**Kimberlie Kranich:** Good morning.

**Donald Hyche**: Good morning.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** I'm Kimberlie Kranich. Today is Friday, July 7, 2017 and I'm at the WILL Studios in Urbana with Sargent Donald Hyche, welcome. So let's just start please tell me, tell me in your voice, tell me your name, where you were born and your birthdate.

**Donald Hyche**: My name is Donald Jerome Hyche. I was born in North Port, Alabama, but I grew up in Chicago.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what date--

**Donald Hyche**: And my birthday is January the 21, 1951.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what part of Chicago did you grow up in?

**Donald Hyche**: The South Side.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** All right, in Englewood?

**Donald Hyche**: Yes, the Englewood District.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What was it like for you growing up in Inglewood in the '50s and '60s? What do you remember?

**Donald Hyche**: It was, it was a lot different. By Chicago being a city you would never think that. My exposure to other groups, other like whites and so forth, I didn't have no interaction with them at all. The only time I really seen white people was when I went downtown or we had certain deliveries that came into our area, like the Hostess guy, the guy that delivered the liquor, the pop, so forth. 'Cause during that time I didn't never see any black drivers, you know, black delivery men, they was mostly white. And of course most of the police during that particular era was white. So, you know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So in your neighborhood, it was an all black neighborhood?

**Donald Hyche**: Mm-hm.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And the patrol officers were white or black?

**Donald Hyche**: They were mostly white. It was a few, very few, you know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what were the interaction with, with the white people that you had when you were growing up? What was that like?

**Donald Hyche**: It was, well I really didn't have that much. And I had a sense of physical superiority, for some reason. I don't know why, but I learnt that when finally I went to the Marines and got my butt whooped by one, then I realized that wasn't true.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Okay, where did you think, where do you think this came from?

**Donald Hyche**: I don't know. I think that um... I don't know maybe the Mandingo thing, a lot of times when they showed us these muscles and, you know what I mean? And all that type of stuff. So I guess I got it from there. You know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And talk about your home life in your all black community and your neighbors and your teachers. What did it feel like to grow up in that? Was it nurturing, was it comforting?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, it was.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Talk about it.

**Donald Hyche**: It was a very nurturing. It was during that particular era unlike now where we didn't have the luxury of standing on the corner smoking marijuana. We couldn't do that. It was, that saying that it takes a whole village to raise someone, that's the concept that was going on during that particular period. I'm a only child, but you would think I had 100 grandmamas and granddaddies, because wherever I would go in that neighborhood they knew me and if they saw me doing something that I shouldn't have been doing they would tell me. "I'm gonna tell your mom or I'm gonna tell your daddy." Or in some cases they would beat my butt themselves. You know. So it was kind of like that. And we did a lot of things together, block parties and stuff like that. For us to have a block party it could be decided in, say like everybody, we wake up and it's a Saturday. And everybody look, "Oh it's a beautiful day. Let's have a block party." And we just had it. And we didn't ask for permits and all this type of stuff. Everybody just got together we would go from house to house, "What you cooking?" And, "what you gonna cook?" And, "You gonna bring this," you know. And we had it!

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Sounds nice.

**Donald Hyche**: Mm-hm, it was.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What about teachers? Did teachers live in your, tell me about the schools?

**Donald Hyche**: No, well the schools was real nice. You know they were they was. I never, I didn't have no problems. I wasn't a disciplinary case or nothing. The school was pretty good, you know. I guess all the normal stuff that you go through in school. Most of my teachers were black. There was a few white teachers there, but most of them was black.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Talk about your immediate family, your mom and your dad. Tell me about them and what they did in there and your thoughts about them as parents.

**Donald Hyche**: Okay my mother she worked at a hospital. Let me go back. At first, my mother used to leave me with my grandmother a lot. Because my father, when we were living in Alabama, she had divorced him and she left and went to New York. So consequently my grandmother took me to New York a couple of summers. And finally my mother moved to Chicago and then once she got settled in Chicago I came there to stay with her. So during that particular time, a few years later I ended up with a stepfather. He was real disciplinary, real, real disciplinary. I wasn't too fond of him at first, because I wasn't used to a man telling me what to do. I was just used to my mother telling or my grandmother. I don't know, my mother always pushed education and stuff like that. She didn't take no mess and she still don't. You know, as far as me trying to have whatever. I broke her heart when I joined the marines. She didn't like that at all, you know. Because there was a war going on.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yeah, let's talk about that. Did you have any relatives in the military?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah I had cousins and stuff that had went and that's what made me interested in going to the military. Because, 'cause I idolized. You know they were older than me and I kind of looked up to the them. So when they went, of course I wanted to go.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And were they cousins in Chicago or Alabama or where they--

**Donald Hyche**: Well they were, a couple was in Alabama and some was in Chicago.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And how old were you when you moved to Chicago with your mom?

**Donald Hyche**: I had to have been like, oh, how old was I? Like nine, 10? Somewhere in there.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Okay. Yeah. So you joined the marines, tell me about your dates of service in the marines and when you were in Vietnam.

**Donald Hyche**: My date of service I joined the Marines in April of 1969. I enlisted for four years. I went to Vietnam in 1970. And I stayed there 13 months.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And tell me why, since you enlisted, why did you pick the marines?

**Donald Hyche**: Because I didn't want to go to the Army. And I was fascinated with the marine corps dress blues. Plus I had a cousin that had went to the marines. During that particular era to be a service man was prestige, you know. People, looked up to you. You know you were somebody. You know and I liked that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Okay and so had you thought about further education beyond high school or--

**Donald Hyche**: Not really, no.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Okay. What is it about the Marines? Or why not the army? You said you didn't want to enlist in the Army, what was wrong with the Army?

**Donald Hyche**: No, well because. Well first of all I had two cousins who had already went to the marines. And like I say I liked the dress blues, I liked their uniform. And I like that, the way they was treated as opposed to the army they seemed to be treated differently. And then the army was, it seemed like that's where most of all the blacks went, was to the army you know. And I wanted to be different, so I went to the marines.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And you said you enlisted when the Vietnam War was going on.

