

## **Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project**

Interviewee: Ron Hudson, Marine Corps

Interviewer: Palmer McCay

Date: November 10, 2025

Location: The Workspace for Audio, Video, and Emerging Media, USC Aiken

Transcribers: Palmer McCay, Jack Shaffer

00:00:05

PM: My name is Palmer McCay. I'm interviewing Vietnam veteran Ron Hudson, who served in the Marines and was in Vietnam from 1969 to 1970. Mr. Hudson, this interview will have four sections: your life before service, basic training, your time in Vietnam, and your life after service. Let's get started with your background. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

RH: Well, I was born in Sumter, South Carolina, and the first year of my life, my father was in the Army Air Corps in Sumter. He was based there. And when he got out of the military in 1949, the year I was born, we moved to northern Indiana, where he had a job with the railroad. And subsequently I lived in northern Indiana for a few years, and then we moved to a suburb of Chicago—that's pretty much where I was raised up until I left for college, and then the Marine Corps.

PM: Did you have any siblings?

RH: I have an older sister that's six years older and a brother three years older.

PM: You mentioned your dad worked with the railroad—what did he do?

RH: He was a switchman. And, at that time, switchman, there wasn't electronics they had to pull the switches by hand back in the in the '50s, and so, he had a rough job. And he worked different shifts. And in Chicago the winters were—could be horrible.

00:01:34

PM: Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you telling war stories from World War II?

RH: No. My father was a World War II veteran, but it wasn't until later on in life that we—I had some discussion with him about what he did in the military.

00:01:52

PM: Did you have a favorite World War II movie growing up?

RH: I can't think of one [chuckles].

PM: A lot of Vietnam veteran memoirs mention John Wayne as an influence on their expectations of war. Do you remember John Wayne that way?

RH: No, I remember him more of as a cowboy. Cowboy movies.

00:02:15

PM: Before you enlisted in the Marines, where did you go to college, and what did you study?

RH: Well, after high school, I entered—I went to Western Illinois University, primarily because two of my best friends, a lot of students I knew, were going there so, I entered Western Illinois University in the fall of 1967.

PM: Did you hear anything about Vietnam during your time in college?

RH: Yes. But for me, I wasn't political and without the internet, and I was more in tune with—I played sports in high school, and I was more in tune with sports, and didn't read the paper much then. I had other things on my mind as an eighteen-year-old, as you can imagine.

PM: In the pre-interview, you mentioned a particular antiwar protest during your time in college. Can you talk about that a little bit?

RH: Yes. It actually happened after I came back from Vietnam. It so happened I was living off campus. It was about my third year or my second year back—it was probably 1971 or '2 [1972]. I graduated in '73 [1973] from Western. But my next-door neighbor was a history teacher, and I was taking his class. I happened to live right next door to him. And he was going out on this anti-Vietnam march, if you will. He says, "come on with guys"—I was in the yard—he says, "come on with me." And I said, "okay," because he's my teacher. I didn't want to, you know. So anyway, I went and it was no big deal. It was peaceful. And it—just a march. Took about an hour.

00:03:47

PM: 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?

RH: I was enlisted.

PM: What were the main reasons you volunteered?

RH: Well, my first year at college didn't go so well. I technically flunked out, and my other two friends, Don and Bob Hall, were there at the same time and Don didn't do very well either. But

Bob did real well, and he was the one that summer said, “well, if you guys aren’t going to go back to Western, I want to go in the Marines, let’s go in the Marine Corps.” So, after a lot of beer that summer we enlisted in August of 1968. That’s how it happened. It was—I felt bad because when I went to college, my parents had to work hard, scrape up to get the money to send me to Western. And then when I flunked out, I just felt really bad about—I didn’t want to stay home because junior college, I wanted to do something totally different just to try to get my life back together pretty good.

PM: So just to clarify, did all three of your friends enlist?

RH: Yes, we all did.

PM: And did you guys serve together?

RH: Well, we went in on the buddy plan, and the Marine Corps calls it the buddy plan. “Oh, yeah. You’ll get to go through boot camp together.” And Don Braaten and I did go through boot camp together, but Bob got assigned to a different platoon, but we could see him, but we couldn’t talk to him for fifteen weeks, as you could imagine.

PM: Did you expect to go to Vietnam?

RH: I think it was a given when we enlisted. There was no question, that’s where we were going to go.

00:05:28

PM: What, if anything, did you know about the country of Vietnam before you enlisted?

RH: Very little. I mean, I started watching some newsreels and things at that time. You could see it was all over the news. I just knew that it was—my brother was in the Air Force at the time, and he was in Thailand, and so, I knew that it was probably going to be, you know, a difficult arena in which to serve.

PM: What did you know about the Vietnam War?

RH: Not too much. I also have to mention that I had—my brother-in-law served in Vietnam a couple of years before me in the early years of Vietnam. And he came back and he was—worked at some type of supply, and I don’t think he was in combat too much.

RH: And so, I really didn’t know much about it at the time.

