

Paul and Anthony LaFalce Oral history Interview

August 5th, 2013

Interviewed by Aaron Pylinski

- Aaron: Let's start back from the beginning, though.
- Paul: Yeah, let's start from the beginning, dad.
- Antho: I came back around that time...discharged.
- Paul: You got discharged after the war, in 1945; we'll get there.
- Aaron: This is going to be a great interview.
- All: [laughs]
- Aaron: First of all, gentlemen, both of you, thank you so much for coming in here to the library. It's an honor just to be sitting in the room with you gentleman. As a veteran, it means a lot. It means a lot to this library too. Thank you for your service and thank you for coming.
- Paul: Thank you for your service too.
- Aaron: We are all on the same team.
- Paul: We appreciate all of our veterans.
- Aaron: It's something that I totally, completely, appreciate from the Vietnam vets especially. More than anything because I think they understand what it's like to come home and need those brothers to helping you out.
- Paul: That's right. We need to help each other out because we understand what's going on inside of our minds
- Aaron: Every day, every day.

Paul: Listen and try to definitely understand. And feel what you've gone through. And you don't get that from people who haven't been through the experience. They couldn't understand it. There is no way that they wouldn't understand the traumas and the tragedies and the brotherhood bonds that are created.

Aaron: And it is just a whole different dimension. With living and dealing with war.

Anthony: Yeah, it is a bad dimension. But...

Aaron: It's there!

Alright, I am Aaron Pylinski. And I am here with Anthony and Paul LaFalce. We are doing stories of service for the Pritzker Military Library's oral history program. So gentlemen, again, thank you for coming in. So, I'll start with you, I think with rank has its privileges. Give us your name, and tell us when and where you were born.

Anthony: Born May 16...1921. How many years ago? That's so far back I can't even remember...I'm 91, I'll be 92.

Aaron: Right around the corner. And where were you born, sir?

Paul: I am Paul LaFalce, Tony's son. I was born in Poughkeepsie, New York, as well. That is our hometown. Our grandparents—dad's mom and dad—they immigrated to Poughkeepsie from southern Italy in...grandpa came in 1903, and grandma came in 1906, right around there. So that's our family background. They had eleven children: 9 boys, 2 girls. Big family. I am the grandson. We had 4 in our family. But when I was growing up I had about 35 first cousins from his family. We were very close. We all knew each other. We played with each other quite a bit, went to school with each other. Visited at grandma's house a lot.

Anthony: Sundays after church, we'd congregate at mom's house.

Paul: Yeah, that's another thing, too. It's a wonderful upbringing that we had. The family was very devout Catholics. That moral foundation built a foundation for all of us, growing up. I'll

never forget that. I will always appreciate that in my life, and I know Dad does too.

But, getting back to you Dad, your story in 1921, you were born, growing up during the Depression, pretty soon after that, your family was poor. Grandpa was a laborer when he came over. He really couldn't, you know, fund the family very well as the children kept coming. Mostly your older brothers when they got to about 8th grade, they had to drop out of school and go to work. And dad's kids, you were 15, a sophomore in high school. You finished your 10th grade then you had to leave a go work at a coat factory and help out. And that's the way it was. All of the boys had to work and bring money home to mom and help, you know, help the family survive and grow together. There were hard times, but a lot of fun times.

Anthony: A lot of love in the family, I'll tell you that. We didn't argue, we didn't fight. We had differences of opinions about things but it was all done peacefully, you know.

Aaron: Did you guys ever have a chance to finish school? You had to come out of school to work during the Depression. Were you able to go back to school to get your degree or diploma?

Anthony: No...

Paul: Uncle John, the youngest one, went to college. He graduated from college; he was a teacher.

Anthony: I think I went up to...

Paul: 10th grade.

Anthony: 10th grade, that's about it.

Aaron: Right.

Paul: So by the time you were 15, you went to work at the coat factory. But you were also a musician. The whole family were musicians. Tenor sax and a clarinet player. He learned from his older brother, Pat, who made sure...

Aaron: Did you guys play a lot of music during the Depression? Did that help you along?

Anthony: Oh yeah.

Paul: Oh yeah, and they sang too. They sang in the church choir. They were all singers.

Anthony: We had an orchestra, a dance orchestra, for dance occasions like that. We were kind of looked after to do that, those jobs...

Paul: They were good.

Aaron: What was the name of the orchestra?

Paul: The LaFalce Brother's Orchestra.

Anthony: The LaFalce Brothers

Paul: LBO: The LaFalce Brother's Orchestra.

Aaron: Nice, very original, very original. So what brought your family over to the U.S. from Italy?

Paul: When grandpa came, his older brother Tony—who you are named after—had come already. He was here. And he was working as a laborer and he sponsored my grandfather to come. At that time, that part of Italy was very poor. There was a huge immigration of folks from the late 1800s to about 1920. That's when the Italians came. It was right in the middle of the Italians coming over. They came here seeking a life of, a better life.

Aaron: Opportunity. America.

Paul: Opportunity. America. Yeah, they heard about America. The streets were paved with gold! Go to America and make your way. Everyone is rich over there. Of course, it wasn't that way. Grandpa was paid \$4.50 a month as a laborer, building roads, mixing concrete. Hard labor. But that is the immigrant's story.

Aaron: Paid by the sweat of your brow.

Paul: You know he was a good man from a good family. Grandma and him raised a fantastic family.

Aaron: Were they musically inclined as well?

Paul: Grandma was, right? Who did you get the music from?

Anthony: From my mother.

Aaron: From your mother. Did she play...?

Anthony: No, she sang. She sung like a professional singers. She had the right timing. The right-- just came natural to her. And that's where we got it from.

Aaron: So there is no sense of classical training? It was just a natural thing.

Anthony: Yeah.

Aaron: Some people have it.

Anthony: Some people have it, exactly, yeah.

Aaron: So post-Depression, didn't finish high school, right? What led you up to your enlistment?

Paul: You were drafted in 1942, August of 1942, you went in. You were working in the coat factory during the day, and playing in the orchestra with your brothers at night. And they would play as many jobs a week that they could, and that would help bring in the money for the family. And he really, really knew music. His older brother saw that in him. When he was 14 years old, they decided to send him to school in New York City, which is about an hour and a half train ride from Poughkeepsie, every Saturday for 2 years. He went down to Manhattan. He studied under Otto Cesana who is a famous big band arranger and director at the time. He had his own big band. He taught. So Dad went on the train, 2 years, every Saturday. He learned arranging. That's writing the notes and knowing in your mind what each instrument part is, the harmony that they play, or the melody, and being able to write and that was with a calligraphy pen and drawing the notes. He is wonderful at that. He could still do it today. He can set down any tune. He could write out the music.

Aaron: That's impressive!

Paul: His brother saw that in him. And so you were 16, you were playing with your brothers and working in the coat factory. Until 1942 when the war was on and you got drafted. And...

Anthony: I don't remember...

Aaron: It happens. The years start to go. Sometimes you lose it. It's completely understandable. Did you...how did the family react when Pearl Harbor happened?

Anthony: Our kind of reaction...in those days that grandma and grandpa didn't get involved much.

Paul: No, they probably didn't even listen to the news that much. But your older brothers all knew that you had to go to war.

Anthony: Oh yeah!

Aaron: How did you guys find out about Pearl Harbor?

Anthony: On the news.

Paul: The newspaper or radio.

Anthony: Yeah, the newspapers.

Paul: I think in the movie theaters, too, back then, they used to have news reels. And they would show pictures from Pearl Harbor and you know, the fact that we were attacked.

Anthony: They had the news happen...in those days.

Aaron: So then, just under a year later, you got drafted. How did you find out about that?

Anthony: Somebody told us, I guess.

Paul: You got a letter right?

Aaron: Did you got a letter in the mail? A phone call? Or singing telegram?

Anthony: A letter.

Paul: We don't have a copy of it. They used to send telegrams back then, or letter you know. You got your notice because you had brothers already in the service too. Uncle Frank, was in the Navy. 6 of the 9 boys served in World War II.

Anthony: Three in the Navy, three in the Army.

Aaron: How many joined right after Pearl Harbor? Or were they drafted as well?

Paul: Well, Uncle Frank was in the Navy. He may have joined. He was working for the post office. When he got into the Navy, they kept him in that role. He was a postal [worker]. He stayed stateside the whole time. And Uncle Louis was older too. He was a barber, and he went into the Army and he became a barber in the Army. And he stayed stateside. Then Uncle...Uncle Joe?

Anthony: Uncle Joe didn't make it.

Paul: Uncle Pat? No. Uncle Jimmy? No. Then, you.

Anthony: I think Jim...

Paul: It was you and then Mike, Carmen, and Johnny. So that is 6 all-together. So you were the next to go after Uncle Frank and Uncle Louis. And you got drafted...

Aaron: You were drafted in August of '42. Where did you have to report for your draft?

Anthony: Right.

Paul: It was Fort Eustis.

Anthony: Fort Eustis, Virginia.

Paul: You went there for basic training. You were saying before, you didn't do a whole lot of basic training because of his musical ability, they put him in the special services.

Aaron: Right. That is what I was curious about, with the special service...how did they...did you volunteer for that? Did they already know you were a musician?

Anthony: No, I was a volunteer. They just came and told me.

Paul: Yeah, they must have known from when you enlisted, when you went through your induction that you were a musician.
Tell them what happened with the hernia.

Anthony: Well they drafted me when I had a...side-hernia. It had to be operated on. Before they took me, it should have been operated on. But they decided to take me and do the operation when I was in service. It saved mom and dad some money I think.

Aaron: Yeah, I would say so. Bet you paid for that one.

Anthony: They took everyone they could back then.

Aaron: I guess you had to! How long were you at Fort Eustis?

A: Oh God...

Paul: Well, not very long because they did the surgery on you down there. They did his hernia surgery down there and then...

And then they sent you back home to recuperate for a month. And then after that, you went back to Fort Eustis. And all the guys that you went in with were gone; they had shipped out already. And he comes back to Fort Eustis, and he is a musician, and he just had his hernia operated on. He is recovering but they still put him on a troop ship with a coastal artillery unit, and sent him to South Pacific. He is on this big troop ship and they had to go down through the Panama Canal to go to the South Pacific. Tell them what happened when you were coming up through the Canal.

Aaron: What was your military occupational specialty? Like what was your...were you an infantry man? Or did they give you a job as a...?

Anthony: I had no gun experience, shooting guns. So I had no experience in fighting. I was involved in special services, entertaining the troops something like that.

Paul: He is not really sure exactly what they told him when he left on this ship. But he was with...

Aaron: They just said, "Get on the ship. You are heading out."

Paul: Get on the ship, you are heading out. So maybe they were going to put you in the band when you got over there. But maybe you were gonna be on the gun, an artillery guy.

Anthony: Something happened to the ship, before it got through the Canal. So that the ship...

Paul: What happened to it?

Anthony: Well, it hit one of our own mines, so they said.

Paul: Five miles out from the Panama Canal. They told them that they hit one of our own mines. But, there were a lot of U-Boats around the area, by the Panama Canal, they don't really know exactly what happened. But the explosion was very close to the magazine. It could have sunk the ship. But, it didn't.

Aaron: Lucky.

Paul: Got lucky there. It disabled the ship when you had to be towed in.

Anthony: That's right.

Paul: And then what happened?

Anthony: They put me on a boat from the Atlantic side, to the Pacific side.

Paul: They put you on a train. They put everybody on a train, right?

