

Hanretta, Kevin U.S. Army

[00:00:16.76] KEVIN HANRETTA: So I was born in Cornwall, New York, just outside of West Point, New York, in 1946. And my dad was a Vietnam-- correction, my dad was a World War II and a Korean War veteran, and served 38 years at West Point as the printing officer. I was the first in my family that had the opportunity to go to college. And while in college, with the Vietnam War going on, I enrolled in the ROTC program. After two years in the program I really enjoyed the camaraderie, I enjoyed the professionalism of the individuals that were the instructors. And so I competed, and was the first of two ROTC scholarships that were awarded in Siena College in Albany, New York. Ours was a different ROTC program in the fact that all regular Army graduates were commissioned in the United States Army Field Artillery. So we used to think of ourselves as a little bit better at math than most. And so I was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1968, and immediately came on to active duty, where I went to Fort Sill.

[00:01:54.07] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

[00:01:57.41] KEVIN HANRETTA: So I was 22. I graduated from college at 21. Spent a year going through my Advanced Course, through Ranger School. And then just prior, because I volunteered to go to Vietnam, I had the opportunity to go to Airborne School. And so, two months before I left for Vietnam I completed Airborne School, with the thought that I was going to Vietnam to serve as an airborne adviser.

[00:02:28.90] JOE GALLOWAY: But you were still-- your basic MOS was still artillery?

[00:02:33.64] KEVIN HANRETTA: My basic MOS was still artillery, but again, part of the regular Army commission. The fact that I was Ranger-qualified and I was volunteering, they allowed me to go to Jump School, because that was not a requirement at the time. But I went to Jump School with the follow-on assignment to serve as an airborne adviser, which was not long-lived.

[00:03:05.48] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your family situation when you left to go to Vietnam?

[00:03:10.58] KEVIN HANRETTA: So I was fortunate. My mom and dad were alive. My dad worked at West Point, New York. I was the oldest of three. I had a younger sister that was three years younger than I was, who was in nursing school. And I had a younger brother, 15 years younger than I am, that was just graduating-- or was in high school.

[00:03:33.80] JOE GALLOWAY: You were not married?

[00:03:35.18] KEVIN HANRETTA: I was not married.

[00:03:37.49] JOE GALLOWAY: And you still considered your hometown--

[00:03:42.15] KEVIN HANRETTA: Well, New Windsor, New York. The largest town nearby is Newburgh, New York, but for all practical purposes, West Point--

[00:03:50.78] JOE GALLOWAY: West Point.

[00:03:51.56] KEVIN HANRETTA: --was home.

[00:03:54.11] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you decided to enter the military?

[00:04:01.30] KEVIN HANRETTA: To be honest, I really didn't understand it. Again, as a young ROTC graduate, as a college student, I listened to all of the arguments against it. Yet the United States was committed to Vietnam as I completed ROTC as a regular Army officer, as I completed Ranger School. And during Ranger School I met a number of NCOs who were going through the Shake 'n Bake program. Complete nine weeks of Ranger training successfully, they were promoted to E-6 and immediately shipped off to Vietnam. So I got caught up in the enthusiasm of not only serving, but having met some of the finest NCOs and officers as I went through Ranger School. So as I completed Ranger School, went back to Fort Sill as an artilleryman, I then started thinking about, it's my time. And that's where I volunteered to go to Vietnam, with the stipulation that I got to go to Airborne School.

[00:05:17.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you were setting off to Vietnam, an Airborne Ranger-qualified guy, and you hoped to be an airborne adviser to the Vietnamese military.

[00:05:30.53] KEVIN HANRETTA: Yes, sir.

[00:05:31.94] JOE GALLOWAY: But you said that didn't work so well.

