



Fort Bliss, 1966



Ron Jardine

Ron Jardine celebrated his 21st birthday stationed at a lonely hilltop outpost in Vietnam.

The young Army soldier guarded Marine outposts along the demilitarized zone dividing North and South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Nights were spooky. Encircling each outpost was barbed wire with rock-filled pop cans hanging from the wire to provide warning if enemy soldiers attempted to cross. Claymore mines, hung from the wire, exploded outward in a fan-shaped pattern.

Jardine recalls daytime attacks by enemy forces, who launched flurries of rockets toward the outposts.

"You could see the smoke when they were fired," he said. "You knew they were coming. I'd wonder, 'Is it my turn today?'" F-4 Phantom jets generally arrived quickly to fire on the attackers.

Jardine, who now lives in Hermiston with his wife, Sherrie, returned home to Utah after a year and bought a 1966 GTO with his war earnings. He resumed his job with Union Pacific Railroad as a sheet metal worker and pipe fitter. Jardine has served as commander of Hermiston's VFW Desert Post 4750 for three years.

Tangney: Well, there was probably 36,700 killed in that 36 months, and there was 103,300-something wounded. If you figured that out in days, there were 33 killed for every day and there was 92 wounded for every day of that conflict. That's one of the bloodiest conflicts or wars that we've had. There wasn't as many killed as what there was in World War II, but in World War II they were fighting all over. With Korea, we were in one small area. It was a bloody conflict.

Stangier: When I came home the war was over in Europe. I had my 70th mission in the end of April, and then the war was over in the middle of May. When I came home, the conflict was only in the far east, and there were 10 million people in the service, so we were too much of the general population. Nobody came up and thanked me. I'm having people thank me now but in 1944, '45, nobody thanked me because everybody was in the service and it was nothing unusual.

Lambert: We didn't have a lot of parades or anything like that, but I will say when I came home to Pendleton after being injured, the VFW and the whole community was lining the streets just showing their support. I had a great homecoming here and I heard from multiple veterans from the VFW: "We wanted to give you something that we didn't have." It was the homecoming that was amazing.

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Aney: What was it like readjusting to life here, once you were back?

Jardine: I think each war would be different. Each person's different. Some people take things harder than others, you know. It bothered me for about my first two years, but I got adjusted, and I got back to work. And I got things going again and that helped a lot.

Lambert: I would agree with that, and to build on that, we have different thoughts on different generations of what mental health is. A long time ago, you'd be weak if you asked for help, if you said you were struggling with something. You'd self medicate or you'd just bury yourself in your work. Then over the last, I don't know, 15, 20 years it's been acceptable to say, "I'm struggling with this and I need help."

Jardine: Yeah, back in the '60s, well you didn't hear this stuff like you did. You got home and that was it. You didn't hear about PTSD. You hear more about it here in the last 15 years, or 20 years.

Tangney: Because my brother was killed they brought me back to the States early. I was sent home for his funeral, and because of where he was killed (Korea) and under the circumstances, he had to be identified by his home doctor, his home dentist and one member of the family. My mother was not in the condition that she could've accepted it and my dad was an alcoholic who really didn't accept anything anyway, so I was elected for that. I had always been very close to my brother. He was

my banker, and the guy that took care of me when I was growing up. So when I looked at him, he had one finger and a thumb remaining, and the left side of his head was blown away. It'd been patched up pretty good, but I had to identify that body, and I think that was probably the one thing that tore me out more than any of the other things that I went through. I don't know if that caused it or what, but I did start drinking too much then, and I think for about three months I was feeling sorry for myself. I had trouble adjusting and finally my wife-to-be told me, "Take a hike buddy. I don't want nothing to do with you." I finally got straightened up and never had any more problems, but I went through a period there that I know that I was doing the wrong thing, but I couldn't really control it at that time.

Aney: I know J.D. that you came home because you were injured, and I'm just wondering if you'll tell any of that story?

