

## **Bucha, Paul US Army**

[00:00:13.74] PAUL BUCHA: I was born in the Columbia Hospital for Women in Washington, D.C. on August 1, 1943.

[00:00:20.32] DEVON HARDY And can you tell us a little bit about your family members, your siblings and your parents?

[00:00:23.67] PAUL BUCHA: I have three sisters, one older, two younger. My mother and father are both deceased. They came from Hammond, Indiana, and Calumet City, Illinois area. He was an Army officer. Served over 30 years. He is buried in Arlington with my mother.

[00:00:48.00] DEVON HARDY Did he serve in World War II?

[00:00:49.51] PAUL BUCHA: Served in World War II, yes, he did.

[00:00:52.29] DEVON HARDY What do you consider are your hometown?

[00:00:55.08] PAUL BUCHA: Right now, Connecticut. Ridgefield, Connecticut.

[00:00:59.46] DEVON HARDY Not Washington, D.C.?

[00:01:00.58] PAUL BUCHA: No, ma'am. They got me wrong in the very beginning, why would I go back, right?

[00:01:09.29] PAUL BUCHA: Oh, it's really kind of a funny story. My father used to pick the homes we would live in while he was an Army officer, depending on how good the quarters were. Because during World War II, he had made not a lot of money, but a good deal of money, accidentally, filling out a contract. And much to his surprise, they multiplied the contract by, like, 30. And instead of making \$30,000, he was making a million dollars.

[00:01:41.18] And as he said, he used to walk to the shores of the ocean in the Philippines during World War II and look for his ships coming because he said, he never thought, when he signed the contracts, which the U.S. government asked him to do, that it would be a personal transaction.

[00:01:59.72] In doing so, that meant that wherever we were assigned, we would usually live where the schools were best. And so when we were coming back from Japan, and I had been a swimmer in Indianapolis and a swimmer in Japan, he said-- he got assigned to St. Louis. And so we lived in the town of Ladue, which is famous for its schools, but it's also famous because it's among the richest per capita communities in the country. And into that rich-per-capita community moved an Army officer, which meant we didn't try to keep up with the Joneses, the Smiths, or anybody here.

[00:02:40.91] I was a high school all-American swimmer. And so I decided I would go to University of Indiana or Yale to swim. And both schools offered me scholarships. And I thought,

that's a pretty good deal. And as my dad and I were driving back from New Haven, he said, would you ever consider West Point? I said, well, not really. Although Colonel Renfro, my Boy Scout leader in Japan, was a West Point graduate, and he's a great guy. He said, would you like to see it? I said, why not? We're here. Let's go see it.

[00:03:16.38] So thinking West Point was a point that pointed west, and I was driving, we drove up on Highway 9A for almost two-and-a-half hours, and West Point was supposed to be like 45 miles away from where we were. And I finally had the courage to ask somebody at the gas station, where's West Point? And they laughed and said, well, West Point is on a point facing east. I said, OK. [LAUGHS]

[00:03:45.73] And we got down to West Point. My dad called the swimming coach, who apparently had been corresponding with my father. And the coach came over, and he said, would you like to go to the mess hall with the cadets? I said, oh, I'd love it. And I went there, and I saw all these freshmen, plebes, being mistreated by these upperclassmen. And I thought it was hilarious. Never thinking that if I went, I was going to be one of the plebes.

[00:04:12.07] And I just had a wonderful time. And the coach said, well, where do you think you'll go to school? I said, I think I'm going to be going to Yale. He said, OK. But if you change your mind, let us know. Remember, we start in July. I said, yes, I understand. I got back, and my athletic director said, if you go to West Point for only one day, you will be a better person for that day.

[00:04:38.11] And I thought long and hard about that. I said, that's something that speaks to the more important things that you do in life. And so I called the swimming coach, and I said, I'd like to come, but I don't think I'll stay. He said, well, if you come, we'd like you to stay, but we understand if you won't.

[00:04:58.69] And that was the term, so I entered West Point. In fact, Colonel Renfro was teaching at West Point. My dad dropped me off at his house. It was about two miles to where the academy started. And in the morning, he said to me, take your suitcase and follow that trail in the woods. It ends where you're supposed to be, where all the cadets will be running around and yelling at each other.

[00:05:20.18] So I was sitting in the woods on my suitcase, watching people I actually knew, other sons of Army officers, being yelled at and screamed at. And over my shoulder, came this voice, what are you doing here? And I turned around. It was an upperclassman, a guy named Bobby Clements. His brother was a very famous football player for Red Blaik, and he had been brought in as the new running back two years earlier and had crushed both knees. So he had lost the sport, and technically, was going to be disabled. And therefore, he would receive his degree but not be matriculated into the Army.

[00:06:00.82] And he said, well, my name is Bobby. I said, my name is Bud. And he shook my hand. And I wasn't aware that you weren't supposed to do that. And he says, well, I messed that one up. Now you have someone you can always come to if you have a problem, because between us, we're on a first name basis, which is forbidden at West Point.

[00:06:22.79] And I thought, that's a fortuitous way to start four years. And I found West Point when I was there in the summertime. I just had a ball. And we had eight all-Americans on the same team. So compared to all the records that the academy had, the times we achieved were much better than those. So we knew this was going to be kind of fun from a swimming point of view.

[00:06:47.45] And on December 6 of my freshman year, I remember looking in the mirror, and I thought, oh my God, I never told Yale I wasn't coming. So I ran down to the office, the clerk's office in the company, and I said, I have to call the swimming coach. And we were swimming Yale that afternoon. I said, Coach, I didn't tell Yale I'm not coming. He said, trust me, they know. And I stayed at West Point and had just an extraordinary time.

[00:07:20.89] The stuff that was supposed to be difficult, the physical demands, I don't think they were as daunting to me because as a four-season athlete, because I played water polo, as well, you were always in shape. And they had to dumb it down for people who weren't in shape. And so, that wasn't difficult. I was fascinated by the school. So I did extremely well academically.

[00:07:49.24] And I thought being an Army officer, or a Soldier, which they trained you to-- was really a lot of fun, as well. So these three areas of cadet life-- academics, athletics, and military-- for a person 17, 18, 19, 20 years old, just seemed to be ideal. I wasn't burdened with a girlfriend. I didn't have all the problems that can cause problems for cadets.

[00:08:14.09] I just really enjoyed it and did well enough that I had the opportunity to go to the graduate school of my choice, in the subject of my choice, whenever I chose to go. And the Army would pay for it.

[00:08:32.43] So I decided-- I was competing for a Rhodes scholarship, and they told me it would be three years obligation for every year at Oxford. So it was three at Oxford, plus nine. So I mean 12 years, I was locking myself into. Half my age, in other words. And then the Army told me that if you go to graduate school for two years, it'll be 2 to 1, but they will overlap. So I owed them four for West Point. The first two would count for West Point and for the graduate school.

[00:09:11.56] The next two would satisfy the graduate school. And then I had two more after that to do the rest of the schooling. So it got to the point where I got six years of schooling for four years of service, but at a rank higher than most people had. I was a first lieutenant. So that's how I got into the Army. And while I was at Stanford, I had 91 days of vacation, and most people went and got jobs at banks and insurance companies.