Anthony: A train, right.

Paul: And went over to the Pacific side.

Anthony: There's hundreds of us behind me. And I was in the front row, on the very end, two guys came up that belonged to the post, looking at us and checking us out. And I said, 'Hey, do you have a band on this on this post, here?' And they said, 'Yeah, we are from the band. Why do you ask?' I play sax! 'You do? What kind of sax?' 'Tenor sax.' 'You play tenor sax?' Well, it just so happens they were looking for a guy like that.

Aaron: What are the odds?

Anthony: How about that.

Aaron: They must have known you were coming [laughs].

Anthony: I don't know how.

Paul: Well they were trying to form a dance band within the military band. They hadn't really progressed really far with that. And they needed that on the post—this was Fort Amador in Panama.

Aaron: This was in Panama?

Paul: Yeah, and they needed to get a dance band going because it entertains the guys, the troops, and it also plays for the officer's clubs and any [social] occasions.

Anthony: So I wind up...

Paul: Two weeks later...

Anthony: Two weeks later, in charge of the band.

Paul: They changed your orders, and they put you in the band in Panama. And then two *months* later, you became the leader of the band. But what did one of the sergeants, one of the older sergeants tell you...you didn't want to take the leader job.

Anthony: No, no.

Paul: Because you just got there.

Anthony: Yeah, there was a trumpet player that had been there for a long time. I said, "Why don't you let him be in charge? Why give it to me? He's been here a long time." And this guy was a southern guy. 'Corporal LaFalce I want you to be ta-da, ta-da, ta-da...I want you to be it.' 'Okay, okay.'

Paul: Now, we got pictures of him in Panama, playing in the band. I got them on a CD here. So, the pictures he brought home were in the closet for many, many, many years. When Dad came to live with us a few years ago, I took them out and scanned them, and put them in the computer. A lot of our cousins know. They are up on Facebook. They are there electronically and we can do whatever we want with them. But it is great, because you think of it, for two and a half years of World War II, he was a band leader in Fort Amador, Panama. We used to always...

Anthony: On my way to the South Pacific

Paul: On his way to the South Pacific.

Aaron: You got held up, right?

Paul: Yeah, what are the odds? Now, some people say you are lucky, but...what do you say?

Anthony: No. Grandma's prayers and Aunt Helen's prayers. And everybody else's prayers.

Paul: Well, it brought all 6 of you home too. All 6 of them that served in World War II, everybody survived and came home.

Aaron: That's incredible. That's really incredible.

Anthony: Three in the Navy, three in the Army.

Aaron: So you were stationed at Fort Amador? [...] How long were you there for?

Paul: Two and a half years until he got out. Until the end of the war.

Anthony: Yeah.

Aaron: So you stayed your whole enlistment there at Fort Amador.

Paul: From January of '43 to August of '45.

Aaron: What was your...what were some of your better experiences being there at Fort Amador. Do you remember...?

Anthony: Well, not having to go out and shoot and kill people.

Aaron: Did you carry a weapon?

Anthony: No. [Laughs]

Aaron: Your saxophone was your weapon.

Anthony: Yeah. [Laughs] I could kill it with my sax.

Paul: But Dad, tell them what you used to do during the daytime? When you had to load up in that duce and a half truck and drive out to the jungles in Panama. Panama was well-defended. We had a lot of artillery emplacements and guys were there on guard duty.

Anthony: We had to entertain.

Paul: They entertained the troops. That's what they did. During the day, a lot of the pictures they have, the guys are loading up the bass and the instruments onto a truck. And making their way out to one of these emplacements and setting up and doing a concert for the guys.

Aaron: Did you guys have your helmets and stuff with you? [...] Did you guys have your helmets or were you in battle uniform? Or were you dressed up nice?

Anthony: Regular khakis or...No helmets.

Paul: You will see in the pictures some of the pictures of them going out. In fact, a lot of the trips you were in the greens, in your fatigues. These little uhh, we'd call, "boonie caps." You would call them something else, one of those little floppy hats that you used to wear.

Aaron: We always used to call them "boonie caps." Yeah, because you are out in the boonies, wearing them. You were always in the woods when you were wearing them. So, got to go around and entertain these gun bunnies while they were in place. Did that for about two years.

Paul: Yeah, and they traveled. You went to Costa Rica. You went to Peru. You went to Galapagos Islands. We got pictures of those guys on Galapagos, entertaining. One picture we have where they are getting on one of these DC-3, one of the old military transports, and there was some actress and a couple of guys waiting at the door. And all of these guys are right on the tarmac, right next to the plane. So they were entertaining the troops, and you know, that was a big deal.

Aaron: Absolutely, morale is huge.

Paul: Morale was huge. And music, back then...every time he went on a Navy ship, or an Army Base, there is guys who got a guitar or somebody is playing an accordion or a clarinet and trying to pass the down time away and keep the spirits up of the guys. So it was an important job that they played.

Aaron: Agreed. Did you guys work with the USO (United Service Organization) at all?

Anthony: Yeah, occasionally they came by.

Aaron: Any famous people? [...] Did you meet any famous people? Bob Hope? I don't know. (laughs)

Paul: Not Bob Hope, but there were some...

Anthony: There was a lady. She was a singer or I can't even remember her name...Do you think you could remember her name?

Paul: I don't know who it was. But I know there was a lady in that picture by the airplane-- when you were going to Peru. On the back of the pictures you always wrote notes. We picked up a lot of information. And that one, you were in Peru or were going to Lima at the time to do a show. A USO show.

Aaron: So there were troops in Peru that you were going to entertain.

Paul: Must be; must have been.

Aaron: What was Peru like?

Anthony: I can't remember. [Laughs] Sorry.

Aaron: No, that's no problem. I'll ask and if you don't know, you don't know. [...] Yeah, what was Peru like? That you can remember.

Anthony: It was a clean place. People were nice, friendly.

Aaron: Good food?

Anthony: Yeah, I guess. I can't remember. I am 92-years-old, man! [Laughs].

Aaron: That's completely understandable.

Anthony: Give me a break!

Aaron: I just want to make sure that we get the best part of your story. That's my job and so far, everything's going just fine. There's no problem at all.

Paul: He really shook that band up for a time though.

Aaron: I was going to ask: I mean, they put you in a leadership position pretty quick. You must have been a fairly talented individual and a great leader.

Anthony: Compared to what was there...presently, I guess I was more advanced.

Paul: What was their talent level, the guys that were already there? The band? What was their talent level?

Anthony: They played good, they played well. They had their reading and everything.

Paul: They knew how to read.

Anthony: Not much making and creating on their own was going on.

Paul: Yeah, that's what he is good at.

Aaron: Improvising. Would you say that the band, when you left the band there, would you say that they were in better shape than when you got there?

Anthony: Yeah, yeah. I helped some, get them together more or less, you know, in some areas.

Paul: Musically.

Aaron: Did you guys have a lot of down time? [...] Did you have a lot of free time while you were in Panama? Like time to yourself?

Anthony: Oh I see! Go out on pass and all that.

Aaron: Yeah, did you go out on pass? [...] What was your free time like?

Anthony: Well, go out into town. Have a couple of drinks or something. And stay away from women and their diseases! [Laughs]

Aaron: Was there a lot of that going around?

Anthony: They told me, stay away if you wanted to be healthy. [Laughs]

Aaron: Gotta abstain as they say.

Paul: I used to ask him about that, if he fooled around, you know, with the girls, but no, not him. They had a very strict religious background. He was a good boy. In fact one of the pictures we got of him is on a Sunday at the Holy Name Society. And there were a lot of guys in the room and he was in there. And there were some Navy guys too that just happened to be there and went to church and went to the Holy Name Society. And he said he stayed away from the girls and fooling around down there.

Anthony: Oh yeah!

Paul: But, what about all of the things you did on the base? They had tennis courts, a golf course, archery! He's got picture of him with the guys!

Aaron: So you were doing archery and playing sports in your free time too? Doing archery and playing sports as well?

Anthony: Archery? I didn't do that.

Paul: Well, there is a picture of you!

Anthony: I think that was just for a picture.

Paul: But golf! There are several pictures of you with the guys playing golf. And...

Anthony: Yeah. Golf.

Paul: Tennis.

Anthony: Yeah. Tennis. Golf.

Aaron: I could imagine Panama is a pretty cool place to play golf. [...] Full of vegetation. What was the scenery like there?

Anthony: Oh, palm trees...

Paul: These guys took pictures of him in front of a big fanned palm. Must have been out by the barracks there because a lot of these pictures are there with his buddies, out there. He had a dog, right? [...]

Anthony: A little black and white mutt. Small and dark. We called him Piccolo.

Aaron: Piccolo! Okay. One of the small instruments. Small dog, right?

Paul: Dad is a dog lover. He is an animal lover. Even our dog at home right now. He's the closest one to the dog. The dog loves him. There is pictures of him holding little Piccolo in Panama.

Anthony: Piccolo! [laughs] I had one picture, I think it was in the car. He was looking out the window. And somebody wrote on it--

Paul: That's Brownie.

Anthony: "I am not the driver, I am just the pet", or something.

Paul: That was back in Poughkeepsie. The LaFalce Brothers Orchestra had a van that they traveled in. They drove the same van to every gig that they had. And there is a picture. They had a dog named Brownie, a mutt, you know. So here is Brownie, sitting in the driver's seat, looking out. And it said LaFalce Brothers Orchestra on the door. And Uncle John digitally changed it to like, "My name's Brownie. I am just the mascot. Not the driver." [laughs]

Aaron: So would say you had a pretty solid group of friends while you were in Panama?

Anthony: Yeah, yeah! You know...

Paul: You got along well.

Anthony: Got a long fine. No arguments. No fighting.

Paul: How about Pete? Tell him about Pete.

Pete, they stayed friends for many, many years. When I was kid, I remember him coming over to our house to visit. And then we would go from Poughkeepsie up there to visit. They were close friends. He was a clarinet player.

Anthony: He felt indebted to me somewhat. Because I got him into band. He was a sax player

Aaron: How did you get him into the band?

Anthony: Well, I just talked to the top kid in the band. There is a guy out there, he is a sax player. And he said, "Yeah, come in."

Aaron: Where was he at? Was he a regular soldier on the line?

Anthony: I have no idea where...

Paul: Was he on his way over to the Pacific too?

Anthony: He could have been. I forget these things.

Paul: Yeah. But I know he was always indebted to you. So he must have been in a different role.

Aaron: Yeah, I am assuming that he was en route to probably something a lot more dangerous than playing in a band in Panama.

Anthony: Right, right. Even if there was no fighting where he was gonna go, but still but I saved him probably.

Aaron: The situation would probably have been a lot more hairy.

Paul: Yeah. Yeah. When we put your information up on Facebook a couple of years ago. One of the pictures is of the whole band, in formation, all standing with their instruments. And Dad, at the time wrote all of the names of each guy, under the picture. So we have all of those names. So I posted it on Facebook. I said, "Hey, if anybody had a grandfather who served in Panama and was in a military band." So sure enough, Pete's son, Pete, lives in an area of Pennsylvania and he wrote me on Facebook. And he said, "I can't believe. I am sitting here crying right now looking at pictures of my dad and your dad. My dad speaks so highly of your dad when he was in the war and how much he thanked him for getting him into the band." And that was just a couple of years ago so that was nice.

Aaron: That's awesome.

Paul: I haven't heard from anybody else, any other families out there.

Aaron: The military does a good job at forging friendships. This is the band, huh?

