ORAL MEMOIRS

OF

DAVID NEYLAND

An interview conducted on

May 10, 2018

Interviewer: Kathryn Ostrofsky

Angelo State University

West Texas Collection

"War Stories: West Texans and the Experience of War, World War I to the Present"

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OSTROFSKY: Well, we'll start with an easy one then. What . . . what's your name?

NEYLAND: David Neyland. N-E-Y-L-A-N-D. Think of University of Tennessee football stadium. It's Neyland Stadium.

OSTROFSKY: Okay.

NEYLAND: It was named after my great-great-grandfather's brother.

OSTROFSKY: Oh, wow.

NEYLAND: He was the head football coach there when they won two national championships and they won two national championships at Army. And uh I think if . . . of think Disneyland without the "Dis." D-I . . . you get rid of D-I-S, and N-E-Y-L-A-N-D. There we go. That's how I tell people my name.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah. When and where were you born?

NEYLAND: Oh, thank you for asking. Most people want to know why I was born.

OSTROFSKY: [Chuckling] Oh.

NEYLAND: I was born in Albany, Georgia, May 7, 1950.

OSTROFSKY: Is that where you grew up?

NEYLAND: No, my dad was in the Air Force, and uh we travelled a lot. I started first grade in Panama, junior of high school in England. Graduated from high school in Hawaii, was drafted in the Army on Waikiki Beach in Hawaii. And in England, I stayed in the house of um Edmund Fitzgerald, the uh guy who translated uh . . . I can't . . . I can't say . . . Arabic! But . . . Kalum uh El Quran or Eric . . . no. Um . . . I can't even think of the name. But he translated the stories, the uh poetry and stuff. And uh his parents, Edmund Fitzgerald's parents, lived in the manor house across the street, and uh it was a great place to be as a teenager—fourth . . . well, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade. And uh his parents built the house because they didn't like his friends, and his friends were like Shelley and Yeats, and stuff like that. No wonder. I'd get them as far away as possible from me. But I loved it out there in England. It was a great place. I worked on the Sutton Hoo project when I was in fifth grade.

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: Yeah, because it was in the . . . on the River Devon. I lived, actually, in Woodbridge. My mailing . . . my mailing address was "Fitzgerald's Corner, Woodbridge, England," and that was it. The . . . people in the United States could write that on the mail, send it to England, it would get to me.

OSTROFSKY: Wow, that's cool.

NEYLAND: Yep.

OSTROFSKY: So, were—before we even get to *your* service—

NEYLAND: Yes.

OSTROFSKY: We're also interested in what it's like to be a family member of a serviceman. So, what was it like growing up as a . . . as a military brat and moving around, and having your father serve?

NEYLAND: Oh, I was not a military brat. I was moved around a lot.

OSTROFSKY: Oh, okay.

NEYLAND: I had the um . . . I read a lot, which was . . . in all these places I went to, and then I had the nickname "Mr. Encyclopedia." And these kids . . . the other kids would like me having there in class because I could answer the question before the teacher got through with it. But I loved it. It was nice. My dad was a, uh, chief master sergeant in the Air Force. My mother was an angel because we moved around all the time.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

NEYLAND: We could pack everything up within two days and unpack within two days, and you'd never know we were at a different house.

OSTROFSKY: That's cool.

NEYLAND: But I got to go to a lot of different places. And then when we were in England, we went to uh Europe and then uh . . . then when we . . . I was in Panama, we went to South America. I've been to fifty-four different countries, including some that changed their names—including the one that I invaded, Cambodia. It's now Kampuchea, but when I invaded them, they were Cambodia.

OSTROFSKY: Hm. Wow. So . . . so, when and where did you enter the armed forces, and what branch did you serve in?

NEYLAND: Four September 1968. Signed my oath of enlistment on Waikiki Beach for the Army because that's what they put in. They put in . . . everybody who was drafted went into the Army infantry except for one man, and that was Al Gore Junior—who, by the way, was a junior. George Bush was not a junior. George W. Bush was not a junior. Al Gore was a junior. Al Gore was a college dropout. Uh George W. Bush, who I've met before many times . . . well, a few times through people that I know down here. And um, he was . . . he had a master's degree, and he was a pilot for an F-101 jet fighter. Al Gore was trained as a generator mechanic, and he never was. The only person I know that was not drafted . . . that was drafted and not went into

the infantry was Al Gore Junior. Trivial Pursuit. I'm so good at Trivia Pursuit, they give me the answer and I got to come up with the question.

OSTROFSKY: So, what . . . uh when . . . so, what were the years that you served?