**Donald Hyche**: Yes.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What did you think about that draft and were you afraid of being drafted?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, but I didn't think I would go to Vietnam because I don't have any sisters or brothers. But little did I know that don't, that don't keep you out of a combat situation. What keeps you out of a combat situation is you got to be the sole survivor to carry on your name. And I have uncles and stuff. So the name would be carried on. I would have to be the last person you know, to give me that exempt from going to a combat situation. But they don't tell you all of that, you know. And so, I went. And lo and behold I went to Vietnam.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So tell me a little bit. What was your sense of the draft? So you did make a conscious choice for many reasons.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What was your sense of the draft and did you know people who were being drafted and made the choice to enlist rather than being drafted? Even though you didn't think you were gonna be--

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah, well during that era most guys thought they would be drafted. Excuse me. The only way you wouldn't be drafted is for you to get a deferment. And you had to be in medical school or something like that. You know something along those lines. So that never entered my mind about a deferment. I always thought that I would end up in the service. Almost everybody I know ended up in the service. And one of them, you know and most of them ended up in the army. Because they got drafted. Most of them got drafted and they got drafted for two years. I stayed in the Marine Corps four years because it's an actual contract that you sign when you go in the service. So you kind of like trying to sell yourself, you're bargaining with them. And they wanted me to give them four years. And I kept saying, "No I want to go for two years." And they kept saying, "No you got to give us four." So eventually I went for the four.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And you said your mom was, you said pissed, that you enlisted.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Did she think you weren't gonna get drafted? Or why was she angry? If so many people are having--

**Donald Hyche**: Well she was angry because we had known a bunch of people that they either came back from Vietnam, something was wrong with them or a lot of them didn't come back. You know it was nothing, everybody during that era knows somebody that died over there. You know it was common. So of course me being 18, I didn't think of death and stuff like that. I didn't see myself going over there dying. But her being my mother and being the mom to a person, you know she understand that. Yeah and she was really pissed about that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what was the, you were, the Civil Rights Movement was, there were a lot of struggles and victories and everyone. The Civil Rights Movement was very much alive and mobilized.

**Donald Hyche**: Yes.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** How did that impact your sense of self or your service in the military? Did it in any way?

**Donald Hyche**: Well eventually it did. Initially it didn't. Because I didn't see that, I didn't realize that the service was somewhat segregated. I didn't know anything about that. That was one of them things that wasn't talked about a lot. But when I went to the marine corps I realized the marine corps was an expression we used back in that day was virtually lily white. You know most of the guys in the marine corps if you look at old pictures and stuff you don't see hardly no blacks. Mostly all blacks went to the infantry. During that particular time very few went to technical jobs, technical skills and stuff. Most white guys got those jobs.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yeah, talk a little bit about that, what you observed. How some of the differences in ways you and other black marines were treated, what you saw. Whether it was boot camp. Let's start with boot camp, yeah. Because we're in--

**Donald Hyche**: Oh yup. Boot camp was, that's where I was. I mean drill instructors during that era could put their hands on you. They would beat your butt, period. And they would call you the n-word and anything else they wanted to call you. And you couldn't do nothing about it, you know. It was kind of like an accepted thing. Racism was all through the military. You know during that particular era. And it wasn't... We had racial scrimmages in Vietnam. Where we would go to the enlisted man club and get to fighting and stuff like that. The Vietnamese or the Viet Cong were slick. What they would do was if a patrol went out and say like if it was three, four blacks in the patrol and there was seven whites, they would kill as many of the whites as they could and not mess with none of the blacks. So consequently when they go back to their unit or whatever, it created, "Why? "Why none of them didn't get?" Even though if it wasn't talked about you thought it.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what did you understand the reason was that blacks weren't shot at by the Viet Cong, but the whites--

**Donald Hyche**: Propaganda. The Vietnamese, the Viet Cong was aware of the struggles in the United States. You had to think we were so isolated over there in Vietnam, the stuff that was going on in the United States we didn't know nothing about it. The only way we knew about it is somebody sent us a newspaper clipping or most of the time the Viet Cong would let us know. Either in some type of leaflet or you know there were incidents where loudspeaker would just be, you know. They would just speak over loudspeaker about what was going on. Back in the United States. And they would say stuff like, "Black man this "is not your war, why don't you go home? "Don't you know in Detroit this is going on? "Or in Chicago this is going on?"

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Were there other black marines in your unit when you served?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah. But most of the blacks, when I went to the Air Wing, it wasn't really. In the infantry there was plenty blacks. But in the Air Wing there wasn't a lot of them there. It wasn't a lot of crew chiefs or the guys that worked on the jets or the helicopters. There just wasn't a lot of blacks into that. And there were times when we would have racial situations over there when I would go down to the infantry. You know the infantry where they stayed was like maybe two or three blocks from where I was at. So I would go down there and stay down there with them. Because, I don't know you go to the club or something and you're with all these white guys and we all right and cool and then we go to the club. And something's happens there and it would be racial. And you just felt funny going back with all of them and you know that these black guys just beat them up or whatever. You know and sometimes it would be the other way around. Where they would beat up the black guys. So it was just a bad situation. And those situations was stuff that's never been talked about. They just don't talk about that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Do you have any specific memory of any? I've gotten a good painted a good picture. Do you remember one particular incident that you could share with us?

**Donald Hyche**: Well, there were many. Just at the enlisted man club because we had them. And of course we could drink. And once we get to drinking and stuff, you know, we get into it. To be honest see i can't remember just one specific. It was a lot of them. Most of the time there wasn't any nobody died. Not that I'm aware of, but there were times that people got messed up pretty bad.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And did that, you know you hear a lot about the military, you're a cohesive, tight unit. You're gonna protect your person's back, they're gonna get yours. Despite these racial fights and name calling when you're actually in the combat zone was it different? Or did you notice the racial tension?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah it was different. Yeah, because you had to depend on each other. You know, you didn't have that luxury of not liking the guy next to you. You know, you just didn't have that luxury. Most guys in units, some guys say like in a unit the blacks and the whites were real tight. And say like another unit, they wasn't like that. You know what I'm saying? And this particular unit, the one where they real tight at, they would stick together no matter what they dealt with. The reason for that is because they had to depend on each other. When they went into the bush and stuff you had to depend on that guy that was behind you. You know plus the fact you wouldn't want to be out there and someone could just blow your brains out and you wouldn't even know it. It ain't like they was running around in Vietnam having ballistic check. They don't know how you died. I mean they don't know who shot you, they're assuming that it was the enemy. But I mean, if you had a situation where somebody hated you and didn't like you or something, you know they could do that. So you tried to stay away from that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Did you feel when you were, and we'll get into your specific service in a moment, but in general did you trust the white marines that you were on the helicopter with and on the ground with?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah I did, yeah. I had to and they had to trust me. It's particularly the pilots. You know the pilots don't have a rear view mirror. A helicopter don't have that, you know. It's also, it's so loud that you can't see when you're being, I mean you can't hear when you're being shot at.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** I want to know a little bit about your basic training if you would. Where were you, where did you train? And talk a little bit about that.

