

*KUED Interview with Dale Hansen
Salt Lake City, Utah
October 15, 2013*

Tell us when you left Vietnam, what was your MOS?

Dale Hansen

I left in early August of '69. And my MOS was 11B. 2P at that time. So that was light weapons infantry. I served with D Company, the second 327 which was 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne. And Bret and I served together with the 101st and we were snipers together for a while. I guess at the time that when I left country I was a spec 4 and when Bret was killed he was also I think a spec 4.

Tell us your name and how you got to know Bret and who he was to you in Vietnam?

Dale Hansen

My name's Dale Hansen and Bret and I were together at Fort McClellan, Alabama for advanced individual training. And from there we went to Fort Benning, Georgia for jump school. And when we graduated from jump school most of us got orders from Vietnam. And those orders had a specific date for you to report. But since those were orders for Vietnam there were just a whole lot of guys that didn't care much about reporting on time. So if you were two, three, four days late, you know, what's the army gonna do, send you to Vietnam? But as it turns out, three of us did report in on time Bret and Tommy Cooper and I. And since we had known each other from training before and didn't know anybody else at Fort Lewis, you know, we hung around together and we got to be pretty good friends. And so those days that we were there waiting for our flight to Vietnam, some of the other guys started to trickle in, but they got sent to other groups and other flights and other units like the 1st Cav. But the three of us got sent to 101st Airborne. So when we arrived in country, within the first couple of weeks they sent us through a course, it was called preparatory training or Ptraining. And this course was basically designed to acclimate you to the conditions and kind of hone your infantry skills, you know, like patrolling and map reading, ambushing, whatever. And when you completed that course, that's when you received your orders for your actual combat unit. And my orders were an aviation unit with the 101st. Apparently I was gonna be a door gunner on a helicopter. And if I remember correctly, Bret and Tommy had similar orders. But these orders had a big red X across them. And they told us that they had been rescinded and they handed us a new set of orders sending us to a line company with the 101st that had just been decimated by their own air strike. After the jets initial pass, they dropped their second load on a company and they killed or wounded like 59. So they were obviously desperate for replacements. So not only did Bret and Tommy and I go to the 101st, I think there were probably another ten from that Ptraining class that also went.

Were you aware of this decimation when you got orders?

Dale Hansen

Oh, no. Not at the time. It was when we got up to the company that we learned what happened. I mean when you arrive at the company and you've got the armorer saying, "What kind of weapon do you want to carry," it's like huh? I mean we were all trained in all these different rifles and weapons that infantry carried but for them to give you a choice, that usually didn't happen. So.

Pick up where you left off.

Dale Hansen

Well, you know, Bret and I, we spent lot of time together talking. And for the first two or three months we were in country we worked in and around the A Shau Valley. And we decided together that we wanted to try something different. So we went to our platoon leader and we asked for a transfer to the battalion's recon unit, the Hawks. And he started telling us how we were the two of his best men and how the platoon couldn't do without us and if we'd stay, that he'd see to it that we got first shot of any new opportunities. So we stayed. And it wasn't long after that, true to his word, he grabbed us and said that he had a couple of slots for Marine Corps sniper school. And of course Bret and I jumped at the chance. But my wife was pregnant and I was supposed to meet her on R&R and it was going to be her last opportunity to travel. And naturally the class of my R&R, the dates overlapped so I had to decline the school. So Bret went off to Marine Corps sniper school and I went on R&R. Well, when I came back the lieutenant had some good news for me, he said we're going to hold another sniper class here at Camp Eagle and you can attend that one. So while I'm in sniping school at Camp Eagle, you know, I keep hearing about Bret and all their success out in the field and I was just really I just couldn't wait to join them.

Those three months before you received sniper training, what were your conversations, what were you talking about? Tell me about his personality.

