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My name is Palmer McKay. I am interviewing Vietnam veteran Don Engle, who served in the Marines and was in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968. Mr. Engle, 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.

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Where did you grow up and what was your area known for? What was your second question? Where did you grow up and what was your area known for? What was my area known for? Okay. Well, I was born in Cincinnati, and we moved to Springfield, Ohio when I was, in the, I don't know, third or fourth grade.

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So I pretty much grew up in Springfield, Ohio.

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Springfield, I guess, is known for International Harvester. They had a big plant in Springfield.

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Can you tell me about your family growing up? Well.

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My family had growing up. And a mother and father, of course. And one sister who was several years younger than me. Three little more than three years younger than me. So there was enough age difference that our circles of friends were totally different.

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She was a very spoiled kid, and of course, I wasn't so. That pretty much characterizes our relationship. Would you describe your dad's job as blue collar or white collar? Well, my dad had a real estate business, so I would say white collar. And he also had a, home products distribution business. So he had several people working for him that had roots.

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Unknown

Would they would, you know, go around in different cities, mostly in Ohio, a couple in Indiana. And they would sell home products.

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Unknown

And the real estate business.

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Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War Two? Well, my dad was not in the in the, armed services in World War two. He was for f

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Unknown

And most of his friends, he had friends that were in the service, but I frankly don't remember any of them talking about their days in the service. They may have amongst themselves, but I don't remember being part of any of those kinds of conversations.

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

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Probably a movie called The Guns of Navarone was probably my favorite. And there was a there was a TV series on the black and white TV series on, probably in the, in the, in the 50s, maybe in the early 60s called Victory at Sea, which was a, just a terrific, series about the, you know, the World War Two at the sea.

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A lot of Vietnam veteran memoirs mentioned John Wayne as an influence on their expectations of war. Do you remember John Wayne that way? No, I do not. I, I knew even at the time I went into the Marine Corps that John Wayne had never been in the military. So he was a he was a caricature of what it was like to be in the military rather than actually having been in the military.

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But I certainly do remember John Wayne. Before Vietnam. Where did you go to college and what did you study? I went to after I graduated from high school. I went to Ohio State. I was there for a little over two years, and I had a meeting with my counselor one day, and she said, you know, your grades are so bad that you've got a choice.

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You can either flunk out or quit. And if you flunk out, you won't be

able to come back. But if you quit, you can come back whenever you want. So I said, okay, I quit. And, not long after that, I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

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Now, I'd like to move on to the start of your basic training. Okay. And your service. Historians of the Vietnam War note that in addition to volunteering, being commissioned and being drafted, there were also draft motivated volunteers. How would you describe yourself? Draft motivated volunteer. Because in those days, after I left college, the draft was still very much alive.

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And I had gotten a draft notice with a deferment because I was in college. But, after I left college, that deferment no longer applied. So I knew within a matter of a couple months I'd be drafted. So I went down to talk to the recruiters. I told my dad I was going to go talk to the recruiters, and which I did, and, I went back to his office and said, well, I did it.

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He said, you did what? I said. I enlisted, and he said, well, that's that's great. So you go into the service for six months and then, you know, do summer weekends. And so I said, no, I enlisted. He said, well, what do you said you were going to enlist in the Navy. Is that what you did? I said, no, I enlisted for four years in the Marine Corps.

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He looked at me and he said, your mother's going to kill you. So? So I went into the Marine Corps. Why enlist in the Marine Corps specifically? Specifically? I didn't really know much about any of the branches of service, but the night before I went down to talk to the recruiters, I had a date, and I told my date I was thinking about enlisting.

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And she said to me, oh, you should enlist in the Marine Corps. They have the best uniforms. So I enlisted in the Marine Corps.

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Unknown

And I will tell you this.

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I spent about six years in the Marine Corps, and I have had a very good life. I've had a successful business career. I've had a successful marriage. My life has been really good. But the six years I spent in the Marine Corps, those are the best days of my life.

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About what year did you enlist in the Marine Corps? 1962, I think. Did you expect the Marines to be difficult? Yes. Yes I was. I had every expectation of it being.

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Both mentally and physically challenging. And it was much more so than I expected. But it was.

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Can you describe your boot camp experience?

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I can describe it in one word. Tough. If you want three words, I'll say tough as hell.

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Did anyone around you struggle with boot camp? Oh, yes. There. There are always guys who are not. Not in good enough physical condition to not have to really struggle with the physical rigors of being in boot camp and the, the, the, the mental toughness which comes with going through boot camp in the Marine Corps is difficult for a lot of people.

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Especially people that, you know, for lack of a better description, call a mama's boys. You know, they're not really as mature for their age as they should be when they go into the Marine Corps. Marine Corps basic training is very tough. So, you know, it's it's both physically demanding and mentally demanding. Can you give us some examples of how it was physically and mentally demanding?

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Well, physically demanding is is is pretty, pretty easy to envision. I mean, you're you're going on long marches, long runs, a lot if you know everything you can do physically push ups, sit ups, chin ups, long marches, long, long runs,

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Unknown

You know, picking up a supposedly wounded marine and running 100 yards with them over or over on your back. Things like that. And, you know, it's if there's no, there's no, there's no break to it. I mean, it's from the moment you get up in the morning until the moment you close your eyes and go to sleep at night.

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The Marine Corps is very physical. They don't want people to wimp out in combat situations. So you get if you're not in shape. When you go into the Marine Corps, you're in shape when you come out of the Marine Corps, even to the extent of the weight you're carrying. I mean, they have in the dining halls, they have what's called the fat boy table.

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Unknown

And if if the drill instructors look at you and say, you know, you're overweight, you're sitting at the fat boy table and you're not getting as much to eat as everybody else. Well, they get that weight alpha off of you.

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Unknown

To that point. Can you describe your drill instructors a little bit? Well let's see. There's there's typically, at least at that time, there are typically, three drill instructors assigned to each, recruit platoon, senior drill instructor, and two junior drill instructors.