[00:09:41.07] I found out I could do Airborne and Ranger training if I went to the schools when only the enlisted men and non-commissioned officers were going. No officers would be going. But I could get it done in 90 days. So I did that.

[00:09:58.36] DEVON HARDY During your vacation?

[00:09:59.37] PAUL BUCHA: During my vacation. And graduated from Stanford Graduate School of Business in 1967 as a first lieutenant. When I was at West Point, as a freshman, a plebe, I saw black-and-white movie, a Movietone news piece, this is what they were called in those days, depicting Ho Chi Minh as this courageous, valiant patriot trying to expel the mean French royalists.

[00:10:30.63] And then by the senior year, he was this filthy Communist. So I knew there was something political there. No one was sure. But more importantly, when I got to Stanford, I was in the middle of all the international hubbub. And David Harris, who was one of the three most vocal of the student leaders in the country, was the president of the Stanford student body.

[00:10:53.83] So I was there as an Army officer. And there were a few other officers there, too, but we never wore uniforms. They didn't know. And since I was basically the age of the students, no one thought I was an Army officer. And I taught scuba, and surfing, and coached the swimming team, and went to business school. That's what I did. And so, as a result, I knew a lot of the kids really well.

[00:11:18.46] And one day, I saw them-- as I was coming back from my class, getting ready to go over to the pool, I saw a couple of the swimmers in the line. And pretty soon, I realized, ten people in this big line. But the line might have had 400 people in it. And it was an upside down North Vietnamese flag. And then on the other side of the plaza was a Red Cross.

[00:11:41.65] So I saw all the swimmers-- and it was the first line as you came towards class-- And I said, what are you doing in this line? They said, well, why? We're giving blood. And I said, well, that's for the North Vietnamese, Communists. There's the Red Cross. They said, oh, OK. And they're reading their books, eating apples, and they just moved. But the whole line went with them.

[00:11:58.72] And I realized, these kids weren't caught up like the leaders were. They were just going to school. And when things sounded kind of cool to do, like give blood, they would do it. But when I told them to move, the whole line moved, and no one objected. There wasn't anybody saying, no, no, we got to be in this line.

[00:12:19.25] So I got exposed to this violence of the student leadership in American universities. People who did know that I was an Army officer, not one ever talked to me negatively about what we were doing in Vietnam. It was more, you're too young to go there. Because they knew the one story that they could relate with, which were the kids coming home in body bags. So it was less the politics of the moment in the States than it was the sadness that their friends' families had to suffer when one of theirs, or maybe a neighbor's child, or a relative's child, came home as a casualty of the war.

[00:13:06.65] And so I was exempt from the violence because that was student body only. But I started receiving feelers, if you will, from my brain to my heart, saying, this isn't the safest thing you're going to be doing in your life. And so I started thinking about that aspect. What would I have been doing if I had gone to Yale?

[00:13:32.90] Then a couple of my men, my classmates from West Point came by. And they would stay with us before they would go up to Travis Air Force Base to catch the planes to Vietnam. And I really got caught up in the concept that if I went, whoever was assigned to be in my unit, whether it's a platoon or company, because I really cared, that perhaps they would have a greater probability of surviving.

[00:14:03.90] It wasn't the thrill of war or the conquering in it. It was, would it be possible to take 30 or 150 young men to Vietnam and bring them home? And that became the challenging thought.

[00:14:19.73] DEVON HARDY So you were 23, 24 when you graduated--

[00:14:22.00] PAUL BUCHA: 23.

[00:14:22.25] DEVON HARDY --from Stanford?

[00:14:23.22] PAUL BUCHA: Yeah.

[00:14:26.37] DEVON HARDY What did you do before you went to Vietnam after Stanford?

[00:14:29.88] PAUL BUCHA: I got assigned to the 101st. I got assigned there, had to report in August. And they had already alerted us around Thanksgiving that we would be transporting ourselves to Vietnam. So I had to become a jumpmaster. First month, I was assigned by the brigade commander to be a company commander with only one person in the company-- me.

[00:14:59.86] And what it was, I reported in, and I'd gone and bought some fatigues, and I'd spray starched them. And I spit shined my low quarter shoes. Sewed my rank on, unfortunately on the wrong collar. I went by his office at five in the morning, like I was told. I knocked on the door. I said, Colonel Mowery, sir, this is Lieutenant Bucha. He said, oh God. Go stand by that bush. I'm busy.

[00:15:28.32] And the bush was right at the base of the stairs of this building where everybody entering the building would go by. And as people would walk by, I said, no one has low quarter shoes. They all have jump boots. Nobody has brand new fatigues. They're all really professionally starched. And I said, oh, damn, they have the rank on the opposite collar I have mine on-- [CHUCKLES]

[00:15:57.12] And everybody would look at me and salute if they were enlisted and laugh. If they were senior to me, I'd salute them, and they'd look, like a double take, and then shake their heads and walk by me. And he kept me out there until six in the evening. And then he yelled, Bucha, get in here.

[00:16:21.34] I said, Lieutenant Bucha. He says, oh, hell, I know who you are. I just can't figure out what you are. And he says to me, I see you have a graduate degree. I said, yes. He said, I bet you're really proud of that. I said, yes, I am, sir. He said, well, you're going to meet a guy that's

got three of them in this brigade, and he won't be impressed. I said, sir, I'm sure that I can impress him if I get to meet him. He says, you just did, and I'm not impressed. [CHUCKLES]

[00:16:47.27] And I said, oops. And he said, you don't know a damn thing about the Army. Sure, you're a Ranger, you're this and that, but you don't know anything. You've never been in the Army. Your father was in the Army, but you weren't. So you're going to go be a company commander, but you're going to start a company. It's going to be called Delta, 3rd of the 187th. Which eventually became a storied unit in the Vietnam War.

[00:17:18.34] What it was was the entire Army had decided to add one extra rifle company to every battalion. Set up a headquarters company and three rifle companies. Every battalion in the Army would have a headquarters and four. And the last division in the entire Army to expand, after everybody else gobbled up the good guys, was the 101st. The last brigade in the 101st to do it was the 3d Brigade. The last battalion to do it was the 3d Battalion.

[00:17:51.71] And Delta Company, 3d of the 187th was the last expansion company in the entire United States Army. And as a result, my first eight guys had flunked basic training. And I met them. They were my guys. And I asked one of them, I said, what do you do? And he said, I make cars go fast. I said, no, in the Army, what do you do? He said, I make cars go fast.

[00:18:21.34] I said, why do you make cars go fast? He said, I'm from Ducktown, Tennessee, that's what I do. I said, huh, pretty interesting. But I'm also thinking in those days, basic infantry training, if you walked or chewed gum, you were OK. You didn't have to do both. Just one of them. And these guys hadn't passed that. And there were a thousand reasons later on I knew, but I didn't know them, and I was incorrectly operating based on the superficial.