J.D. Lambert: It was November 16, 2004. It was in the middle of Ramadan, which is I guess the layman way to describe it as the Muslim holy month. During that time attacks doubled, just overnight. I was in a forward operating base outside of Kirkuk in the middle of six cities, which was millions of people. Our base was about the size of Blue Mountain community college campus.

On that campus, it was our company, and an artillery squad with 15 to 20 guys. We hadn't been in much over the past week. We came in for about four hours, and we were the most rested platoon in the company. With that four hours, you're resupplying your ammo, making sure your weapons are clean, getting something to eat, taking a shower and trying to get two hours of a nap.

We get called back out because a squad had gotten into a firefight. We were told to go out and check a grid for a possible ambush. The grid is over a series of about six aqueducts that intertwined with each other and went over each other, and there was a bridge that was about 30 feet from top to bottom. The Humvee tires hung over a couple of inches on each side. There was no railing, and so we were very careful about it. I don't know what (happened to) my driver, if he fell asleep, or if he was startled, but he drove off of that bridge.

There were nine of us in the back of that truck. The Humvee landed upside down in the bottom of a canal that was drained, to my knowledge, that day. There was a bunch of soot and sediment which cushioned my fall, but my thumb got ripped off, and it was dangling by the tendon. They were able to attach it, but it was spurting blood everywhere, and I buried it in the mud — the doctors were not happy with me on that one. A couple wreckers had to come up to the top of that bridge and maneuver the Humvee to get us out. When they moved one end of it, it would crush me. When they moved the other end, it'd crush my friend. Everyone else was able to get out without having to move the Humvee. Eventually after two hours I was able to get out. I thought the whole time that I would just (crawl out)

once they got the truck off of me, but I couldn't feel my legs once they did that. I went to crawl out and nothing would work. It ended up just being something pinched, like a hose being kinked. It took some time for that feeling to come back. I was pulled out, life flighted out of there. My friend was able to get out four hours later, and he died from those injuries. I guess all the pressure from being pinned down, his heart exploded when the blood came back.

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Aney: How did the experience of war change you, if it did?

Stangier: I'm sure I'm a different person now, having been in the service, than I would've been if I had not. I was a 20-year-old kid with no responsibility. All of a sudden you're in a very responsible position, and you got five guys, their lives depending on your ability, and it gives you a pause for a minute to think about it.

I have respect for the military. I didn't like it at the time. I thought they were kind of bone-headed. But they had a purpose and they had a design, and the plan, and they adhered to it and it worked.

Tangney: I think the thing that changed me, as I became more aware of other people and other people's problems, and other people helped me, and I was able to help other people. And it stuck with me when I came home. Because of that I'm very involved in several different organizations, and in community activities. I think it made me a little more willing to look at the other guys' problems and try to help as much as possible.

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Aney: What does patriotism mean to you?

Jardine: It's the guys that have gotten wounded, and the guys that have gotten killed, and didn't get to come home. Being in the VFW now, it has really changed my attitude. We do funeral services. We get probably about, on average, about three a month. I speak at each one because I'm the post commander. After the services, the family comes up and they thank you. I mean that really makes you feel good.

Stangier: I was taught in the school that the United States was the best country in the world, and I believed it. When I was over in Europe, the way they lived, and the way we lived was entirely different, and the way we lived was much better. Now, all these people are trying to get in the United States, and then these idiot kids with no responsibility have these demonstrations. They don't know from Shinola what they're doing, really. It just infuriates me that ... I had a lot of friends killed in the war, and they don't appreciate it. They have had life served to them on a silver platter, and now they're protesting. Half of them don't even know what they're protesting.

Tangney: I can sum it up in one word. Patriotism is respect. Respect for your country, respect for your flag, respect for your fellow man. Patriotism is just really respect for other things.

"Patriotism is respect. Respect for your country, respect for your flag, respect for your fellow man."

— Tom Tangney, on his definition of patriotism