RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK JULIAN VELLUCCI

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Rebecca Schwarz: This begins an interview with Patrick Julian Vellucci on December 9, 2010 in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Rebecca Schwarz and Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Thank you, Mr. Vellucci, for coming in today. Where and when you were born?

Patrick Vellucci: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey-- the home of so many bad jokes-- at Margaret Hague Hospital … on 5 July 1947.

SH: Again, thank you for coming here.

PV: My pleasure, really it is.

SH: Can you tell us about your father? I see you share the same name with him.

PV: He was a senior. My father was one of the finest men I ever met. Naturally, I'm a little prejudiced. My father was a Hollywood handsome kind of guy and sort of, if you will, the star of Union City, a small town next to Jersey City, also brunt of so many wonderful language [jokes]. Brooklyn gets it bad too. … He was quite a fellow. My father served in the China-Burma Theater … [CBI]. In fact, I just hung up his medals. He worked at one time for the great General Stilwell, also known as "Vinegar Joe." … I have wonderful pictures of my dad-- I would have brought them here-- attaining the rank of first sergeant, which is saying something. He worked in General Motors as a lot of people did from that area then because the plants were down there then, and the money was good, and he worked his way up to supervisor. Unfortunately for him, when he came home from the war, China-Burma being what it was, and two straight years in the jungle, he was a little rattled-- bad malaria, bad dysentery and he could not return to General Motors. The noise drove him crazy, and it's a very sad story. Well, it ended well, but it's kind of sad because he had worked his way up, and, of course, in that war-- unlike Vietnam-- you came home, "Johnny" came marching home, and it was, "What can we do for Johnny," here's your job, here's your wife. … It wasn't like Vietnam, "Get out of here." They were ready to give him his job back, and he had it back, and the money was even better and the unions were terrific. … He came home and says to my mother, "I feel like I'm taking incoming rounds." He couldn't take the noise. So, he went off and did other things and became very successful in the automotive sales industry, which was a happier ending then it could have been. That's my Dad. He loved [Rudyard] Kipling, and he loved to read to me about Kipling, and when I came back from Vietnam I said, "I'm going to forgive you for this." We laughed. My father wanted to go-- like Kipling-- in the poems, "to see the jungle, see the pyramids along the Nile," because he was on Central Avenue, Union City. Who wants to stay there when you can go on a Kipling poem. [laughter]

SH: Well, he got the jungle part.

PV: He got the jungle part, but when you get there, [laughter] and, you know, you're fighting a rat for a spot-- Kipling left that out of all the prose. [laughter]

SH: Your father was born in Brooklyn.

PV: [He] was born in Brooklyn. … The first sport he ever saw was polo. … There was an officer's range there, and as a young boy, again looking to do more, coming from a … working-class family, he would go on Sunday and he would watch the officers play polo, and he always aspired to be that. He wanted to be that and we talked about that a lot. …

SH: Did he come from a large family?

PV: No, … just his brother, his younger brother who served in Europe, my Uncle Arthur, and my Aunt Dolly was his sister. So, it was just the three of them. My grandfather, wonderful story, that was the man who came here … with no language. No language, and worked his way up in the Bennett Box Company, which is a lumber company where he would go all over the country. He was always in Ohio and Iowa, checking the boards and all of that. So, he worked his way up, this man who barely spoke English and then, of course, he learned. … He was a classy guy, if you see a picture of him, he looks like … Humphrey Bogart. … He looked a little bit like that, and was a real star, an idol of mine and my cousins. We all wanted to be like him because when he'd walk down the street it was, "Mr. Vellucci, Mr. Vellucci." That was my father's father.

SH: Where did he immigrate from?

PV: Italy, all from Italy. My mother's family is from Battipaglia, Italy, and my Dad's family just above that, I don't know, I can't pronounce the village but they're all pretty close in that area. I say this now-- this is so ironic-- because only recently did I send away to Ellis Island for my grandmother on my mother's side, information about when she came here and I have the manifest, the original manifest. Then I bought a picture of the ship, (*la ledgeria*?). … They came steerage, and it says right on the manifest, "This is the steerage manifest." It was my grandmother, my (Aunt Josie?), my (Aunt Eleanor?) and some cow, because that's what steerage [means], "the steerage," the steers, and that's the way they came over. I say this because I got in a little bit of trouble at the Vietnam museum when we talked about illegal aliens and the … problem with illegal aliens. … In the summertime we have the teachers come down, so we can affect, as Carl probably told you, we can affect curriculum [at the] … Veterans' Memorial and Educational Center. … Now we have museum status being the only one of its kind in the country. A lot to thanks goes to the ex-governor, Ms. Whitman and her husband, a Vietnam veteran, Johnny. John put the right people together. Anyway, I was saying that yes, it's true down through the ages, people of the world have given us … their most precious commodity, which is their children. … Lucia Marsicoutere is her name, it's long. … It had where she came from, who paid for her transportation, what was her profession. Even at seventeen years old, she was expected to have one, and where she was going to stay and what he did for a living. … In other words even that Irish cop at Ellis Island with his pen knew how to ask certain questions, and if the answers were wrong, not good. Now we have a group of people who simply arrive-- they cross a border--and I said this to the wrong teacher, for which I didn't apologize. … The trouble is there were like maybe twenty educators there and two superintendents and this one very liberal kind of guy was in the front, and I said to him, "What happened to these people in

my experience, my sixty something years on this earth, I can't believe how old I am, is that these cultures, the Irish cop, the Polish people from across the street, they all immersed themselves in what's called America. They learned our language … our values and our laws, okay, that's what they did. "Let's take a look at how it's changed." When we do critical comparison, this group of people from South America and Mexico, have come in and said, "We are not going to obey your laws, we're going to march in the streets of Paterson and Passaic, … and as far as your culture and your language is concerned, not only we're maybe not going to learn it, you are going to learn ours, if you want tenure in certain positions like teaching." So, that to me is a real head scratcher … and I said to him, "If I were guiding young kids, if I were trying to celebrate ideas today, I would at least give them the critical comparison of the Polish immigrants who came over, the Irish immigrants and all of that, where you saw signs that said "no Irish" because they hated Irish people, they had no reason." I said, "Here at least there's a reason." … He came at me, and as you could probably tell from my personality I didn't relent, and the other teachers in the back were cheering. … I said, "I don't have an answer you know," and all of the kids that work for me are Latinos, I mean, I'm not a prejudiced person. … Often, I say, "You guys are the new Italians, so that doesn't bother me." But there is a difference and we should be discussing that in class. I'm not saying round everybody up, but I am saying people have come here for the first time in our history, and said, "We're breaking your laws, we're not doing this, and we're not doing that," and if you intend to teach at least in Hudson County, … you can forget about your education at this great school and whatever graduate degree you received at a greater school, you're going to learn to speak that language, or we're not going to give you tenure. …

SH: Who was your grandmother's sponsor?

PV: Her sponsor … was my mother's Cousin Johnny, very interesting. … Johnny was here, and of course it's a big joke because he was a gambler. … He wasn't a high level Mafioso but he was what we call in Union City and the Hoboken area, a "runner," also called a "bag man," known for that because what they did, they carried bags, and they said, "Hi, Sandra, how are you doing today," and they'd give you the bag because you hit the number that day, whatever it was, or you hit the horses, and then you take five dollars and tip him. … That was a bag man's job but he listed his profession as a plumber or something like that. This guy never saw a wrench. … They lived with him, and his wife and each one of the girls had a profession that they claimed. I think they claimed seamstress, although they were so young. My (Aunt Josie?) was pretty old, she was the eldest, she was about twenty-five which for that group was old, and the two other girls were sixteen and seventeen. Just off subject for one second, my mother once said to my grandmother, because we were all so close, "How could you leave your mother?" And my grandmother, I was there when she said it, with my cousin, she said, "Because we had no food to eat. I didn't just leave my mother because I felt like going on a vacation, because America was [fun]. We had no food to eat."

SH: Talk about your mother and your mother's family.

PV: … My mother is Jean Marie Juliano-Vellucci from Hoboken, of course, the daughter of this woman, and thus the Julian. I stole her name. My mother was a stay at home mom, lucky for us, because she was really a supportive person. My brother was a school teacher, passed away early,

premature, just very hard for us, at forty-five. He was a great school teacher down in Hackettstown and a coach. There were like a thousand people at his service and they had grief counselors at the school. … Usually, they'll bring a grief counselor in-- … they had a team of grief counselors in there. I mean the "hoody" kids loved him, the gangs loved him, the football team loved him, all of the kids who were failing loved him. … He was a biology teacher and earth science. That was her other son, and my mother would help him at the table. … He's a graduate of Montclair State, Teachers College then, and I used to see him come down here and play rugby against Rutgers. … They'd come down here, they'd be punching each other. … I played football and I thought that was a tough sport. … This is the joke about Rugby: it's a game for hooligans played by gentlemen, and I saw my brother right over there play, it's kind of funny, it feels like yesterday. My mother was a stay at home mom, and … when I came back, my first school, before I went to St. Peter's College, was the American Academy of Dramatic Arts which was a boyhood dream of mine to be an actor, and I was one for almost twenty years … before I moved into directing and producing. … She would help me run my lines, and you know, there's no [payment] for that.

SH: How did your parents meet?

PV: I don't know that, I think they just met the way people met in those days, and still today. … Only recently did I become an old guy, have they given up on me. The way it is in Union City, I'm guessing that somebody said, "I have a guy for you" or "a girl for you." …

SH: What are your earliest memories of growing up in Union City?

PV: Oh, my memories are the greatest. I wish I could get rid of them, because from a critical comparison point of view, my life pales, and it's been a hell of a ride. My memories are very early, very young. I always remember my (Cousin Joyce?) and (Lucille?), who I talk to just about every week now. They went down to Florida, they live on this big compound and have beautiful homes. They moved many years ago, which was a traumatic experience for my mom and for me, because we were so close, we saw each other every day. I was brought up with my two cousins, (Joyce?) and (Lucille?), who bossed me around because I was the youngest, and pushed me around because I was a nutty kid and if you didn't give me a slap I would be out of control, and they were like "Miss Perfects," because girls in those days were brought up to be Miss Perfects. … For some reason-- you talk about change of times-- here's these two girls that had to take me around, and I was not an easy kid, and they never complained, they never said, well, once in a while my cousin Lucille would say, "Do we have to take him?" "Yes, you have to take him," and my mother would say "That's okay, leave him here" and I go "No, I want to go with you." "All right, you got to behave yourself" but I just couldn't behave myself because it wasn't in my DNA.

SH: How much younger or older were they?

PV: (Cousin Lucille?) is eight years, and then my (Cousin Joyce?) is four years, and then there's me.

SH: What was the age difference between your brother than you?

PV: … My brother is … nine years difference, there would have been.

SH: Younger or older?

PV: … He was younger, he passed at forty-five, and we were very close, and when that thing that I described to you, move to Florida, and then my mother's cousins all moved to Florida, everyone moved. So, we went from the twenty dinner [to] … there was only the twins, my twin aunts whom we'll get to. Those are my next memories, and that's on my mother's side. In those days, as a backup to my story. My mother brought home, a big heavy girl who had a twin sister, who wound up being my (Aunt Kate?) for her brother, who had just come home from the Army. They all lived in the big house and they hit it off, and one of my earliest memories is, and this is a very funny story, of my mother telling me the story that my grandmother told my (Uncle Nicky?). … She said, … "I'm a fatter lady and (Katarina?), she's not going to get too small," because, you know, big heavy women. They eventually did lose a hundred pounds but in those days, they were two big heavy twins and fun Italian crazy people, the best gamblers you ever saw. … She said, "If you like that, you love her, you got to understand this is what it's going to be." ... "I love her anyway." My grandmother goes, "Okay, then you ask her," because they would ask my grandmother. I mean … can you imagine a son asking his mother if he could propose to some woman? Then, he went to my mother, and he said "I'm going to ask (Katie?) to marry me," and so that's how that happened, and then (Aunt Kate?) came in with her twin, and she just died this year, and her twin died a couple of years before. My fondest memories of being with my friends, television stars and all that, and instead of saying, "Come on over, we're going to have a party up at Manhattan Plaza," where I lived, they would all say, "We're driving out to your house," because they knew that's where Italian fun was. They loved the table. That's what my friend Joe Aytebello, our neighbor who passed also (everybody passed in my life) would say, "The problem with America today is we have to bring back the table," very big Italian thing, and at first we laughed, but he was right. We were always there at the table, you see, which is a very nice cultural thing.

RS: You grew up in the aftermath of World War II. Did your parents ever talk about it?

PV: … All the people that you talk to here, grew up in the wake of that war, and it had a profound effect upon us, some more than others. … We grew up maybe spoiled, maybe immature, but we did understand, it had been the last war … fought for a reason. It had to be won, because we see what happened to the people who couldn't stand up to these fellows, and I think that affected our thinking. Madeleine Albright, a woman who I have great respect for, and I am not alone there, once said that, "Maybe this generation learned their lessons of Vietnam too well." Meaning … maybe we rushed to war, maybe we were too skeptical, … because we could have won Vietnam, if we ever get to that subject, twice, certainly after the Tet Offensive. If you bring a hundred guys in here right now, they'll all have different stories, but out of that hundred guys, I'll bet you ninety-five of them will tell you for a fact, no matter what, and you can ask from general to a PFC, after the Tet Offensive is when you could have won Vietnam. When I say "won" Vietnam, I mean you put those people back up to the seventeenth parallel, and they

would have been happy to go. So, Madeleine Albright likes to say that. You grow up cautious, and you grow up respectful of the people who served. In fact, that's one of the reasons I wound up serving. I often talk about the Gold Star mothers and the Blue Star mothers at the museum. It kills me that the teachers don't even know what the hell this is, and the kids, I can forgive, but some of the teachers don't know. They do when I'm finished with them. So, people gave up a lot, women gave up a lot, my mother had to wait for my father. They would have been married years before, and she had to wait, my grandmother had to wait every day. When I came home from Vietnam, just as a side-bar story, my mother looked so old, and I can show you pictures of her like two years later, where she looked young again. … She was only in her late forties anyway, she wasn't an old lady. That's the toll it takes on a mother, on a wife, on a child. When you see these kids coming home today on TV and the camera moves in--I'll cry now if I think about it--they surprise the child. … Not a "child" child, he's like twelve years old, not kiddie kid, and she saw her father, she ran up to him and hugged him and then wouldn't let go. There was just silence. … The producer was so smart to just let it run, and on prime time nightly news, they let that thing run, I'm not exaggerating, thirty-forty seconds which is golden time, if you know broadcasting. That kid couldn't let go of her father, he started to cry, the principal started to cry, see that's the effect it has on people, and the soldiers. The soldiers have it tough, but, you know, there's a wife and a mother and a kid and all of that home.

SH: Your mother and father married after the war.

PV: … I'm pretty sure it was after the war.

SH: In Jersey City.

PV: Yes, … it was still a valid point, they had known each other, and would have, [but] because he was away, and then he was in the jungle for two years. So, he was away the whole time. He did Fort Dix, and then from Fort Dix he was in Africa, he was down south at Fort Sill and then China-Burma. … It wasn't like, take a weekend pass and get a bus and go visit, he was "way" away, but that's how it affected us.

SH: Did your mom talk about having a war-related job?

PV: Yes, which is how she met (Aunt Kate?) and (Aunt Millie?), and so she brought them home for (Uncle Nicky?). That's how they met. My mother, of course, is a very different kind of woman, … she was making something like sixty, seventy-five dollars a week, and men were not making that kind of money. … She went to her mother, being the baby of the family, she said, "Mom, I just don't want to do this anymore, they said I could work in the office and I could wear nice dresses," because my grandmother made beautiful dresses for my mother. I should have brought some pictures in, she looked like (Jean Peters?). She said to my grandmother, "Would you mind if I got out of there?" She was working with mercury which was dangerous, and she didn't like it. … The twins said to her, "What are you, kidding, if you go upstairs you're going to lose [money]," and so my grandmother said, "*Quanto costa?*" She said, "It will cost me about forty dollars a week." "If it makes you happy, it's okay," because my (Uncle Vincent?) was 4F, and he was bringing money into the house. … My grandmother's second husband, he had a

pension or whatever from the railroad, and my grandmother is just not that kind of a lady. She was like, "If you want to dress up and go to work, go ahead." … Seventy-five dollars a week is a lot of money, and for a woman, because there were no equal rights then, women were always [paid less]. … My mother just did that and then eventually she left to go to work in New York, so she could dress up and go to things. … Even now I say, Imelda Macros is going to come here and borrow a pair of shoes. [Editor's Note: Imelda Marcos was the wife of the former Philippine dictator, Ferdinand Marcos. She is known in the United States for her extravagance, including a massive shoe collection.] Behind the bedroom door, there's like thirty-five pair of shoes, still at ninety, from being poor you see. … They were welfare people, … so she always remembers that, wearing welfare shoes, and that's the reason. The twins were not like that, but my mother wore welfare shoes and she never forgot it. So, my grandmother would make these great things when they got off welfare. … So, there's a reason behind it without digging too much about it psychologically. So that was my mother, and that's how it was.

RS: Do you know what she was doing with the mercury?

PV: No, I don't. I know that you put mercury together, and you had to know how to, because you had to develop hands, it's hot as hell and sharp, and put it into something, and then move it down the line, and I believe it had something to do with lights, electricity. There's mercury in the bulbs, and that's what she did, right over in Jersey City, right here. … Jersey City, Union City, Hoboken, that's where GM was, and that's where people came to work.

RS: When you were growing up in your neighborhood what type of games would you play?

PV: Stickball, I played stickball. I was a stickball champion. Stickball was the greatest for us. … There were stoops in Union City, and we played handball against the stoops, and I was on the boxing team at Holy Family School in Union City. I saw my first play there too, incidentally, because that was where, it's nationally famous, … the Passion Play performs.

SH: Is it really?

PV: … Every year, that Passion Play, and of course it's very interesting because now it's all, it's practically done in Spanish, because Union City is Spanish, and if you go down there, there's like maybe ten percent Anglo people, but it's all Hispanic. … The Passion Play is still there, it's there for its 75th or 76th year. That's where I first saw theatre, I went, "Oh my God, this is fabulous." I didn't know in the back of my head I was going to be an actor, but I knew I wanted to do something like this because Holy Family fed into that Passion Play.

