

## **Blitt, Casey Army**

[00:00:20.79] CASEY BLITT: I'm an only child. I was born in Phoenix, Arizona. I did my undergraduate work at the University of Arizona, just like I was telling Mr. Mars. And there was no medical school in Arizona back then. I went to medical school at the University of Oregon, and I did my postgraduate training at UCLA. That's what I did. That's my life.

[00:00:43.92] DEBBIE COX: What years was that?

[00:00:46.08] CASEY BLITT: Oh, let's see. '59 to '63, '63 to '67, and '67 to '70. Nobody with my education and training would voluntarily join the military. I mean, there would be no reason for that. I mean, in my opinion, I was drafted because, back then, there was a draft. There isn't a draft now. And that brings up a whole series of other problems. I knew that, eventually, I was going to have to go somewhere, or I was going to have to serve somewhere. I was-- I was probably drafted back in the early to mid '60s.

[00:01:26.28] I mean, I think I was drafted when I was still in medical school. If you were fortunate, you could postpone your obligation to complete specialty training. How that worked, I'm not 100% sure. It probably had something to do with what specialties the government decided that they needed. The kids today have no idea what the draft is all about.

[00:01:57.18] I have some opinions about that. Because if everybody has to serve their country, it gives them quite a bit better insight into freedom and what the United States is all about, and a number of other things that happen when you have to serve your country in some way, shape, or form, not necessarily join a branch of the military, but serve your country in some way. There are a lot of countries that do that.

[00:02:26.85] I mean, women and men have to do that. That doesn't exist anymore. I think there's an upside and a downside to that. And I just told you the downside because folks don't have a good appreciation of what freedom is all about. On the other hand, parents don't have to worry about their kids going off and potentially getting killed, because that's-- old soldiers never die. It's just the young ones, or for the most part.

[00:03:00.85] So I was drafted. I was fortunate enough to obtain a deferment and to finish my specialty training. And the day I finished my specialty training, they said, thank you very much. Here you are. I mean, I did everything I could. I mean, I did everything I could to avoid going to Vietnam. My attendings at UCLA and other folks that I knew. I knew the top dog in anesthesia in the Army because that's who drafted me.

[00:03:36.75] And I did everything I could to avoid going to Vietnam. And this guy said-- he says, listen. He says, you're a fully trained anesthesiologist. We need anesthesiologists. He said, you're going to Vietnam. So I went. I got this piece of paper that said, be here at such and such and such. At first, I went to San Antonio.

[00:04:08.32] It was basic training for five weeks, maybe, of worthless information where they tried to turn-- where they tried to teach me to be a soldier. And a bunch of us were there. I mean,

a bunch of us doctors were there. And I knew that I was going right from there straight to Vietnam. They wanted to teach me to be a Soldier. And I said, I'm not a Soldier. I'm a doctor.

[00:04:30.94] And they had all these folks that kept telling me, your uniform's not right, and you're not doing this right, and you're not doing that right. And finally, I just said, leave me alone, because the worst thing that can happen to me is I'm going to Vietnam. And I'm already going. You can't punish me by sending me to Vietnam because I know I'm already going.

[00:04:54.60] They tried to teach us a lot of worthless stuff. At least for me, they tried to teach us a lot of terribly worthless stuff about tropical medicine and malaria and this. Now, I mean, I'm an anesthesiologist. We're going to be operating on people. And that's pretty much the only time I ever had to wear my uniform, when I was at Fort Sam. Otherwise, it was-- I never wore it.

[00:05:27.34] CASEY BLITT: It was in the summer of 1970. I had finished my specialty training on June 30. OK, probably a week later, I got a letter that says, report to San Antonio to-- I don't remember-- Medical Field Service-- MFSS, some crap, some letter thing that said, report here to San Antonio. And then you'll be on your way to Vietnam.

[00:05:57.16] I must have been a major because I was a major when I got out, so I suppose it's possible that the first few days or something I could have been a captain or something, but I think I was probably a major-- that little orange-- the little oakleaf cluster thing, yeah. Whatever it was, it was a play rank. We all called ourselves-- you ask Gus-- we all called ourselves play majors. And we didn't know what it was all about, except for in San Antonio, when everybody thought that they should teach everybody to be a Soldier, nobody bothered you. You were a high enough rank, so nobody bothered you basically about Soldier stuff.

