00:00:05:00 – 00:00:32:15

My name is Palmer McKay. I am interviewing Vietnam veteran James Holland, who served in the Army and was in Vietnam from 1970 to 1971. Mr. Holland, this interview will have four sections your life before service, basic training, your time in Vietnam and your Life after Service. Let's get started with your background. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

00:00:32:18 – 00:01:05:03

I grew up right here in Aiken. I attended, what was called Aiken Graded School at the time, which no longer exist, and I went to high school at Schofield High School, which is now called Schofield Middle School. But I did all 12 years of my education there. Can you tell me about your family growing up? Well, my family, I was the oldest of five children.

00:01:05:05 – 00:01:35:19

So, that made it rather hard on me. I had a lot of things to do. Had to leave, and, I always felt do more, but, my father worked for the railroad, and, my mother was a, an LPN. So, they worked. So a lot of things they delegated to me. Can you describe your mother's job?

00:01:35:21 – 00:02:06:00

Well, she was an LPN at the Aiken County Hospital, which is the old hospital before, as we used to call it, before they came up with Aiken Regional. And, she did her nursing duties and, quite often she would do additional duties beyond our hospital duties and private, patients. And what does that acronym stand for?

00:02:06:01 – 00:02:13:02

LPN, Licensed practical nurse.

00:02:13:04 – 00:02:30:11

What did your father do with the railroad? Well, he was a maintenance worker, and they literally worked on the railroad. They, moved the rails and the cross ties and their gravel, hard work.

00:02:30:14 – 00:03:03:00

Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War two? No, my father was. And, World War two. Neither was my grandfather or anyone that was, across the. I remember as being a World War Two veteran. Later on, I met some Korean War veterans, but, I, personally knew, I knew of them, but not

personally knew any,

00:03:03:03 – 00:03:11:19

Well, our two veterans, none of my immediate family members were World War Two veterans.

00:03:11:21 – 00:03:18:14

Did you have a favorite World War Two movie growing up?

00:03:18:16 – 00:03:29:12

I guess I had plenty of them, I guess. No. Too many.

00:03:29:14 – 00:03:47:16

Mostly the John Wayne war movies. I think it was one about, Admiral Hershey. I think. And, it was Jima, the Red Ball Express.

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And, bridges over.

00:03:56:24 – 00:04:16:22

The River Kwai. I River Kwai, River Kwai. Maybe that was in Korea. Some of those movies are my favorite movies on Saturday was an opportunity to go to the movies and watch those. As I grew up.

00:04:16:24 – 00:04:31:09

It's interesting that you mentioned John Wayne. A lot of Vietnam veteran memoirs mentioned John Wayne as an influence on their expectations of war. Do you remember John Wayne that way? Yes.

00:04:31:11 – 00:05:04:08

Can you extrapolate on that a little bit? Well, he always came out as this macho military leader who, led his men and they always won the battle. And, of course, everybody wanted to be on a winning team and have a leader they could look up to. So, John Wayne was the man. He was a winner. Now, I'd like to move on to the start of your service and basic training.

00:05:04:11 – 00:05:21:29

Would you describe yourself as volunteering, being commissioned or drafted? I volunteered right out of high school. I graduated from high school and the thirsty and I was in the Army on a Monday. Wow.

00:05:22:02 – 00:05:25:28

What were the main reasons you volunteered?

00:05:26:00 – 00:05:56:29

Well, in Aiken at that time, the, I worked at the local pig that we agreed as a bag boy did some stocking. But, that's about all I can have to offer, so I wanted to go further than that. Well, I've had more to offer for me than the that here in Aiken. And there was nothing else that was really readily available that I could see.

00:05:57:01 – 00:06:01:29

And did you expect to go to Vietnam?

00:06:02:02 – 00:06:19:15

Oh, yeah. When I went to Vietnam, that was, years later in my career. But, yes, I expected to go to Vietnam. And what year did you enlist? Well, I enlisted in 1958.

00:06:19:18 – 00:06:24:09

What if the 58.

00:06:24:11 – 00:06:56:08

What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you enlisted? Very little, if anything, later on, you know, through the years, they started talking, you know, you'd hear noise about Indochina and things like that, but, I, I learned all my history about Vietnam, later on, and, and, military life.

00:06:56:10 – 00:07:15:08

Mostly, doing that special forces training, Indochina, the French, and their efforts to, Win over the Vietnamese, contain the Vietnamese.

00:07:15:10 – 00:07:23:03

What did you know about the Vietnam War?

00:07:23:06 – 00:07:51:16

Well, I just know that, you know, there were those conflicting ideologies of, communism and democracy was basically at the root of it. So we, being the ones who thought that, our countries should have a a chance to have a free democracy, we were on this, on that side.

And, of course, the Chinese were backing the North Vietnamese, so they were on that side.

00:07:51:18 – 00:08:11:21

So that's still a pretty much saw it as being that simple, which, of course it was not. But, it had to choose a side. And especially when you're in the military on one side, you have to be, faithful and true to that.

00:08:11:23 – 00:08:19:18

How did you feel about going over after the Tet Offensive?

00:08:19:21 – 00:08:28:06

After the Tet offensive, I realized that they,

00:08:28:09 – 00:09:02:12

They could do us some serious damage. They were really, fit to fight, and they were good. Bring the war to us. Which they literally did during the Tet of 68. We, had a lot of casualties, and, A lot of things happened that, we didn't expect looking back at, you know, the historical documents and those things.

00:09:02:14 – 00:09:16:00

Did you have any views of the war that were shaped by leading black figures like Martin Luther King or Muhammad Ali?

00:09:16:03 – 00:09:51:03

No, I, I understood what they were saying. I understand, especially Doctor King. I think I understood what, he was saying. And if you ask veterans, no veteran who wants to go to war. If you've been there, people get killed. And, the politicians need to come up with, you know, alternative solutions to warfare because there's a lot of destruction of people, property, materials, everything.