[00:05:34.49] KEVIN HANRETTA: Sir, I don't think I was on the ground more than an hour. I can remember the flight in. Commercial flight, nice airplane, good looking stewardesses. And as I looked out the window they said, well, there's the lights of Saigon. And I said, I'm ready. And I can remember landing. I can remember getting off the aircraft, and the heat from the summer. And of course, we were processed in, we came in at night, I remember that part. And so the next morning we reported in for our assignments. And as I stepped up to the table the gentleman-- provided him a copy of my orders-- broke my heart. He said, well, this was your orders when you left the United States. You're going to become a Military Assistance Command Vietnam adviser. I said, I don't know what that is. I said, I thought I was going to be an Airborne Ranger. He said, right now, what we need is MACV advisers, and so you're off to a place called Di An for two weeks of adviser school. Broke my heart, because again, I had fought to get to Airborne School, and as quickly as I completed it, got to Vietnam, my assignment was changed. I saluted and moved out smartly.

[00:07:02.36] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions on getting off of that airplane in Vietnam?

[00:07:07.17] KEVIN HANRETTA: Well, from all of the media coverage I expected to see the tight security, the flashes, the booms, to be in combat, and it was just the opposite. We flew into the Saigon International Airport. There was a bus there. We loaded on to that, it was at night, off

of a commercial aircraft. And we were taken to BOQs, an old hotel that they were using to put folks up that were in transit. So again, much nicer than I expected. I had--

[00:07:43.31] JOE GALLOWAY: What year was this?

[00:07:44.20] KEVIN HANRETTA: This was 1970.

[00:07:45.95] JOE GALLOWAY: 1970.

[00:07:46.79] KEVIN HANRETTA: The end of June, beginning of July of 1970.

[00:07:56.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you went off to Di An and did your advisory training. What was your assignment following that?

[00:08:05.36] KEVIN HANRETTA: After my two weeks I was shipped down to Can Tho, Vietnam, down in IV Corps. And when I reported in as a captain-- I flew in as a lieutenant. In the two weeks that I attended adviser school I was promoted to captain-- so when I arrived in Can Tho as a captain, they put me as the team leader of a mobile assistance team. The mobile assistance team consisted of five individuals. There was the captain team leader. I had a lieutenant who was a linguist, and spoke Vietnamese excellent, and that was good for me. I had a medic, E-6. I had a heavy weapons sergeant, E-7, and a light weapons specialist, E-7. And so the five of us became a mobile assistance team, where we would go out and actually live in one of the larger villages, assisting them in defensive operations against the Viet Cong.

[00:09:14.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Working with ARVN or Ruff-Puffs or--

[00:09:19.55] KEVIN HANRETTA: All of the above. I had very little contact with US forces. It was mainly working with the ARVN, who had the forts, but then the Vietnamese National Defense Force, who actually secured the villages.

[00:09:37.60] JOE GALLOWAY: The militia?

[00:09:38.35] KEVIN HANRETTA: The militia.

[00:09:39.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:09:39.67] KEVIN HANRETTA: And so again, during that period of time we had provincial advisers, civilians, that were in charge of winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese people. And so I dealt, at that level, with civilians more so than I did with the regular Army that was over there.

[00:10:06.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you're living in the village with South Vietnamese forces. What was your food like? What were your quarters like?

[00:10:18.09] KEVIN HANRETTA: The food I came to enjoy. While we were at adviser school they taught us 101 ways to use C-rations with rice to make main dishes. So I was sort of a

celebrity, initially, because I would-- at our place, we would make up food and, of course, invite the elders and the officials in the village into our little hut. It was, I guess, you and I would consider it a shack. It was nothing elaborate. It was wood. But it was better than what the average Vietnamese villager had, who was a lot of times either a shack or even a grass hut, like you saw.

[00:11:02.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Mud floor.

[00:11:03.04] KEVIN HANRETTA: On the floor. We did not have running water. The shower was a 55 gallon drum that you filled up, and you pulled it, and that's how you took a shower. We did have a stove, a gas stove. And so we lived better than the villagers, but not probably nearly as well as the folks in Can Tho that was our home base.

[00:11:31.00] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for off duty activities, recreation, if there was any, when you were doing the village thing?