PM: You mentioned your brother being in the Air Force. Did you hear much from him during your time in country?

RH: Yeah. Interestingly, he—I was in boot camp, and he wrote me a letter. It’s kind of funny because the mail call in the Marine Corps is at night, right before you go to bed at nine ‘o clock at night. And I got—they called me, you know, “PFC [Private First Class] Hudson,” you come up

there and they give you your mail, they go in there, and I look on the outside of the letter and he had written "Marine Corps Dis [Drill Instructors] suck" [laughter]. And I thought to myself, "If that DI had seen that and wasn't in a hurry to disperse the mail. I would have had, you know, gone through some, a regiment of some physical training, probably."

PM: That's hilarious.

00:07:21

PM: How would you describe your boot camp experience?

RH: I guess it was about what I expected—that I would lose all liberty, and it would be totally controlled by the Marines. And it was. And I didn't think about the psychology of it, but now, in hindsight, you can see why they bring you in there no matter where your background is. If you're the poorest person or richest person, no matter where you came from, they're going to break you down in the first three or four weeks and then bring you up as a team. And that's what they do. That's the psychology of boot camp, Marine Corps boot camp.

PM: Were you at Parris Island or somewhere else?

RH: No, I went to MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] in San Diego. They called it, you know, "Hollywood boot camp."

PM: Did anyone around you struggle with boot camp?

RH: Yes. Except there was another fellow from my community enlisted the same time with us. But it wasn't with us, I mean, we ended up in the same platoon and ended up going AWOL [Away Without Leave] during firearms, like later in training, and ultimately was dismissed from the Marine Corps.

00:08:36

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

RH: It was a long flight. We left—it was late at night, and I remember all the information, there was a pile of information, they gave it to my friend Bob Hall. He was in charge of it. So, we flew to—let's see, okay, we flew to San Diego and there was instructions to get on—Bob was to go to this phone down the hallway, it was a pay phone, and call this number. And he went down there and called the number. And all of a sudden, down the hallway, you hear the expletives. There was a drill instructor down there yelled at us "get your..." They're going on us. We're running down there. It's like ten 'o clock in San Diego now. And they got us lined up in some kind of ragtag formation, and he's yelling at us. People are coming. It was late at night, so there's not that many people in the terminal. And then they put you in the, what they called the cattle cars, it's not a bus, its cattle cars, you're hanging onto stuff. You get there and you get on the yellow footprints and that's the initial experience that you have when you get there.

00:09:51

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

RH: In Vietnam?

PM: Yes, sir.

RH: I remember flying. We flew to Hawaii from California, refuel. We had to get off the plane, and then we flew to Vietnam. Got there during the day, and it was pretty quiet, you know, everybody was just sitting on the plane and just having their own thoughts. And we got off the plane and it looked, I don't know what to expect. We had stewardess on the plane. So, I was thinking to myself, "this can't be too dangerous situation we're in right now," I kind of figured that out. So, they got us off the plane and they started going down this list. You know, "Hudson, recon over here" and "John Smith, you go over here," "infantry unit, third Battalion," whatever it was. So, it was kind of like, just like an administrative activity. And they get us on these trucks, and then they drove us to our, in my case, first Recon Battalion, that battalion was located at Camp Reasoner. And it was not a lot of fanfare or anything

RH: You get there and they give you, in my case, I was assigned to third platoon, first Battalion Recon and the team at that moment was up on Hill 146. And so I was in a Quonset hut with a couple other guys that were brand new, and the team was up there. And it just so happened that three days after I was in country, the team up on Hill 146 hit two booby traps, and they were like four wounded and two killed from that—my platoon, which the people I hadn't met yet. So, I had to deal with that when they came back and—but basically what I was doing while I was there before they came back with, they did some training. And one of the things we were doing one day, we were repelling from helicopters, and the helicopter I was in, we went up to do some more, and then suddenly the—something happened with the helicopter and it crashed, and nobody was hurt. But that was my first. I crashed in two more helicopters later on in country and in the field. And so, I always had that feeling from that moment about flying in helicopters, how they stationary fly, sometimes they hover and you sit there and you're looking out, and so that gave me a little pause when I would fly in helicopters.

00:12:25

PM: Would you describe yourself as being in combat, in the rear, or something else?

RH: In combat.

PM: I know you mentioned you were in a recon unit—what kind of work did you do?

RH: Well, our mission was pretty straightforward. We'd have a team of seven or eight men, including a patrol leader or assistant patrol leader. We'd have a Navy corpsman. We'd have two radio operators, and we'd have, maybe, somebody carrying an M79 grenade launcher, and then one other two, what they call a "Rear end Charlie" and a point man. So usually seven or eight men and, what else did you want to know? You were asking me? Oh, okay, so we had a seven-

man recon team, and our mission was always to, number one, not engage the enemy, but to find the enemy. Either look for—sometimes they'd give you a clue, they'd say, "we've seen missile sites, this area. We've seen some movement from the air," or whatever. Go in there and find them, call fire missions on them, you know, try to eliminate the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] if we saw them and that kind of thing. But we would be out on patrol for probably three or four nights on a regular patrol.