Dale Hansen

Well, you know, Bret was a little older than I was so he was more like a big brother. And you know, me growing up in Kansas I hadn't been around the world too much and you know, he told me about all his snow skiing in Utah and how he was a ski instructor and I thought, you know, I've never been skiing and I just barely seen the mountains. And I think the first time I ever saw the ocean was when I went to Vietnam. So, you know, we just spent a lot of time. He'd tell me about working at the Kennecott Copper Mine and you know, I used to think about one day moving to Utah and working with him in the mines. So I mean we just... we just spent a lot of time together when we could.

Before he went out into the field that's when the audiocassette letters were happening between he and his parents. Do you remember Bret talking about his parents?

Dale Hansen

Yeah, we discussed it some. He didn't get a whole lot into his personal life. But you know, I remember those well, those recordings. We had been out in the field and we

had come in for a standdown. I'm thinking for some shots. One of the guys in the mess hall had hepatitis and I think they were bringing us in to give us shots for that. And you know, there were a few of us that were lucky enough to have tape recorders. And of course they had to stay in the rear with the other gear, nonessential gear. So the only time you got to make or listen to a recording was when you were in the rear. And those opportunities to come back to Camp Eagle for us were few and far between. So.

Did you have a cassette recorder as well?

Dale Hansen

I did. Yeah, I was reminding Tom how I got that recording. At the time we had an XO that was, I guess he was some kind of expert on reptiles. And one of the guys in my company, we got into a conversation about snakes. And I said something about a spitting cobra and he said, "Oh, no, there's no such thing as that." Naturally we had a bet and the XO was going to be the judge and jury. So, we went to him and of course everybody knows there is a spitting cobra and that's how I wound up getting the money for my recorder. And I made a lot of tapes and you know, I can recall that night and I can still see those, all the flares and all the gunships running up and down the perimeter. Yeah, that Bret spoke about in his tapes back to his parents.

What did it feel like hearing your family's voices? Different than a letter?

Dale Hansen

It sure makes you homesick. Yeah, it really does.

Makes you more homesick more than a letter?

Dale Hansen

Oh, absolutely. They did. I know Bret had several from his family and I did too and you know, to this day I still have some of those tapes and I still have that recorder. So, yeah that meant a lot to us.

That was a very popular way, and reeltoreel, of communicating back home.

Dale Hansen

Yeah, and again, it would've been, especially if the guys got to come back to the rear a lot. For example, you know, some of the units, they'd go out during the day and they'd come back every night to their base camp. And so for those kind of guys they could do that. But they'd send us out to the field and you know, we'd get resupplied every four, five days. We'd carry those big heavy rucksacks and more times than not we'd rotate in our fire base and we'd pull security for a week or two on that and then back to the field we'd go. But that fire base was not the same as being back at Camp Eagle where your gear is and your tape recorder and where you feel about halfway safe. You know?

But in the field at least you also had your letters and your stationary.

Dale Hansen

Yup. We had that. We had pen and paper in our ammo boxes that we carried. It's the only way you could keep something dry. It was one of those green OD metal ammo cans. And we kept our cigarettes and paper and pens and anything you didn't want to get wet, you kept it in that. And have that tied on right under the flap of your rucksack, up as high as you could get it.

There's a section in Bret's tapes where you're all singing songs. Talk about that. It was kind of a group audio letter.

Dale Hansen

Well, I don't know. You know, at that point I'm not sure I recall that. Bret might have been with some other guys. Maybe some other guys enjoying their R&R in the rear. Those few days we were there, maybe they had

You don't remember singing "Teen Angel"?

Dale Hansen

You know, possibly.

You were drinking.

Dale Hansen

Go figure.

Tell us some of the fun things you did with Bret.

Dale Hansen

Some of the fun things, huh?

Well, there was one time when we were on the sniper operation and we'd made contact with a sizable force. And there were lot of bullets flying back and forth. And Bret and I, we had our... we had several targets of opportunity. And he was a little to my left and forward of my position and he was lying across a big rock. And Lieutenant Carpenter was there. And he was behind us on the radio supporting artillery unit. And he was calling in fire missions. And so we're firing and then all of the sudden, Bret puts down his rifle and he turns around and he starts yelling at Lieutenant Carpenter. And I'm going what in the ? And I turned around and looked and Lieutenant Carpenter put down the handset to kind of hear what Bret was yelling and Bret's going, "Sir, sir! You're not at cherry anymore." And this was in response to Tom's first actual combat, his baptism of fire. And Bret was laughing and smiling the whole time and I'm thinking, you know, who laughs while they're getting shot at? But that's just how he was.