[00:18:53.90] This is our first eight guys. But I had been marching alone. I would have a guidon, and I would say, eyes left. And I'd move left, and I'd say, eyes forward march. And I would spin around, all present and accounted for. And I would be working as the clerk in the company. And I was the supply sergeant. I did everything, everybody--

[00:19:13.30] And when they went out in the field, I did it alone. I had to cook for myself. I had to do all this. Everybody else had-- and I really enjoyed it. I was having so much fun. And everybody was mocking me, but I didn't care. And my battalion commander, who was the only other West Point graduate, really never took an interest in helping or teaching. He was very standoffish on it.

[00:19:43.61] And I went to see the colonel after the first two weeks, the guy that had sent me to do this, and he said, how are you doing? I said, I'm doing fine. He said, by the way, I thought I should tell you something. This is a brigade of "OTWOPs." I said, sir? OTWOP? He said, yeah, OTWOPs.

[00:20:06.48] And he goes, you don't know what an OTWOP is? I said, no, sir, I have no idea. It's Other than West Point. I said, oh. He said, we've had some West Point people in here, and we've gotten rid of them. And I'm thinking, this is not going well now. And he said, I've got to hand it to you. I didn't think you'd take it walking in parades alone and all this. And I said, well,

sir, you're right. I learned a lot. I know how to do all the company clerk duties. I know how to do them all.

[00:20:37.43] I said, and I inspect a very clean building. There's no one else there but me. And he just was really, really supportive. And then he started filling up the unit. And I started looking at the backgrounds of the people being assigned, and they all had stockade time, either through the 82d or the 101st. And some for not inconsequential crimes, like assault and battery, grand felony theft, and things like that.

[00:21:08.11] And apparently what the military had done is gone to the stockades, and said, look, we've got a company we've got to fill up. If you're willing to go, we'll give you a break on what you've done. Well, everybody accepted. And when they got there and found out it was me, who had never been to Vietnam, many of them said, I'd like to go back to the stockade.

[00:21:27.45] And I heard this. And pretty soon, I got it up to about 50 people. And I knew I needed a first sergeant quickly. I went and got-- he was in the stockade for trying to beat up the division's sergeant major. And I brought him in. He said sir, we'll be fine. We'll be fine. And he says, I like these kind of guys. And I really loved him from the moment I met him. He was a Native American. And just a wonderful guy to me.

[00:22:00.18] Now the troops hated him at first because he was very, very tough. But he used to tease me. He says, good thing is when we go to the field, I don't have-- he didn't have to go. He said, you have to go with these guys and good luck. I have to stay here and work.

[00:22:17.93] So one weekend, the colonel called me, the battalion commander. He says, you're the only Ranger captain in the battalion. So I'd like you to teach survival techniques, including survival food preparation, and all that, over the weekend in the field. And I'm going to send only the NCOs and enlisted men. No other officers will be there. I said, fine, that's good.

[00:22:45.48] And he said, the reason I'm picking you is that Dickie Quick, your sergeant, is also a Ranger. Got some rough spots in his resume, but he's a Ranger. I said, good. So I said, Dickie, I want you to get me some chickens. We're going to kill the chickens and cook them. It's very simple. He says, got it, sir. He said, around here, we got mangy chickens around Fort Campbell.

[00:23:08.95] I said, that doesn't matter. We're not going to eat them. They're going to eat them. He said, OK, sir, as long as that's the word, we got it. When I get there, Dickie says, they said, now the chickens are there, sir. I'm going to bring the men in over here. I'm just asking you. Don't lose them. Get their attention early. Because in most cases, I hear you referred to as a joke. And you've got to be careful that you don't lose them.

[00:23:39.96] And I said, thanks. That means a lot. And if you've got any advice, don't hesitate to give it. He said, my only advice is, don't lose their attention. Captivate them. Get them right in the beginning. So they're all sitting there, and I start talking like I'm a Ranger. I have my white T-shirt on. I rolled it up. And no one's listening.

[00:24:02.71] And they're turned around on the ground talking to each other, not facing me, but facing in the other direction. And Dickie Quick is going, please, do something. So I said, hey, hey, hey, hey. How does a leg kill a chicken? Because you got to kill the damn chicken before you can eat it. People look over their shoulder, and I said, how's the leg kill a chicken? And a leg is a non-paratrooper.

[00:24:30.63] And one guy says, he cuts the head off. I said, you got it, Soldier. And I pulled my bayonet, and I whacked the head off a chicken. And I threw it into the crowd. And it's running around. And I did 12 of them. And so I have all these little chickens running around, squirting blood everywhere, and the guys are jumping up. My god, hey, watch it.

[00:24:50.52] And I'd say, how does a paratrooper kill a chicken? Well, he wrings the head off. I said, you got it. And I grabbed the chicken by the head, and I snapped it, and the body flies off. And the wings are flapping. And I did 12 of those. By now, I've got two thirds of the people paying attention because they don't want to get blood all over them.

[00:25:13.54] I said, how does an Airborne Ranger kill a chicken? And this fat kid-- it's always a fat guy that does it. He says, he bites the head off. I said, that's right, Soldier. Come on up here. He says, no way. I said, come on, some Soldier here. Come up here, and do what we Airborne Rangers do. Right, Dickie? And Dickie-- not me, sir.

[00:25:34.96] I said, come on. Who's going to bite the chicken's head off? I said, hell, give me a chicken. And I bit the heads off 12 chickens. When it's over, on Monday, we have officers call. As I walk in the officer's club building, Colonel Mowery, the brigade commander, not the battalion commander, he says, you, come here. He says, did you bite the head off a chicken? I said, well, sir, not a chicken. Twelve.

[00:26:07.46] He said, that's the most disgusting thing I've ever heard. I said, well, it's really not that bad if-- he says, put your hands down, stop it. He said, I've got people calling this place. Every guy in this battalion wants to be in your company. Somehow, they think you're the meanest, baddest guy that's ever walked the planet. So stop being stupid.

[00:26:27.26] I said, sir, I had to get their attention. He says, figure out a different way to do it next time. And I walked back cocky as hell. And the officers were all looking at me. I'm in my little spot where no one wants to sit with me. And I said, yes. [LAUGHS] That was my indoctrination into the 101st.

[00:26:50.16] PAUL BUCHA: We left right before Thanksgiving in 1967. I had spent the three months that I had the company, after my survival training class, I took them into the field every day. We never came in. And I had them practice all of the things we knew were appropriate in combat.

[00:27:21.07] And we did it on a drop zone where I could stand in the middle and see the men maneuvering. And when they would get to a road, I would see if they would really put flank security out, and then cross the road one or two at a time. And if they didn't, we'd go for a one-mile run.



[00:27:39.07] And it was really serious training for what I thought was going to be Vietnam. Because I had not been there, but some of my men had been there. And they would tell me this, we've got to learn this, we've got to perfect this. And my first sergeant said to me, the most important thing is, I hope to hell you can read a map.

[00:28:00.40] He said, because, sir, if you make a mistake on that, especially if it's naval air fire, you could kill us all. He said, so if you do anything, please work on that. And he didn't know if I could or couldn't, but I happened to be really good at that. At West Point, I was the number one man in my class in Earth, space, and graphic sciences, which was mapmaking and aerial photos. So I was good at that. But he brought it home that it's no longer a textbook exercise. It's life and death.