PM: Where in Vietnam, specifically, where are you located?

RH: Well, Camp Reasoner was at the base of Administrative Hill in Da Nang. It was not in the center of Da Nang, but on the outskirts of Da Nang covered by some mountain range there. And we would fly out of Camp Reasoner over the mountain range into north, I'd say, it was more northwest of Da Nang toward Laos. And the only patrols I went on, close to twenty patrols, and we were—I never walked a rice paddy, we were always in the mountains. So, some of the landing zones that they would find from the air look pretty good. But when they come down it didn't work out too good, but usually they would find areas with elephant grass, and which is pretty high, eight to ten feet sometimes. And they could land in the elephant grass areas.

PM: Did you like the work you were doing?

RH: I didn't think about whether I liked it or not, this is what I had to do for the next year. It was—there was no thought about, "did I like it or not?" But I guess the camaraderie with the Marines was good. It was hard initially, but after you go on a few patrols, they embrace you and you become part of the team. You know, they give you a little hard time, maybe the first few weeks you're there just to kind of initiate you. But after that, I was never thought like, "this is wow, this is really cool stuff, you know?" And I was thinking, "this is serious stuff." And it was more I got my head right pretty fast, you know, I didn't, you know, I knew when I could have fun and drink beer, you know, when you're in a rear area, and there was a time to do business when you were on a patrol.

PM: You just talked about, kind of that period where you're coming in and you're the new guy. Does the term FNG [Fucking new guy] mean anything to you?

RH: Yes, I know what that means. My granddaughters may see this someday, and I don't want to say it [chuckles]. "Effing new guy," right?

00:15:52

PM: Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours?

RH: *Dung lai chu hoi, buku*, a few slang words, that's all. Now, my friend Bob Hall, he went to Vietnamese language school, and he ended up with the twenty six Marines, so he actually utilized some of his language there.

PM: Can you explain what some of those Vietnamese phrases mean?

RH: *Buku* means “a lot.” *Dung lai chu hoi* means “to surrender.” I think. And *di di mau*, “get going, move,” you know, but that's all I know.

00:16:37

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

RH: It was a mixed bag. I mean, you really didn't know until you talked to them. We had a young African American from North Carolina. We had some guys from Texas and all kinds of backgrounds. There's one's father, it appeared he had money because he had an airplane, and he said he almost broke his arm when he was telling me a story, “I almost broke my dad's airplane. I keep wanting to put my arm up to it.” He said “well, just go ahead.” So, he did, and he almost broke his arm [chuckles].

PM: Wow.

RH: But you—with the people you were working or living with and going on patrols with, you never looked at them, you looked at him as Marines. You didn't look at them as anything other than a Marine doing the same thing you are and trying to get through this patrol and get back safe.

PM: You mentioned this seemingly rich guy that you served with. Is he an outlier? Because most of the other people you served with were from working class families?

RH: You might be able to say that, I don't know. I only knew that because he told the story about this, he had an airplane, dad had an airplane, he said, “dad had an airplane, you know,” and I think most other people came from middle class, I would say, families.

PM: Do you remember any women on base, either Vietnamese or American?

RH: There were Vietnamese women on base because they would do some laundry for us and that kind of thing. I didn't see any female Marines. I saw female Marines in boot camp, and I can remember them going—one of those duties ahead of the first three or four days I was there was to go to this office area was all female Marines, and they gave me the hardest time. They were worse on me than the males, the drill sergeants, I think. They were just terrible, just harassed us. They enjoyed it. They were having fun.

PM: Can you talk a little bit more about the Vietnamese women who you said did your laundry? Did you ever call them *mamasans*?

RH: That was a term that was used, but I didn't have much interaction with them, you know. We did have in the rear at Camp Reasoner, we did have an enlisted bar and NCO [Non-commissioned Officer] bar. You could go and drink beer and they would be servants in there, and they were female. And occasionally we'd have a USO [United Service Organizations] show

that would come to our Camp Reasoner and put on a show, and there would be Vietnamese women that would perform.

00:19:19

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

RH: I didn't have that much interaction with the people that lived in Vietnam. I mean, the ones that were there were servants and things like that. Like I said, I never walked in a rice paddy, I never walked through a village. So, it was—I was kind of an outlier of Marines that they all had that experience that they were in combat, and they were in the field, and they would go through villages and stuff. I never went through a village, so I didn't have much contact with the Vietnamese.

PM: Did you ever get to know any ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] personnel?

RH: We had a couple what we called *chu hoi* Kit Carson Scouts. But I didn't like to have them on the patrol because they wanted—I had two bad experiences with them because they wanted to cook food on a recon patrol. And you just don't do that. You know, I had one guy and he started, he was cooking. I said, "what're you doing? Put it out!" because, you know, you smell of food and fire, smoke, and didn't make any sense to me.

PM: What do you remember about Vietnamese children?