Tell me more about who Bret was. What his personality was like?

Dale Hansen

Bret was always quick with a smile, everybody liked him. I don't think he ever had a

cross word with anybody. Everything he got involved with he really got he put himself into it. He just gave everything the upmost attention he could. He really liked to listen and learn and teach people things. You know, I remember he was always telling me the way something should be or the way it was or I guess he was like a big brother to me, I suppose. But like I said, I can't recall anybody ever having a cross word with him or he with them. Bret was just really a nice guy. He'd fix me a cup of coffee once out in the field. And at the time I didn't drink coffee. But you know, since he fixed it for me, I went ahead and choked it down. But you know, from that day on, I've been hooked and I've been drinking coffee every day since, so. I don't know what to say, Bret was just a nice guy.

What was he like as a soldier? Tell us about his sniper skills.

Dale Hansen

Well obviously he was an outstanding shot. He was the best I'd ever been around. And when we'd make contact he was always really calm. He never seemed to get stressed out. I guess it's because he was so wellprepared and he was confident. And having Bret out in the field with you, you know, you just felt safer. You always wanted him to be somewhere around you. So I mean he was somebody you wanted to spend time with, trust me.

I wonder where he got that confidence. From his parents?

Dale Hansen

I don't know, I would think being a ski instructor at an early age like he was would give him some confidence too. And plus, you know, most of us back then were working parttime jobs before we went in the Army, working at gas stations and such, and you know, Bret was working at Kennecott Copper Mine so that was like a bigtime employment.

You were there and Tom was there when he first killed... did he actually know that he killed a VC? You were there looking through a scope.

Dale Hansen

Well, yeah, if you're talking about that long shot. Now I don't think that was Bret's first kill. Because when I joined the company after sniper school, Bret had already had, he had a list, he had a body count. But I was with him on that occasion and I remember we spotted this was a free kill zone and there weren't many in Vietnam, but this one was. So anybody out there was the bad guy for us. And we spotted this guy coming down the beach and he was a long way off. And back then the scopes that we had on our rifles weren't very good and with the weather conditions condensation built up in them and you couldn't see through them. So Bret had taken his scope off. Now my scope was still clear. I was kind of playing the scout for Bret to shoot. And like I said, he had open sights in his rifle. I don't know, I'm thinking we were probably 1200 meters. That's a considerable distance. And I'm looking through the scope and Bret makes a shot and you can see it hit by the guy's foot in the sand. And the guy just kind of glances down

like what was that because you know he couldn't hear the shot. And I told Bret where he hit and he adjusted and he fired again and the guy went down. And we called back to Hill 88, because they told us to stay put, and they sent out Lieutenant Carpenter in the patrol. And by the time they got to enemy soldier he had bled out. So like I said, 1200 meters, that's a damn long shot in anybody's book.

Probably pulled that talent from his hunting skills.

Dale Hansen

Yeah, I imagine he Bret and I, I guess, we talked some about hunting. But again, you know, I'd hunted quail in Kansas, you know, what do I know about shooting elk and big deer, so. I'm sure that's where he got a lot of it, like Sergeant York, you know? He was a natural.

Back in the States people were watching the news. I'm pulling this from Helen's cassettes to Bret where she says, "nothing's happening with the Paris Peace Accords." Do you really think people had an idea of what was going on over there?