[00:28:37.08] So we headed off to Vietnam together. And before we actually touched down in Alaska, where they were refueling us, I had all my guys get off their planes and come in. I said, I just want to let you know next stop is going to be Bien Hoa in Vietnam, which was a huge Air Force base, and the whole 101st was flying there.

[00:29:04.66] And I said, and from this moment on, I ask only one thing-- that you trust me. If I ask you to do something, understand, I am more than willing to do it myself. But I'm asking you because I think you might be better at it. And if you will trust me, I will bring you home. And that was the bond.

[00:29:32.24] And I apologize now, we're getting into this. I have PTS and this happens. But in keeping with our reputation, we landed and got out of our plane, took our stuff over to where we were assigned. And this one tent was going to be for the officers. And there was this huge guy sitting on my bunk, drinking. And the side flaps of the tent were up, so the four foot of sandbags all around.

[00:30:08.54] And I hear the first sergeant say, all right, everybody fall in, and they're getting ready to go. And they're going to line up ready. And then I come out, and take the salute, and tell them what's going to do. And this guy won't move. I said, you got to move. You're in my bed, son. And he says, I'm not moving anywhere. And he got up, and he pushed me. And I said, stop it. And I pushed him. And he started going backwards because he'd been drinking. But he was huge.

[00:30:32.25] And so I grabbed him, trying to hold him up. And instead, he went over the sandbags with me on top of him. So it looked like we were having a fight. And my first sergeant was ecstatic that finally, the company commander does what we do. And he said, Delta, attention. And they were standing at attention while this guy and I are flailing on the ground.

[00:30:53.99] And finally, the guy rolls over. I said, get your stuff and get the hell out of here. And he goes. And I'm talking to my men, and a lieutenant colonel comes and arrests me.

[LAUGHS] The kid went back and protested that this company commander had beaten him up. And I knew the guy arresting me from West Point. He said, you're always in trouble. You're always in trouble.

[00:31:15.03] I said, you know what, I might be in trouble with you, but not my men. Trust me, this is the best thing that ever happened. And it was.

[00:31:21.85] DEVON HARDY How long had you been in Vietnam?

[00:31:24.24] PAUL BUCHA: Two hours? [LAUGHS] And then we were sent off. And they said, what are you going to do? I said, well, we have three days of downtime, moving in time. I built myself a shower with hot and cold water by having one of the 50-gallon drums painted black and one painted white. So one reflected the heat, and the other absorbed the heat, and I had little things I could--

[00:31:51.22] And I was quite proud-- I never used it, but I was quite proud of it. And we built the church for the chaplain. And my men told me that was something they liked to hedge their bets. Meaning they wanted to do something good for God. And it was a Catholic priest. None of us were Catholic, or maybe two or three of them were Latinos, and they were Catholic. But most of them were Protestant.

[00:32:16.50] And I found out how creative they were. I needed a tent for the church. And one of the men said, I'm good at this. Can I take one of the helicopters that we got? I said, yeah. Go down there, and tell them you need it. You're going to go get supplies. Yeah, I'm going to fly to Da Nang for supplies. He flies back with a rope pulling a huge mess tent from the Marines. He had pulled it right off the ground.

[00:32:40.19] I mean, it was really quite funny. And the chaplain says, it says Marine Corps, USMC. I said, damndest things show up on the jungle. I think it's just-- you can't. And he said, well, shall we say thank you to God for the gifts that we don't anticipate but do receive?

[00:32:57.68] Yes, my men would like to be here. And he did. He thanked them. It was just a wonderful thing for me to see. They weren't doing something for themselves. So these tough, nasty guys were doing something for someone else the first hour in a combat zone. And we lived that life of a special unit. Westmoreland was my superintendent at West Point for two years, so I knew him. The 187th was his legendary regiment from the Korean War.

[00:33:31.33] So here was a young company commander that he knew, commanding a unit in his old unit. And so whenever things got really bad, we didn't like it because it meant someone would say, hey, go get Delta Company. They would fly us in, reinforce us so that we were more than a company. And we got these special combat assignments, which was wonderful. I mean, it was great experience. We were alone. We didn't report to anybody, except maybe some general we were assigned to.

[00:33:58.81] And the men just-- in that kind of environment, were just almost perfect in their professionalism. As a result, we didn't have any casualties. And everybody else had suffered 20 percent, 30 percent casualties. So there was something kind of quirky and kinky about this company that was not getting hurt at the rate everybody else was, was not taking casualties. But, nonetheless, was taking the more aggressive roles.

[00:34:32.70] I believe we were safe because we were aggressive. So they used to have-- they had a thing in Vietnam called the night cordon. And it was a tactic that you would try to circle around a unit in the late hours, and then you'd hold them there during the night, and bring in all the artillery first thing in the morning.

[00:34:50.85] I didn't do that. I wouldn't let my men do that because that reminded me of the kids game where they all hold hands, and they put two in the middle, and they try to break out. If you turn the lights out, the two in the middle always get out because no one knows what's coming. And two people hit one and they're out. So I said, I don't do that. We're not going to do that. So they would send us off on our own.

[00:35:12.85] And the other thing, then they came up these night defensive perimeters, which just the opposite. You don't go around them. We'll let them come around us. And we'll sit there. And as they try to attack, we'll kill them. I didn't think that sounded very smart either. I said. Everybody knows where you are. I mean, no, thank you.

[00:35:30.49] We moved at night. And that was what the men had learned at Fort Campbell. Because that's what I learned at Ranger school. You move at night. You move quickly, you move silently, you move lightly. And you keep your focus on your objective, not some distraction. And so, if you're supposed to go to point X and you see, oh, there's something at point X. Don't go there. Call them up and say, go to point X yourself, not me. That was the way we conducted our affairs.

[00:36:01.19] And it got to the point where we got some very high responsible assignments, one of which was to-- after the Tet Offensive had begun-- was to come to Saigon. We were going to be the third company that was given the responsibility to protect the headquarters of Westmoreland. And at the same time, get the embassy back from the NVA, VC people. That didn't take any trouble.

[00:36:32.00] We just drove over there, and it was a couple of armored vehicles, and whoever was around left, and the embassy went back, and we went back in. And my men said-- one of the guys was a platoon sergeant, he said, sir, I have a question. They don't have any airplanes. I said, what? He said the bad guys don't have airplanes.

[00:36:52.51] I see. I said, this whole building is surrounded by anti-aircraft shelters. Doesn't make any sense. I said, what would you rather do? He said, tear them down and make them fighting bunkers, DePuy fighting bunkers. We'll lock in our lines of fire. We'll do the coverage. We'll block it. We'll make this a combat place. I said, OK. Go do that.

[00:37:15.27] Then I asked the first sergeant, I said, what do you think is the greatest risk? He said, honestly, one of these colonels or brigadier generals is going to shoot somebody. That's what when he says, they're all carrying pistols. And I hadn't noticed it, but they were. Because after Tet, where they played tennis and were now risky, people-- they all had weapons.