RH: I had no involvement with children at all. I might—I would see some in the Da Nang area there was a Freedom Hill. It was a place where you could go where they had a PX [Post Exchange] and they had a bowling alley and things like that. And there I would see some Vietnamese children, but other than that I had no contact with them.

00:20:51

PM: Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam?

RH: Well, there're water buffaloes, and we had those right out, in Camp Reasoner there was a field there, and there was some there. But I remember seeing giant anteaters on patrol on a river one time. We—I had a radio man on our team, Dave Rivard, who was a herpetologist in college for one year, then entered the Marine Corps and he knew about snakes and stuff. And we came across a, he called it a rock python, that was about—it was coiled up between these rocks. We were up on a hill and we came to this little open area. There was all these rocks, and this thing was coiled up, and it had to be about this big around. And I don't know how long it was because it was curled up. And he says, "well, it's sleeping because it just had a meal" and he could, he knew this and he wanted to put his—he wanted to put the snake in his backpack and want me to carry his radio. And he was serious. And I said, "what are you talking about?" You know, "I'm not going to carry the radio. We're not taking the snake back. So, let's keep going." So, but then we saw the centipedes, the giant centipedes they talk about. We came up on a—we were up on a hill, and it was triple canopy. We'd gone through a lot of brush, and we got to

the tree, like almost to the top. And it was like an opening a little bit where there wasn't much underbrush. And there must have been like a room this big, filled with these centipedes, about eighteen inches long, hundreds of them, thousands of them. And it just, it was and, of course, we walked around and we don't want to walk through that, but that was amazing. One time I had—I was walking through and I hit a leaf and red ants, like fire ants got on down. We wore long-sleeved shirts and gloves because of the brush and everything, and got in my shirt, you know. And I wanted to scream. I couldn't, you know, and I was trying to be quiet. I'm getting this thing off me, they're looking at me like, "what's wrong with you?" And I got these ants all over me, and so we got through that. But another time we had a, we'd go to a harvest site where we sleep, and that night we could hear a tiger in the vicinity. Sounded like it was eating something. And we looked at each other, and we just stayed real quiet. And we got up the next morning and we couldn't find it, then we just kept moving. But there were tigers and there was—there have been teams that would bring back a tiger that they killed on patrol, as a souvenir, I guess, I don't know, it was crazy.

00:23:27

PM: Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam?

RH: No, I don't think so because I never got involved with the culture of the Vietnamese at all. I mean, I never got into the city of Da Nang. I went to the Freedom Hill PX and that kind of thing a few times. So, it was—it wasn't a culture shock. It's more like a country shock. You know, the climate shock, the elements of, you know, finding yourself with, 60 pounds of weight going up and down these mountains and pulling yourself with limbs to get to the top and going through triple canopy and, you know, moving about, maybe two hundred fifty yards an hour sometimes it's that difficult.

PM: What season do you remember being the hardest to adjust to?

RH: When it was hot, it was hot. That was bad. But the monsoon season was tough. When it started to rain, sometimes you'd sit on the tarmac waiting for your helicopter to take you out. And so, it was a little break in the weather. So they take you out, they get you and they come back. And all of a sudden, it rains for three days. You're supposed to get out, you run out of food, they can't get to the helicopters to you and you're just sitting there. And, so that was miserable sometimes. When you're wet, your feet are wet and you want to get out, but you have to wait another extra two days.

PM: Did you get sick at all during your time in country?

RH: No, I don't recall ever getting sick. We had a couple patrols with guys who would come down with malaria, and we had to medevac them. But I always took the pill. A lot of kids, guys would just throw it away. But malaria was not as prevalent as the grunts, the guys that were out there all the time. In recon, I mean, you came down with malaria, we were in a safe area once we came back to our rear area. But no, I don't recall ever getting sick.

PM: You mentioned the fire ants being particularly hard. Were there any other afflictions that you or the people around you experienced?

RH: As far as medical or illnesses and that kind of thing?

PM: Medical, yeah.

RH: No. Not really. I mean, sometimes somebody would get injured getting off a helicopter, jumping off, just sometimes the helicopter would hover like three feet and say, "okay, get off" and you jump off, somebody might hurt their ankle or something, but no.

00:26:09

PM: What was the most interesting food you ate in Vietnam?

RH: Well, I ate no Vietnamese food, most interesting was probably what we ate on patrol, it was freeze packed meals. High caloric, you know, because we'd have, like in the morning, we'd have a can of fruit for lunch, we'd have crackers and maybe a little chocolate bar or something. Then at night we had this food that we just add water to stir it up and that was our meal. And that's what ate. They had about two thousand calories in that meal. And they kept us going.

PM: What American foods did you miss most while in Vietnam?

RH: Any American food [chuckle]. Well, we would have, they'd have days where they have steak served in the back area and they cook hamburgers and stuff. So, you got that. And there was always beer available. You know, especially after you come off patrol, there was cold beer there for you if you wanted it.

00:27:12

PM: Do you recall ever seeing Vietnamese civilians collecting or using American trash?

