

## **Hanson, Wilfred US Army**

[00:00:13.90] WILFRED HANSON: I was born in Santa Ana Community Hospital, Orange County, California, April 9th, 1944. It was an Easter Sunday, and my mother had just finished baking the ham, and had to rush off to the hospital.

[00:00:35.53] MARC HENDERSON: Where do you consider your hometown?

[00:00:37.06] WILFRED HANSON: Orange County, California. I was the last of ten children. My mother ran out of family names and named me after the obstetrician who delivered me, Wilfred Weston. And today, I have three brothers remaining alive, and the rest of my family is deceased.

[00:01:07.24] MARC HENDERSON: How old were you when you began your service, and what year was it?

[00:01:11.02] WILFRED HANSON: The year was 1967. I had finished one year at the Harvard Graduate School of Business, and I joined at that time.

[00:01:26.84] MARC HENDERSON: So what was your sense of the war before you entered the military?

[00:01:31.12] WILFRED HANSON: My sense was that it was a just cause, and that the domino theory-- you know, if we didn't stop them in Vietnam, it would impact the countries in Southeast Asia. In particular, I had a college professor at Claremont McKenna College that was a proponent of that theory, and Orange County was a very conservative place at that time. It had a lot of anti-communist rallies. And so I was predisposed that it was a just cause, and we could make a difference.

[00:02:16.87] MARC HENDERSON: What were your thoughts on the draft?

[00:02:18.64] WILFRED HANSON: I had siblings. One served in the end of World War II, two served in Korea, one served in the Navy after Korea, and another served in the Army, pre-Vietnam. So I was predisposed that that would-- you know, it's just a normal obligation. You know, after I was back from Vietnam and the events unfolded about Lyndon Johnson and the Pentagon Papers, I realized that it was an unwinnable war. But as an Armed Services member, we were there, and we had a duty to do. And we had an obligation to our fellow Soldiers.

[00:03:14.11] MARC HENDERSON: Did your thoughts on the draft change?

[00:03:16.42] WILFRED HANSON: Not until afterwards, when all the statistics came out that it was predisposed to take blacks and minorities, and the number of people that were able to get National Guard in other ways. You know, it bothered me that Bill Clinton was considered to be presidential material.

[00:03:48.12] MARC HENDERSON: Were you drafted, or did you volunteer?

[00:03:52.62] WILFRED HANSON: I volunteered. I had finished-- toward the end of my first year at Harvard Business School, I realized that I would become-- I would probably be drafted when I graduated. I wasn't assured that I had the connections that would enable me to avoid the draft, and being a scholarship and loans, I just didn't want to graduate from Harvard Business School with loans outstanding, and then I didn't want to be drafted. I'd rather serve as an officer. So because I didn't have connections like the majority of my fellow classmates, I thought maybe the best thing to do would be enlist or sign up for officer candidate school.

[00:04:58.74] And so I spent a little time and figured out the Navy required a five-year commitment, which seemed too long. The Army had an armor program, and I figured that would give me an ability to become an armor OCS candidate. And so I opted-- so I'm a volunteer, but the draft-- it was behind in my mind.

[00:05:35.67] MARC HENDERSON: Was the GI Bill an incentive?

[00:05:40.28] WILFRED HANSON: A small incentive, and it turned out that the GI Bill benefit just covered the increase in the price of tuition three years later.

[00:05:59.43] MARC HENDERSON: So where did you do officer candidate school?

[00:06:02.88] WILFRED HANSON: I was signed up to do it in the armor program at Fort Knox. At the end of my basic training, they closed the armor school and gave us an option of going to the infantry school at Fort Benning, Georgia, and then an armor transition course. I opted to do that. It was the winter of 1967.

[00:06:33.78] MARC HENDERSON: Did you receive any specialized training?

[00:06:37.29] WILFRED HANSON: I was supposed to go to AIT in reconnaissance. It turned out that I had a hernia at the end of basic training, so they gave me an operation. I went home to recuperate, and I had asked to-- I had formed a friendship with about ten individuals who were college graduates in a special armor program. I wanted to go to OCS with them. So the option was I could go to clerk typist AIT, which is half the time of the regular reconnaissance AIT. So I opted to do that, although it placed me a little bit behind the others when I got to OCS.

[00:07:40.14] The one vivid memory-- the one resentment I have from basic training was I was with some young-- I'll say punk kid who has made our squad leader. And his manner was dictatorial. And I remember making the request that I was a non-smoker, and perhaps I could do something other than clean the butt cans. And he looked-- he gave me this look, like, you-- so I shut up and did what I was told to do. Once I graduated from OCS, then there was an armor school transition course at Fort Knox. And at that point, I was commissioned in armor.

