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My name is Luke Aldridge. I'm interviewing Vietnam veteran Phil Homan, who served in the Army and had three tours in Vietnam from 1968 to 1972. Mr. Homan, this interview will have four sections your life before service, basic training, your time in Vietnam and your life after Service. So let's get started with your background. Okay. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

00;00;25;07 - 00;00;54;12

I grew up in Harvey, Illinois. The rural community outside of Chicago, south of Chicago. And, went to high school there. Tinley Park High School. I enjoyed the area. Most people that live there at that time would travel to the South Side of Chicago or or in bigger communities to work and things like that. So as far as knowing anything about it, that's pretty much what it was.

00;00;54;15 - 00;01;24;07

The cornfields. Can you tell me about your family growing up? I had, two brothers and a sister and myself. Both my parents, they were very supportive when I was going to school and encouraged me to get involved in sports. So I did track. I playing football and track. Just wanted all of us to do the best we could with what they could do.

00;01;24;10 - 00;01;51;00

And I thought they did a great job with that. Looking back over time, how they sacrificed sometimes for things and and helped us move forward and grow. Would you describe your dad's job as blue collar, white collar or something else? I think he was a little bit in between. He worked for General Motors and he handles all of their maintenance programs for different dealers, so he would review what they did there.

00;01;51;03 - 00;02;16;16

So he had a good background in mechanics. But he would travel to different dealerships and review and do quality checks on their, their maintenance and things that they were doing. So it was kind of an in between blue collar. White collar. Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War II to.

00;02;16;18 - 00;02;35;22

Not early on in my years, but later years. My file told me some stories that I understood why he didn't talk about it. Because it kind of hit home with me with some of the things. And I think he felt at

that point that he needed to tell me what he had done because he hadn't done that.

00;02;35;24 - 00;03;00;25

And I think he felt sorry that he hadn't told me earlier about some of these things. Do you think your father's service influenced you when you joined the Army? Oh, I had a big played a big influence when I joined the Army. I knew I wanted to go in the army, and. But I wanted to be. I had to prove myself that I was better than him.

00;03;00;27 - 00;03;23;15

When I went in. And so what he belonged to was very elite, very specific. And I said, I've got to do better than that. So that's what brought me into it. And then from that point on, I just grew into my different roles that I played in the Army. Did you have a favorite World War Two movie growing up?

00;03;23;18 - 00;03;51;01

Well, I always thought Guadalcanal Diary was behind, battle of the bulge. That was a good one, too. So those were the two? Probably. That kind of influenced me. What was Pacific? One was European, so I. But I thought they were pretty realistic back then. And what about now? Now that I've done some of that, not so much.

00;03;51;20 - 00;03;59;20

Okay, well, now I'd like to move on to the start of your service and basic training. Would you describe yourself as volunteering? Being commissioned or drafted?

00;03;59;20 - 00;04;15;15

I volunteered and I went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for my basic training. I did six weeks of basic at that time. They moved here from eight weeks to six weeks because they tied it into advanced individual training.

00;04;15;17 - 00;04;38;00

And then you would pick up another six weeks after that. So I went to basic ness, just really what they termed as basic. You learn weapons qualification, how to march, how to obey rules. How to you get a pretty good history of the military, what the army was about and what they're supposed to do and things like that.

00;04;38;02 - 00;05;06;27

And then you moved. Then we moved from there down to, Fort Polk, Louisiana. And that's where you got into more advanced, where you got into leadership roles. Map reading, land navigation, escaping invasion, more weapons qualification, more advanced weapons qualification, things like that. And you had to move into a different leadership role, starting with the squad leader all the way up to a platoon leader.

00;05;06;29 - 00;05;31;14

So you got a good variance of different jobs that you could possibly get when you got to Vietnam. So to back up to when you first joined in the military historians of the Vietnam War, note that in addition to volunteering being commissioned to being drafted, there were also draft motivated volunteers. How would you describe yourself? Strictly a regular army volunteer.

00;05;31;16 - 00;05;47;02

So the draft didn't play a role. I thought I would end up being drafted and I wanted to do what I wanted to do, not what they wanted to give me to do. And that then someone set my tone from where I was going to go.

00;05;47;05 - 00;06;13;17

What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you enlisted? Nothing. Just sort of I saw a little bit on the news about it. But as far as the overall culture and climate and those things, I didn't know anything about it. What did you know about the Vietnam War? That that we were there to support a democratic government and that the French had been pushed out.

00;06;13;20 - 00;06;43;02

And the president at that time thought that there would be a domino effect if they lost Vietnam. And so they got got us involved in that. And that's what I didn't know. And that was strictly from the news. Do you remember anything specific about the last days before your service or the trip to base? I'm sorry. Do you remember anything specific about the last days before your service or your trip to base?

00;06;43;05 - 00;07;12;18

I do, when I got ready to go, I was going away. Party, from my family and everything like that. Then from there, I went to the military entrance processing center in Chicago, and we went to final, physical information. We got our orders where we were going for our basic training. They started hollering, yes, you right here.

00;07;13;05 - 00;07;35;09

And then from that point, they told us that we weren't going to get there during the daylight hours, that they I wanted to take everybody at night. So they put us on a train to go to Saint Louis, and we got to outside Saint Louis and it was daylight. They said, well, you're going to sit here on over the Mississippi River on this bridge until it gets dark.

00;07;35;11 - 00;07;58;02

And then they took us into Fort Leonard Wood after it got dark. And as soon as we got off, we used to refer to it as the sharks, because those drill sergeants go running up and start screaming and hollering at you. Told us where we were going to sleep. Everybody lay down. An hour later, they came and got us all up and said, it's time to go to breakfast.

00;07;58;27 - 00;08;22;15

There wasn't that polite, but. And why did they want it to be dark? I think so that you didn't get an idea of where you were really at. And the installation. And they didn't want to give you a false sense about where you were going to live and things like that. And we actually ended up living in World War Two barracks to start with.