[00:11:40.63] KEVIN HANRETTA: Mostly we would go in to Can Tho to visit either the Air Force or the Army facilities to go shopping, to resupply. But there really wasn't many activities, except for maybe one which may bring a chuckle. Because we were a MAT team that was about 15 miles from Can Tho, the only way you could get to this village was by canal. And so we had two Boston Whalers with 75 horsepower motors on them, two each. And literally, those Boston Whalers would fly. I very seldom touched the water when we were cruising those canals, because again, anything moving slow was a target. As a result of that-- and again, I go back to my heavy weapons sergeant-- he said, you know, wouldn't it be neat with these boats-- if I was back home I'd water ski. And I said, really? I said, I got a set of water skis back home. Let me write my mom or dad and see if they'll ship them over to us, and maybe we can figure something out. And in fact, I wrote the letter.

[00:13:08.43] My dad, working at West Point, having been there almost over 30 years, knew everybody. And he brought this pair of wooden water skis into the post office, at which time the clerk said, sorry, Sir, this exceeds the length for packages that we're able to send, even to service members, overseas. And so my dad, the person that he was, said, let me talk to the postmaster, who he had gone to high school with. And lo and behold, the postmaster was able to give a waiver. And about two weeks later in Vietnam, at the post office, a pair of water skis showed up, with a tow rope. And so what we would do is go out, back down by Can Tho, which had access to the Mekong. And we would go out to the middle of the Mekong, well beyond small arms range, and we would water ski. We didn't do that often because this was late in my tour. And so, about the time I got the skis, the time we did a few water skiing-- and again, no one said we couldn't, so we did-- I got the Ranger assignment. And so I left the skis, along with everything else that I had, with the MAT team, and hoped that they would enjoy it.

[00:14:37.97] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your impressions of the Vietnamese people you were living with, initially, and by the end of your tour?

[00:14:48.30] KEVIN HANRETTA: Initially, of course, being young I didn't know the Vietnamese people. I got a chance early on to meet them, and I think my experiences in that first

two weeks at Di An, meeting the best of the best, intelligent, very articulate Vietnamese, I was able to open my mind. And they gave me a different view of why we were there, and what we were doing working with the Vietnamese people. And so when I went in and was the team leader of a MAT team-- this was a rather large village, and so I had a good working relationship with the officials, the village chief and his folks. A lot of what they received, based on their ability to meet standards that we set for defense, to include-- we provided most of the materials, the fence, the weapons. We provided all of the training.

[00:15:50.62] And so there was a very professional relationship, because at this time, I had never met the enemy. This was a large village. It was about winning the hearts and minds. It was about ensuring that that village did not fall to the Viet Cong, but remained within the government of South Vietnam. And so it was a professional relationship. I felt very much at ease walking around, meeting the Vietnamese people. We would eat with them. Occasionally we would have them into our area. At night, when the defenses would come up, we would walk together the perimeter of the village. And to be honest, we were so close to Can Tho, maybe 15 miles from Can Tho, which is a major city, that the Viet Cong activity was not great. There was some. We had penetrations every once in a while, but it wasn't a daily routine where we were in combat.

[00:17:01.92] And so, to go from my first impressions, after about three or four months I still couldn't get over the fact that I really thought I was there to be an Airborne Ranger, and instead I was an instructor and a facilitator. While I was back in Can Tho, I went over to the Ranger compound, 4th Ranger Group, run by the Americans, advisers, and I put in an application. I said, what would it take for me to be a Ranger adviser once I complete the first six months of my tour as a MACV adviser? Well, again, being a field artillery guy, they looked at me and said, yeah, OK, come back when you get closer to being available. And so I went back and I finished my six months.

[00:18:06.14] And again, destiny and luck, more, I think, than talent-- I went in and was sitting in the waiting room to see the brigade commander, the 4th Ranger Group commander, for an interview. I had at least got the opportunity to interview. And as I sat there, through the door comes Lieutenant Colonel Harry Ball. Ranger adviser, World War II veteran. And as he walks up to the desk and demands to see the brigade commander, this sergeant at the desk said, Sir, let me check to make sure he's available. If you'd like to take a seat. And he said, I don't have time to take a seat. He said, I need to see the brigade commander. Meanwhile, I'm listening and watching like a good captain would.