[00:37:34.15] I said, what do you want to do? He says, I want to take them away. I want to check them at the door to the saloon, if you will. And in the morning when they come, I'm going to tell

them to put their weapons here. We'll register them. And when they get ready to leave, they can take it with them. They don't need it here. That's our job.

[00:37:52.08] I talked to my boss, who was a three-star general, and he said, ooh. Who's going to do that? I said, I don't know. He said, let me check with the boss, his boss, which was Westmoreland. And Westmoreland said, I agree. He said, I'll be the first one. And he did. And they locked their guns at the gate.

[00:38:10.14] And the guy doing it was an E5. He'd been an E5 a long time. He said, you don't know how long I've waited to do this. To say, general, sir, put your hands on the sandbags and spread them. [LAUGHS] And that's what they did. And the casualties, accidental firings, went down to nothing. And we weren't going to be there long anyway, but everybody was quite happy with what we did.

[00:38:35.85] We were never hanging around. We didn't fire our weapons, ever, because no one fired at us. And therefore, they felt safer. But they didn't like me because one general said that I had disrupted the appearance of peace that was so essential to their relationship with the press. That the press had to see that this was peaceful. That we had this old battle, which we weren't even privy to, of what was the story being put forth from the forces in Vietnam, and what was the story the press saw.

[00:39:15.68] And it didn't mean that they were in opposition to each other, but they were different. And Westmoreland was right. It was, essentially, generally, peace. The military forces won every battle they had. Things were accomplished that otherwise would have been impossible. But at times, there were really severe engagements through the country. And those were important.

[00:39:44.23] And for us, we escorted everybody home at night. They went to their homes. No one complained. We picked them up in the morning. We didn't let anybody mess around. My men, they didn't fire one around the whole time they were there, even though they were shot at. And we got-- those that weren't out put on patrol, got to watch movies and eat ice cream, because that was available. And Westmoreland would come down and cheer us on each morning.

[00:40:14.28] And we really did do a good job at something no one else wanted to do, because it looked terrible. I didn't want to do it. And it earned the reputation, though, for the men. Because no one would have ever assumed this group of guys could go in. They would be all over the beer, and-- They didn't. They were strict, very high professionals.

[00:40:43.67] PAUL BUCHA: Then they gave us-- after Tet I got a call saying, this is Operation BOX SPRINGS, I think is what it was called, which was for the military units in and around Saigon to attack with a lead element whose mission was to find, locate, and engage the withdrawing enemy. That unit was us. The proverbial fox terrier, if you will. Or poodle. And we were chasing the five mastiff bandwagon.

[00:41:19.02] And I kept thinking, God, if we catch them, what do we do then? And we were inserted in on the 16th. Immediately got engaged. And then the night of the 18th, just at dusk, a resupply. And as we were moving into the jungle, and the idea was for us to move at night.

[00:41:53.47] I had a long-range platoon assigned to me and two other units. And the LRRP said to me, request permission to fire. And I said, for what? He said, see women, and children, and men carrying water and rice. And he said, I don't think this is the unit, but it could be a group supplying the unit. So I'm going to just make sure. He said three rounds, recon by fire, that's all. It's to be in the air.

[00:42:30.64] He fired the first round, and it was like Niagara Falls came firing back at us from all around. I said, oh my God. And I reinforced the front unit that was pinned down by-- the citation says a bunker, but-- there was a bunker there, but that's not-- there was a guy in a tree. They called it the Y of a tree, and he was shooting down on the men. And then people shooting this way so that the men couldn't rise up to shoot him.

[00:42:56.91] And my medic said, sir, this is now my time. And he left. And he'd never said that to me. He always said, got to go, see you in a little bit. Got to go, be back in ten. Got to go-- always would be back. He said, this is my time. And he lost his life giving tracheotomies to four LRRP people in front of this bunker.

[00:43:26.99] And another sergeant I called over. I said, Roy, take your machine gun and take the flank over there. There's something going on. And he too, would always say, got it, sir. What are we doing tonight? What are we doing? Just kind of joking around. He said, got it, sir, and saluted, and went. And he lost his life.

[00:43:50.81] And then I said, I got to go find out what's going on. So I went up forward with my RTO. I said, you stay here. I'm going to go in there, and this Y of the tree everybody telling me. I saw it, and the guy, and I just threw every hand grenade I could get to make sure there's no more tree. Fired my weapon, and the men had withdrawn like they were supposed to. And then I found out they were all back where I wanted them to be.

[00:44:11.66] So I told my RTO, OK, I'm done up here and let's go. We've covered this. And then I heard this massive explosion from my back right rear where the platoon had started carrying the wounded back to be medevacked. And I got a call from the lieutenant. He said, I'm hit. I think we've lost three or four more. I don't know where we can go without risking everybody.

[00:44:45.53] And I said, I'll be back to you, and I looked at the map, saw where they were, and I called him back. And his radio telephone operator, RTO, answered, Calvin Heath. I said, Calvin, turn off your radio and tell everybody to feign death. I'll see you in the morning. Never having any idea how he was going to do that.

[00:45:14.58] But I was scared that they would get attacked again. And it was bad because it was a huge Claymore that they had run into in the ambush. And everything kept flying up, and we

were beyond artillery. So I had to use air power only. And it wasn't going well. And I brought everybody into this little clearing.

[00:45:38.50] And then there were 89 of us. Almost half the unit was somewhere else, on R&R and the rest-- and some-- I had sent about 20 out from heat prostration about an hour before this started. And I kept checking to what was going on. And I said, if somehow they know there's only 69 of us here, and you take 10 away from that, I think, everybody says is wounded or killed, it's 59 people. That's not a lot of people.

[00:46:12.82] And I said-- I told my-- not my first sergeant, because he wasn't there. I called in the platoon sergeant, and I said, I want everybody to move out and put Claymores out ten feet from where you are. And then I'm going to run around and see how big the perimeter is. And I may ask you to do it twice. And maybe some will go twice. Some will go one. But gather up your Claymores. And I want Claymores solidly around us.

[00:46:39.25] And I said, and get all of your M79s, which is the grenade launchers, all the M79 ammunition, I want in the center by me. And I said, now, I've got to figure out where those men are. And I don't want anyone to move. Once you get everybody out, signal me that you've got them out.

[00:47:06.29] And then I'm going to start yelling numbers every 15 to 20 seconds. I want you to pick a person to go on the 15, one to go on the 20. So I will say 1, 2, or 3. So three men, different men in each squad, will throw hand grenades at different times. And I hope to hell it works like a minefield. And one of the men came back. He said, sir, I can see them. They aren't ten feet away.

[00:47:37.63] I said, OK. Throw three hand grenades, right now. Go back. Just count it and throw them. And I said-- and he said, go on. We didn't know how many were there. Then I kept getting-- contact my people in the air. Here's what we know. Here's what we can do. The brigade commander said, I'm going to send A Company to reinforce you. I said, it's too dangerous. We've got to do this alone.

[00:48:08.46] And he said, you really think that? I said, I know that because I can hear them talking. I know where they are. The weapons they're firing, they're not from a small unit. They're huge weapons and are engaging the damn fighter aircraft that are coming over. And I said, this is bizarre. I said, I think I've got it. But I said, just get me some air support. And he did.