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In the Marine Corps, to become a drill instructor. You first have to go to Drill and Dillon Drill Instructor School, where they take Marines and teach them to be drill instructors. That in and of itself is a rough school, rough in terms of physically demanding mentally demanding.

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Unknown

And they, they learn what they need to do to make Marines and you really,

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Unknown

I guess the best way to describe it is anybody could go into the Marine Corps. But when you come out of basic training, you are a marine. They make you a marine both physically and mentally. So it's it it is, it's very demanding. And there are guys that don't make it

through boot camp. They wind up getting, discharged out because they just, they they don't have the mental toughness.

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Unknown

They don't have the physical. They don't develop the physical toughness, and they get discharged. Did you ever regret choosing the Marines over a different branch? No. Well, let me rephrase that. In boot camp, every day, you regret being there because it is very tough, very physically and mentally demanding. The physical toughness, you know, that comes you build strength, the mental toughness that that really that really challenges your soul.

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And there are there are days that I believe that anybody who has ever gone through boot camp has to have asked himself a dozen times, why, why did I do this? Why did I enlisted in the Marine Corps? Why not the Army? Why not the Navy? But that's what being a marine is all about.

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Between the time you entered the Marines and when you deployed. What training did you do beyond basic training? Well. I, Well, after you're done with basic training, then you go to what's called advanced, advanced and advanced training program. I forget the exact name advanced combat training or something like that. I did that at Camp Pendleton, and that is, the kind of training where.

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Unknown

You know, you you you really. That's where you really first learned to be a marine. Basic training is both physically and mentally challenging.

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But they don't really they don't really teach you in basic training to be a marine. They prepare you to be taught to be a marine. When you go to advanced combat training, advanced infantry training, there you you get your first lessons in what it's like to be a marine. I remember, the way that program was set up in the days when I went through it.

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Unknown

It was it was a month long, and the first few days of that program was sort of a classroom endeavor where they teach you how to read a map, how to read a use a compass to read a map, how, you know, what they called tickle for fish, where you put your arms down on these ice cold streams up in the in the mountains to catch fish with your bare hands.

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Unknown

You know how to catch birds and trees for for food. Wow. And that program, that part of the of the program lasts about a week or so. And then, they have some Asian Marines, usually Japanese guys who were, you know, Japanese descent who were U.S. Marines. They come in and they, they break you out of the hooch.

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Unknown

That's your sleeve, the Quonset hut that you're sleeping in, and they give you a map and a compass, and they say, okay, you got to get over to this point on the map to meet you there, to rendezvous with your next contact. You got to be there by such and such. And they and you're in groups that your pairs are paired off with in three guys in a group.

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Unknown

And you go out with the map and a compass and the clothes on your back, no supplies, no food, or they give you a, a parachute and a knife for three guys and you're in the mountains. This is up in the in the Sierras in them. The I went through in March. So it was you know, six feet of snow still on the ground everywhere you went.

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Unknown

And, You know, they they tell you you got to be at this point, which is several miles away. You got to be there at a certain time to meet your rendezvous, to get directions to the next point. And in the meantime, you got to catch your own food. So it was, you know, as I say, that's that was part of teaching you to be a marine.

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By 1967, did you expect to go to Vietnam? No, I did not expect to go to Vietnam. And I'll tell you why. I, I was, I was stationed at, El Toro. Where?

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El Toro was about midway between San Diego and LA, and I was in the officer's club one night, and I overhear this, several other officers talking, and I thought to myself, boy, that sure sounds like they're talking about not only my home town, but my neighborhood. So, there was a captain sort of in the center of the conversation.

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Unknown

I'm now a second lieutenant, and I went up and I introduced myself, and lo and behold, his parents lived two doors away from my parents. I knew who he was. He knew who I was. But there was enough age difference between us that wherever we were in our in the process of going to school, he was always out of that school.

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Unknown

When I first went into the school. So we never knew each other, but we knew of each other. So he was a helicopter pilot and I was a fixed wing pilot. And he said to me, how'd you like to go to Hawaii for three years? I said, I'd love it. He said, well, you got to transition into helicopters.

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Unknown

I said, no problem. So I did that transition, and, I went to Hawaii for three years, and I expected to be there for a full three years. And then one day, all of a sudden, I got orders to Vietnam. So I only did about two years in Hawaii instead of three. So those orders surprised me.

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Unknown

What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you deployed?

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Unknown

I can answer that in word. Nothing.

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Unknown

What? I knew the name Vietnam, and that was about it. Wow.

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Unknown

What did you know about the Vietnam War? I knew probably less than nothing. It was. Yeah, I'm being facetious, but of course, I knew guys were going overseas to Vietnam. I knew people that went, I knew there was, you know, war going on there, but it was remote. You know, I when I did that transition from fixed wing aircraft to, choppers, I went to Hawaii.

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Unknown

I know, you know.

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Unknown

Orders. For three years, I paid very little attention to what else was going on outside of, you know, what I was doing in Hawaii. I knew about the. I knew the name Vietnam. I knew guys that had gone there, but I didn't really know anybody that had come back from there. And I, you know, I just didn't pay much attention to to it.

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Unknown

You watch the news at night, you'd see a little this, that on the news. And that was the extent of it.

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

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Unknown

My flight to Vietnam. Did you ask me? No. The only thing that stuck out about the flight to Vietnam was getting off the plane in Danang.

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Unknown

And, you know, it was like, oh, my God, I'm here.

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Unknown

What was so unique about that? Well, there wasn't anything particularly unique about it. The plane landed. You know, it was a, I think it was TWA in those days was that airline was still around, you know, it was all. It was all military people on the plane going to Vietnam. Different branches, different rags. We just get off the plane, you're out on the tarmac and it's like, oh my God, I'm in Vietnam now.