00:09:51:03 – 00:10:21:06

People literally die. So nobody wants to go to war. And in the country at that time, based on the way, our military situation is, was set up as far as procurement of soldiers and Marines and sailors in some cases was the draft. And so they were draft people, citizens between the age of 18, in in their early 20s.

00:10:21:08 – 00:10:52:09

And, of course, they had no choice but to go. And, this, really played bad as far as, those with that same, less fight, less economically favored, you know, the blacks and the lower income people because, we could not go on to college. The things that would give us a, an automatic deferment. So we were ripe candidates for it.

00:10:52:12 – 00:11:27:07

And, you were at that early age where you don't have a wife and, dependents. So young black men. Yes. Three were. We did more than our proportionate share. And that's true. It's all documented. They, you know, they said it and I said it by the military documentation and everything. But when you have a system that's, set up that way, that it's what you get for only those that can escape service, serve.

00:11:27:09 – 00:11:44:21

I mean, you always have those are volunteer, but involuntary. Involuntary those that have, that come in, don't have, an alternate route.

00:11:44:24 – 00:11:49:11

How would you describe your boot camp experience?

00:11:49:13 – 00:12:18:19

It was quite. It was quite an experience for me. It was the first time I had, dealt with a large, community of people like that, outside of, Well, any anywhere. My class, our graduating class was small. This school was large. But to, function as a team, the teamwork and those things were different, which was a good thing.

00:12:18:22 – 00:12:47:27

The responsibility, the confidence. It gave me, I, I appreciated that, it was really a confidence building thing for me. I could find out that I could participate as well as the others, if not better than most. So that gave me a good feeling. I was an expert marksman and other things. So I did well in basic training.

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Was basic training integrated or was there some stuff? So it was. It was totally integrated. That was 58.

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It was,

00:13:03:01 – 00:13:29:14

It was it was totally integrated. Our academy, our trainers and, everything was, I would say, just as it is today in the military, totally integrated, based, you know, from the standpoint of where we were, we were, you know, basic trainees in an infantry training company. You know, the other things, the higher up echelons of promotions.

00:13:29:14 – 00:13:53:09

I mean, we were privates. So for our promotion capability, promotions and things like that, that were not, anything we were concerned about because they were not possible. So you tried to do the best you can with, what resources you had. And, complete basic training and go on to your next assignment.

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Was the Army boot camp the first institution that you were a part of that was integrated? Yes, yes, it was, my high school and my elementary school were totally segregated at that time. Did anyone around you struggle with boot camp? Yes, there were a few. Not if I wouldn't say a few. But you always have, 1 or 2 people in your platoon that that, unable to say, pass their requirements.

00:14:34:18 – 00:15:17:25

Have other issues? They don't complete, basic training. We even some, I remember, there was some that had problems with marksmanship, and other issues that happened. But, you may find 1 or 2 people, within, within my platoon, say, a platoon of, say, basically 50 people, and I don't remember, but one, one individual that was a, left behind after, of the during finish.

00:15:22:13 – 00:15:38:15

I'd like to move on to your time in Vietnam. Did anything stick out to you about your flight to Vietnam?

00:15:38:18 – 00:16:06:09

No. The flight, was not, because it was. Okay. I, left out of, California. I think it was Norton Air Force Base in California. And we went to, Hawaii, Guam and Vietnam. So it was a, military. Some people were going back for their second tour, some and taking emergency vehicles and other thing.

00:16:06:12 – 00:16:39:08

Things come back to the States and returning to Vietnam. So, so there was nothing unusual about the flight? It was a commercial chartered flight. We had, civilian stewardesses, but we were all in military uniform and to Vietnam. What did you think of that stewardess as being on the plane? Well, they were flying, and we flew into, a relatively secure area.

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And,

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So, I'm sure they dropped us off and headed back to, a much safer place. And was Vietnam at the time the furthest you had been outside the US? Oh, yes. Definitely. I had never left the continental U.S before going to Vietnam.

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Could you describe your first 24 to 48 hours in country?

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Well, there's a lot of apprehension going on because, they put you and,

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These are, well, really housing places where they, really understand what they're doing. They've got, you know, you all come in and they have to personally identify everybody with, vacancies that, that are out there in country and then set you up with transportation to that particular location. So I stayed there for a couple of days.

00:17:48:09 - 00:18:19:05

And then, they told me where I was going the first night we were there, we took incoming rounds, so we had to go to our bunkers and everything, so. So that was our, sort of a baptism right away. Incoming fire. And then I, was sent to, Special Forces headquarters and the training. And I was there for the in-country orientation for a week.

00:18:19:05 - 00:18:56:00

And then they sent me to the Delta, join a C team there. Did you arrive in the train? Did you arrive somewhere else? No. I arrived at the, Danang. That's where the big Air Force base was. And, the train was north of there. And so I took a flight from Danang to near Trang.

And then, when I left the Trang are safe country was by air.

00:18:56:00 – 00:19:10:05

Well, there's a helicopter. Yeah, a lot of C-130s and a lot of the, C7 days.

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What did you expect when you arrived, based on TV shows or stories that you had heard?

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Well, I, looked back on the training that we had last year for the forces training. As far as trying to,

00:19:34:08 – 00:20:00:20

Get in and orient myself and do my job. See, we were with the Vietnamese, and they, taught us the importance of our, getting along with their counterparts and, also getting your mission done. And I knew we had a combat zone. And there, the mission was all that was very important.

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Did you work closely with Arvin? Yes. That the way it was set up, we were on, And one of the special forces compound. We ran the compound, but of and forces were there. They provided the security for the, for the base.