[00:19:06.29] And so, as he's pacing around he walks over and he says, Ranger, what are you doing here? I said, Sir, I'm here for an interview. He said, OK, sounds good. And again, I had my crossed cannons on, but I'm sure he didn't see those. He just looked at the Ranger tab. And so he went in, talked to the brigade commander. He came back out and he said, Captain, are you serious about being a Ranger adviser? I said, yes, Sir. He says, can you be ready to go in 72 hours? I said, yes, Sir. He said, you've got a deal. Get ready. And that was my introduction. I never did get an interview with the brigade commander. I actually interviewed in the waiting room with the battalion commander, who had come in after just having relieved one of his captains on his team. I don't know the circumstances. I just knew it was an opportunity for me, and I was literally at the right place at the right time--

[00:20:10.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Sitting in the right waiting room.

[00:20:11.88] KEVIN HANRETTA: --and I had the right answer, was, yes sir. Ready to serve.

[00:20:20.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your assignment as a Ranger adviser.

[00:20:25.40] KEVIN HANRETTA: Again, it was sudden. And so I went back to our MACV team, mentioned that I-- luckily, I had coordinated that I was going over for an interview, no one expecting that I would actually get that. When I came back and said that, not only was I accepted, but I leave within 72 hours, they were very supportive. I cleared the MAT team. I signed in to the Ranger command. And literally within 12 hours of signing in, I was on a helicopter, full battle gear, en route to a pickup point. And again, probably my second most vivid memory was, I was on a re-supply Huey. This Huey touched down in the middle of this large field as I looked around. And the pilot said, get off, you're here. I said, really? So I get off with my rucksack, expecting to see somebody, when the helicopter took off. And as I looked around I said to myself, what have you gotten yourself into? And then, like in the movies, out of the wood line came Staff Sergeant Gary Carpenter, who later became the command sergeant major for the Ranger Regiment. Walked up and said, Sir, welcome to the Rangers. It's you and me, let's get to work. And I began my Ranger career with Sergeant Major Carpenter, just the two of us, with the 32nd Ranger Battalion.

[00:22:16.81] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is located where?

[00:22:18.85] KEVIN HANRETTA: In IV Corps. We were out of Can Tho. Most of the time we were down by VC Lake, further south, because that's where the activity was. They would come in from Cambodia through the VC Lake area and infiltrate into the IV Corps area. And so my first 30 days-- I went in, linked up with Sergeant Major Carpenter, and for 30 days we walked with the 32nd Ranger Battalion, conducting combat operations.

[00:22:54.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Constant?

[00:22:55.49] KEVIN HANRETTA: Constant. Again, one of the things that I mentioned is that, I was very conscious of the fact, and asked the question when I signed in, what was my billet? And my billet was as a Ranger infantry captain. And so, as a Ranger infantry captain, even though I was an artilleryman, I was eligible for the combat infantryman's badge if I met the requirements. I shared that with Sergeant Major Carpenter. One of those goals you never think you'll get to is being able to qualify for, I consider, probably the elite infantry badge of courage, is the combat infantryman's badge.

[00:23:46.81] JOE GALLOWAY: The only one I ever wanted.

[00:23:48.61] KEVIN HANRETTA: Yes, Sir. And so Sergeant Major Carpenter said, Sir, it will not be difficult, from my past experience-- because he had been with the 32nd Ranger Battalion for about two months before I got there. And the 32nd was a little different in the fact that the 32nd actually was an honor guard battalion in Saigon, until they fell out of grace. And then they were moved to IV Corps. So the other Ranger battalions were the 42nd, the 43rd, the 44th, and

the 32nd. Didn't make a lot of difference to me. I was doing what I thought I came to Vietnam to do, and that was to serve as a Ranger-- Airborne Ranger adviser. And so again, the other stipulation, which impacted the family a little bit, was that one of the conditions that they would accept me was for a full year tour. And so I had served six months, and I had to extend six months to be able to qualify as a Ranger adviser. So I had the great fortune of spending 19 months, during my first tour, in Vietnam.

[00:25:07.11] JOE GALLOWAY: While you were with the-- you'd gone now from more or less a peaceful six months to full on combat operations. Pretty constant. What combat operations, significant actions, do you recall? Let's say your first big operation.