NEYLAND: Sixty-eight to '70, and then I also went in after college. I went back in and re-enlisted . . . well, was commissioned in there. And so, I stayed there until I met my wife. And uh met my wife, and uh she was from Del Rio. She graduated from college in Berea, Kentucky. I don't know if you're aware of it, but it's the best college in the United States because they don't charge tuition, because it's uh . . . it's all the work-study colleagues. And she worked . . . my wife's an RN, and she worked for um, uh, Appalachian Native Health Services. And then she thought it'd be neat to live on the border when she graduated, so she moved to Del Rio. And then my friends and I were in Fort Hood—we had just got through a twenty-one-day training exercise—and this friend of mine had a car, a Mercedes Benz, and he said, "Man, this car can go." And I said, "Okay, let's go down to" . . . well, actually, we were heading towards Boy's Town. I don't know. That's . . . it's a, uh, convent down in the . . . in that . . . you know what it is. [Chuckles] But anyway, we were going there, and then uh we were drinking and stuff, and . . . and then I . . . I told him right there after we came out to Ozona, I said, "You aren't going to see another sheriff between us and the Big Bend National Park." And I said, "Gun it." He gunned it, the police pulled us over, [laughs] said, "You boys been drinking?"

"No." Looking . . . beer cans everywhere in the car. He says, "Well, you know, y'all are Army guys, right?" I said, "Yes, sir."

"I . . . who are y'all with?" And I told him I was with the 1st Air Cav. Division in Vietnam. And uh he said, "Well, I was with the 101st, and I'll tell you what. You know, I've got to sit here and write up all these tickets and stuff, so if you . . . if everybody in the car will give me a twenty-dollar performance bond, then when you come back to Ozona, stop with the police station, and I'll write your tickets." We said, "Yes, sir." We gave him beer money for the . . . for the holidays. [Laughs] It's a true story.

OSTROFSKY: Wow, that's great. Um so, you were in Fort Hood at one point. So, where . . . where were you . . . ?

NEYLAND: No, I was uh . . . I was in Vietnam. I was . . . I went through infantry training at Fort Ord, California.

OSTROFSKY: Okay.

NEYLAND: Then my friends signed me up for jump school, for airborne school, and I didn't want to be in air . . . airborne school. Uh, but they signed me up, said, "Come on, we can go airborne and the Army says that when we go to Vietnam, we can all stay together as a unit." The Army lied. We got to Vietnam, we scattered. It's uh . . . I had to exit an aircraft while it was in flight, and I kept trying . . . trying . . . when I first showed up at Fort Ord, they gave me my orders, and I said, "I don't want to go to Fort Benning and go airborne." He said, "Well, when you get to Fort Benning, you can drop out." And so, I said, "Alright." I got there, showed up on a Sunday afternoon, walked into the orderly room, and said, "I want to drop this course . . . this uh airborne school because I don't want to be a paratrooper," which is what I was. When I say

airborne, it means paratrooper. And uh, he said, "Well, I got to call the first sergeant." So, the first sergeant came in from church . . . came in and . . . well, he . . . he first he told me to sit down in the room, and he said, "I'll call the first sergeant, and after church . . . when he gets out of church, he'll come in and sign the papers." The first sergeant came in, and he . . . see, in the Army you're either leg or you're airborne. Leg means you're infantry. You're . . . and then so, airborne was there. And he came in, and he kicked the door and he says, "Where's this guy that wants to drop out of my airborne army? I want to get my size sixteen boots and ram it up his butt if he wants to drop out!" And then when he walked in, the uh orderly clerk just reached down into his drawer, and he pulled out a bottle of vodka and like a big, red, you know, Solo cup. He filled it full of that, first sergeant got it, went [aggressive drinking noise], like that, just drank it all. And he goes, "Where's that leg that wants to drop out of my airborne army?!" Then he walked into the orderly room, he started throwing stuff around. "If I find that leg, I swear I'll ram him up my belt. I'll, like, hit him around and these people." And so, I looked around, and uh he was . . . went in there to get another drink, and I came running out, hit the door, and I ran to the barracks. And I told people, "People, you do not want to meet this guy's preacher," because he came in all riled up. But anyway, I did my five jumps, which wasn't as scary as it looks. But anyway, it had to be done. As long as you're around friends, you can do it, you know. Next question, please, por favor.

OSTROFSKY: Alright. Um, so what was your rank uh when you enlist . . . when you um joined, and then was your rank when you left?

NEYLAND: Private., and then when I . . . after two years, I was . . . I was a sergeant.

OSTROFSKY: Um and so, why did you enlist in the armed forces . . . or were you drafted?

NEYLAND: Because I went to the mailbox, and I opened the mailbox and found out I was in the military. And I know the next question is, you know, what did you think of that? Well, I didn't have an option. It's either two years in Fort Leavenworth, or two years in the Army. And we . . . everybody that was drafted ended up infantry. The infantry only . . . it takes up ten percent of the Army, but they have two-thirds of the casualties. And you can look that up in the um verification websites that the Pentagon puts out. But only ten percent of the Army, and two-thirds of the people that got Purple Hearts and were wounded or killed were . . . were infantry. So, you hear all these stories about people, "Yeah, I was in Vietnam. I was in Vietnam." And the true story behind Vietnam, the dirty little secret, only one person in ten fired their weapons in combat and all the other nine in ten got the war stories.

OSTROFSKY: Did you fire your weapons in combat?