Dale Hansen

No, absolutely not. People in America had no clue. And the information that the media was giving them was false. They talked about body counts all the time. You know, that was the most ridiculous thing we ever heard. Somebody would send us a news article or a letter and say yeah, we heard that this unit made contact and the company had light casualties but they had a body count of X amount of enemy soldiers. And we might have firsthand knowledge of that. And you know, if they said the company had light casualties that meant about half the company got wiped out. And the body count they had was probably exaggerated by four times. So, I mean, yeah, we didn't believe anything. And I'm afraid the people back home believed everything. And especially when Walter Cronkite put the stake through our heart.

Explain...

Dale Hansen

Well, when he told the American people, the public that we were losing the war. I mean we all kind of laughed and saying hey, we were winning when I left, you know? You couldn't tell us we were losing. We never lost one major battle over there. So.

Was he referring to the Tet Offensive?

Dale Hansen

I'm sure that was a big part of what he was referring to, but you look back at the military defeat that we gave them on that, it was just unprecedented. So yeah, we hammered them.

Did people back home have any idea about your state of mind and what you were going through and the fear?

Dale Hansen

No. Well, you know, we try to be careful. I know I did. I'd send letters, I wouldn't tell my wife what was going on. She was worried enough. And so it's like when I was in the hospital, I wrote my sister and told her I got hit, I never told my wife. I just figured they had enough to worry about. So we didn't talk about it a lot.

I can tell Helen and Irwin were reserved in expressing their concern and fear to him. But they were very afraid.

Dale Hansen

Well he was obviously their whole world, only son. I mean they thought the world of him and he thought the world of them. He talked about them a lot.

What did he say about them?

Dale Hansen

Well, Bret, you know, like I said, he never had a bad word to say about anybody. I mean he loved his mother and father just to no end. They were just wonderful people. He'd tell me about them and I looked forward to meeting them too. And I knew one day I would, it just unfortunately wasn't under the circumstances I would've preferred.

His cousin Alan said he got a letter from Bret saying his first VC kill, it really took a toll on him. He said, "I hope God forgives me." Did you talk about it?

Dale Hansen

To tell you the truth, I don't recall us talking about that. We might have. But you know, as anything, you do it enough times and you become hardened towards it. And... yeah, being his first kill, I can understand that. And just anybody would've felt the same way I'm sure. But you learn to get over it. By me taking him out I might have saved my buddy over here.

Helen kept copious notes of your missions etc. Were you aware of this?

Dale Hansen

No, I wasn't aware that somebody was tracking us the way we were.

Those mothers were home and they knew what was going on. And Helen watched TV every night and knew what was going on.

Dale Hansen

Well I knew that she was keeping tabs on all of us when she wrote me a letter one time and said, "I see you got the Army Commendation medal." I barely knew about it, how did she know? So, yeah, I don't know. Without the Internet I don't know what her source of information was, but it was pretty good.

Bret's attitude, as the war progressed and he started going to the field more, he wrote a couple of letters that he said he wanted to come home. Did you sense an attitude change?

Dale Hansen

Well, yeah, we were all like that. More so than anything, the conditions. The mosquitoes, the bugs, the rats, the snakes. I mean the conditions were worse than the enemy. And so yeah, we all wanted to leave. I remember the day I got hit, I'm trying to think back, I don't think I'd been dry for 60 days. I mean it was at the end of the monsoon season. And I knew that when I was medevaced out I was gonna sleep in a dry bed for the first time in I don't know how long and in a bed instead of sleeping on the ground with a poncho liner over my head to ward off the mosquitoes. So yeah, it was the conditions. And I think, yeah, and Bret, he's no different than any one of us, he just wanted out because of that.

I didn't know you got hit.

Dale Hansen

Yeah, I got... like I said, Bret was so successful around that AO. We had fire bases and a lot of villages, rice paddies. I mean it was a perfect place to deploy snipers. And you know, Bret was doing well before I ever got to the field. And of course when he got hit and they medevaced him, I got hit probably, well, less than a month later. And there was another sniper with me in the operation and he also got hit. So we got medevaced out and that's when I learned about Bret's condition from his mother. Like Tom and I were talking, you know, the information just didn't flow too well down to us. So we'd hear sketchy reports but we really never knew what was going on. It wasn't until I started receiving letters from Helen that I actually knew. And I remember she wrote a letter to me and said that Bret said to tell Dale he needed to get that VC. So you know, and it looked like his condition, they were improving. And then, like I said, while I was in the hospital recovering she sent me another letter that said that Bret had encephalitis and swelling of the brain and you know, and in late March he died. So that was pretty devastating.