SH: Why did your family decide to send you to parochial school?

PV: Well, in Union City at that time, even though we didn't have the means, Catholic School was cheap and had a better education system. We're not religious crazies, but we were Catholic, we went to mass on Sunday, and my grandmother prayed and all of that stuff. … I still do that, … Italian jokes, everybody is sick in my family, everybody, (Lucille?), (Joyce?) and Lucille's daughter just had a baby and I always say, "I'll light a candle for you." So, I said to somebody

last week. … I have Agent Orange, and prostate cancer, a little bit of bladder cancer too, and so I said, "I light candles for myself, and I'm running out for the rest of this family, my mother, everybody is sick." So, we're not professional Catholics, but Catholic enough so that it was close to the house and it was everybody who was everybody went to Holy Family Catholic School and Holy Family High School. By the way, neither one of those schools exists now. The people fled Union City and Jersey City for where I live now, in Paramus. They came north to Hackensack and all that. [Editor's Note: Agent Orange was a chemical defoliant used by the US military during the Vietnam War, which was found to have dangerous health effects on the Vietnamese and Americans who came into contact with it.]

SH: You were born in Jersey City, but you grew up in Union City?

PV: Union City, yes, that's because the hospital was there, Margaret Hague. … Tina Sinatra was born there. So, Mrs. Sinatra was pregnant, and it was a homecoming because my mother was brought up on Adams Street in Hoboken across the street from Frank Sinatra, who then was just a skinny kid. He used to sing on the corner. … She said, "Pat, to tell you the truth, he was a skinny kid who hung around on the corner, that was it, he was very unassuming. I don't remember him until he got really big, and by the time he got big, he moved to Hasbrouck Heights." He was in Hasbrouck Heights, and you know, didn't want to talk to any of us. … My mother has absolutely no memories of him except, we had pictures of him. I gave him a picture when he did the commercial down in Atlantic City, … and he grabbed me like he's going to fight, and he goes "I'm going to talk to you, you and I are going to talk later on," and Steve Wynn from Las Vegas was there. If you remember, he tried Atlantic City and didn't do too well. He came over to me and grabbed me, I was with the production company, he said, "What are you doing with that?" Because everyone was afraid of him, you know, you couldn't talk to him, and his contract said he couldn't be directed, he's going to do one take. I said, "Mr. Wynn," I said, "to tell the truth, you're paying this man for one take, what if something goes wrong?" He said, "It's the only way I could get him." So, anyway, I showed him a picture that my mother had.

SH: I thought maybe perhaps you moved at some point. That is always somewhat traumatic for children.

PV: Tina tried to sue me like five or six years ago. … I was running the Gretna Theatre in Pennsylvania, and I booked one of the top big bands in the country, but not the famous big bands, (Al Franklin Band?) out of Philadelphia, and the father has written books on big bands … and everything. The band is still hot in the metropolitan area, and he called me up one day, and said, "I'm doing a tribute to Frank Sinatra, I got this handsome kid, sounds exactly like Sinatra." I said, "Stop right there, I love it, I'll take it, because I have got to do a fundraiser in-between all the shows, and this is perfect." I knew the band. … I said, "Send me the thing on the kid," and … it was early Sinatra, just early Sinatra, this kid was, and he was Hollywood handsome, my staff was on the floor. They didn't have any what they call production values or anything like that. So, I said to my stage manager, I said, "Take the famous Sinatra hat with him in the hat and … we'll shoot it against the screen, and that will be the whole set." You're not really supposed to do that, that's his trademark. So, I said, "Tina, let me tell you something." I said, "You're going to finally beat me in court, you know this," and I said, "and I love your father." … I said, "You

know, I don't know, is he that famous that he owns the hat?" "You're using his image," and she used a few other choice words. Tina is the daughter of Frank, she's got the "you know what" in the family. The other girl was the singer, and very sweet, and Frank Sinatra, Jr. who … doesn't look that good, but he's his father's double when he sings, if you close your eyes. … I was always surprised that he didn't do [well], he did the big band tribute down there in Atlantic City. … Anyway, yes, this side bar story, Tina called me afterward, it was not a good homecoming. I invited her down and all that, I also lied to her, I told her I was going to take it down, but I didn't. It was only two perfomances.

SH: Were people involved in the community, such as the church?

PV: No, they were not involved people like that.

SH: Politics?

PV: No, no. We were part of the Hudson County Democratic machine. On HBO there's a series called *Boardwalk Empire*, I recommend that you see it, Martin Scorsese was involved in it, when you get done with your finals, because it's in the '20s, it's right after World War I, and it shows the genesis of the big bosses and historically (being an amateur historian, the worst kind-- or semi-professional since people pay me to teach it) it's the beginning of that patronage thing. That old-fashioned politician, … because you study it, Frank "I am the law" Hague, from Jersey City. He would go down, and it's so historically accurate, he'd come down to Atlantic City, and he would talk to "Nucky" Johnson, who ran Atlantic City, and that was Frank "I am the law" Hague. We all grew up learning about him, of course, he was way before my time, but even growing up in the '50s, you knew who Frank Hague was. … They still do jokes about it, Frank "I am the law" Hague. They would say, "Well, what are you going to do about this, … it's against the law." He goes, "I am the law." Well, he was, because to be a policeman you had to pay, and I was brought up with that, to be a teacher, oh, please, and then to get a job in administration for teaching, there were envelopes going around Hudson County, you could build the Empire State building five times over from the envelopes. So, I was part of that in that I knew that they existed. We voted for them because if we needed something we went to them and that's the only activity I think. … My father was not involved politically in that, and often wishes he could have been. They asked him at different times to do different things, and he didn't want to get involved with them, not that they were Mafiosi but they were just dirty. Politics was, if it's dirty now, then it needed five showers. … I was brought up in that. … We were involved, but we weren't. We knew we had to vote Democratic, that's what we knew, wouldn't think about anything else, we voted, and we knew by voting Democratic these people were going to be in office, and by these people being in office, we never had to worry. … When we needed something, which was very rare, because we were working-class people, or something happened to us, we picked up the phone and we'd say, "Hi, this is what happened," and they said, "We'll take care of that, don't worry about your daughter who can't get in grad school, don't worry about her." … Then they'd call the next day and say, "Tell her to go see this lady, she's got a job, she's been accepted." "But you don't understand she never finished her [degree]." "She's been accepted to grad school at Jersey City State." … That's what we knew. Years and years later, fifty years later, when my aunt died, her sister who was another character

was living with her brother. I said, "Anne, did you get in there, there's a long waiting list down in the senior housing in Jersey City" because Jersey City has been built up again, the "Gold Coast" and everything, and she was a tough babe. Jersey City, lower Jersey City girls, you know with the cigarette and the whole thing. She smoked her cigarette, "Yes, yes my brother and I got in, we're going to have separate apartments." I said, "Ann, how the hell did you get in, I understand there's a seven year waiting list." She said, "How the hell do you think we got in. This is Jersey City, we made a telephone call. What's the matter with you, you've been out in show business too long," and I apologized, I said, "Oh, I'm sorry." So, it's a ten year wait, I forgot. She's part of that Jersey City machine, she picked up the phone and she said, "Listen, I'm too old for my house now, and my brother is sickly." "All right Anne, wait a minute, let me call you tomorrow, okay. Do you want the sixth or the seventh floor, I got 'B' and 'C.'"

SH: Let us talk about going to grade school. You were in a parochial school.

PV: Was in parochial school, didn't like it, was scared from the minute I got in there, and became kind of anti-Catholic even. My father understood that, and he said, "Just get confirmed and then after you're confirmed you go when you want, you'll be a man then." … We had the conversation, I was eight or nine years old. … I got another four years with these people, I said, "I'm going to hit somebody." He said, "I know it's tough." … I was in Catholic school until about the fifth grade, then we went to Paramus, and then I went to public school, and when I went to public school, I missed the Catholic school because I missed the order. In Catholic school, there was sixty-two people, I remember the nun up there writing thirty-four boys and thirty-six girls … on the board and she would slap her hands when she wanted attention and they would whack you around man, they would really whack you around, and I didn't like that. So, I became anti-Catholic, anti-all of these things. … What I held against them the most was not their cruelty to me, but to people who could have used some kindness. I tell the story, Jerry Lewis tells a similar story. In those days you went to first grade and at the last day of class, this may have happened to you, you went to the second grade to meet your teacher and to say, you're going to be in the second grade. … I remember as a kid in the third grade walking and seeing these two girls and a guy, and they were sitting in their chairs. I remember thinking this first girl, she was so gorgeous, she was the most gorgeous Italian girl I ever saw, a nice Italian nose, and so pretty, and she was crying and she couldn't stop crying and the kid behind her was crying, and the guy was trying to be tough but he was humiliated too. What happened was, those kids were being put back, and bad enough that they were being put back, they were going to be humiliated for it too, and humiliated in front of the people who knew they'd be working with them, learning with them, for the rest of the year. It wasn't enough for the Catholics to leave these people back. I learned later the one girl had a language problem, all of her family spoke Italian (does that sound familiar). So, she had a tough time with the lessons and she couldn't find anybody to help her. It turned out at the end of the next year, she was one of the smartest kids in the class, but who had time to examine that. They were too busy humiliating her and making her cry, devastating her okay, which Catholics are good at. I remember even as a kid, thinking that this isn't any good, I wouldn't use the language I used then, how I felt over the years, and I repeated that story about a thousand times in my life and I'm happy to repeat it, when people say, "I'm into the church." I say listen to me, as bad as pedophilia is, this was worse because I remember them crying and I remember even as a kid, what an act of cruelty. What monster thinks this up to

leave these kids there and have the nuns imply, "These dopes couldn't make it, and this is where you could sit," you know it's like, turned me off, and I never went back in a Catholic school. I haven't told that story in a while and I hope it isn't too much of a downer.

SH: Talk about the transition to public school. How old were you?

PV: I was pretty young, maybe fifth grade, I don't know how old that is, yes, and people were wild and yelling and running up and down and I was disoriented because I was used to the discipline. I didn't like the Catholic meanness, and they were mean because that's what nuns were in those days, but I missed the order because … you can get your work done, you could do it, and you could communicate, if you listen to them, and mind your "Ps" and "Qs." … When I got into the public school, they were yelling and screaming in the hallway. The teacher would be teaching on the board, and somebody would be talking, but the teacher wouldn't say anything, it was like she was "on rote." You know, "I'm here doing this class, if you want to pick up on this class, then these are the equations, if you want to talk, talk." For me, it was like holy shit, Sister Mary Theresa would give you a good class in classroom management lady, but when you're twelve … you don't say things like this, you keep your mouth shut, and then I acclimated like everything else, and I became a public school kid. …

SH: Where did the family go for summer vacations?

PV: We went, when I was a kid … to Point Pleasant every summer. We were there for a week, I had fish and chips there, and we stayed in one of those, I guess they'd be called bed and breakfasts today, we called them a bungalow. The lady had a big boxer dog, and her husband was an ex-prize fighter with a big picture of him on the wall, and he used to spar with me. … He had great stories, he fought Primo Carnera. He was proudest of "going in the tank" for Primo Carnera, which was the big Italian giant that … the Mafia brought over, and they fixed his fights because he couldn't fight. [Editor's Note: Primo Carnera was an Italian boxer who became the world heavyweight champion, although it was suggested by some that many of his fights were fixed.] He was tough, and this guy, I remember, his claim to fame was he went in the tank for Carnera, for in those days, a hundred dollars, a lot of money. … We went there, and went on the beach every day, and then I would order fish and chips at night, and I loved it. … My mother and father bought me my first watch, it was a Timex. So, those were great times. … On the weekends, we would all go together. Billy Ervolino, of the *Record*, do you know him? It used to be the *Bergen Record*, now it's just the *Record* and he's a writer, very Italian-American, and he's a comedy writer, writes for lifestyles, and he has a book of all of his stories. … If you're ever feeling blue, you just pick up a paper, and he talks about his growing up Italian, and he does a sketch on going on vacation with his Italian family, and the grandmother and the aunts and the uncles and the kids in the car, and the five cars going down, and instead of buying hot dogs, forget that, they had the pots … and we stirred the gravy on the beach. [laughter] You say, where did I go on vacation, I went to the beach, but the pots and the meatballs came with us, we all traveled together. [laughter] … Listen, we drove down the shore, and I would have the meatballs, and my (Cousin Joyce?) would have all the pasta on my grandmother's lap. I mean, today, it's like how many people does your car fit, in those days we just jumped in. … That's what we did down the shore, and then recently, like about five years ago they revamped a theater

down there, they restored a theater, and I sent in my resume and they gave me [an interview]. They said, "We're going to see three people across America, and you're one of them." I went down there and I really liked a lot of the people and the staff was great, and you could tell they liked me too. They whispered, "We hope you get this." … When you go for those jobs, you interview all day. First you do it with the mayor and politicians, and then you do the community, and then you have all the city fathers, and then you have the board of directors, and then at night you have a dinner. So, it's like a ten-hour interview, and you got to be on for the ten hours. … The kids were saying, "They're very conservative, when you talk to the board, please remember that," and I said, "Well, [I'm] very liberal, you remember that, and if I come here, they're going to be very liberal." I said, "I'm an independent that leans to the left." They said, "Please don't ruin it, Pat, please," because they really wanted me, the ladies there, because of my arts in education programs. … My arts in education programs have won awards all across America now. I'm a big believer of arts in education, and thus my connect with the Vietnam museum thing. … I didn't get it, and that was too bad, but that was the job I really wanted, and right down the shore, where I have so many memories.

RS: Did you partake in any other activities besides stickball?

PV: When I got into school, then I played organized sports, and I was a pretty good football player and I actually hoped to get a scholarship, and almost did, but my grades were so terrible. When I got into junior high school it was at West Brook Junior High School. I remember the first graduating class. I played football, and I played basketball, and I ran track. I love track. As I got older, I wasn't that good, because we had guys that had scholarships to UCLA and Rutgers, two of my teammates played right here in Rutgers, one was a little All-American, Vic Canzani, Bobby Luckow, you may know, the Luckow Pavilion of Valley Hospital. … We used to go to New York every day. He'd go down to Wall Street, his brother would go to the Met, and I'd go to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. We'd go on the train every day, and it's such a kick, now I go to his hospital.

SH: Were you ever in Boy Scouts?

PV: I was a Cub Scout for ten minutes but I didn't like it, I didn't like that kind of discipline. Sports were a different kind of discipline, very macho atmosphere. In those days, coaches kick you, hit you in the head when they wanted to talk to you. They'd grab your face mask if you did something wrong, and you just expected it, it wasn't mean. I never thought it was mean when Coach Degasparis, who played for Vince Lombardi at St. Cecilia High School, right by us, right down the highway. So, those guys came from a Lombardi tradition and Lombardi would smack professionals, NFL, Green Bay Packers, you can only imagine what they did, but I never thought it was mean. I just thought that's the way football coaches talked to people like me who don't pay attention.

RS: When you were growing up in Paramus, were the blue laws in effect yet?

PV: That blue laws were always in effect, … and "we have fought those blue laws." As a kid I didn't understand what that meant or why the passion. I didn't live in Paramus my whole life. I

was in Florida for years, I was in Pennsylvania for 10 years, and … I was in Manhattan, but I never really counted that, because on the weekends I'd be back at my house, it was only 40 minutes from my house, and everybody wanted to come to my house. So, I felt like I've been close to Paramus for most of my sixty plus years, and as I grew older, I realized the importance of those blue laws. A city, like a person, has got to rest, and from the beginning, the city fathers, who were mostly transplanted Italians, and the Jewish population from the lower East Side, when they came over, they were smarter than a lot of people. They said, "There will be blue laws here." This city is going to rest on Sunday, and I can't imagine in the fifty years since, what that town would look like without blue laws. The myth is that the town [makes the money]. No, Macy's makes it, and Gimbels makes it, and they send it to the corporate headquarters on 78th Street. We had an influx about twenty years ago when Wall Street was hot, many of the older people, my mother's friends, all moved to Florida. So, when they came in, they came in with a different attitude, they were the new Paramus people, like the new Hoboken people. If you go to Hoboken, there's like maybe five percent of the original people in Hoboken, it's all "yuppie land." … We'll do Hoboken jokes in a bit, but now I truly understand and I understand Mayor Joseph Cipolla, who was a football coach at Lyndhurst High School, and I worked with him. In those days, teachers had to have another job. Okay, he was a guy who was a football coach, had a master's degree, and was I think a math teacher, and he worked at Wallach's at the Garden State Plaza with me, when I had just come back from Vietnam. So Joe and I were good friends, and he later became mayor of Paramus, and twice on his watch they were down to the wire, the yuppies came into those meetings, the new Paramus people, the new urban people. … One guy got up, and he did this whole report about what we would make, and Joe was like, "No, we won't make it, Macy's will make it, … you won't make it, and the town won't have a rest."

SH: The blue laws still stand.

PV: Yes.
RS: Is Paramus as built up as it now thirty years ago?

PV: Paramus is not Newark, Jersey City, you can go anywhere, and I performed everywhere, I mean I played Greensboro, North Carolina, all through the South and everything, and you can say to people, "Where are you from?" and say from "New Jersey, *Paramus*, New Jersey," and people go, "The Garden State Plaza!" People knew the Garden State Plaza and the Bergen Mall then, and I'm like by the mall, I go there all the time, but now it's the town mall, and it's like this elegant place. When I worked there, there was a movie theater there. … I'm so old the plaza and the mall were not covered, so you wore your coat when you went from Gimbels to Macy's, in fact, you might even remember this, … it wasn't covered, and it was an outside thing, but the changes have been quite dramatic because now it's kind of really chic nice, and I kind of miss going outside. … It's really something now, you're absolutely correct. My brother, rest his soul, who was a traditionalist, … was a hunter, and so he was always over there with the fishing and the whole bit, and just before he passed away we drove by there, he said, "Somebody saw twenty square feet in Paramus and built a mini-mall." Yes, we have these four major places okay, but we have a dozen strips, that I can think of and they were serious strips, I'm talking about fifteen to twenty stores per, and not baloney stores--Bed Bath and Beyond, Ramsey Outdoor store, Bob's, big national chains, those are just the strips, and then we've got the four, you know, cities

on to themselves. Bobby used to say, "Somebody saw twenty square feet and they put a mall up." If he was alive today, well, he'd laugh.