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The forces that, we worked with as they were the Special forces. And was that, Cambodians and, they were our, foot soldiers.

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Would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Well, the way, the special Forces operation was set up were set up. It was say that I was. And there were hours with the C team. The C team is a main control element. And then we had a couple of B teams, and each B team had, five or 6 or 8 teams.

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And the eight teams were the ones that made daily contact with the enemy. They ran the patrols every night, whenever necessary. So they are under constant fire from the enemy. And then the B team, they

were, there also. And the, B team, I mean, the C team was a little further back. And, as a district officer, my job was to keep them supplied with whatever they needed.

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I sent ammunition to them on a daily basis. And, the materials we would send out, I've run convoys, from the C team all the way down to some of the AA teams. And usually the convoys would consist of barrier material, sometimes a, A team would get hit and, you know, things would get blown up bunkers and parts of the perimeter, and they want to repair it.

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So they would need concrete and steel rebar, concertina and barbed wire. So, due to their weight and their bulk, the best way to get those, was by your, convoy. So, I ran quite a few convoys, and, Yes, I was ambushed. Quite a few times.

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But fortunately, I survived. And sometimes, when I got to the site, I had to remain overnight at the site. And so I was subject to, you know, the enemy fire and those things while there and, back at the camp, we, we took more of our almost, well, regularly. We'd have mortar fire, but we didn't have to worry, even though it was a possibility.

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Worry about ground penetrating, troops and things like that. At that time, the Delta was going to be. It was well before we left. We, underwent a project, Vietnamization, they called it. We turned all our assets. How it to the Vietnamese? We said they could handle it. Which didn't work out too well. So, the rear area was.

00:23:49:03 - 00:24:25:16

Yes, almost a bit more. A bit more secure than being on an A-Team B team. We didn't have the constant threat of hostile fire. Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours? Yes. You learn. I fear honest survival, but I never took the language. Had formal training. You know, you learn a few things, like rank and, water and food.

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The vet we it. Well, the Vietnamese prepared all of our food. And we had Vietnamese workers and soldiers. So you, learn to communicate with

them? We had, some Vietnamese, who were fluent and, Vietnamese in English. And they act as interpreters, but they're up. You didn't get any formal training in the language.

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Can you give us any examples in Vietnamese? Well, I remember, captain, was, that we.

00:25:09:05 - 00:25:31:03

I think water was my water. And, I just, really hadn't thought about any of those words since, until you asked me just then, but I had a, A I had an interpreter at my disposal all the time.

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It's fascinating. He drove by my Jeep and, I read, interpret for me. So we had a wealth of interpreters. Some of them were Chinese, and some were actually, Vietnamese who had known the language. Did you have one interpreter that you would work with particularly closely? Yes, I had one that I'd work with particularly closely.

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Most of the staff sections had at least one that they worked with particularly closely. Do you remember their name? We give them American names. That's the way we, Americanized. We give them American names because, like, in the logistics. My, people had to, I had one NCO that was responsible for the area for the ammunition.

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So he had to go through the city to the, ammo dump. And at that time, Vietnamization had turned the ammunition over to the Vietnamese. So he would, make trips with him on a daily basis to pick up ammunition and bring back, I had a, clerk that was a Vietnamese, she could understand English.

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So, correspondence and things like that, that I had to, write. I'd have her typed them up for me. She would answer the phone and so all of our, all of our clerks and things like that, and people that worked in the area were Vietnamese. All of us soldiers were, when CEOs and, like, or, I had had one officer who was over the supply effort.

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And he had two of his servants. I worked with him. And then I had, any

seven that took care of the ammunition and then, had my riggers. I had an 86, 26 I no, I had two sixes and, about four high fives. They were all the CEOs were with them. We had, Vietnamese, that worked with them.

00:28:05:16 – 00:28:36:19

Some of them were soldiers and some of them were civilians. And, our government paid for, so government, it was separate funding because, the funding of, the Special Forces was different from the funding of the regular army. So they told us, but, you know, the bottom the bottom line is the American taxpayer pays for it all, but it was different funding.

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What you mentioned just a circle back. You would give names to some of the Vietnamese people that you worked with. What kind of names? I mean, like American names. Right. Just can you give us some examples of those?

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Like Bobby Robert? And some of them, we would, they would insist on their Vietnamese names, but that's what I mean. We give them American names and, and sometimes their names are simple.

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And, we would use them, but, in most cases, I guess, to, to be, to get along with the Americans. I mean, many of them, I think, gave them those names themselves so that, the Americans would find them more friendly, easier for them than trying to pronounce their Vietnamese names, although most of them were short and, hard to pronounce once, you know, they tell you the phonetics of it.

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They're a bit difficult looking at it at first. You get this out of that, but, you could remember the words, the names were always short.

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How would you describe the Americans you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion?

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Well, In Vietnam and Vietnam, all of the people I swear to were with were, With special forces, American troops. And they were riggers and

they were airborne. They were all highly trained, highly skilled and professional soldiers. So, with them, I felt quite safe and secure knowing that, someone that had my back at all times.

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My, team sergeant was a Mexican American.

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I mean, he went back for several generations in New Mexico. He didn't come across from the Rio across the Rio Grande. And, wanted to,

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Generations ago, he was my team sergeant. That's the most senior. He's a he was in the eighth. That was your most senior sergeant. And, I had, then I had, three, 40 sevens. I had a black seven. Those of the sergeant, first class, as they are senior NCO was also I had one, in fact, he happened to be from Augusta, Georgia.

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So, he was the only black one in the riggers. My, top two riggers were all black, but so we were well integrated and, we never had,

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Only problem was getting the mission done. So we got along well with, that we I took care of my men, and, I think they took care of me.