Did that come back to the squad? How was everybody informed of his death?

Dale Hansen

Well I don't know how many people learned of it because I was in the hospital. But I know that when I rejoined the company, there were still guys that didn't know. And it blew everybody away because the last thing they had heard, you know, Bret was doing better. They had sent him back to El Paso and they had heard he was doing better. And then to find out he had died it was just like say what? And so.

Can you imagine Irwin and Helen driving to El Paso thinking everything is going to be fine and he's lucid and he's talking to them in bed and all of the sudden he started getting delirious? The cause of death was necrosis and abscess formation of the cerebellum caused by a fragment. Where was your wound and were you sent home or

back to the field?

Dale Hansen

Where was my wound? Well I got hit in both legs, my arm, my face. I mean, Bret pissed them off. He shot a lot of their buddies and they started setting down a lot of booby traps. And you know, I found out years later that there was probably a bounty on us. So I don't know how they did it, but they put out a lot of booby traps and that got three of us wounded in a 30day period. Yeah, we had been out to the same spot two or three times before and every time we were successful. And I guess they got a little tired of that, so. I tried to talk our company commander and the first sergeant out of sending us there. And you know, I think he respected me and he listened to me whine and moan for a couple of hours and then he finally locked my heels and he said, "You're going." He said, "But you stay off the point." And I used to walk point a lot before I was a sniper. So we'd take off and we always moved during the night and we get out near the beach not too far from where Bret had shot that one, and the point man got us in some brush. I mean there was no way out of it. So we're all in there, we all backed out and the sky was starting to get a little light. And so I made the decision, I'm gonna take up the point because we need to get there or we've just wasted our whole time. So I took up the point and came up to our position, we sent another group with another sniper around the base of the mountain and the other two sniper groups went with me. And we got up to our position and I threw down my rucksack and just had my rifle and I was leading them back through our position to another trail where they were gonna go and like I said, the sky was light but the ground was still dark. And there was a trip wire across the trail. So I hit that and that tossed me about ten feet in the air. And the sniper that was walking my slack, he got hit. And when he fell back, you know, he still had his rucksack on and it pinned his arm behind him, and he had a big piece of shrapnel that cut his neck and just blood started pouring down his shoulder and he was screaming because you know, he thought his arm had been blown off. And (McGrouder?), some of the other guys in the patrol behind us, he stepped on a bouncing Betty mine and that bounced up and hit him in the chest. And luckily it was a dud. There was a booby troop, 500pound bomb there. I mean they had the whole place they were gonna... so I think I (inaudible) two more that day. I hit the trip wire and that knocked be about ten feet and then Jolley was hit. So two of us were wounded right there. But they had just set booby traps. I figured that was an ambush. So I crawled to my rifle and was waiting for the incoming fire but it didn't happen.

It was all shrapnel?

Dale Hansen

Yeah, it was all shrapnel from the booby trap. Like I said, 'cause, you know, it was almost like in slow motion. I tripped that and it's like I heard a puff and it's like I look down. I mean it was all in slow motion. Next thing I just got a face full and then I was going through the air.

They all say that, they can just see it so slowly.

Dale Hansen

Yeah, it's incredible how your mind slows down. So, hey, you need to watch this.

Where were you leading up to the operation that wounded Bret?