[00:06:47.86] I'd been on a plane for I don't know how long, and I looked and I said, "Why would anybody want to be in this godforsaken place?" I was from military base to military base, but I'm looking around. I didn't see any sounds or smells, I was at some compound, at some camp.

[00:07:12.33] And I'm looking around, I'm thinking, this is a godforsaken jungle full of mosquitoes, diseases. And I could tell very quickly that this is a third world country and I'm thinking, what on Earth--what on earth am I-- and then in a large version, what on Earth are we, meaning the USA, what are we doing here?

[00:07:43.42] My initial stuff is trying to keep from getting bit by mosquitoes because if there's 50 people in a room and one mosquito, the mosquito will find me. They give me a cot or something, put me under some netting, and then they started handing out uniforms, and then they told me where I'm going.

[00:08:09.05] So then I'm getting on another airplane and, you know, you're going to Phu Bai. I get off the plane at Phu Bai, which turned out not to be very far from the hospital. And I'm thinking to myself, if you wanted to give the Earth an enema, you'd put the tip in Phu Bai.

[00:08:30.96] So here I am out in the middle of nowhere and there are all these Asian people sitting around, doing this or doing that, eating or this or that. And I'm saying, what on Earth are we doing here? And then they transported me to the 85th Evacuation Hospital, CASEY BLITT: it was a Navy and Marine installation before they bailed out and abandoned it. It was built in about 1968. And when the Marines and the Navy left, the 85th Evacuation Hospital, which I was told was in some other location moved to Phu Bai.

[00:09:17.83] If you were within a certain geographical radius of where we were and you got hurt or wounded, they transported you to our hospital. I think officially, we were supporting the 101st Airborne Division.

[00:09:44.08] We were 10 miles from Hue. And Camp Eagle was where the 101st was. I was told I'm not to say what we called the 101st. They call themselves the Screaming Eagles, we called them the Puking Buzzards. The 101st Airborne Division was what was there, OK? I guess theoretically, we were supporting them. If you were a casualty and you were within chopper range or whatever, you came to our hospital.

[00:10:17.03] If you had certain types of wounds, then you were supposed to go a little bit farther toward the coast and south to the-- I can't remember the name of the installation, but it was in Da Nang. And that was across the hill and through the pass from us because they had neurosurgery capability and we didn't have neurosurgery capability. If it was determined by somebody whoever was doing the triage that it was only a head injury, they would go to Da Nang, and if it was pretty much anything else that was close enough they'd they would come-- they would come to us

[00:10:58.54] Our numbers, our stats, were about the same. I'm told as they've been in Iraq and Afghanistan and whatever was the Desert Storm thing. We were able to do what we do because we had people that had just finished their training that knew what they were doing and knew how to operate. That's the whole reason that we were successful, I don't think there was anything cutting edge. There's nothing cutting edge about meatball surgery, about trauma surgery. The first 10 cases you see are kind of interesting and-- for surgeons, they like to operate. When you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

[00:11:50.33] So, the surgeons liked to operate, but basically we were just doing the same thing over and over and over. And depending upon what the casualties were, sometimes we would work for two or three days straight and then we could not work for a week. It just depended upon where the casualties were and how they came. I had no idea what the patient census was. The maximum number of operating rooms that we were capable of running at one time was three. They were not exceedingly well equipped and we pretty much had the basic necessities.

[00:12:39.84] CASEY BLITT: The second year of my residency, well I guess through my whole residency, we were involved a lot in clinical research. And there were a couple of drugs that everybody knows about now, that we did clinical investigations on at UCLA.

[00:12:58.08] And so-- now, I don't want to get anyone into any trouble but, most of them are either retired or passed away or the statute of limitations is gone. But there were a couple of

drugs that I had been clinically investigating as a resident with my attendings that it immediately struck me that these were some ideal medications for hypovolemic trauma patients, young healthy people whose basic problem was trauma and associated blood loss.

[00:13:33.58] And because the drugs that we were using to put these people to sleep just put the blood pressure in the toilet, made the blood pressure fall. And even young healthy kids can only tolerate so much hypotension.