[00:25:31.90] KEVIN HANRETTA: So I'm glad you asked me that question. My first big combat operation-- and one of the requirements for a combat infantryman's badge is that you must have three documented encounters, close combat, with the enemy. First day with Sergeant Major Carpenter, with the battalion, we were moving to combat along a rice paddy. And of course, we moved close to the wood line so then, in fact, if we were ambushed, you could get into the wood line for cover and concealment. And I can remember, probably my second vivid memory as a Ranger adviser-- first when I landed and thought I was all by myself until my Ranger buddy showed up. The second was as we were moving in the Ranger file down this paddy dike, I can remember, oh, maybe 1,000 meters away, I started to see things exploding. And I was mesmerized. I had never seen close combat. And I can remember standing there and feeling this tug on my leg, when the sergeant major looked up and he said, Sir, we are under attack. I would recommend you get down. At which time I immediately dove down into the rice paddy and our combat had begun.

[00:26:56.80] We did a lot of movements to contact. We did a lot, in the early months, of typical Ranger operations. Identify the objective, move to the objective, secure the objective. The Rangers were used where others-- for special operations. They would go in after intelligence targets. We would go in any time we heard that there was a VC stronghold where there might be Americans or allies being kept. And so I remember more times the unsuccessful raids that we conducted, because it was very disappointing to take battalion, move in to an objective, secure the objective-- and of course, we took casualties-- and then to find out the intelligence was not right.

[00:27:59.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever rescue any Americans in any of these operations?

[00:28:06.82] KEVIN HANRETTA: Sir, we rescued American-- no, I'm sorry. We never rescued an American. We did find an Australian POW. Had not been held long. Because down in IV Corps, Nam Can was a little bit further south, and it was a port area where the Navy operated out of. And there was an Australian that had come up missing. I mean, within 24 hours they had a target. And we were airborne, en route, on the ground, swept it, and found this individual who was unharmed, and again, liberated back to his unit.

[00:28:57.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Military or civilian?

[00:28:59.50] KEVIN HANRETTA: He was-- he had to be military. I'm sure he was Australian Navy, down there. But I can remember, towards the latter part of my tour with the Rangers, when the decision was made to pull the American advisers out of the units. And so late in '71, mid to late in '71, the Ranger advisers came out of the battalions and we were consolidated at the group level. And then what we would do is working with Special Operations Group, the SOG, we would facilitate raids on targets, using the Ranger battalions, but not accompanying them on the raids. Again, this was a decision that was made by leadership. And then, it was also at the same time that we were conducting operations in Cambodia.

[00:30:06.59] KEVIN HANRETTA: I think I shared two of them. Probably the most scared was when I was all by myself in that field, looking around, saying, I sure hope I'm in the right place, but I don't feel good about it. And again, when Sergeant Major Carpenter walked out of that wood line and became my Ranger buddy, I knew I was in good shape.

[00:30:36.79] KEVIN HANRETTA: I got to be honest, I think the best day was the day that I was in the right place at the right time, and was able to be selected as a Ranger adviser. That's why I went there. I can remember the night before I shipped out in Oakland, I made a point of it to go see John Wayne in The Green Berets, and I just knew, as a Ranger or as an Airborne adviser, that that was almost a necessary training film. So I was ready to go.

[00:31:15.68] KEVIN HANRETTA: I think the worst tour, again with the Rangers, is when we lost a Ranger. Many times, because we operated around VC Lake on the canals, we would be in our boats and get ambushed. It was very common. And to me, the most emotional was the first time that we lost a Ranger buddy in combat. The second was a little bit lighter, because again, before I got to the Ranger battalion-- and maybe the contrast and some of the lessons that I learned-- is with the Rangers it was about the Ranger creed. It was about your Ranger buddy. It was about accomplishing the mission. When I was back on the mobile advisory team it was about helping people. And you say, well, what was your worst memory? It was Christmas 1970, and we went back for resupply on Christmas Day. And I can remember everything being closed, and eating a hot dog for Christmas dinner. I said, there's something wrong with this picture. I really need to do something else. And while I was back was when I went over and put my application in to become a Ranger adviser.