00;08;23;24 - 00;08;49;02

So it wasn't very comfortable, but we knew we were going to and that was that's what they refer to as a reception station. And there you go through and you get your all your clothing and everything that you need. You give them, you give up your little bag of stuff that you bring, turn in all your civilian clothes and they mail it all back to you next of kin.

00;08;49;05 - 00;09;17;29

And then you, they provide you with everything. How would you describe your boot camp experience? It was apprehensive to start with because everybody's hollering at you. You weren't really sure what you were going to be doing. And as it progressed, you really started to understand why they wanted everybody learn to work as a team, to create a cohesiveness amongst amongst everybody.

00;09;18;22 - 00;09;43;18

They tossed you to, buddy up with different ones at camp. We prefer to Italy. Now was a battle buddy. But back then it was just you, muddy. And you learned how to work with things and what they did, and you would kind of critique them. They would critique you. You learn a lot

of discipline. And I thought that was really, really good.

00;09;43;20 - 00;10;07;22

So how difficult was the experience of boot camp for you playing sports and things? It was as difficult as it was for others. I think that played a factor in it because I was used to be empowered and playing sports and things. So, for me, the difficult part was sometimes, why are we going out here? And it's for down rain.

00;10;07;24 - 00;10;32;11

You know, we could do this inside. And a lot of people felt that way, but it was just something different that you had never been exposed to. Once you understood what your drill sergeant wanted, your life became a lot easier. And you kind of were able to figure out what they were trying to instill in you.

00;10;32;13 - 00;10;52;28

Did anyone around you struggle with boot camp? Oh yeah. We had quite a few that got there and couldn't couldn't take it. You hear them crying in the middle of the night? They called for their mother or dad. They'd be up there, tell them they want to quit. Then, even if they were drafted, they wanted to quit.

00;10;53;00 - 00;11;19;25

And they just really had a hard time with it. They were the ones that caused those that weren't doing anything wrong to have to do extra work. And extra work was either run more miles, do more push ups, things like that. So they kind of became ostracized from everybody else because of that. Historians talk about recruits being broken down and then rebuilt as soldiers.

00;11;20;21 - 00;11;39;13

Do you think that fits what you saw? Boot camp. Yeah. It did because everybody you could just see a change in people after about the second week that they were starting to get on board with what they were trying to teach you or telling you to do. And then you and they did a little more explanation on things.

00;11;39;23 - 00;12;09;19

From that point on, the first two weeks was probably the roughest. Would you say that boot camp prepared you for Vietnam? No, no, it really didn't because you had really. No skill training at that point. You just had the basics. And, you know, I suppose in a different time you could have went somewhere, but not not for there.

00;12;10;17 - 00;12;16;27

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

00;12;16;27 - 00;12;34;28

It was a long flight. It took us 18 hours to fly. It was on a commercial jet that we flew on. We always laugh. They always gave you the worst looking studio. So I think they resurrected it from Lindbergh's flight because.

00;12;34;29 - 00;12;59;02

Because they were. They were not the nicest, nor were they the helpful they were. They were kind of grumpy and mean, but they knew where you were going. After a year and flying for 18, we landed in Hawaii and we landed in Okinawa. And then we went in the country. Could you describe your first 24 to 48 hours in country?

00;12;59;05 - 00;13;39;14

The first 24 hours, we got to the year landing and I ended up landing at Tanzanian airbase. And as soon as you got off that plane, you could smell the. There was a real stench in year. The heat was oppressive at that point because there was no tree covers or anything like that in our coverage. The heat was about 110 degrees, so you just kind of melted where you were in, and then you had people yelling at you to get off the runway, get away from the plane, because they were they would get mortared when sometimes those planes would come in on the airfield and they were and ask you to get in the cover,

00;13;39;15 - 00;14;06;12

go here, find your liaison for the unit you were assigned to, and they would take you at that point and send you to where you needed to go. What did you expect when you arrived based on TV or stories you'd heard? Well, when we arrived, most of us thought I was going to be just, you know, walk off just like you walked on the plane, walk off and kind of take your time going where you were going.

00;14;06;23 - 00;14;31;17

None of us expected the heat to be as bad as was. That was probably the worst was the. It was like stepping out of a really air conditioned place into the outside. You just got slapped in the face with the heat. You could just all of a sudden you can just feel yourself starting to perspire. We had taxis on and everything was wet, and you just felt what, like, all you want to do is go get a shower.

00;14;31;17 - 00;15;02;29

And that was not going to happen. You mentioned the stench earlier. What was the stench like? Pretty oppressive. I think it was just due to the overall area. You had rice paddies not too far away. And the way they fertilize was totally different to what we would do here. You had stagnant water sitting around, where there was trees.

00;15;02;29 - 00;15;28;15

You had a lot of rotten trees down and around. The dirt would be turned over, and you just had a smell from there. Was like, good, rich, black dirt. And when did you arrive in Vietnam? I actually arrived there in May of 1960. 67. I'm sorry. January 8th of 1968.

00;15;28;17 - 00;15;58;18

Would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Oh, I was in combat. And what kind of work did you do? I was actually a what they refer to as an 11 Bravo, which is an infantryman. And when we got in country, you went to the company or unit you were assigned to, and then they would determine what position you would have within a platoon in a squad.

00;15;58;20 - 00;16;20;12

And that's how they determined. So I knew I was going in to take somebody else's place who was leaving at that time. People went in and out as individuals. They didn't go as a whole unit like they did later on and worse things. And did you do the same kind of work in all three tours? Yes. You mentioned that you arrived in January of 68.

00;16;21;08 - 00;16;44;27

Could you tell me about being in country during the Tet Offensive? It was very chaotic. We got the unit that I got to. They were out already in the field. And so there was three of us that were going to that unit. It was a resupply run. So we got to what they termed as a medium LC.