[00:48:32.82] And at one time in the night, a lieutenant colonel, whom I don't know, got on the net, my net, started talking to me. And I hear, this is Blue Eagle, get off the net, which is the brigade commander. And then I hear, Delta-- me-- he says, this is your supe, meaning Westmoreland, I'll get everybody out of here. And all these planes left.

[00:49:02.72] And what it was were people wanting to be there, so they could say they were there. And that left me with Westmoreland, the brigade commander, and the battalion commander. No one else other than FACs, forward air controllers. And I say, here's my ideas. And Westmoreland said, send them in Smokey, which was this big Gatling gun thing. And that guy comes out, he says, OK, Captain, put out your bean bag lights.

[00:49:34.81] I said, sir, we're down here trying to figure out how we're going to ever see another sunshine. We don't carry damn bean bag lights. What are you talking about? He said, OK, I'll get you some. Hour later, boom, comes a thing in, and it's bean bag lights some Air Force supply group brought in.

[00:49:51.13] He said, now you got them. Put them out. I said, how far? He said, five feet beyond your Claymores. So I told everyone. They put them out. And he said, when I tell you the signal, you set this up. I want them turned on for about 10 seconds, and then off. We turned them on and just go, whoosh. And it shot out most of them, these Gatling guns.

[00:50:12.48] I said, Oh. Me-- it scared the living hell out of me because it was just so close. He said, I got you. Go on and do your business. And he said, I'll be doing that about every 30 seconds. And I just said, this is the greatest gift for God. Four hours later, he said, I got to go. I'm out of ammunition. So he had to leave. The other one was engaged. Then I had Air Force forward air traffic controllers-- air controllers. And I had Army helicopter guys.

[00:50:46.17] The helicopter guys knew where they were and everything. And they were getting shot at. So they had engaged the enemy. But the Air Force guys said, we got to do something to tip the scale. In about six hours into this, I get this guy on my radio who says, hey, mate. I said, who the hell are you? He said, well, I'm Magpie 31.

[00:51:11.17] I said, oh. He said, I understand you got yourself in a pickle. I said, Magpie 31, why are you calling me? He said, oh, oh, oh. One of the FACs said you could use some heavyweight machinery. I said, like what? He said, I think I have two 700-pound bombs I was supposed to be taking to a free fire zone to get rid of them. It was a special bombing mission. I've been asked to divert them to you.

[00:51:40.43] I said, I have no idea what a 700-pound bomb can do. He says a lot. I said, can you see where we are? He says, I know where you are. I said, you can't drop that near us. He said, no. I said, could you do me a favor and lower two hills? Because we're being shot at from these hilltops. We have six or seven hills, just pick two.

[00:52:05.57] He said, OK, mate, keep your head down. And I looked at my men, and to a person they knew we were going to die. And I was thinking, what a terrible place to die. It doesn't even have a name. How can my mom compete with her friends? My husband died in Normandy. My husband died in the Belleau Woods. My grandfather died here. And in Vietnam, Khe Sanh. And Panmunjom, and Plei-- I'm coordinates XYZ. That's it. No name.

[00:52:41.57] And this jet comes by. It's just treetop level and takes off towards the heavens. All we can see is the afterburners and the hill, a good distance away, goes boom. And we bounced. And I looked at my men, and they all had smiles. And he says, hey, mate, how was that? I said, wonderful.

[00:53:06.71] And he said, got one more, then you're on your own. He says, keep your head down, and did it again. Another hill over here. And I don't know what it did, but for my men, and for me, it was that there was hope. No matter how hard you're trying, you just sometimes know,

this isn't going well. And this Australian guy, and the FAC that found him, dropped those two bombs. And whether it was 500 or-- I don't remember anything that clearly, but they were huge bombs. I thought they were 700. One guy said, we don't carry 700.

[00:53:46.50] And I said, well, whatever they were, they were big. And he laughed. Then my battalion commander comes on the net and said, you've got a lot of fighting to do. So I'm going back because I'm sleepy. I said, what? He said, you're on your own. I've got to get back and get some rest. And he flies off.

[00:54:15.49] He wasn't in the fight. He was off a little bit. But you knew where he was. And he periodically would say, all right, can I get you something? The brigade commander came on my net, not the larger net. He said, let him go. I'll be here. And he said, what are your most immediate needs? I said, I got to get five or six of these severely wounded out.

[00:54:41.84] He said, well, do you have a landing area? I said, no. It's about 100 feet by 20 feet. He said, well, that might work. And he had the best pilots. I see him bring in his Huey, and they're chopping trees away. He said, we're not going to hit anything big. If we hit it, we'll have to leave.

[00:55:09.14] And he got down about a foot and a half off the ground. And we threw on three severely wounded, and then some people who were-- just had to get out. And he goes off. And he said, OK, other medevacs can come in. I said, I need to send three people out in each one. And he said, well, medevacs can take more than that. And I said, I'd prefer the small helicopters, and some of these guys would be able to sit. We brought in two more helicopters.

[00:55:39.67] The way we did that, I stood on top of the guys, waving my flashlights and bringing them in. And when that happened, we thought, how cool is this? One of the guys jumps off the plane. I said, who are you? He said, I'm the padre. I said, oh, Colonel Schultheis. He said, yeah. You built my church.

[00:56:07.95] I said, yeah, the guys did, didn't they? He said, what can I do for you? I said, well, what were you sent here for? He said, last rites, I think. And I said, well, we're not ready for them. So get a gun, and there are plenty of them around here, and get on the line, and make sure you tell people you're on their left and on their right, so they know who you are.

[00:56:26.22] And that, just like the bombs, brought a smile to everyone's face. Like God had intervened. And we just kept going until morning. And eventually, helicopters took all the killed out. We found in that first group that was cut off, three were killed, but the others were alive.

[00:56:53.11] And so as a result from them, we knew everything that was going on in the enemy lines. And two of the men said, look, you're going to see body counts that aren't going to reflect reality. They were hauling bodies out of here all night long. And I said, really? And he said, yeah, from over here, what were you doing?

[00:57:09.80] And I said, well, that's where we were dumping a lot of aircraft and stuff. And he says, well, they hauled a lot out of there. Next morning, we found NVA uniforms. We found



black regular force. It turns out it was a NVA battalion, 300 people or so. And they called it a regiment. I have no idea, but it was called the Dong Nai Regiment, which is a regular VC unit. They had come together and were withdrawing up to the mountains. And we had been the proverbial Jack Russell that catches the bus.

[00:57:44.04] The men just were extraordinary. They were extraordinary. And in the morning, they were tired. And that colonel came back, the battalion commander. He said, OK, Delta, here's what I want you to do. I said, sir, with all due respect, I've got a flight coming in. We're going home. We've done our share.

[00:58:10.22] He said, well, here's what I want you to do. I said, no, sir. Hot choppers landed, wzzt! I never saw the man again in my life. The brigade commander moved him. But the men, even though that was our first casualties, the men took the attitude, which I don't agree with, but they took the attitude, it's amazing we all lived. I took the attitude, but I broke my promise to ten men.