[00:08:50.75] MARC HENDERSON: So what was that like? The armor course?

[00:08:54.95] WILFRED HANSON: It was a chance to, you know, indoctrinate you with armor, and the tanks, and the history of the armor school. I enjoyed that. And I actually did well there-- although I did have one incident that was bad, but it turned out to be good, in the sense that one of our attack scenarios was we were-- you know, they described a certain maneuver we were going to do.

[00:09:39.45] And so we were taking notes, and I took my notes. And then a captain had forgotten his pen, or something like that, so he wanted to copy my notes so he would have them. Well, the instructor saw that-- that I was sitting there without any paper. And so he called on me to explain the course of action. So I got my paper back and did what I thought was a pretty incredible job, because that particular exercise, I understood it fully.

[00:10:20.72] Well, then, he said, well, Lieutenant Hanson, how would you have done if you didn't copy your fellow-- you know? So the captain and I had to get with him right afterwards and explain that I was doing him a favor, not the reverse. And I think that enabled me to be rated very highly on that. I think I was the third-highest ranked in the class.

[00:10:55.46] MARC HENDERSON: Did the armor school prepare you adequately for Vietnam?

[00:11:00.08] WILFRED HANSON: In addition to the armor school, I served in the training brigade for a year. And there I had a 4-point-deuce motor platoon-- squad, excuse me-- no, excuse me, it was a platoon. And then I also transitioned to having an armor-- you know, a five-tank platoon. But before I went to Vietnam, they sent me to a two-week orient-- jungle class in Panama. And so by the time I had that training, I thought I was ready to go.

[00:11:50.60] WILFRED HANSON: Let's see. When did I arrive? I arrived in '69, and I was born in '44. So 25?

[00:12:00.43] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. So you were an old fella.

[00:12:01.93] WILFRED HANSON: Yes. And that was one of the reasons I wanted to stick with the group that I met in basic-- that we were all college graduates. And so we had a camaraderie. There is a certain amount of apprehension. I'm always an optimist.

[00:12:23.23] So the Tet Offensive occurred while I was in OCS. So you know, that put us would-be lieutenants-- you know, certainly caught our attention. There was a lot of talk about the North Vietnamese had shot their wad, and the Viet Cong had surfaced in I Corps, and so the end of the war was just in sight, you know? Of course, little did we know it would go on until 1975 .

[00:13:06.91] But anyway, you know, nothing really prepares you for what-- you know, when you actually land, and then you're in a helicopter, and you see all the smoke from the burn pits. And I mean, that's your first impression, is they're burning crap all throughout the country as a sanitary thing. But that's your impression. It's a shithole.

[00:13:45.37] MARC HENDERSON: Who did you leave behind? Were you married?

[00:13:47.59] WILFRED HANSON: No. And the girl I was dating at Fort Knox, we had broken up before I left. And so I had siblings, and I had nephews and nieces. And let's see. I guess my mother was still alive. My dad died when I was four.

[00:14:14.32] MARC HENDERSON: Did you fly over on a civilian plane?

[00:14:17.23] WILFRED HANSON: Yes. And I was looking for that picture, but I guess I took it out of my book. You know, it's just a normal-- I was in a uniform, but sitting in a civilian plane. I went in the Repo Depot, so I didn't know where I was going.

[00:14:35.66] MARC HENDERSON: OK. And how did you end up in a cav unit?

[00:14:39.28] WILFRED HANSON: Well, I got assigned to the 101st. And I guess it was Delta Troop.

[00:14:52.56] MARC HENDERSON: So you ended up in the 101st. What was their area of responsibility in Vietnam?

[00:14:58.32] WILFRED HANSON: In I Corps, in the-- it was an airmobile unit, so it covered the A Shau Valley.

[00:15:06.78] MARC HENDERSON: And did you go straight to Camp Eagle, or did you spend any time at Camp Evans?

[00:15:13.14] WILFRED HANSON: No. Straight to-- that's where Delta troop was in, Camp Eagle. 2nd of the 17th Cavalry. Seemed pretty exciting.

[00:15:22.11] MARC HENDERSON: What were your living conditions like?

[00:15:24.21] WILFRED HANSON: We had an officer's hooch. Had a little bar at one end of the hooch. And you know, the idea that you could take a shower every night-- that was certainly better than my envisions about living in a foxhole for 30 days at a time. Food was pretty good, and we ate it in the mess hall. When I was having breakfast this morning, I was thinking that I really don't have any memories of the food, so it must have been decent.