RH: No. Well, I will say that that patrol that I talked to you about that there was two killed and four wounded at Hill 146. Sometimes in those booby traps they would use some of our discarded LAW [Light Anti-Tank Weapon] grenades. A LAW grenade was about—a device you could open up and you can shoot one, and then you just, you know, throw away the tube and that tube, they could slide in twenty-six grenades right down there, it's perfect. And they would take, you know, take the pins out and then use it as a booby trap. So that's garbage that the Marines would leave out, or Army, and anybody that was using those LAW grenades.

00:28:00

PM: Did you personally encounter the Viet Cong or NVA ?

RH: Yes, we saw them, but we didn't engage with them. I'm trying to think the most, the one I remember the most is we had flown—this was kind of unusual. Usually, we go from a helicopter into twenty miles out and they drop you off. This is when we went to Hill 200, and we were going

to walk off of 200 because they had been seen, you know, there were sightings and they wanted a regular recon team rather than their guys, they sometimes do that, but they just wanted another team. So, we walked off that and after I think, several hours that first day, we were sitting up on a knoll and as you look down, we were covered pretty good because we had the highest, it was, we had just walked off the hill and then so we were still elevated, but looking down, there was a tree line and it was like a little break in the in a tree line. And I told somebody to keep an eye on it, get the binoculars and keep an eye on it. It was—looked like it might have been a path. And sure enough, we saw NVA soldiers were walking by two at a time. You know, I mean, this was just constant. Then they go back the other way, and then we heard some noise, like maybe they were doing something like maybe, so, we thought that it was a base camp that was being built. So, that gave us some pause because we knew at that point, we couldn't effectively leave the hill because they could be anywhere and we didn't want to engage them. So, we were in kind of a predicament. Luckily, we were on this knoll that was kind of a landing zone for a helicopter if we wanted to get out. So, we wanted to stay still. So, we call all this in, and they sent out a—they first sent out a, I've never saw it before, it was like a Piper Cub. It was a spotter. He was just reconnaissance. I've never seen one. Usually it's, you know, some other aerial type of apparatus, but he came over going low over the tree line, and he marked our spot. He could see us. And then they had some aerial observer come over and they saw more and they said, "yeah, we got to get you out of there." So, at this point, the NVA soldiers on the ground, I don't believe they knew we were there yet, even though this Piper Cub went over, they see this stuff all the time and they just ignore it. Or they look at it and it goes away. And when the helicopter came in to get us, he was only able to land his back wheels on this little hill. And, as we were getting on the plane, the helicopter is coming down, and the blades are coming down. And I was the second one from the end, and we just barely got out and, you know, it took off. It was like, I see these blades coming down in any moment. This is going to be it for me, you know. And so, we just hustled on and we got off and right off we got off the fixed wing started coming in with napalm and bombs, and they just obliterated that whole area. And there was a base camp there. And so, that was probably the closest call I had in Vietnam.

00:31:13

PM: Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed?

RH: No, not personally, but I'm on the Agent Orange registry because when we went in Vietnam, we would patrol in areas that had been defoliated with Agent Orange. But not a lot, you know, we'd see it, we'd move away from it. Not because we knew it was dangerous, but just because it was an open area and we didn't go in there, where it was defoliated.

PM: Those areas that were defoliated; what did they look like? Can you describe them?

RH: Well, I can only tell you—well, it's pretty barren. It just destroys all the vegetation, you know.

PM: Were you concerned at the time about Agent Orange?

RH: No. I don't think it was an issue at the time. I mean, I've seen the movies where they're shaking barrels of Agent Orange out of a helicopter or a plane, and it's just terrible, you know?

PM: Do you recall anyone in the military telling you that Agent Orange was safe?

RH: No. No, we didn't deal with Agent Orange. This was somebody else and that was their job. And after seeing the pictures, I just count my blessings that I wasn't on one of those helicopters or they were shaking those barrels of Agent Orange out, I tell you. It's still affecting Vietnam vets today, some of them.

00:32:45

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

RH: We drank a lot of beer, [chuckles] you know. When you weren't in a bush. Well, I know I did, I wasn't a prolific letter writer, but I wrote home occasionally, and I had friends that would write me letters, and, but there was a time I remember in about six months in country, I thought to myself, "I don't feel like I've ever been anyplace else in my life." That's the feeling I had. And so, then a couple months after that, I got an R&R [Rest and Recuperation], and I got to go to Taipei, and, but it was a matter of coping did you say?

PM: Yeah.

RH: You just do. You're a Marine. You're doing what you're told to do. You have a mission, you do the mission, and you know that there's a light at the end of the tunnel if you get that far, that you're going to go home. So, that was that was my thought process at the time.

PM: When you were there, were there Marines smoking pot as well, or just drinking beer?