Paul: That's him with his brothers in 1954 [looking at picture].

Aaron: Is this the LBO?

Paul: That's the 9 LaFalce Brothers singing group. They started recording in 1953, '54. They tried to make it gold as singers. As recording artists. They had a contract with RCA Victor. They recorded two singles. Front and back, sides. They were doing pretty well. They were also asked to appear on the Arthur Godfrey Show.

Arthur Godfrey had the talents scout show during the '50s. It was a very popular show, a national TV show. They appeared on there and we have an audio recording of that.

Uncle John kept it all these years. A friend of one of the brothers at home had just gotten one of those reel to reel tape recorders. It was a new thing back then and he taped it right off of his TV set. So we have the whole audio from the whole show. It was in pretty good shape. My uncle was able to clean it up with his equipment over the years and his software. To hear these guys on there... They sang "Old Man River." And they knocked it dead.

Dad wrote the voice arrangement. Of course, the studio orchestra fixed the orchestra arrangement that day before the show. And my Uncle Johnny had just graduated from Potsdam University. He was a voice major. He had a real operatic voice. He was singing professionally at that time with the Robert Shaw Chorale and traveling around the country so he was right, he was the perfect baritone for the lead in "Old Man River." And they just nailed it. And that is one thing that we would like to give you as well. The copy of the audio recording of the show. It is really...the commercials. Everything is done live.

Aaron: Everything is authentic.

Paul: Yeah. We tried to get a copy of the video but, we went to the CBS studios about in 1960, one of my cousins went down there. Asked a guy for it. And he said, "Yeah sure, what is it?" September 20th, 1954. So he goes back and pulls the can off the

shelf. And he opens it up and it's disintegrated. Because that old kinescope video tape, the first-- they lost so many TV shows. Unfortunately, it was lost. So we never got a video of it but, we've got a good audio recording. It's unbelievable. We play it for friends at home and they get a big kick out of it.

Can you get 'em Dad? [Shows pictures] We have all these pictures from his time in Panama.

Aaron: Yeah, these pictures are incredible! So two years in Panama, playing in the band?

Anthony: Yeah, two and a half years.

Aaron: And then you were just discharged?

Anthony: Yeah.

Aaron: In 1944, 1945?

Anthony: Whenever the war was over, they start dischargin'.

Paul: In September.

Anthony: I wanted to be discharged, to be back when my brothers and all that, so they gave me a discharge. The reason? Anxiety.

Paul: Yeah, at the time...there were so many guys getting out of the service. It took time if you weren't coming from Europe or the Pacific or from an infantry unit. They had top priority for discharge. A band in Panama, you had to wait a long time to get out!

But his top sergeant, your commanding officer, kind of rigged his paperwork and said he is suffering from anxiety, he's gotta go home now. So he got to leave in September or August of '45 because he wanted to get home to his brothers. And also they offered you to stay and make it a career.

Anthony: Yeah, they wanted to send me to West Point.

Paul: They wanted him to go to West Point.

Aaron: And play in the band.

Paul: Yeah, yeah. And make a career out of it.

Anthony: I said no thank you. [Laughs]

Aaron: Yeah, you'd be playing tenor sax in Korea probably.

Paul: You would have been traveling with the army band. I've seen them here in Chicago. They are great. They travel all over.

Aaron: You said thanks, but no thanks.

Anthony: Yeah.

Paul: Thanks, but no thanks. You had to get back to your brothers and the LaFalce Brothers Orchestra and your family.

Aaron: So you went back to Poughkeepsie?

Anthony: Mmm-hmm.

Aaron: How did you get back from Panama?

Anthony: Train.

Paul: You took a ship. Remember you took a ship to New Orleans? They dropped you off in New Orleans and then from there you took the train.

Anthony: Took the train from there.

Paul: Back up to New York.

Aaron: Okay. What was homecoming like?

Anthony: What was homecoming like? Oh it was beautiful. [Laughs] Those are the only words I can use.

Aaron: Happy to be home?

Anthony: Yeah, I felt more at peace. More like I belong and that kind of feeling.

Paul: And you met Mom a little before that too.

Some of the pictures you had in Panama were of Mom and her family and friends back in Poughkeepsie. They would send him

photos with little notes on the back. And you had little notes. I know you had a little spark going there.

Anthony: Our families were friends.

Aaron: So you knew each other before you left for the war?

Anthony: I knew her, yeah.

Paul: Yeah, it was a small town and a very tight knit Italian community, an immigrant community. So all the Italian families pretty much knew each other. A lot of them did. So when you got home, you and Mom-- you and Mom got married in 1945

Anthony: I remember [laughs] I went home just for...while I was still in service. For two to three days. Your Mom was sitting there with a lot of her friends. And she said, "Look who it is! Is that Tony? Oh ...that's Tony." [Laughs] No big deal.

Aaron: Right. Oh that guy.

Paul: And he ended up marrying her.

Anthony: Wind up getting married.

Paul: Getting married in 1946. So it was about a year after you got home. Not even a year. Because you got married in June of '46. Got home in August of '45.

Anthony: I can't keep up with all of these details.

Aaron: It's a good thing you got him with you.

Paul: Yeah! Well my older brother was born in May of '47. So you were not even home for a year and you got hitched.

Aaron: How much longer after that were you born?

Paul: Two years. I was born in '49.

And my sister Patti was born in '52 and Bobby was born in '55.

Aaron: Aside from your ship in the very beginning with the mine or the possible U-Boat, was there any other harrowing activities or

any other moments of...danger that you can recall while you were in Panama?

Anthony: No...I can't think of anything.

Paul: You might have dropped your horn on your foot one time or something (laughs)

Aaron: That's a possibility. And you took...and you only took leave or vacation once while you were in Panama?

Anthony: Yeah. I took that one time I got home for...was it for surgery on the knee or something?

Paul: Well, yeah that was at Fort Eustice. When you first went in. You went home for a leave. Yeah, I don't think you got to go home from Panama for those 2 and a half years during the war. You weren't overseas.

Aaron: No R&R.

Paul: No R&R. You had permanent R&R.

Aaron: Well having a two and a half year playing in a band in Panama.

Anthony: Yeah, that was a blessing.

Aaron: Not to downplay your service. But that was definitely a great gig.

Anthony: Oh boy. That was like being on vacation down there. Golf course, tennis court. C'mon.

Paul: And playing music, which you love. I mean that is what you have been doing all your life up until that point and you were good at it.

Aaron: Did you have any awards and decorations that you came home with?

Anthony: Any awards? Yeah, I don't know if I got one. I can't remember these things.

Paul: I forget what they call them. There is different campaign medals. There was the American side, North American, there

was some campaign medal. You got a good conduct medal. Honorable discharge. And you know, luckiest guy in World War II.

That story is just phenomenal. Unbelievable. To be on your way during the buildup of the Pacific campaign. January of '43 we were just getting going. And they sent hundred of thousands of guys over there. And to be picked out like that. Just happened to run into a couple of guys from the band while you were waiting for your orders to get another ship from Panama. And meet these guys and get put into the band. A blessing.

Aaron: What rank were you when you were discharged?

Anthony: I think sergeant...was it 3 up and 2 down.

Paul: They called it a tech sergeant

Aaron: Okay, so he is 7.

Anthony: Yeah. 3 up and 2 down.

Paul: And on his discharge order, it says, you know, OMS's band leader.

Aaron: Band leader. It didn't have a number or anything?

Paul: I didn't know there was such a thing as a band leader.

Aaron: I think they call them drum majors. I know in the Army now it's usually like a war officer. If it's like a bigger band, like a field commander.

Excellent. So you were born in '49.

Paul: Yep.

Aaron: And where did you go to school? In Poughkeepsie?

Paul: In Poughkeepsie. I went to grade school, a Catholic school. Holy Trinity, our church school. For high school, we lived in a little...we lived in a township outside of the city. It was called Arlington. So I went to Arlington High School. Graduated high school in '67.

Aaron: Did you play and sports or were involved in any clubs while you were in school?

Paul: Yeah. I was involved in music, chorus, sports. I love sports. I played basketball, football, baseball every season. Wasn't really good. And then I didn't make the high school teams. Just a kid growing up around the corner with my brothers and sisters. And then Uncle Mike and Aunt Gloria, their family lived right around the corner from us from the development that we lived in.

Anthony: Skyview Drive

Paul: Skyview Drive and Laftko Drive ... So I was very close to those cousins. My cousin Tom was my age. And Michael, and Larry, and Steven, Helen. We were all close. And all the buddies on the block.

Aaron: And you got a big family, you know. So plenty of people to pal around with.

Paul: Yeah. It was a real nice area to grow up. It is very rural. In Dutchess County, New York. When people think of New York, they always think of New York City. You go 50 miles North, not even 50 miles North and you're in...

Aaron: Yeah, my family is from Cooperstown.

Paul: Oh you know!

Aaron: In the middle of nowhere. Well, I live 17 minutes outside of Cooperstown in a small town that is like 75% my family. [Laughs] So I can totally relate.

Paul: Nice, nice.

Aaron: How aware were you of your dad's service, growing up as a kid?

Paul: You know, I knew it had happen. We heard the story of him going to the Panama Canal and getting into the band. And as a kid and we used to play war all the time. That was a big deal. Because World War II just ended. Everybody knew it. War movies and stories of the war. So we would run down the street:

Americans against the Germans or the Japs. And all of this stuff. And we would always ask each other, “What did you dad do in the war?” “Well, my dad was a paratrooper.” “Oh my dad was in the Battle of the Bulge.” “My dad was a band leader in Panama.” [Laughs]

Aaron: Everybody had to pull their part.

Paul: Yeah, I understand now. That was a blessing. It was wonderful that that happened to you. But anyways, we revered the World War II veterans. Our dads. Most of our dads were in the war.

The dads never really talked about it that much; they downplayed it. Never really went into a lot of detail of war stories. We tried to get them to talk about it. No no no. Not in front of the family, we are not gonna about it. You know, other dads. But, having been in Vietnam, myself, now I have a better perspective looking back as to what those guys went through.

Aaron: Absolutely.

Paul: It seemed like the World War II guys were just told, “Hey suck it up. You’re home. Forget it. It’s over.”

Aaron: Reintegrate. Get back into the world.

Paul: Yeah. And some guys had a real rough time with it. We had a neighbor down the street. I remember one night, hearing screams. The windows were opened in the summertime. It was a few houses down. I woke up hearing the screams. It was Phil... [...]—and you told me, yeah he was in the war. He had a rough time and he has the bad nightmares. This was the first time I had heard anything negative about World War II.

Aaron: How’d that make you feel? What were you thinking when you found out about that?

Paul: It was scary because I heard him. He was screaming. Once it was told to me what had happened, it didn’t really sink in. I didn’t understand what it meant. But now I do. Now, I can appreciate what the poor guy was going through.

Aaron: You definitely gain perspective, being in the military when those things are concerned. So you graduated in '67?

Paul: '67. I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to go out and work. At that time, it was about half and half. Half of the kids went to college and half of them went into the workforce. I wanted to...I used to read Boy's Life Magazine. And I wanted to go see the world. I was these ads to go join an airline. If you go to this airline school in Minneapolis for 2 months, you are guaranteed a job with a major airline. So I did it. I went to Minneapolis in September of '67. For two months. It was a great experience. Went to this little airline school in downtown Minneapolis. My buddies from school all got jobs in Chicago. I didn't want to go to Chicago because at the time, dad had just moved our family to Hollywood, Florida. It was a big move and that same summer, you went to...with Patti, Bobby, and Jackie...went to Hollywood, Florida. One more thing I should mention in between that: my mom passed away. When I was about 12 years old. In 1962. She had cancer. And in those days...there was no radiation or anything. Poor thing. She died young. She was only 41-years-old.