00;16;44;28 - 00;17;20;21

That means you got sometimes you got shot out and sometimes you didn't. It was a hard LC. So they were able to come in and land didn't. Land was stayed off the ground about three feet. They kicked all the supplies out, kicked us out and said, go find whoever you have to find. And so you kind of stood there for a minute, and then somebody would scream and ask you to get off of there, and then you'd find who your platoon sergeant was, and then they would start talking

to you about, you know, your job, what you were going to do, how long they were going to be there.

00;17;20;21 - 00;17;53;13

They were going to stay overnight, and then they were leaving because that would become our, target point for rockets and mortars. Right. So you only stayed overnight, and then you pick up and leave. And from that point, they loaded me up with my rucksack and all the things that I had to have with it. And next morning we got up and started climbing a hill, and some of the hills we climbed were about 8000ft in height and slippery, with a triple canopy you couldn't see.

00;17;53;16 - 00;18;12;21

Sometimes you couldn't see more than five feet in front of you because we were so thick and you had to learn to adjust. And of course, being in country and knew you had to let your body had to adjust to it. We had a lot of, a lot of ones that were there, even for a while, that would pass out from heat exhaustion.

00;18;13;17 - 00;18;36;17

And the first thing they told you is when they come round, medic comes around in the morning, you take those salt tablets and the malaria tablets and it'll help you became a firm believer in them. So you mentioned that arriving during the Tet Offensive was chaotic. Could you expand on that a little bit? You really didn't know where.

00;18;37;10 - 00;18;59;22

And we referred to him was Uncle Charlie was was going to be, where they were coming. We had an idea that they were going to go more towards toward the ocean side of Vietnam and more toward the the bigger cities. Boy. Danang down along that coast in the middle part. What they refer to as low lands.

00;18;59;25 - 00;19;24;13

And that was the direction that they were going to go or had more improved highways, able for they were able to move quicker. There and then what, they weren't in the mountains. So we kind of knew that that was there. They picked us up and moved to send in the low lowlands from the mountain tops, and we supported, just outside way in Quang Tre Province.

00;19;24;15 - 00;19;58;19

So on that note, where were you primarily stationed during your tours? Mainly I was in the ER, Shaw Valley in my first tours, and then on my

second tour, I ended up at the north part of Vietnam, on the northern edge of the Shaw Valley and the south side of the DMZ. How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion?

00;19;58;22 - 00;20;32;16

To be perfectly honest, none of us thought about that. None of us thought everybody was was the same. We didn't think of each other as being white, African American or anything else. We were brothers. We had to rely on one another in order to stay alive and everybody said that that, and again, I'm just quoting what I read in the paper and Stars and Stripes and stuff like that, that, you know, the draftees were mainly an underclass people.

00;20;32;23 - 00;21;01;29

And that's that was not true. That was that wasn't there were more Caucasian that were drafted than what they were African American. And and sometimes you you kind of were hesitant to because, you know, you only believed in what you grew up whereas and where you grew up around, but once you were there and you got into a firefight, you they just became the same as you and you became the same as them.

00;21;01;29 - 00;21;31;06

You just want to stay alive and hope they'd help you do that, and you want to get to help them with that too. So did you talk with the people in your squad about where they were from or their. Oh, we always have to try to find out where people were from. But she learned quickly that you want to try to avoid that because you didn't want to know that much about them, because if something happened to them, you always felt that you had something to do with that.

00;21;31;08 - 00;21;58;21

So you you'd get their name and find out they were from. One example was a guy that was our point. Person was from break Kentucky, and he talked about his family and that stuff back there. But other than that, there was not a whole lot of talk about sheer economics or political views or anything like that. So looking back now, could you comment on the diversity of those that you served with?

00;21;58;23 - 00;22;30;21

Oh yeah, I, I, I'd say in the, in the unit that I was with, we were probably 60, 40, 60% being Caucasian, 40% being African American. And the tide shifted some, but it was no more than 5050. And were some of those people drafted? Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. When I got there, most everybody in that unit were came from Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

00;22;30;23 - 00;22;48;09

They were all pretty much. They were our volunteers. At that time, that's the only where you could get in there more. And wasn't being volunteered. If you were drafted and you want to go airborne, then you had to extend for another year. So you went from two years to three years, and they went over as a full unit.

00;22;48;09 - 00;22;55;27

So they had a closer relationship than those of us and were just kind of coming in.

00;22;56;00 - 00;23;03;12

Did you work alongside any women, either Vietnamese or American? No.

00;23;03;14 - 00;23;34;01

No, I didn't have any any contact with with any of. How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you? Well, again, I spent most of my time in, in in the brush. So as far as contact with the Vietnamese, if they were out there that far out, you, they were the enemy because there were certain zones that they were told they had to live in.

00;23;34;01 - 00;23;59;15

If you lived out there. You just automatically assume that they were part of the part of the enemy group, and you treated it as such. You were very cautious. You, I say cautious. You were very apprehensive about getting to meet any of them. And even if you came during the rainy season to low lands, depending on where you were at.

00;23;59;18 - 00;24;15;28

You still were very cautious because there were some that you know were good during the day and ready to take you out at night. So you learn to stay away.

00;24;16;01 - 00;24;40;02

And did you interact with any Vietnamese villages? We did go to some villages. It was mainly, and a lot of people refer to, to search and destroy. A lot of ours were just search. We didn't see any reason to destroy their houses and burn them down and relocate them out of there. If they if we couldn't find anything, we just let them go about their business.

00;24;40;04 - 00;25;17;01

There was really no purpose for that. And the unit that I was with, which was 101st, that has the Screaming Eagle pass, they didn't know what an eagle was, so they referred to it as a fighting chicken. So when they saw us coming, they really didn't do much. And when you took over an area and work that area, their attitude changed because we tried to, even then in an infantry unit, try to be more compassionate to what they had to do and what they were subjected to during day and night.