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Unknown

That was, you know, that was pretty much the, the, the extent of it. And then there was, You know, several jeeps, trucks, other vehicles sort of pulled up to where everybody would had collected when they got off the plane and names were called out. My name was called, I got in this Jeep and went from the airport to Marine Air Base at Marble Mountain, which was just outside of Danang, joined the squadron that I'd been assigned to.

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Did it strike you as particularly hot or humid? You know, I don't really remember ever being really hot in Vietnam. I know, you know, it's it's very hot. Very humid. But I don't know the heat. It never

really the I never really paid much attention to the to the temperature. Never seemed to bother me, never gave much thought.

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Unknown

Humidity. Yeah. There was a lot of humid days.

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Unknown

But, the heat never really seemed to ever. I have no I have no thoughts about thinking how hot it might have been. What was the smell like? Well, depends on where you were. In Danang. There really weren't any particular smells of memory. If you went out into some of the small villages, you know, you got a sort of a dead fish smell on a lot of places.

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Unknown

But, on the base at Marble Mountain, there were no unusual smells, just musty, because it was always so humid.

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Unknown

That was it.

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Unknown

What months did you arrive? In 1967. What month did I arrive in Vietnam? In 1967? The first part of February, I believe. First week of February 1967.

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Unknown

What? Maybe the end of January? I don't I don't quite remember should, but I don't.

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Unknown

What did you expect when you arrived, based on TV or stories you had heard? I didn't really have any particular expectations.

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Unknown

It just.

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Unknown

I, you know, it's just, I guess the only expectations I had were I wasn't going to be living in an air conditioned hotel room. That's about the only expectation that I can remember. Would you describe

yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Well, I had two phases of my duty in Vietnam. First as a helicopter pilot, flying resupply and medevac, which is always frontline stuff.

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Unknown

You know, you're you're you're you're home base for the helicopter is in the rear, but you're out, to forward, forward troop positions, forward marine positions, resupplying ammunition, supplying food, picking up, you know, wounded Marines, medevac, that sort of stuff. So it was, you know, in and out all day long. That was for about the first half of my time in Vietnam.

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Unknown

The, the second, roughly the second half of my months in Vietnam, I was the forward air controller for first Battalion, ninth Marines, and that was 100% front line on the ground.

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Unknown

And what kind of work did you do in that role? Well, and, in the Marine Corps, forward air controllers, as contrasted with the Army. Army has forward air controllers, and they fly around there in airplanes. The Marine Corps forward air controllers are on the ground. They move with marine strike battalions. And their job is to handle incoming direct incoming aircraft that are coming in with the Resupplies, taking out wounded Marines and so forth.

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Unknown

But they they you're doing it from the ground. You're on the ground moving with that, in this case, first Battalion, ninth Marines, The Walking Dead,

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Unknown

So it's, you know, you're in the thick of it. Can you tell us a little bit more about that name, The Walking Dead? Where does the name come from? The Walking Dead? Well, first Battalion, ninth Marines had seen a lot of combat action, and they had been very effective in their combat actions. Enough to this is the story that I was told, enough to draw the specific attention of Ho Chi Minh.

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Unknown

And at one time, Ho Chi Minh ordered his North Vietnamese regulars to eliminate first Battalion, ninth Marines, and He, he, Ho Chi Minh called them the Walking Dead, and somehow that name came back to the first Battalion, ninth Marines, and it was adopted by the battalion

and it stuck with the battalion.

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Unknown

So fortunately, I was not one of the walking dead. I was one of the walking, living.

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Unknown

Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours? De Mao, D.T. Mao, which means run. That's the only Vietnamese word that I can remember. I did have, I was certainly not conversational, but I did have some, you know, minuscule knowledge of Vietnamese back then. But the only the only word that sticks in my mind today is Didi.

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Unknown

Mao.

00:29:14:09 - 00:29:39:19

Unknown

How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion? Well, economic background, I have no idea. You know, nobody really. I don't remember anybody talking about, oh, I lived in this big mansion, or I lived in a hovel or, you know, I drove a new Corvette, or I drove a beat up old Chevrolet.

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Unknown

I just I don't have any recollection of those kind of conversations. There were, you know, most of the most just as a percentage of racial despair. Oh, not disparity, but, you know, the race mix. There were mostly white guys in, in the Marine Corps, but a lot of Hispanics, a lot of blacks. There were Hispanics in in, first Battalion, ninth Marines.

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Unknown

There were black guys in first Battalion, ninth Marines. I don't remember ever seeing or hearing any even a word of racial conflict. Everybody, as far as I know, was looked at as a marine, not as a black marine or a white marine, just a marine. And the only thing that matters is can you pick carry your pack and can you shoot straight?

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Unknown

Do you remember any women during your time in Vietnam, either Vietnamese or American?

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Unknown

Do I remember any women? Well, I had a girlfriend in Hawaii. I certainly remember her. I don't, I don't remember encountering any women in Vietnam other than Vietnamese women that you'd see walking on the street or something, but I don't I don't remember seeing any service women when I was in Vietnam. So you never encountered, like, a mama son?

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Unknown

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I mean, for example, when when I was flying, and I was flying out of Marble Mountain, there were, you know, roughly 6 or 8 Marines stationed are not stationed, but assigned to, to these corrugated metal, hutches. They were called a couple, you know, there where our our beds and things were.

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Unknown

And each hooch had a, a maid. So. My maid was Missy Leo. I don't have any idea how old she was. She didn't look young. She was a, a, what do they call it? A betel nut. Sure. So she had, you know, it said her teeth were in good condition, but they were totally black from chewing betel nut.

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Unknown

And she was just a, you know, a little old woman. She'd come in and make all the beds and change the sheets and sweep out the hut and everything, and and there were, you know, a couple other women like that in the hut next door whose name I would know or something, but that was the extent of my my, relationship with Vietnamese women.