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Can you talk a little bit more about the either Vietnamese or American women you worked with? Well, the, the clerk that I had, I knew nothing about her other than she showed up for work every day, and she would work. And,

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We had a little office space there. She tried to keep that, tidy, and, she kept, you know, good files and records we always had. We received a lot of correspondence that came through all the time. So she kept my files straight, and,

00:33:04:04 – 00:33:07:23

Whatever else?

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I needed, unfortunately, yes. Clerks of secretaries do make a lot of coffee. But, I found her to be, I thought, quite loyal, so I never had any problem with her. We never suspected anything about her activities or what she did. We had a civilian employment office within our compound, within our headquarters that hired local nationals.

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And, they were paid.

00:33:45:08 – 00:34:10:01

Through that office. And, I had one the entire time I was there. She was their entire. You. She was a young lady, early 20s, I guess. And were there any Masons on base or with Vietnamese women? Oh, yeah. Clerks. Yeah, we had some we would call mamas on. They would, come around and, I like cleaning.

00:34:10:03 – 00:34:39:07

We had someone that would come around and make our bunks and, we didn't really have any quarters, so to say, but clean up our sleeping areas. We had, one that would come in and, we did have a bathroom and, clean our bathroom and, clean our quarters within our section of the compound. I say our quarters.

00:34:39:07 – 00:35:12:09

I ran what they call the S4 shop. That was a logical part of our operation. We'd come over and clean that every day for us. And, we had, an old man, I remember, too, that would go around and, clean. The, the, storage areas and the, the yard every day and our perimeter.

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So, yes, we had people all those menial tasks like that, we had Vietnamese doing that. And these are Vietnamese three. And it's not Vietnamese soldiers.

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And, I did have some Vietnamese, that, we had trained as riggers. They would help us with the loads that we sent out to Vietnam, to the, a, a sites, and we'd teach them how to, package a load for. Well, in most cases, what we had was laying loads. That is, they would be hanging below the helicopter.

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We would, you know, put them on the platform, secure them to the platform, have this long rope or a long or strap that ran up to the helicopter, and, they would take that most of the supplies out, hang it from the bottom of the helicopter because, they were, they wanted to be able to, that, quickly release them once you got them out there.

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So, we did have, some things to go by the, Chinook, which was a larger helicopter. You could put things inside, but most of our stuff was still slung from the bottom of the aircraft. And, sometimes we had Huey's, but we didn't take this in too much. But here is their payload was were small only in necessities.

00:36:54:28 - 00:37:35:08

When we have to. Because most of us were available for, for operational needs. So, But, we had, right into here for us. We were, adjacent to an Air Force to the airport. So we had, aircraft unit there and aviation unit there that had the Chinooks. And each day we would get dedicated aircraft to, take our requirements out.

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How to. And also, my, my regards. If there were a down aircraft, they would go out and try to, and participate in the recovery.

00:37:49:00 - 00:37:55:07

When possible, we would try to recover the aircraft.

00:37:55:10 - 00:38:04:16

How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you?

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You learn very quickly. There are people who are so much less fortunate than we are.

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And, And so you that comes home, you think about it a lot. And, I mean, there was so much poverty, if you went into the local village and the surrounding countryside.

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You know, it was just, A lot of poverty, the little hoochie, the huts that they lived in were.

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Or were awful or not adequate as far as, their living conditions. You know, no running water and sewer. I mean, no running water or adequate sewage. When you did find sewage in other villages, it was just an open ditch change to the city. Since change to where they were operating from, where? This other place of a dozen or more.

00:39:14:15 – 00:39:41:18

I guess, which is, where it was then, downtown Kanto. Kanto was at that time and still is the largest, city in the Delta. And so, when you look at their standard of living, you saw a lot of sick people. You didn't,

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See a lot of old, old people, even though a lot of them looked old. They were not old. And years. So, if we could have done something I said to improve their, the sanitation and their health conditions, we would have really, done a lot for the country.

00:40:05:17 – 00:40:36:18

On the a couple of occasions. So, you have Public Health Service people there in Vietnam, but, that was a job, much too large, right? At that time, we were concerned about a war. Like water was a problem. We had a, water filter, an army water filter, big recall. It was an early lead, big treatment.

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Tank that we used to treat our water. So, that was it. So the water left a lot to be desired.

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And there wasn't an availability of a lot of bottled water or anything like that at the time.

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Did you ever see Vietnamese civilians collecting or using American trash? Yeah.

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Yeah, they would, do that around, all all of our campsites.

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And, but I've literally seen them do as, Well, yeah, you had a lot of rodents there, and, they would catch, our medics. We put the, traps, and catch the, rats at night. They'd be large, and he'd have to get out very early to get the rats before they did, because I. I've seen them cook and eat the rats.

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Yeah. That were caught. What do you remember about Vietnamese children?

00:42:02:19 – 00:42:37:17

Usually that's, like the pictures you see on TV. Malnourished or crying. I mean, the smaller ones, you know, slung across their mother's back or something. I don't I really don't think that they were getting. They have no health care, no adequate nutrition, but, there's nothing that, we could really do. But, when you looked at that, that was really a downside.

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And,

00:42:41:05 – 00:42:55:24

Of the war. And I guess that makes the countries like that vulnerable because, the economic conditions are so bad, the people have really,

00:42:55:27 – 00:43:21:19

No dreams. Hopes are aspirations of a brighter future. And every day is, day. Survival from day to day. The women must spend all day preparing that meal. They go around and try to find scraps to, pieces of wood to make a fire with, to cook that evening. Real.

00:43:21:22 – 00:43:29:13

And they would have the little pots and which in many cases would be nothing but cans.

00:43:29:16 – 00:43:53:03

That have been used for something else to cook out of, and they would just dip the, the water right out of the river, wherever they were, they had no clean water. So if you could have improved that, you would have done a lot to improve their lifespan. I'm sure.