[00:33:02.86] KEVIN HANRETTA: Once we were pulled out of the battalions and I was back at the Ranger group headquarters, one of my major responsibilities-- and again, this is where my field artillery training became useful-- is, I would coordinate the employment of tactical air. Whether it was Air Force, it was Black Pony, Cav or allies. We had a number of Australian gunships that were made available to us. And so I got to meet some of the pilots and talk to them, and they were just gung ho. Just first class. And so, as a result of meeting them-- as you know, every six months you were authorized three days rest and recuperation, R&R. And so my first R&R, I actually went to Australia and spent three days in Sydney, walking around and getting to know the Australian people a little bit better. But I never-- because the Rangers were very specialized, it was Americans only, with the Vietnamese Rangers. And then my interaction was with fire support.

[00:34:28.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:34:34.49] KEVIN HANRETTA: I promised to write as often as I could. I wrote often. I can remember sitting under a tree-- Sergeant Major Carpenter was much better than I was about doing that. But again, every letter you wrote you had to carry the material with you, you had to hold it. And about once a week we'd get a re-supply bird in, where you could give the letters, and they would go out. And of course, you always looked forward to mail call. But I wrote often. I was very close with my family. My mom-- today, just turned 90 in January-- has been my greatest supporter for my career in the military. My brother was very young. My sister was in college. And so I was fortunate. I had a solid family that cared about me, worried about me. But you know, at 22 I was invincible, and I was doing exactly what I wanted to do.

[00:35:39.82] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you communicate? By mail only, or--

[00:35:44.07] KEVIN HANRETTA: I tried the MARSAT, I think it was one time, I just didn't like that. Over. Out. It never never seemed to go well. And so, I think 99% of all the communications was by mail.

[00:35:57.64] JOE GALLOWAY: By mail. How long since you've written a letter to someone, lately?

[00:36:01.67] KEVIN HANRETTA: Wow. An email I could give you a better answer. A letter--

[00:36:09.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody writes letters anymore.

[00:36:11.34] KEVIN HANRETTA: They don't. I think the last two letters I wrote were sympathy letters of condolence to folks that had passed away, and I was writing to the family.

[00:36:23.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How much news did you receive about the war, from home?

[00:36:33.19] KEVIN HANRETTA: Not much. I really wasn't interested. Again, I had had all of the media before I got there, so I knew the spin that they were putting on the Vietnam War. Again, I volunteered, so I was going because that's what I wanted to do. When I got there, although I was initially disappointed, I wound up doing exactly what I wanted to do while I was there. And so the only thing-- the only memory I have is, again, sitting with Sergeant Major Carpenter at night, and we would have a little portable radio. And a lot of time the only station you could get was the VC--

[00:37:19.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Hanoi Hannah.

[00:37:21.04] KEVIN HANRETTA: Hanoi Hannah. And so we used to just laugh about that. And we used to even let our Vietnamese counterparts sit and listen, as well. And then they would tell us the real story. So I sort of lost touch with what was going on, other than the immediate situation that I was in. The only time that I remember coming out of that environment is, we got an opportunity, with very short notice because a Chinook showed up, to fly up to Tan Son Nhut and see the Bob Hope Christmas Show. And so I actually got a chance to attend a Bob Hope

Christmas Show. And then we flew back that night, and-- but that was another very, very fond memory.

[00:38:17.17] KEVIN HANRETTA: I returned in January of '72, after completing 19 months.

[00:38:24.97] JOE GALLOWAY: What was that like?

[00:38:28.42] KEVIN HANRETTA: Again, I know I got a different spin on it. Again, because I was doing what I wanted to do. As I came to the end of my Ranger assignment I was contacted by branch. Again, I hadn't completely made the decision that I wanted to make the Army a career, although I was pretty happy and content in what I was doing. And so my assignment officer-- again, back to the field artillery-- said that, I've got a deal for you. We promised you an airborne assignment, going to Vietnam. We didn't live up to that commitment. How about we assign you to the 82nd Airborne Division if you're willing to come back? I said, it's a deal. And so when I came back in January of '72, I was assigned to the 319th Field Artillery in the 82nd Airborne Division, as a fire support officer. And again, a couple of the things that I mentioned really served me well. As a fire support officer, as you know, the primary mission is to work with the infantry and provide them cover-- whether it's artillery fire, aircraft fire-- as required.