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Unknown

Do you remember ever encountering American nurses or donut dollies or what? Donut dollies. Donut dollies? No, I never heard that expression before. No, I, I do not remember, even seeing an American nurse. Except for on the flight back to the States from Vietnam. There were a couple American nurses on the plane, but I don't remember ever seeing one serving as a nurse in Vietnam.

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Unknown

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

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Unknown

Well, it certainly made me appreciate the life that I had in the States.

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Unknown

And, who?

00:33:40:03 - 00:34:10:03

Unknown

I had a lot of respect for the Vietnamese people. They had they had what I would consider to be harsh lives, and they seemed to be pretty happy with their lives. They were kind of they were a happy people. And they liked Americans. At least they certainly appeared to like Americans.

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Unknown

And you know that that's pretty much the extent of what I know about the Vietnamese. I mean, I didn't have any Vietnamese friends. I didn't have any, you know, personal acquaintances, even if they weren't friends of such.

00:34:28:24 - 00:34:57:12

Unknown

But, you know, just observing them, you know, from a distance, really, they all seem to be pretty happy, have good family lives, and, you know, they seem to be nice people. What do you remember about Vietnamese children? Well, I guess the best. The the the most.

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Unknown

The best word I could give you to describe Vietnamese children is curious. You know, Vietnamese adults, although most of them had never even been outside their own village, knew there was an outside world. They knew there were, you know, what they called round eyes, like us. The children were there were very, very curious about our appearance, the things we had, what we did, how we talked, what we looked like.

00:35:34:21 - 00:35:49:11

Unknown

They were they didn't have, they didn't really show any fear of being around, Western people. They were just curious.

00:35:49:13 - 00:35:57:17

Unknown

Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam? Water buffalo. That's it.

00:35:57:19 - 00:36:35:23

Unknown

Water buffalo with horns that go up like this. Big animals, they pulled carts and they they helped, plow the, you know, the rice paddies and stuff. Do you ever run into any snakes? I did

occasionally, when I occasionally is too big. Sit down too often when I. I got shot down one time, in North Vietnam and,

00:36:35:26 - 00:37:07:15

Unknown

Coming back through, you know, walking back through the jungle occasionally. I mean, rarely did I encounter any snakes. Mostly they were tree, you know, they would climb up into trees and hang out. So I was always more, eyes up than eyes down when I was walking out. But, you know, I didn't have any any incidents with snakes.

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Unknown

I definitely want to come back to you getting shot down over North Vietnam. Okay? But I want to get a few more questions before that. Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam? Well, I guess that the answer to that question is sort of yes and no. It's.

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Unknown

You know, I went to Vietnam as a marine. I lived with Marines. You know, that's where I spent all my time, day in and day out was with other Marines. But instead of, going to the beach and, Laguna Beach and in, California, it was, you know,

00:37:55:01 - 00:38:21:08

Unknown

Life in Vietnam. And that is a very different culture. You know, you know, there are any restaurants that you go into and say, give me a Big Mac. It's eating C rations and stuff like that. And so in that sense, yeah, it's a culture shock, but it's not the kind of culture shock that that I would think of, to use that term.

00:38:21:10 - 00:38:50:09

Unknown

You know, culture shock would be, well, get on a plane and fly to some remote place and live with the natives and so forth, and, it's it's a different, a different kind of culture shock. It's a culture of being going from having a McDonald's right down the street to eating C rations. Did you get sick at all during your time in country?

00:38:50:13 - 00:39:30:05

Unknown

No, no, I never got sick. What was the most interesting food you ate in Vietnam? The most interesting food? Well, I guess the only thing I can answer with that is C rations. C rations. I don't quite it. When you say C rations, you're saying letter C, not C or SCA. And I remember looking at C rations and they said all canned food.

00:39:30:07 - 00:39:45:28

Unknown

And they had the packaging date on all the cans. And there were, we were reading food that was put in those cans before World War Two started. So that was always pretty interesting.

00:39:46:01 - 00:39:57:06

Unknown

Did you ever see Vietnamese civilians collecting or using American trash? No, I never saw that.

00:39:57:08 - 00:40:04:06

Unknown

Did you personally encounter the Vietcong?

00:40:04:09 - 00:40:38:21

Unknown

Did I personally encounter the Viet Cong? Well, I personally encountered, what we characterizes the enemy now, whether they were Vietcong or North Vietnamese regular army. I can't be 100% sure. For most of the encounters that I had for probably the majority of counters, I am certain there was North Vietnamese regular army. Could have been Viet Cong, but North Vietnamese regular army.

00:40:38:21 - 00:40:44:06

Unknown

I had more than one encounter with.

00:40:44:09 - 00:40:49:28

Unknown

Did you encounter Vietnamese?

00:40:50:00 - 00:40:54:08

Unknown

Vietnamese P.O.W. was.

00:40:54:10 - 00:41:01:00

Unknown

Only on one occasion. Where?

00:41:01:03 - 00:41:20:03

Unknown

And this was a case on in Vietnam where there were a couple of Vietnamese, probably Viet Cong, being questioned by, Marines. I don't know exactly what their job was, what their rank was, but.

00:41:20:05 - 00:41:24:23

Unknown

The questioning was.

00:41:24:25 - 00:41:38:17

Unknown

Was not gentle, but not brutal either. That's the best way I can answer that question.

00:41:38:19 - 00:42:22:12

Unknown

You mentioned earlier, that you were shot down over North Vietnam. Can you tell me a little bit about that experience? Well, we had. Different missions to fly in Vietnam and in one of those cases, one of my missions was to fly north of the DMZ for reconnaissance purposes. And I was maybe 80, 100 miles north of the DMZ and flying along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

00:42:22:14 - 00:42:54:29

Unknown

For reconnaissance purposes and I guess they didn't like me flying along for reconnaissance purposes. And they shot me down. My wingman, my crew chief, were both killed. I got banged up, but I was able to move. Okay. And, I knew where I was and I knew where I needed to go. So I started south and they were hunting for me.