00:43:53:05 – 00:44:03:19

Do you remember kids begging GI specifically? Oh, yeah. Or selling anything? Yeah.

00:44:03:22 – 00:44:24:19

You mentioned rats being a large part of your time in Vietnam. Do you remember any other distinct animals?

00:44:24:22 – 00:44:30:09

No.

00:44:30:12 – 00:44:56:06

Within our combat, compound, we had a, python, a pet python, and we had a dog. But, the joke was, don't let him get out. Don't let him get away. That's the will disappear. And, the snake, they would eat snakes, too. But those are our pets. And we kept them secured. But no, you did not see cats.

00:44:56:13 – 00:45:03:00

Cats and dogs running through the streets.

00:45:03:03 – 00:45:09:04

Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam?

00:45:09:06 – 00:45:48:06

Yes. The entire ordeal was one big culture shock. But I was with fellow Americans, and we had our mission so that, you know, keep you oriented. You know, what you were supposed to do. And you knew your job and you tried to do it well, but there was a lot going on around you. You know, the living conditions, as we said, there, the water, the food, on occasion, we could get into the village.

00:45:48:06 – 00:46:15:29

There was a, compound there, a mak b compound, which was a regional headquarters, and, they had, a dining room there so you could go in there and, by Vietnamese food, it was, prepared to serve Americans, and you could actually go ahead and buy it on the street so you could try some of the dishes.

00:46:16:02 – 00:46:54:13

And, what everybody, knew about was, a particular source. They had the

call nook mom, which they put on everything. And, wherever food was served, there was a, a crock. And they'd always put the leftover food in it to ferment and the juices soon that fermentation is what what, made the sauce, and they called it nook mama smelled awful, but that was,

00:46:54:15 – 00:47:07:27

The main flavoring ingredient. Everything they made, they did a lot of rice in the Delta. They grew rice, a lot of rice, all kinds of rice and, seafood.

00:47:08:00 – 00:47:33:07

It was right on the river. And, the ocean wasn't really far away either. So you had always had shrimp and, other types of fish. Of course you had chicken. And you go down into the market and these, say chickens. They would just be hanging there and they would have addressed the chickens. That is, they would have taken the feathers off.

00:47:33:09 – 00:48:08:28

They just be hanging there with all of the flies and everything lighting on them. So, you know, that was a bit different. But, they didn't have refrigerators, so they shopped every day those that had money to buy. So, they were always exchanging something. There were a lot of little vendors, people exchanging something with other people, I guess because of, the way the economy was, like, so, like food, they had no storage capability at home.

00:48:09:00 – 00:48:28:20

So every day you had to go out and buy something to eat for the night and the morning and the other parts of the day. And there were people that were preparing food on the street also, all the time. Did you get sick at all during your time in country? Many times.

00:48:28:22 – 00:48:35:09

Food poisoning.

00:48:35:11 – 00:48:41:21

Terrible diarrhea? Yeah.

00:48:41:23 – 00:49:18:25

But there, you know, a dining facility, we were able to get American rations, but the Vietnamese prepared them for us. We had, one sergeant

who ran the, the dining hall, and, he tried to get the food prepared as much as he could to be acceptable to us. So, when he went to the ration point, he could, get, the things that the other American troops were eating.

00:49:18:27 – 00:49:36:09

What American foods did you miss most while in Vietnam?

00:49:36:11 – 00:50:03:03

I don't really know, because I. I've never been one, driven by food. I always say, you know, eat to live. I don't live to eat. So, I was more concerned about, my welfare, the mission, the welfare of my men. And getting back home safely to my family. So I was wanting to get back to a steak or what have you.

00:50:03:06 – 00:50:31:14

We had beer and wine. Also the beer. We didn't have much of a choice. Most of the time it was colleagues, Black Label. But we would get the beer by the pallet loads. And so there was always beer and it was much more palatable than the water I gave me. So we had plenty of beer and, every once in a while the parks would get somewhere.

00:50:31:16 – 00:50:47:12

Some wine, and there was a little compound near where we were, and so we could buy, wine there. And, my team sergeant,

00:50:47:14 – 00:50:56:00

Would receive packages. He we get a lot of wine from his wife, who was in Germany. So.

00:50:56:02 – 00:51:24:21

Well, and also, if you drank the hardest stuff, we had to have that also at the era, at the the liquor and wine and beer. You mentioned being ambushed before you personally encountered the Vietcong. Yeah. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

00:51:24:24 – 00:51:54:05

Well, Well, well, I was running a convoy. I was in the, in the lead vehicle, and, we cleared it. But what happened is it was not in the center of the road. We had some white trucks, you know, the tractor trailers. And, one of them hit a roadside mine. And, of course, that triggered the ambush.

00:51:54:07 – 00:52:27:26

And so that knocked that truck out, along with all the material and everything. So. And then they had us from one that was their worst. And, it went on for a while. We couldn't get assets because the assets and I say assets, I'm talking about people that help us. We had, when you go out, you make sure that you're covered by air support, and that's what you call your assets.

00:52:27:28 – 00:53:00:04

And so, they had been called away. So it was a while before, before we could get any kind of air cover in to help us out. So we had to fight there. And, we all working with firepower and everything, and they finally started retreating. And then, the road was blocked, so all we could try to do was to blow the trailer and the rest of the stuff, clear the road so we could continue on.

00:53:00:06 – 00:53:37:23

We had some more casualties, but no Americans. Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed? No. By the time I got there, they had stopped spraying the Agent Orange. But, you know, it's still persist even today. You know, in the plants, the water environment. So everyone that was there during that time was affected by Agent Orange because it just contaminated the environment.