RH: Oh, there was some pot smoking going on. I would say, I can only speak to recon and, I—on a patrol, I never saw anybody in any of my patrols ever smoked pot. Now, on the hills, that was a little different because that was a little more relaxed. You have twenty-five, thirty men up on a hill for two weeks, and somebody is going to bring the stuff. They'll go to one end of the hill and they'll smoke pot. And I never did. But it wasn't accepted, but it was tolerated. I mean, you know, I was a corporal toward the end of my enlistment there and the upper ranks usually have a staff sergeant, even lieutenants on the hills, and they wouldn't tolerate it. Now, I do recall in recon, there were some that had, there had been some scuttlebutt about a couple of guys with heroin, but I didn't know anything about that. And I think that probably was true. And they removed those guys as they found that out. But, yeah, there was drugs in Vietnam. It's, you know, it's a given.

PM: Were there any jokes that circulated during your time in Vietnam that you'd like to share?

RH: Any jokes? No, [chuckles] no.

00:35:23

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

RH: Well, there was a corporal. Well, Sergeant Cleveland was—he took me out of my first patrol and then he—that was his second tour of duty. And he left after I was there after about two months. And he was remarkable. And he was kind of a mentor on my first patrol. He really took care of me, and I appreciated that. And then, there was Corporal Andrekroupalis, he was from Wisconsin. They called him Corporal Andy. And I went on several patrols with him, and I actually became, he asked me to be his assistant patrol leader, and we got a friendship going there, and I think he was the one that put in a word for me, not that I was asking for it, but he said, “Hudson might make a good patrol leader someday,” I think. And, as a result of that, six months into the country I went to, or maybe a little later than that, I was selected to go to NCO school, which is right there at, what they call Division Hill. And that was a two-week course, and I graduated first in the class of fifty Marines and got a combat promotion as a result that to corporal. And just prior to that, as a lance corporal, I had taken a couple teams out. Normally it's sergeant or lieutenant does it, but they were, I don't know why, but they were sending lance corporals and corporals out and so, but he was a remarkable guy and I've touched base with him after, a year or two after I got out of the Marines and haven't heard from since then.

00:37:04

PM: What was the most beautiful thing you saw in Vietnam?

RH: Just the country. I mean, we were in a lot of areas that hadn't been harmed by the war. Waterfalls. Seeing anteaters down drinking water at a river. Just gorgeous. And it was a beautiful country. It really was. And I saw it from the perspective for the mountains, I didn't see the rice paddies in the villages and the, you know, it's a total. It was like a total different Marine life as a recon Marine, you know.

00:37:41PM: Who did you write to and receive letters from while you're in Vietnam?

RH: Oh, just a few friends and parents, that's all. I didn't, I wasn't much of a writing letter writer.

PM: Were there other ways you communicated with friends and family back in the US?

RH: Well, my two friends that I went in with, Bob Hall and Don Braaten, I saw both of them. Don was at first Marine Air Wing, and occasionally, he was—he worked for the he was in the mail area. He was clerical and interestingly enough, he was the biggest one in the group. He was an all-state football player and all this kind of stuff. And Bob, the other friend, was a cross-country runner, and I was a baseball basketball player. I was 5'10 and 135 pounds when I went into the Marine Corps and Bob Hall was about the same size, and Don was like 190. And he's a clerical guy and we're both in the bush doing stuff. Go figure. But I used to see Don and Don had a good network at home. And so, his sister would write me, and he would tell me what's going on, and he was hooked into what was going on back home. And then Bob had his friends that he contacted. Bob was in 26th Marines and he had a tough I mean, he was a grunt, you know, and he was in battles and fighting and that kind of thing, yeah.

PM: Do you think it made a difference that you saw friends from home while you were in country?

RH: I think it did make a difference. It kind of made you think that there's something beyond this. And that's when we would laugh the most about the stupid things that would happen when we'd say, and so, we were looking for it and we all made it back. And interestingly, I—we went into the Marines, we signed up, we said, “okay, we're all going to go in for two years,” because at the time they had a two-year program. So, we go in there and Bob signs for two, Don signs for two, I sign for three. They go, “what are you doing? Are you crazy?” Why'd you go for?” Well, I don't know, I say, “go get some school.” So, I fell for it. But ironically, the way it worked out, I got home before they did because of, it was, I had been in the Marines eighteen months and a week, and Nixon had been pulling troops out. And when I got back to California, I didn't know this until I got back to California from Vietnam. And the sergeant says, “you can get out if you want.” I said, “what do you mean?” He says, “well, you have less than eighteen months left on your enlistment, you can get out.” I said, “where do I sign?” [chuckles] And I got out. And so, I was home before these other two guys got out. So, at the end of the day, it worked out all right.

PM: That's ironic. Did you stay friends with those same people that you enlisted after Vietnam?

RH: Oh, yeah. Don just died five years ago, and I was executive of his will. And I gave a eulogy to him. And Bob's still alive, and he's still working as a consultant. He has a consulting firm that he has and works. But, yeah, I called, I just sent Bob, a happy birthday Marine today. Today's the Marine Corps birthday. And yeah. And Don was my best friend, and we've—but Bob and Don and I have known each other since grammar school and through high school and everything, so, we, I still stay in touch with Bob.