00;25;17;03 - 00;25;41;23

But at the same time, you were cautious, very cautious, very apprehensive, cautious on high alert. You never let your guard down because there always be that one instance that something would happen. And how did that affect you? Trying to be compassionate and cautious at the same time. It's hard to do. It's very hard to to walk that fine line that's there.

00;25;43;20 - 00;26;06;23

You would feel sorry for the conditions they lived in. You may ask for extra rations and give them extra food, but you knew if they got caught with it, it was a good chance that they wouldn't survive. That that they would be killed because they were working with the Americans. And that's how that was turned. You work with two Mexicans?

00;26;06;25 - 00;26;21;15

The you don't have a life. You know, you had to they they were trying to be convinced that they had to support the North Vietnam and the Viet Cong in their in their life.

00;26;21;17 - 00;26;55;23

What do you remember about Vietnamese children? More. When we would come back in the lowlands, we would interact with the some of those villages and children. But again, you were very cautious, because there were a lot of, things that would come up that you'd hear about a hand grenade being thrown at you from a child. Not so much as an IED type, but sometimes you just walk up and hold onto it and then let it explode.

00;26;56;17 - 00;27;19;07

So you kind of kept an arm's length. We would and mainly we would come down on the mountains when the rainy season, it was hard to resupply, and a lot of us sent letters home asking for clothes, socks, things like that. And we give them that so they'd have better clothes to wear

and and things like that.

00;27;19;09 - 00;27;44;10

And then we got to know someone by name and they'd stay around where our, our, bunkers were always outside. So you can keep an eye on them, but, you know, they'd pick up the trash around there and take care of that kind of stuff. And, you know, they felt that the American was pretty good. They always wanted candy and cigarets.

00;27;44;13 - 00;27;49;21

Hopefully not for them. Yeah, it was for them. The.

00;27;50;13 - 00;27;54;22

Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours? Yes.

00;27;54;22 - 00;28;22;23

Do you remember any of them? Oh yeah. Like they did email. Who are that? I can't remember the other day you would wave your hand, and that would be come here in my would be run away. Leave. Go away. To Hawaii. That would be surrender.

00;28;22;25 - 00;28;26;04

Interesting.

00;28;26;06 - 00;28;40;22

Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam? Oh, we'd run into, monkeys. Elephants, tigers, huge snakes.

00;28;40;24 - 00;29;04;22

I had a company commander one time that had a bet with our battalion commander that he could get the biggest tiger. And so we spent a week chasing down tigers. So were you hunting all of those animals? No, we didn't. And that was one time that he decided he was going to do this. And we went through that process.

00;29;04;23 - 00;29;28;28

Now we were still moving in the direction we were supposed to go, but we just if we ran across them, then he wanted to know. And then he would look and see if was larger than the one that the other guy had and the one that one was our company commander. He shot the tiger. But you would hear, the monkeys all the time.

00;29;29;11 - 00;29;48;12

There was a little lizard over there was a gecko lizard, and it sounded like somebody was talking. And then when when they would, it would emit sounds. So you got, you know, that was Chuck out there or if that was the lizard. And was that scary for you when you, until you found out what it was.

00;29;48;13 - 00;30;15;11

Yeah. You really your mind plays a lot of tricks on you when you hear. Sounds like that and your senses hit so high two that after a while you could actually pick out what it was. Now the lizard's sound was not very appropriate. It sounded like you were saying something very off the wall, you know, with what I was saying.

00;30;15;14 - 00;30;42;17

So you you could say. And then you could learn distinctly. Learn that that the way it sounded, that that was the lizard, not a human. Me would you mind giving an impression? You don't have to, but it would be for you. Okay. So all night long, all night long, you would hear that around different lights. And that lizard was probably a little over three inches long.

00;30;42;19 - 00;31;04;29

But it lived on this tree on the side of the trees. What about the other animals? Were you a little bit paranoid of running into a tiger or something? Not so much the tiger because they pretty much avoid. And the elephants would avoid, if he started going through, then they would, kind of scatter. Now, the monkeys were totally different.

00;31;04;29 - 00;31;24;01

They get up there and it was trees. Neat enough for a sniper or not, because noise they'd make and they'd run into the tree tops. And I think a few of them got taken out thinking that they were a sniper instead of a monkey.

00;31;24;04 - 00;31;57;20

Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam? Yeah, I you did. That's just the way they lived, how they lived, what they thought was important and their life when what you thought was important in your life. In the northern part of the country, that was pretty much, a Catholic European group up there versus in the further south, which was was moot.

00;31;57;22 - 00;32;29;21

So there was that culture war with their religion too. What was it like going from the suburbs of Chicago to living in the jungle? Oh, I went camping when I was a kid and there was nothing you could even compare to. Yeah, you get in there. You. What you ended up for is if you want to go to sleep at night, you put a poncho up it for two, sticks up and tie it off, kind of make a little tent to keep the the humidity off you.

00;32;29;21 - 00;32;49;16

Because if you didn't, you'd be drenched. From the humidity and things even during the night. And so you just learned to sleep on rocks. You learn to sleep without a pillow. You never let your weapon out of your hand. You learn to sleep with your weapon in your hand all the time. He never laid out flat.

00;32;49;16 - 00;33;08;12

You always tried to curl up and kind of hide yourself. There were a lot of, huge trees, and some of the tree roots were as high as three foot high off the ground coming out. And if you could get in there, that was perfect because then you had protection around you. You know, you could, you could sleep like that.

00;33;08;12 - 00;33;33;26

And then and we always slept on the downward slope of the hill. See. Yeah. Don't figure out how to keep yourself from sliding down the hill. And so you had to learn how to do that and dig your feet in. You didn't get undressed or anything like that. You didn't take your boots off. You didn't take your clothes off because you never knew when you when you know, you could get into a firefight.