[00:15:57.99] MARC HENDERSON: What were your initial duties?

[00:15:59.90] WILFRED HANSON: My initial duties? I came in while-- there was a period of time when I was unassigned, really. But in my first week at Delta Troop, they were preparing for a rappelling mission. So I immediately was shown how to rappel from a helicopter. I didn't have a platoon assigned, so they assigned me to one of the sergeant-- a squad leader, and said that it would be an orientation. I would just tag along to see how things were done and be a part of the mission.

[00:16:51.33] It was very interesting for the end of my first week in Vietnam. We had, I think, 12 helicopter loads of 6 men each, all poised and ready to go. They would pick us up at the pad. And I think I was assigned to, like, the tenth helicopter or something. And we were all ready to go.

[00:17:19.71] And then the first helicopter-- an RPG knocked it out of the sky. And so everybody was scrambling. They then put everybody in lower, further down the hill. And then we moved up the hill to where the contact was initiated.

[00:17:53.82] The mission was supposed to be a search after a B-52-- an Arc Light, which was a B-52 strike. And then we were supposed to sift through the rubble. Well, the strike did not occur, and the powers that be decided just to go ahead and do a surprise attack.

[00:18:25.83] And so all the things that we covered in OCS-- you know, the Air Force doesn't come through, if you're on the ground in triple canopy, when you pop smoke grenades to show your position, the smoke can go through, filter through the trees,

and then the gunships or the jets are going to end up firing on your own location. And that happened to us.

[00:19:03.39] And in OCS, they told us that a foxhole is your friend, you know? When you're on the ground, dig as deep as you can. Well, the problem, then, in our missions were we were always on ridges where you had about one inch of topsoil, and then you're digging-- you're trying to dig into rocks. And I remember that.

[00:19:31.44] I had about two inches down in the dirt, and then a piece of cardboard. And you know, trying to get my body down so enemy fire wouldn't-- and the gunship that hit some of the people came right down in front of me. And because I was behind the line, I didn't get hit. But we lost several people. Well, they were wounded.

[00:20:05.95] MARC HENDERSON: From friendly fire?

[00:20:07.48] WILFRED HANSON: From friendly fire. And the next morning, they said, well, you know, at the crack of dawn is usually when the enemy attacks. And so as soon as it started to get light, we were attacked. But we had plenty of firepower. And to my knowledge, no one was injured during that.

[00:20:36.32] But we did find a lot of ammunition, and there was a cache there. So we found that. One of the memories of that was the sergeant I was assigned to-- his squad was assigned the task of putting the deceased in body bags. So we went out to find the downed chopper. One of the quirks was when the helicopter hit the triple canopy, the pilot and co-pilot were thrown through the windshield, and I think one of them had a broken leg, but they survived.

[00:21:35.32] But the helicopter exploded. And everybody else-- I think like eight of our Delta Troop people-- were incinerated in that. And so the sergeant came up to me and said, well, Will, do you want to provide security, or do you want to help with the body bags? And I thought for a second and said, you know, Sergeant, this is my first week in Vietnam. I think I'll provide security.

[00:22:13.94] MARC HENDERSON: So at first you were unassigned. What were some of your other responsibilities?

[00:22:18.32] WILFRED HANSON: Well, it turned out that the officer who ran the TOC-- the Tactical Operations Center-- at the time, Captain Fred Rees, was then assigned to be Delta Troop commander. The existing commander was rotated out. And at that time, they asked me if I would do his duties.

[00:22:51.26] And so I did that for a short period. Several weeks, I think. And then the 1st Platoon leader at Delta Troop turned captain. That was Ed Cruickshank. And he was being rotated back stateside. So I was given the opportunity to be the 1st Platoon leader.

[00:23:18.32] And I decided-- they actually gave me the choice, if I remember right, that I could continue to being the TOC officer, or going into 1st Platoon. And I said, well, if I'm going to do a combat, I'd rather do it in the first six months, and then go to something else. Yeah. And so at that time, I became the 1st Platoon leader.

[00:23:48.59] MARC HENDERSON: And you were a first lieutenant as well?

[00:23:50.24] WILFRED HANSON: Yes. I had to become a first lieutenant.  
WILFRED HANSON: Delta Troop's mission was ready reaction force. And so one platoon would be a 15-minute ready reaction force. The second platoon would be maybe 30-minute, and then the third platoon would essentially be off.

[00:24:26.90] So you know, on the days that we were 15-minute, we would assemble outside in the morning, have our packs and rifles and everything ready to board a helicopter. And the only thing that we didn't have were the grenades. And so as soon as we got word that we were needed to provide security for a downed aircraft, we needed to support a long-range reconnaissance platoon that was under attack, or for some other reason-- and so in those days, we were pretty much restricted to where we were and what we did.