NEYLAND: Yes, I did many times. I was infantry. I was uh . . . I worked with a, uh, reconnaissance unit, five-man recon team. Sometimes we'd go out in fifteen-man units and uh . . . Beth has . . . she's looking up a picture of my platoon that I was with because we very seldom got in a platoon. A platoon was like thirty people, and we were five-man units, or ten or fifteen, depending on the mission. And so, we went out there and I fired my weapon. Killed a gorilla . . . I mean, an orangutan once with an M60 because he was up a tree, and . . . and I looked up at him, and he looked at me. And I said, "I don't like your face, and here's a [machine

gun noise].” So, I shot him with an . . . with a machine gun. M16 bullets would’ve bounced off of him. I . . . I was nineteen! Nineteen, young and stupid, and they gave me weapons and they said that I could walk around and shoot anything that moved. I was authorized to do it because everything . . . every place was a free-fire zone. So, I shot them and did it.

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: And then I went in to Cambodia, too, and uh—Cambodia, also—and uh even before we were supposed to be there. Because you get the military line maps, and they had a line of demarcation and says no U.S. troops are supposed to pass this line. The line was here, we went there. We were sent in there fifteen, twenty team . . . man teams and would find these huge caches of supplies. And we’d put a transponder down, and then we’d call into the C-130s or the C-123s, and they would come in and spray Agent Orange. And then when the North Vietnamese tried to get their equipment out . . . when uh they would move it out because the leaves would be gone, then they, our transponders, would pick them up. And we had B-52s overhead, and the B-52s would bomb them. Then we would come in a couple of days later, and go do a bomb-damage assessment and we’d drink water straight out of the streams after it’d been drained. That’s the reason my hands shake. Well, I have Parkinson . . . I have a hundred percent disability, by the way, from uh Agent Orange and uh Parkinson’s.

OSTROFSKY: Wow. Wow. So, was that . . . so that was your . . . or most of the missions you were on were . . . were what you just described? Or different stuff?

NEYLAND: It was all . . . it was all reconnaissance.

OSTROFSKY: Reconnaissance.

NEYLAND: All reconnaissance. And I could shoot anybody that moved. Every place was free-fire zone. Didn’t take any prisoners.

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: It was too small of a unit. But Beth will show you the pictures of the platoon that I was with. See, a squad is like any . . . uh, a small-range reconnaissance patrol would be five or ten people and then a squad would be two . . . two teams, and then a platoon would be about thirty people. And I was with the recon platoon. She’s got a picture of the rowdy bunch of people I was with. Surprised half of them weren’t in prison by now.

OSTROFSKY: So, how did you understand the mission that you were given at the time, and the part that . . .

NEYLAND: Kill, kill, kill. That is the spirit of the an airborne ranger. And just yell. Yell . . . yell “ranger” and kill. And I was sixteen . . . I mean, nineteen. I didn’t know the difference. I . . . it was a great adventure. I could walk around and throw hand grenades, had a light anti-tank weapon every now and then to throw up, blow up bunkers and stuff. The only people stupid enough to want to do that are teenagers that think they’re indestructible. And I thought I was.

Now, this is a true story, too. And uh, this was before I left. I recorded on a cassette tape in '68—you know, these little cheap ass recorders—and I told people what was going to happen to me. I told them I was going to Vietnam. I was going to be infantry. I was going to be a sergeant. And I was going to get wounded, but I wouldn't get wounded very bad. And I . . . the only thing I left out was I did not think I was going to be airborne. Did not think I was going to be a paratrooper, even though they paid me fifty-five dollars extra a month to do it.

OSTROFSKY: Oh, wow.

NEYLAND: Which, when you're only making $345 a month for killing gooks—or not gooks—killing North Vietnamese regiments. That's all I faced was North Vietnamese because we were . . . we were reconnaissance. And . . . and we'd find out where they were, and then . . . then we'd come back, make contact with them, and then call in the airborne . . . the uh airmobile infantry. And the regular line companies would come down, and they would try to engage them in heavier fights because the line company had anywhere from 125 to 150 people.

OSTROFSKY: Huh.

NEYLAND: And you're nineteen years old. You can do it.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

NEYLAND: I wasn't even legal to drink.

OSTROFSKY: Does that mean you didn't drink?

NEYLAND: No, I got another story I'll tell you about that later whenever you get around to it. When I came back from Vietnam, it was on Christmas Day, and my . . . I came back to San Antonio because a lot of my uh relatives were military or civil service there in San Antonio. So, two of my cousins put me . . . they . . . they met me at the airport, and then they took me to my grandmother's house. We had a party and stuff. They decided, "We'll go out country and western dancing." And so, my two cousins got there and they pulled off, and I said, "Okay, let's go."

"Now, David! Your money's no good for us." I said, "That's good because it's not even good for me because I can't even find it! I forgot what I did with it." And uh, so they . . . they stopped off, and they got a bottle of whiskey, Wild Turkey and stuff. And they were drinking it straight. They said, "Here, David. Have it." I said, "No. Can I mix it with something?"