**Donald Hyche**: MCRD San Diego. When I went there I was really fascinated by the fact that I could do things that I thought I never would be able to do. Because they pushed you to the brink. But also what they did was they brainwashed you. And the way they brainwashed you was every time they would tell us, they had a command where they would say, "At ease." When they say at ease, we would say, "Kill." And then when we finally sit we would say, "Viet Cong." You know, so. And this went on during your whole training cycle. So by the time you got to Vietnam you was ready to shoot anything that looked Vietnamese, 'cause you was brainwashed, you know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And did you realize it at the time?

**Donald Hyche**: No, no, not at all. And we had they call it ITRA. And I done forgot what that acronym, but anyway, they had the huts and stuff set up. It looked just like Vietnam, you know on Camp Pendleton. And we would go there over and over and over again we would assault that village. You know over and over and over again never thinking that it's possibly women, children and all that in this village. Your mind was kind of like, ain't nothing there but some males trying to kill you. No one said, "Wait a minute, it could be some kids there," or stuff like that. You know, that never was talked about. What was talked about was, "This is a Vietnamese village. "You're gonna run into this when you get there "and the enemy is gonna be in there." So when you get there you're on automatic.

**Donald Hyche**: And that's what they trained you to do.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** That's what they trained you to do. Do you remember when you got your Westpac papers, the day that you got those and what those are?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah when I got them I didn't know what Westpac meant, you know. And the Westpac don't say Vietnam it say Westpac, whatever that meant. Yeah I remember getting them and we was talking about it and finally I realized that's what it meant. But you don't go that particular day. You still do whatever you're doing. One day they would say like, "We're gonna have "this drill or whatever." And you get all your equipment and stuff together and then you run out to this bus. First of all they have this drill three or four times before you actually get on a plane. You know they have you to get on buses or trucks and they would drive you to an outpost or someplace that, you know, where they had a plane. And you would get there and you would act like you fixing to run up on the plane and they fixing to deploy you some place. But then they would say it's a drill. So consequently you get back on the vehicles and you go back. Now one particular time they called that and we got on the plane. And when the plane landed it landed in Okinawa, Japan. And we stayed in Japan about six days and after that we went to Vietnam.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And do you remember the flight to Japan or to Vietnam?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah! It was man, it was about 18 hours. Believe me the world is 2/3 water because all of that time that's all I saw was water. Every now and then you would see a rock, a island or something. But most of it was just water, you know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Do you remember how you felt when you were finally going? What your thoughts were, what your emotions were?

**Donald Hyche**: Excitement, fear, all of that. You know because I was a marine and I had admired the guys that had been and came back and they had all the rows of ribbons and medals and stuff. And I wanted that, you know, and the only way you can get it is to do that. And then my focus was not on the ones that didn't come back, was on the ones that did. Because one thing about the military, now that I think about it, the base itself you didn't see cripples or people with no arms, no legs because they had went to Vietnam. The people you saw were people that was healthy, they may have been wounded or whatever in Vietnam, but they were all right now. So, you didn't get that sense of something would happen to you like that. Or if it did you'd still have a sense that probably you would survive, you know. Now if I had went to a VA hospital prior to that I would have had a whole different, another take on that. You know because that's where you see the guys that, no legs and, as a matter of fact if you notice now on television you see more ads, commercials and stuff about veterans and they show them with no legs, no arms, no this and that. Think about it. They used to, you didn't see that. You just did not see it. But now you see it all the time.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So tell me about what was your assignment in Vietnam, what was your job title? What did you do?

**Donald Hyche**: At first when I got to Vietnam I was at, they sent me to MAG 16, Marble Mountain, and I was in a company called Zulu Company, MAG 16. And basically our job was the security of the base, because the base was part of the 1st Marine Airwing. Which they had helicopters and all that stuff there. They gave me orders to go and be active in the Airwing in terms of being a area door gunner after I was there for awhile. Prior to that I very seldom went out in the bush or anything like that because like I say we were basically security for the base. But after that then we went. When I got on the helicopter I always saw different stuff. First they started me out with being familiar with the guns and stuff on the helicopter. And we would go out around there, I think it was the Red China Sea, whatever they call that. Anyway we would go out there and get familiar with the guns and shoot at fish that we could see swimming or whatever. After that short period then you know, I would actually start doing missions. And the missions I started out doing was like resupply. Infantry that's in the bush and stuff, you know, of course they've got to get food and they got to have a whole lot of different things. And so that's my job at first, that's what I did. And then slowly it turned to Medivac. And Medivac is usually part of the dangerous ones because sometimes when you're going to bring out a wounded person they actually are engaging with the enemy at that particular time. And you know we don't wait until it's over with. We have to get that person out of there, 'cause we're trying to save his life. And at first that was super scary for me because I thought about it. I thought about what we actually was going to do. After awhile I put it out of my mind and I stopped thinking about it because fear, I was so afraid initially that, I didn't tell you this before but I can remember one of our first missions where I went. And we actually was engaged in combat. Well I was afraid to shoot the weapon. I just, I was stuck. You know, I was so afraid. And I could see the traces of stuff coming up from the ground, I could see the flashes. So I know we was being shot at. But I just could not pull that trigger. I was stuck, you know. The other gunner on the helicopter, 'cause there's two guns, the guns stick out the right and the guns stick out the left. And basically what they do is what they call a spiral. And the reason they do that is so we cover 360 degree thing and it comes down like this, like in a circle. I call it like a bedspring. It comes down like that. So that a gun is constantly, you know, being turned. Because I only, the only way we can stop the enemy from shooting at us is we maintain fire superiority. And fire superiority means I must suppress your fire. And the way I suppress your fire is I got a machine gun I can shoot faster than you and I got the high ground. You know and I got seeming like unlimited amount of rounds because I'm on a helicopter. And I'm not carrying any of these bullets. My bullets are in a big ole box. So when we engage the enemy I'm constantly shooting because I can't allow him to shoot up at me. So during this time when I froze, you see how dangerous that was? And holes start appearing in the helicopter everywhere. It's just lucky we didn't get, nobody got shot or anything. But the pilots and stuff went off on me. You know the other guys on the helicopter, yeah they were, they was pretty pissed. They said, "You can't do this man, you can't do this."

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And then you were able to do it.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah what I did was I just, I went from one end of the spectrum to the other end. I just became a damn fool. And what I mean by that was I didn't care. I would do stuff that people would say was heroic, but they wasn't heroic it was fear. I was afraid! And that's the way I dealt with my fear. You ever, you know people that you probably grew up with and they were people that looked like they'd fight anybody and all that type of stuff. But actually they are scared people. You know and that's fear that's causing them to act the way they act. And basically that's how I was operating.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And just to clarify, so you were an area door gunner.