[00:58:46.21] And with that, we could live. And to this day, if they try to say, oh, if he hadn't done this, we'd have been dead. No, they're not allowed to do that. And I'm not allowed to say, oh, they were these mean, scruffy warriors. They want to be known for a little bit of cockiness and all that. And that's the way we talk.

[00:59:09.53] But that unit, which, for all practical purposes, was the loser of all units in the Army because no one wanted these guys, and they had me, went on to become one of the most highly decorated companies in the Vietnam War. As I put it, these losers proved to be winners of winners. And that's the story that I tell.

[00:59:43.93] The medal, the men wrote that up. And I recommended my medic for the Medal of Honor. We had two other guys get the DSCs. My medic-- they didn't accept it for the medal. They gave him the DSC as well. And he was killed. Roy Estrada got the Silver Star. Of the 69 guys, everybody was Bronze Star with V or higher. Almost all had Purple Hearts because everybody was beaten up somewhat.

[01:00:30.02] To this day, we live with this private bond. And they know that I can't talk about it without knowing where my failure was. But I can't live with it without accepting the failure. And as a result, they don't talk about it. They can tell their families whatever they want, but among us we don't.

[01:00:57.37] And the lesson that I've learned is, we have to be very careful allowing other people to judge people before we meet them. Among these criminals, as they were known, or that their official title that the Chicago Sun-Times assigned them were the "clerks and the jerks," and they were so proud of that.

[01:01:32.12] They went on to prove that no matter what anybody else said, they were beyond better than everybody else's estimate. And that in the face of extreme stress, it's unbelievable what a human being can do. And so I tell people, don't ever let someone tell you about someone you're about to meet. Tell them, no, thank you. I'll talk to you later about it.

[01:02:09.12] Meet the person head up, and understand, within that person resides the potential, if circumstances so conspire, that they can literally challenge destiny and change the world. These kids did it. Calvin Heath, who I told to turn the radio off, lay across his lieutenant all night long to protect him.

[01:02:38.65] The NVA sat on him and ate breakfast. So he couldn't breathe in any way that's normal. They didn't detect him being alive. One of the NVA walked away. The other one stood up. And Calvin had his knife out, killed him. And he called us. He said, we're all right. And there he was with his lieutenant.

[01:03:07.39] And his lieutenant, Jeff Wishik, got the Distinguished Service Cross because he had done everything that was beyond the call of anybody who had the right to ask him. And his little RTO was just like velcro with him all night long. And Calvin was medevacked, as a miracle of military medicine, I guess ended up at Fort Carson.

[01:03:35.79] No one told me where he was. And my men didn't receive their awards because the general was too busy to go to the hospital the next day. And they were all medevacked out. Those that were medevacked didn't get their medals. So Calvin calls me 30 years later. And he said, sir, I need some help. I said, how much you need? He said, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. He said, I need some psychological help. I'm having a problem with that G word who sat on me.

[01:04:08.88] I said go to the VA, and they have this wonderful program. He said, sir, I can't go. I don't have VA benefits. Really? I said, you have a Silver Star, a Purple Heart. You've got benefits. He says, no, I don't have them, sir. And he told me the story that because his wounds were in his back, the lieutenant-- who commanded this platoon to which he was assigned while he was in the hospital-- spread the word that he was a coward, and that he had been wounded running away from the battlefield.

[01:04:45.27] The lieutenant wrote the family that Calvin was in his charge, and don't worry, I will make sure he's treated as he should be because he's not one of us, this kind of thing. And Calvin had had enough of it. And he just said, to hell with it, and left. He was a Nipmuc Indian from Connecticut.

[01:05:02.62] And he just then went AWOL. And then the Army found him. And said, if you go to Fort Benjamin Harrison and sign some papers, they'll let you go. But he signed a paper, he got a dishonorable discharge, and gave back all his VA benefits. And he had been living at home, trying to make a buck here and there. His sister and brother were taking care of him. And he called me, and I said, well, I'm going to fix it.

[01:05:29.84] He eventually got his Silver Star. He got his Purple Heart. He got an honorable discharge. And he got \$25,000 in back disability pay. And he called me. My daughter and I went to see him get his Silver Star. And the congressman didn't know how to pronounce his name. Heath, how hard is that one? So I said, Mr.-- I'll do this. You just do the pinning on.

[01:06:05.39] And so I just told everybody what he had done. And the tribe was standing there, the elders. And you could see in their faces, they're saying, oh my God. And the congressman

pinned it on. Calvin said, thank you very much, and took it off. And I said, oh, Jesus, he's going to throw it away.

[01:06:27.51] And he said, everybody can leave. Please. Just leave. Thank you very much. And then he came over and asked me to pin it on. And I said, I'm going to pin it on you, but immediately, you take it off and put it in a box. One day, I'm going to have a two-star general, who's supposed to be the one that gives you the Silver Star, not a captain. And you're going to get it presented the right way.

[01:06:55.90] He said, OK. OK. OK. A month later, I called him, and I said, hey, you got to be at this place. Bring your medal. Wear a suit. And he hadn't received any of these benefits yet. They were waiting for him. And I called him, I said, hey, what'd you learn? He said, you know what I learned, sir? The people who are worth something are those that love you and respect you even without a medal.

[01:07:29.45] I said, ooh. I said, well, be at this place, and bring that medal. And you're my guest for the dinner. Bring anybody you want. He brought his brother. I had told the West Point guy in charge, I want an attention to orders. And the way they do this in the military is, yell at the top of their lungs, attention to orders, and everybody pops out of their seats.

[01:07:55.15] And since these were all West Point graduates, they were going to fly out of their seats. And I had talked to the superintendent of the Coast Guard Academy who was going to be there. I said, I want you to do-- He said, geez, I've never done this. I said, this is a real deal. I sent him a copy of the citation. He said, oh my God. I said, this is what it is.

[01:08:16.39] And that night, the guy yelled, attention to orders. Calvin starts shaking, comes up. The superintendent is shaking. They pin this medal on him and everybody's crying. And all these people at this dinner who were giving these-- what do they call them? silent auction prizes, like two trips to London and all this stuff. Gave it to him. Gave everything to him.

[01:08:40.39] And the VA called me the next day. He said he got it. We notified the supe. He got it. He'll have his check for \$25,000. I said, wow, isn't that cool? Isn't that cool? And over the inauguration, I finally met, again, the guy that set his stuff up, a guy named Hershel Gober, who was a friend of mine. But he left right away and disappeared.

[01:09:02.92] And Calvin walks up, gets his stuff. He's too embarrassed to say thank you. He just starts crying. Everybody's crying. And three weeks later, I called him. I say, how are you doing? He said, I'm doing wonderfully. I said, when are you going to London? He said, oh, no, no, I'm not going to London. I gave the two tickets and the hotel to my brother and sister-in-law, who have taken care of me through these years.

[01:09:34.44] I said, well, you got the \$25,000? He said, no, I don't need the \$25,000. I gave them that, too. So that they made some money off me living with them all these years. And I said, and you still got your lesson? He said, yep. You love the people that love you for what you are, not what you appear to be.