Aaron: What type of cancer, if you don't mind me asking?

Paul: Stomach.

So they told us it was stomach. I don't know if that was exactly what it was. But, you know, it was stomach cancer. And, so we lost mom and a few years later, dad remarried and that's when they moved to Florida. And I went away to Minneapolis. So from Minneapolis, I wanted to go to Florida. I wanted to get a job in Miami. Because they lived in Hollywood. So I went down there and in a couple of weeks, I couldn't get hired. I was trying to get on at Eastern, Delta, and PanAm and National.

Aaron: Well, what kind of work were you doing though? Was it a steward?

Paul: No, it was like an agent. They called it a ticket agent or baggage service. Or air freight or operation. Doing the weights and balances on the plane. That type of...That's what we were trained for. And that was a pretty good job back then. So, I

couldn't get hired in Miami and my buddies who did go to Chicago, they called me and said, "Hey Paul, you come up here and we guarantee you if you stay here at O'Hare, you will have the job with a major airline." I am like, "Alright!" So I put my suit and tie on and flew up to Chicago and stayed with one of the guys. And sure enough, first day, I got a job with Eastern Airlines. So December of '67, I started with Eastern and I actually spent 20 years with them until they went bankrupt in '87.

Aaron: So were you registered with selective service then?

Paul: Yes! Out of Albany, New York.

Aaron: Right, because you graduated from high school out of Poughkeepsie.

Paul: Right, and I never changed my draft board to Chicago. So I was here from December '67 to '68. And then in March, I got drafted of '69.

Aaron: Okay, so you were living here in Chicago when the Democratic National Convention and the riots.

Paul: Yes, I was working at O'Hare that night and I can remember...

Aaron: How was that? What was that experience like for you?

Paul: We heard on the radio, we were at work, working the night shift, the union shift and we knew what was going on. At the time, I wasn't really paying a lot of attention to politics and the war. I was just working and trying to make a go of it. I didn't really pay a lot of attention. We knew that was going on, like the older guys at work, "Ah, those damn kids, downtown, breaking those buildings apart. I hope the cops beat 'em up!" And I didn't know one way or the other. I didn't really have that much feeling about the whole thing. I wasn't paying that much attention to it, to be honest with you. But, my draft notice came. And I watched the war on T.V. As a kid growing up, in high school, every night it was on the news.

Aaron: I was going to say, 1968 was a very pivotal year for the Vietnam War as far as the media was concerned. It was all over the news. You must have watched Walter Cronkite's expose...

Paul: After the Tet Offensive...right right. I was probably more leaning more patriotic to the right at that time. I wanted America, I believed in America. We should be there, we should be stopping Communism. And the tide was turning. I was working. I was 18-years-old, I had a full time job at an airline. I just threw myself into that, you know.

Aaron: Gotta make a good paycheck, right?

Paul: Yeah! You know, soon as I get my draft notice, I didn't really want to go. I knew the war was raging. It was gonna be dangerous but, what do you do? You have to serve your country. It was either that, or there were kids going to Canada at that time, to avoid the draft. And I wasn't gonna do that. I wasn't gonna go to jail and protest and say I am not gonna go. So, when I got drafted, I think 40,000 got drafted. 40,000 a month. They would turn us over. You only did 2 years and that was enlistment. And if you went to Vietnam, you did 1 year. And you came home and you were pretty much done. So, yeah, they were turning us over and I remember...I went to training in Fort Dix, New Jersey. Because I got drafted. I had to go back to Albany to get inducted. And they sent me down to Fort Dix and they just started building up new barracks down in Fort Dix. It was a training center for basic training and advanced infantry training.

Aaron: That is where my dad went to basic. In '72, '73.

Paul: Actually, it was pretty nice. March was kind of cold when we got there but, the barracks were all brick buildings, all brand new. We had nice places...but it was still basic training.

Anthony: Well, yeah, they really work ya!

Paul: You wake up with a slap in your face [Laughs]. It was the military!

Aaron: Get up, hurry up! Eat, wake!

Paul: [Laughs] Yep!

Aaron: So when you got your draft notice, how did you feel about that? What was going through your mind when you found out your son was drafted for Vietnam?

Anthony: I hated to see him go. But there was nothing I could do about it. It was governmental etc., etc. So, I wasn't exhilarated about it but it was something that had to be done.

Paul: You were really supportive. You used to tell me you were proud of me.

Anthony: Yeah, I was really supportive.

Aaron: I was gonna ask you, did you feel a sense of pride? Vietnam at the time really wasn't that popular with the American public but, you know, you being a service member and your son is getting ready to join the service.

Anthony: Yeah, yeah. I felt that there was...not that much said about it actually. As far as news was concerned.

Aaron: Did you offer up any advice? Did you offer him any advice before he left?

Anthony: Did I say, "Be careful?" I must have said something...

Paul: Yeah, you used to talk to me about drilling. And marching. You used to teach me how to march, and do order arms, and present arms. I remember that.

Aaron: A drilling ceremony. My dad was a career military man. He used to take us to all the obstacle courses and stuff like that. When I joined, the only piece of advice he gave me was, "Don't volunteer for anything." And I am like, "Well, it's too late for that!"

Paul: You told me that too! Don't volunteer for anything in the Army!

Aaron: I think that is the golden rule of the Armed Service. Don't volunteer for anything.

So you got your draft notice. Your father was helping you along and giving you some words of advice. How did the rest of your family take it?

Paul: Very supportive but, they were really worried, you know? They were very worried. Grandma Scrivani , my mom's mom, who also lived down in Florida by you. I was talking to her and they were so worried. So, a lot of prayers from the family. Grandma LaFalce and Aunt Helen, all the aunts and uncles knew I was going. Out of all the cousins, I had a cousin Mikey went, Uncle Joe's Mike. But he was in the Navy. But, nobody else in my generation had really gotten into the infantry and gone over there. I knew I had a lot of support from my family back in Poughkeepsie and down in Florida and that helped me a lot over there. But anyways, Fort Dix, New Jersey. Basic training. You get done with basic and they we are waiting for our next step. And everyone is hoping, "Maybe I'll get Germany. Maybe I'll get Korea." You know? Right. 99% of all of us went to Vietnam. You look up on the board and there you are, "Advanced infantry training for Vietnam." And I'm like, "Oh crap!"

Aaron: And you get one guy over here, "Band!" Right? [Laughs] Alright, so where did you do your advanced infantry training?

Paul: At Fort Dix.

Aaron: Right there at Fort Dix as well.

Paul: Yep, they did it there as well.

Aaron: Did you stay with the same company? So was it a group of guys all together at the same time?

Paul: No, no. It was a different company. They moved...I think I was with some of the same guys but, they just reassigned us to a new AIT (advanced infantry training). Then there was another 8 weeks of advanced infantry training. And that was pretty intense.

Aaron: A lot of shooting, a lot of walking.

Paul: A lot of shooting. A lot of marching. 5-mile forest march to the range. Night marches. A lot of operations. A lot of jungle training. A lot of range work. I qualified at basic with the M-14. And never touched the weapon my whole life. There, I remember the first day at the range in basic. They come along and they give you three rounds. And you gotta hit the bull's-eye. I think it was 200 meters or so. But we were laying down in the prone position, and listen, I'm just doing what they taught you to do. Hold steady. Take your breath. Breathe out. Squeeze the trigger. Let it go out, don't let it surprise you. Very very slowly. Well, I did. And I was right next to the bull's eye. But I made one of those three ring circles. You know, first round, second round, third round. Each touching each other. And that was a pattern they were looking for.

Aaron: That is a great shot. You are right there!

Paul: I was lucky you know?

Aaron: You know they say, though, that guys who have never touched a weapon before, when they go through the military, usually those guys turn out to be great shooters.

Paul: Great shots! Right.

Aaron: Because the military way of doing it is so very simple.

Paul: It is! And you don't have the bad habits of a kid who might have hunted all his life.

Aaron: Or bought a Winchester and shooting his own way.

Paul: Well, the cool thing about that day, was that we had steak at the range. You know, these thin little steaks that were in those big metal containers.

Aaron: Field chow, right.

Paul: But, we never got steak! That day, we had steak! So, we had our mess kits and had to go up there to get your lunch, waiting in line. Well, the colonel came by and he was looking at the targets and he went, "Now that is the kind of target I am talking about! The three-ring circle! Whose is this?" "LaFalce!" "Well, where is LaFalce? Get up here, LaFalce!" I go, "Yes, sir?" He

goes, "Want another steak?" I said, "Yes, sir!" He says, "Go up to the front of the line! You are getting another steak!"
[Laughs]

Anthony: Oh my God!

Aaron: Nice! Did you know about this? Did you hear about that?

Anthony: I might have.

Aaron: My kid got two steaks because he is awesome at shooting.

Paul: I will never forget that. You know, you never eat steak on the field. The day we had steak, I got two. You know, you are hungry all the time in basic training. Every morning, you are up at 4:30, quarter to 5:00. Roll out. Get in formation. Go to class. Standing outside in some class. And then you finally get to march and then you run to the mess hall. So by about 7:00 or 8:00, you are starving. You just eat everything in sight that you possibly can. And they did it. There was no seconds. You better eat it all and drink your milk at the end. And your water. And then you are done. And lunch, you are starving. At dinner, you are starving again. It was great. It was great training. You know, I was in the best shape of my life after basic training.

Aaron: Can't go wrong with that.

Paul: So that is a little story. And then AIT, we made it through that okay. Then the orders came down. Everybody was going to Vietnam. And I got a month off, or 2 weeks off. I went to Florida for a week. And then I flew back up to New York because I had to go to Seattle. I had to fly out of Seattle. So, they let me go to New York for a week and I stayed at Aunt Gracie's and Uncle Joe's house. Because of Rocky-- and they lived in an area where it was close to everybody and I got to stay there for a week. And I'll never forget, that was the week of the Moon landing. July 29th, I think it was. The 27th. I can remember sitting in Aunt Gracie's living room, with Rocky, and Annie, and all my cousins, and getting ready to go to Vietnam but, there it was: the Moon landing.

Aaron: What was that like?

Paul: Awesome. I will never forget it. Seeing him step out of...

Anthony: There is a joke: someone says “everybody goes to the Moon but, nobody goes to the sun.” “Are you crazy? You’d die if you go to the sun!” “No, I’d just go at night time”.

Aaron: [Laughs] Yeah...so you see the moon landing before you take off.

Paul: I got see the moon landing and that is a memory I have. And then also, a new magazine was out and we were all into music, you know. It was called *Rolling Stone*. And I had never seen that magazine before. And on the back, there was an ad for Woodstock. And that is right across the river from Poughkeepsie. And we are looking at that and we were like, “Man, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin!” All of these bands are coming! This is gonna be so cool. And at that time, the generation was just flowering or something. Kids from all over the country were interested in coming to this.

Aaron: The hippie movement was big!

Paul: Yeah! It was big then. And that was late in August and I was shipping out August 2nd. And I was so mad. Everybody was gonna go to Woodstock and I was so mad. I ended up reading about it in *Stars & Stripes* once I was over there. It was the only thing I heard about it.