**Donald Hyche**: Area, yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Area door gunner. And you had a, was it an M-16 machine gun?

**Donald Hyche**: No M-60.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** M-60, pardon me. And can you give me an example of something you did out of fear that was foolish, but that you were compelled to do?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh like went down on a jungle penetrator. A jungle penetrator is a big ole lead ball that has legs on it. And the guy that, we was going to Medivac, wasn't able to get on that and we couldn't land it was just too dense. So I got on this jungle penetrator and they lowered me down. And the only way that they knew where to go was by a strobe light. A little light that flashes like this. You know because in Vietnam, you got to think you can't see your hands in front of your face. But one of the things and I have to say this, it's the most beautiful sky you ever seen. You'd be amazed at all the stars that are in the sky. That pollution we don't see it, but over there you see all of that. But anyway I went down on this jungle penetrator and I get the guy and I strap him to me and then we get pulled back up. And that's, that was when I was first told to do that my initial thing was, "Are you for real?" But then, once again I allowed fear to take over and I said, "Yeah I'll do that come on! "Yeah let's go get him."

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So you went from being on the helicopter and giving supplies to the troops to bringing wounded soldiers up to firing on the Viet Cong to protect our troops.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, oh yeah! Well see it was kind of like the process is. I'm not trying to make it like it was steps that you go through 'cause actually it wasn't. What it was it just happened to be, that's what was called for at that particular time. Vietnam had a weather condition that was just something else. It could be bright and sunny and 10 minutes later everything is soaking wet. Then an hour later everything is bone dry again. And they had a lot of situations where we would have low clouds. And we couldn't, we couldn't fly. Or we couldn't resupply troops and different stuff like that. Some of these times maybe these troops hadn't been supplied in a couple of days because of the weather. But when we could fly we immediately did that. That's what I meant when I said that I started out like that because that's what was going on. But say since for instance if it was Medivacs at that time I would have did that too.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And when you grabbed that first soldier was the soldier wounded and what do you remember about?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah, yeah he was wounded. He had a, he was almost... His stomach, his intestines and all that stuff. They had on him what's called like a battle dressing. It's a big ole pad that they put on and they tie around you. And you keep it moist to hold your intestines and all that in. Because his was coming out. So when we got him on the helicopter we pour water on it, 'cause we got to keep it moist. You know you got to keep his organs moist and stuff. The guy didn't feel no pain or anything like that. He asked for a cigarette. Because they had gave him morphine. He didn't feel no pain.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what about you? What was the impact on you to see this? And you repeatedly did this, is that correct?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah. Well it was, like I say, I never gave myself time to think about it. I didn't process that like that. I learnt how to suppress though. And I became real good at it because a lot of guys I was in Vietnam with, I couldn't tell you their name. I do not know their names. Very few faces I even remember. Because I suppressed all of that. I suppressed incidents, various missions, and people I interacted with. I suppressed all of that. Because we're sitting here me and you all tight and we cool. And you may be gone tomorrow. And then what am I gonna do then? Now I'm all messed up. Because you was part of my existence here. Now you not here no more. You see? You learn how to protect yourself and stuff like that. Although, you was real tight, particularly with blacks. You know if you seen another black, and they could be in the army or in the marines, we would stop and greet each other. We had that camaraderie there. But like I said a lot of that stuff was fear. I learnt that much later that that's what it was, it was fear. Afraid and scared to death, believe me.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** You're talking about the fear and not being able to shoot that first time. Tell me the story, you told me about that scared soldier you dropped off. Do you remember that?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh the one that didn't want to get off the helicopter?

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yeah, yeah, tell me that.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah the thing about that is, when we go down into a LZ which is a landing zone we actually only supposed to be on the ground seconds, not minutes, seconds. And when we were down in this particular LZ and we was taking fire and this guy didn't want to get off! But he got to get off! We can't take you back with us. You have to get off. So all of his squad and stuff ran off the helicopter and he still was sitting there, wouldn't get off. So I had to virtually pull my .45 and go back there and almost beat him off the helicopter. And the helicopter was, we was lifting up off the ground. And basically I just pushed him out of it. You know, because I can't take you back. You know, we don't do that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Do you remember what he looked like?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah he was a white guy. And I'll never forget he had these big ole giant blue eyes. And that's what I remember seeing that as he was looking at me when I saw that fear in his face. You know he was scared, he was scared, he was red, red! He was scared, you know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Tell me this that you also saw a soldier that was being pursued by Viet Cong from the helicopter they were shooting.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Tell me that story.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, we we seen, I seen a guy that I don't know how he did it, how he survived. Because we had went down this LZ and was extracting troops. And this one particular guy, how it happened I don't know, but the Viet Cong they were chasing him. And we could see that. And he was running and he would get in this real dense places like with trees and shrubbery and all that stuff. And you wouldn't see him. But you seen all these Viet Cong and you say, "Ah man, they done got him." And then you look down there again and lo and behold there he is again running another way. You know and this guy was just something else. He made up his mind, "I am not dying today." And he didn't and we went and got him. But it was just, it was something else. And we was up there cheering for him. We wanted him to go to an area where we could hurry up and sit down and pick him up. But he kept saying he had to stay in the dense areas to avoid them, because he didn't want to go into no clear area because he know he would be a target. You know and he was trying to evade them. And eventually he did. And it was just something else to see that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** That's amazing.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, it is.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** You guys were happy that day.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, oh yeah! We was cheering him on and everything, everybody, yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What are some of the sights, the sounds and the smells that you remember about Vietnam?

**Donald Hyche**: Vietnam is real hot, super hot, but burnt bodies is the smell that you and decaying bodies and stuff like that. That never leaves you. You never forget that smell. Unlike TV where, you know, they can show you combat situations but they can't give you the details of the sense of the environment and how it felt. And that played a big role a lot of times. And like I said, it could start raining and you sink in the ground because it rains that hard. And then like I say an hour or couple hours later the ground is just at dry as it can be. It's amazing. But people don't understand it's a tropical climate. Everything over there, pears was this big. Fruits and stuff, everything was big. Of course we had a lot of wildlife over there. We had snakes over there that looked like little hogs. All that stuff. We had a lot, Vietnam is something else. But it's one of the most beautiful countries you ever seen.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Have you been back since your service?

**Donald Hyche**: No! Do I want to go back, no!

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Why not?

**Donald Hyche**: I just don't, it's just, I don't know what it'll make me remember. And I know from being in post-traumatic stress disorder or classes and stuff I've had and talking to psychiatrists, it's a lot of stuff I don't remember and I'd like to leave it that way.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** You talked about things you saw from the helicopter and the shooting that you had to do. You told me before that there's a sort of a distance between the killing and your emotions because you were in the air. Can you talk about that?