Dale Hansen

I thought I was going on the operation. I was rucked up and heading out when Lieutenant Carpenter informed me I wasn't going. And I go really? Because we used to go out a lot together. And I remember that pissed me off. And it took me, I don't know, 30 years to find out that it wasn't him that told me not to go, it was our company commander. So Lieutenant Carpenter takes out the patrol and I was back on Hill 88. And I believe it was that night, that same night that we heard that Bret was doing what he always did, he was helping somebody. They had a new guy in the unit and he was showing him how to put out a claymore mine and trip flares and whatever else for their night defensive position and somehow a booby trap was tripped and Bret got a head wound. And then... at a risk to their own safety Lieutenant Carpenter, he fired up a strobe light to bring in the medevac. That was pretty gutsy but he brought it in for Bret. And they got him loaded up and the medevac left and 420 for them, they didn't receive any incoming on that. It would've been a scary deal.

How did it feel when you heard the news?

Dale Hansen

I was sick. I was just sick to my stomach. Because you never think, you know, your buddy's gonna get hit. It's always gonna be somebody else. And you know, you never try to get too close to anybody. But every time you did, something like this seemed to happen. But it was too late, you know? Bret and I had been like I said, Fort McClellan, Benning, Ptraining, sniper school. I mean we were snipers together out in the field. You know, I just I couldn't get away from it. So. It was tough.

Do you remember the sequence of events that happened? Did you follow where he went? He went to hospital ship, Japan, and then to El Paso.

Dale Hansen

Well, like I said, we watched the medevac fly over our position out to their location. And you know, thinking back, since it was a head wound, I think they flew him straight out to the hospital ship. And from then, information from that point on got pretty sketchy. And I remember I'm not sure I remember Japan. I don't know, we may have never been told. But I certainly remember him being sent back to El Paso. And then probably about that time is when I wound up in the hospital. And that's when, you know, Helen used to write all the time and tell me about his condition.

Did you and Bret talk at all when you were both in the hospital?

Dale Hansen

No. No. The only correspondence I had was with Helen in letters.

Tell me about Helen and what you remember from there on out. What was she saying in her letters to you and then when he passed away what became of Helen and Irwin?

Dale Hansen

Well, she was just such a sweet lady and after Bret died she just wrote to me all the time. She wrote to my wife. Helen and Irk were always sending cards to my kids filled with dimes. They never missed a birthday. It reached the point where Helen actually told me one time that one of their friends tried to warn them not to get too close to me. That you know, I was no replacement for Bret. So I don't know that that really cooled anything off, but we stayed in contact until the early '80s when I went through a divorce. And I recall you know, writing Helen and telling her. And I think it broke her heart as much as mine.

That you got a divorce?

Dale Hansen

Yeah, and that is when what we had was kind of over. Because like I said, she wrote my wife all the time too, and the kids. My kids still remember.

Did you come visit her here in Utah?

Dale Hansen

I came to visit her and Irk in Phoenix. When I got home from Vietnam I flew out to California to pick up a car and drive it back to Kansas City so I thought that would give me a great opportunity to go through Phoenix. So I went there and I saw Helen and Irk. And I was only there for the afternoon, but boy, that was a tough one because we sat and we talked and cried over Bret. And I remember Irk was so proud of him. He went in the other room and came back with his SKS rifle that our old company commander had personally delivered to him with his condolences. And I remember that rifle. I have a lot of pictures of it. But Irk was proud of that rifle and they were just sweet people. They were just so good.

That rifle, did you ask Alan who has that?

Dale Hansen

Yeah, I'd like to know who has that SKS now.

What are your thoughts on the war? What do you want people to know about the Vietnam War and your experience there?

Dale Hansen

Oh, boy, that's a tough one. You know, I guess it all boils down to you know, a lot of wars aren't real popular with people. Just like the things that we've been going through. Believe me, I was not for sending missiles into Syria. But what people have to understand is that if their country gets into a skirmish or something, the soldiers, they

need the support. It's not their fault. They're going where they're sent. And people have to understand that and not kill the messenger. It's like when we came home from Vietnam it was like, wow, what planet am I on? You know, as a kid I always dreamed about going off to war and come home to music "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." And I come back to a bunch of protesters trying to spit at me or whatever through the fence. Yeah, it was just not good. So people have to understand and support their troops. And I think that's the most important thing. But obviously the Vietnam War, it was just a big political mess, a waste. But, you know, what are you gonna do?