00:42:54:29 - 00:43:29:22

Unknown

But I managed to escape and evade. I had I had been in, in training when I went to Camp Pendleton, I went to what's called Sere school. Sorry, survival, escape resistance to interrogation and evasion. School. So I had had some training in those techniques, fortunately, and they served me well. After I got shot down, I managed to walk back about 100 miles or so.

00:43:29:25 - 00:44:08:21

Unknown

I managed to walk back to South Vietnam. I got back to the the case on Combat Base, which is in the northwest corner of Vietnam, just a few miles south of the DMZ. And, Got, you know, got back there, felt relieved. How long were you stranded in North Vietnam? About a month. Well. What did you eat? What did I eat or.

00:44:08:23 - 00:44:27:08

Unknown

Well, when I went to Sere school, they taught us there how to catch things like birds in a tree. And, you know, catch fish with your hands and stuff like that. And that's what I ate.

00:44:27:10 - 00:45:14:25

Unknown

Mostly raw corn. Yeah, I know, pretty disgusting. Especially for a stomach that's used to cooked food. But, you know, was that or starve? Did you ever worry that you were lost or that you were close to getting caught? Well, yeah. There were a couple times when I was close

to getting caught, which would have been disastrous, if I had gotten caught and survived the catch, I would have wound up for sure in the Hanoi, the Hanoi Hilton, which would not have particularly desirable outcome.

00:45:14:27 - 00:45:38:03

Unknown

But I did not get caught. I never felt lost. I knew where I was, you know, not to the specific yard, but I knew pretty much where I was. I knew how far inland I was when I got shot down. I knew how far the DMZ was. So all I had to do was.

00:45:38:05 - 00:45:42:24

Unknown

Not get caught.

00:45:42:26 - 00:46:12:07

Unknown

What was it like finally making contact with Americans back in South Vietnam? Well, the initial, the the the initial time of making that contact was dangerous because here's some guy that's been out in the jungle for a month. Keep it up to your tears. You know, your guard positions and say, hey, I'm an American. Don't shoot me.

00:46:12:09 - 00:46:28:18

Unknown

That doesn't just quite, quite cut it with the guy with the gun pointing that you. So that was that was a little bit worrisome, to say the least. But after that it was, you know, fine.

00:46:28:21 - 00:46:49:24

Unknown

Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed? Yes, I remember seeing it sprayed. I remember spending time in Agent Orange, and I certainly remember dealing with the 25 years of cancer that I've dealt with because of Agent Orange.

00:46:49:26 - 00:47:22:13

Unknown

Were you concerned at the time about Agent Orange? No. Nobody was really concerned about Agent Orange at that time. That's why they continued to use it did great about. Earlier you said you remember spending time in it in Agent Orange. Yeah. Oh, yeah. Can you elaborate a little bit on. Well, when I was walking back after having got shot down, I walked through areas that had been defoliant with Agent Orange.

00:47:22:15 - 00:47:52:02

Unknown

I, when I was assigned to first Battalion, ninth Marines, I went on

many reconnaissance missions with the with, units of that battalion. And we walked through many Agent Orange areas. So I had a lot of exposure to Agent Orange and as a result of that, I had a lot of a lot of, time spent with cancer to.

00:47:52:04 - 00:48:05:03

Unknown

What were some of the ways you coped with the war? What were some of the ways I coped with the war? I never thought about that.

00:48:05:06 - 00:48:10:15

Unknown

How did I cope with the war?

00:48:10:18 - 00:48:21:28

Unknown

Well, well, that's a tough question. Let's come back to that. Okay? I don't know how to answer that question.

00:48:22:01 - 00:48:36:20

Unknown

Did you pray? Did you drink? Did you write home and some of the other. Well, I wrote a few letters home. I didn't drink, I didn't pray.

00:48:36:23 - 00:49:11:12

Unknown

It was just, You know, you put one foot in front of the other, you know, it's the I never I never doubted that I was not going to survive it. I was, you know, never gave a second thought to the fact that I would be going home in one piece. I know there are a lot of guys that didn't have that attitude, but I was very optimistic about it.

00:49:11:15 - 00:49:37:07

Unknown

So you fully expected to survive the war? Oh, yes. I never, never a doubt in my mind, except for maybe on the way down when I got shot down in the Octagon. But, yeah, I never I never really had any doubt about going home. Why? What gave you that resolve I have? I can't answer that question for you.

00:49:37:07 - 00:49:41:22

Unknown

I don't have any idea. I just.

00:49:41:25 - 00:49:45:27

Unknown

Sunny disposition, I guess.

00:49:45:29 - 00:50:07:12

Unknown

Okay. Do you remember humor or slang or jokes being a part of life in Vietnam? Yeah. You know, there's always that sort of gallows humor that, you hear a lot about, the jokes,

00:50:07:14 - 00:50:32:06

Unknown

You know, there's always a, you know, a joke being told somewhere. I don't really remember any of the jokes. It's sort of like there is a joke. Not that I didn't hear this in Vietnam, but it's a joke. That I'll tell you about. A guy goes to prison and he's in the dining room with all the other prisoners, and somebody steps up and yells out, 21!

00:50:32:06 - 00:50:52:09

Unknown

And everybody in the dining room laughs, and another guy steps up and yells out, 37! And everybody laughs. And so finally, the new guy looks to this prisoner sitting next to him. He says, I don't get it. What's what? Why does everybody laugh when somebody yells out a number?

00:50:52:12 - 00:51:12:19

Unknown

And the guy says, well, we've all been here so long, we just assign numbers to the jokes and rather than tell the whole joke, we just tell the number and everybody knows it. That's funny. So after a couple weeks, the new guy gets up and he says, 71. Nobody laughs. And he sits back down and he looks to the guy left and says, why didn't anybody laugh?

00:51:12:19 - 00:51:18:08

Unknown

And the guy says, well, some guys can tell a joke and some guys can't.