[00:13:50.73] So we had ketamine and pancuronium and neither one were clinically-- then Roger just discovered yesterday-- when I was talking to him Roger says, oh, so that's where we got the ketamine? Because he had never been-- he had never used it in his residency, but he picked up on it pretty well and I told everybody how to use it.

[00:14:14.01] And Roger says, yes, I was using that ketamine in Phu Bai. I said, do you know where it came from? Roger says, no. I say, it was probably illegal, but nobody cared back then. They were shipping it to me by the carload from UCLA. And I said, hey-- I called them up because I got hooked up with my wife-to-be there.

[00:14:40.71] The most important thing about Kathy at that time was, she had the only stateside phone on the compound. So she was the only one at the whole 85th Evac that you could pick up the phone and call the States because she was in charge of arranging emergency leaves for people whose wives were having babies, or for people that were injured, and this and that had to go, so she had she had the only stateside--

[00:15:05.67] DEBBIE COX: She worked in the Red Cross.

[00:15:06.81] CASEY BLITT: She was a Red Cross lady, a Donut Dolly. And so, I hooked up with her mostly because she had-- she wouldn't want to say it, but everybody else in the 85th knew I hooked up with her because she had the only-- so I got on her stateside phone and I called back to the anesthesia department at UCLA and I said, listen, I could really use some ketamine and pancuronium. I said, because all we got here is healthy people that don't have enough blood and we put them to sleep with pentothal and curare and bad things happen.

[00:15:46.65] I says, if we could give them ketamine and pancuronium to start them out that would really be good. That was all it took. Nobody opened the packages, nobody knew anything. It came and I taught everybody how to-- I taught my OJTs, I taught my nurse anesthetists. I was the only anesthesiologist there. And they threw me in there and said, OK, you're supposed to run an operating room, you're the chief of anesthesia and operative service. I said, really?

[00:16:11.28] DEBBIE COX: How many nurse anesthetists worked for you?

[00:16:15.41] CASEY BLITT: I have no idea for sure, probably at least four, five, or six, and I had two OJTs-- the 12-week wonders that decided to do 12 weeks in some specialty so they could get out of being in the bush. I know they had them in anesthesia. They had them in orthopedics, and they had them in a couple of other specialties. And they went to some Army hospital somewhere-- well, if you were in the Army.

[00:16:51.93] Well they allegedly taught you how to do anesthesia in 12 weeks. Well, that can't be done. You can't learn how to be an anesthesiologist in 12 weeks. but they were young, they were bright, they had been to medical school, and I knew how to train residents because I knew how to train residents. So I had two junior residents and I don't-- four, or five nurse anesthetists, one of whom is here, and he knew what he didn't know, he knew the difference between an anesthesiologist and a nurse anesthetist. He wanted to learn what he didn't know.

[00:17:39.61] The rest of the nurse anesthetists didn't know what they didn't know. They didn't care. OK, and even though I was the chief of anesthesia and operative services, they didn't want to really pay much attention to me. And finally I said, hey, I said, this is the way you're going to do it. I says, and if you don't do it this way, I'll figure out some way-- and I had no idea what to do. I said, I'll figure out some way to get you into trouble. Alright? Because this is the way we're taking care of our patients. So that was it.

[00:18:14.57] And the hospital commander was really a goofy guy, he was an OB/GYN who probably hadn't practiced in I don't know how long. And we didn't deliver any babies there, but he knew one thing, he knew that-- Well first of all he liked me for one reason or another, I have no idea, but he knew that we were running a good shop and he didn't want to mess with it, he didn't want to upset the apple cart, so he didn't bother me, he left me alone.

[00:18:50.59] I was living in the nurse's compound because the Red Cross lady lived with the nurses in the nurses compound. And she had an air conditioner and all sorts of stuff that I didn't have in my beautiful hooch, which was right-- it was the other side of Gus and Bob's.

[00:19:13.15] OK, all three of us were in the same hooch, Agostinelli, Kappler, and me were all in the same hooch, but that part was my hooch in name only. I moved into the nurses compound pretty early on and nobody-- there were only a couple people that really cared about it. There was one chief nurse was unhappy but really couldn't do anything because Kathy was basically a civilian. She was working for the Red Cross, so this person had no military authority.

[00:19:51.73] And the hospital commander said, you're running a good shop. Do whatever you want, I'm not going to bother you. He'd invite me to his trailer to chat about stuff and all sorts of stuff, so that was the way it worked. And we had good surgeons, and we provided good care, and we had illegal drugs that were good for our patients, and that was it.

