

Alex Lockett: 5/28/01 Interview conducted regarding the Vietnam War, interviewed parties were Donald Leslie and Helen Leslie...

AL: What was your first reaction when you found out about the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War?

Helen Leslie: Well I thought that since the government decided to do it I didn't argue about it, I thought it was okay.

Donald Leslie: I thought it was a terrible situation because we sent people there as advisors and all of the sudden we were involved. Somebody somewhere up in the higher parts of the government made a BAD mistake. That was my opinion.

AL: Okay...How did life change from before the war to during the war.

HL: I didn't notice life changing very much for us per se because I was a house wife and I was home with two small children so I didn't notice it that much. But I would hear on TV and on the news what was happening and it wasn't good.

AL: So you just didn't think it was a good idea?

HL: No, I thought that if the country, the United States government decided we needed to be there and we needed to be involved, then we did and the dissidents shouldn't have complained. They shouldn't have become so radical. There were riots and burnings of the flag and running to Canada and it was hard for me to fathom that the American people would react this way.

AL: So you thought that if the government decided we should be there, then you would support it?

HL: Exactly. If we were going to be over there and if our government thought we should be over there, then we should support their decision and support our country, and honor our flag for it.

DL: Well, I really didn't understand what the war was about except that there was communism, and it just didn't make sense to me that people reacted the way they did. They became quite fanatical. Certain groups became very fanatical and at that time there was hardly any patriotism, nobody wanted to go. I wouldn't have wanted to go either, however if the government has stuck their foot in it, then you just about have to do something. It really had no direct affect on my family and myself.

AL: Do you recall anything about the public opinion of the war? You said you saw those things on the news and...

HL: Just what we saw on the news. Every night they had something at the height of it, there were rebellions and riots in the United States and at the Democratic convention in Chicago...

DL: That was very disruptive...

HL: We were very disrupted by it. There were flag burnings and the Kent State Riots, and the National Guard going in and shooting the students. Which was wrong, but the students shouldn't have been in such an uproar. I mean, where was their patriotism? That was my thought. Even though maybe we shouldn't have been there, it was still happening to us and we needed to defend it and the government's decision.

AL: So there was a lot of anti-war sentiment?

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HL: Oh very much. [There was a lot of anti-war sentiment, the veterans... I didn't know anybody personally, but they would go on their tours and they would come home and people would treat them terribly. They didn't want anything to do with the veterans. That is why I think so many of them became street people. Like, when they first got home and I mean they were into drugs, which were plentiful over in Vietnam for them to get. They went into that because the reaction of the public to them was so bad against them over here when they first got home, they didn't run off.]

DL: There was no support base for the veterans when they came home, and if they wore their uniforms in public, then they were really ostracized. They were really made fun of. It was a terrible situation and a terrible time for our country to, because part of the population was so against this and another part was blasé about it and another part was- well, were there, let's do this and get it over with. But the part that was let's do this and get it over with, lost out.

AL: So at the beginning it was thought to be a good idea and then it quickly changed to a very anti-war prospective.

DL: Yes.

AL: Did you notice anything economically that changed in Hillsboro, or was it not really focused on?

HL: I don't remember anything like that.

DL: I don't recall any change in the economy during that time.

HL: It could have been, but I didn't notice it.

AL: Were there anti-war/ pro-war demonstrations, and how did they affect you?

HL: In Hillsboro?

AL: Yes.

DL: There have been a few small ones but we were never affected by them.

HL: Yeah

AL: Okay, so you said before that the Veterans were treated very badly when they came home, so when people found out that others they knew were going into the war, were they treated very horribly or did the people react to that at all?

DL: Well, they were treated like, why are you doing something so ridiculous as going to war, why don't you go, leave the country, get away from the draft boards. There were a lot of men who had male offspring, who took their offspring to Canada simply so they wouldn't have to participate in the Vietnam War. I didn't personally know any but I have read articles on them.

AL: Okay, did you know if there was any community activities like blood drives for the soldiers in Vietnam?

HL: There has always been the Red Cross blood drives.

DL: But I don't recall any specifically marked for Vietnam veterans, there may have been but I don't recall any.

HL: I do remember that when we pulled out of Vietnam there were television pieces that came on during the day with photos or newscasts that showed them pulling out, and it was chaotic and hectic, of those, you can see those even today when they show things on Vietnam.

AL: What do you remember about the draft in Hillsboro or surrounding areas?

HL: The draft.

DL: If you were actively enrolled in college you could get a deferment, and you would be amazed at how many people became actively enrolled in college immediately. But the draft was just like it always was, it was like a lottery.

When I was in the service I received my draft notice when I was in Florida. I received a notice that I should report to the draft board and my commanding officer wrote to them and told them that I was already in the military. So the draft really didn't change much.

AL: Did you know any people personally who openly resisted the draft?

DL: No

AL: To what extent did people enlist voluntarily? Was there a lot of early enlistment (you said there was a lot of pro-war sentiment in the beginning).

HL: I don't think so...

DL: We never did have the patriotism that we had in previous wars.

HL: Yeah, we were your age and a little older during the Korean conflict and that is when people... that is why it is so hard for me to believe how the people reacted to Vietnam conflict.

DL: But the Korean conflict was really right on the heels of WWII, and so consequently people still had some patriotism left because they remembered some of the things that happened during WWII.

AL: So they were kind of used to what was going on and when the Korean War came around it was just another war they would be patriotic about and pay attention to, but when Vietnam came around it wasn't really patriotic because it wasn't on the end of another war?

DL: Not nearly as patriotic.

AL: So is there anything else that I haven't asked you that you would like to relate to me?

HL: About Vietnam?

DL: Well, I don't understand why they became so deeply involved in the Vietnam war, just kept sending more and more materials and people over there.

HL: Then they pulled out like they did.

DL: They were run out.

HL: Well, I mean they had to pull out like they did; they never had intuition to do it.

DL: I don't have anything else to say.

AL: Okay thank you.