RS: When you were a child, did you get an allowance? Did you have chores?

PV: Yes, I got an allowance, and I had jobs, and it worked out well for me. My father believed in that.

SH: What were some of your jobs?

PV: I don't remember, but a lot of lawn [work] when I was here. When I was in Union City there wasn't much to do because it was all city and we were in an apartment. … Helped my mother throw the garbage out and all that stuff but when we came in here, now we had a lawn and stuff, and a garage so my father gave us stuff to do, and gave us a little money to do that. It's nice to grow up that way.

RS: In school, how did you do in academics? Were you an enthusiastic student?

PV: No, sorry. That's the worst part of the story. I didn't get into education until way late. I say education, I used to do what I could to pass which was nothing because I had a good mind, I hope. … I just didn't like the way I was being taught. I used to look out the window, and I had a slight form of dyslexia then, but there was no dyslexia then. They thought it was a bad attitude, "You're not focusing" is what they said. Even today, you're talking to somebody who reads, you know, never stops reading, and then for twenty years reading scripts. … You just don't read a script and produce it, you've got to read it twenty times and everything. I read very slowly, so I make sure I get it right because I have a very slight dyslexic thing, I like to put things in front of where they need to be. So I used to do what I could to pass which was easy for me because I was a smart kid, never did a lot of homework because I was playing sports and chasing girls and I didn't take advantage of one of the most wonderful educations that a man could have at Paramus High School. Because, believe me when I look back at it now, I love speech, and I loved English, and I love the language, and I loved the teacher teaching it. I also love history, I mean look, my whole life is history, but unfortunately I got caught two years in a row with student teachers who really were boring and they put me to sleep. In fact Lou Lanzaloto, the teacher, would come in, and go, "Were you asleep?" I said, "I'm sorry Mr. Lanzaloto the woman is so boring, can't you help her?" He goes "No, I can't help her, because this is her training, and you know, she'll get better." I go, "She'll get better, but I'm not going to survive her." (As a kid, I'm giving director's notes, I'm going, "She's got no stage presence.") I said, "At least you walk up and down the room, and you throw chalk, and you're doing things." … He said, "Well, not everybody is going to be me, this is a good lesson for you, you got to stay awake." "Oh, I'll try." … That's unfortunate, because I didn't pick up on, and I was always behind, finished my official degree at forty, master's degree at forty. Tony Danza has a wonderful show, and I don't know if you seen it, it was called *Teach*, and he went into a school in Philadelphia, and he's teaching them, and I don't think it's going to make it because he doesn't do four letter words and he's a good guy. Tony Danza from *Taxi*, and he's such a terrific guy, and he was a teacher, and he has a degree, before he was a fighter, in history, and he keeps saying to the kids, "I got smart later

on, but I want you to get smart now, because if you get smart now, you're going to be ahead of the game, and you're going to be able to do other things and apply them," and that's me, I wasn't smart, I got smart late. I got smart in the Army, and fortunately when I got smart, there was a whole wonderland out there. I was at the University of Wurzburg in Germany, down in Fort Bragg, University of North Carolina had an annex at Fort Bragg. … A lieutenant grabbed me and slapped me around one day, and he said, "You're wasting," because soldiers tend in those days to get drunk and chase women--that's what soldiers did--but there's a whole lot of opportunity in the services, even then. Now, it's phenomenal, now it's absolutely phenomenal, but then there were great things, and that's what happened to me there, I got caught there, and then haven't stopped since. …

SH: What were you planning to do when you graduated from high school?

PV: I was planning to go into the Army, because in those days there was the draft, and I just didn't want to go to school and get pulled out of school. I don't know if you remember this, you may be too young to remember that, not only was there a draft in school, you had to retain a certain grade point average to beat that draft. … You had people really struggling to pick it up, you know, "I'm a 3.2, … I got to get to 3.5 to beat the draft," and then I used to think, "Well, when you get to 3.5, and you got 3.5, and then you finally graduate, then what?" Then you got to get drafted anyway. … I wanted to get all that over with. I wanted to have a clear mind, I didn't want to have a wife, I didn't want to have a girlfriend, I didn't want to have children, I didn't want to have responsibilities, and then get dropped in the jungle. … Also, I was looking forward to it. … This is off the subject, but even though I was loved, and I described this for you, this "love machine," this "Italian love machine." I still wanted to get away from it. I still wanted to travel, because in my heart of hearts I kind of knew, I may never get to these great cities of the world, I may never get to "see the jungle when it's wet with rain," I may be here the rest of my life in New jersey. Even if I become a Broadway star, I may be a Broadway star across the tunnel, … you don't see the jungle when it's wet with rain, and you don't have to take mass at the cathedral of Notre Dame in France. So, this was an opportunity for me to be a soldier, which my father was, and all those uncles with their pictures on grandmother's wall who had saved the world. … I wanted to be a soldier.

SH: Were you involved in theater arts in high school?

PV: No, I was an athlete in high school. I think I was probably afraid.

SH: Did you go to New York often?

PV: Yes, that was another thing with the school. You talk about our school and what shaped my life. I can't remember a year where we didn't see at least three plays, and plus we produced two plays in high school. …

SH: Were you involved in that?

PV: No, I wasn't involved in that. I was playing sports, but … we'd go to Broadway, and I'd go, "I think I can do this." I don't know what the hell made me think that. Well, I could sing, I was in the singing group and I had a good voice, not a great voice but a very good voice. … We'd go see Sammy Davis, Jr. in *Mr. Wonderful*, *Golden Boy*. … You can't name all the great stars we saw. I saw Streisand doing *Funny Girl*, I mean are you kidding me, … the greatest stuff I saw, and I would see that, and, "I think I can do that," you know. Maybe I wasn't smart enough to [think], "No, you can't do that," nobody can be Richard Kiley [laughter] but you like to think about it when you see him. That was my upbringing, … that's how great the school was, and still is by the way. …

SH: Were you planning to enlist or were you going to wait until you were drafted?

PV: I was going to wait, and what happened in those days is … the "greetings" telegram. Before you got the greetings thing, you got a letter to go take a physical, and once you took a physical, you were about thirty or ninety days out from getting drafted. So, I got the physical thing, and I thought, "This is baloney, I'm going to go join the Army, because if I join the Army, I'm going to get a chance to go where I want to go." … That's what I did, I joined the Army, and I went to Germany, but they sent me back to Fort Bragg. You don't make a deal with the government. … I wanted to get it over with. … In those days, it wasn't fashionable to say I volunteered for the Army, I volunteered for the cavalry, where I had an MOS of personnel, and I volunteered for Vietnam, you know, people thought I was crazy, but I volunteered for a lot of that stuff.

SH: You talked about wanting to get into the Army because of the draft. Was Vietnam on your radar scope at that point?

PV: Yes, Vietnam was very much on our radar.

SH: You are aware of it in 1965.

PV: Yes, yes it was. … When I teach a class I always say, and especially to educators, I say, "You want to talk about Vietnam, when do you want to talk about Vietnam?" … If you want to say how unpopular the war is, they're going to give a date and time. Don't get mad at me, but I'll give you a time when it was very popular, and with decent reason. Not reasons I agreed with now that I understand communism, and worse yet, colonialism, and the different kinds of communism, but then I didn't, and most people didn't. So if you recall the vote to go to Vietnam was something like ninety-five percent okay, because we were in the wake of the question that you asked, we think of World War II, and isn't communism bad, isn't communism like Nazism, and socialism and fascism. Isn't that bad? … If, as President Kennedy said, you know, if one topples then all of them, the dominoes will fall, and we will eventually pay for it, and we bought into that, with the other ninety-five people in the house, okay, and the senate, and a lot of the country. So, that's where it was on my radar. It also gave me a chance, because I had played with my soldiers all my life, and listened to my father's story to see if I could cut that. That was, you know, later on, I realized what bullshit that was, but as a young man I saw that as like a lot of people do, the crucible of my manhood. "We lucky few, we band of brothers who are here in

this field today," and then as, Henry says "and years from now men who are not here with us on this field of battle will hold they manhood cheap, that they did not bleed with us today." Now, this guy up in Connecticut here is the district attorney of a state okay, this guy has graduated from an Ivy League school, and this guy has got a law degree from the best of the best, he's the state's second most powerful man, and he's a marine. What does he tell people when he wants you to get elected years later, what does he tell people to show that he's got the mettle to lead. He said, "I was a Vietnam veteran." First of all, how stupid, you can't lie about that especially, I could lie about it, because nobody knows me, but the guy like that can't, because everybody is going to go, "No, I was with you, you know, isn't it funny." Isn't that funny, Shakespeare wrote that speech, you understand, and now eight hundred years later, this guy doesn't tell us he's a loving husband, he's a father, he does Toys for Tots, he's in his marine uniform, takes a lot to be a marine. I mean not the same thing as being at, you know, at Khe Sanh, and holding out, under siege, you know, but it still takes a lot to be a marine, it's the toughest basic there is. Takes a lot to get into school and to graduate from an Ivy League school. If you gave me his bio, believe me, I'll tell you, I could be President, … but what does he say to everybody. Tells everybody he's a Vietnam veteran. … What was he thinking, and everybody asks down at the museum, "Are you mad? Does it make you mad at wannabes?" and I go, "No, I'm always complimented by it, I love it. … Listen, if they want to be us, that to me is a compliment, that's flattery, … imitation is the greatest form, etc. If they want to be us because they think that we're so terrific, let them do it, it's a credit for our resume that this guy is not talking about that he graduated from you know, Georgetown Law School or something. Anyway, the question was something else. [Editor's Note: Mr. Vellucci is referring to United States Senator Richard Blumenthal's service record during the Vietnam War, which was a controversy during his successful 2010 election campaign.]

SH: Where was Vietnam on your radar scope?

PV: It was happening, it was prior to the big buildups.

SH: John F. Kennedy's death was also a big event.

PV: Kennedy died in my junior year. We were to play Bergenfield High School, football, and we cancelled the game.

SH: Then we get the Cuban Missile Crisis.

PV: Never a big fan of Kennedy's. … Now, this goes back to your question, about how you get shaped with that. When you are in school as a kid … you're going through drills in the hallway because Nikita Khrushchev, who was a crude mother, let me tell you, those guys, it's fun to make fun of him now, but this guy sat at Stalin's lap and survived, which means he had to purge thousands and thousands of bodies okay. This is who Khrushchev was, and he was vulgar and low and when he looked in Kennedy's face, and he told us, "Your children will grow up under communism." … The famous thing that I saw, Ted Sorensen, who just passed away this year, I've heard him speak twice, and Khrushchev was fond of going to the map, "This will be all communism, … and your grandchildren will be proletariat." I mean that's scary shit. Okay,

that's some scary stuff, and then you go for air raid drill. … We used to go on the beach in Hollywood where my family had moved, but now we went to the beach in Hollywood and there were tanks on the beach. There were tanks on the beach in Hollywood, facing Cuba.

SR: Hollywood, Florida.

PV: Listen, we were swimming and playing football, there were guys in tanks on the thing, and they would come down and play catch with us, the Cuban [Missile] Crisis. … Listen to me, I got out of school to see Castro go down to have a parade, because remember Castro faked everybody out. … He threw Batista out, who was a bad deal, who made Cuba, they used to say, "America's whorehouse," which he did. He was the ultimate Hudson County politician. Where Batista went, he was crazy to go to Miami, he should have moved right into Hudson County because he would have been at home, plus all the money he stole from the country. Interestingly enough, I just finished reading *Companero* (1998) which is about the early days of Castro and the brother--and Che--together. It's a great book, if you want to really go back. … That forms your opinion. … I just wanted to swim down here, this shit is real, and you're a kid so you can't really process what these tanks can do and what they're there for. Well they're there because the Russians were in Cuba, and they had their stuff, and we had our stuff, and was the world going to end if they did nuclear stuff? So, that really shaped my philosophy about freedom, about democracy, loving this country, fearing the government always, questioning the government always, but loving the country. So, yes, I lived through all that. …

SH: You said your parents were on vacation in Hollywood? Did your family move?

PV: No, we were on vacation, we used to go a lot because the family is down there. … In those days you could fly down. … We never drove. We drove once when I was a kid, because I wasn't in school and my cousins were, but we would fly, because you could fly then for like no money.

SH: Where were you when Kennedy was assassinated?

PV: I was in class and it came over the loudspeaker, in Paramus High School, and I was getting ready to play Bergenfield on Saturday. … He died in November, and I remember being--it gives you an idea of how shallow I was--I wasn't the biggest fan of him and Jackie and all that because, you know, they were the Paris Hilton of their time, you know, listen to them constantly, Jack Kennedy and Jackie. So, they bored me a little bit, because it was too much, but I didn't dislike them or anything, and I certainly felt bad for the man to be assassinated. … I remember being so disappointed that I wasn't going to play. They called the game for Saturday, and I had such an ego, I wasn't going to catch passes and hear my name over the loud speaker. I was so disappointed in that, and, of course, I felt bad for America because, I thought, "Wow, they can kill the President." …

SH: Was this discussed at school?

PV: It wasn't discussed well. … My teachers, they were good teachers, but I don't think they had a sense of history. … In those days, politics were black and white, okay, which sometimes is good by the way. If you look at our situation now, Muslims, that is a black and white situation. People don't want to admit it because they want to be politically correct, but that's a black and white situation. In those days, everything was black and white, and we were brought up to, not indoctrinated, not beat over the head, but we understood that if we're out in that hallway with the thing over our head, that somebody could be nuking us, that's the reason we're out there, and we were afraid of the people who were doing that to us. We were afraid of those people, and I was afraid of those people. … Usually when you're afraid of somebody the best thing to do is kill him, so you don't have to be afraid of him anymore.

SH: Was President Johnson someone who you knew anything about?

PV: No, didn't know him, because he came from nowhere, for the rank and file person. I mean a sophisticated intelligent person who is following politics knows Johnson, knows what he accomplished in Texas, knows his history in the Senate, my God, but for a kid who is playing football and trying to score on the cheerleaders, who was he?

SH: After you graduate, what do you do then?

PV: I go into the Army. In the summertime, I take classes at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, and then I go in to the Army in October.

SH: Was that just a stop gap that you went to school?

PV: Yes, it was a stop gap.

SH: You had no intentions of staying?

PV: Oh, yes, I had intentions of going in and graduating and being one of its most famous alumnus--didn't work out that way as you see--but I had a heck of a shot. I did a thing here, and then I went into the service. I went, as they promised, to Germany.

SH: Where did you do your basic training?

PV: Fort Dix, and then my advanced training, got a job in personnel, nice MOS to have, Fort Dix again, then Germany, where we were still in the middle of the Cold War. War games on the Czechoslovakian border, right there. So, as a young man, … once I see those tanks, and I see those tracks, I go into the intelligence office, I'm working in personnel, I go, "I got to get on those tracks." … It's like seeing a beautiful woman, I mean, especially if you're a kid, and you grow up with that. I mean you see a tank for the first time, you see those guns and all, it is like holy God, I thought I died and went to heaven. I had to get up on one of those tracks, and to get on those machine guns. You know, you're a young kid. … So, I did, now what happens here is, a fourth answer to your question about shaping, what happens here is, I see people running across [the border] that made *Life* magazine twice--you'll have it right here in this college--of a

guy being chased, carrying his girlfriend through two barbed wire fences, and rushing from tanks, which were our tanks from World War II, that we gave them, firing at these people.

SR: You were on the line?

PV: I was where my car is parked, from them. … We could have been in *Life* magazine, the couple made the cover. The first thing that I ever published, " World War III and Lonnie Stoops," was the title, and it was picked up in the *Stars and Stripes*, a big newspaper, and everybody read it all over the world. I had a kid from, he was from, not Harlem, but upper Manhattan, and he was a black guy, and he was Sergeant (Stoops?), and he taught black English, and he made me laugh all the time, and he pulled the hammer back on the fifty-caliber machinegun, and I thought, "(Lonnie?), what are you doing, we can't fire at the Russians," you know, and he would go, "Kill the mother!" You can imagine the language that he used, and I'm going, "Lonnie will you stop pointing at them?" So, there was a lieutenant who is the team leader of all of the twelve tanks and he's asking us to check, and he said, "Hold your fire, repeat, do not," because that is World War III. … "Hold your fire," and (Lonnie?) … goes, "I'm not going to hold anything." He goes, "Repeat, hold your fire," and I'm laughing hysterically, and crying. I'm watching this girl come out, and she gets hit, and he carries her, and it's on the cover of *Life* magazine, and he takes her on our side, and we're cheering. So, what we did was we took the lights that we had on the tanks, … and we pushed the lights up the hill on the tanks, in their eyes, so they couldn't see well, and people would get through. I thought to myself, now I'm a young guy, what the hell kind of a society is this, where they have to put barbed wire around your country, and they shoot at people who want to get out. Holy shit, have I been underestimating how wonderful it is to be here in America, and to learn that lesson at such a young age and to see these kids hugging, and what a heroic story, it was like a skinny little guy, and he went in there and got his woman out. I always wondered what happened to them. I thought it would be a great follow up story. … You remember those things, because you were of age then. Anyway, so that had a great effect on my patriotism, and on the potential of this country, this democracy. …

SH: When you were in Germany, did you get to do any traveling?

PV: Very little, because I wasn't there that long, in war games. … I was outside of Schweinfurt which was bombed tremendously during the war. It was like a campus where we were, and it was really pretty, kind of neat, but it was a tough duty.

SH: Were NATO forces there or was it just the United States?

PV: Yes, well I was just with the US, but the NATO forces were there, and (Conrad?), he wasn't even allowed to have an army then. They were ragged guys with long hair, we'd make fun of them because they were not allowed to have an army, and they didn't have much, and when we'd go on war games with them, we'd giggle.