[00:20:25.27] About a month for me would have been enough. OK, I can look back and say, well that was my trauma fellowship but I didn't need a trauma fellowship, there was plenty of trauma in Los Angeles. It's not like I had to go someplace to try and find it and a month would have been about enough, 365 days was just awful. It's the worst 365 days of my life that I can remember. The only good thing is that I met my wife there. And she said, you better tell them that, OK? Or you'll get into trouble. But that was it.

[00:21:07.20] And they had flush toilets in the nurses compound too. You can't believe the squalor and the stuff that we're doing living out here in the middle of nowhere, living out here in the middle of the jungle. And the food was terrible, everything was just awful.

[00:21:32.60] As soon as we came back from Vietnam we got married, in November of '71.

[00:21:37.50] DEBBIE COX: So 40-some years. That's fantastic.

[00:21:39.20] CASEY BLITT: To the same person obviously, yeah. That will be 43 years, I guess this November. CASEY BLITT: Whoever came to us we treated, and the problem was a lot of time, you didn't know whether they were your friends or not your friends if they came to you. If they came to you wounded or injured, basically you treat them. So you didn't know whether they were the regular old South Vietnamese, who were supposed to be our allies or whether they were the Viet Cong, you didn't know who your friends were or who your friends weren't.

[00:22:15.37] Certain of us were friendlier than others because we worked in the same area but there were some other folks, like Bob was an internist and there was another internist, we struck it off well. You got to make some friends when you're drinking with the same people every night, OK? There wasn't anything to do here, OK? There was very little if anything to do except try and forget where you were.

[00:22:48.43] Well we had a better system worked out. I went on one R&R and I don't remember what the timing was or anything like that, Kathy and I went together. It wasn't very long, it was probably less than a week and the transportation was, you could sit-in the airport for 10 hours waiting for your transportation to leave for your R&R.

[00:23:15.40] I think we went-- we wound up going to Australia. But we had a triage system because there were certain types of injuries like major vascular injuries and burns are two of the examples that all we could do was stabilize.

[00:23:30.85] And once we got them stabilized, we had to evacuate them. And we evacuated them to one of two places, either a military facility in Japan or a military facility in the Philippines. I think some of them went to whatever hospital was associated with Clark Air Force base in the Philippines and some went to, I'm trying to remember the name of the hospital in Japan. So we had a rotation, and these patients had to be medically accompanied because that was the rule.

[00:24:09.85] CASEY BLITT: So we had a rotation of medical accompaniment and that usually got you a minimum of five days out of Hell, somewhere either in Japan or in the Philippines. The best place was Japan. And you'd get loaded up with money to go shopping for everybody at the PXs in Japan because they had stuff that we didn't have in Vietnam. You'd wind up with a couple thousand dollars in your pocket to buy everything from cameras to stereo equipment, everything for everybody.

[00:24:51.39] Oh, you're going-- you're the next one up for a medevac or whatever to Japan, here get me this, get me this, or get me that. We had a system. So we got to get out of country more than just the one R&R.

[00:25:10.17] Now, if you were really smart, you had a pregnant wife at home and you got to go back for the baby. And we had some people who went back for the baby and did they come back? No, they did not. They did not come-- I don't know how they did it. I guess if it was me and I had done it I'd just say, I'm not getting on the plane and going back there. Shoot me. I don't know what to tell you.

[00:25:37.86] CASEY BLITT: The toughest part was that the surgeons wanted to operate all the time. And the hardest part for them-- they wanted to do elective surgery, because there was no shortage of pathology walking around. OK, I mean, people with tumors, goiter, there was all sorts of-- And the hardest part for me was limiting how much elective surgery my surgeons could do because everybody gets bored sitting around.

[00:26:13.71] For me and my guys, my department, it was fine, but the surgeons got bored and they said, I want to operate, I got this guy over here with a big hernia or this or that. And I said, we can do it, but we're going to do it only certain days of the week and in certain times because we can't have an operating room being tied up if we've got casualties coming in.

[00:26:38.13] So you can only do certain types of cases at certain times and everything. And there was pushback about that, but then I said, hey, go ahead and operate on anybody you want, but do it without anesthesia. And they said, he's got a good point.