"Yeah, if you think . . . if you want your relatives to think that you're a wimp. Go ahead and do it." So, I drank it and . . . we could not pick up a single girl at anything in . . . on New Year's, you know. Hallow . . . I mean, Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, went in there and couldn't pick up a thing. So, finally—we were so obnoxious they wouldn't talk to us—so, finally, we went to this one bar that's . . . this guy says, "I know an after-hours bar." And it was down Broadway Street in San Antonio, an offshoot of it, and it was called The Blue Moon. It used to be a movie theater; they turned it into a bar. So, we went in there and looked around, and it was just girls, everywhere. There were no guys there. We were the only guys there, and all the

girls looked at us and they stared. Man, we found the right spot! And we sit down there and we were drinking, and we looked around. And, "Hey, these girls are all together!"

"That's the reason . . . that's the reason we can't find any girls. They're all in here."

"No, David, these girls are lesbians!" And so, I . . . so, what they did is they said, "I'll tell you what, David. Yeah, you start a fight, and we'll beat up some lesbians and then we'll get in the car and we'll drive away before the police came." And I said, "Alright, I'll do it." So, I went to the bar, and there was this one girl that was pretty good-looking, and uh she was sitting next to her friend—her lover, I guess. But she was wearing a white t-shirt, and had her sleeves rolled up and Marlboro hard pack cigarettes in there, and she had like a butch haircut. It was cut here on the top and then wings on the bottom. And so, she had a monogrammed shirt on that said, "L-E-I-G-H." So, I figured, "Well, there's a good way to start a fight." I said, "Guys, watch me. Watch this." I walked up to her, and I said, "Hey does that" . . . first, I asked her to dance, and her girlfriend looked at me and just "[growling]" like that, you know. I said—and I looked at her monogram—I said, "L-E-I-G-H. Hey, does that say 'Lee' or does that say 'Lay'?" When I said that, her . . . her girlfriend, without even leaving the bar stool, she got her hand and she just went "whap!" Hit me right on top of the head, hardest I've ever been hit in my life! I was seeing stars, my . . . my knees turned to Jell-O. And I was trying to stand up and I couldn't do it, and I kept falling down. And she got out of the bar stool and she just started kicking me in the butt all the way around. I was trying to crawl out, and I . . . it looked like the dance floor was in . . . it was, and . . . and it was circling and everything, and the stars. She kicked me out all the way. And then I heard the other girl . . . the other girlfriends, they all lined up in two files, and they were all cheering her on and stuff, and I was trying to crawl out. She said, "I'm going to kick your miserable ass out of this bar!" And she did . . . and then I tried . . . I still tried to get up, and she kicked me all the way out to the cement and then said, "I'll show you where your miserable ass belongs!" And then she kicked me and knocked me down into the street and said, "You stay there in the gutter!" I looked at her and just, "Oh, God." [Laughs] Started throwing up and everything. [Laughs] Anyway, that was my first day back from Vietnam.

OSTROFSKY: Wow. Well, we have a . . . a question here about uh transitions . . . difficulty transitions, and transitions, but . . .

NEYLAND: Okay, my transitions? I'll tell you my stories. I got kicked out of my first college at . . . after six weeks. Because I went to ranger school, which I thought would be, you know, kind of poetic because I was wearing ranger tags. That's that little arm . . . I mean, band up there in my First Cav. Division. And uh so, I went there and stayed there for six weeks. And then I . . . I had an apartment outside, and I was staying down there for a while. Then I was with some friends and we got pretty drunk again. And uh then I was with this one girl, and I was supposed to give her a ride from my . . . from my house, my apartment, to the dorm room. I gave her an apartment ride there, and somehow or another, we ended up in her dorm room. And we . . . because we were drinking, we were both drunk. And we . . . and this dorm mother came in and said that we were making too much noise. Man, she pounded on the door. And I told her, I said, "Shut your miserable ass up!" She said, "I'm going to call the police!" And I said, "I don't care if you call the police, I'll get this bottle of Jack Daniel's and throw it at you!" And so, I . . . next morning, I had to show up in front of a disciplinary board because the . . . at that time, the legal drinking age was twenty-one, and the girl was under twenty-one. I think she was even younger than that, but it was a junior college, you know, Ranger Junior College. Do you know where it

is? In Ranger, Texas. Yeah, near Cisco and Fort Worth. And so, anyway, I showed up to the disciplinary board and they said, "Well, Mr. Neyland, do you have anything to say for yourself?" I said, "Yeah, I'll tell you what. I'll plea bargain. I know y'all want to kick me out, but I'll tell you what. I'll plea bargain. I will drop out of school and I will never come back to Ranger, Texas again." And I've never been back to Ranger, Texas. "And uh, all you have to do is just don't arrest me, and don't do anything to the girl." And the woman on the board said, "You mean Darlene?" I said, "Who?" She said, "Darlene. That's the girl you were with."

"Oh, is that her name?" [Laughs] So, I got kicked out after six weeks, and I went to Arizona in the Superstition Mountains. And I went there and hunted for gold. I had a Volkswagen that would just go anywhere, and so I would just . . . I packed everything up, used all my airborne infantry skills, and I would just patrol around. I was in there for three or four days, and from that, I . . . I'd never see any people for three or four days. And I'd be on top of a mountain: sitting there, smoking dope, drinking beer, you know. Did some peyote and talked to Joe Mescalito. That was my transition.