00:51:18:10 - 00:51:32:14

Unknown

So I didn't hear that in Vietnam, but it's sort of like that, you know, you know, there's always there's always humor. Even in the darkest of times, there's humor.

00:51:32:17 - 00:51:35:20

Unknown

So.

00:51:35:22 - 00:51:41:03

Unknown

I'd like to remember some of the jokes I heard, but I don't.

00:51:41:05 - 00:51:52:04

Unknown

Do you remember songs by artists like Country Joe and the Fish?

00:51:52:06 - 00:52:06:27

Unknown

Songs with a lot of gallows humor like you were talking about. Well, I know the name Country Joe and the fish. I never thought he was very good. He had a terrible voice.

00:52:07:00 - 00:52:19:14

Unknown

But I really don't remember much, much about that. What about slang or any marine specific slang?

00:52:19:16 - 00:52:54:18

Unknown

Well, you know, there's the Vietnamese are always referred to as geeks. You've probably heard that before. Slopes. But, you know, there's not a I'm sure there must have been more slang than that, especially among, you know, in, in the aviation field, there's there's a lot of slang for, you know, the way you fly an aircraft and so forth, but I don't really remember much.

00:52:54:20 - 00:53:26:12

Unknown

Did you or anyone you served with change in terms of face during the war? No. Nobody that I know ever, ever did. Guys that were Catholic stayed Catholic. Guys that were Presbyterian were Presbyterian. Guys who were Jews, stayed Jews. Religion never really seemed to rear its ugly head. Why do I say ugly head? Because I think,

00:53:26:15 - 00:53:54:02

Unknown

There's a lot of good things about religion, whatever your religion. But religious beliefs are. But more people have been killed in the name of religion than any other particular force on the face of this earth. So religion has a very serious downside too. You can see it today. Just what's going on between the Western world and the Muslim world.

00:53:54:05 - 00:54:17:05

Unknown

Since you were in country in 1968, I have to ask, how did you experience the Tet Offensive? How did I experience the Tet Offensive? Well, I don't ever recall hearing the Tet Offensive called the Tet Offensive.

00:54:17:08 - 00:54:24:24

Unknown

When I was in Vietnam in 1968.

00:54:24:26 - 00:54:56:12

Unknown

I don't even recall in a particular escalation in military activities during the so-called Tet Offensive. It was, you know, I know about it, I know it it's called I know what took place then and so forth and so on. But all that I know about the Tet Offensive, I learned years later back in the States.

00:54:56:15 - 00:55:06:13

Unknown

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

00:55:06:15 - 00:55:10:15

Unknown

Well.

00:55:10:18 - 00:55:46:20

Unknown

When I got my orders to Vietnam from Hawaii, there were two guys in Hawaii, two other marine pilots that got the same orders. The three of us were friends in Hawaii, and we went to Vietnam together. One of those two guys, got killed in Vietnam. The other guy lives in Indiana, and I talked to him probably at least, you know, once every couple weeks.

00:55:46:22 - 00:55:56:27

Unknown

Can you tell us their names? His name is Tom Evans. The guy that got killed was Johnny Garner. GA in the air.

00:55:56:29 - 00:56:27:09

Unknown

I have spoken to his wife. What was really tragic about his death. It was a it was a strange event. I, I was flying for, what was called the night circuit watch. Where they send up a chopper and fly around the base, keep an eye out for incoming flashes, and you have a wingman.

00:56:27:12 - 00:56:55:05

Unknown

And I flew the first round of that for that evening, and I landed, went back and got Johnny Garner because he was flew the second round that night. And I told him to be very careful of his wingman, because my wingman was constantly rendezvous ING on me by rendezvous. And what I mean is, if you know what that means.

00:56:55:07 - 00:57:22:13

Unknown

So when, if if helicopters flying this way and there's a guy behind you and he's chasing you and you turn and he turns at the same time and you go like this, he's going to rendezvous. When you halfway around that circle, what he should do is go straight to the point

where you turned and then turn also. And that way he stays behind you.

00:57:22:15 - 00:57:48:14

Unknown

Well, the guy that was my chase that night was constantly turning when I turned and therefore created a collision point. And I told Johnny he had to be careful of his wingman because my wingman was constantly rendezvous ING on me. I had to shout at him several times. You dumb son of a bitch! Quick turn! And when you turn, wait till you get to the point where I turned.

00:57:48:16 - 00:57:56:22

Unknown

Well, Johnny's wingman rendezvoused with him. Wow. Mid-air collision.

00:57:56:25 - 00:58:24:11

Unknown

So he got killed. His wife, he was. You know, as I said, he was in Hawaii with me, and his wife was pregnant when he went to Vietnam. She had her baby while he was in Vietnam. Never saw the baby. Wow. That's sort of one of the tragedies of war. So those were my two best friends.

00:58:24:14 - 00:58:30:24

Unknown

What was the most beautiful thing you saw in Vietnam? Oh, my God.

00:58:30:26 - 00:58:42:27

Unknown

What was the most beautiful thing I saw in Vietnam? Well, it certainly wasn't a girl.

00:58:42:29 - 00:58:51:00

Unknown

I don't, I don't I don't know, I really don't know. I never really thought of what I, you know.

00:58:51:02 - 00:59:07:19

Unknown

Things about what I saw on beauty. I mean, the the, the country itself is, you know, it's especially in the as you get further north in the country, it's jungle. And.

00:59:07:21 - 00:59:23:13

Unknown

It's, you know, it's the country is very pretty. But I never really thought in terms of, oh my God, this is a beautiful country. Look what we're doing to it. We're dropping all these bombs and stuff. I never thought about it like that.

00:59:23:16 - 00:59:38:14

Unknown

What was the worst thing you saw in Vietnam? The worst thing I saw in Vietnam.

00:59:38:17 - 00:59:45:05

Unknown

The worst thing I saw in Vietnam.