**Donald Hyche**: Right, well. One of the things is to me it's nothing to shoot someone. You got to think about it because you got a weapon and when you fire it everything goes away from you. The impact of the round and all of that that hit the person or whatever, unless you're very close up on him you don't see none of that. You don't experience his pain, you don't experience, you know the aftermath of the blood and all that. You don't deal with none of that! You see? Because you're main objective is to stop him from doing whatever he doing trying to hurt you. And once you've done accomplished that you don't be, "I wonder where I shot him at. "I wonder if he bleeding a lot. "I wonder is he in pain." You don't deal with none of them. You just do not be emotionally attached to any of that. At all. You just don't. That's why I can understand these kids in Champaign the way they're shooting and stuff like that. Because you got to think. If we sitting in this studio if a guy came in here and started shooting and stuff he don't experience what that bullet is doing to us! You know what I mean? Because everything goes away from him. Now it's a lot different when you got to get up on somebody. Now that's a whole different person.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Were you in that situation in Vietnam?

**Donald Hyche**: Where I had to get up on somebody?

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yeah, yeah.

**Donald Hyche**: No, no not really. I did see. I mean I've been not real close where I could touch you, but I been pretty close at different times where I could see them. And then like I say I start firing and I don't see you no more. And then the infantry would radio us and tell us about the blood trails they would see. Because a lot of times you didn't see a body. You just seeing a blood trail. You know that whatever it was, you know that it's person you hit, but they always try to pick up their wounded. Although sometimes they couldn't, but most of the time they would, they would pick up their wounded. So all you would see is a blood trail.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Tell me, there was a time though that you were on the ground and somebody in your unit was a bomb fell. Can you talk about that?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh you mean like incinerated?

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yeah.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah 122 rocket hit a guy and hit him, hit him point blank. I mean it hit him and when it hit him it disintegrated him. Pieces of flesh or bone and all that was just everywhere. It was all over me and all that type of stuff. And I couldn't hear for I don't know how long, because it was so loud. And it messed up my vision. I didn't tell you that before. It messed up my vision because that flash and that loud sound as close as I was to it, it just messed up my vision and stuff. I was just seeing little black spots for I don't know, maybe like a week. And I didn't fly none of that week because I couldn't hardly see good. And I certainly couldn't hear. I had a ringing in my ear for I don't know how long.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** But then your vision and hearing came back to normal?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Good. Let's talk a little bit about your relationship to the Vietnamese. Before you went over there had you ever thought about Vietnamese people or soldiers?

**Donald Hyche**: Not at all. Not at all, didn't even know they existed. Never thought of them at all. And what really blew my mind was when we did get there we had Vietnamese actually worked on the base. They would clean up. Some even worked in the barber shop and all that kind of stuff! And then at night when they were trying to breach our perimeter or whatever, some of those same people that worked on the base would be in the wire dead. Some of those same ones. But during the day they just smiling in your face and you know, and all of that. And you might know their name or whatever. At night they're trying to kill you.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So did you have any particular names you would refer to the Vietnamese as, whether they worked on the base or they were in the military?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah we used to call them gooks. If I'm not mistaken gook basically means foreign. Now we really were the gooks, but we called them gooks.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What role did alcohol and drugs play during your time in Vietnam?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh, I mean we stayed drunk and high all the time. A can of beer was 15 cent. And you basically, the rules was very relaxed. I mean we drank all the time. That was like giving a guy a soda. We stayed drunk and we stayed they had some pills over there. I think they were white crosses. Used to call them BT and basically it's speed. And what it does is it keeps you woke, it keeps you alert, at least that's the way you feel. Because say for instance I'm on flight status and I been on flight status for the last 13 hours, just back and forth, back and forth. In order for me to continue to perform at the level I need to perform at I would take a BT and that would, it was speed. So I wouldn't get drowsy I wouldn't be sleepy and I would feel like I'm still alert. And then after I get back to the brig it's time for me to go to sleep or whatever I try to go to sleep or whatever. I would take something, it'd be either be heroin or I would try to drink it down or something to put me down, on the opposite end. So it was. This wasn't like a everyday thing, but it happened a lot.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And were the sergeants also engaged in this and the pilots?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah! I used to go get my pilots marijuana and B and yeah. Because my pilots was officers and so they didn't want to be in the villages and stuff like that. But I would go in the villages. And that's where you found all your stuff at, you know, in the village. They sold marijuana that looks like Pall Mall cigarettes without a filter. They was called a 10 pack. And they cost 50 cent. And it was 10 of those in a little cellophane package already rolled up and all of that. And they looked liked a Pall Mall cigarette. And all of us that's in this studio couldn't smoke one of them. All of us. We used to play king of the bunker and we would be passing it around. Because the marijuana over there was like liquor, you would pass out if you continue. The marijuana today people smoke it and after they smoke it a while then they immune to it. Over there that marijuana, I don't know what it was about it but believe me you couldn't continue to smoke it, you would pass out. 'Cause it was so strong.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And were there doctors over there? What was the relationship to the drugs and alcohol and doctors in the service?

**Donald Hyche**: Well, well there wasn't no drug programs when I was in the service that I'm aware of. If you became addicted to something or something like that you had to go see a psychiatrist. You know that's how they dealt with alcoholism if they dealt with it at all. I know that I used to be in charge of some guys that basically supposed to, in the mornings they'd form a line and we'd go pick up all the cigarette butts. Anything that God didn't put on the ground we had to pick up. So, a lot of times when they would be in formation and I would walk through the formation most of the guys there I could smell that they'd been drinking or this or that. That was an accepted thing.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What role did prostitution play in Vietnam?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh a big role, a big role. They had places in Vietnam we could go that were, prostitutes was readily available, I mean they were everywhere! Everywhere. I remember when we used to have perimeter duty we used to go get a prostitute and bring her inside the base at night and have her inside the bunker with us all night. You know and the next morning we'd take her back out.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And who was the prostitute? Who were these women? Where--

**Donald Hyche**: They were local women, Vietnamese. I didn't know it, but during that particular time they were quite young, but you didn't know that at the time. Because it's hard to assess their age because they all look. You know they had, of course you could tell the mama san and papa san because you know they're skin start to wrinkle or whatever. But, a Vietnamese woman that from the age probably of 15 to 25 or something like that you couldn't hardly tell the difference. You wouldn't know. 'Cause they don't age quick like that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And you talked about seeing some of the faces of the soldiers who were scared. What were the prostitutes, how were they treated by the men? Did you have a sense of what they were feeling or did you have anything like that?