00:41:06

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

RH: The Rolling Stones comes to mind. Music, you know, and we still listen to a lot of music, but TV shows. Johnny Carson was something I watch. *Shock Theater*. I mean, you know, I don't know. As a kid, and I was growing up, I'd always watch the Cubs games. I was living in Chicago. My mother was a great Cubs fan, I was. I'd get out of school, grammar school, and I get home about three 'o clock and catch the last three innings of the day game at Wrigley Field. But shows, comedy shows or what is the funny one? Not *Saturday Night Live*, but the—Goldie Hawn was in there and it was, what was that? That's way before your time so you wouldn't know.

PM: *Laugh-In*?

RH: There you go. Yeah, that was a favorite, too.

PM: So, were you able to watch those shows in Vietnam?

RH: I never saw a TV in Vietnam [chuckles]. No, they didn't put the football games up and stuff. It just doesn't, you didn't have the ability to do that I don't think.

PM: You mentioned USO shows. Can you talk a little bit about your experiences with USO shows on base?

RH: The one most remarkable one was December 25th, Christmas Day, 1969. Don, who was in Marine Air Wing, and I wasn't out on patrol. I was, he says—he called me, "Bugs," that was my nickname, that's all he knows me by. Says "Bugs," I got a ticket to the Bob Hope show." He says, "can you get one?" I said, "I don't know, I ask around." So, we had some and they were doing a lottery and I got one. So, he and I got to go to the USO show. Bob Hope, December 25th in Da Nang. And interestingly enough, some weeks later, you know, when it's broadcast at home, everybody was calling Don, said, "Don, we saw you on it. You know, he's getting all these letters and calls. And I was sitting right next to him, and I didn't get on there. So anyway, I mentioned that at his eulogy and I got a good laugh.

PM: Do you remember that show fondly?

RH: Yeah, I try to find it. I was, you know, I tried to do a search and look for his shows and maybe I could see him and me together there, but I could never find it. Yeah, but I remembered it was. It was an interesting show.

00:43:37

PM: What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the PX.

RH: Well, I bought a watch once when I went to Thailand, but I didn't have any money. I mean, even with combat pay, I think the most I made was three hundred dollars a month. Sound like a lot [chuckles]?

PM: No, it does not.

RH: No, and, I think combat pay was, I don't know, hundred bucks? So corporal was about three hundred bucks a month.

PM: Did you buy any Vietnamese souvenirs?

RH: No. I did bring back a—we had this currency. They would—we didn't have US currency. They had, I forgot what they call them, but I brought a couple of those home and it has, like a submarine on it. It's, you know, anyway.

00:44:38

PM: You mentioned R&R in Taipei. What was R&R like?

RH: A lot of drinking, basically. But I also went to Australia. That's kind of interesting. I came back it was—I'd been in country eight months. So, I finally got to go out. Everybody wants to go

to Australia because they speak English and all that. And so, I had a, I was a corporal at that time, and there was a PFC that had—was working administratively for a period of time with the for one of the lieutenants. And he's walking out and saying, "I got an opening to Australia for R&R," and I grabbed him. I said, "I want to go." He says, "you just got back two months ago." I said, "I want to go." "You're going to get in trouble." I said, "I don't care." He said, "okay." And so, I went to Australia and I never heard anything. They didn't say anything to me. They let me go and I had a good time.

00:45:32

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

RH: Well, there's a couple of remarkable things. One time on Hill 146, it was a probably June or July, and it was about eleven 'o clock in the morning on a Sunday and not a cloud in the sky. And I look up and I saw three B-52s are up in the air and we're looking at across the valley from us is a place called Charlie Ridge, which was notorious for Viet Cong, VC, and patrols were always getting in firefights over there, and the planes are up here. I look back on Charlie Ridge and all of a sudden these two-thousand-pound bombs. go "Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom." Just walking the ridge like that. And the pants from their shock were just waving like that. And I thought it was remarkable. And then I thought—

PM: Your pants?

RH: Yeah, my trousers were just kind of waving from the shock all the way across the valley to our hill. And then I thought about my brother in Thailand, in the Air Force. He was a dog handler, and he worked at the base where the B-52s would fly security around the base, so.

00:46:46

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

RH: I think in the Marine Corps, and my experience there, got me to the point that I knew that I could do pretty much what I wanted to do. Now, I was a lot smarter than my grades reflected on my first year of college. And so, I said, "I'm going to go back to college. I'm going to get a degree." Initially, I was a physical education major, wanted to be a coach in sports and a PE teacher, but I went back to college, and I didn't have a major. And then a friend of mine became a Chicago police officer, and so he invited me to ride along with him. And I said, "I got to do this, this is what I want." So, I majored in law enforcement administration, graduated and became a police officer in my hometown of South Holland, Illinois. I was trying to look for other jobs at the time, and that's the best one I could get at the time. So, I became a police officer.

00:47:56

PM: Did you know any antiwar veterans?

RH: No. I mean, other ones that I would see on TV at the time. But personally, that became it. No.