[00:26:57.90] Yeah, we rotated call but you never knew what call-- you never know when casualties were going to come in. And depending upon what came in, I always wanted to be there. I said, if it's a small case, if it's not a major case and there's only one patient, and you're only running one room, I said, call me if you need me. OK, but if there's more than one room running or if there's really big cases, I said, I want to be there and it doesn't matter when it is.

[00:27:42.39] There weren't any lawyers or anybody else who was going to get you into trouble if you came to the operating room after you had a beer or something like that. There wasn't anybody that was going to give you a hard time about it, so you just went about your business and if you got called, you got called. I don't know what it was, 10 o'clock at night. We were all four sheets to the wind and Gus hurts himself, so we've got to take him to the operating room and fix him.

[00:28:19.91] CASEY BLITT: It was an awful place. I could never figure out for sure why we were there and I still can't figure out why this country does what it does. The British couldn't win on our soil, OK? I'm talking about the Revolutionary War.

[00:28:42.67] The British couldn't win on our soil and every place that we've been, Korea, Vietnam, all the places in the Middle East, what do we learn from generation to generation, what do we learn? Because as soon as we leave, the bad guys take over. And it's been that way. It's impossible I think to win in a foreign country when you're not on your own soil.

[00:29:19.63] And frankly there are probably some countries that may be better off not being a democracy than being a democracy. I'm just thinking, what have we learned sending all these young kids out for nothing? And to me it's very, very sad that we don't learn the lessons.

[00:29:46.75] And I'm looking and I'm reading about everything. I'm learning about Afghanistan and Iraq. And I'm thinking, what lesson did we learn from Vietnam that we haven't applied here? The answer is everything. And then the poor kids get back, the poor kids get back-- and you're not going to like this-- the poor kids get back and are subjected to the lowest quality medical care that this country has to offer, and that's the VA system, and I just feel so bad.

[00:30:31.98] The folks that are going in now, the people that are choosing to enlist in the military, are mostly those folks that don't have enough education to get a job in our society-- for the most part-- and they're hoping that they're going to pick up some skills while they're in the military that are going to make them competitive enough to be in the workforce when they get out.

[00:31:01.86] And everything that I see, they're not learning, they're not learning those skills for them to become competitive in the marketplace when they get out of the military so that they can get a job. So they're jobless and they're homeless. And the poor-- I can tell you my story about the VA.

[00:31:26.01] CASEY BLITT: I developed a disease, probably about 2006 that was clearly related to dioxin, which is the major chemical ingredient in Agent Orange, that was clearly related to dioxin exposure when I was in Vietnam. So I went to the VA and I said, hey listen, I've got this bladder tumor and my urologist wrote a letter and my urologist says, this is most likely related. OK, they've got some law that lists about 50 different cancers and tumors that are automatically associated with Agent Orange and-- but bladder cancer is not one of them. Why? Because they obviously used no science in creating this law back in '91 or '92.

[00:32:10.41] And so I said, I'll show you the literature that says that dioxin is a carcinogen, et cetera, et cetera. And I kept getting these letters back, and they kept saying, denied, denied, denied. And I said, is it possible for me to get to talk to a human to make my case? And I got no positive response.

[00:32:32.44] So, I'm still a legal resident of the state of Arizona. So, I got a hold of my senator, who's no small potatoes. I got a hold of Senator John McCain's office. He knows me, I know him, and I said, Senator, I got this problem. And I said, I can't get the VA to even talk to me.

[00:32:56.28] And in less than 72 hours the VA talked to me. I went and I saw a human being. I said, here's the information, here's this. It was a doctor, OK?

[00:33:08.39] DEBBIE COX: Mm-hmm.

[00:33:10.02] CASEY BLITT: I was doing this in San Diego, which is crawling with military, OK, mostly Navy. And he said, yeah, you're right. I said, I'm not even asking for any money, all I'm asking is for you to say that my bladder cancer is service connected. And he says, you're right, we'll put it on there.

[00:33:28.02] And I said, thank you very much. And I'm just thinking to myself, I'm a knowledgeable, intelligent person and here I have to go to this length to get my story listened to?



I said, what are these other poor people doing? And that's a whole other story, but I don't think that the VA health care system is giving our veterans, particularly the young ones-- are giving them the best care that they deserve.