**Donald Hyche**: No, it was very mechanical, the actual sexual experience. For them it was, it seemed very mechanical. And believe it or not the prostitution was segregated. We didn't deal with the same prostitutes that whites dealt with. And whites didn't deal with the same prostitutes we'd deal with, particularly in Okinawa, Japan. You couldn't go, we had our own area in Okinawa and whites had their area where they went.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** I didn't know that.

**Donald Hyche**: It's amazing, isn't it?

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yeah.

**Donald Hyche**: And it was accepted, that was the way it was!

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So were these women paid by the soldiers?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah we paid them! Yeah, yeah we paid them. Maybe like $5 or something like that, yeah.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And so did you just kind of discover that there's a segregation among the prostitution?

**Donald Hyche**: Well it's kind of like when you get there of course there's guys that's been there. And they let you know. You know they tell you, "Hey man we over here, we go here."

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What's an Article 15?

**Donald Hyche**: Article 15 is a disciplinary article that they can apply to you. It's kind of like a misdemeanor when they give you a Article 15. What comes after Article 15 I think is a Summary Court-Martial. A Summary Court-Martial is like a mild felony. And then they got, oh I just had the other one, a General Court-Martial. That's like a Class X. You know that's the worst you could get.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And did you have an Article 15?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, I had an Article 15, I don't know nobody probably went to the service that didn't have an Article 15. You got an Article 15 for almost anything.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And what the reason for your Article 15?

**Donald Hyche**: Not going back when I'm supposed to. Stuff like that. Most of it was that kind of stuff.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Do you want to talk about the impact of the, the prostitution on your health? Or is that something you could share?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah. Well most of the time you would end up with gonorrhea and you know of course you had corpsmen over there and stuff. You could, not go to the doctor 'cause if you know a corpsman you just go to him and give you some penicillin. And everybody know you just take so much of it like I think 1,000 milligrams or something like that and it clears it up. It was par for the course, that was part of it. You almost knew. Because you got to think, they didn't have condoms in Vietnam. They didn't have that. Another thing they didn't have in Vietnam is rolling paper. That's why, you ever heard the expression shotgun? With marijuana when somebody say I'm gonna give you a shotgun. 'Cause actually we would stuff marijuana in one end of the barrel of the shot gun and we would light it and we would blow it in your mouth or whatever. That's why it was called a shotgun.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Did you know any guys who had children with because of either relationships

**Donald Hyche**: Oh yeah, yeah!

**Kimberlie Kranich:** with prostitutes--?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah. You could tell. A lot of times you wouldn't know if that was your kid or whatever. You just seeing a bunch of kids running around there of Vietnamese got blue eyes. Or Vietnamese has got a more like a olive complexion and curly hair. You knew that was black guy and the one with blue eyes was probably some white guy. Because I don't think that they had any birth control. And they did have a thing that I mentioned to you 'cause I never ran into it. I think where they would take a bamboo stick and it's hollow. And inside of it they would put little pieces of razor blade. A prostitute would insert that in her and so when a soldier, marine or navy whatever went to have sex with them and insert themselves they would cut their penis. And I heard about that a lot. I never ran into it, but I heard about it. There was some women I later on I heard about that was, had syphilis. But we kind of thought the military was telling us that as a deterrent so maybe we wouldn't go mess with them. You know, because we never, I never knew nobody that had syphilis. They did have some over there that they call it black syphilis, that they said they couldn't cure it. They didn't have a cure for it. And they would put you on a ship because you couldn't come back to the United States. You know, 'cause certain diseases you get you can't reenter the United States with them. So they'd put you on a ship and you just stay on the ship until they figure out what they're doing or you die. Now all of this was stuff I heard, now. Whether it's all true, I kind of believe it's true. And the reason I believe it's true was because just there were guys that was missing and stuff and they weren't shot up or nothing. They was just, you just didn't see them no more. And they didn't rotate out of country or anything like that. So you know. Strange though.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Yes. Do you remember when you got word that you were gonna be going home? You remember that?

**Donald Hyche**: Do I remember that? Yeah because you already knew your rotation date. You knew that, when you first go there you know. You know that this is from this date to that date. And when you start getting close to that date is when you really, where you really feel it really comes in then. Because a lot guys done got killed and had a week, had three days left and all that type of stuff. And you want to go to your CO and tell him, "Look, "I ain't got but a week. "Can I stay back here and do such and such and such?" And in a lot of cases they wouldn't allow you to do that. You had to still go out there, just like the guy that just came, you know. So yeah. During that period you really become afraid.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And so did you have keep going out until that last day?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah! Yeah you had to keep going, yeah. You might get the last three or four days, you know something like that. In some cases guys went out up until the day they left. It depended on what you were doing and what was your job.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Do you remember your flight home from country, from Vietnam?

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, yeah. I remember it, I remember it. What I remember more than the flight is when we landed in San Francisco and all these demonstrators was calling us baby killers and all that kind of stuff. You know and how the military basically was telling us, "Don't wear your uniform." Because there was a lot of demonstrators and stuff that was trying to harm us, you know, in different ways. So it was something else. This was along the period in time where they had all these protestors and stuff about the Vietnam War and all of that. When I left the United States I was a hero before I even went. I could be walking down the street and have my uniform on and a cab would just stop and say, "Hey Marine, were you going? "Come on, get in." And wouldn't charge me anything. I came back and it was a whole different ball game a year and a month later. Everything changed. The war was so unpopular, you know. That's why I think they got this big push now for, you see all these commercials on TV about veterans and the military and this and that. Because think about it, I mean you old enough, we don't remember all of that! My grand kids when I was their age, you know I never seen stuff on television about the military like that and stuff. Never saw that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** When you came back then, did you wear your uniform in the airport? Or did you take their advice and not wear it?

**Donald Hyche**: No I didn't wear it! I didn't wear it, I didn't want to. I mean I ain't never seen it, but there was a whole bunch of people and they was trying to hold them back and all that stuff. And some guys didn't have nothing to change into. You got to think, you, in Vietnam today and tomorrow now you back in civilization the United States. Your mind and everything is still in Vietnam. It takes a while before all of that cross that water. Even though you physically came over here on that plane, but you still in a sense in Vietnam.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Do you remember who you first saw when you came that was your family or a friend?

**Donald Hyche**: Oh I seen my mother.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** She went to pick you up?

**Donald Hyche**: No, she didn't even know I was there. 'Cause I didn't know where I was gonna land at or anything like that. And she was living in Englewood, California. And so they, the plane landed in San Francisco and then I went and caught another flight down to Los Angeles and then I called up someone in my, I think I called my uncle or something. He came to the airport and picked me up.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** When did you first start to realize, what were the cost of Vietnam on your psyche and your body that you realized later on?