00:53:37:25 – 00:54:10:03

But I've seen pictures of it when I was at Fort Bragg of them spraying the Agent Orange. And there, what happened immediately thereafter and things like that, were the areas that you worked in specifically? Were they cleared with Agent Orange before you arrived? Yeah. In the in the in the Delta. Yeah. They had, I mean, but that had been, that was in 70, but, you know, you have it in this growing season.

00:54:10:04 – 00:54:26:04

So I think he recovers very quickly. But chemically, all that stuff is still there. But the leaves turn brown and they fall and they're,

00:54:26:06 – 00:54:54:04

And then the Highlands, they use a lot of it, too, because, the, overhanging, trees, they had, but they said triple canopy, you know, three levels of, plants. And, it's hard to see the ground from the air. So, by using that or, Agent Orange, you could defoliant it. It was a defoliant, is what it really was.

00:54:54:06 – 00:55:02:29

And that would get rid of all of the leaves on the trees. But, they all recovered, and,

00:55:03:01 – 00:55:06:09

How did you.

00:55:06:11 – 00:55:14:06

Cope with the realities of being in a war zone?

00:55:14:09 – 00:55:23:04

Oh, well, really, I had 12 and 18 hour days every day.

00:55:23:07 – 00:55:26:01

And,

00:55:26:03 – 00:56:00:13

You didn't get a chance to much more than work and sleep. There was no time for self-pity. How did I get here? So you you did your job as best you could, but, was, I mean, many people there say it was hell, and, it's very demanding, very demanding. And fortunately, I was able to survive it.

00:56:00:15 – 00:56:20:03

But, yeah, I did 12 to 18 hour days every day I was there. So you just work hard. And are you your people around? You were doing the same thing. So it was what was expected of you. And,

00:56:20:05 – 00:56:35:25

So you performed well, and you made sure people made sure your people performed well. How did people around you cope with being in a war zone?

00:56:41:13 – 00:57:05:01

Pretty much the same way I would think around. They would, you know, my uncles, they would gather sometime in the evening when they did have free time and, you know, drink beers. And everybody looked forward to the to the meal.

00:57:05:03 – 00:57:25:08

A lot of people received, tapes and they'd have their tapes and they'd

have their mail, and they would try to write letters back home, but there's just, just no way out of it. You have to accept it as a reality. And,

00:57:25:11 – 00:57:28:15

And say, and,

00:57:28:18 – 00:57:48:25

And say, one day this will be over, you know, but, I did get to, going under. While I was there, I met my wife and, how I so we had a week there. So that was a break that I had.

00:57:48:27 – 00:58:03:02

Do you remember halfway through my tour, do you remember humor or slang or jokes being a part of life in Vietnam?

00:58:03:05 – 00:58:06:14

Not.

00:58:06:16 – 00:58:37:06

Well, the troops always had their inside jokes. They had a radio service there that was, run by FEMA Forces Network, and you could pick it up on your regular radio on a band. And there are a m band, and they would try to come out with a little humor, or they had someone called Chicken Man, and, he would be on in the morning if you had time to listen to him.

00:58:37:09 – 00:58:40:25

But,

00:58:40:28 – 00:59:13:09

We'd keep the radio on in the office sometime. But the, But why did they call him Chicken Man? That's what he called himself. Chicken man. The, the DJ, the announcer who was running the program, he would come on with a little, little chicken cock a doodle, and, he would talk for a couple hours in the morning.

00:59:13:12 – 00:59:47:09

Since you were in country in 1971, I have to ask, do you remember fragging taking place? I had a lot of friends, after, postwar talking to some of my fellow officers. And, the units who actually,

00:59:47:11 – 01:00:13:03

I guess, had some rough time so they would, you know, where their, pistols constantly, you know, and things like that. And they talk about other incidents, but no, I think those and in the Special Forces, I think we had a different breed of troop. They were, we trained, they were highly motivated. And, whatever, needed to be done.

01:00:13:03 – 01:00:54:00

They did it willingly. So I didn't have any any problems with any of that. And I don't know of any because we were one team and we were close together, officer and NCOs and enlisted. So. No, I never heard of, fragging in, Special Forces unit. Not by, you know, the fellow soldiers. No, I have heard of some incidents of, where the Vietnamese dragged.

01:00:54:03 – 01:01:30:05

Americans. But again, there that's, you know, rapport with your kind of fights. I mean, you can't treat these people as if they're dirt and expect them to be loyal to you. Treat them harshly, badly, and run patrols with them. You may not come back. So, so you just have to respect the people. That's basically what what it's all about respecting the people, taking care of those who work for you and, trying to do the right thing.

01:01:30:07 – 01:02:02:02

So, just to be clear, you heard stories of Arvin troops fragging Americans. You know? Wow. Yeah, but the nothing like that happened. My team sergeant, all of these guys, that I had, these eight sevens by that time, they have they were on their third or fourth tours and always special forces. So they gather all the information from everywhere.

01:02:02:04 – 01:02:15:26

But, one thing that was emphasized, the Special forces crew establish rapport with your counterpart. And,

01:02:15:28 – 01:02:28:13

And it's basically just respecting him as an individual, as a fellow soldier and, the Alaska.

01:02:28:15 – 01:02:38:11

They weren't very good soldiers, but, But they were what you had.

01:02:38:13 – 01:02:56:03

So similarly, you may have heard about rather than experienced, racial violence, but did you experience or witness any racial violence among Americans? No.

01:02:56:05 – 01:03:11:09

What was the most memorable friendship you had during your time in Vietnam?

01:03:11:11 – 01:03:20:23

I think my, team sergeant and I, we, established a very good relationship.

01:03:20:25 – 01:03:39:05

Very good relationship. And, many of these relationships, they went on well beyond Vietnam. I had, the, my amba ammunition, NCO he went on to,

01:03:39:07 – 01:03:53:05

Be a sergeant major and factor, three of these guys made sergeant major. So shows you the caliber of troops that I had. And, they did. Well.