[00:34:08.68] CASEY BLITT: When there wasn't any casualties and there wasn't anything to do. And I could sit around, play ping pong, and not have to worry about wounded GIs flooding my operating room. It's like these one of these questions, do you still beat your wife, type of questions. Are you saying-- sure, there was satisfaction in patching people up that were hurt and wounded, but on the other hand, you patch them up, but you didn't even have any say in what was going to happen to them afterwards. You patch them up and some of them went right back out to duty. And your thinking, wow, we heal this, we fix this person up and now they're going to be out there where they can get injured again.

[00:35:13.30] So, it's the same satisfaction you get taking good care of a patient and having a good outcome and that sort of stuff. But there were no best days. Every day was about as miserable as it could get.

[00:35:36.01] CASEY BLITT: I can't figure out any day that's any worse than others, they all pretty much blended together. There was no best day, there was no worse day, it was just all the same thing, 24/7, 365 days. And it was terrible.

[00:36:04.88] CASEY BLITT: The only way you could have contact was through the postal service. And so you could get postcards and letters. And I would write to my mom and dad. And then I felt really bad telling them how horrible it was, what a crappy place this was to be, and all that sort of stuff. I'd call them every now and then since I had access to the phone and say hi, but that was pretty much it.

[00:36:36.86] And nobody-- one of my good friends sent me a card pretty much every week. And other than that there wasn't anybody back stateside that gave two hoots, as far as I'm concerned, where I was. So I'm not a big letter writer and this or that. But all my friends and everything, they knew where I was. There wasn't a big communication thing with me.

[00:37:13.90] CASEY BLITT: My duty was September of '70 to September of '71. I don't remember the actual dates, I can just tell you that I was there 365 days and I arranged-- because some of the flights to get back home when you were done with your tour you were just abysmal, you could sit-in the airport for I don't know how long. So I arranged when it was time for me to go with all my colleagues that there was a patient that needed to be evacuated.

[00:37:50.92] And so I jumped on an airplane with-- and all my stuff. I jumped on an airplane and then I was in Clark Air Force-- the Clark Air Force in the Philippines. There was a general and thoracic surgeon that I knew from UCLA that was in the Air Force that was stationed there, so I called him up and we sat around and talked for a little bit and I went to the-- wherever you go. This was-- this is Air Force now, so they know about-- they got better air transportation than the Army does.

[00:38:25.18] So I just went in there and I said, hey, I'm out of Vietnam. And I was in a jump seat in a C-141, one of those-- a big military jet. And in no time at all I went from there, I went to Okinawa, I got off the plane and there was a nurse anesthetist that I knew from Fort Sam or from-- somebody had told me about it. And he outranked me, which is good. So I went and rung him up in Okinawa and I said, listen, I need to-- help me get home. So next thing I know, I'm on another plane to Hawaii.

[00:39:15.40] So then I get off the plane on the Air Force base in Hawaii, which is-- the runways are immediately adjacent to the commercial airport in Honolulu. I got out of the military plane, I walked across the tarmac, and so I was at whatever the airport's called in Honolulu now.

[00:39:36.82] DEBBIE COX: OK.

[00:39:37.43] CASEY BLITT: And I walked up and showed them my orders and in no time at all I was on an airplane from there to San Francisco, and then from San Francisco back to Phoenix. And that was my trip. And the reception was-- it was the most unpopular war we've ever been in for one reason or another, and nobody cared about it. That's probably why Bob's talking about my uniform. I never wore my uniform when I was in Vietnam. I walked around in a pair of Bermuda shorts, tennis shoes, and an OD green t-shirt, and nobody bothered me.

[00:40:24.13] And when I came back, my second duty assignment was in San Francisco at Letterman General Hospital, which is no longer on the Presidio. And I wasn't chief of anything there, but the antiwar sentiment was so strong in particular locations-- San Francisco was one of them-- we were instructed not to wear our uniforms. So I didn't wear my uniform, I didn't wear my uniform, well it wasn't a full year, my second 10 months.

[00:40:58.21] At Letterman General, I didn't wear my uniform either, I dressed like I was a real doctor going to a real hospital, I put on slacks and a shirt, and a tie, and a clinic coat, so that's why Bob was saying, I'm known as the guy who never wore a uniform.