PM: Were you aware of active-duty military personnel who opposed the war?

RH: Well, I think in Vietnam there were guys that were, when we got there in '60, April '69 [1969], within the first few months, there was talks about Nixon withdrawing troops. I mean, we had more troops in Vietnam in 1969. I think it was like half a million, like five hundred fifty thousand. I was there when they had five hundred fifty thousand troops there. And there was talk of bringing troops back. So, that put a, you know, kind of a time out for people saying, "well, wait a second, I don't want to go on these patrols. And, you know, I might, you know, it might be over in six months." So, that was in the mind of a lot of us, I think. But I wouldn't say antiwar. They were just more. "Let's get out of here. Let's end the war. Let's go home."

PM: Do you remember anyone actually refusing combat?

RH: No.

RH: I'm thinking of somebody that shot themselves in the foot on Hill 146 and got evacuated, and that was suspicious. You know, accidental discharge, foot, you know. Another bad thing happened on Hill 146, too. We had a friendly—we had a dog handler that went outside the perimeter at night, and I saw him. I was sitting at one—it was like, probably ten, eleven 'o clock, really dark. And I had a M79. And he walked past outside the fence line, concertina wire, said something to him, and then fifteen minutes later he got shot by one of our guys on the other side because he thought it was somebody on the line. Yeah, that was that was bad. And it was bad getting the muzzle on his dog. And then, but that made me think about that, yeah.

00:50:09

PM: After Vietnam, where did you go to college?

RH: Western Illinois University where I flunked out and previously and I got my degree in 1973. It's also the place where I met my wife.

PM: What did you expect on campus as a Vietnam veteran?

RH: Well, I was fortunate because Western Illinois had a huge veterans club, and we had a thousand veterans on campus, mostly all Vietnam veterans. And so, prior to me coming back down to register, they had hooked me up with another vet to get me housing, get me registered. And it was great. And so, I just—it was like another, like I was in the Marines again, or the military. Well, not really, but you know what I mean. Everybody had the same mindset. They'd been in the military, been to Vietnam, and it made a whole lot easier for me.

00:51:04

PM: How did you interact with the VA [Veterans Affairs] in the years after the war?

RH: I've had a good experience with the VA. I go to the VA, they have a VA clinic here in Aiken, which—I go every year, because I want to stay in the system, but I have the wherewithal to get my own doctors if I want. And I do have some private doctors that I use as opposed to the VA, because I think, it's more convenient for me, and so. But the VA does a pretty good job from what I've seen. I actually drove the bus for the VA for about three years. That would shuttle patients from either the hospital down in Augusta or the clinic here. And I did that for three years.

PM: Did you participate in any veterans rap groups or Agent Orange studies, or use the GI Bill in the years after the war?

RH: Well, I used the GI Bill for the rest of my Western Illinois University. And then when I was a police officer, I was assigned as a student resource officer in the largest high school in Illinois, four thousand students. It was a pilot program, and I was there for five years. And while I was there, all the deans and counselors, we had eight deans and eight counselors for students. And all of them seemed to be going to college trying to get your master's degree because that elevated their pay. And so, I started thinking there was Chicago State University offered a—the criminal justice program. And so, I went back to get my master's degree at Chicago State at night, on the GI Bill. I had enough left to do that as well. So, for me, it was like a part-time job and getting paid for it.

00:52:43

PM: Who since the war have you talked about Vietnam?

RH: Can you explain that a little bit?

PM: Yeah. So, since the war, who have you talked to about Vietnam?

RH: I talk to anybody who wants to. If they find out I'm in Vietnam, I mean, I don't offer a lot of information they'll say, "what did you do?" And I'll say I was a recon Marine. Say, "What's that?" And sometimes I'll just say, "just Google recon Marine in South Vietnam." You know, that's the best way to find out what I did. I don't want to go into detail.

00:53:14

PM: Have you been to The Wall in DC?

RH: Yes.

PM: What do you think of it?

RH: I think it's a wonderful tribute. And I think it's difficult for to go there and then realize how many men and women were killed in Vietnam. It's, fifty-six thousand or something like that. So, it's moving, yeah.

PM: Do you remember it being controversial?

RH: No, I don't. Was it?

PM: There was some controversy?

RH: Yeah.

PM: Originally when it was built.

RH: Yeah. I wasn't aware of that. I suppose there's controversy anytime you build a memorial or anything about anything.

PM: Have you taken your kids or grandkids To the Wall?

RH: No.

00:54:09

PM: Have you been back to Vietnam?

RH: No.

PM: Would you like to go back?

RH: I thought about it. But I probably won't.

00:54:30

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

RH: The only books that I've read about—I've read some books about Vietnam, but there's one that are force recon and recon related. I enjoy reading those because I can see similarities what they did and what I did, and it just—I can read that kind of thing.

PM: Mr. Hudson, thank you for talking with us and sharing your stories.

RH: It's my pleasure.

PM: Really appreciate it.

RH: Okay. Thank you sir.