00;33;33;29 - 00;34;02;06

How much sleep did you get every night? Oh, I would probably say about 2.5 hours a night. Three hours maybe. Because the way it was set up is we would stop around four in the afternoon and that would be dusk. And then you know, we'd try to eat and and then you start pulling guard duty. So you would pull guard duty basically from five at night til about nine in the morning.

00;34;02;09 - 00;34;15;19

And it was two men. So every, every two hours you were switching off. And how long were you in the jungle at a time. Oh we, we, we were out there.

00;34;15;22 - 00;34;43;13

Before we got to come back to a fire base. You already been out there about four months. And then we got to go to a fire support base. And we had a three day stand down so you could get new clothes get cleaned up, get a good good hot meal because we never got hot meals. We, we ate cig rations or what they called were laughs which was, packaged food.

00;34;43;15 - 00;35;06;03

Not not the memories that they have today. They were they were not good. So you go weeks or months at a time without being able to shower and get out about. Yeah. You didn't. Yeah. Maybe if you got into a rainstorm, if you got caught in the rain, you try to wash off someone you didn't. And there were several reasons for that.

00;35;06;04 - 00;35;26;16

One, the mosquitoes kind of stayed away from you because you had an odor, and then the enemy couldn't distinguish that you were so different. You kind of fit in with the smell of the jungle in that. And did that affect you being on such little sleep and being dirty all the time? Oh, yeah. Affects it affects your mental state.

00;35;27;06 - 00;35;54;05

Being dirty didn't bother me so much. It was just the sleep deprivation then that got it. But that was one of the things that when we went through training and everything that they taught us to do is in the advanced individual training, they would make you and some of the exercises the same way they started out with doing a longer term and then catch your sleep time down, cut your sleep time down.

00;35;54;07 - 00;35;59;09

So you were learning to operate with a lot less sleep.

00;35;59;09 - 00;36;03;08

Do you remember Agent Orange being sprayed?

00;36;03;08 - 00;36;23;01

Oh, yeah. Well, we were coming back to, fire support base. We were going to be there that day. And as we were walking along, the aircraft went over and it was like rain coming down and just covered everybody and everything.

00;36;23;03 - 00;36;44;17

So you got directly sprayed with adrenaline. I got directly sprayed with Agent Orange and we didn't know what it was. We just thought it was you know, burn off fuel or something like that that we thought it was. It did have an odor, but not not anything. It was very distinct. And, after we all got back and soaked all this area, got it.

00;36;44;19 - 00;37;04;08

And this and that was where we were at was one of those areas. And then I kind of went and looked at some pictures later, and it was really a lush jungle. And then it was nothing but sticks, because that was right off along the Ho Chi Minh trail. And how long was the Agent Orange on your skin.

00;37;04;10 - 00;37;25;29

Oh it's we didn't take a bath so we're just kind of evaporated. Wow. Were you concerned at the time about Agent Orange? No. No, because everybody was telling, you know, it was just a defoliant and nothing was going to hurt you. Don't worry about it. So you didn't. You had other things to worry about.

00;37;27;14 - 00;37;30;06

What were some of the ways you coped with the war?

00;37;32;27 - 00;37;52;12

I was not a real religious person before I went, but I did learn to pray. I felt there was, an appropriate time to do it. And not being a false prayer about, well, God, if he saved me today, I'm going to do this, this and this. It was just I hope I make it through. It's in your hands.

00;37;52;12 - 00;38;13;19

I hope my my body next to me makes it. And things like that. You would talk about an incident that would happen. Or maybe it happened from a firefight. You talk, like, kind of laugh about it. Well, you know, if you were to fire your wife, and Marie may not. We may not have gone so much in coming rounds, and we'd make jokes about that kind of stuff.

00;38;13;19 - 00;38;22;20

And just to relieve the tension. How did other people around you cope with the war besides chatting about it?

00;38;22;23 - 00;38;48;24

Well, we were, we were. And you couldn't get alcohol. You couldn't get

any of that kind of stuff. So they pretty much were doing the same things. I think I think the comradeship that you made with people helped an awful lot. Again, I don't want to know much about you, but, you know, let's talk about what happened, what we just saw, what we went through.

00;38;49;15 - 00;39;17;23

That made a difference. Just being able to talk about that. What was the most memorable friendship you had during your time in Vietnam? His name was Stephen Keel and great friend. He was from outside Detroit, Michigan. He and I went together to a night, jumped school, the whole thing. Both of us went to the same unit and unfortunately he did not come home.

00;39;17;25 - 00;39;30;13

But he was a great friend. Could you spell his name? Could you spell his name? Yeah. Well.

00;39;30;15 - 00;39;56;13

And it's so happened that where he was at, we had a defensive position set up and out of the squad that we had, which was 14 people, 12 of them got killed. I was on the firing line and he was on the opposite end. And they took an artillery round into their position and all 12 of them were killed.

00;39;56;15 - 00;40;28;21

And then in my first year that I was there out of our company, which was 90 people, we lost 49 people and was 50%. That lost their lives. So it it stays with you. I can see his face. I can see him when I saw him last. Everything. Thank you very much for sharing that. I'm sorry to hear about him.

00;40;28;24 - 00;40;56;17

What was the most beautiful thing that you saw in Vietnam? Some of the areas we went to were just magnificent. We ended up going to a spot. It was called Rangoon Valley and there were waterfalls, beautiful foliage, everything about it. But it was a route for the whole human trail. But the over, if you went into it, you would never know what was.

00;40;56;17 - 00;41;15;07

It had a beautiful pond in the middle of it. Everything. It was just. Just magnificent. And when the sun would come up and we were up on the hill tops, and when the sun would come up, it was just reflect all

over that water and those waterfalls. And it was, it was great.