00:59:45:07 - 01:00:04:24

Unknown

Was it was probably when I was forward air controller with first Battalion, ninth Marines. I had two radio operators that worked with me.

01:00:04:27 - 01:00:07:27

Unknown

And.

01:00:08:00 - 01:00:26:11

Unknown

We were sitting in a, a short trench foxhole with glasses, looking out into the jungle movement in a rocket. Came in, landed right in front of us.

01:00:26:13 - 01:00:57:21

Unknown

The radio operator on my right got killed. The radio operator to my left had his legs cut off by the explosion. I didn't get a scratch. Wow. Two guys sitting right next to me. One guy dead. The other guy had had both legs cut off. I didn't get a scratch. That's probably the worst thing I ever saw.

01:00:57:24 - 01:01:17:23

Unknown

Who did you write to or receive letters from when you were in Vietnam? Well, I was single when I went to Vietnam. I had a girlfriend, in Hawaii. But after I left to go to Vietnam, I guess she quickly found a new boyfriend.

01:01:17:26 - 01:01:42:17

Unknown

I wrote to her a couple times. I never heard back from her, and I'd wrote to my parents, and, you know, we communicated. Actually, we didn't really. We didn't really write that much. We used, tape recordings, and that's all we would. I would send them a tape and they would send me a tape and so forth.

01:01:42:19 - 01:02:04:17

Unknown

There were a couple of letters, but mostly these little, little, 3.5in reels of tape. And what was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the.

01:02:04:20 - 01:02:09:10

Unknown

What?

01:02:09:13 - 01:02:18:28

Unknown

Literally I would I never I never saw let alone buy anything in one.

01:02:19:01 - 01:02:47:03

Unknown

Did you ever order anything from the catalog? I didn't know there was a catalog. Wow. No, I'm not being facetious with that. I know it might sound funny, but I never saw a catalog. I never heard of a catalog until you just mentioned it. And I don't know, I don't know if there was a at Marble Mountain.

01:02:47:05 - 01:03:17:11

Unknown

Did you buy any Vietnamese souvenirs? Yes, I did, I bought, a set of bookends. They were hand-carved out of marble. Wow. Which came from Marble Mountain, which is, where the hell all the helicopters were based in Danang and Marble Mountain. I bought bought these in the Nang. I still have them.

01:03:17:13 - 01:03:44:13

Unknown

What was R&R like, and where did you go? Well, I had two answers. One, I went back to Hawaii to spent time with my old girlfriend, and the other, which was far, far a better or far better answer was I went to Bangkok. That that was the first time I'd been there. And that was that was a great

01:03:44:16 - 01:04:28:13

Unknown

What made it so great? Well, what made made it so great was, first of all, not being in Vietnam anymore. You know, being back in what we would say as being back in the world as opposed to Vietnam. I met a girl there. We spent almost all the time I had there with her and had a lot of good stuff to eat and good clean hotel to stay in and wear clean clothes every day instead of, you know, clothes covered with dirt and mud and stuff like that.

01:04:28:15 - 01:04:44:28

Unknown

Nice hot shower every night. That was that was great. And I've been back to I've been back to, Bangkok a half a dozen times since then.

Well.

01:04:45:00 - 01:04:57:01

Unknown

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

01:04:57:04 - 01:05:01:20

Unknown

Let's talk about your post service life. Okay.

01:05:01:22 - 01:05:15:20

Unknown

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

01:05:15:23 - 01:05:25:03

Unknown

Probably. Probably the relationship with my sister.

01:05:25:05 - 01:05:33:18

Unknown

Why is that?

01:05:33:21 - 01:05:44:09

Unknown

When I was in Vietnam, I got a letter from my sister. I probably did this. Probably should not go. This is not a good, good story.

01:05:44:11 - 01:05:59:03

Unknown

I'm not sure I want to repeat this. That's okay. You don't have to. Okay. Would you rather just move on? Would you rather move on? Yeah. So other. You can ask me that question again.

01:05:59:05 - 01:06:10:08

Unknown

What was the question again? Just what relationship in your life was most changed by your service? Yeah, let's move on.

01:06:10:11 - 01:06:21:07

Unknown

It's not a pretty picture. Did you know any antiwar veterans?

01:06:21:09 - 01:06:34:21

Unknown

No. John Kerry. That's the only thing that comes to mind. What a jerk.

01:06:34:23 - 01:07:04:17

Unknown

After Vietnam, where did you go to college? After Vietnam. I went to college, at DePaul University in Chicago. What years, roughly, were you there? Let's see. Well, I came back from Vietnam in 68, I guess I moved to Chicago in 70.

01:07:04:20 - 01:07:21:09

Unknown

72 or 73, I think. And then I started back to school at DePaul. And after DePaul, I went to Loyola University Law School, got my, law degree.

01:07:21:11 - 01:07:31:02

Unknown

What did you expect on campus as a Vietnam veteran?

01:07:31:04 - 01:07:37:03

Unknown

What did I expect?

01:07:37:05 - 01:07:41:25

Unknown

Nothing pleasant.

01:07:41:27 - 01:08:02:13

Unknown

Fortunately, my expectations were not fulfilled. I didn't really have any problems being back on on campus. Per se, but I had did not have good expectations about what, what would occur back in campus.

01:08:02:16 - 01:08:19:25

Unknown

Who? Since the war have you talked to about Vietnam? Well, I mentioned Tom Evans. I talked to him occasionally. I have a,

01:08:19:28 - 01:08:49:03

Unknown

Communicated with other guys that I flew with in Vietnam, like, you know, communicate with fairly regularly. I've been to a couple of reunions. I'm going to another one. In June. So there's, there's most of the guys that I've communicated with and there aren't a lot, but most of the guys I've communicated with were guys I flew with rather than guys.

01:08:49:05 - 01:09:04:18

Unknown

In first Battalion, ninth Marines. Did you ever talk to your family about Vietnam? A little not much.