OSTROFSKY: Um, so . . . let's see. Where were we . . . um so, back to your service.

NEYLAND: Yes.

OSTROFSKY: What—this is kind of a big picture question—what was . . . what did America symbolize to you at the time that you uh . . . ?

NEYLAND: I didn't care. I was too young and stupid. And I was a . . . you know, in . . . in the countries we used to visit, you know, uh just as tourists and stuff, they didn't like Americans. I know in England, they were having . . . they had ban the . . . Ban the Bomb marches all the time. And so, they would pick us up in the school bus—it was a real pretty English school bus—but they had . . . we'd have to have a military police escort because Ban the Bomb people would throw balloons at us with blood and stuff. And we . . . fifth and sixth-graders, fourth-graders. We didn't know. But I figured they didn't like us. So, I didn't care. So, I didn't . . . I didn't care.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

NEYLAND: Still don't.

OSTROFSKY: Did you . . . so . . . so, you said most of your interactions then, militarily, were with uh . . . with North Vietnamese regulars. So, does that mean you . . . did you have contact with the uh locals in Vietnam?

NEYLAND: Very, very, very little. Very little. And my contact with the local individuals was I shot them and killed them.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

NEYLAND: Which I was real proud . . . I have six personal kills. And I'm . . . four of them . . . four of them were North Vietnamese regulars. Because to get personal kill status, you had to actually be, like, between me and you, and I . . . you know, coming out. You couldn't just . . .

I've been in situations where the North Vietnamese would charge, like, the landing zone or something. Might just shoot them out, but I couldn't claim it because you couldn't . . . couldn't tell who did it. The only one that I'm really not proud of was the . . . the one time I had an interaction with black pajama Viet Cong, I was on a . . . I was on a trail, and I could see a bigger trail going this way; it was like this, perpendicular to the bigger trail. And I could see these two Vietnamese with black pajamas and the little conical hat and stuff, and they came in and they were hauling something on a bamboo. And so, I waited until they got . . . until they got right close to me, and I went out and I sit there. I had the M16, and I just walked out there and I touched them on the shoulder, and she look . . . they looked around, and I said, "You lose! Pew!" And I went to the next one, shot him too. And then in the . . . the one in the back turned out to be a girl. I didn't know it at the time. And so, I says, "Man, we feel bad." And then the rest of the recon team came up to me, said, "Neyland, what'd you shoot the girl for? We could've raped her first, then you could've killed her!" I said, "Look," you know, "I still got my poncho liner. She's still warm. We'll throw it over the . . . over the head." And the guy said, "Yeah, I might think about doing that, but that would be too much like having sex with my ex-wife." True story. I was with some real radical people.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah. So, tell me about the . . . did you uh have friends in the unit? Did you make friends?

NEYLAND: Oh, yeah. Everybody was friendly with each other: blacks, whites, Hispanics. We . . . we all got along because we depended on each other. Now, the racial tension was in the rear . . . rear echelon, was in the back and that's where they didn't have combat units, combat situations. But in a combat situation, you know, I knew they would back me up, and I knew I would back them up. And that's where I got my nickname "Crazy Neyland," by the way. Yeah, that's when I killed the girl and they said, "Neyland, only a crazy person would do that." And like a captain told me one time, he said, "Neyland, come here." He said, "Now, you . . . when you can remain calm when everybody else around you is highly agitated, oftentimes that means that you're not aware of what is about to occur." And that was me. I was . . . I was the most naive, stupid thing there was. I was, "Oh, okay."

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: Any more questions?

OSTROFSKY: Yeah. Did you find your service challenging?

NEYLAND: Yes.

OSTROFSKY: How so?

NEYLAND: I was exiting an aircraft while they were in flight from1,200 feet.

OSTROFSKY: That would be challenging, yeah.

NEYLAND: Yep. Shut my eyes. It was a night jump every time because I'd shut my eyes and be, "Jump!" Because you didn't want to look down, you just looked in. But challenging as to what? What do you mean?

OSTROFSKY: Whatever . . . whatever that means to you.

NEYLAND: Uh, uh . . . challenging? Well, talking to people about it after I was discharged in '70, that was a real hard struggle because in college, everybody hated the Army, hated the military. And you know, they'd come up to me, say, you know, "Well, what did you do?"

"I was airborne infantry reconnaissance."

"Oh, means you killed people." I said, "No, no. I shot people shooting at me," you know. And so, it was challenging. The girls wouldn't have anything to do with me. And back then, you know, I was at the University of Texas in Austin and they had anti-war protests all the time and stuff, and I didn't get it . . . get involved in it. But they'd find out, you know. Other girls would try to set me up with dates, and the date would find out I'd been to Vietnam and was infantry, and they didn't want to have anything to do with me. So, that was a challenging experiment. Now, the married women that came to college to pick up younger guys, you know, I think . . . I thought that was great. Most of my girlfriends were married women in college because the young girls my age wouldn't have anything to do with me. True story.

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: It's a very different time.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah. So, let's see. Um you served in direct . . . did you see . . . so, you served in direct combat during your deployment?