And that's something that you've discovered since you've been home?

Dale Hansen

Sure, yeah. Because at the time we didn't know why we were there. We were there because we were sent. And of course everybody that went over there figured you know, the war's gonna be over, and it won't take long. I want my opportunity.

What do you want us to know about Bret Crandall? Why is he your personal hero?

Dale Hansen

Bret Crandall didn't have a mean bone in his body. He was... he was so well liked and respected by everyone that he came in contact with. He was competent in everything he did. And I don't know if I mentioned it or not, but he was also an outstanding shot. Bret had just all the right kind of attributes you would expect to see in a nice young man. I just cannot think of one derogatory thing to say about him. Bret was a good guy.

Can you explain the bond of brotherhood in the service that's still with you 45 years later with Bret?

Dale Hansen

Well, yeah, you know, you always hear about in combat you're fighting for your buddies for those on each side of you. And you know, that's really true. But I think a lot of the times you forget that those guys go through all those miserable days with you. And they share a lot of the same memories. And those memories really defined us back then, both good and bad. And unless you went through it, I don't know that you can really comprehend unless you spent those same moments in time with us. So it's... it's something that you just, I guess had to be there.

Anything else you want to share with us? Anything you feel people need to know?

Dale Hansen

Oh, boy, I don't know.

Tom Carpenter

Tell them about the band of brothers. Finding each other on the Internet.

Dale Hansen

Well, I don't know, 10, 12 years ago, I went to a reunion for the 101st Airborne and this was the first battalion reunion and I was the first, second battalion guy to be invited to it so it was a big deal. And the second year there were more of us that came and we decided to start a website and try and get as many of the old familiar faces back together again. You know, it was tough. People would get on the telephone and make phone calls and try and find others and so we thought by building this website we'd give kind of a rally point. And so that's what we do. We get a hold of someone, we put them on the website and a picture of them. Their picture from Vietnam, if possible. And a little bio and put them on the roster and contact information. And you know, over the years we've hooked up a lot of guys and a lot of families getting closure on their loved ones that were killed. It's just been a really outstanding thing for us. And it's given closure to a lot of people.

Does it also help to talk about it?

Dale Hansen

Well, you know, it's a lot easier to talk about it with the guys you served with. You know, everybody's tour in Vietnam was different. And it might be hard to understand, but like I said, the guys maybe in the 1st Cav, they'd go out on patrol during the day and the helicopters would drop them off and then they'd patrol all day and the helicopters would go back and pick them up and bring them back to base camp. Well, that didn't happen with us. You know, we'd go out in the field and we'd be out there and if in four or five days we couldn't get resupplied because the fog set in and we were in the mountains, we went hungry. So our tour and their tour was different. And it was like that all over the country. So when you get with guys that you served with, like Tom and I, you know, we can really relate with each other. And the next best thing is just another Vietnam vet. But when you talk to people that weren't in the military, they have no concept of what you went through, you feel like you're just wasting your time so you just kind of dummy up.

Helen told Jan Carlston, one of Bret's best friends growing up, that he actually didn't die of his wound; he died of a bad blood transfusion. Were you aware of that?

Dale Hansen

I was not. The last thing I knew is that he died of encephalitis, swelling of the brain.

Ultimately he died from serving.

Dale Hansen

He was a great loss for all of us.

How do you come back from something like that?

Dale Hansen

You try not to get too close to the next guy.

Which is unfortunate.

Dale Hansen

It really is but... you know, you try and insulate yourself and that's what happens. And that's why more times than not when guys were returning home from Vietnam, that was it. I remember we contacted one guy that we spent a lot of time on Hill 88 with, and we got a hold of him after we started the website, he's a farmer upstate New York. And we talked to him on the phone and it was like, "Hey, guys, thanks for calling, don't ever call me again." He was done. He wanted to put Vietnam behind him, he didn't want anything to remind him of it. And there are a lot of people like that. So we don't drag those into the website though. We just get the guys that want to find their old buddies.