01:09:04:21 - 01:09:18:26

Unknown

Have you been to the wall? Yes, I have been to the wall. It was a very. Emotional experience.

01:09:18:28 - 01:09:49:06

Unknown

What did you think of it? Well, in terms of the wall itself. And you know what it commemorates. I thought it was great. I have no, I have no lesser feelings about it, but, you know, it it, I know the the design when it was originally approved was very controversial. Not the, you know, not the,

01:09:49:08 - 01:10:20:07

Unknown

General. On the on the on the white stallion, carved in marble with a little plaque underneath it. It was very unusual in its design and the way it's, the way it's been set up, but I thought it was very appropriate, very nice. Have you been back to Vietnam? No. I take that back. Yes. One day, I was on a cruise.

01:10:20:09 - 01:10:46:16

Unknown

And the cruise stopped in, Trang, which is in the south part of South Vietnam. So I was never that far south when I was in Vietnam in the 60s. So, I didn't spend much time there. You know, the cruise docked, the cruise ship docked for a few hours. I got off, walked around in the drag, got back on the ship and left.

01:10:46:19 - 01:10:52:00

Unknown

Would you like to go back as a sound trip?

01:10:52:03 - 01:11:18:20

Unknown

Yes and no. I have thought about it often. I've examined plans to go back, but I've never actually made a commitment to go back. So. Yeah, I think I would like to go back, but I haven't taken any steps to do that.

01:11:18:23 - 01:11:35:03

Unknown

Have your views on the war changed at all since 1968?

01:11:35:06 - 01:12:00:01

Unknown

I guess I would say yes. In 1968, when I was in Vietnam, I didn't really have a view on the war. America said, go to war. I was a marine captain, you know, the country said, go to war. We went to war. That was the thing to do. In the sense, have my views changed? Well, my views have changed about war.

01:12:00:04 - 01:12:03:21

Unknown

It's stupid.

01:12:03:24 - 01:12:12:01

Unknown

And the Vietnam War is no less stupid than any other war.

01:12:12:04 - 01:12:19:12

Unknown

It's just, you know, especially,

01:12:19:14 - 01:12:49:01

Unknown

Especially these days. By these days, I'm talking about, you know, in the, in the 21st century, because to just interrupt you and ask, was it any more stupid? Yeah. That was. Yeah. Yeah, it was, it was probably was. Let me, let me think about that question. Was it any more stupid? More stupid than any other war? Than any other war?

01:12:49:06 - 01:13:14:01

Unknown

Well, that's hard for me to say, because I've only had experience in one war and I've read about other wars. Was it was it more stupid than the than the Seven Days War? Was it more stupid than the, you know, than the, the Romans conquering all of Europe, you know, how do I know? Was it more stupid than, say, World War II?

01:13:14:01 - 01:13:22:09

Unknown

Two? No.

01:13:22:11 - 01:13:28:09

Unknown

Two.

01:13:28:11 - 01:13:56:24

Unknown

Was it more stupid than World War two? No, it wasn't more stupid than World War Two for a couple reasons. Number one, the U.S. didn't precipitate that war. The US. Entered that war, in my point of view, at least, to preserve the rights of other people.

01:13:56:26 - 01:14:14:19

Unknown

The U.S. entered the Vietnam War to disrupt the rights of other people. You know, we had this domino theory, that McNamara espouse so, so broadly and vehemently, which.

01:14:14:21 - 01:14:47:02

Unknown

You know, has proven yet to be a fallacy. I mean, that was the that was the. That was the prevailing reason to go to war in Vietnam was if we don't stop communism in Vietnam, all the other countries in that part of the world will go communistic. So we stopped Vietnam, did we? And, other countries in that region, some are communist, some aren't.

01:14:47:09 – 01:15:20:13

Unknown

So I don't know whether the rationale for the domino theory was right or wrong. Not for me to say, but, you know, human beings have been fighting each other since there been human beings. You know, when we were all living in caves, there were still wars among people that lived in caves. It's just our nature, I guess. But it's a lousy way to settle disputes.

01:15:20:16 – 01:15:26:06

Unknown

This is my last question. Promises, promises.

01:15:26:09 – 01:15:32:28

Unknown

Do you have a favorite book, poem, or movie about Vietnam?

01:15:33:00 – 01:15:37:15

Unknown

Well, my favorite movie.

01:15:37:17 – 01:15:43:18

Unknown

I don't have a favorite poem about Vietnam.

01:15:43:21 – 01:16:07:16

Unknown

My favorite movie about Vietnam is probably coming home. You familiar with that movie? Can you tell us a little bit about it? Well, it's. It's the story of a guy who came back, lived in California, and,

01:16:07:19 – 01:16:19:06

Unknown

Did his best to adjust to civilian life and wound up committing suicide by swimming out into the ocean.

01:16:19:09 – 01:16:53:26

Unknown

It was a disturbing movie, I thought. Coming home. What do you like about it? I didn't say I liked it. Why? Is it your favorite? Well, it's my favorite because I think that particular movie embodies all the postwar problems that people that came back from Vietnam had, and many still have. Although the many is becoming a lot fewer because of

their ages.

01:16:53:28 - 01:17:12:07

Unknown

But it was it was just it was a sad movie, and I think it embodied all of the problems that that, people who fought in Vietnam, all the problems they had when they tried to readjust to normal civilian life.

01:17:12:09 - 01:17:43:24

Unknown

So if you haven't seen that movie, it's worth getting and seeing. All right. You might get a better understanding of what I'm saying. Let's look. Now, I don't really have a good favorite book about Vietnam. There have been several books written. I've. I've read several. That comes to mind is my favorite poems. No art. Although I like poetry and I have books of poems at home, but I don't have a favorite poem about Vietnam.

01:17:43:26 - 01:17:51:14

Unknown

All right, well, Mr. Engle, thank you so much for talking with us and, well, sharing all your stories. You're welcome. You're welcome.