SH: Really?

PV: … Well, they weren't allowed, and they had lost all their NCOs after World War II, and remember this is the wake of World War II. Also in addition to that incident, you must remember I served with all of the World War II guys because they had to do thirty years to get a decent pension. It's not like today, you can go out at fifteen, halfway decent, twenty terrific, thirty, but in those days those guys had to do thirty [years] to get something halfway [decent], so they were in, my first sergeant was in World War II and Korea and Vietnam.

SH: Where were you housed?

PV: I was housed in a billet, with a lot of guys, five in a room, but very collegiate, not rough at all.

SH: What did they do to keep you busy?

PV: We worked all the time, and then when we didn't work--this is how I got into trouble in Fort Bragg--we got drunk, and we chased German women, nothing good. … I mean drunk every night, and at the "EM" club, and it was amazing. … I mean this is the "EM" club, it's run by the Army, and I was surprised. There were things there, but you have to look for them, you had go to the University of Wurzburg, you know, which had an annex there. At the University of Wurzburg I had the pleasure of working with Max Reinhardt's protégés. He was the famous Shakespearean director who did all the great stuff in the thirties. His students taught at the University of Wurzburg, but he had come to America, MGM brought him out there, but I worked with people who were directed by him.

SH: How long were you in Germany?

PV: I was only there six months, I think.

SH: You changed your MOS?

PV: … I lost my MOS, didn't lose it, because I picked it up somewhere down the line. … Now, I'm in Fort Bragg, North Carolina in Fayetteville, which is known as "Fayettenam," home of the Special Forces and the 82nd Airborne Division, and the Cavalry divisions. Fort Bragg, a very serious place, and that was the buildup for Vietnam. That was a buildup training brigade for Vietnam. …

SH: This is in 1966?

PV: This is 1966, correct. This is mid '66, and they still call it Fayettenam, and that was really wild, that was just terrible.

SH: Had you volunteered for a special unit? What unit were you assigned to?

PV: No, I just came back. When I came back to the training brigade, they didn't know what to do with a lot of us, and there were thousands of records, and so I moved the records around, I

would take all the new guys in, and I would do records with them, and I would give them to the people who processed their records, and then I would drive them back. I guess I was a sort of truck driver. … Then, I was on the rifle range, which was a fun job except it was loud, so I put things in my ears. All day I worked on the rifle range, because I had been, you know, with the cavalry there, and I had a bunch of other little jobs. It was a training brigade, and I had a ton of jobs, and I liked doing different things all day.

SH: Were you thinking of trying to go to OCS?

PV: I thought about going to OCS. I was woefully under-educated, I had to start catching up, number one, and number two, I didn't want to give them any more time. I was already going to give them three years, which is a lot of time when you're young. When you're young, you think three years is a hundred and fifty years.

SH: You said you went to school.

PV: That's when I got into an incident, I'm boring you guys, but I got in one of those incidents. Another reason I was a little disappointed with service. I thought I'd meet new friends and go to great places and all this. America was changing then. So, when I first went to Germany, they were mostly "crackers," and you saw the Southern flag, and they hated me, and the blacks were there, who hated the crackers, who hated me worse, and I was really uncomfortable there for a long time. I made friends because I'm a friendly guy and all that, but it wasn't what I hoped it would be. When I came back to Fort Bragg it was the same thing. It was loaded with crackers and the blacks and I was in the middle of all that, and I was very uncomfortable. I was just so disappointed, I was hoping to meet new friends and have fun. I mean I did it, don't get me wrong, but there was tremendous racial tension there. How much racial tension you want to know? There was an incident, I would say every single night in my barracks, in Fort Bragg, every single night, and when you went to Fayetteville, there was an incident every night, and I got in a famous riot. … Later, a lieutenant grabbed me, and he had my records, and he said to me, … "You're a pretty smart kid." … I said, "Well, thank you," being a wise guy. … He said, "You know, you can come here, you're going to be in the Army a long time, and you can get drunk, and you can chase women, and you can do all the things, smoke a lot of dope, and you can do anything (this is the '60s in Fayetteville)." Then he listed this great menu of things that I could do. I mean, I studied with the best professors from the University of North Carolina who had an annex there. I studied Samuel Johnson and talked about his dictionary. I studied all of the great authors there. I studied leadership courses and sat with guys who taught at West Point. Are you kidding me? I went to those classes. I worked martial arts with the guy who ran all of the Special Forces hand to hand combat in Fort Bragg. I studied with him, I learned. Every day was a different thing, I signed up for everything, and it was like a Disney World for somebody who was intellectually curious, I mean if you can imagine. …

SH: It was this conversation with this lieutenant that sparked your curiosity.

PV: He did it. When he was done, he said to me, "I'm busy today." I'll try to clean up what he said to me. … He said to me, "I'm done with you now." He goes, "These are the possibilities

you can do." He said, "Or you can go get drunk and go get laid and everything else, and we'll come and clear you out again, maybe you'll even wind up in the stockade, it's up to you, you're a smart kid." I said, "Well, sir." He said, "Get out of here, I got to see twenty guysHe took an hour of my life. … There's a great thing about the Army, okay, "I've given you this information," he wrote it down on a pad, "now either get out of here and go chase women." … Young men like young women, and that's what they do, and then drinking too, and fighting too, and repelling out of helicopters all day, I mean I thought I was in Disney World. … The only thing I didn't like was getting up early and running, but other than that, Jesus, you know, all my friends were taking the train into Wall Street, you know, and they were sitting in the cattle car, and I was rappelling out of helicopters. So, I thought I'm a lucky guy, you know. I was on the boxing team at Fort Dix. I quit because I wanted to go to Germany with my class. When I went down to Fort Bragg after Germany, the whole boxing class was black, every single person I'm seeing is black. I'm approximately the same size I was then--a good middleweight--I was 165 pound to 157, that's the weight classes in the army. So, I went over and I said, "Sergeant Lee told me to come over." He goes, "You worked with Sergeant Lee, huh?" … I said "Yes." He was a lifer, and was the man, and everybody was … looking at me funny. He said, "Oh, let's see what you can do." … So he gets up and he calls this guy, who's got like … 230 pounds and he's a big tall guy. … So, I was watching him, and he can't move so I'm not really afraid. So, I get in, and "ba, ba, bang," I hit him, and I circle him, I don't run but I circle him, and I thought this guy was going to go, "Yes, you know, you're pretty good, you know you learned your on the First Army boxing team with Charlie Lee who coached the All-Army boxing team," I thought he was going to say that. You know what he says to me? He goes, "Okay, white boy," he goes, "We know you can dance, but can you fight?" I already hit this kid like five times, "but can you fight?" "Yes, I can fight," and then I said to … him, "I could especially fight somebody in my weight class, but if you want to do this, it's okay." So, we danced around, and when I get all done, he goes, "All right." I go, "All right yourself." I pull the gloves off, I said, "I think I'm going to join the debating team, but thanks anyway." He goes, "No, no, I want to talk to you some more," but it was like that kind of prejudice, they didn't even want a white guy in there, and I mean that's really out of line, 165 pound twenty year old guy, and this, he must have been like 230 at least, and tall, and what is he finding out? … It gives you an idea of the racial tension then, and it was obvious. … Nobody was politically correct then.

SH: What were you hearing about the Civil Rights movement?

PV: It was on the press every day. It was the prevalent subject, it was Civil Rights, Civil Rights, more Civil Rights. If you're in between, if you have no camp to which you can, you know, have an intellectual conversation, it's very uncomfortable, it's very hard. … The worst thing is to understand why people hate you but you can't tolerate it in anyway. I understand how the Islam people hate us, I really do, I get it. I just can't allow disrespect. I understand that black people hate white people for two hundred years especially people who lived in the South. … If I were a black man now, I'm sure I'll be hung, or in jail, I'm sure. I'd bet my life on it, but I couldn't allow myself to be mistreated. So, it was a terrible position to be in, and the dialogue was always hot. … James Baldwin used to say, "What do I say to my grandchildren? When do we get invited to the [party], when does the shit end?" and that was it. The '60s came, and they said, "Well, you know, we served in World War I. We came back, you hung us in our uniform. We served in

World War II, Rosa Parks still couldn't get it done now," so I got that. Yet, I was still a white guy. So, it was a difficult time for me, and I was fortunate enough to be with a some black people who liked me. … By that time I had made some black friends and black people understand what's in your heart, they know you can't bullshit that. … I was closer to the black people than the crackers. I had much more in common with them. They were all from New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia area, and the crackers were crackers. … Who would know I'd grow up to produce a thousand country concerts. God, in his sense of humor, but I never even heard of country music [then]. I didn't know what it was. I knew Gene Autry because I loved him, and would watch his show, and Roy Rodgers, because I'd watch his show, but I didn't even consider that country, I considered that cowboy music.

SH: Roy Rodgers?

PV: Roy Rodgers, yes. … I will tell a story about his son, we'll just back track if you want later, but I didn't know country music. So, I was really closer to the black people and that was that, and then finally I just got fed up one day, and I said, "I want to go to Vietnam," and I went to the (other?) room, and I volunteered.

SH: Were most of your officers white?

PV: … Yes, well just about, eighty percent, you know. If ten guys came in, two of them would be black.

SH: When you volunteered for Vietnam, what was the reaction?

PV: From my family? … I lied to everybody, no one knew I volunteered. I just said they sent me. They didn't know till I came back, I just lied.

SH: Did you take liberty and go home before you went to Vietnam?

PV: Yes, I got on a bus, and I drove to Miami where my family was living now, my Cousin (Joyce?) and (Lucille?), and promptly had an affair with (Joyce's?) best friend, a pretty Cuban woman, and then I said, "Gee, I don't feel like going to Vietnam now. I want to stay here and go to the beach with (Sara?)." [laughter] … Of course, the Army had plans for me, nothing ever works out. So, I went down there, said goodbye to everybody, and then I went home. I flew home, I took the bus to Florida, I flew home, had a couple of weeks there, and then I went to Vietnam. My Dad took me. You could have played "Danny Boy" in the background. My Dad took me to JFK [Airport] by myself. I said, "You can go now Dad." … He goes, "No, I'll walk along with you," and he started to cry just as we got to the gate. I said, "I'll be all right, I'll be all right," but he knew what everybody else didn't know, because he had been in China-Burma. He'd only been about five hundred clicks from where I was going, and I always remember that. …

SH: Did he give you any advice?

PV: My father … said, "When you get in the Army, Pat, it's a little different than this." He said, "You better keep your mouth shut, because this is where the big boys play." I listened to him and I was glad because I never got into any serious trouble, and I made a lot of rank. … I went to E5 in twenty-three months which is the minimum limit just to go to E5. He didn't give me any kind of soldier advice.

SH: When you volunteered for Vietnam, did your training change at all?

PV: No.

SH: Did you go for jungle training?

PV: … No, they do that in Vietnam.

SH: From JFK, where did you fly to?

PV: … I flew into California to the biggest hanger in the world. There were all guys waiting to go, and then from the bunker we went to Hawaii, and then from Hawaii, we were in Hawaii for like about six or eight hours. Then, we got back on the plane, and we went to Vietnam from Hawaii.

SH: Where did you fly into?

PV: … I don't remember where we flew into. We flew into Tan Son Nhut, I think, and then we took a C-47 outside of new Pleiku, and then from Pleiku I took a chopper into Dragon Mountain, home of the Fourth Infantry Division where I was stationed at, Dragon Mountain. So, it was a heck of a trip.

SH: When did you know you would be assigned to the Fourth Infantry?

PV: Oh, when I got my orders.

SH: You already knew when you left?

PV: Yes, I knew that. They came in the mail. They say you're taking this flight, they did the flight for you too. … In those days, travel did the flights. …

SH: What did you know about the Fourth Infantry and what they were doing in Vietnam?

PV: Not that much. I knew that they were up on the border, I knew they were in some deep shit, I knew they were always in trouble. … I just knew that they were, you know, in the action, and I knew that they had, elite units like the Tenth Cavalry, which I was in.

SH: What was your MOS at this point?

PV: My MOS is 11D, cavalry, and 71H, personnel, secondary, because remember, I went to school for that, and changed [to] the other.

SH: I was wondering what your MOS was.

PV: … That wound up, maybe, saving my life later on. … Got to Dragon Mountain and that was a rude awakening.

SH: When you were in North Carolina, had you met anyone who had already been to Vietnam?

PV: A few people, yes, a few. All the Special Forces were there, and we trained with them. They ran the rappelling school and I worked on the rappel thing all day, and they ran different things, because they're Special Forces and they're the best of the best, jungle warfare training there, seven day course there, fabulous.

SH: Where did you do that training?

PV: In Fort Bragg, that's all done at Fort Bragg, and that is a precursor to Vietnam. This is part of the thing we did, you know, a lot of guys didn't go to Vietnam. …

RS: Did you know what you were going to be doing before you arrived in Vietnam?

PV: Specifically?

RS: Yes.

PV: No, you don't know that till you get there, and even when you get there, that could change.

RS: You did not have any specific jobs?

PV: No.

RS: Where were you stationed? How far were you from Saigon?

PV: I was in Pleiku, Vietnam, the Central Highlands, which is on the Cambodian-Laotian border in the north. … We kid about it, because President Nixon and everybody had said, you know, "We don't go into Laos," and even at reunions and stuff like that, my troupe commander who came from money in Minneapolis--he's a retired financial investment adviser--and even like twenty years ago, I was with him, and he walked up to me … and he said to me, "Let me ask you a question, Sergeant." … I said, "Yes, ask me a question, go ahead," and he said, "Were you ever in Cambodia?" … I said, "Sir, I'm an obedient servant of Lyndon Baines Johnson and Richard Milhous Nixon, we do not operate in Laos or Cambodia." … He said, "Good for you," he goes, "Still lying after all these years." I go, "Nobody cares anyway." I don't remember a day we weren't in Cambodia. [laughter] I can't remember any of those days, and I used to read the *New York Times*. See, everything was two weeks then. You wrote a letter, it was two weeks. …

Unless you knew somebody from the signal corps, the signal corps could patch you through. So, you'd read, and the politicians would be going, … "There will be no excursions into Laos." [laughter] You'd be reading it in Laos. … Gee whiz, a little knowledge is a terrible thing, you know. It's hard not to have a sense of humor about that. [laughter]

SH: What was your initial reaction to arriving in Vietnam?

PV: I got on a bus, and a guy comes in the bus trying to impress us, and, you know, some of the people had been to Vietnam. … They were not trainees, a lot of them were experienced soldiers. … He gets on the bus, and he's a captain, and he's wearing his .45, and I knew he was a pimp when he walked in because he had a pearl handle on his .45. So, I already knew a lot about him before he even opened his mouth, but like my father said, "Keep your mouth shut." So, he goes, "Gentlemen, welcome to the Republic of Vietnam. You all notice bars on the windows," and I did, I noticed bars on the windows like the prison had bars, and he said, "The reason for that is that a hand grenade cannot fit through those bars as hard as you try." So, he said, "Do not shake, do not throw cookies, this is not Anzio, we are not liberating these mother, … we've come here to kill them," and I went, "Oh, here I thought we came to support the democratic people of Vietnam, who were our allies." Crazy me, I read the *New York Times*, knowledge will kill you man. … Instead, we've come here to kill all of these children, you know, and gee, nobody explained it to me that way, but I kept my mouth shut. … I understood what he said, because that's how a lot of people did buy the farm in Vietnam. … That was indelible in my mind. … The guy in front was a big black sergeant, and he said, "Yes, first time I came here boy," he goes, "we had a kid like that, … and he couldn't get it in, but he tried," and I said, "No shit," and he said, "Yes, really." So, you knew you were in a war when you got there. So, you knew you were in a war, but the first casualty of war that I saw was up at the orderly room, two kids, ripped up and shot, North Vietnamese. … I don't think they were regulars, they said they were, and they dragged them into the orderly room and they were then tortured by a … (North Vietnam officer?) who was impeccably clean, I was thinking, "He's not … doing too much fighting."

SH: They were not from North Vietnam.

PV: Yes, the NVA, they claimed these guys were NVA. They were not NVA, they were Vietcong farmers, they were two kids who probably, you know, trust me, these were not [NVA]. They dragged them in there, and they had been caught on an ambush. … I was like processing with the first sergeant, then they brought these guys in, and they weren't tending to their wounds or anything, and then this guy came in, and just beat the hell out of them for like an hour. It was horrible, and I said, "Well, Pat, you're in Vietnam now." You're in a war now, people are shooting, dying, bleeding, getting the shit beat out of them, probably innocent, and you're not at the beach with Joyce and Lucille. So you made some bad ass choices, I remember thinking that!

SH: Describe the base.

PV: … Dragon Mountain was a … huge [base]. Actually, the official name is Camp Enari, but nobody used that. It was Dragon Mountain because it looked from a distance like a dragon, and it was just huge and you drove down a long road and the perimeter was, you know, like half the

university, and that was my job, … guard the perimeter. … In front of the perimeter there were these sand bagged hooches, and in front to them was barbed wire all around it, and in front of the barbed wire was where the Agent Orange was laid, so we could see out. Which is how, now they say, "You have prostate cancer, you must have Agent Orange," because I did sleep in that, and I did lay in that, and walk in that, and eat in that for a year. … I have a great picture. We were in a tent, but it was really a nice tent, it was a GP, small, me and another guy. At first, I was with five guys, terrific guys from Chicago, and it was nice. It was a general purpose tent, like you saw in *M*A*S*H*, if you watch *M*A*S*H* the show. … I can always remember fires burning. We burned our refuse, and then sometimes at night we would burn fires until it got dark, do marshmallows. It was like camping out, except it was a war, and that was that. We had wooden floors, we put the wood in, and the wood was this high because of the monsoon, and that was it, and we opened up the sides … of the tent, because it was really hot. [Editor's Note: *M*A*S*H* was an American television show based on a US Army medical unit during the Korean War, originally broadcast in the 1970s.]

SH: What time of year did you arrive in Vietnam?

PV: … May, which was the beginning of monsoon [season].

SH: May of 1967?

