maryland for his last year and there was so many crazy, well it was Vietnam War veterans everywhere. And the MP's were busy...really, really busy because these guys had come straight back from war, and PTSD...nobody did anything to help them.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well they didn't have any knowledge of that.

LINDA BARGMAN: There was no mental people with no mental help...he had his eardrums ruptured when he was wounded. And we were staying in a barrack until we could get our housing, and there was a 3 Star or 2 Star General and his wife in the one next to us, and he was going to Vietnam. And they were from the South, and he didn't come home one night...and I had no idea...but then he sent me a message and said he had just gone out on the firing range... well...

GEORGE BARGMAN: Training the weekend warriors...

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, you know? And here he is with ruptured eardrums, so I went over there, and I talked to the General and said, "can you *please* find out where my husband's at?" I really had no clue, and so I gave him all the information I knew. He told me I was a very informed wife. I said, "well this is going on 4 years." Well they didn't have children. And he found where he was, and he came back and said, "oh he's out here doing this, doing that, doing this." And I went, "Okay, that's all I needed to know."

GEORGE BARGMAN: I spent months training the weekend warriors maneuvers.

LINDA BARGMAN: Back then they didn't go to Vietnam

GEORGE BARGMAN: No.

Q: You were still in the military?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I was an S4. An S4 is where you go to have fatigues done, cleaned, stuff like that. That's what I was doing, because they had a spot there and it was the rank that I was. So that's where they stuck me. And I seen there was another person there that I'd seen, Jackman was his name. He was a First Sergeant of the group when I was in Europe, and every foul language that you can think of, he would say. Well I seen him when I come back, and he said, "Bargman, you made it back!"

LINDA BARGMAN: I'm surprised somebody didn't shoot him...he was awful...just....

GEORGE BARGMAN: So, it was needless to say, I was not the hit...

LINDA BARGMAN: Nobody was.

GEORGE BARGMAN: I was in charge of a group, when I was in Europe, that was radar and ground surveillance. And that's all we did. We'd go out and sit on the border and run the goddamn radar up and down the border to see if there was any movement. Now I'll tell you something that was really weird. I...there was something going on down on the border and my driver and I went down there. There was...looked like a couple of them down there. We get down there, there was a whole platoon of them come up...they could have taken us into East Germany or Czechoslovakia without any problem at all. The only crazy thing was, the guy had a nametag on that was my name. And the only thing was...he had two n's on the back of his name, and that's what they did over there. Now when they moved to the United States, my grandparents dropped it, so it wouldn't be like it was from Europe. But he had exactly my name.

LINDA BARGMAN: Probably saved your butt.

GEORGE BARGMAN: That was on the Czech border.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, you were supposed to go to Vietnam on ground surveillance radar, and they gave him a life expectancy of 3 months.

GEORGE BARGMAN: I'd have made it. I'd have made it. No matter what, I'd have been okay.

Q: How long were you in the military once you got back?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I was in 4 years. So, went in in 66. Add up to 70.

Q: After that, after you got out of the military, how...what...did you have any issues going back to civilian life?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Hmm. I don't know. I didn't like doing what I had for a job. I was working on an assembly line at...where was it?

LINDA BARGMAN: I don't remember...you only did the first few months and then you went to Des Moines.

GEORGE BARGMAN: I went to Des Moines, was a banker, and then I was...in computers and put on my resume. And that's when I was hired by Vulcan Materials as manager of their information department.

LINDA BARGMAN: It was hard getting out of the service for that last year. We spent a lot of time talking about what we were going to do, as did everybody, because so many people were drafted for 2 years, but he enlisted for 4 and they pulled you out of college, so so many people back then never had their college degree. And when you get out of the service you couldn't afford to go back, because they didn't have the stuff they have now to push you through. So, there was a lot of people just left in limbo. When we lived in Des Moines, we were what we 2 blocks from the VA hospital?

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yeah

LINDA BARGMAN: And there was a guy that lived 2 houses down from us, that had no legs and no arm. He had married an Army nurse. He had been so close to was it a grenade?

GEORGE BARGMAN: A Grenade.

LINDA BARGMAN: And your heart had to go out to him, because he was bitter...so very very bitter. Here he was, what 23 years old? And no way for anybody to help him like they have now. And his life was a wheelchair with no one rolling it. I think he did kill himself. I don't know but I mean it was a tough time for veterans. It really was.

GEORGE BARGMAN: That's when I worked 2 jobs...worked at the State Department and on weekends I drove a flower truck.

LINDA BARGMAN: That was after Ann, our daughter. We worked...he worked hard...we both worked hard to make it work...It didn't kill us?

Q: What changes, at the time, did you want to see within the reintegration of veterans into society, or anything like that? Did y'all have an expectation or a hope that something would happen, because there was a problem there?