00;41;16;24 - 00;41;20;26

Who did you write to or receive letters from when you were in Vietnam?

00;41;20;26 - 00;41;42;10

To my parents, the girl that I was dating. And then I got the Dear John letter halfway through and said, I'm leaving. Goodbye. Thank. And how was that? Oh, it was heartbreaking because I read, I really thought we had something and was going to connect later, but she met somebody else and that's just happened.

00;41;42;12 - 00;42;12;19

How did your squad react to that? Oh, they were kind of upset because I would talk about her with my other, teammates and they just said, well, you're probably better off. She was doing that before you left. It was the old, military song. Jody got the girl and you were left alone. So I let it bother me for a while, and then I realized nothing I can do.

00;42;12;21 - 00;42;35;07

So I just let it go. Then. Did other guys in your squad get their John letters? So. Yeah. Yeah, that was pretty frequent. You know, they were fine first couple months and then pretty soon, you know, the letters wouldn't come like they had been. Then they just went away to nothing.

00;42;35;09 - 00;43;01;13

What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the time? I didn't go to the Yankees, but I didn't have the opportunity. Now. Could you get any supplies that you wanted that weren't mandatory. Now everything that we got I was put on a chopper and I was food and ammunition and some water and water was these big rubber bullets that they would bring out me a lot of 50 gallon rubber bullets.

00;43;01;13 - 00;43;28;14

So you would have fresh water, fresh good water, not stream water and things like that. Were you able to order anything from the catalog? No. That was not an essential item and you had to carry it. If you got it you had to carry it on your back. We never had when we were say a permanent base that we could buy something and put it there.

00;43;28;16 - 00;43;48;24

Did you get any Vietnamese souvenirs. Yes I did. I have a NBA helmet.

Built over the cartridge container. I got a bayonet and I got a weapon.

00;43;48;27 - 00;44;22;00

That's the end of my service. Questions. Is there another story we haven't talked about from your time in Vietnam that you like to share? I think the second two was a little bit different than my first tour because we got assigned. I went to Special Forces and so things changed a little bit. We actually ended up being, in an AA camp, which was an area that was set up to interact against some, people coming down the whole Chi Minh trail.

00;44;22;02 - 00;44;55;19

So we did kind of have a semi-permanent camp, and our role there was to train what they referred to as a civilian or regular defense force. And that's what our role was, was to teach them how to do ambushes, learn the different weapons that they would be using and things like that. So we would take them out every night on a, on a mission and, and go maybe up, from 1000m to 2000m out and set up ambushes and things.

00;44;55;19 - 00;45;23;02

And, and we did a lot of, Interaction to see where the enemy was moving through on the trail and things like that. And what types of vehicles they used. Was it trucks? Was some bicycles. Was it all, bugles and or just human labor? And we ran into all of. So were you in the Army Special forces or were you coordinating with other branches?

00;45;23;03 - 00;45;52;23

No, I was in the Army Special Forces. And our coordination there was just with aviation. And now if we got into a, a major confrontation, then we would call in aviation to, to help us with that. And that was gunships and what they used to refer to as Puff the Magic Dragon. And that was a at that time or old C-47 that they had multiple machine guns and it would fire so quickly.

00;45;52;26 - 00;46;34;19

There was just a solid red line coming from the air. And they could hit, I remember correctly, they could put around every two inches. Wow. Could you talk a little bit more about your missions near the Ho Chi Minh Trail? Yeah. It it, there again, it was to really kind of see how they were moving supplies. We would try to see what types of units they were moving people or equipment, and then we would take a count, and then we would try to identify that unit by either taking a prisoner or something like that.

00;46;34;21 - 00;46;59;23

And so then we can identify what, what regiment, what company, whatever else it was that was coming down the trail. So we really worked right up at the, at the head where it came in from the North Vietnam and the South Vietnam. And did you get into a lot of firefights? We were getting into a few and we would have to, we were undermanned usually.

00;46;59;23 - 00;47;27;22

So we would have to try to escape and evade and get back to a safe, safe location. You talked a little bit in the pre-interview about your, weapon loadout. Could you talk about that? I'm sorry. What weapons did you have? Oh, I had I when I first got to Vietnam, I carried the M79 grenade launcher, and I wanted to hand that off as quickly as I could to someone new coming in because of the weight and everything else.

00;47;27;25 - 00;47;55;25

And then I ended up with an M16. And then when I went to our safe, I stayed with the N 16, a 45 pistol. And then my assignment there was what we termed as light weapons. So we were teaching the CDC, IDG people how to use and we gave them M1 Kar means old Grand rifles, Thompson submachine guns, things like that, and then some m-16s.

00;47;55;25 - 00;48;18;29

Once they got through the basics. And so that's that was my job there was to teach them how to use all. You mentioned prisoners a minute ago. Do you know what happened to the prisoners you captured? We would turn them over in intelligence we picked up from our camp, and then they would take them from there. So I don't know what ever happened to any of them.

00;48;19;01 - 00;48;48;00

Did you ever hear about prisoners being captured and then being turned into Arvin troops? Yeah, they were called Kit Carson Scouts and they were supposed there were ones that all of a sudden have epiphany that they were going to go to the wrong side. Well, a good majority of them didn't. They would say yes. And then we we heard about units being walked into traps, ambushes, other things like that.

00;48;48;06 - 00;49;14;14

And all of a sudden they'd disappear. And if they disappeared, you know, you were going to get hammered. Were you concerned about a

similar thing happening to the civilian? Oh, yeah. Yeah. We had we had actually we had some NVA that were in our civilian group, but you kind of were able to figure it out because they would kind of be wandering all the time where, you know, most of them would be up along the berm.

00;49;14;27 - 00;49;34;24

Different paths, different fighting positions. So once in a while you'd see them wandering, kind of looking at a specific bill bunker or something like that. So we kind of figured that's what they were. And then you would turn them over to if you had an urban unit with you, you would turn them over to them. And again, I don't know what happened.