PV: … May of '67, monsoon, and when the monsoon came a year later, everybody was saying, "Hey, the monsoons are coming." That meant it was time to go home, so you were waiting for it. … Getting there at first in the monsoon was not a lot of fun, because what the monsoon is rain and more rain and then more rain. … It's bad enough to go out on a patrol or anything, you know, but to be in mud like that.

SH: Someone in personnel also does patrols?

PV: I wasn't in personnel. … I was later assigned to an admin company, but I was with Tenth Cavalry first, right across the road. … It was great, it was better then being in infantry because then the cavalry rode everywhere, and we were in birds. … So, we got a chance to do a little bit less, not that much, but enough. … Also at night, we put the tracks down, and we'd build a fire behind then. Being with cavalry is very bad that you're going to have contact every single day, because people call the cavalry. It's good in that you're going to almost always do it on your terms.

SH: What were you assigned to in the cavalry?

PV: I was in a gun team, the fire team in a cavalry unit, air cavalry unit, and I would do a lot of rappelling. I still have marks in my crotch from when you pull up wrong. … We did a lot of that.

SH: Where did this training take place to teach you to be able to do what you did?

PV: I had mine at Fort Bragg, and then … when I got to Vietnam, we went to a lot of air mobile training there, that was at least three days of that at the repo-depot … because you had to learn that. Sometimes, if an LZ is hot, … you just can't come out of those helicopters at a hundred feet without knowing what you're doing. They disbanded the unit. I worked for General George Patton, the legendary Patton's son. He was a lowly lieutenant colonel, and he was nothing like his father. I played chess with him once, and his wife called me when he passed away about seven years ago. … He grew flowers up in New England, in Rhode Island I think. Yes, he was nothing like the father.

SH: You are an E5.

PV: … I'm an E5, "buck sergeant," acting buck sergeant. I was promoted as a specialist fifth class. … They made me a "three stripe" sergeant, acting sergeant. I didn't know what the difference should be, but they did. ... Then, I became an E6, (acting), because I wasn't in long enough to be a real staff sergeant … when the other guy left, because on the one team there's a lieutenant and an E6. …

SH: How many are on the team?

PV: Twelve-man team, twelve-man fire team, split up--six and six. So, I had some rank which was decent, because it got you out of doing certain things. … Then, I was the laundry NCO. I used to take the laundry into Pleiku in a truck, it was fun. I ran the garbage.

SH: What is the distance from your camp to Pleiku?

PV: About a ten mile trip, treacherous ten miles too, because you never knew. I mean you'd go on a laundry run, but you'd take a jeep in front of you, and you'd take a machinegun … because you never knew. Like these kids in Fallujah [Iraq] now, and the kids in there, I mean, they don't know. That's why you see these women coming back, they signed up to be personnel, you know, computer geeks, and they wind up getting shot at because they went to the candy store. So, that's essentially what that was. Once you're outside the base camp, all bets are off, you never knew.

SH: What was the closest village to your base camp?

PV: *Villes* were all over the camp, you could see them, and we had one. I was talking about this the other day. … We even had "Sin City" that was run by the army. A lot of people don't know this, but right outside, I would say maybe five or six football fields up on the side of the mountain, there's a place called "Sin City." It was like a little *ville*. … It was all massage parlors, bars, and other things like that, and "mamasans." … The MPs were there, and the medics were there to make sure that the girls had shots. It was such a different time, talk about political correctness now, can you believe it, and we'd just go up there. … We'd have women, and the MPs would be there, and we'd gamble, and just do things that you do in "Sin City" if you had an afternoon off. You could do that, you could have an afternoon off, and the Army provided it for you, and they said if you come here, these girls have had shots. [laughter] I mean, give me a break the people, insanity. [laughter] "Dear mom."

SH: What about the battle for hearts and minds?

PV: I was very connected to that, because I was in a program called … "Operation Hastings." If you look it up, … they brought me there, and that was a battle for hearts and minds. What we used to do, … we would call it MEDCAP is what we called it. We would go to different villages and we would give candy and we would give clothes and we would give all kinds of stuff, and they would tell us where Victor Charles was, where the NVA was, what time they came in, they … ratted them out. That was … America's idea of hearts and minds, which by the way is only fifty percent of the equation. If we would have thought to treat them respectfully, you'd really have something. … They left that part of the equation out.

SH: Were you only operating near your base camp?

PV: Very close. Usually, it was pretty close. Once in a while, you know, once you get into Laos and Cambodia, it doesn't matter because it's only like five or six miles.

SH: Would your operations be focused towards Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos?

PV: … We operated different every day, because we were with the cav. We supported units all over.

SH: I meant the operations about the hearts and minds.

PV: Hearts and minds, all over, that was throughout Vietnam. … You see *Vietnam: The Ten Thousand Day War* (1980), which I thought was a pretty decent series, left out what we like to leave out, which is the beginning. How we got there, that French colonialism screwed us into this, and our own sense of colonialism, and our own inability … to define communism, Stalinism, Leninism. … It's almost like democracy, who's democracy? Obama's democracy, or John McCain's democracy, or Rush Limbaugh's democracy? Well, we never broke communism down that way, and had we done that, I don't think, I know, and had we ever really sat with Ho Chi Minh, another reason my why father cried at the airport, because my father fought with Ho Chi Minh. I have pictures of him in Saigon, against the Japanese, right, didn't he do that, I have a picture of Ho Chi Minh, I sold it for four hundred dollars, believe it or not, and then his son goes, twenty years later, to go kill Ho Chi Minh. You understand why he's crying at the airport? He's got reason to cry, because no one sat down with Ho Chi Minh, and said look, "You've written a document that you copied from Thomas Jefferson. We know that you know that communism is bullshit because you lived in Russia, you were part of that, socialism okay, but especially that kind of communism. You know that that will not work. What are you, are you a nationalist, are you a communist, and if you are communist, can we work with you? This is your country." Nobody sat down at the table, and did a Hudson County deal with this guy, but you could have. That's the one thing every historian will agree on, … you bring the best guys in here, … you could have made a deal with this guy. He fought side by side with us. China, I'm reading the *Valley of Death* (2010) now, and the Chinese and the Vietnamese are going back and forth, … because China doesn't give you the benevolence like America gives you, but when

China comes in and gives you some, you pay for it, and your children pay for it, … but you see nobody wanted to make a deal with him, a Hudson County deal good for everyone.

SH: To go back to your efforts for the hearts and minds, how far were you sent as part of Operation Hastings?

PV: We were all over. We were actually up and down the Cambodian-Laotian border, and we went to maybe a hundred places, and sometimes we'd be going for different things, different reasons, you understand. … Somebody would come out and they would give us twenty boxes of shit, forgive my language, and they would say drop this off at this *ville* for this guy, and I would say, "Okay," and we would do this. … There'd be a CID guy there, he was like a CIA guy. They wore no rank, … and they wore cowboy hats, or different kinds of hats. They would come in, and we would do the schmooze, and he would ask a bunch of questions, and he'd write his stuff down. … It's almost like a good arts company, like my good theater companies that I ran, whenever we can do an arts in education program, an outreach program, I would do an outreach. I have the stars talk to the students, I have the dancers, bring the dance schools, and everything. So, that's essentially what we were doing. We'd go there, and we'd do our outreach, and while we were doing our outreach, he'd be asking questions, and he'd be taking pictures.

SH: Did the CID travel with you?

PV: Well, not all the time. …

SH: They just appear there?

PV: Well, during the Tet Offensive, they came in and tried to take over, and I got in big trouble with that too, because even though they don't have rank and stuff like that, … I never got it then. … I once said to the troop commander, I said, "Who is this freaking guy? … He's telling me what to do." He goes, "He's one of the CID guys. You got to be light with them." "Tell me to be light with them? I almost shot him." He said, "Well, that would be too bad, because they'd probably hang you." He said, "We got to put up with these guys," and then, of course, my troop commander didn't like him either, but he came and he started bossing people around, including a lieutenant, you know, and we really didn't like that. …

SH: What about the press?

PV: The press, I have to giggle about that. The press were not embedded with us. The press were in pools, the press got what we wanted to tell them, and we told them bullshit. … The good press, of course, started taking pictures, Tim O'Brien, people like that, all those great photographs.

SH: Were the press taken to where you were operating outside of the base?

PV: No, never with us. … One time, one French woman who had a friendship with somebody way up came with us to run a relay, which means you're picking up with the Special Forces

thing, inside Laos or something, and she was on a bird. … I thought to myself, "Holy shit, this woman must really be good at her job," and I was being sarcastic, because … she was a gorgeous woman. French, condescending, not too much fun, I could see she was unhappy to be with such lowly people like sergeants and lieutenants. … She was a big star, I'm told, on French TV. Of course we had, my dear friend (John Parker?) was the school teacher, seventh grade school teacher, who was the king of anti-colonialism. He used to say, "Velluch," he called me, "Velluch." "It is colonialism, and the white men's desire, his opiate, to subjugate the yellow," this is in the middle of NCO club, "to subjugate the black man and the yellow man." I would go "(John?) you got a point, give me a beer," and he would do that. [laughter] … He really got into it with her, and he said to her, "*Mademoiselle*," and he starts speaking French with her, he was a very educated kid, and he told her, "We're cleaning your shit up," is what he told her, and she starts screaming at him. … I said, "(John?), please with this, I hate her anyway, and she hates us." He goes, "Hate her. We're here, we're cleaning up her mess." Then, he started, because he was a born teacher, and he was used to it, you know. You think I'm bad. You'd say, "John what's going on." "What's going on?" … He would do a class, he'd do a lesson, and … I'd get hysterical. … Of course, he was right, because he had, none of us had been studying that stuff, he was right. He told her [about] Dien Bien Phu, … which I'm reading about right now, forty years after John, almost forty years after he gave her this lesson, and she was unhappy about it. … The actual answer to your question is that there was a press place and they were in Saigon. Dan Rather I think was there. The biggest kick of my life was we went out with Morley Safer. … I went out with him, he was always my idol because I love nice clothes, and I always remember his clothes. I saw him at CBS like fifteen years ago, outside of the thing, I said to him, "You don't remember me, do you? [I was] with the Tenth Cavalry." … I never forget, because I was doing the minute shows of Hanukkah and Christmas, you know, *The 21 Days of America*, I directed and wrote those. They were one-minute shows on Channel 5 over here. … He said, "I've been looking for you for years and telling the story about how you complimented me." … I said, "You're kidding, Morley, you're kidding." He had a jungle fatigue jacket on, he's got a shirt, I mean he's the best dressed man on television after Bryant Gumble, and he's wearing a kerchief. … To me Morley Safer was the ultimate star and the nicest guy … and he said, "I'd give you this kerchief my dear boy," he says, "but I'm so hot." … The next time he came out with us, he had the same thing, only he had a different stripped thing on. Even in the jungle, he looked fabulous. He looked like a star and we took him with us. Then he went with the Seventh Cavalry across the street, and that's where you see on the famous program, where he was in Vietnam, and he was holding the hand of a boy who died and he started crying, he broke, because, you know, he's a humane guy, and he couldn't take it. If you see it, it will really move you because that's the kind of guy he was, Morley Safer. … By and large, … they were not out. Errol Flynn's son was out, and two friends of mine died looking for him. Errol Flynn's son did whatever he wanted to do, he had a pass, he was, as you know, a combat photographer and very famous, and I played cards with him one night, he was with us for a week up in Dragon Mountain, and he went out. He went out with the LRRPs, he went out with us once, and then we lost him. He went up to wherever he thought there was action. … He was quite like his father, a daredevil, and was always in trouble, but didn't really care. He was Errol Flynn's son and he was with this guy, they were together all the time (a lot of people said they were lovers) I don't know, you know, I never got into that, but they were always together, both of them missing. So, you know, it's a dangerous place to be and he'd go wherever. …

SH: How were race relations on the base that you were at?

PV: Okay, now, you have a different thing, see. Now, you have people, and that's why I love being down at the museum because we have the black guy statue--I think I told you this on the phone--extending his hand to the white guy on the ground, and a Latina nurse holding his bandage. When people are responsible for your life, your safety, you will be surprised how people suddenly don't give a shit if you're Jewish, Muslim, or whatever it is. You will be surprised how they will suddenly love blacks. How the crackers will say, "Come home to dinner." How black people who have two hundred years of lynchings, will split a foxhole with you. Once you've done that, you know, the survival surpasses any feelings of bigotry. … So that was actually a decent thing. We were in that together, we knew it, America was against us, we knew that, Jane Fonda is a star making major money, we know that, so if the public allows this, then the public doesn't like us. So, all we had was each other, you know, and that was a bond that happened there. Now, may I just do the second part of the question. … On the two occasions I went on R&R, and I came back from Cam Ranh Bay and I was on the ocean, I thought I was in Miami Beach, you went right back to segregation. …

SH: On the beach?

PV: Yes, and I once read this in a college report, and then I got to take another two minute break--my bladder cancer, compliments of Vietnam. … Only recently like two years ago, a friend of mine was doing this documentary thing, and he said, "In a college situation, you see people in the arts and in sports who intermingle, but in the colleges, especially down south, it's just as segregated. It's just not officially segregated, there's no lines that say all the black chicks are going to sit at this table, and all the white chicks are going to sit there, but they do." The football players, no way, if the guard, you know, doesn't pull, the back is screwed, do you understand? The actor knows, that if you don't know your lines, and you and I got to do a love scene, then I'm screwed, do you understand? … If you're a dancer and you're going to jump into my arms, all you care about is I know how to catch you, you do not care if I'm Jewish, you do not care if I'm Italian, … you don't care anything about that. All you want to know is, I'm coming up and I got to hit that arm and I got to catch that thigh or you are going to break your leg. … The army is the same thing as college.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SH: At the time that you are in Vietnam, we are beginning to hear stories about drug use in the military. How prevalent was it where you were located?

PV: In that part of Vietnam, at that time, I must tell you there was a lot of "grass," and hard not to smoke it, very hard not to smoke it, because it was all over the place. It was uncut, a hundred years later you would hear about "Cambodian gold" and all the stuff like that, well we were the original people for it. It was prior to all of that heroin stuff, I don't know where that came in, I have no experience with that. That came later when morale went lower and lower, and different people from the left were moving to the right, the police and the firemen were making apologies

for all the people they beat up who were just protesting against the war. Mothers and fathers were saying maybe we had this wrong. … The famous, McNamara's book, *In Retrospect*, … said, "Now, we're done." He said to the President, "Now, we're done," because on the lawn, … there's thousands of people, I know there's different numbers of how many people were there, the press swears it was a hundred thousand, and I think that's right just from the picture, because it was very similar to the crowd at Martin Luther King's great speech. He said, "Now, we're done because this is Middle America, this is mothers, fathers, school teachers," you understand, "these are the people who drive the trucks and the electricians who come in our house who said no more of this. Look out there," he said, "and find me a hippie, find me somebody with dirty hair." Johnson said, "No, you're a defeatist," but McNamara had known, he said "Now, we're done because the mothers of America have had it." But prior to that, to answer your question, a lot of grass, and on the base camp, but not in the field, because you could get in a lot of trouble with that, but grass was certainly prevalent, and just all over the place. There were people that smoked it the way you smoke cigarettes. Later on, it got bad, I can't speak to it.

SH: Did someone's use of drugs ever endanger the lives of other soldiers?

PV: No, not that I can see, because we were smart enough to know. I've heard stories like that, but most people whose life is on the line, they'll act correctly, you know, they'll act correctly.

SH: Were there any incidents of enlisted men killing officers on the base?

PV: No, I never knew of anything about that.

SH: Was there a good relationship between officers and enlisted men?

PV: … It depends on the officer, depends on the men. … As I say, it was an interesting time to be in Vietnam, it was just at that turning time, the country was not totally against Vietnam at all, never with the Vietnam veteran. … It was a year before all of that really heavy turmoil, and so the "fragging" thing came later on. A lot of it is exaggerated, I can tell you for a fact, but I never thought to do anything like that, for the reasons that fragging took place.

SH: Were most of your officers career men?

PV: No, on the lower level which I was on, you know, I interacted every day with lieutenants and captains and, of course, warrant officers, who were that wonderful middle ground between enlisted men and officers, and there were a lot of pilots as you know, and then we had some warrants who were mechanical people, operational people. So, we never really integrated with the big guys. Patton was a good guy, he used to like to walk through the tent. … The first time I met him, he walked through the tent, I was playing chess with (John?), he said, "Let me show you how to do that." … I said, "Well, you know we gamble here, and, you know, we don't play for free, sir, if you don't mind." He said, "What's the stakes?" And so I said, because I knew he had a sense of humor, and he wasn't like his father, I said, "I'd like to have one of your father's pearl-handled revolvers." He says, "Stop right there." The reason I said it, is because when he came in, they wanted to have pictures of him with that stuff and all that, because Patton had

given it to the museum in DC. … I hated his father, anybody with a good ninth grade education should hate him. Bad bigot, now you hear, so it was a different time, when those guys came home, you didn't have warts in all the bios then. Dwight Eisenhower and all these people, Dwight Eisenhower did gay jokes, Patton was such a bigot, and hated the Jews, and called them swine, it was terrible, it was disgusting, and the son was not that way. … George Scott years later, I did a movie called *The Hospital* (1970). Scott had just done *Patton* (1970). … He acted like Patton, and one day the assistant director came over here and said, "George wants to talk to you," and I said, "George wants to talk to me?" I was just one of the interns, I had like two lines. He said, "George wants to see you right now." I say, "Where is he?" He's playing cards with Paddy Chayefsky, the legendary writer … and a few other guys. So, I went in there, and he says to me, "So, tell me, what's Patton's son's problem, kid?" He goes like that, and I said, "Well, you know, if you really knew the guy, and you really did a warts and all bio on him," I said, "and we'll never know that," I said, "you'll never know that, George." … If you called him Mr. Scott he'd correct you. … He was the nicest guy, don't get me wrong, but he was George Scott, it was, "Get that guinea in here I don't believe him," and that's what he called me. … I said to him, … "Maybe that's what it is." He said, "All right, I got what you're saying," he goes, "Well, you know, sons and fathers." I go, "Yes, sons and fathers, George, sons and fathers." I wanted to say: "Because the son was a man not a blow hard," to put that guy out there, slap a guy with shell-shock, somebody should have, see if I had been in that tent with that, I'd be in jail now, I wouldn't survive that. I'd a slapped him with my pistol, I swear to God I would have, that's unconscionable. [Editor's Note: US Army General George S. Patton slapped and berated a US Army private at an evacuation hospital in Sicily on August 3, 1943, an event made famous after it was reported in the news. His son, Major General George Smith Patton IV, served three tours in Vietnam.]