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, and it didn't happen for years and years and years and years.

GEORGE BARGMAN: It's um...I don't know whether there was...there was no hope that you'll be able to get ahead. You push, and you push, and you push, and you push, but it doesn't do any good.

LINDA BARGMAN: Well and access to the VA was so remote.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Especially if you were in the Midwest. There was one in Chicago and one Minneapolis.

LINDA BARGMAN: What, George?

GEORGE BARGMAN: VA's

LINDA BARGMAN: There's a VA hospital in Des Moines. You went to it.

GEORGE BARGMAN: I know. Hospital. But no representative.

LINDA BARGMAN: No, no. You know, I think, personally, I think, the person who has done the most good for the VA, for the veterans, has been Trump. He's pushed to get these VA's accountable, the hospitals. They've pushed to get, like Alabama had 4 VA nursing homes and...

GEORGE BARGMAN: And they're all so packed we'll never be able to get into them now.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, the waiting list is 2 years. But most of the World War II veterans are dead, and so are the Korean, so basically, the next group is your Vietnam veterans. And we were at the VA hospital and this guy came up and he was a Vietnam veteran...He was just kind of batty, he was just...I went, "okay..." But its all so sad, because like I said there was no kind of mental help to help these vets to come back and talk to somebody. The mental-nervous field wasn't there, and how much help does it does it do 30, 40 years later? It doesn't do much good. And it just wasn't addressed for years and years and years, it was just, "thank you for your duty, goodbye."

Q: What do you think about talking to somebody who knows...mental aspects of being in war for a year? Do you think that would have helped you? To come back and work through...

GEORGE BARGMAN: I think if the VA had representatives that you could go and sit down with and talk, I think it wouldn't have as many people taking their own lives as what they have now. There are too many people that haven't come to be able to live with that. I don't know whether it was us putting bodies that were dead along the side of the road and putting diesel fuel on them and burn them. I don't know. All of that has memories. It gets old...after a certain age, and you go, 'what did I do?' 'why did I do that?' (Deep exhale)

LINDA BARGMAN: Well they've got the help now for the Afghan and Iraqi veterans, but even them taking their own lives, each war has its own set of casualties, I think, because every war is different. When Chris got ready to be shipped off to Desert Storm, George said to me, he said,

“ours was agent orange, but Desert Storm was chemical. Each one is just as bad as the other.”
But yeah, I don’t know.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Did we cover everything you wanted to ask?

Q: I’ve just got one more question and that was ‘how do you think that perception has changed about the Vietnam War since the War began, and since the end of the War? How it’s changed over time?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I don’t know, because you’ll never be welcomed home the way other people were. People for World War II, that they welcomed home, they had the Korean Conflict. All they had for us was a goddamn wall, and its up there in D.C..

LINDA BARGMAN: They didn’t have parades and they didn’t have people standing in the airport thanking you for your service.

Q: They had people in the airports, just not celebrating.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, exactly. In my opinion, anybody that lived it, in that, say, 10-year span, because it started under John Kennedy. I think had John Kennedy not been assassinated, I don’t think the conflict, the Vietnam War would have ever gotten as wide open as it did. That’s something that George and I talk about quite often.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Johnson, Johnson, it was all political.

LINDA BARGMAN: It was. It was very political...for the poppy fields basically, for the poppy fields. And that’s when the drugs first started to really come into the United States...was those poppy fields over there. But all of us, probably, from 50 up, still think it was a waste of time, and a lot of unnecessary death. But then look what happened, they have the killing fields after we all pulled out, which was unbelievable. Would they have happened had we not been there? I don’t know.

GEORGE BARGMAN: If we hadn’t left the way that we did.

LINDA BARGMAN: Yeah, it was just pull out overnight practically. Left everybody high and dry.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Well, you’ve seen the helicopter...now how many people can you get on it?

LINDA BARGMAN: It was awful. I remember that day.

Q: How did you, as a veteran, feel...of the quick pull-out?

GEORGE BARGMAN: I felt I was not appreciated. I felt there was no one thanking us for what we had done over there. All those dead bodies...what was it? 50,000 or something like that in Vietnam? I mean that’s a lot of people, not to count how many we killed. And this dumbass in Texas, I guess he’s dead, I don’t know if he is or not.

LINDA BARGMAN: (Laughter) He’s dead, he’s been dead a long time.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Someone like that need so be...have a special place in hell, because of his promoting, getting rich, that’s all it was

LINDA BARGMAN: Off the poppy fields.

GEORGE BARGMAN: Yup. Okay?

Q: I've gone through all of my questions. I'd like to thank both of you for your service, and you being a military spouse, of course, and thank you both for sitting down and having this interview with me.