NEYLAND: Yes. I have two Purple Hearts and two Bronze Stars with "V" devices for valor.

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: And my battalion commander turned out to be a . . . and when uh he was commander of troops in the First Gulf War, he was on the cover of *Time* magazine. His name is Lieutenant Colonel John Galvin. And so, that's my . . . my one little distinction there; I knew a guy who ended up on the cover of *Time* magazine. I met him many times because of my Purple Hearts and the stuff . . . you'd get your decorations and he'd shake your hand and tell you, "Go kill more people." So, I said, "Okay, show them to me. I'll do it."

OSTROFSKY: Well, and that was . . . the next question is: were you wounded in action?

NEYLAND: Yes.

OSTROFSKY: So . . .

NEYLAND: Twice. And right now, because you're combat wounded, you get Purple Heart license plates. It means that if I went to Big Bend National Park, I don't pay uh due . . . dues to

get in. And uh I can park at any airport in the United States with uh Purple Heart license plates, and I don't have to pay for parking. Made for a good conversation piece, my Purple Hearts.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah. Um so, how did your service influence uh or affect your family at home?

NEYLAND: No, they . . . it was a mostly military family. My brother was in ROTC.

OSTROFSKY: Okay.

NEYLAND: And he retired a full bird colonel from the Air Force. My dad was active duty uh chief master sergeant. My mother was a military mother, and my brothers thought I did good.

OSTROFSKY: I see.

NEYLAND: So, didn't affect them. I was in a different situation.

OSTROFSKY: Sure.

NEYLAND: You know, I had a big, strong support group that other people didn't have.

OSTROFSKY: Did you keep in touch with them while you were deployed?

NEYLAND: With my brothers?

OSTROFSKY: With anybody in your family?

NEYLAND: Uh I wrote a couple letters. I didn't . . . I didn't . . . I wasn't much for letter-writing. And then when I wrote letters, I'd write them to my brothers and I'd go around the jungle and I'd collect all these uh . . . see the . . . the Army would put out pamphlets. They would say "Chieu Hoi" pamphlets . . . Hoi Chanh. You can bring this in to an American soldier, and you're declared a POW, which didn't . . . I mean, uh declared a prisoner of wars. And so, I'd collect all the pamphlets and I would send it to my brothers. And uh my younger brother and my . . . and my youngest brother, they would use them in high school as . . . as hall passes. A couple of my cousins, I kept in touch, I sent them . . . I'd write them some weird stuff.

OSTROFSKY: Well, what are your most vivid memories of your time in service?

NEYLAND: Right here.

OSTROFSKY: Right there, okay. So, I'll um . . .

NEYLAND: If you want to read it . . . here, I'll read it out to you.

OSTROFSKY: Okay.

NEYLAND: This a true story. "This message is forty-seven years ago overdue. I'm alive today because of the heroic actions of Pearson." We all used nicknames or last name in Vietnam. Pearson was a guy that his brother showed up this morning at Fort Stockton, had breakfast with him. His brother's uh high up in the uh Nebraska uh . . . natural gas association. He come down. "Many times I thought of words" . . . and this is forty-seven years. This . . . it took me forty-seven years to write this because I wouldn't even talk to my wife and my daughter about . . .

"Many times, I've thought of words to express my dying devotion to the memory of Mickey Don Pearson, at least that is the name I seem to remember. I helped, with other members of the squad, write the Bronze Star for valor cite . . . citation. It seems like only yesterday today. It seems like yesterday today. I only wish I got to know him better. I arrived at Echo . . . Echo Company Reconnaissance as a nobody, nothing. Mickey John . . . Mickey Don Pearson took me under his wing, and tried to help me become a better soldier and increase my chances of survival. He reminds me of Sergeant Elias played by Willem Dafoe in the movie, *Platoon*. He was that kind of caring, honest person. I would like to divide this letter into two parts: the day . . . one, the day of the action that resulted in his death, and my family and career life that Mickey Don said . . . saved. I know this might not be too much to you. My life is no replacement for your brother. I cannot watch the movie Sergeant . . . *Saving Private Ryan* without thinking of the old veteran touring the graveyard in uh France. The veteran turned to his wife and says, 'Tell me I've been a good man.' That had a great effect on me. That is the reason of me telling you my life story today.

May 6th or May 7th U.S.A. time, I was . . . it was my birthday. Uh recon was in a fire base, waiting to leave that morning on an early-morning mission. I was relatively new and was assigned to walk point. Recon had been briefed in the morning and told the danger level was high. We'd been told to make sure our weapons were clean and to carry extra ammo, food, et cetera. A short time before departure, your brother walked up to me and said, 'Neyland, we are going to a sit-down in a known hot zone. If you walk point, there's a good chance you'll do something dumb and get us all killed.'"—which I would have—"'And get us all killed. I want you to switch places with me. I will walk point, and you carry the machine gun.' I agreed, and now comes the scene I must tell you, but you will have a hard time believing or understanding. I felt like an out of body experience was occurring. I swear that at the time of the conversation, I was elevating, looking down at both of us. I also knew or felt that this was the last time I would see him. I then knew, don't ask me how, that something bad was going to happen. I've always felt like such a coward for not telling him to keep the machine gun and I would walk point. Your brother walked point, and three hours later, he walked into an ambush. He was gravely wounded and died during the medical evacuation. I will never for . . . I will forever feel guilty. I now wish I had died instead of him.