[00:40:02.68] Wearing a combat infantryman's badge gave me instant credibility with my infantry partners. Over and over and over again, it would almost be the first topic of discussion, is, how does an artillery guy get a CIB? And again, in the 82nd, it wasn't unusual to be Airborne Ranger-qualified. What was unique was to be Airborne Ranger with a CIB in the field artillery. And so it served me well. And I was able to stay in the 82nd Airborne Division for four years. I commanded twice. As fire support officer I commanded the Headquarters Battery, and then later I went on to command Bravo Battery, 319th Field Artillery. So again, I credit the experience and credentials that I earned in Vietnam as furthering my career as I moved forward.

[00:41:11.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you-- there was no return to Vietnam after this?

[00:41:15.05] KEVIN HANRETTA: No.

[00:41:15.35] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:41:15.89] KEVIN HANRETTA: No, and I guess the only humorous story-- I didn't experience, like so many-- I didn't feel that I wasn't welcomed back, because I wasn't looking to be welcomed back. I was over there, I felt good about the mission that I performed, I was en route to my next assignment, which was almost a dream. And so, as I came back through, the only humorous story is, I can remember being in uniform, again, as a captain, at the airport, waiting to board a aircraft back to New York, when I can remember this lady with her husband and two kids standing there-- and of course, by now I had a lot of the decorations and the ribbons on-- but she noticed the Ranger tab. And she leaned over to her young son and said, see? He's good. He's a forest ranger. I said, I'll take credit for anything good, and I shook the little boy's hand and moved on. But that was my welcome home, versus the demonstrations and the lack of respect that so many of my fellow veterans experienced.

[00:42:44.55] JOE GALLOWAY: You missed all of that because you were happy in the arms of mother Army.

[00:42:50.33] KEVIN HANRETTA: And I was. And to be honest, the other thing that I'm glad I missed was a lot of the fragging and discontent that took place inside of regular Army units. As I said, it was all about, when I was with the Rangers, your Ranger buddy, taking care of one another. And so we heard about those things but we couldn't relate to them, like so many American units were going through.

[00:43:27.27] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your Vietnam experience affect your life afterward?

[00:43:33.93] KEVIN HANRETTA: I've got to say that it was a positive, life changing experience. Standing in that field all by myself, I understood it was important to know who you were. As part of the United States Army I felt in Vietnam to serve my nation, it's important to remember where you live. And then, making the decision to continue my military career, I think it's important to understand what you would like to do. And so I was-- coming out of Vietnam, I was very comfortable about who I was. I had discovered fears I never knew existed. I did things that I never knew I was capable of. I knew that I was proud when I came to be an American citizen, having fought for my country. I was equally proud coming home. And I knew, by the time I got back to the 82nd Airborne Division, that the military was for me. I knew it wasn't for many, and I met many folks that were not happy, had competing interests that were more important, but that wasn't my story. My story was, Vietnam helped shape who I was. And I knew what I wanted to do, which was to make the military my career.

[00:45:24.98] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans returning from combat today?

[00:45:35.34] KEVIN HANRETTA: I think, first and foremost, I say, thank you for your service. Every veteran serves this nation. For those that have been in combat, I think there is a special trust that we owe them. That, should they come back, whether it's mental or physical-- and that's why I'm so proud to serve in the Department of Veterans Affairs-- that our nation, through the Department of Veterans Affairs, is there to help all veterans, with a special emphasis in my mind, on combat veterans who have paid a special price.

[00:46:25.74] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today, in our society?