SH: I understand.

PV: But anyway that was George Scott, "Tell that guinea to come in here and tell me why he wouldn't get involved as an adviser." They wanted that name, special adviser General George Patton the IV. George Patton, the blow hard that I hate of history, is really George Patton, I think the III, or IV, which means my commander was like the V or VI, and he just cut if off, because once somebody is dead you can do that. I don't have to be Pat Vellucci, Jr. if I don't want. I keep it on my license and everything, but I didn't even know this. … He was actually George Patton, the V or VI, whatever, and he cut it off, he didn't like any of that pretense. So, that's why I said to him, figuring he had a sense of humor, "I'd like to have one of those pearl-handled things," he laughed, and then he went back to the command hooch, and he said to my troop commander, who was a captain, he goes, "Vellucci's got a hell of a mouth, doesn't he?" … The troop commander said, "You have no idea sir, you have no idea."

SH: You talked about having two R&Rs in Vietnam.

PV: I had one R&R, and then, when we performed a great act of heroism, at least according to the Army, I won another one. I did a three day to Taiwan, but my first one was to Australia, and that was swell. That was really swell, I went to Australia. …

SH: Was it about six months in that you got it?

PV: … I'll tell you when it was, it was during the Tet Offensive, I came back during Tet, and I was stuck down in Cam Ranh Bay, the story I told before. I couldn't get back up to my unit. So, I sat on the beach having a cigar. [laughter] [Editor's Note: The Tet Offensive of 1968, in which every major city in South Vietnam was attacked by the Vietcong, is seen as the point when American public opinion began turning against the war.]

SH: I thought that you had gone to Cam Ranh Bay.

PV: Came back from Cam Ranh Bay, through Sydney, Australia. Now, it was a particularly interesting R&R for me because I served with the Australian SAS for thirty days, maybe more, they were with us for a month operating with us, and I just adored those guys, I used to do their accents for them. There was a lieutenant colonel there who would talk to the sergeant major and he would ask, "Sergeant major," and he'd said say, "Sar!" … That's the way they would yell at each other, you know, and they were just out of a movie, those guys, and I loved them, and they loved me back, because I would do Australian accents. … They were tough men, those guys know the outback, they know the woods. I mean they were tough as nails, but they didn't act it, they were fun, they were great fun. There was a sergeant (Smithe?) there, who was my very best buddy, and he would call me, "Your majesty, your grace," and things like that. He would say, he'd come in with a cigar, and say, "Pardon me, your grace." [laughter] "We're looking for a box of cigars," and he said, "My dear friend, the Italian, Mr. Vellucci is going to handle this. Was I right in assuming so, your majesty?" I got a box, "Aren't you a good lad?" he'd say. [Mr. Vellucci is speaking with an Australian accent.] Another thing they did, which is in the movie called *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), is they would talk about "boring" people. They understood that soldiers bore people with war stories, and the sergeant major used to always say that his daughter was a professor at Sydney [University], … huge school over there, and he would always talk about, "My daughter," he goes, "and their bloody liberal friends came over and bore me," he goes. … I guess he wasn't close with his daughter first of all, he hadn't been married to her mother for many years--like a lot of soldiers--and they were not close, but she was still his daughter. When he left, he said to me, he held my hand, and he held my shoulders, and just before he hugged me, he said, "You're a good bloody sergeant of infantry, yes mate," and I said, "Thank you, sergeant," coming from him, a sergeant major, right. "Thank you sergeant major." He goes, "And when it's all done here," he said "you'll be back to school with you, get this dirty uniform off, it'll be back to school with you, you'll come and visit your old bloody sergeant major, and all of my daughter's boring friends, and we'll bore the bleeding hell out of them with war stories, won't we do that lad?" … I said, "Yes we will," he goes, "Okay," and I never saw him again. [laughter] Isn't that a wonderful story, he goes, "We'll bore the bleeding hell out of them," because every time we would do something, he'd go, "Oh, we went to some deep shit down there," he goes, "Oh, yes, I can't wait to get home and bore the bleeding hell out of my wife with this one." [laughter] Because soldiers have a sense of humor, … they know that people, they don't want to hear war stories, or not all the time, you know, which is why I still say now, I said you guys, as soon as I go to the bathroom, I'll come back and bore you some more. I still carry it with me, you know, I still carry it with me. … I went to Sydney, and when I was in Sydney, I looked up and called the daughter who actually came with a bunch of women and … I

had a nice time. They weren't much older, they were a little bit older than we were, but some of them the same age, and they were really pretty girls, and one of them hooked up with somebody else, it was kind of nice. I said, "Your father will be home to bore you with some of our stories." She was like that, very academic, but in any event, Sydney was great because they had been, you know, they were very close to Japan in the Second World War, so they were, you know, they were afraid of being invaded and they were very anti-communism. You couldn't go in a restaurant, and they'd go, "Give those yanks a drink. Give those yanks a drink." I can't tell you how many times I stand up, and, you don't want to be impolite. "Thank you very much, I appreciate it." Wherever we went, we were just treated very well, and it was great to see white women, I mean it was unbelievable to see white women … and people who spoke your language, almost. Sydney is a beautiful city, just a beautiful city, and I went to see a play one night and my friends would go, "What are you crazy?" because they were going to go get drunk at the (auto club?) and I saw *There's a Girl In My Soup*, which is a play I later did when I first became an actor. … I came in, and I remember the girl at the box office, and [she] said to me, "Hello," and I said, "Are you sold out tonight?" She said, "No, you're an American, aren't you?" … I said, "How can you tell?" … She laughed, and she said, "Are you in the business? I said, "No," I said "I'm a singer actually, … but I know this play, I've read about it," I said, "and I'm anxious to see it." She said, "Well, what a pleasure," she said, "most of the Army people don't come to this place." … It was a small theater, like a three hundred seat theater, and went in. I had a great time. Then she came and grabbed me later on, and she said, "Would you like to go back and meet the cast?" "Sure, I'd love to go back and meet the cast," and she took me backstage, and even the actors were like, "This yank come from America, he's with a singing group called the (Delmonico's?), and rather than go get drunk with his friends he came to see us, well hello mate," and they took me to an actor's bar. … My friends, of course, later on at the hotel were like, "What are you doing?" "I went to see a play." … To them that was the most foreign experience, to go see a play. … That's not why you went to Sydney for wherever how long we were there, but I went to Sydney, and that was fun, it was great.

SH: Was it hard to come back to Vietnam?

PV: It was very hard to come back because … it was the first time I had running water in six months. It was the first time I went to a toilet in six months, and flushed. It was the first time I went to a toilet and didn't have to worry about flies biting me. I slept on sheets, not that I had it bad at Dragon Mountain, but it wasn't the same as sheets. … Sydney was a happening city, I mean it was just happening, and if you were popular and we were, you rented clothes when you went in there. There was a guy there, and what a concession he had, they say he became a millionaire from the war. War makes a lot of people rich, there's a lot of ancillary businesses there. … I rented a blue suit and a blazer. … I could have bought it, it was really a sharp looking suit, and I looked pretty sharp I thought, and just had a great time, didn't want to leave, and there were guys who went AWOL there.

SH: Really?

PV: It was a wonderful script that everybody [tried to do] and never came to fruition, Bob De Niro was supposed to do it. Well, you probably know the book, *Going after Cacciato* (1978).

… He's the guy who went AWOL, write it down, look at it, you'll really enjoy it, and then Sylvester Stallone was going to do it, but for some reason it never got made, Bob De Niro was supposed to make it. *Going after Cacciato* [is] really quite an interesting piece. Sometimes when a book is so famous, for that reason, there's so many people pulling at it, it's got to be exactly right. … Anyway, that was a great time and coming back into the Tet Offensive was not great.

SH: Did you understand what the Tet Offensive was at that point?

PV: Yes, the whole world did, because it was misrepresented first of all. The initial misrepresentation was that they were taking over, … and there was a push for that, and I congratulate them on their attempt, but they failed. … We didn't find this out until later on, and they failed tremendously, we know now, but, you know, twenty, thirty, forty years, … we're late to class, kids. … The whole world knew the Tet Offensive was on. In fact, I remember, I had for the longest time the *Daily News* and … the *Tribune* was alive then, the *Tribune* had the big, "The Tet Offensive pushed throughout South. North Vietnam, nationals to take back country," and the whole bit and they thought, holy cow.

SH: Your leave was not cut?

PV: No, it kind of started as we came in. It was unsuccessful. … There was a Tet II, which people don't know about, some of your veterans will tell you about it, that was in May. A couple of months later they tried with what was left, but they were completely demolished. They lost all of their politburo troops, they lost them all, like ninety percent down south. Up north, there were divisions which were decimated, and half of the Vietcong army, you know, that's a lot, and of course in addition to human loss they lost their operations, they lost their [supply line], because we went in, except LBJ and Richard Nixon will tell you otherwise, but we went into Cambodia and Laos, and bombed the Ho Chi Minh trails. There's no Ho Chi Minh trail, please write that down. … The Ho Chi Minh trail is like eleven trails. …

SH: It is used to refer to a series of supply routes.

PV: Exactly, and you can talk to people who really think they know, and they go, "The Ho Chi Minh trail," and I'll go, "No, sir, it's Ho Chi Minh trails." … So, that's what happened there, that's what that story was, and we could have won the war then, we could have done a Hudson County [deal]. At that time is where you could have sat down with a Hudson County deal with Ho Chi Minh. "Your people are dead, your country is dead, there's the seventeenth parallel up there, go up there and be a communist," and we'll stay down here, and it will be like Korea, because then he would have had no choice, because we're going to bring it. Now, we're really going to bring it on Ho, we're going to bomb, … and we were bombing the north at that time, all the prisoners in the north would get bombed. Poor John McCain he got tortured all night, and then we bombed them, because we weren't sure. That was the time to make a deal, and again it slipped through our fingers and we went on another what, seven years, six years of people dying.

SH: How soon did you return to Dragon Mountain after the Tet Offensive?

PV: About two months after that, we caught a guy. … This is a real war story but I can make it in thirty seconds. A Montagnard kid was kidnapped, and the kid's grandfather was a chief in one of the villages, and he was crying, you know, the kid was only twelve, and the Vietcong people took him. So, they took his grandson, and we had to go find [him], and I thought, "Oh my God, if you want to talk about a shitty job, how are we going to find him, where are we going to look?" So, we took two Kit Carson Scouts with us, those are Hmong warriors, Montagnards, you've probably heard of them, those are the people that live in the mountains, they're like the blacks of our country, they're ostracized. The Vietnamese don't like them, and they live as they lived … two thousand years ago. We took them because they knew the area. We took them a lot as a matter of fact, and they were called Kit Carson Scouts. They would say, "Who's your Kit Carson?" I would say, … "Lang," and they'd go, "Oh, man." They were tough guys, … they really knew their business, and by luck--I would love to tell you that I'm a hero--by luck one day we were flying and the door gunner said, "I see something" and what he saw was a team of guys setting up a perimeter, and we were behind them and the kid they had in a tree, who was going to be like the sniper, and the kid probably didn't even know how to handle the gun, had him up there, and he said, "There's the kid, I'll bet that's the kid," and then the Hmong guy goes, "That's him," because the Hmong, you know, had talked to the father. So, we came up behind them, and … we had guns blasting and everything. We had outflanked them. When you hear outflanking, what outflanking means, if you guys are there and it looks like I'm going to attack you, the best way to attack you is for me to have somebody over here, because now you guys have to look that way. Now, you're vulnerable for me here, and then this guy is doing that, and if I'm really good, in Napoleonic terms, I'll encircle you and bring up your rear. So, now you're looking at me, you're getting outflanked. … That's what we did with two helicopters, because the one just kept going around. He hit the flank, and then he hit the back, and we got the kid. It was like a movie. … Of course, with my mouth, … we made it sound like it was a John Wayne thing, staged at Paramount Pictures. … It was really just dumb luck, we brought the kid [back]. … This is also what shaped my life, I mean it reminded me, and I always tell the kids at the museum, "People are more alike than they are different," and I'm glad I learned that at a young age. Because here was a kid who was maybe twelve and he comes back to his village on an APC (armored personnel carrier), and he goes to his mother who was the daughter of the chief. … I don't know where the father is, and he starts to hug his mother, and he cries, and the mother cries. I mean this woman has got nothing on top, I mean she's like, you know, primitive out of *National Geographic*, but she's still a mother who misses her son, and he's still a kid who was separated from his mother, and wants to be back with her. … The grandfather stood in the back, and the grandmother wearing all this jewelry, and a gun, it was a crazy time, you couldn't do a movie about this. … I said, "Gee, it's just like my family, you know, just like an Italian family when you go home." She was crying, and he wouldn't let go of his mother, and remember, he's twelve or thirteen years old, you know, and she's maybe, you know, twenty-five, a young woman, beautiful woman with long hair and braids and everything, Montagnard woman. It was the best I ever felt in Vietnam, two or three really good feelings in Vietnam and that was one of them. I thought we really did well. So, we came back, and we made sure everybody knew it, and we caught two and a half days in Taiwan, which is not the same as Australia. That was debauchery in Taiwan. That was it, that's how that happened.

RS: You had interactions with South Vietnamese civilians.

PV: Tons.

RS: Did you have interactions with the South Vietnamese military?

PV: Yes, I did with them. They just came on patrol with us, and we reinforced them on two or three occasions, because we were cavalry, and then when they came up on Dragon Mountain, they trained with us when I was in Dragon Mountain, and they did the perimeter detail in the base camp. For the last three to four months I was there, that's all I did, were base camp patrols. So, I interacted with them, and was very sympathetic to them, you know, they wanted their country, and they wanted a democratic society, they weren't sure it could happen. They didn't want us there. They were in a very bad position. …

SH: Did any of them speak English?

PV: Yes, especially officers and NCOs. You must remember, we'd been there since the late '50s, so just because we didn't have hundreds of thousands of troops doesn't mean we didn't have a presence. … The English were there, the French were there, so they had been occupied, a lot of those people for a long time, and the Australians were there, New Zealanders for a little while. So they knew the language, they heard the language. Once we come in, we take over, Americans take over, we take over your stores, we take over your clothes, we take over your bars, we take over you daughters, we take everything over because we have money, you understand, and when we come in, it's our show. If we do it correctly and politely as I tried to do, you're loved. If you do it incorrectly you're hated, but they still don't throw you out, because you've got this. [Mr. Vellucci rubs his fingers together]

SH: Money.

PV: … Wherever we go, we take over, because we have this. [Mr. Vellucci rubs his fingers together] In London, World War II, the line was, "The bad things about the Americans are that they're over fed, they're over paid, and they're over here," but that's for every war, yes right?

SH: You left out the vulgar part of the phrase. [laughter]

PV: Yes, but enough vulgarity for me today. That's for every war, we just take over. … Do you think we haven't taken over in Afghanistan and Iraq? What are you kidding me? … It's bad because it's not where we live, it's not our home, it's not our street, it's not our school, it's not our bar, those are not our daughters, you know. We never get that.

SH: Were the South Vietnamese troops professional soldiers?

PV: … The troops that I worked with were professional soldiers, regular army soldiers. Yes, they're conscriptions, but it was a good mix. I think, by and large, they really wanted to defeat communism. They really saw what could happen with a democratic situation, and they were

happy to give it a shot. … While we were there, … it looked like the parade was going to go on forever. It was like a great love story, you know, you never think it's going to end. … If I'm a Vietnamese I'm thinking we've got some hope as long at the Americans are going to be here.

SH: You said that communication was on a two week lag.

PV: Ten days to two weeks, yes. I wrote letters.

SH: How were you getting news about what is going on in the United States?

PV: Coming from the States, it's all newspapers and letters, that's it, just the paper and letters. Remember … we're way up, and Saigon is different. Saigon is like being in San Francisco, but even those guys, unless you were in MACV [Military Assistance Command Vietnam] headquarters where, you know, people could pick up the phone and call their girlfriend. I met a guy, called his girlfriend every night, I said, "How did you do that?" He goes, "There's the phone, we have the overseas thing." … Other than that, we got it every two weeks, and we got it from our friends and families who sent newspapers and periodicals, and that's the way it went, but even … when you had *Newsday*, *Time* magazine, it was still two weeks behind. …

SH: How did you celebrate the holidays?

PV: Well, we didn't really celebrate the holiday. … We gave a party for the orphans, and then we had to keep them there, because we couldn't get them back, there were some skirmishes outside which was kind of fun. Now, I had to play host with my friend Joel Eagon. It's funny, he said, "I'm the only Jew here, and I'm the one that's doing the Christmas party." He loved kids, and we had like about sixty, seventy kids there, and we had to keep them on Dragon Mountain, and so we had to find places for them to stay. That was crazy, some of them were really young. If you were working in the field, and it was Christmas, you just worked in the field and you said, "Merry Christmas." If you were in the rear where I was in Dragon Mountain, which we considered the rear, and you weren't on a base camp patrol or on the perimeter duty, we had a … really nice dinner. The guys in the field had dinners too. … General Abrams then said, "Every Christmas and Thanksgiving you will have that." So, that's how we celebrated. If you were in the field when you came in, you celebrated late, but it was a seven day, twenty-four hour job. You didn't think to go.

SH: Was there any point that you considered making the military your career?

PV: No, never thought of that. I had wanted to be a star, I really was, you know, talk about delusional. … I was an actor for twenty years. … But I wanted to be a "star" star.

SH: What about the USO? We hear about various entertainment figures visiting the troops.

PV: Well, now comes the great story, and, of course, the great finish. Martha Raye was my all-time idol. …

SH: You need to tell the tape.