I will now tell you something of myself. I've been married to the same wonderful and understanding woman for thirty-eight years. Her name is Ruth Neyland. She's a retired registered nurse, who has saved many lives in the emergency room. She has also helped many to . . . helped many . . . helped deliver many babies in hospital seating . . . setting. She is a pillar-of-the-community type. I've been blessed by God to know her, and my . . . to have had her for my wife. I have two daughters: Emily Sarah Neyland and Betsy Neyland. My daughters were born with a rare form of muscular dystrophy called Friedreich's Ataxia. Betsy is now in heaven because of the disease. Emily is in . . . in . . . is in the end stage, unable to tolerate getting out of bed."

And then this other one goes uh, uh, "I'm a . . . I'm a retired vice principal and special education and history teacher. I've taught at public and private schools along with state and federal prison schools." I tell people I've been in prison for fifteen years. I was a teacher, but I don't tell them that. "During my time in prison schools, I helped many Vietnam veteran inmates in their transitions from felons to becoming well-adjusted members of society. I've had many . . . I've had many of the same emotional and physical problems common to veterans, Vietnam veterans. I was diagnosed with a . . . PTSD and agent . . . Agent Orange Parkinson's Disease. I've tried self-medicating: alcohol and drugs and one strong suicide attempt. The doctors told me I . . . I uh . . . that I dodged a bullet. And, furthermore, our battalion commander Lieutenant General . . . Lieutenant Colonel Galvin was on the *Time* . . . cover of *Time* in the First Cong . . . uh, Gulf War. He is commander of NATO forces," and it goes on and stuff. But I am a retired teacher, vice principal. I taught um . . . taught at High Frontier at the school for the emotionally disturbed four miles south of Fort Davis.

OSTROFSKY: Wow.

NEYLAND: Have you heard about that?

OSTROFSKY: Yes.

NEYLAND: It's a great school. It's a . . . we did a lot of uh . . . a lot of therapy. And we were . . . had a positive peer culture. The students were not judged meanly by . . . just by grades. They were placed in groups by psychological type, so you varied your instruction depending on who you were getting. And um we did a lot of . . . lot of group therapy. The students could call group at any time they wanted if they were having a problem with somebody . . . somebody else. Well, we did that, and then instead of, you know, moving from class to class, if we were still in group therapy . . . group, then the other class stayed at . . . stayed . . . the other classes stayed in their uh . . . in their classes. But it was a good school. I think we helped a lot of people. And then, in my time in prison, I've been told I . . . I helped many people there because . . . see, I'm . . . I also used to be a Citibank mortgage officer. My best year I made $141,000.

And uh my second year, I was on . . . I was um on path to break it, but my two daughters had muscular dystrophy, and they were going straight from walking into the wheelchair, and they had a hard time carrying their trays and stuff like that. And people would make fun of them. And I was living at Kent Island, Maryland. The house I was at, I can look out my back window, and I can see the Naval Academy and uh . . . but it had grown so fast, they were putting kids in uh portable buildings and stuff, and the interactions between the kids just wasn't there. And they just would make fun of my daughter. And so, I figured I'd move to Fort . . . back to Fort Stockton. I taught Fort Stockton High School for a year and uh special ed. And uh I said, "Well, I'll move back because the . . . the school will take better care of you because they're more . . . they're more adapt to it." This . . . Fort Stockton is a great community, by the way. And uh, especially for my daughters. And uh my . . . I have one daughter that ran for Miss Wheelchair Texas twice. She got first runner up and Miss Congeniality. And then my other daughter went to uh Las Cruces, New Mexico State. She was an Aggie. I didn't know at that time they were Aggies. I wouldn't have let her go there. But um, she went there just to have . . . just to get out of state, you know, just a rite of passage. She knew her term . . . her situation was terminal, and uh we never kept anything from them when they got diagnosed.

See my . . . my wife, when we were in Maryland, my wife worked at Johns Hopkins at these uh coronary care . . . coronary care units, where she worked one-on-one critical care and then with heart transplant patients and stuff like that. And she learned a lot about it. And then, also, the idea that when . . . she was talking to other nurses because my daughters, they . . . there was no test for diagnosing Friedreich's Ataxia. And . . . and it . . . they couldn't ride bicycles because they couldn't stay steady. And so, we were doing some tests and she asked for, you know, the doctor, that supervising doctor that she was working with. Said, "I . . . I'll look at her brain scans and . . . and uh see what else we can do." Said, "We can help you out." And he took it to Dr. Ben Carson.