Aaron: Did you heard from your friends about it too? Did they write to you?

Paul: Nobody from Poughkeepsie went because you couldn’t get there. You couldn’t get over the mid-Hudson bridge. The throughway was backed up almost all the way to New York City. But, except my cousin Rocky had a motorcycle. And he and is buddy had a motorcycle and they just road shoulders all the way up. Winding through Kingston all the way to Woodstock. I remember, when I got home, he told me the story and he said, “Paul, it was unbelievable. We never thought we’d get there. The cars were all parked in the street. We just drove around them in the motorcycles. We got there, there was nobody there to stop us from getting in. We didn’t have any

tickets. We just drove right up where there was the big bandstand was, where the scaffolding was. We pulled up around back.”

Aaron: So they just drove straight into the venue?

Paul: He said, “We get off our bikes and there is Janis Joplin. And Carlos Santana.” Just hanging there. He said it was so cool and he got to spend 3 days there at Woodstock. But nobody else. Tony or Richie. My cousins who were in the band and were musicians. Everybody wanted to go see Woodstock!

Aaron: So did you read *Rolling Stone* a lot when you were over in Vietnam?

Paul: No. No. They don’t have it. Just *Stars & Stripes*. In the 4th infantry division newspaper. We didn’t get a whole lot of news over there. So anyways, I get over to Vietnam.

Aaron: What unit were you with?

Paul: Well, I went to Cam Rhan Bay and at the time of August of ’69. It was the first pull out of the war. Nixon was gonna wind the war down. And the first infantry division was coming home. Well, there was 40,000 guys in Cam Rhan Bay. And the exiting side of the base, the transit base. There was just as many guys going in. And I am looking around, “How is this a pull out?” We are just swapping! And it stayed like that for about 6 months. But anyways, I got signed up to Pleiku to the 4th infantry division. The 2nd and 35th infantry. “Cacti unit”. Got there, and the division base camp, they assigned me to Delta company. I went on one mission with Delta Company. On a quick 3 day mission. We weren’t out very long.

Aaron: Foot patrols, or air assault, or...

Paul: That was a foot patrol out of Pleiku. Or might have been close by at a fire place near Pleiku, a division camp. Just a few days out there, I met a buddy of mine. I became very close with Pat Carbone , another Italian kid from New York City, from the Bronx. And we started talking, “You know, this company is not good. They are not behaving like military, like soldiers should.” They are goofing around, drinking beer, some guys were

smoking pot. They were making a lot of noise. I am like, “This is scary!”

Aaron: While you were on patrol?

Paul: Yeah! This is in a whole company. Four platoons based in this one little area. So there are a hundred guys.

Aaron: You guys weren't together at all stateside.

Paul: No! That is where we met.

Aaron: In Vietnam.

Paul: So we came back into the base camp, after three days. We were in Pleiku, in Camp Enari. And there, you know it's a big base camp-- they have mess halls, you get to go inside and eat and have hot food. We were waiting in line to go in. And there was a guy in front of us from Delta company who was on his way home. He had 10 months in country and they were transferring to the Big Red One because he was going home with the colors.

Aaron: Right.

Paul: He was kind of lucky. He didn't have to do 12 months, he only had to do 10. And he turned around and says, “You guys are FNGs.”-- You guys-- that is what he called us. And he says, “I'm telling you something: If you wanna live the year that you are here, and survive,” he says, “get out of Delta Company. Join Recon.” And I was like, “Oh, I've heard about those guys.” He says, “They are gung-ho.” They are gung-ho. These guys are in the field all of the time. And he says, “You are right, they are gung-ho. But, it is a platoon.” Recon is one platoon that operates on its own, doesn't go with a whole line company. A part of Echo Company which is a four deuce mortars and a single headquarters type of company that stays at the fire base. And Pat looks at me and says, “Maybe we should listen to this guy. He knows what he's talking about, he's been here.” And I said, “Pat, never volunteer for anything in the Army! I don't know! I don't want to volunteer!” And he says, “I know, Paul! But he goes...”

Aaron: ...Common sense, man.

Paul: Yeah! He goes, “We were just out there. You saw what it was like with those guys. Maybe we should do this.” So, we did it. Pat really talked me into it. I was...

Aaron: God bless him, right?

Paul: God bless him because it was the best decision we ever made. We got to Recon. They sent us right over to Bison 2. I remember-- and they were on his fire base at the time.

Aaron: What was the name of the fire base?

Paul: Bison 2.

Like the buffalo bison. Bison 2. It was pretty close to Pleiku, to the big base camp there at Banari. And I remember my first day there. They sent me to my squad. I met the platoon leader. I met the platoon sergeant. I met the squad leader. And he says, “Okay come over here by these bunkers, we are staying over here tonight.” And they looked up my rucksack and my weapon. And he says, “That is not gonna get it...you gotta tighten it up.” So they are taking my canteens and bringing them in. And they said, “You gotta carry a lot across your back. You gotta tighten that down. Your C rations are gonna be in a sand bag.” We carried them in a sand bag. And that tightens up at the bottom of it. He says, “If you don’t tighten this stuff up. You aren’t gonna walk. It’s gonna kill you when you walk. You gotta keep it high up on your back. Second of all, the jungles are so thick, there is so much vegetation and vines, you’ll get stuck on everything.” And you can’t do that. You can’t make any noise in the field.

Aaron: Right, you need noise discipline.

Paul: Right. Always be quiet because you don’t wanna give away your position. So, Recon really had their shit together. They really knew what they were doing. The squad leaders were all-- Stucky was from Oklahoma. Slick was from Minnesota. These guys were country boys that knew how to behave in the woods. You know, how to maneuver in the woods.

And, you know, it was such an eye opener for me. And everything from there was CA, combat assault. We did flies on

helicopters and they would drop us somewhere. LZ somewhere, wherever we were supposed to do. And then you know, we had 3 squads and we were quiet. Never made a noise. Never talked. If you had to say anything, you barely whispered it. Squad leaders had signals. We had the lieutenant who had the radio operator with him all the time. They were very quiet. We were just stealth. You had to be quiet. We never wanted to get ambushed! We didn't want the enemy to jump on us. We wanted to get them before they got us. And, so that's how we operated. We stayed off trails. We were in the Chu Pan Phan Mountains. Our first missions we ever went to were up high in the mountains. These triple canopy jungles in the mountains. Killer walking up in those things all day long.

Aaron: How heavy was your pack, usually?

Paul: Probably 50-60 pounds worth. You had your gear and everything and your ammunition. On my first time, I was ammo-bearer with the M-60 machine gunner, David Perez. So he was teaching me and bringing me along and how to behave and everything out there. The whole thing was, "Don't give your position away. Don't fire your weapon. Unless you have to or you are told to or when it is time to fire. We don't wanna give a muzzle flash...your weapon will give your position away." Didn't step on twigs. Walked very quietly. Don't make a noise when you are out there. And that is what we did. The whole time I was out in the field.

Anthony: Tough time...

Paul: It was terrible.

Aaron: What was the combat action like for you guys when you did have contact?

Paul: Usually if it was during the day time, we would bump into them. We would be quiet and we would walk into a little bunker complex or, we would stop and they would be diddy-bopping down a trail, let's say if we were on a trail, we-- they didn't know we were there. So, we would stop. And I tell ya, this platoon in combat, was the best. We are down the line and charged, every time. Nobody stayed behind. Nobody got behind

a rock or a tree. It was first squad and point man who initiated contact. They would turn sideways. I guess 2nd squad went to the left, 3rd squad, I don't know. But the squad leaders were so good. They just had it so good. So when the shooting started, dropped down onto our back, we would drop our rucksacks, and then we had our pistol belt and our ammo separate. So we were ready to move. And you just went to your squad leader and fast as you can and got out of the way. You can't shoot while your buddies are ahead of you. You could shoot them. You gotta be right side. Or horizontal with them. That was the whole idea. And once we got the platoon on line, we were fast. We did this [Snaps] like that! On line, fast! And then, two squads would fire and one squad would move up. No two squads were fire both. And they had this down. We would just move. It was unbelievable. And then, you know being quiet, sometimes for days and days of a time. Such a release of adrenaline. Let your rounds off. Start shooting and screaming and hollering. Yelling everything we could. It always turned out, for the most part that we would chase them. I don't care if it was a company of them. They thought the world was coming after them. We made so much noise. We fired so much firepower. We had 3 machine guns. Each squad had a machine gun. We were blowing them-- shooting off. Our 79 grenade launchers, and firing our M-16s and screaming and hollering. And our foreign observer was there with us who would be on a radio with a map, calling in fire, calling in...because we would always be within range of the fire base. So we would always have a 105 battery on at the fire base. And our four deuce mortars -- they would shoot for us. And, he would call in a fire mission. So as we are moving up, we see that first round of smoke come in. [Makes sound of mortar zooming in] Pop! First round would be smoke so he could hear where that round was. And he adjusted, left, right, so many meters. And drop. And he would shoot one round at HE, and you would hear that [mortar sound]. And you knew that you guys were moving up. Okay, that sounds good. That is the direction we are chasing the dinks, And then they would just start--

Aaron:

Fire for effect?

Paul: Yeah, nah, very seldom fire for effect. We would get a volley. Sometimes 2 to 3 volleys. They had certain protocol to follow. Fire for effect...I think I heard that one time.

Aaron: That would be like leveling an entire grid square.

Paul: Yeah.

Aaron: That is the ultimate, we gotta get out of here.

Paul: Five guns shoot for you. Five howitzers coming in. [Makes mortar sounds]

Aaron: Ground shaking.

Paul: Oh man. We were always worried about a short round, if they didn't pack it right. By then, on top of us, we had that worry. It happened time to time when the maps weren't quite right. Our FO was so good. He was...he knew where we were on that map at all times. Those maps in the jungle are hard to read. It is all lines and elevations and you got hill tops and side hills and which hill are we near? Is it this grid or that grid? I never really know enough to do it myself to call it in. So proud of those guys.

Aaron: How often did you hear from Paul while he was over in Vietnam?

Antony: Not very often.

Aaron: Did you get a lot of letters or no?

Paul: I wrote home.

Anthony: Yeah, you wrote home.

Paul: Yeah, I wrote home all the time. I wrote to Richie a lot, my brother and my sister. Richie was living in New York or California, he had moved. And my younger brother and sister...

Anthony: I think he was in California.

Paul: Yeah, yeah. But I did. I wrote. And you guys wrote to me a lot. I had a lot of letters from home. Which was so, you know, important. Getting letters from home.

Aaron: Did you ever change or omit stuff? How were your letters home? Were you pretty open or forward? Or were like you like, “Hey, how are things? Cool.”

Paul: It wasn't “everything's cool.” It was, I probably opened up a little too much than I should have, you know. It was just so frustrating. The heat. The heat in Vietnam is so oppressive. You can't believe it when you get there, how hot it is.

Aaron: How long did it take you to acclimate?

Paul: Probably within a month. A month or so. And the fact that I was with Recon, really helped. I didn't know it at the time. I didn't wanna be there. Nobody wants to be in war. You know, when you wished you could be as far away from there as you possibly could. At the time you don't really realize how much of a bond you are building with your brothers in arms there. You are going through it and we talked to each other. We would sit beside the trail sometime near the fire base. Which was a big deal for us to get into a fire base.

Aaron: Oh yeah, I bet.