PV: Yes, I need to tell the tape. Martha Raye came to Dragon Mountain to do a "tab" version (a cut show) of *Hello Dolly*. When Martha Raye came, I was, you know, on the floor, because she was Martha Raye and she was the greatest comedian ever. … Chaplain had called her the greatest, the funniest woman in the world when they did *Monsieur Verdoux* in 1939, 1940. So here comes Martha Raye and many of us had grown up watching her on television … [on *The Martha Raye Show*] but Martha Raye was also a lieutenant colonel in the Special Forces. She came dressed in her "tiger" fatigues. … The military was her life. She had been in three different wars, been a combat nurse. … You have to understand, she was like a goddess to us, just a goddess. An advance guy came, and she had a piano player, I think it was just a piano player, I'm pretty sure it was just a piano player. If you know the show, she has a wonderful song, "I should have said so long, so long dearie," … and as she was doing that. All of a sudden I hear, "Pow," and I went, "Oh, holy shit what was that?" Now, behind the stage on the hill was our artillery, so I was hoping it was them, but it wasn't. We had incoming, because the Cong and the NVA hated Martha Raye. They just hated her because she was always bad mouthing Jane Fonda, said she wanted to kill Jane Fonda, and the Vietcong loved her. They thought Martha was pro-war. She wasn't pro-war, she was pro-military. So, we got hit, it was just incoming, nobody knew where it was from, but … the MP's put the actors in the back of the theater. … They left the stage, and then they told the piano player to leave the stage, but Martha Raye stayed on the center of the stage, and she finished her song. So, since she finished her song we all got calm and stayed put. She just sang, like an old vaudeville trouper that she was, and she sang, "That's all, so long, so long ago." … We started to applaud and applaud and applaud, and then the cast comes out, and they started to applaud her. … I asked guys who were there, nobody can remember stopping applauding, it was like five or ten minutes, all we did was applaud and cry. It was like you didn't have to be a theater lover to appreciate this. Later she came into our mess hall, where we gave her a party, and I made friends with this girl, who played (Mrs. Malloy?). I said, "I got to meet Martha Raye." She said, "Come on and walk with me. Martha this is Pat Vellucci from Jersey," and I said, "Well, thank you Miss Raye, so good to see you." I said, "You know, my father met you in China-Burma." … She goes, "You look just like him," and you know what, she then proceeded to tell me [about] his unit. She said, "Built the Ledo Road with General Stilwell. I kicked Stilwell's ass in pinochle." (She couldn't compose a sentence without [profanity] … that would make, you know, sailors blush.) She was everything you hear about her, and more. "I kicked his ass all night in pinochle, General Stilwell." I said, "Miss Raye, this is so great," and that was it. … Can you imagine meeting Martha Raye. Now, we segway to me going to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, and couple of years at St. Peter's college, becoming an actor, and then becoming a director, and it happened really fast, like five years. … I'm in Fort Lauderdale, Florida where I am the artistic director of the theater, the Stage Door Theatre, and the producer says to me, "I have made a deal with Martha Raye today." I picked Martha up at the airport, as her director, and we hugged and kissed and all that stuff, and we talk about Dragon Mountain, and we'd do interviews together. … Ordinarily, you would never do an interview with a star. They don't want to talk to me, they want to talk to Martha Raye, but she would drag me in, and I would tell the story, she loved me telling the story, because I would tell it well, and it was such a wonderful story. You didn't have to embellish, and that was my Martha Raye fantasy come true. Then I became her director, and we worked for years together off and

on. … I was very lucky, I became a director, I don't know how I did it, I probably lied. Oh I know I did lie and I said I could direct a show. Next thing I had like ten hits, and people were calling me … only regional theater, but I was a pretty well-known director, and directed a lot of big stars. … That was my Martha Raye experience, and that was really something. Bob Hope came as well, with the big commercial show, and he came with a group of people called the Golddiggers. The Golddiggers were very big, if you remember, the Dean Martin Golddiggers. It were all pretty girls, … but the Golddiggers were girls in short dresses and bikinis and all that, but I knew this Golddigger from Bergenfield, New Jersey. She had written to somebody saying, "I want to look up Pat when I get there." … I was telling everybody, I was trying to show off, "I know one of the Golddiggers." … On the day the show came in, I was doing just a basic, base camp patrol. It was supposed to come in at one o'clock, but the scout dog got loose, so from one o'clock it became six o'clock, and the show was at a certain time, and as I came back to the thing, I saw all of these girls flying out, and I'm looking up all these girls' dresses. Okay, the dresses are up to here, right, and Raquel Welch (still not can of worms at sixty-five) but you can imagine. … Raquel Welch, and Joey Heatherton, and I'm looking, and they're waving, and I'm waving, "Goodbye." So I go see them somewhere else and I saw the whole show. Raquel Welch was one of the first people, she didn't get credit for this, because she was really a difficult person in those days. I worked with her once, and I reminded her of this: When Ms. Welch came back on the *Johnny Carson Show*, or the *Merv Griffith Show*, I'm not sure, she said, "This is a lot of BS. We have these guys over there, they're away from women, … and we send over these people in miniskirts, and they send me over in a bathing suit to drive them crazy. We should be sending prostitutes over, and so they can give these guys some comfort. This is what they need." … I mean, to me the worst thing in the world is to see Raquel Welch in a G-string, okay. Which brings me to my third story. This is a short one. If you ever saw *Apocalypse Now* (1979)? Well, I got a call one day from across the way, the first sergeant said, "Go across the way, to the Fourth Air Battalion. … They're going to take a bunch of girls there for a public relations thing," and I said, "Oh, a show?" "Well, it's not a show, one is Miss June of the Penthouse things, and another two are Miss something else and Miss something else, and they're going to dance for the guys," and I say, "Well, that sounds good." To me it sounded like a stripper bar thing, but who am I complain, and he said, "I'll send Vellucci with these people and he's good with stars." He called them stars, the girl is a star, because she's Miss June. So I said, "But, I'm not hearing what they do," it was a warrant officer I was talking to. He goes, "I don't know what they do, Vellucci. They're going to come in here, they're flying in here now, we're going to take them out, inside the Laotian border for, it was a cavalry company, with a bunch of LRRPs." It was a LRRP company, long range reconnaissance patrol. I went, "Holy shit," I said, "You're going to take three girls," I thought it was five girls. I don't remember now exactly how many it was, but it was more. Turned out to be like eight girls in bikinis, and they're going to dance for these guys on this stage with this disc jockey from California, just like *Apocalypse Now*. In fact, *Apocalypse Now* was taken from incidents like this. It's so perfect because the director had all advisers that were veterans. So I said, "What do I do?" … I made friends with all the girls, … and they were very nice, and very flirty and all of this, and they were not dressed yet, … and in their shorts with the halters, they were like, you know, to die for, and you wanted to grab them. … I'm thinking, "These girls are going to go down from this?" … I went to the head guy, I said, "What happens here?" He goes, "They take their clothes off, they dance. It gives the guys a good treat. We get in, and we get out of there." He goes, "The key is not to keep the chopper,

not to shut the chopper down, because we got to make some fast exits." I said, "Let me tell you something my friend, you aren't going to get out of this." "There's no show per se." … He said, "Pat, we improvise it, we're doing ten of these a day." I said, "You may be doing ten of these a day down south, but you are not going to do [this] inside Cambodia. … We're asking for trouble." Later on, this idiot asked the … [other soldier] if I was gay. He really didn't get it. We go in, and the rest is exactly as it happened there. Guy comes out, and he does his thing, "How are you guys doing, you raggedy-ass grunts? I got a surprise for you, and her name is (Jenny?)," whatever it was, "Miss Long Island City," and (Jenny?) comes out, and as soon as she comes out, she starts dancing. These guys started to get wild. … This is only the first girl, there's six more to go, until we get to the playmate of the year, or the month, whoever she was, … Miss August, or something. … I'm thinking, "Holy shit," so I say to the bird, to my friend, I say, "You know, we're not going to make this." He said, "I don't think we're going to get off this thing alive." He said, "And I'm going to tell you what," he goes, "I'm out of here." … I said, "I'm out of here with you." I said, "I don't know what these kids are getting paid." … So, after about the fourth girl, they started running to the stage, I grabbed everybody, I threw them in the thing, we got everybody off, and off we went, and I wanted to leave the guy there. I should have, he was a disc jockey with a bad Beatle haircut, but apparently a big star in California, where he had a morning radio show, and he came over with these girls, and he gets in the bird and he goes, "Phew." He goes, "That's a close one." I said, "You'll never know how close, man." I said, "One hundred eighty LRRPs who haven't seen a woman in a long time and you go … [show] their boobs? What do you think they were going to do? Say would you like to write a letter home to mom?" … I said, "What the hell is wrong with you and who hired you?" … I wasn't a producer yet, but I was thinking like a director and stuff like that, but when you see that, think of me the next time you see *Apocalypse Now*, it's on television. That happened to me. Only it was no fun, because I was really scared, I mean I was really scared. The one girl, they grabbed the one girl, and we almost didn't get her back, and the crowd would have eaten her. They grabbed her from the stage, these two big black guys grabbed her from the stage, and she was happy. She didn't get it until she was off the stage and they were grabbing her, and we pulled her back by her legs and there were two MPs up front. … She was happy until [then], … and if they didn't grab her, the crowd could have eaten her up. I mean what could I do, fight a 180 guys? … It was me, the pilot, and my friend Joel. So, that actually happened. So when Raquel Welch says, "Send over hookers." We agreed. Anyway, let's get back to the war, enough of my show business stories, Christ. [laughter]

RS: Did you have a chaplain assigned to your division?

PV: We had a drunken chaplain, and he was a classic drunken Irishman. He was a major, he was a very old man, and he would scream at you if you weren't at mass. Mass was in a little tent, and it was very nice on Sunday, but if you worked in front of the perimeter almost every night, you wanted to sleep during the day. So, he caught me one day, and he goes, "I didn't see you at mass." I said, "I was on perimeter detail, padre," and he started to scream, "There are no Atheists in foxholes. The next time you're in a foxhole praying to the good Lord to save you, remember you didn't come and cherish him and worship him and praise him," and I said, "Yes, I'll praise him next week when I get a chance. … He had the red nose and the whole bit, and he was like a

laughable guy, and then they got rid of him over something, but yes, and there was a Rabbi up there too.

RS: Was there any contact between the soldiers and Vietnamese women?

PV: Tons of contact all the time, all the time, that's what America does when we go in, we take all the daughters and we pay them. That's what we do.

SH: How did you identify who the enemy was? Were you in that part of the world where it was impossible to tell?

PV: No, I wasn't in the city thing like that, only when I'd go into new Pleiku, you'd have to be careful. When we went into the bush, we knew what was what. … Way in the rear with the gear is a little harder for guys in Pleiku and stuff like that, because [they'd] walk up to them, and go, "Hi, how are you?" and take a grenade and just drop it down and run. So, in a way, it's harder duty. It's kind of scary all the time, if I'm out here, I know what's what.

SH: How hard was it to know that you only had a few weeks left? How did you count it down?

PV: Short-timers.

SH: Short-timers, I know the term.

PV: Short-time. There are all kinds of things.

SH: When does that start?

PV: Well, it can start whenever your psyche tells you to make it start. I knew guys that were over there for thirty days, and they'd go, "Get out of my face, I'm short," and then the answer to that would be, "You're about as short as Wilt Chamberlain [the basketball player], that's how short you are." "No, I'm short." Then, guys would be, both in Germany and in Vietnam, I loved this, when they got really short, and they have a bunk, guys would be creative, they'd have a ladder. … The ladder would be like here, paper-mache ladder. … I'd go, "What's that for?" "I'm so short I need a ladder to get in my bed." [laughter] There's all kinds of creative shit you do. … When you're in a situation like that, that's when you really got to stretch for humor, but that's how. It depends on your psyche. I never tried to do that until the last thirty days, that's when I became aware that I can make this or not, because if you think about that before hand, it can hurt you. … There's guys at the Vietnam museum, I just heard the other day, everybody gives a different spiel at the museum depending on who's running the inside, and the guy said, "One of the reasons I think I'm alive, is because I wasn't married and didn't have a girlfriend and I just concentrated on my job." … "It's very interesting, I never heard it put that way." I said, "Yes, when you think about it, guys who are married and who have to worry about a wife and worry about bills, and then there's these senior guys, the lifers, the career soldiers, they had other problems, they had teenage children. … You've got that in your mind and you're leading people in combat, that's a lot." I mean, it's a lot we put on people in Afghanistan and in Iraq, it's a lot on

these people, some of them, not even twenty. I remember my sergeant major came to me one time, he said to me, "I need you to do me a favor," and I said, "Sure, Top, what can I do?" He said, "I need to write a letter to my daughter, it's her birthday." I said, "Well, yes." That's what I do, bullshit is my business, because I had written that thing about World War III, and everybody knew me. … He said, "Come into my tent afterwards, … I got a bottle of scotch." I went into the tent, and he said, "My daughter," and he proceeded to cry. This is a guy from World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and a second tour in Vietnam, sergeant major, as high as you go. He said, "I left her and her mother, but, you know, I had to make money, and … she's on drugs now, she doesn't come home and I never got a chance to tell her I love her, and what I think how smart she is and how pretty she is. Here's a picture." He showed me a picture, and she was a pretty girl. I said, "All right, well we'll send her a birthday card," he said, "and we'll put some money in it," and he said, "What do you think I should tell her?" I said "Well, what do you want to say?" … He said, "I just want to tell her I love her and I hope that she's straightens out, … and I'm sorry I wasn't there for her." So, I just wrote, "I haven't had a chance to tell you how much I love you because I've been in Normandy and Vietnam, but I do, and I have faith that you'll do the right thing in your life because you're a good person, and because you're my daughter, and when I get back, I'm going to give you the biggest hug … you've ever had. So be ready, sergeant major is going to hug you to death. With all of my love." … He just sat there, and he said, "That's it, that's what I want to write." … I said, "That's enough." … I gave it to him, and he wrote it in his hand. She was sixteen years old, she was in deep shit according to him, taking drugs all the time and stuff like that, but that was when drugs were really bad in American schools, and I never knew how it worked out. He was always friends with me after that. Of course, he got a letter from his wife, his wife said that his daughter was crying when she got it, and she was crying, and all that stuff, and I said, "Well, you know, it's a tough time for everybody man, that's what the war is." There's a kid who doesn't have a father, you know, she doesn't have anybody home, the mother doesn't have anybody home, and she's got to work, and in those days those people didn't make money, today a sergeant major makes a heck of a salary. … War is a hardship on everybody.

SH: What did you do as a short-timer, what was your routine? What did you do to get through the last thirty days?

PV: Oh, I just didn't think about it. I put it out of my head until the last four days, and the first sergeant called me up, he said, "I got bad news," he goes, "there's nobody else here." I said, "What's the matter?" He goes, "We have to run a relay for [someone] who got hit," and I said, "Oh shit, … today is the day," and he goes, "Stop being so fucking dramatic," just like this. "This is just a relay," and just like that, he snapped me out of it. … That was the only time I was really [scared], I was petrified many times, especially when you're alone, or you're with four or five guys and at night, you know, you were always petrified but this time I thought it was [it]. It was four days left to go, and it worked out, because I'm here boring you guys. … That was one, I was like oh shit, because I didn't even do my laundry run the last week, I didn't even want to go in, I just wanted to get [out], because you left the mountain in a plane, or a chopper to go to New Pleiku. … So, you're pretty safe, unless they shot them, and they never did that because it was, you know, it wasn't crazy air space. You do hear stories of people who got it in the end, that's just the worst, can't explain it.

SH: What about "Dear John" letters?

PV: All the time. Yes, you wind up hating women because of that, and you hear a lot of military people are women haters, and it's true. Young men at that age, anyway, because … we didn't have respect for women. We went to Australia, and this [is] a beautiful country. All we did was look for people that we could have sex with. … We went to Taiwan, we bought women, because in Taiwan that's what you did. I didn't realize till later on, you're contributing to a slave trade. I mean can you imagine that? We never even considered that. We just said, "How much is this girl?" "She's very nice, 25-50 dollars." You say, "Okay, come here, come on," and then give her a fifty dollar tip, and she would say to you, "Thank you so much," and give you a hug and kiss, because we've acclimated her too, the Americans are here. You're a whore now! The woman hugged me and kissed me, in fact, you know, [she] even took my address. I mean, she was like seventeen years old, slave trade. I mean, she was not a woman who lived in a penthouse. … I mean this was a woman whose father probably couldn't feed her, gave her to this guy in Taiwan, and the guy sells her to us. Sold her to me, which was a good deal because I wanted to go gambling, do stuff like that, so we had a good time, we got drunk, and I said to her, "Why don't you go visit your family? Maybe, I'll see you tomorrow," I gave her another hundred dollars, which she thought was like [great]. They would live for a year. She was really a pretty girl, long, long hair. I said, "Will you get in trouble?" She said, "No, I won't get in trouble because the mamasan will think I'm with you." … I said, "If you want to come back at the end, I'm going to leave the day after tomorrow." … You bought people. … So there was that going on, and then you get a Dear John [letter], and you can't blame the women, you know. They're here with college people at Rutgers University, and they're with guys who have long hair and they're nice and they hate the war and why should you write your boyfriend a letter in the Laotian border, you know, when you got a guy and wants to take you to dinner.

SH: How does that affect morale?

PV: Very bad, very hard, on younger guys.

SH: Well, you are not exactly old at this point.

PV: No, not at all, luckily. … I consider that luck because your feelings aren't where they should be. So, the worst is for the older guys whose wives sent them the Dear John letter, that's the worst. … You're twenty two years old, some girl writes you a letter whose twenty years old because she's, you know, met a basketball player from Rutgers--who gives a shit? By the time you're twenty-four, you're not going to remember her, she's not going to remember the basketball player, and it's, you know, for now it's heart breaking, and maybe even you're engaged or in those days going steady. … Older men got Dear John letters who were married for many years. That's very hard, and that does affect morale. … You get over that by bad mouthing women, and that's how you become woman haters and all of that stuff. … That's what we did, we bad mouthed women. It was a different time, a completely different time.