Ben Carson was the doctor who diagnosed my daughters and uh he was a real nice guy. I've talked to him. He's very busy, but he'll spend time to talk to you. And I've used him as a guide for a lot for my students because he grew up in the ghetto. He said he would take books home and people would throw rocks at him, say, "What are you doing? Trying to act . . . act white and stuff?" But his . . . his mother was a drug addict and uh his aunt took him in, and she worked with him and schooled him. She was illiterate, but he didn't know about it and didn't know she . . . didn't figure that out until the seventh grade. But she . . . she would make them read books, and give book reports, and do all their homework, and . . . him and his brother. But they grew up in the projects, and he'll sit there at . . . at Johns Hopkins University. He could be in this real prestigious office, but he wants the one where he looks out and he sees about a twenty . . . twenty-layer ghetto building in there. He said, "That's where I came from." And I'd tell my students that and stuff. And they . . . they wouldn't believe it. I said, "This guy's . . . he's so good, you could talk to him and I'd ask him a question, and he would kind of look up in the sky and he'd get his hand, and it was like he was reading it directly. And he could tell you directly." He had that kind of memory where he could tell you directly what the uh medical textbook said about it. But he was a great person and I'm so glad that he's got in uh the cabinet now. And he was a really nice person. But anyway, what's it . . . what else . . . are we through here?

OSTROFSKY: No. Okay. So, um . . . just a couple more questions if you've got time. Um . . .

NEYLAND: Yes.

OSTROFSKY: So, let's see. Where were we? Um I think we talked about . . . we talked about some of the technology that you used, right?

NEYLAND: I . . . I used a bullet finger. I had a lot of anti-tank—oh, yeah! Yeah, we put . . . we put the transponders down by the caches of supplies, and that's how the B-52s would pick up that there was movement.

OSTROFSKY: Right.

NEYLAND: So, we did that. And then everything else was . . . compared to what they got today, it was just so low-tech, you know. So . . .

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

NEYLAND: I . . . I used a light anti-tank weapon sometimes. Found a Volkswagen out in the jungle in Cambodia, got my light anti-tank weapon, and fired it. There was nobody in it. It just . . . the rocket went right through the Volkswagen. Have you ever seen that um movie with uh Goldie Hawn, where like she has a cannonball that goes through her stomach? You know, it leaves a hole in her stomach. It goes through. That's what the . . . that's what the LAW—we called it "the LAW," Light Anti-tank Weapon—that's what it did. It just blew right through it. It was like somebody got a blow torch and just cut their way through the . . . can you imagine the next guy that showed up trying to get the Volkswagen? "What have we got? Termites?" Okay, what . . . I had no technology.

OSTROFSKY: There you go. Um well . . . so, looking back on . . . on your time in the service, what is . . . like, how do you feel about your military service now?

NEYLAND: I feel very good about it. And uh I survived. It took me a long time to talk about it, and even with the . . . like, UT in Austin. I mean, the Vietnam vets would get together sometimes, and we wouldn't . . . a lot of times, we wouldn't talk about it because we . . . we had all these rear echelon people, which, we hated them. We'd call them "REMFs," R-E-M-F, Rear Echelon . . . Mothers [laughs]. And we wouldn't talk to them. We wouldn't communicate because they didn't understand. Because they were the ones that were having all the race relations problems and stuff because they were never in a combat situation where you had to depend on each other. And unless you'd been in combat, you . . . you just don't really understand it.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah. And do you have any advice for young men and women who are entering the service now?

NEYLAND: Yes. Go into the Army, save as much money as you can on the GI Bill, uh go infantry. If you're going to be in the Army, be in the Army; go infantry. And uh then when you get out, after . . . I think they have three years enlistment now. When you get out in the next four years, you have your life planned in college. So, from the time that you graduate from high school at eighteen to the time you get out of college—you'll be twenty-five—then you won't have a uh . . . you won't have a, um . . . a uh student loan debt. I don't . . . I graduated from college without a single student loan. I worked in the oil field for forty hours a week, and I was also a, uh, breakfast cook. So, I made it. Then I married my wife. She had like $25,000. A lot of it was on this world campus afloat, where you get on this—have you seen that? Where you get on a cruise ship, and you circle around? Supposedly, you take classes when you're there, but it's just a big party ship. It was $25,000 for . . . but she went to Lord . . . Lourdes and uh then, in uh France, and then also, she went to uh Portugal. Which one . . . the Catholic priest where the . . . they have the . . . the little kids have the apparition in Portugal? Uh, Miracle of Fatima. Okay, and that's it, and then she went to Jerusalem. And then she also visited Egypt and went around to all these different countries and stuff. But you ought to try $25,000 in debt, though.

OSTROFSKY: Yeah.

NEYLAND: But I would strongly suggest that they go because uh it's memories that you'll have for the rest of your life because you can think about it, the three years you served in the Army,

when you come back later and have your memories. When you think . . . if you were, like, going to do a . . . like I told my students in the prison, "Make a movie of your life and find out which events in your life have the most meaning for you." It's usually a big drug deal, or a big drug bust, or firefights they were in with the people. But I said, "Think about that time." But the time that you spend in the Army will occupy more of your time in . . . when you do a picture of your life, those three years will occupy more of your time than any other time and you'll learn more experiences in there. But, I strongly recommend that they go.