01:03:53:08 – 01:04:02:01

And they're, back doing the,

01:04:07:27 – 01:04:28:10

Let's say Carter administration, some of our soldiers were held hostage, and, and they were aviators. And one of the aviators that was held was this, my NCOs, son and,

01:04:28:12 – 01:04:57:27

So he he he, you know, he was a military family, but he made sergeant major and my team. Sergeant Morris, he made, sergeant major and Butler and, he was another E-7. I had, he worked with me in Burley and, and, he made it. So I had, carried on a relationship with, most of for quite a few years thereafter.

01:04:58:00 – 01:05:21:12

Were you in contact with your friend at any point, you know, during the IRA and hostage crisis, whose son was. Yeah. So, you know, that's

one of them called me and told me about the other son. You know, I reached out to him, but, Yeah, we were we were close to the group, and, my era.

01:05:21:15 – 01:05:39:03

XO. Jose was his name. He was quite a guy. I had a very good relationship with him. So, yeah, I came away from Vietnam with a lot of good friends.

01:05:39:06 – 01:05:47:18

What was the most beautiful thing you saw in Vietnam?

01:05:47:20 – 01:05:54:29

And, that's a great question to ask. And what is the most beautiful thing I saw?

01:05:55:02 – 01:06:05:00

You know, really, I guess I was, taken aback by,

01:06:05:02 – 01:06:26:06

The beaches that I saw there and the trang there. The palm trees and the beach. And also in one town, I saw the same thing. And we had one camp down on the, Cambodian border.

01:06:26:09 – 01:06:35:29

On the South China Sea. And it has a tremendous, sea and landscape here.

01:06:36:01 – 01:06:42:27

So that was, I think of those places.

01:06:43:00 – 01:07:11:15

I didn't get into the Highlands at all or anything like that, but, those things as well as natural beauties, so those are really, it's something different from the beaches that you see in South Carolina and Florida and California. You mentioned letters being a big part of your time in Vietnam. Who did you write to or receive letters from?

01:07:11:18 – 01:07:38:08

I receive, letters from my wife, of course. The family members, mother was right. And, I had their, sister that was, in college at the time.

And, she was pledging a sorority, so she had to have all of her, that her sisters at one point send me letters. And, the fellow thought it was funny.

01:07:38:08 – 01:08:14:08

They say, hey, captain, you got all these letters, and they all have a turn days with women's names on them. So you had all these girlfriends, but they're, Yeah, me. And mail was a big thing. But I had close, stayed in close contact. I had one sister that would send me care packages off. You know, she'd buy these little, packages of, salami and cheese and, goodies, you know, and, send them to me.

01:08:14:10 – 01:08:22:23

They're non-perishables. So you could send them through the mail. So she would send those to me quite often.

01:08:22:25 – 01:08:36:04

Do you remember any American TV shows or songs from your time in Vietnam?

01:08:36:06 – 01:08:55:13

Only one. I don't really even remember the name of it. And I'm forgotten forever. But it went on the I'm leaving on a jet plane. I'm going back tomorrow. I'm going back. I don't know when I'll be back again. So that sort of stuck in my mind. Leaving on a jet plane? Yeah, it was on a jet plane.

01:08:55:16 – 01:09:12:17

I hadn't thought about it since, since you mentioned it, but, as you got shorter, that sort of rang out in my mind more than once. I'm leaving on a jet plane.

01:09:12:19 – 01:09:31:05

What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the.

01:09:31:07 – 01:09:34:07

Nothing. Well.

01:09:34:10 – 01:10:03:23

Nothing. Really. They, It was nothing, really. I needed, I didn't drink liquor, so, I give my ration to the to my NCO to do whatever they wanted with. Because whenever we needed it, they had wine, and,

my team sergeant would get it for me, and we could get the beer without any ration cards or anything.

01:10:03:25 – 01:10:26:13

And, if I got something and it wouldn't, it wouldn't last very long before it would be sold out. But what they did have over there was a was a mail order catalog. And, so I use that quite a bit to send gifts to, to family back home because they had a lot of things in there.

01:10:26:15 – 01:10:57:13

They had a nice colorful plates, page after page after page. And, so, I would shop from that once in a while when I got a chance, but, what else did you buy your family for? The catalog? Just, mostly, like, for all my sisters and my mother, but, some kind of, chinaware or something like that about them all.

01:10:57:19 – 01:11:11:19

Chinaware do you remember the stocking products that catered to black servicemen and women?

01:11:11:21 – 01:11:47:02

No, I don't remember. Very issue with whatever. They, they didn't stock that much. And, you know, they get up supplies in and they'd be gone shortly. And so, and really, I never went there maybe a few times during the whole, 12 months. But there, But one thing that they did sell, the different points were refrigerators.

01:11:47:04 – 01:12:14:15

And, but the refrigerators headed to the black market, and that's what that was about. The little odd, as you would call a dormitory. So size refrigerator, two square feet, right. 36in high. Yeah. That was a hot item. Was the black market particularly prevalent during your time in them? Yeah. And they would purchase or,

01:12:14:18 – 01:12:45:27

You dollars to if you had and we weren't supposed to have dollars when we went in country whatever dollars we had returned them in and pieces military purchase vouchers and that's what they paid us. And so, but they, they wanted, there were people that, dealt in that extensively and have people in the States send them American money to the mail.

01:12:45:29 – 01:12:52:01

Did you buy any Vietnamese souvenirs? Yeah.

01:12:52:03 – 01:12:56:21

Yeah, yeah.