SH: Was listening to music an important activity on the base?

PV: It was very important, and we wrote to Barry Gordy, Motown CEO. He's the worst person in the world. You see the movies, and all that stuff but, of course, he's a lawyer and a mogul. … When we wrote to him, we wrote to him and we said, "Listen, we are not hearing any good sounds … and we were wondering if you'd send something over to us because we bought your records and the brothers have nothing to dance to, and the blue-eyed brothers (meaning the white guys) the same thing," and you know what? In less than three weeks, a big box arrived, I mean two big boxes arrived with a letter from Barry Gordy to my buddy who wrote it, okay, and a big publicity thing of Diana Ross and the Supremes, and all of the groups, and then probably about forty albums; Temptations, the Four Tops, the Supremes, Little Stevie Wonder. He sent us the thing, he said, "Stay well, be careful, and know that we support you. Yours truly, Barry Gordy."

SH: You played the vinyl albums?

PV: Yes, we played vinyl albums. There was no television up by us, but there was Armed Forces Radio, came on late at night, and that was spectacular because there was wonderful interviews and stuff, not a lot of the guys [would listen], they were bored with it. … I would listen to interviews on … the *Jack Benny* [*Program*] and people like that because vaudeville was still alive, remember it's the '60s, and it was just great. Armed Forces Radio was just before it was going into, like if you watch *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), it was the tail end of that era. … We played the vinyl records and we would blast Steppenwolf stuff when we'd come in to intimidate, and it was very intimidating. We caught a prisoner one time and he said, "We really, always heard you were crazy, and we heard you were drug-addicted maniacs. We didn't realize it till you came in the village." … We came in the village with three choppers blasting Steppenwolf with big speakers. I don't know where the hell we got the speakers, on the chopper, just like *Apocalypse Now*. … You'd be surprised, it had a disconcerting effect on the enemy. They were tough guys too, the NVA were tough guys. Remember, they'd been at war, they beat the French in 1954, so a lot of these guys were fighting for almost fifteen, eighteen years, since they're fifteen years old. You didn't intimidate these guys, but they thought we were nuts, and we were a little nuts.

RS: You got the Purple Heart. What was that for, if you do not mind me asking.

PV: … I don't mind you asking, I love to tell the story, because it's not a great John Wayne story. I had to guide a whole bunch of new people one night at a base camp. The first sergeant said, "Put these people in a hootch and watch them." … I said, "Okay," and I said, "Do they have gas masks?" … He said, "Only half of them have gas masks" I said, "Great," because we got hit a lot with the gas rockets. So, I bring them in the hooch and sure enough, we get hit. It's incoming, okay, and now I have everybody quiet, and I took them, one at a time, I took my gas mask, and I said, "Just run to the bunker right outside, that's all you have to do," but there was no bunker directly outside. … The bunker was only about twenty yards, but when you're getting hit, it's like twenty million yards. … I said, "One at a time," … and then they all went out, I got everybody out, and I put my gas mask [on], and as I come in, I hear a click over me. You usually hear it just before it's about to go off, a rocket will go "pop," you'll hear it. … I can't do justice to it, it's like an airplane jet. As I ran, I went, "Oh, my God," so I jumped in a water

barrel, because we had water barrels all around, which is what we bathe in, and we drank. There was nothing like rain water, and so there's barrels all around, and I jumped in a barrel, … but my foot was out and I got some fragments. It was such a severe wound, that I didn't even know I had it. [laughter] … You can't even feel it. … You know how they took it out? They took it out with tweezers. Later on, I was in the NCO club, and my foot was burning, there was all blood, and here it is right here. … They took it out with little tweezers, and so I didn't think anything of it. It's not the greatest John Wayne story, but it puts me as a "Category 3," now, so I get all my stuff free. … I'm with the Veterans' Administration, because I lost my insurance, when I left my last theater.

SH: Talk about returning to the United States.

PV: Coming home was fine. I didn't have the trauma a lot of people had, because I had this great family support system, great neighbors, and when I say great, I mean great.

SH: Where did you fly from?

PV: I flew from Vietnam to the Philippines, and in the Philippines I had fun. Then, I flew from the Philippines to Washington where they separated the people who were getting discharged out of the Army, and those who were going to stay in the Army. I was going to stay in the Army another two or three months. So, from Washington, I flew into, I believe Chicago, and then Newark. … When I got into Newark it was late at night, … there were no cell phones then. My mother and father knew I was coming home that night, and so I got in, and I went to the baggage which is now another terminal in Newark, because I had been in that terminal my whole life because my family, as I told you, moved to Florida and we visited a lot. So, I really knew Newark, and I went up to the baggage terminal, and I waited for about an hour. … The only mean thing that happened to me, nobody warned me that that was not the main terminal. … A black guy came up, a porter, I was all alone, and he said to me, he said, "Son, you just come in?" I said, "Yes." … He said, "It's up there now." I said, "Oh, thank you." I went into the terminal and got my bag an hour late, and I went right to the front of Newark Airport, and I saw a taxicab and I called him over, and I said, "How much for Paramus, New Jersey?" and he said, "Seventeen dollars," or whatever it was. I said, "Too much," and he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to wait to get the [bus]." … I was always a haggler, and I thought I was back in Vietnam haggling with "papasan." So I said, "Too much," and he grabbed me. He said, "It's not too much, it's a good price," he said, "and it's not seventeen, it's usually twenty-five." … In those days, that's a lot of money, and so I said, "All right." I liked the guy, and that was it. I came home on the eighteenth of May, 1968, and I remember when I go to my block, it was like, "Oh my God," and I drove into my driveway, and … my mother's best friend was there. … My brother was only ten at the time, and he came running down the steps, and he jumped in my arms, and he said, "Hi, Pat," and I held him and hugged him, and I gave him the things that I brought back. I brought him a knife. … I was just using it the other day, I was cleaning out the basement, I bought one of those swords, and all the stupid things that you buy when you go to a war, and that was my homecoming. It was just fabulous, because I was lucky to have people that understood, that had been in a war, unlike other people, who didn't have that support system, didn't have people sending them salamis and stuff like that. I mean, I was really lucky. People

were not disrespectful to me either, because I wouldn't put up with it, but then I never talked about Vietnam ever. So, I never had that experience that so many [had]. All the vets down there at the museum have a bad story. I'm the only one that doesn't have a bad story, really bad.

SH: When you came back to the United States, you were still in the military for two months. Where did you go?

PV: I go to Fort Dix. … I landed at Fort Dix, and I worked nights doing records at night, first time I ever worked at night. I'm living in a whole barracks by myself, in the room in the end where the NCOs stay, but there's nobody else in there, and I get this kid who was married, and I say to him, "Will you work for me on Thursday night?" … I forgot what I gave him, like twenty dollars, he said, "Absolutely." So, he worked for me on Thursday. I had Friday and Saturday off. … He worked for me on Friday night, so I worked Monday to Thursday night, and I would come home, because it was only an hour and half back to where I live, and I did that for a while. … Then I come back one day, and they said, "The first sergeant wants to see you," and I said, "That's never good." He said, "They need people out on the firing range." So, I said, "Oh shit." I didn't want to do that, first of all, the gunfire, and all that shit, and the grenades, and they were all new guys, because there's a build up for Vietnam. … I was supposed to be out in October, but I had a friend write me a letter, saying that they needed me for summer stock to produce--it was legitimate, but not really--but you could get an easy "early out" then. They wanted to get rid of us. So, in that capacity, I went out there, and … I helped run the rifle range. I ran the hand grenade range and all that. … I thought this is how I'm going to get it at the end, after being through all this shit, some kid is going to walk in shaking. There's this one kid come walking in … my very first day there, and I said to him, it was just the two of us in the bunker, I said, "Are you afraid to throw this thing?" He said "Yes." I said, "Just stay right here. … Did you join the Army?" "Yes, I joined the army." He goes, "I was a tailor, I'm going to be in the quartermaster corps." I said, "Okay, quartermaster, just step back here," and I pull the pin for him, and I throw the thing, and I go, "Grenade!" I said, "Okay, go ahead, out of here." I wasn't going to let this kid throw a grenade when I'm alone with him in this bunker. … So, like every fifth kid, I just ask him, "Are you afraid to throw this thing?" … Then, I got caught, and I owned up to it. So, they put me somewhere else, remember I'm an E5 now … so they can't really mess with me that much, and then there's my ego and mouth to go with it. So, what we did then was we protected a man whom we idolized. He had a DSC [Distinguished Service Cross], he was a master sergeant, but he was a very bad dunk, had been through four wars, that poor man, he'd done two in WWII, Korea and two Vietnams. But he was a bad drunk, and he wouldn't make it till eleven o'clock. So, we covered for him … because … the Army wanted to throw him out after twenty-eight years, twenty-nine years. He had to stay in another whatever it was. So, we lied for him, because he was in charge of all of us. When the drill sergeants would bring the troops up, you know, and every once in a while there'd be a lieutenant come up and say, "Where is (Mathis?)" … I said, "He went with the sergeant major somewhere, I don't know where." So, we protected him. Then, I got the letter, and I got out in July, three months early, they were happy to get rid of us, because they didn't know what to do with us. We weren't going to take orders, we weren't going to be disciplined, we didn't give a shit. … They didn't want us with the new guys. We weren't trainable, so the only thing they wanted from us is to stay in the Army and kill some more people for them or go home. We served no other purpose for them … except maybe

training, and I thought I did a really good job on that, I enjoyed doing that, I enjoyed helping people fire a weapon correctly and all that stuff. I wasn't going to give, you know, a guy's going to be sewing field jackets, a hand grenade when he's shaking like this, what are you crazy? I didn't lose any sleep over that. The only time he's going to see a hand grenade is when it has to be counted in a box. Why does he have to throw a hand grenade? … [laughter] That's what happened when I came back and then I went home.

SH: Then you have this wonderful career in show business, doing what you loved.

PV: I was lucky for a long time, yes. Actor, then director, producer, promoter, ran the State Theater outside of Pittsburgh, ran Lycian Centre, up here in Sugar Loaf, and the Gretna Theatre. Today, I don't know whether I'm unemployed or retired. … My mother's very sick, … and I got sick about six months ago, so I really, I'm a kind of freelance, but if you need like Bill Cosby to play the Rutgers theater thing over here, people will call. … I'm the kind of guy you would call, and "I'll book him for you." There are things I want to produce, but right now my plate is kind of filled.

SH: How did you become involved with the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans Museum and Learning Center?

PV: I saw an ad in the paper. They said they needed guys, and I had taught at the New School. I had been a guest in a lot of different colleges, and I always thought if I had my way, I would like to build a syllabus, a nice course, because it hasn't been taught correctly from say, even the 20th Century. … I think if you can get in there, 1900 and just do a hundred years, you can put it together, and then go from there, you can really understand Vietnam, colonialism, and all the other stuff, but every time I would get close to doing it, … I didn't have the academic credentials. … So, then I finished, and I got my master's degree from Pacific Western University, because they took all of my credits, and it was tons from different colleges and all of my experiences, and they gave me many credits, and I went right to qualifying paper and thesis and all that stuff, and my thesis has been quoted in writing three or four times. It's on the educational and industrial message.

SH: Where did you get your BA from?

PV: Pacific Western also. I almost got it from St. Peter's College, but my career intruded.

RS: Did you use the GI Bill?

PV: Yes, I did. I went on the GI Bill, which was kind of helpful. I went to the St. Peter's College and American Academy of Dramatic Arts on the GI Bill. I could have used it later on, I had some months left, but … I was forty years old when I got my master's degree, I could have used the GI Bill, and should have, but I was not one to avail myself of that, and I should have, believe me. I tell you, like the VA hospitalization now, which is saving my life, because [it's] very expensive to have the procedures that I've had done, never availed myself--didn't listen to my father.

SH: Are you teaching as well as leading tours?

PV: It's the same job as we structure it at the Learning Center. I'm a guide, a tour guide, and I do whatever they ask for me to do. What we do is we bring people into the theater, and there's a film on a loop, people talking like me. Then we shut that, and we talk to the kids and we tell them what's available. The room is in the a circle, and it starts with Vietnam in the 1300s. … That's why I said Vietnam era, because you see what's going on, on top. You'll see Jimmy Hendrix, and when you get to the '60s, and you'll see the Beatles, and underneath it will show you what's going on in Vietnam, and there's little kiosks there. That's on the wall around us. Around the theater, which is in glass, which is pretty much like this, and it's all encased, and there's all letters and medals and personal things. You'll see telegrams saying that "your wife just gave birth to a son, and his name is Joe," … and the second telegram is how happy he is and he can't wait to get home, and the third telegram is, "we're sorry to tell you, your son [is gone]." … I think it's too much for the kids, but nobody asks me, because we have seventh graders that come.

SH: Is that the usual age group?

PV: No, we do seventh grade to college but there's some seventh and eight graders and it's a lot for them. … I also don't tell war stories like a lot of the guys, because if they're too young I don't think they need that, they get enough of that on television, they shouldn't get that from us. So, I tell the kind of story that I tell here, make everybody laugh. I always find if you get people laughing, then … that's when you grab them. As a director, I always did that, and in my class, so I don't tell them any war stories. I have a friend who comes in, talks about the ROK [Republic of Korea] marines, and how they cut people's throats, and all that stuff. "I was a medic," this one guy said, "and I was giving an IV to a person and the ROK marine, … (they were really the most deadly guys I ever saw) said, "Let me help you with that, and he cut the guy's throat," and I'm like, "I don't know that seventh graders need to hear that," you know, and then he cut his ear off and he wore his ear. … I myself being Italian, who was more prone to gold, and jewelry like that. [laughter] … That's what I do there. What I would like to do, I don't do yet, which is to teach a course for the teachers in the summertime, which we did, but we need to get all the teachers in [on] this. Some schools are very aggressive, Short Hills, I guess Carl told you, I mean Short Hills will bring probably a thousand kids in one week from the junior high school right through. That's because their superintendent is a veteran or something. He says, "These kids need to go there … to the museum."

SH: Was the Vietnam Memorial the first veterans group that you got involved with?

PV: Well, I was also a member of the Vietnam Veterans Ensemble Theatre. We brought *Tracers* to the stage and co-produced *Dear America, Letters from Vietnam* for HBO.

SH: You get out of the Army in 1968, but the war continues on.

PV: The war continues on, I have to listen to BS about it. I have to listen to people who don't know what they're talking about, pontificate. I had to listen to people's opinions for six or seven years, and for the most part I didn't say much.

SH: Do you tell people that you are a veteran?

PV: At that time? Yes, I did. On the occasion people would get too windy, I would say, "You know what, when I was [there], … it was a little different. What is your experience with that? Oh right, you read the *New York Times* last week." Which is, you know, a pleasant way of saying, "You need to shut up now, because you don't know." Not that you shouldn't have an opinion, if we'd have listened to a lot of people's opinions, you save maybe, not fifty thousand lives, but you'd have saved thirty thousand lives. … It was a hard period, and I would tell people. … My opinion is always like in theater, a little bit out of the box. I would always talk history, "The French wanted it." Well, Ho Chi Minh is no different than you or I, if you were coming, if you landed in Paramus, and you wanted to rape my sister and mother, take your house, how'd you react? Not good. Well, that's what we are, and that's what we do. We fly in, we jump in, we screw all those girls. Okay, that's somebody's daughter you're fucking I always tell them, okay, or that maybe you bought. How would you feel if people, especially people of a different color, different size [did that]. … Imagine, if it's all Swedish blond-haired … Germanic people were in the streets now. … You don't like that, it's very scary. … I always explained it that way, and I always said, "Only, Ho Chi Minh knows in his heart if he was a nationalist or a communist, and when you're ready to talk to me about the differences in, you know, Stalinism and all that," I said, "then we can have a conversation, but if you don't want to do that, then, you know, shut up." … So, a friend of mine once said to me, "Pat," he says, "You've changed more minds in two minutes about Vietnam than anybody I know, … because sometimes it's that simple. … We have to own up to who we were, and what we do, and what we did. They did the great documentary on Cuba which said, "They're tired of being America's whorehouse." That's what Cuba was under Batista. It was just America's whorehouse, and you went from Miami and you could be there in an hour and you gambled and you had women, and … there was no industry there, except for the sugar canes, and pretty looking women, who didn't want to chop canes all day, and then the revolutionaries came, and they said to Meyer Lansky, "We're taking this hotel." Castro said, "We're taking this hotel, go home." … The guys that were not lucky, Castro shot them, he hated the Mafia … because they were the ones that ran Cuba for the corporations. You know, Castro was a lawyer, graduated at the top of his class, he may be a killer and a bad guy, but stupid he wasn't, and Cuban he was. He understood Cuba, you know, you have to read *Companero* to really get it. …

SH: Are there any stories that you have not told that you would like to put on record before we close?

PV: No, I think I've covered everything. There's a million stories, but they're all, you know, equally as boring as all of these. … I'll type you if I can think of anything. I think we got good stuff, a lot of personal stuff on me. It's too bad I'm not famous, boy. If somebody's doing a biography on me, they could come here. [laughter]

SH: Well thank you very much for coming in.

PV: It is my pleasure to come, as command sergeant major would say, "We'll bore the bleeding out of those college types." … Isn't that a great goodbye? I never saw him again. It was like he was telling me I was a good soldier but he was saying this call to arms is not a trade for a guy like me." … It was like he was saying okay you've done this, now you've got to go do something with your life, and not kill any more people, and I always remembered that. [laughter] No, you come back and visit me. It's off to school with you lad. He always called me lad and I guess he understood, … America's army is different. … George Washington had the philosophy: the army of Cincinnatus, you know, you take your sword, and you give the sword back to the country when you're done with it. You say I have fought for this freedom that we enjoy, and now I give it back to you, and I go back to the land for which I fought, so we've always had … "citizen-soldiers" (great book too by the way).

SH: I think that is a perfect place to end then.

PV: Yes, that was me, "Citizen" Pat Julian Vellucci.

RS: Thank you.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Jonathan Conlin 12/1/11
Reviewed by Nicholas Molnar 12/15/11
Reviewed by Patrick Julian Vellucci 2/13/12