Paul: We didn't get in very often. And when we did, we didn't behave very well so they would throw us back out into the field. We ended up being kind of a reactionary force for the battalion. The colonel would always-- when something was bad, or one of the companies was pinned down. We would CA out there and help them. We did a lot of that. You know, the experiences-- we talked to each other and said, you know, if we ever told anybody back home about this, nobody would believe it. It would be like...you couldn't understand what this combat crap is. You know...it's survival. It's kill or be killed. You don't wanna be there but you damn well better be good at it. Because Charlie would love nothing better than to sneak up on you at night and cut your throat. He hated us, we knew that. We were just there for a year to do our job and get home. And, the only way to do that is that you better be good and you better win every battle. And that is the attitude we took. It's not bragging or anything, it's just survival. While you are going through it, it's just horrible, you just can't believe it. And being in the heat, in the jungle, and the bugs, you know we would see bugs crawl.

We would be sitting down and some caterpillar would come by with THAT long of hairs and you never see, even in a book, you never saw anything that weird looking. And there were snakes!

Aaron: What were your impressions of Vietnam as a country while you were there? Growing up in New York and everything.

Paul: It was a beautiful country. I remember thinking how beautiful it was but I could not really appreciate the beauty of it. Flying in those helicopters, flying over those triple canopy jungles. It is just depressing. Okay, I am going down soon and we are gonna have to start an operation. Sleeping on the ground, the rains on you, bugs crawling underneath you. We never dug in. We didn't dig foxholes. Because every night, we stopped. If there was a trail, we ambushed the trail. So the trail is like this and then we would make a perimeter. 2 guard positions on the trail. One behind. And three guys would have to be up all night long on guard duty. If it wasn't a trail, we would create that perimeter in the midst of that thick jungle somewhere. And you are tying your poncho to little twigs over here and over there, trying to get it to slant so that when it rains, it rolls off of you.

Aaron: You got a poncho?

Paul: Little poncho that high. And you sleep underneath it with your poncho liner, you keep your boots on, you gotta have your weapon next to you.

Aaron: Your baggage and your pillow.

Paul: Yep, yep.

Aaron: I can remember many a nights. Long nights. Jumping out of the plane, hitting the ground. Doing a follow on mission. Getting those 3 hours of sleep in those ponchos. It's terrible.

Paul: You got these watches with the luminous dial so you could see. It is the only light you could give off. And you never forget the middle of the night. Someone would whisper, "LaFalce, LaFalce. Get up. Guard duty. It's your turn." "Okay, I am getting up." And you would go over to the guards. And you sit

there and you gotta stay awake. You are so tired from walking all day. You better stay awake.

Aaron: Did you have any night-vision devices for your patrols?

Paul: We did! I remember getting a night scope. Once or twice. We had it towards the end of my tour. We had one with the platoon. I don't think we had one in every guard position. You basically sat there in the dark and listened. If you heard anybody coming, then, of course, you had to wake up the guys next to you but you had your Claymores. You'd set out Claymore mines every night. And these are bombs...

Aaron: Front towards enemy.

Paul: Front towards enemy, right. And this thing's got 700 steel balls in the front, C4 explosive in it with a wire running in it and a blasting cap. The wire comes all the way back and you put that in front of a big tree so you wouldn't get the back blast from it. So, you had to make 6 or 7 Claymores out there and you had all the clacker so if they enemy was coming and it was time and you ambushed them, and BANG! You just blew them up. So that was at night.

Aaron: What was it like when that Claymore went off?

Paul: I remember one night we blew them off and it knocked the tree down and it almost hit me. You had to pick a big tree. If it was only about that big, you might knock it over with the back blast.

Aaron: Oh I bet. Those ball bearings, man. They don't...they are not forgiving.

Paul: That was the routine every night. Set up camp. In an ambush or in a perimeter camp. You had to go through it. You know, with you guys in Afghanistan or Iraq, I think about you all the time. I tell one of my buddies when you are thinking about those kids, just imagine us every night, you don't get to sleep through the night. Someone will come wake you up. And there is only 6 guys in your squad at the time. You divide the minutes of darkness by 6. It could be like 96 minutes, you got to pull it. You gotta pull that portion of guard duty every night. That is just a part of being in an infantry in a war and living through it

and I have such a great appreciate of the guys today that are serving our country that know they have to go through the same thing every night.

Aaron: Absolutely. A lot of mountains there in Afghanistan; it's a mixed bag. A lot of desert too. Depends on where you're at.

Paul: Yeah. Right. A lot of alternate territory.

Anthony: I don't think I would have ever survived what you went through.

Paul: You know Dad, I don't think so either. But when you are thrown into a position and you got good guys around you, and they train you... You do it! You just do it! You do it to survive. And thank God I survived and came home. Most of my buddies didn't.

Anthony: Oh sure! I was just listening to somebody talk about it.

Aaron: So the whole time Paul was over there, how were you and the family coping?

Anthony: I was just praying for him. That he would be safe and come back safely. Nothing else we could do. We couldn't go to some governor or big chap and say "Get my son back here!" No, we just prayed for his safety. And prayed for all the others out there.

Aaron: So you did a year in Vietnam.

Paul: Yeah.

Aaron: With the recon for 2nd.

Paul: August '69 to August '70.

Aaron: What was coming home like? I am very curious about how it is...I've seen enough movies and Vietnam documentaries to hear people's experience about being a short timer and knowing that your counting days.

Paul: I got a calendar to count the days to go home. Well, when we did have down time, we took advantage of it. We kind of went nuts.

Aaron: I was going to ask. You said they kicked you off a fire base many a time. What was your down time like?

Paul: Yeah. You know we-- being recon when you came into the fire base, we didn't have to pull guard duty...almost never, because there would always be a land company pulling security on the top of the mountain from the fire base. So, we would get a few days rest. And they knew we needed a rest. We would playing cards, drinking, and smoking grass, you know. Doing what young kids did back then. We listened to music, we had little tape recorders. We would get cassette tapes from back home.

Aaron: What kind of music were you listening to?

Paul: Ohhh man, you know: the Beatles, CCR, Janis Joplin, all this stuff, classic rock stuff that was popular during the day. That was a big relief. That was fun, doing that. But we didn't have to dig bunkers-- we didn't have to make big bunkers, they would put us somewhere in the fire place, and we would sleep on the ground. Sometimes we would need a tent but very seldom. And if something happened at the fire base, we would have to be a part of the reactionary force. Of course we would help them and join the bunker and fire. But most of the time there wasn't anything happening at night. We might get shelled or something but we were pretty safe.

Aaron: How did those other line companies feel about you guys, recon, walk in through the perimeter. Ah, here comes recon.

Paul: They didn't like us (laughs).

Aaron: No? A lot of animosity there?

Paul. Yeah, yeah. They'd go, "Why don't they have to pull guard duty? We are pulling guard duty." But they knew we were kind of crazy. "Those guys are nuts." When we'd come it, we'd be so full, after all the pressure and the stress, we had to let loose. Some guys would get drunk and go crazy. You start of playing cards, you know, and then after a while...

Aaron: Once the booze starts kicking in...

Paul: Yeah! They'd start fighting and you know. Crazy things happen... I don't know. And there was a couple of times when we had some bigger stand downs. We were near the town of Bong Son and we weren't really doing anything. We were in this big field and the whole brigade was there. A lot of guys wanted to go into town. At that time, in '69 and '70, towns were off limits. They no longer allowed the GIs to go into towns. When I was there, in Pleiku, went to recon school, it was still-- they gave us an afternoon Sunday pass to go into Play Cu City. But you know, after that-- taste of that, having some fun in town, we wanted to keep going!

Aaron: Did you get R&R when you were over there?

Paul: I did get an R&R.

Aaron: Where'd go you?

Paul: I went to Bangkok.

Aaron: Oh very nice. I won't ask what you did there if you don't want to tell me but, I know Bangkok is a pretty awesome city. I was through there once.

Paul: It is! You know, I will never forget going to a Thai boxing match. Kickboxing, which at the time, a lot of Americans knew nothing about. Now, it's a big deal.

Aaron: MMA.

Paul: MMA, right. Back then it was just Thailand. It was cool. I went sight-seeing. I had a taxi cab driver all week. He stayed with me. Took me to the beach. Went swimming.

I was the Malaysian Hotel. It was all GIs there.

Aaron: Something that the government sanctioned off for all the guys?

Paul: Yeah. Exactly. There was...we went to the Hotel Interncontinental to see a show there. Sarah Vaughan was there the week before. And Johnny Mathis was coming the week after. I missed them both.

Aaron: Who'd you get?

Paul: I don't know. It was a Thai dancing. You know where they wear the big gold hats. All this dancing. It was cool. You got to go in there and you take your shoes off when you go in the place, and you sit down on this couch at a table and your feet dangle below you, never experienced that before. I went on one of the little trips back into the canals. They take you in one of these long motorboats. And you just go, go, go, go. And you go through all of these...and all of these houses are on stilts. And they are back in these canals. I had some lunch back there and did some fishing.

Aaron: A lot of elephants? Did you see them? The Thais love their elephants.

Paul: Yeah, yeah. Everything was elephants. Carvings all over the place. The day that I got there, I was in my fatigues and the taxi cab driver says, "You wanna get clothes?" And I said, "Yeah, I wanna get regular clothes." So we go up to this tailor shop. And this guy comes out and brings out this big book, this big magazine. And he says, "You pick what you want." So I picked out a shirt, a tie, a pants, and a belt. Two hours later, I come back and he measured me and he was done. So I had civilian clothes to wear.

Aaron: How much pay did you have? I mean, you were getting paid regularly. Were you able to get to your money? Did you have some spending change?

Paul: Yeah, I think we were getting paid \$100 a month back then. Plus combat pay. I don't know. It wasn't a whole lot. But there was enough...the hotel was free. You just had to pay for your food and going out.

Aaron: Did you have some of your buddies from recon that went with you?

Paul: No. No. I went on my own. When I got back, to Cam Ranh Bay, there was a kid from Bravo company who was leaving for R&R. And he said, "Hey did you hear Recon hit the shit?" And I said, "No." He said, "Yeah, it was bad." April 8th, 1970. And, well, to jump forward 30 something years. I go to reunions and

I've been reunited with my buddies. It took about 30-some years.

Aaron: To get everybody back together.

Paul: Yeah. But, it happened. It's wonderful. We are just as close today as we were back then. In fact, closer. Our wives are close. But, that was about 9-10 years ago. I ran into our association website. I posted who I was and when I served. And I said, "How did I get ahold of my buddies?" I got a couple of emails back that night. And one was from this guy, Tiny. And he said, "Paul, remember me? Tiny? I was your squad leader." And he was. This guy is about 6'5"

Aaron: Anything but tiny!

Paul: Right. [Laughs]. Really tough guy. He gave me 5 or 6 guys' phone numbers. I picked up the phone and called him. My sister called everybody and learned about the reunions and stuff. So I started going. Where was I going with this?

Aaron: April 8th.