01:12:56:23 – 01:13:24:29

I have, one painting. Well, I didn't buy it. It was given to me, but it, I think it was Matisse's The Wine and had a large bottle. Large round bottle. Not a surgical bottom, but around bottle. And there was a painting on it that my team sergeant had made, had painted downtown some by some vendor down there for me.

01:13:25:01 – 01:13:38:06

I still keep that as a souvenir. I have a couple of little plaques, like paintings like that I bought back.

01:13:38:09 – 01:13:44:26

And, And,

01:13:44:28 – 01:13:50:07

But they had some wonderful craftsmanship. They did great work.

01:13:50:09 – 01:13:55:13

The woodwork and, the paintings.

01:13:55:15 – 01:14:09:16

You mentioned meeting your wife in Hawaii on R&R. How did your wife feel about you being in Vietnam? Well, that,

01:14:09:18 – 01:14:25:27

She supported me. She knew it was to my. My was my choice, so to speak. So associated with it as you could.

01:14:26:00 – 01:14:44:07

That's the end of my service questions. Is there any one story we haven't talked about from your time in Vietnam that you'd like to share?

01:14:44:09 – 01:14:55:24

No. Nothing. I think you've covered it adequately. Let's talk about your post service life.

01:14:55:26 – 01:15:05:09

What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

01:15:12:02 – 01:15:32:09

And of course, to clarify, your service in Vietnam.

01:15:32:11 – 01:16:05:29

Well, when you have a lot of, I guess, experiences that put you, near death and see people die around you, you do a lot of, thinking, a lot of introspection. And, I think that does change the way you tend to look at life. As far as your motivations and, what you want to get out of life and, where you want to go in life.

01:16:06:01 – 01:16:11:16

So I think it has a very profound effect. There.

01:16:11:18 – 01:16:30:28

So fortunately, I was able to live beyond it. So I, try to make good decisions. To carry me on through the rest of my life.

01:16:31:01 – 01:16:45:11

Did you know any anti-war veterans after Vietnam that knew any anti-war veterans and.

01:16:45:14 – 01:17:06:17

No, not so many veterans. I met a lot of people who were anti-war. But, there were not really close acquaintances or anything like that. If they were, you know, they wouldn't be for long. But their,

01:17:06:19 – 01:17:11:22

But as I said, I understand,

01:17:11:25 – 01:17:15:09

What,

01:17:15:12 – 01:17:54:08

What King was talking about. Really? And it's true. You know, if we could have a world that way, how great it would be. So I understood his message. I think. And, yes, the black man did pay. Pay a heavy

toll. But but the thing is, we tend to design societies that way. I look at what's going on in America now, and and it's the same things.

01:17:54:08 – 01:17:59:16

Things haven't changed.

01:17:59:18 – 01:18:13:11

Who? Those with the least expected to do without more than those and have.

01:18:13:13 – 01:18:21:01

Who since the war have you talked to about Vietnam?

01:18:21:04 – 01:18:30:14

Haven't really talked about it much at all.

01:18:30:16 – 01:18:37:17

Have you been to the wall in DC? Yes.

01:18:37:20 – 01:19:02:14

Yes, I've been to the wall in DC and I, I've, seen a little replica of the wall at several other places in the country. Some years ago they brought it to Barnwell, South Carolina. I was there and other places I've seen it, but, yeah, I've been to the wall. What did you think of it? It,

01:19:02:17 – 01:19:17:02

Well, you try to find some of the people you know. It's in alphabetical order. So. And I remember reading about it before, when they was commissioned and what the.

01:19:17:04 – 01:19:20:24

Hardest was trying to,

01:19:20:27 – 01:19:30:03

To express and, it's a powerful, monument.

01:19:30:06 – 01:20:01:05

Especially with all those names on it. And I think of the any other way you could do it, but, yeah, it's, it's a powerful monument. And

each time I've been there have been several times you can always find, flowers or something at the base where someone has been there. Probably knowing a veteran and leaving flowers. So I think it,

01:20:01:07 – 01:20:12:02

Was quite appropriate. You said you remember the architect who created the wall. Do you remember the wall being controversial?

01:20:12:04 – 01:20:38:13

Oh, yeah. Well, I read this, and, I would say time magazine, I'm sure is where it was. And they were looking at the controversy of it and, I guess, He was trying to express what he thought about it, but, yeah, there was a lot of controversy around it at the time, but, but he won out.

01:20:38:16 – 01:20:50:05

But, you know, what kind of, monument can you come up with that? Can represent death?

01:20:50:08 – 01:20:58:26

Life and death of 54,000 men and women.

01:20:58:29 – 01:21:07:27

I think it's great in that we were able to put each name on it.

01:21:08:00 – 01:21:19:27

Each veteran who died in Vietnam has their name, their.

01:21:20:00 – 01:21:47:26

So I think it was quite appropriate in that way. Each person, as I said, if you go there, you and you know someone, you can have your personal moment with it, not just one big monument. So I say all the Vietnam Veterans, each person that visits more than likely takes away,

01:21:47:28 – 01:21:51:17

A piece of his or her.

01:21:51:19 – 01:22:02:06

Lee's his or her feelings. It's a personal moment for them. Put it that way. Have you been back to Vietnam? No.

01:22:02:09 – 01:22:10:05

Would you like to go back? Yes.

01:22:10:07 – 01:22:26:16

This is my last question. Do you have a favorite book or poem or movie about Vietnam?

01:22:26:18 – 01:22:42:06

All right. I've seen a couple through the years. One called The Platoon and the other one called the, apocalypse.

01:22:42:08 – 01:23:14:29

I identified a lot of both of those. I think. What about them? Did you identify with I mean, the war or the war itself? The rigors of, leadership, the struggles that the individuals went through, and those things. Okay. Mr. Holland, thank you so much for talking with us and sharing your stories. Thank you. Glad to have done it for you.

01:23:15:01 – 01:23:16:13

I.