[00:41:21.40] CASEY BLITT: People keep asking me about, well is there a story behind your Bronze Star? And I say, well there may be, but if there is I don't remember it. And you can read the certificate that comes with it and it doesn't go into any detail. It says, for heroism or this or that, or valor or whatever words the military and the government use. I personally don't recall any specific event that I can associate with this. My wife doesn't know either and she knows everything, so I really don't have a clue. All I know is I got it.

[00:42:14.07] CASEY BLITT: One of my OJTs actually was assigned-- he was with me at the same hospital in San Francisco. There was a small group of us that just kept in contact with each other over the years. And in particular Gus and I and his wife and my wife and everything, kept in contact for-- and we traveled together and we visited each other and stayed at each other's houses. And some other folks, another internist. I don't think he's coming in until tomorrow, Mike Grossman, I don't think you're scheduled to interview him, are you?

[00:42:51.92] DEBBIE COX: We are, yes.

[00:42:52.17] CASEY BLITT: OK, well you'll like Mike. A number of us just kept in contact, not close contact, but close enough. And I guess the only thing for sure that we had in common was 365 days of hell in this godforsaken country.

[00:43:16.11] And then sometime in about 2005, Gus and I were probably into our third bottle of wine and we were thinking, why not see if we can get the folks that were in Phu Bai at the 85th together. So we had '06, '08, '10, '12, and now '14. So this will be the fifth 85th Evacuation Hospital we've done.

[00:43:46.53] Gus created a website and people have found us on the 85th Evacuation website. And new people keep coming every reunion who were there during that period of time--

[00:44:01.92] DEBBIE COX: That's wonderful.

[00:44:03.81] CASEY BLITT: Because they find us. We don't necessarily find them. It's been tough because we try to find some people and we find out they're no longer living, which gets to be common at our age. I don't know how wonderful it is, it's like misery loves company.

[00:44:27.21] CASEY BLITT: Post-traumatic stress disorder was not a diagnosis back then, OK? Did some of us have post-traumatic stress disorder? Probably. Did we manage to adapt or adjust to it? We probably did. I just put it out of my mind. I said, that's the worst year of my life. I met my wife, and that's the good part, and everything else was a year of misery. And that's the best it could be. And everybody says, thank you for your service, thank you for your service, and I said, you're very welcome, I says, but it was not voluntary. That's the first thing I say, it was not voluntary. I say, I was drafted.

[00:45:25.05] Me personally, I just put it out of my mind and try and forget about it. And we show all these slides and everything, and we have these reunions every two years and I'm thinking, oh my God, did that really happen? It's been a long-- it's been 40-some years now since then, it's been almost 45 years. And I-- just wipe it out of your memory bank.

[00:45:55.44] Now the people that are-- I was just talking to a lady here that works at the hotel. I don't remember exactly what department she's in, but she just had a son come back from Vietnam-- from Afghanistan. And she said, well, he had a couple of years of college and then he decided to enlist or whatever. And I said, well, now that he's back, is he going back to school? And she said, well, he's having a really tough time because his best buddy died in his arms.

[00:46:37.29] We were not exposed to that experience. We had patients that we did our best but we knew they had lethal injuries, we knew they were unsalvageable. We did our best to save them, but we knew that it wasn't 100%, but we knew we were doing a pretty good job. And that's the best that you can say about it because it was terrible. And I don't think that I-- if I had it, I don't think I had a severe case of it or whatever, I just pretty much wiped the-- wiped the year out of my memory bank.

[00:47:26.00] DEBBIE COX: Sir, is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and has had a lasting influence on your life or changed you in some way?

[00:47:37.54] CASEY BLITT: Well, only my wife. CASEY BLITT: It's not the sharpest knives in the drawer or the brightest bulbs in the scoreboard that enlist anymore, and that's reality. And I'm not going to change that. Nobody is going to change it.

[00:48:01.89] I'm a volunteer police officer where I live, which is the only time I ever have to wear a uniform is when I go out there. And one of my police volunteer colleagues is a retired two-star general. And the only thing he ever tells me, he says, as soon as they abolished the draft, he says the IQ of the Army dropped about 15 points. And I said, really Don? He said, yeah. He says that's reality. Or if they've-- people who've got a marketable skill, that can get a job, don't enlist.