00;49;34;26 - 00;50;04;26

Didn't want to know. What was different about your third tour? Well, it was it was really a shortened version of the second tour. I didn't spend another full year. I spent 18 months with 101st and 18 months with special forces. So it was just, you know, I came back home on a 15 day leave, then I went back again, was assigned back to the same A-Team that I come off of.

00;50;04;28 - 00;50;29;19

So it was just a repetition of pretty much that was there. With the exception of last month and then anybody that was what they considered they referred to as a short timer. They would bring them back and try to assign them to a job in one town, which is where the fifth group was headquartered out of. So I ended up working in the what they in the, training division.

00;50;29;22 - 00;50;55;18

At that point, I spent a month there before I came home. What was most different about being in Vietnam in 1968 versus 1972? The people I think the people change that, that were coming in. You could see it. Those of us that were in 68, all went because we wanted to go, because we felt it was the right thing.

00;50;55;20 - 00;51;15;19

And by the time 72 came around, it was a whole different attitude in the people that were coming in. They were drafted a lot more draftees. And I'm not putting any of them down or anything, but there were a lot of them that were just, I'm here. I'm going to try and do what I can and get out of here.

00;51;15;20 - 00;51;39;12

They would spend more time going on sick call, doing the things they didn't need to do to get into trouble so they wouldn't go to the woods, go to the field. Do you remember people going a wall or fragging? I heard incidences of being people being frightened. You couldn't go a wall because you couldn't get out of the country.

00;51;39;14 - 00;52;08;29

So if you went a wall, your place, you go, if you were north, you can only go to Saigon. And as the war started going down, a lot of those people came out of the woodwork and said, I want to go home. Were you there when Jane Fonda spoke on the radio in 1971? Yeah. No. Yeah. That did not go well with anybody, no matter who you were.

00;52;09;02 - 00;52;37;01

And to a lot of us today, she's considered a traitor. She went over there to put us down. I analyze them, and it just just felt there was bad. What did that do to morale? It it kind of lowered us a little bit. But that was also the same time that people were getting maybe their hometown newspaper that was talking about protests and things.

00;52;37;01 - 00;52;59;17

And we're going we're just trying to do our job, you know, let us do it. And not be out here. You know, we know it's been a kind of a long war, but we felt that given the ability we could have won that war in probably a year or two years and not drug it out as long as it and went on.

00;53;00;28 - 00;53;08;01

Let's talk about your post service life. What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

00;53;15;16 - 00;53;51;14

I think I came home. And I looked at everybody with a very skeptical hi. You know where you want to? Those people that were protesting did you support or not? You know, if you didn't support. I didn't want anything to do with anything with you. I became pretty much an introvert. I just kind of kept to myself. And even though I got out when I first after my tours, I got out of the army.

00;53;51;17 - 00;54;11;29

Now on the reserves, now the reserves that I went into, which was a special forces group, was a lot different than the standard reserve or National Guard. We were more people that were there all been in Vietnam and things like that, and they just wanted continue even on a

part time basis. So there was a lot more spring to corps, things like that.

00;54;11;29 - 00;54;39;05

And I really look forward to going to those meetings. And and I took a lot of active duty time with them. So I kept myself involved that way. And during that time, that's when I decided it was time for me to buckle down and do some schooling. And at that time, it was called the Army Community College, which had affiliations with several different schools.

00;54;39;07 - 00;55;03;16

And it was all done in a classroom there on an installation. So we would just go there. We never interacted on an actual campus or anything like that. So I ended up over about a six year prior to get a bachelor's degree, but it was just the timing of things that weren't that way. How did your relationship to your family change when you came back?

00;55;03;19 - 00;55;39;18

I was very distant. My, Two brothers were not very supportive. They really gave me a hard time about what I did, but they didn't understand. My one brother passed away, which was my second one. My third one. He and I did not talk for probably 15 years because of that. And then, we had to go to a funeral of a family on another family member, and we kind of started to talk.

00;55;39;18 - 00;56;04;12

He said, you know, I really treated you terribly. You know, you want to do something that you thought was right. And I let my my personal views interact and shut you down, or I should have listened to you and helped you overcome your things, you know, that you were going through. And, I said, well, you know, and coming through and finding.

00;56;04;15 - 00;56;32;00

And now we talk once a week and we're fine. And we're your brothers involved in the anti-war movement. Now they just didn't care about it. They they thought that it was just a political war, and they weren't involved in any kind of protests or any of that. They just didn't want anything to do with it. And my other brother, the one that passed away, he was very outspoken.

00;56;32;02 - 00;56;46;08

You know, why would you go over there and kill these people and do

that? You know, we don't have a right to be there, and we shouldn't be there. You know, and why do you want to do that and things like that?

00;56;46;11 - 00;57;10;15

Do you think your brothers were motivated by fear that you would be hurt in the war? My younger brother, I think that was that was true. And he told me that later on when we started to talk, he says, I was extremely worried that you especially doing all you did, that something would happen. And he said Mom and dad would not have survived that.

00;57;12;27 - 00;57;36;24

Did your relationship with your father change? It did. We we started to talk a little bit more about his experiences. I can understand his better and he can understand mine. And he came out and he said what you endured, there was nothing like I endured in my time in the military during World War two.

00;57;36;26 - 00;57;48;08

He said it is unimaginable that that you can go through that and be the person that you ended up being today.

00;57;48;10 - 00;58;19;13

Along with your father. Have you talked to anyone else about Vietnam? Yeah. My counselor. I have PTSD, too. So I have talked to my my therapist and counselor about it, and she has said the same thing. She says, I don't understand. You know, how you how you made that transition just because some people just don't. And I said, well, one of the things I did do is I talked to my wife about it.