[00:46:35.11] KEVIN HANRETTA: I think it was a transition. I don't know how I would answer the question, was it important that we won or lost? Again, I think the debate still goes on. Did I, personally, like the way it ended? No. Was I proud of my service in Vietnam? Yes. Was I proud of the United States Army and the military forces? Yes. And so Vietnam was a proving ground that went on to help future leaders do the right thing for the United States of America. In particular, I have heard him say it more than once, is General Colin Powell, as he remembered back his experiences in Vietnam, ensured that we would never again let the military be in that position. And I think as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, his leadership was shaped by the experiences he had during Vietnam. And the things that he, as a great leader, understood were

not right, and we would never allow happen again. And he kept that promise. And so I'm awfully proud that Vietnam was there for a reason. It took a terrible toll in lives, but it shaped the future leaders that would go on to make this country great.

[00:48:35.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you had contact with the Vietnamese you served with, since the fall of Vietnam?

[00:48:45.95] KEVIN HANRETTA: I have not--

[00:48:47.00] JOE GALLOWAY: None of them?

[00:48:47.42] KEVIN HANRETTA: --to be honest. When I was a colonel working in the Pentagon, I worked in the Office of International Affairs. And so I had the opportunity to meet many Vietnamese. Of course, they were not the same Vietnamese that I knew then. But again, I was not about the political implications. To me, it was a fellow service member serving his country as best he could. He was doing the best job he could. We just needed to make sure we did our job a little bit better.

[00:49:27.30] JOE GALLOWAY: But you've had no contact with your old Ranger buddies?

[00:49:32.24] KEVIN HANRETTA: Sergeant Major Carpenter, again, my first Ranger buddy, I had the opportunity to serve with him two or three times. When I came back from Vietnam I went to the 82nd. From the 82nd I went to the Advanced Course. When I completed the Advanced Course I was selected by my assignment officer to be the fire support officer for the 1st Ranger Battalion in Fort Stewart, Georgia. I again had the opportunity to serve with Sergeant Major Carpenter. Again, I then left, our paths parted. And I got a chance to meet him again when I was the senior aide to the Secretary of the Army, when we would go down and visit the Ranger battalions, of which Sergeant Major Carpenter was the sergeant major at that time. So again, that's probably the only-- every once in a while I'd get a letter, and we'd exchange Christmas cards with some of my team members, but Sergeant Major Carpenter was the only Ranger buddy that I remember, and kept in contact with, going all the way back.

[00:50:54.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful, than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:51:02.76] KEVIN HANRETTA: I think the clear answer for me was, yes. I felt that it gave me an opportunity to search my soul as to what I wanted to do, where I wanted to be. And so, I came out of Vietnam with a very positive experience, unlike so many other veterans of that era that didn't have the same opportunities.

[00:51:34.26] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:51:43.87] KEVIN HANRETTA: I think the first one that comes to mind is teamwork. Teamwork gives you the opportunity for second chances. Not everybody is the quarterback. Not everybody is the star player. But as part of a team you're even greater than that. And if there's an

opportunity, and you don't meet either your expectations or someone else's, never rule a second chance out. I got a second chance more than once, and I remember that very distinctly. The second is that I walked out of Vietnam understanding that the backbone of the United States Army was our non-commissioned officer corps. Folks like Sergeant Major Carpenter. The sergeants that I served with even on the MAT team. They brought the continuity of what the army is all about. They brought the experience. And I was able to stand on their shoulders, as a leader, because of what they taught me. And so, ever since Vietnam, again, to me, the cornerstone of the United States Army, is that NCO who's willing to do his job. Most times quietly, and without a lot of hoopla or thanks, but very professionally. And I saw it over and over and over again.

[00:53:23.67] KEVIN HANRETTA: I've been many times. I had the honor of participating in the opening ceremony for the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War, last Memorial Day, at the Wall. Tremendous event with the president, secretary of defense, secretary of veterans affairs, Secretary Shinseki. General Kicklighter, who was a mentor and close personal friend, and currently is the executive director of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam Commemoration, was there. And so, my impression is that our nation, now, when it really matters most, is making every effort to say, thank you, to those who served, and those that gave the ultimate sacrifice. And that's really what the Wall represents to me, is those that did give the last full measure of service.

[00:54:27.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, Colonel. Appreciate the interview.

[00:54:29.85] KEVIN HANRETTA: My pleasure. Thank you for your time.