[00:48:37.50] So I just feel bad for them because they come out, and what kind of skill do you have? Well, there's not a lot of demand for somebody who can lay a really great Claymore mine. And then they're stuck with the VA health care system, which you've already heard I don't think is even close to cutting edge. All I can say is I feel sorry for them.

[00:49:07.20] Should we reinstate the draft? I don't know, I think that it will make-- I told you this already, so I think it would make people appreciate freedom and appreciate this country more if everybody had to serve their country in some way, shape, or form, not necessarily always the military. But it's not going to happen in my lifetime.

[00:49:33.24] I wish that the members of Congress had to get their health care through the VA or be in any sort of system like everybody else. And then they would see exactly what it's all about, because the people at the very top of the VA hierarchy allegedly-- they either resigned or were fired recently. They have no idea what's going on in their own system, that they're forging records and this and that, in terms of veterans getting seen in the system. Those of us that have been in medicine for a while said, this is the way it's been forever.

[00:50:37.19] CASEY BLITT: I think it's remembered as a big mistake from which we haven't learned anything because we've gone three more times to foreign soil in the Middle East. And like I said, as soon as we leave, the bad guys are going to take over and all we've done is waste lives and young people's blood.

[00:51:05.80] I don't think most people gave a hoot about the Vietnam War. You're calling it a conflict and that's because that was apparently the politically correct thing to do. I don't know the difference between a conflict and a war. Do people get killed in conflicts or more people get killed in wars than get killed in conflicts? I don't know. I can't separate that. I can't separate that out. War is war and killing people is killing people.

[00:51:38.26] It was probably the biggest waste of time, energy, resources, lives, and anything else that you can think of for us to go over to this godforsaken place and think that we were

going to be able to change it. Who's in charge? North Vietnam owns the country. It's their country. They were the bad guys, and they won.

[00:52:15.06] Back in World War I and World War II, it was pretty easy to determine whether you won or lost. You bombed the heck out of everybody until somebody put up a white flag and surrendered. But I don't know how you figure out in the Middle East and Vietnam who won or who lost. I don't see that we won anything, all we did was waste our time.

[00:52:43.83] There's nothing good about war. Humans have been humans and human behavior has been human behavior since forever. But the bottom line is go back as far as you want, the Greeks, the Romans, everybody, there's nothing really good about war and you should only do it when absolutely necessary.

[00:53:15.33] And I think right now I'm not privy to all the intelligence that is-- we used to have a name for that too, contradictory terms, military intelligence. I don't know what the intelligence issues are but I don't see that we've learned anything that we keep going into these other godforsaken places to try and be the world's policeman. In my opinion, it would be a lot better if we used the resources to improve this country rather than trying to be the savior of the world.

[00:54:02.14] Humans are humans, human behavior is human behavior. And I don't think it's ever going to change, but the folks that are making the decisions I guess don't have the corporate memory to be smart enough in my opinion like I think they should to stay out of this stuff whether you want to call it a war, whether you want to call it a conflict, because I don't see any benefit. I don't see any benefit accruing to the USA from doing this stuff.

[00:54:45.21] The problem with the folks that make these decisions is their primary goal is keeping their job, and keeping their job means getting re-elected. And everybody who is in politics, their first three primary goals are getting re-elected, number one, getting re-elected, number two, and getting re-elected, number three. And for the most part that drives their behavior. In other words, they do what they think, or what their advisers tell them they should do, in order to keep their job, meaning keep getting re-elected.

[00:55:22.62] The president's got term limits, but nobody--pretty much nobody else. I don't want to sound really bitter or anything else. This is still the best country on the planet, OK? But it still doesn't mean we do everything right.

[00:55:44.99] CASEY BLITT: I thought it was nice. I thought it was well done. Could have gone up a little quicker, but that's the nature of things. I thought it was nice.

[00:56:01.70] CASEY BLITT: If it educates people it's fine. Well I don't know if there was something magic about having to wait 50 years in order to do it. Maybe it could have been done 25 years ago. It could have been the 25th anniversary.

[00:56:18.82] I think that maybe folks are finally just getting around to figuring out that the folks that served in Vietnam were sort of swept under the carpet for a long period of time and they're

trying to make nice and educate people and let folks know what was going on. It's just fine. It's the government at it's best.