Paul: April 8th! So that's, when we got together, a lot of them didn't really know what happened. The story that I had heard wasn't really quite true. So 35 years later, I am talking to the guys that went through it and what happened. We had a lieutenant at the time who was really gung ho, crazy guy. He wanted to kill dinks, that's all he wanted to do. And for about, I think it was a month straight. A month of march. They killed about 27 enemy in this one area by small ambushes. He would set up guys laying on the side of a trail with a machine gun and would cover them with brush. For 2 to 3 hours, have them lay there. But, there was so much activity. There would always be a couple of dinks diddy bopping down the trail and they didn't know we were there. Bang. They'd shot them, one, two at a time, every day to the point where, I think, they sent in a regiment. And what was—they had discovered a trail with tire tracks in it. Big tire tracks, big fresh muddy tire tracks. So the squad leaders went back to the lieutenant and they said, "Hey, we got to get out of here. This is not good. Something big is down here." "No, no, no, we are gonna stay down here and

ambush it.” He says, “C’mon, everybody’s on R&R. We only got 20 guys out here. Are you kidding me? We cannot stay here.” And he was adamant that we were going to stay. And they fought and they fought well. And he says, “We will move back for the night. And then we will leave in the morning.” So the morning came, and he insisted that they go down there and pull an ambush on it. And sure enough, it was my squad. So I know a lot of those guys: Arkansas, Roy and my buddies told me about it. And you know, typical contact. They saw a point squad coming down this big trail. There were about 8 or 9 of them. They had Claymores set. So they blew the Claymores. Well, the first squad—annihilated them. It was bad. It was really disgusting. The platoon got on line and charged. That was our MO (modus operandi), we always did that. And guys in line company would always say, “Someday! You guys think you are so hot, Recon, you are gonna hit a big unit and you are gonna get your ass kicked by charging at them.” And we always said, “No way! We will take care of them.” Well, what it was a big unit and they *did* retreat from our charge. But they fired to cover their retreat. They fired RPGs so they left a couple of guys there.

Aaron: To cover the retreat.

Paul: Yeah. And they did shoot back at us too. There were guys...Arkansas was telling me that the rounds were flying like crazy and we were charging. And all of a sudden, two of the rounds came up near where the lieutenant was and the FO. And it went off like in a tree. Well, it killed the lieutenant and killed the FO and wounded 5 guys in that area. Jake, one of my buddies, calls me all the time and he got wounded badly in the leg. Roy and another guy saved him and stopped the bleeding. They took everyone’s medical packs and were packing it in there, packing it in there... They finally put a tourniquet on there and stopped the bleeding and saves his life. And Jake always tells me this story because I remember...all I remember was this [makes sound of bomb coming in] and a concussion by this tree. I went out. And next thing he knows, I wake up and there was a bloody hand in my face with a cigarette. He says, “I woke up to Roy giving me a cigarette.”

Aaron: Definitely wasn't an easy day for the guys.

Paul: I wasn't there.

Aaron: It's totally understandable. Every guy that fights for it has to play hard too. You know what I mean. And that's just a part of it. Guys come back from the vacation time or whatever and I mean... it's just war, man. War is hell. We all know it. We've seen it a hundred times.

Paul: The guys that were there had a hard time talking to me about it too but, you know, we've got each other today. We remember the guys that were killed. We give them our honor and commemorate them. But, the camaraderie never ends.

Aaron: It's a brotherhood.

Paul: Yep.

Aaron: So then, coming home. You were short. How short were you? Let's take it a month out before you were going to leave. Was there a tiresome feeling kicking in?

Paul: I got a rear job right around that time. When I got home, I got out of Recon, I got sent to the fire base to work on this radar machine. The last couple of months were easier duty.

Aaron: Laid back.

Paul: Yeah. I got out in early August. One day less than a year. I came home. And, it was great. Flying home was just awesome.

Aaron: What did it feel like? How did you leave the line?

Paul: Well, you say goodbye to everybody. Well, almost every day there was somebody leaving, and guys coming. They were always coming and going. And when you are short, you knew it was your time. And everybody said goodbye to you. And you got to go down to Cam Ranh Bay and wait your turn to get on a plane to go home.

Aaron: Just like the Big Red One. So you flew out of Cam Ranh Bay? Did you fly back to Seattle?

Paul: Yep. Flew back to Seattle. MAC flight. It was Continental Airlines 707. I will never forget walking up onto the tarmac and getting up the bus and walking up the stairs. This is it. This is the freedom bird. I am finally going home. And here was American girls on the plane. We called them round eyes. They had perfume on and they smelled good. And, oh man, it was fantastic. And we got back to Seattle. It was a tough time in the country. Because you didn't know whether people were gonna be like, "Thank you." Or "You are a baby killer." That's the way the country was split at that time. My family was very supportive and no problem with the brothers and the cousins and my dad, of course. Everybody was so happy I was home. I was so happy to be home.

Aaron: Were you waiting there in Seattle or where were you guys waiting for him when he came home?

Anthony: What's that? I don't know.

Paul: You were in Florida. And I flew from Seattle to Miami. First of all, I was supposed to go to California to Los Angeles because my cousin Tommy, who was very close to me had moved to Los Angeles, and my brother Rich was down there. And we were writing back and forth. Well, when you get to Seattle, you gotta come down. And two of my other cousins and my high school buddy had flown out to LA to party with me for a month, for when I got home.

Aaron: Party in Los Angeles for a month right after Vietnam?

Paul: Well, what happened was, I called him from Seattle and I couldn't get a hold of them. Their phone got disconnected because they didn't pay the bill.

I was like what the heck, did they move back? I didn't know where they were. So I said what the heck, I am flying back to your house, to dad. And the family. So I flew to Miami, I didn't tell anybody. I had the cab drop me off. Walked up to the house in the middle of the day. Wanted to surprise everybody and nobody was home. [Laughs]. So I had my duffle bag and I was sitting there on the front porch. And finally Jackie came home

and Patti came home from school and Bobby. They were not expecting that at all.

Anthony: As you are talking about this, it comes to me. But, to remember all of that. I don't remember all of that.

Paul: Yeah, yeah. Well, you know, it's okay, Dad. When I am 92, I'm probably going to forget all of this stuff too.

Aaron: Well, we will have it on tape and we'll have it on the archive. You guys will never forget.

Anthony: All you can do is pray for you.

Paul: Yep, yep. Another thing too, when I was over there, it was around Christmas. Aunt Gracie, one of my aunts back in New York was a great cook, a great Italian cook, one of the best in the family. She sent me a care package and there were two big quart Mason jars. One was full of tomato sauce, her homemade tomato sauce with meatballs. And the other one full of her homemade Cavatelli pasta. And it was all packed in newspaper so it didn't break. It made it all the way to its fire base. And I looked inside and I went, "Oh man, I can't believe this." The only person I told...I knew there was enough for about 3 guys to eat. So I told Carbone and Calibri, my Italian buddies, and I told them, "you *gotta* see what I got from my aunt Gracie..." So we snuck over to cook's mess area. I got a pot. I remember I got a big pot and I poured it all together. I just heated it up slowly. I didn't want to burn it. Man, we had a feast. And those guys remember that. When we go to the reunions, they remember that.

Aaron: Were those your two closest buddies when you were over there?

Paul: Pretty much. They were really close.

Aaron: Do you keep up with them?

Paul: Yep. And Perez. David Perez. Another guy who lives down in San Benito, Texas. Also, Roy Sitig, Donnie, Arkansas. Some guy lives up in Minnesota. Tiny. Jackie Tyler. Good buddy of ours, was a black guy from Chicago. His story was when he got

out, he got a job in Washington with the CIA. He was a case agent for 27 years. And I didn't know this. And he was coming to reunions about 8, 9 years ago. And he goes, "I work for the State Department." And I go, "Ah, what do you do, Jackie?" He goes, "Well, you know, I do training overseas." And I say, "You are always in Iraq or Kazakhstan or Afghanistan." He says, "Yeah, we train their officials on security and how to get around." Then he retired and I went to his retirement party. Calibri and I went. And they pull this card back and sure enough, he was a case agent. He could open up and tell us. Basically, we were looking for bad guys over there. He still has been serving our country all these years.

Aaron: So you finally had your boy home from war. How did you feel?

Anthony: [Laughs] It felt good. I was thankful that he was okay.

Aaron: Life can go on. Everything might have been at a standstill for a year just to hold our breath.

Anthony: Yep, I was just praying for his safety. Not just for his, but all the guys.

Aaron: Right, Absolutely. What medals or decorations did you bring back?

Paul: Well we got the Air Medal because we all had 25 or more combat assaults. I got an Army Commolation medal which we got from one day our platoon was point, and I had a machine gun at the time. I carried that for about 4 and a half months. It was an M-60.

Aaron: Those pigs are heavy, that's for sure.

Paul: Yeah. In Recon, when you carry the machine gun, you didn't get to do one of these on your shoulder. Always at the ready with the sling on it, 100-round assault bag attached, locked and loaded. Finger on the trigger, thumb on the safety.

Aaron: What were the circumstances behind your R-Column V device?

Paul: Well, we walked into the bunker complex, which, again nobody knew we were there, we didn't know they were there. The

point man saw them. There was a fire burning and they were eating. There was probably only 4, 5, 6 of them up there on this little hill top. And Roy instinctively...normally, we stop, get down, form a line. But for some reason, he just bang, he shot once. Well, that woke them up. And then his gun jammed. So, Calibri, our platoon sergeant, Lenny was right up—it was Roy and Lenny was with him and Arkansas was here. And then there was me and Freddy, my ammo bearer. And so, Roy was kind of over here so Lenny runs up to him and they are trying to get his gun fixed, and Lenny is shooting with them. And this kind of counteracts what we normally do. We wanna get in a line before we start firing. So, Arkansas had the M-79 and he fired off a couple of rounds at them. And I look up and all of a sudden, this dink stands up and he's got an AK-47. [Makes gun shot noises] He lets go with it. Well, he is scared as shit, so he's shooting high. And we are down, we hit the ground and those rounds went over our heads. And I looked up and I just sit there. And I told those guys, "Don't move! I got it!" [Makes gunshot sounds] And then 6 to 8 rounds burst. Hit the ground. Brought it up. I didn't see if I hit them. We saw a blood trail afterwards. But anyways, then we—they took off. Once we started shooting at them, they were gone. They were over the hill, they dove over the cylinder. Running. When we got there, the fire was still burning, the rice was still on there. And they left a satchel with paperwork in it. They were a paid company. And they took the money. We didn't get the money. But, we found all of their records. And on their records were all of the South Vietnamese politicians. And the villages around that area. So here are these North Vietnamese guys coming in to pay off the South Vietnamese guys.

Aaron: The local politicians.

Paul: Yeah. Which, you know, that's the way it was. I mean the VC (Viet Cong) were relentless. At night, they would come into the villages and kill these kids and people. "If you don't join us, you are dead."

Aaron: Taliban is doing the same thing in Afghanistan.

Paul: Yeah, yeah exactly. It's terrorism. Well, we didn't know what it was at first. But we radioed back and the colonel, you know, I don't know, they were reading those. And there was an interpreter with us, I think. And he was reading. And the colonel was so happy and was like, "Oh my God, we really got something. This is great information. What intelligence! Make sure you get all that back into us." We were like, "Yeah, okay, whatever." [laughs]. We gotta stay in line and get on and keep humping that day and set up that night. But, yeah, so anyways, Lenny, who was our platoon sergeant, we got back to the river, he wrote it up for me. But we got that Commendation medal. Other than that, you know, it was just the normal Vietnam service medals.

Anthony: Other than that, no more ribbons, that's all.

Aaron: Right, you know, every day going out there, hang it all out there, put your butt on the line. So, post war for both of you guys, when you came home from World War II and you were married, had some kids... Did you go back to the band? What did you do for a living when you got back?

Anthony: Well, I got a job in the coat factory.

Paul: No, it was the shoe business.

Anthony: Oh, shoe business.

Paul: Paul DeFalco

Anthony: Paul DeFalco, right.