**Donald Hyche**: Well it, you, it's a lot of stuff. I came back an addict, an alcoholic. You have a lot of problems that you don't want to be a cry baby about. And you don't relate them to your Vietnam experience. You just don't. And because you be thinking that, there's gobs of guys that didn't come back. There's a whole lot of guys that ain't got legs, arms, can't see anymore and all of that. And here I am healthy and all of this. Or I felt like that anyway. And I'm not fixing to go to the VA and be crying about the fact that I seem to can't get along with nobody, you know. Or I'm having these dreams, these nightmares and stuff that keep waking me up. And the bed is soaking wet because I'm experiencing stuff in my subconscious that I suppressed. You know, later on I learnt that that that's what that is. But I, I even had to tell my wife said, "Certain times when you hear me "moaning or something in my sleep, "touch me, wake me up. Because I'm in the dream then I know I am. Because I get real loud and stuff. Because in my mind I'm living that again! And there'd be a lot of stuff I forgot about. I don't even remember, you know. It blows my mind some of the stuff I did and stuff that I just don't remember. I just don't.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So how did you cope when you came back?

**Donald Hyche**: Drinking and drugging. That's how I coped. Hard to keep jobs and stuff. A lot of different stuff because you're not owning up to the fact you got a problem. You're just not owning up to that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Did you find any solace with other veterans that came back with you or who were here? Did you reach out to them?

**Donald Hyche**: Well, no I didn't until much, much later. I mean like 40 some years later. I went to the, first time I went to the Danville VA, I was telling them that, "Yeah, I'm strung out on drugs," and this and that. And they had already diagnosed me with post traumatic stress disorder, but they wouldn't treat the post traumatic stress disorder until they dealt with the substance abuse problem. Now I think in 2009 or something they finally said, "No we doing it wrong. "We need to deal with these at the same time." When they started doing that is when a lot of veterans got break throughs then. Because you knew you in your heart and your mind that part of your biggest problem was dealing with this stuff you didn't have names for, you didn't know what it was. The alcoholism and all of that stuff you felt like "If I can deal with this, I can probably deal with that." And so finally they started dealing with it all together. And that's when I started getting help at that particular point.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** So that was in, when was this?

**Donald Hyche**: About 2009.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Tell me about meeting your wife and how your Vietnam experience impacted that relationship or?

**Donald Hyche**: Well. She had to be real special in the sense that some of the stuff that I took her through in terms of, most veterans get divorced, 'cause most veterans been married a couple of times and stuff like that. It's hard for them to keep relationships and stuff. My wife was an exception to the rule because she obviously made up in her mind that regardless of what's going on I'm gonna stick it out. And she kept trying to find ways to help me cope with different things. Her and a friend of hers took me to Danville, sometimes I had to go to Danville two or three times a week. Her and this friend went every time I went. They went with me and took me. And they made sure I didn't miss no appointments and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, they did that. And that takes somebody special 'cause most people feel like, "You did that to yourself." You know because they're looking at the symptoms of your problem and not how your problem developed. It's easy to say, "You're an addict." You know or, "You're an alcoholic." But how did I become this? You know prior to Vietnam I had never been in trouble in my life. You know what I mean? Didn't have nothing! You know my biggest thing maybe was a cigarette. I didn't even smoke marijuana before I went to Vietnam. And I certainly didn't have no drinking habit because my momma didn't play that. So didn't none of that stuff exist. But when I first go in the military I mean, I was 18 and I felt like I could go in the club and the club was on base and sit up at the bar and say, "Yeah, give me a couple of beers." They didn't sell hard liquor. But I mean let's face the fact, if you're drinking a beer it's like drinking a fifth of Jack Daniels, you know. So we would sit there and we'd drink pitcher and pitcher after beer and get drunk, you know. It became a way of life. Everywhere we went that's what we did. Every country we went in, that's what we did, drink. That's what we would do.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** When you look back almost 50 years, are there things you've learned about yourself? And if so what did you? When you think about that 18 year old who enlisted and now, you know, you're a senior.

**Donald Hyche**: I learnt that ah, I learnt that I'm more of a survivor than I realize. I realize that have strengths that I didn't know I had. I really do. A lot of times I feel like I didn't, but I really do. Because only I know what I really went through. I can sit and talk to a psychiatrist or therapist and they can help me to get in touch with some things that I experienced but. It's almost like I'm sitting in that chair and I'm also sitting in this chair looking at myself. Because some of those things that I went through and stuff I just, they just don't even seem real. Sometimes they're hard for me to relate to. But then when my subconscious releases them it kind of blows my mind of some of the stuff I did and some of the stuff I went through and survived.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** When you look back what have you learned about war as result of your experience in your recovery?

**Donald Hyche**: That you can't, you can take an individual and you can train them and you give him all of this. But when that person start killing people, regardless if those people are trying to kill him or her, you pay a psychological cost for that. I'm a firm believer when the bible said thou shall not kill it means that. Because when you take another human's life you pay for that. You pay for that spiritually, emotionally and particularly psychologically. You really do. You're gonna have dreams. You ain't gonna be able to have real relationships. You pay for that. And all of these guys. You think about it. Back in World War II they called post traumatic stress disorder, shell shock. Now we all can relate to what shell shock was, particularly in this worst extreme. That was a person that might take his clothes off and get to running down the street. Or they would do something real crazy. Now when they came out with this post traumatic stress disorder I couldn't relate the two. You know because I thought they were different. But the fact of the matter is they are the same. And if it wasn't for the Vietnam veteran the guys that are going to Iraq and Afghanistan and all that would not have the things they have now. The VA would still not address the post traumatic stress disorder that they know we all experience. Almost everybody that go to the military and go through a combat situation gonna come back with post traumatic stress disorder. There ain't no training in the world that can prepare you for that. You know they can, you can go to, like I told you we used to go attack this Vietnamese village, little mock village. But they can't get you ready for when people are actually in that village and you going in there. And now death, weapons, all that stuff is a part of that. They can't prepare you for that. You just can't, you can't, you can't, you know how you, it's kind of like uh... You know that the flight or fight response? Like you're arguing with somebody and your body tells you, "I need to get away from this," and you feel like you need to run. But instead of running you just hit the person before they hit you, because you're afraid! You don't want to hit them, but you're afraid. And that's kind of like, you're like that a lot. You don't know what to do. You just stuck in that. So you try to create an alternative existence. That's where all those drugs come in, so you don't have to deal with all that stuff. You don't have to be sitting there thinking about it all the time and this and that. Then it's like, who the hell understands but a professional? And even them, it's just like here in Champaign, there hasn't been a doctor that you can go to that know anything about post traumatic stress disorder.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** You've had to go outside of--

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, they just don't know! They never. Like I say the military the way they did it for years and years and years, they act like it didn't exist. Because they, I always thought they didn't want to pay out all that money. You know because they have an obligation to you to restore you back to wherever you was when you went into service.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** And how do you feel the military's done in your case?