[01:09:56.16] And I just said, wow. And my youngest daughter who went-- if you said Calvin Heath and you started to say something negative, she's ready to fight. And that's the legacy of this group of Vietnam vets. And they take care of each other. Calvin passed away of a very unfortunate brain tumor.

[01:10:22.83] But as soon as the word was that he had passed away, the guys called me and said, we've collected the money to put a bench at the Connecticut Veterans Memorial. It will be the first bench, and it'll be Calvin's. And just a group of really wonderful young men. And. I think they have the ability of teaching us this wonder of how much potential resides in everyone's-- not only within their heart and soul, but in their capacity to love one another.

[01:11:06.03] And they defy all the erroneous judgments that were made. And I'm sure in Vietnam, that same story can be duplicated a thousand times. The only difference is, I have been given this platform that I can use to honor my men. So I have a rule that when I give a speech and everybody applauds, I thank them for allowing me here to represent my men.

[01:11:36.25] And the Medal of Honor, when they first called me about it from Washington, I told them, I wasn't going to accept it. That I thought my medic should have it. And the sergeant got on the phone and said, can I talk honestly with you? I said, sure Top, whatever you say. And he said, who the hell do you think you are?

[01:11:59.99] I said, what? This isn't your medal. This belongs to your men. And they've asked us to present it to you. That's it. They're the ones special. Don't forget it. I said, yes, Top., I'll be there. And that has also been a fact so that when I'm giving a speech, if I think it's going to get political, I take the medal off.

[01:12:28.04] And I explain to people, I have ten men on the Wall whose political philosophies, I do not know. And therefore, since I represent them while I'm talking to you, because of this, they're entitled for me to remove it so that they're not bound by what I say. And that has helped me too, because it reinforces the people that this is a unit. It's not me. And it's not just them. I'm part of them. Until the day we all die, we're part of each other.

[01:13:15.04] PAUL BUCHA: My first impression was, why can't we get a statue? And the guys who built it were all friends of mine. And they called me and said, we're going to dedicate it tomorrow. You're supposed to be down here. And I said, yeah. And they said, come look at it tonight. So I drove down, and I walked,

[01:13:41.21] And Jack Wheeler, who was a West Point graduate, was Jan Scruggs' partner in this-- Jack said, now, what do you think? I said, who the hell needs a statue? And I go there because-- not for the names on the Wall, but for the people who do not know those names, who come there with respect and wonder at who they were, what they were, and how they ended up there.

[01:14:18.60] But at no time is anyone being cruel or detrimental to the space. There are Jews up there. There are Catholics. There's blacks, there's whites, but we're all one name, all one color.

And I was told when I was a kid, when my mom was separating my sister and I. You both have red blood. Get used to it.

[01:14:45.90] And I see that, and that's true, too. And if you see the way men who fought that war, and the few women who were scattered amongst them, relate to each other, there's no sexual harassment possible because the love is so great. And the men never got their parade thrown by a city. We threw our own parades. They didn't get a memorial built by another group to say thank you. We built our own memorial.

[01:15:23.16] And when we were coming home, I was the only officer, and I was in the back of the plane. And I looked at these guys, and they were all dirty, long hair. And I said, this is kind of cool. These are all survivors. And the pilot came on the loudspeaker and said, 30 minutes ETA, Travis Air Force.

[01:15:51.08] And the guys started pulling bags out, and rags, and they started dusting off their boots. And started putting medals on. Not the little ones, but the whole big things. And I realized they were coming home. The plane landed, and they opened the door, and it was a cold night two days before Thanksgiving, about 11 o'clock at night.

[01:16:19.08] And the loudspeaker says, all right, knock off the noise, enlisted on the right, officers on the left. We'll get you out of here as soon as possible. Click. Done. They had walked off that plane standing ramrod straight and proud. And within five seconds of that nonsense from that loudspeaker, they were stooped over and combat weary.

[01:16:45.29] I'm just sitting there, and there's this line And no one's moving. And pretty soon, something was happening in front of me. It was dark, and you can't see everything. I didn't know what it was. And then, three or four people from me, they're hugging each other. And the guy in front of me turned around and hugged me, and said, sir, welcome home. I love you.

[01:17:10.88] And I turned around, and there was this kid standing behind me with a Silver Star and his Purple Heart. And you could see through his insignia, he was a medic. And he just reached up and said, sir, welcome home. I love you. And then I realized, which people who are not among us and of us can't understand,

[01:17:38.57] we weren't denied the validation of our service, as everyone says. We just were validated by our peers. We didn't need a third party to build the memorial, throw the parade, or to say to us how good we were or thank you for your service. We needed the men and women with whom we had the privilege of serving, even if we never, ever see them again, or saw them before, to say, well done.

[01:18:16.07] And we do that by hugging, by saying welcome home. And in most cases, I love you. And I don't know how many people I've exchanged that with in lines and buildings. But I don't remember the names. It was just my guys. And when I say mine, I mean the people with whom I served. Not in the unit, but the entire length of this damn war. And that's a lesson, too, that people need to remember.

[01:18:54.62] That the true validation of your worth comes from your peers, not from some third party stranger who might have read about you or heard something else. Because whatever he read doesn't speak about what you really are. Just like the evaluation of my men as losers. And in that line, no one called them losers, and wherever they got off that plane.

[01:19:20.56] It's a special experience. It's a special circumstance. It's a legacy of love that can never be diminished. And we were privileged to serve there.

[01:19:36.02] DEVON HARDY Well, sir, in honor of your men, would you please show, if you could, the Medal? And this is for all of your men.

[01:19:43.03] PAUL BUCHA: Yep. That's it. This is the Army one. The Navy one, and Marine one is a big star. And Air Force, which never does things small, it's rockets, and lightning bolts, and stars, and wreaths, and everything. And this, I tell the cadets when I talk, or any Soldiers, I say, if you meet a Soldier in uniform, and you look at the ribbons, it doesn't matter, man, woman, black, purple, pink, tall, short, fat, doesn't matter, and you see on that chest a ribbon for having been in every hot spot God ever created with no valor. Not an ARCOM with V or anything, don't go from that person to someone wearing this medal. Stay with that person. That person probably personifies leadership perfection.

[01:20:46.46] Whereas this, 99% of the time, something didn't go right. People have to fly helicopters where no one said they should ever fly because something didn't go right. But there are people who served this country anonymously because they have no celebrity, which our society unfortunately demands, and we never hear about them.

[01:21:12.20] But what I tell them is, if you see this, just remember that's what every person you meet in life can potentially receive. Doesn't matter anything about who, what they are. But if you find a man or a woman wearing ribbons about they've been to hell and back 40 times, embrace them and ask what do they know? Because they can teach you everything.

[01:21:39.98] So this is my men's. This isn't the original. The original I gave to West Point to put on display up there because I believe without what I learned at West Point, there wouldn't have been any of these. And at the same time, I wanted cadets to be inspired by the service of my men. And they hear about it every year. I give a speech every year. I talk about my guys. There you go.

[01:22:05.82] DEVON HARDY Thank you--

[01:22:06.33] PAUL BUCHA: Thank you for your time.

[01:22:07.32] DEVON HARDY --so much.