Paul: He played with his brothers, every Friday and Saturday night. And that was extra income to the family. He had a job and then he would play. Play some weddings on Saturdays too. They were busy. But, full time, you were in the shoe business. And he was with a shoe company for a while in Poughkeepsie and then you learned the business. You ended up buying the business.

Anthony: A lady had a business that she was wanting to sell and we got involved with that.

Paul: And you got it with a partner, Andy Bovona, great guy. These two guys were like—you couldn't ask for a better friend.

Anthony: Andy, nice guy. He was from Newburg.

Paul: Yeah, across the river.

Aaron: So did you retire from the shoe business?

Anthony: I think that was it.

Paul: Well, you had the store up until you went to Florida. And then you sold your portion to my cousin Al, his oldest nephew. He stayed with Andy. They had a couple of stores open. But, then you moved to Florida.

Anthony: I had a job waiting for me down there. In the shoe business. Shoe store. Orthopedic kind of work. Corrective.

Paul: This guy knows feet. He knows shoes. How to fit your shoes. He might not remember what he had for breakfast this morning, but, if you got a problem with your foot, he can tell you were to put a pad and how to adjust it. That and music. Never forget it. So that's what he did all those years. And you worked in—you stayed working in Florida until '85. You worked all those years. Pretty much because you had to. He needed the money.

Aaron: When you love what you do, you wanna keep doing it for a while. I don't ever plan on retiring, I don't think.

Paul: I think it's one of the things that help keep ya going and why you are in such good shape today. It's that activity and fitting shoes. And walking up and down the ladder in the back room and bringing shoes down. That activity. And then he retired, just a couple of years after that, my step mom passed away down there. He was 88 I think or 87. No way he could stay by himself anymore. The old traditional guy, doesn't cook or clean house. Doesn't know how to do any of that stuff. And you were just getting too old. You were in pretty rough shape. You were taking care of Jackie through her last years. So we came down, us siblings and we sold the house. Brought Dad up, and now you are living with us here in Chicago, ever since. I retired in '08. Dad and I, my wife still works. She's younger. She is only

56 years old. She works at AT&T out at Hoffman Estates does real well there. Dad and I, we go to the Y 3 days a week up in Palatine. Work out. We believe in physical activity.

Aaron: That's right. Keeps you young.

Paul: It does! He's got a little chart that he carries with him. He has 13 machines that he does. And he looks forward to going there. And then we spend an hour and a half there and clean up and go out to breakfast.

Aaron: That is an awesome routine.

Anthony: I eat breakfast, it's what I do for the heart.

Aaron: Absolutely.

Anthony: How many times. How many sets. I keep records of it.

Aaron: It's good. It's good to keep track. To not overwork yourself, not to overdo it.

Paul: And all the folks come up to him all the time. And mostly at that time during the day. We get up at 7:00 and we get there at 8:00-8:15. And a lot of guys my age and a lot of girls and they are always coming up and talking to him. "How old are you?" "91." "What!? You're 91 and you are here working out at the gym. Wow!" So you are an inspiration to them.

Aaron: That's a total motivator.

Anthony: Yeah.

Aaron: What what about you after Vietnam? Went back to Eastern?

Paul: I went back to Eastern. For the next 7 years, I lived in Schiller Park. Pretty much, you know, met my wife. At the time, she was younger than me, we met at a New Years Eve party. Got married shortly after. We have 3 boys. We raised 3 boys. I stayed at Eastern. We got married in '77. And left there at the end of '86. And got into Telecommunications. I was selling for Eastern my last 9 years, I was in cargo sales. I was a sales guy. They knew I was good at sales. A neighbor of mine, a buddy of mine, was working at Telecom which, was a brand new field in

'86. They just broke up AT&T in '84. So, he says you have some long distance services to businesses. And I got in there and it was a good company, they taught me all about digital communications. I did that for the next 25 years or so. I raised 3 boys. They are all doing great. They are all here in the Chicago area. They all went to school. My oldest son Michael was in the Air Force. He actually spent 4 years in the Air Force. Came back and went to school at Western Illinois, got his degree.

Aaron: Where was he at in the Air Force?

Paul: In South Carolina.

Aaron: Oh, at Charleston?

Paul: At Sumter. There is an Air Force base. He was fixing the F-16s. Working on the F-16s.

Aaron: Excellent.

Paul: Also, spent a lot of time in the Honor Guard . Spent about a year of his time as a trooper doing military funerals down there and going out and honor guard. But, then 9/11 hit. It was towards the end of his 4 years, and he said they were working hard then. It was 12 hours on, 12 hours off. Constantly for the rest of his time. The jets were all flying with bombs. They were coming back with a lot of problems because they were putting them through so many G-Forces.

Aaron: Oh yeah, I bet they were flying them like crazy.

Paul: I say, "What breaks on those jets?" He goes, "Wiring harnesses and all kinds of things come loose." They have to troubleshoot it and fix them.

Aaron: Well those vehicles are getting stressed.

Paul: Yeah, stressed. That's right. And he got out and he was actually was married back then. But it didn't work out. And he has a daughter. So I have a granddaughter and she is 12-years-old now. Little Kylie. We love her to death. They live in Chicago here too. When he got back, he went to Western Illinois. Now, Jimmy, my second son, went to Iowa. He got a double major in MIS and Accounting. He has been working in that field. And

right now he is working for the Federal Reserve Bank right down here. We are going to have lunch with him this afternoon. He is data security expert with them so he is doing real well. And Steven, my youngest, went to Western Illinois. He is a football player, he is a quarterback. And he played 2 years. He started 2 and a half years. He followed up Russ Mikna I don't know if you know Russ, he's from Elk Grove Village—He was a great quarterback down there too. So, he had a good stint and we had a lot of fun going to all the games. Michael came out of the service and he went to Western as well on the GI Bill. So we got to have two of them in school at the same time. It was a lot of fun. My wife and I going to the games and meeting the family of friends from the suburbs.

Aaron: Did you guys keep up with the music and playing and singing?

Paul: A little bit. Dad does, he play his sax and clarinet at home. He's taught me a little bit on his keyboard. We have a keyboard so I can back him up a little bit. I encourage him to play. The doctor said for him to play because it is good for his lungs. The activity. The work there.

Anthony: I can still blow.

Paul: And last year, in fact, we went down to North Carolina. My cousin Tony was a musician. He is semi-retired down there. He's got a recording studio. And they did an album. I have a copy of it here for you. He was 90-years-old. They just went through these old standards, one right after the other. He just improvised everything on there. And he sounds pretty darn good.

Anthony: Yeah. No written music.

Aaron: Just playing out of your head.

Anthony: Yeah.

Paul: So we have been doing that and going to family reunions trying to visit his brothers... My uncles who are still living. As much as we can get away. And you know, try to get together with as much as the family as we can. Because you know, we are here

in Chicago and Uncle Mike is in New York. We have a lot of relatives in New York. Uncle John is in Arizona.

Aaron: Everyone is spreading with the 4 winds.

Paul: All over. My brother is in Atlanta, and cousins in Florida. It's fun, we get around.

Aaron: So, I am ready to wrap up pretty soon. I was just thinking of a couple of extra questions. We are doing a little I wouldn't call it a survey. But your boots, that you guys were both issued, how did you guys feel about your boots that you guys were issued? [...]. Did you like them? Are they comfortable? Did they break in?

Anthony: Yeah. I think they felt alright. I don't really remember.

Paul: You had them when I was a kid. They were up in the attic with your uniform. I remember seeing them. But, they were the black combat boots. I've seen them in pictures too.

Anthony: Yeah.

Paul: We wore low-quarters a lot too. The black regular shoes.

Anthony: I don't use those.

Paul: No, not anymore but, he is asking how were they when you were in the service? Did you even think of them?

Anthony: No. No. They were okay. No problem.

Paul: I feel the same way. Combat boots in training were good. They were well-fitted.

Aaron: Did you have the same boots going into Vietnam?

Paul: No. We had jungle boots. With the canvas on the side. The green canvas. They were fitted. They were fine. I think the one thing the army does is make sure your feet are taken care of.

Aaron: If your feet go, you are done. That's the lifeblood of the grunt right there. Keep your feet healthy.

Paul: Yeah! Good feet, good shoes. Good boots.

Anthony: I totally forgot I had those boots. [Laughs] So long ago.

Aaron: So I'll leave this question for the both of you. It was also in the questionnaire but, what are your guys' impression of the citizen soldier?

Anthony: Of the citizen...?

Aaron: You know, citizens in this country giving up our—volunteering a part of their life to give to the service of the country. How do you feel about that? What's your--

Anthony: It depends on the individual. If he has reason enough to not want to partake. As far as I feel it, whatever they desire to do. That's it.

Paul: What do you think of the guys that are in the military today though?

Anthony: Oh well, thank God for those people that are doing, that is important.

Aaron: Right. It's an all-volunteer Army. There is no more drafts. The men and women that fight these days, they do it on their own volition.

Paul: That's right!

Anthony: We have to have a ready to go army. There are things that are in these other countries. You never know what is going to happen in the next moment. I feel good about it. It's a good thing to have.

Paul: I feel the same way. I feel very, very proud. I feel a kinship with them. I worry about them. I think about them a lot. I know what they are going through. I stop and think about it so often. I am so glad we got them. I really am. I am so proud of them. Like I said at our reunions that I would go to, our infantry unit is still active today. They are a part of the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii. And they are always in Iraq or Afghanistan. They have been in Afghanistan a lot. They have been seeing a lot of combat. They sent in a couple of guys back, 3 or 5 guys to our reunion. We get to meet these kids and talk to them. And really can identify with them and know. In Denver, at the last reunion,

I got to talk to this one sergeant, he was a platoon sergeant I think, about some of the activity in Afghanistan, and I shared with him I was in Recon. And he said yeah, we still have Recon but, it is called scout squad. It is the same thing. Pretty much the reactionary force for the battalion and you know, I said, “Yeah, I don’t know, I knew that we used to get in line and charge. I didn’t know anyone else did that back then.” I said, “We did it so well.” And he goes, “Oh yeah! That’s one of our number 1 drills that we do. Get on line and charge!” He goes, “There are other tactics that we use, too. Basically...” He started going into some of the battles they were in. He says, “We’d get...I don’t care if there is a hundred of them that hit us. We are going to bring everything at them! We are gonna go out and go after them and bring in our ships and bring in artillery support. Whatever we got! Helicopters, gunships! And we are gonna get those...” And he said, “We never lose a battle.” He told me. He says, “We have never lost a battle over there.” He said, “The only problem is that they could blow up our trucks.” He says, “That we haven’t solved yet. It’s those IEDs, the most terroristic, murderous things that they have. It’s the only thing that they can do to us”. I was so proud of him. I couldn’t stop listening to him. Telling me these stories of what he is going through because I could identify with him so much. So I really, really appreciate all of our troops.

Aaron: Well, is there anything that I have not talked about that you want to cover? Have I missed anything?

Paul: Well, the only other thing that we mentioned about you and your brothers and music for a long, before and after the war. No, I guess we did cover that. Being on the Arthur Godfrey Show.

Aaron: Mhmm.

Anthony: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah. So he’s had a good life, I’ve had a good life. I am thankful for my family, and being an America. Thankful for being a part of this and being able to share our stories. I hope that something--

Aaron: This is more than amazing. This is great. It's great having you guys in here.

Paul: Well, thank you. It's great to be here.

Aaron: Absolutely.