**Donald Hyche**: I felt it was wrong! Even the doctors in Danville when I went there back in, I think it was 2013 when I really started going back there. They were like, "Where you been? "Why haven't you been here?" Because my first experience when I went to Danville that psychiatrist and stuff that I talked to initially he said, "Yeah he's suffering from "post traumatic stress disorder, "but he got substance abuse problems." And that's all he wrote about.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** But no care.

**Donald Hyche**: They just, they downplayed all of that, you know.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Did you think race had any factor in the way you were dealt with post?

**Donald Hyche**: No, I really don't. I think it becomes a economic, it's about money. 'Cause they have to pay out a lot of money. And I think the VA now has got one of the biggest budgets they ever had. And you think about it Vietnam is like, what was it it was 10,000 or something that died there? There was a lot of people died in Vietnam. I think that if you died in Vietnam they paid your family, I forgot what it was, but it was hardly nothing. So of course if you survived it and you came back, like you see these guys now with these, titanium legs and that stuff is real expensive. Back during the day the VA would give you that old porcelain stuff whatever it was. It was through, like I say the Vietnam veteran, constantly lobbying congress and senators. And then lo and behold we start getting some senators and congressman that had actually been in combat. And so they became sympathetic to us and a lot of that stuff changed. You know, but it took a long time. Most Vietnam veterans never experienced it. They never experienced getting any help.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** You said before you left for Vietnam you were already a hero. And then when you came back you didn't wear your uniform. Do you feel like a hero? How do you think about your service now 50 some years later?

**Donald Hyche**: I think it was, don't nobody give a damn! The guys in the studio they young. I bet you they never asked nobody, "Hey tell me about your war experience, why was that?" They don't talk about that. It's just not interesting. You know we done seen enough stuff on TV and stuff about wars and so forth. Then not only that we in such a technical age that you turn on the TV, hell then you right there. And here's guys that's, you know in Afghanistan or whatever. And you see them all hunkered down there in the hills and all of that. And you look at that and you think that, "Oh well that's cool, that par for the course." But you're not thinking about how that person had to climb up them hills and how his legs is probably all tore up from them rocks and stuff from crawling on them and stuff. You're not thinking about this man ain't probably had a hot meal in I don't know when. And you're not thinking about the fact that in his mind he probably thinking he ain't never gonna come off that mountain. The only people that relate to that I think is veterans. Normal people in society they don't think about all of that. People say this all the time. They say, "Well we got to thank the veterans "because we wouldn't have the freedoms we have if it wasn't for the veterans." They don't know what that means. They don't really even relate to that. They just say that. We know a lot about that because another thing, when you travel and you, the military expose you to different places in the world, you realize that, yeah this is the best country going. But you understand that. But a person that hasn't, how could you? What are you comparing it with? You see what I'm saying? You never seen real poverty. We see poverty in this country and we'll say, "Oh man, they ain't got nothing." I've seen poverty where a person's whole house was made out of cans. Where he took the cans and cut them open and spread them out and they made them a wall and all of that. And they been living in that house their whole life or whatever. And when it become damaged they get some more cans and they repair it. And that's the way of life. Now that's some poverty.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** What is your reason for talking and sharing your story? Why do you want to do that?

**Donald Hyche**: Because I would hope that other veterans particularly been in combat will automatically, part of a their coming back to this country, go the VA, get yourself checked out. 'Cause nine times out of 10 you got some psychological problems. You may not want to deal with them, but I guarantee you they're there. If you're wondering why you don't really have friends and everybody else you know do, that's one of the reasons. Or you wonder why you can't have no meaningful relationships that's another one. You wonder why you drinking all the time? Or you're using drugs all the time? That's another one, you know. And you wonder why you do things that you can't explain or why you're doing them. God knows you know right from wrong, but you still doing them. Go to the VA and get yourself checked out 'cause I guarantee you, you got problems you really do. We're not designed to go into combat. Man has been fighting since the world started as far as I know, but as human beings we're not designed for that. If I hurt you I pay for that. You know I think that's a spiritual law that's in effect. We see people and we call them psychopaths. When a person can hurt you and have no conscious about it we say he's a psychopath, or she, am I right?

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Mm-hm.

**Donald Hyche**: Now. You tell me I can go to another country, kill these people and stuff like that, but I don't take on none of the psychopathic traits? Of course I do.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Is there anything else you'd like to share?

**Donald Hyche**: No that's about it, I just want fellow veterans like I said, if you've been in a combat situation, go get yourself checked out. It's not a natural thing. It's not natural at all. When the bible say thou shall not kill it means that.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** It does sound like to me talking with you that you've learned a lot about humanity through your experience with the war.

**Donald Hyche**: Yeah, but it took a long time. It took a long time, it did. I've been, my wife can tell you, I've been in counseling sessions where I remember stuff I never remembered for the last 40 something years. I mean it's just popped in my head. That's why I knows we need that, we need to release all of this stuff we got inside of us. Because it comes out in a lot of ways that's destructive. And destructive not only to yourself, but your fellow mankind. Look at these veterans getting on top of buildings and shooting police and stuff. Come on now. That's a person that, probably they had some intervention with the VA and stuff and got some help, that probably would have never happened. But what do you do with all of that? What you do with all of that? Once you get in the military and you go in a combat situation you gonna deal with that the rest of your life. It ain't no taking off the uniform and that's it. It just don't work like that. It just don't. And another thing that kind of blows your mind, like my grand kids and stuff. They are so disinterested in all. I bet you not one of my grand kids could they tell you I been in the service and what I did.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** 'Cause you haven't told them, or they haven't asked?

**Donald Hyche**: They ain't interested!

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Maybe they will one day.

**Donald Hyche**: No, maybe so! I've tried to make efforts of whatever to tell them, they're just not interested. Young people today ain't interested in hearing about all that stuff. Most young people find news depressing. They don't watch it. People like us watch the news a lot

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Read the paper.

**Donald Hyche**: Right, 'cause we caught up in what's going on. 'Cause we realize that we have an obligation. We have to be responsible and check out all of that. 'Cause I might be driving down the street and see something or whatever. But a lot of young people today they could care less.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Thank you Mr. Hyche.

**Donald Hyche**: You're welcome. Thank you.

**Kimberlie Kranich:** Appreciate it.