00;58;19;16 - 00;58;41;20

I talked to my daughters and my sons. I don't go into a lot of detail when I have told them that there were things that I would hope they would never have to experience or ever have, that have to see that no matter where you were at. One of the things that people didn't understand is that there was no set line in Vietnam.

00;58;41;20 - 00;59;08;14

Everything was a war zone, no matter where you were at. And in some cases, it was very difficult to do things there because you'd have to call the district commander for that district, which was an Ironman, and they could tell you if you could shoot him, not shoot. And if they were friends with the Vietnamese or NVA or Vietcong, they tell you you couldn't shoot him.

00;59;08;17 - 00;59;28;18

So you just watch him walk by knowing that they were the enemy. So that was made me very skeptical of authorities, too. With some of that. And when were you diagnosed with PTSD, and, sir, when were you diagnosed with PTSD? About five years ago.

00;59;28;20 - 01;00;07;25

I had a, open heart surgery, and I was laying there, and all I could see was all this blood all over and tubes sticking out of me and very disoriented. And it just brought me back to people that I remember seeing and things that you tried to do for them, and that's what kind of triggered it. And as I think back, I probably had it way before that, because if I would get, to an area, especially in South Carolina, they have a lot of, bamboo circuits and in rain.

01;00;07;25 - 01;00;22;10

And that would trigger a smell that you was here before and see before. And I just like, okay, just smells, but it was just a similar smell to what you would hear then. Right. And see.

01;00;22;26 - 01;00;25;06

Have you been to the wall in D.C.?

01;00;25;06 - 01;00;47;08

I've not been to the wall in D.C.. I've been to the moving wall up at Clinton, North Carolina, when Presbyterian College brought it there. And I couldn't go up to it. I told you about people. There were 49 there, but in all total, I know 60 people that are on that wall.

01;00;48;01 - 01;01;09;19

And I just can't bring myself to go look at it. I understand the purpose and it is called the Healing Wall for a reason. Because you, you supposed to let go of everything. But I just can't go up and look. And especially those 12 and are all in the same place on that wall. It's very hard to do.

01;01;09;20 - 01;01;34;19

And they were all, we were all in our sixth and seventh month. So we'd all been together for quite a while at that time. And, and Stephen was usually the guy that shared a fighting position with him. And then when he, and you know, when I saw him then I started to see the other names. It just brought back a lot of bad memories.

01;01;34;21 - 01;01;57;09

What do you think of the memorial based on things you've seen or heard? I'm sorry. What do you think of the memorial? Based on what you've seen or heard? Or do you think it's a fitting memorial? Oh, I think it's absolutely fitting. I think it fits perfectly for what they what they attempted to do is it's better than the usual, you know, oblique or something like that.

01;01;57;11 - 01;02;22;00

I think they've been able to tie that together. And the three soldiers and the nurses, I think that all ties well together. Now that you've been senior counselor for five years, do you think you'll ever have the chance to go to the wall? I really want to do that. That's on my list to do. And I think my wife would like me to do that and go and just look at it from that.

01;02;22;00 - 01;02;32;11

Not just the moving wall, but look at the real. So that's one of our projects for the upcoming year. Yeah.

01;02;32;11 - 01;02;34;09

Have you been back to Vietnam?

01;02;34;09 - 01;02;52;17

No. No. And that's kind of a unique thing, too, because there's people that have gone back. But if you weren't safe, you had a bounty on your head. And it was still there until they kind of settled things down.

01;02;52;19 - 01;03;00;04

But yeah I couldn't go back. How did you hear about the bounties.

01;03;00;07 - 01;03;29;09

I didn't really understand why they did it. I mean we were just there to do, but they felt we were there to overthrow them. And things that we trained other people to do. They really took offense to that and thought we were training mercenaries. And that's not what its purpose was. So they, they everybody that was in our S.F. if and and we still don't understand how they got names but they did.

01;03;29;12 - 01;03;57;21

And if you were on an A-Team which was a forward team, they had your

name. Did someone from the Special Forces hear about the bounties? Yeah. Oh, yeah. They told us all about it. When we were getting ready to leave, they said you'll probably never be able to come back if something changes, because this is why. So now that there was presumably not a bounty on your head, would you like to go back to Vietnam?

01;03;57;23 - 01;04;07;00

I'd like to go back and see some things and other things. I'd be really hard. Hard to do.

01;04;07;02 - 01;04;15;27

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

01;04;15;29 - 01;04;44;09

I really read. Actually, I've got two books and was written by somebody came in to my unit after I had left, but he back tracks enough, so he picks up some of the things that we did and then goes forward. So he actually goes through 1973. And that's a very interesting set of books. And what are they called.

01;04;44;11 - 01;05;12;24

It's a company second and five or deuce. And what about poems or movies. My brother, after I was getting ready to go back, my first tour, did write a poem. And I still have that. I didn't make a copy, but I still have it that he wrote. But that's when he was dead and gone to college. Got corrupted, I guess.

01;05;12;27 - 01;05;43;22

But I went to a very liberal school, so I think that played a part in it. But he wrote it and I carry it with me the whole time I was there. What about Vietnam War movies. Have you seen any. Oh I've seen platoon and that and, and it's a good movie but it's, it's, I've seen Green Beret that's good till about halfway through the movie and then it goes Hollywood.

01;05;43;24 - 01;06;06;16

So do you think either of those movies capture anything realistic about. Oh, yeah, they do like in in platoon where they're being overrun in the bunkers and things. That was very real to stick with their the fire base, or the camp that John Wayne was on. That's beginning of that. That was very realistic. And that's then after that as work kind of goes Hollywood.

01;06;07;19 – 01;06;25;15

But that was pretty real because that would happen just kind of pretty much the same way. Yeah. You'd have waves of people coming at you and you know you just kept firing and firing until you ran out of ammunition or you chased them off because of the fire that you could put out.