[00:25:21.14] Other days, we would be doing training-- you know, going to the rifle range and practice shooting. And of course, day-to-day, there was KP. And, well, officers didn't have to do that. But there was a certain amount of downtime, where you could do things.

[00:25:51.00] WILFRED HANSON: Well, you know, at basic, where I was dealing with college graduates who were embarking on this interesting, you know, basic, AIT, OCS, armor, we had a common mission, even though we were from different places. And so I had some friendships there. And in Vietnam, you know, we had a camaraderie.

[00:26:29.29] And witnessed by the fact that we're willing to get together here, I'm sure you met General Rees-- or back then, he was Captain. And then Blair was-- I was actually at Delta Troop a few weeks before Blair. But I was part of that big mission that we had.

[00:26:58.27] So Blair obviously had a different orientation. He went through Ranger training. He was intent-- you know, Fred Rees and Blair were going to be career military people. Along the way, I had-- I think I mentioned that when I was in high school, I was thinking about West Point. But I was disqualified because of my eyesight.

[00:27:34.57] And you know, when I graduated from OCS, I was open-minded about the idea of being a military career. But being in a training brigade in Fort Knox soured me on the military-- you know, the ranking, and the pettiness, and I had decided then that an Army career wasn't for me. But you know, if you were going to make a career of it, you needed to get some combat experience on your resume. And so here, I'm in Vietnam, in a plum position for a career militarist.

[00:28:28.27] And you know, Blair was commenting to me that in the war, 1 in 11 people were in a combat environment. I mean, there is all the logistics that go to support the one guy on the line. And so there were a lot of opportunities for me not to be in, directly, harm's way.

[00:28:58.57] MARC HENDERSON: Did you form friendships with other Marines, Airmen, or folks from different services?

[00:29:04.63] WILFRED HANSON: Didn't really have contact. We worked with-- we were in III MAF, which is the Third Marine Assault Force, or something like that. But we really-- I mean, at my level, we had no contact.

[00:29:25.42] MARC HENDERSON: What about friendships with men or women from different racial or social backgrounds that you wouldn't otherwise have met?

[00:29:35.38] WILFRED HANSON: We had some-- you know, the officer group did not have any black or Hispanic. And we really formed friendships with fellow officers, right or wrong. And so, no. Not really, no.

[00:30:04.99] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever witness any social tensions?

[00:30:07.57] WILFRED HANSON: Well, we had an incident in my platoon where one of the men fragged my platoon sergeant. Fragging is when you detonate a grenade. And the guy was sleeping, fortunately, with his feet at one end of the tent where the grenade was detonated.

[00:30:33.52] And at the time of the fragging, I thought I had a very superior NCO. One of these people that was very-- whatever I said, he repeated back and did, to the best of my knowledge. But in the review of the men after the fragging, I realized that



some of the members of the platoon viewed him as a parade ground sergeant, and not somebody that was protecting them in the field. And so that was an eye-opener for me.

[00:31:24.16] And some people talk about the million dollar wound. Well, because of the way he was sleeping, he got fragments in his feet. They sent him to the Philippines for rehabilitation, and his tour was up. So that got him out of Vietnam.

[00:31:44.84] MARC HENDERSON: So did they ever catch--

[00:31:46.76] WILFRED HANSON: Yes.

[00:31:47.08] MARC HENDERSON: --the culprits?

[00:31:47.83] WILFRED HANSON: Blair told me later that they put him in a Conex container down in-- I forget where in Vietnam. So it wasn't a pleasant experience for him.

[00:32:01.48] MARC HENDERSON: Kind of a makeshift jail, sort of?

[00:32:03.07] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah, yeah.

[00:32:06.90] MARC HENDERSON: How much time did you have to yourself?

[00:32:11.77] WILFRED HANSON: Well, we shared a officers hooch. And it seemed like we had time. I mean, every third day, where we were 15-minute, that was when we really had to be available.

[00:32:32.20] MARC HENDERSON: What about recreation or off-duty activities? What did you do to pass the time?

[00:32:37.16] WILFRED HANSON: Well, there was always the officer's bar. Alcohol was like \$1 a quart in Vietnam. And you know, you mentioned holidays. Like, I've been known to say that my biggest regret in Vietnam was that Bob Hope and his troupe came to Camp Eagle. And I think it was on New Year's Day, or I could be wrong as to what day it was.

[00:33:16.38] But the night before, I believe, was New Year's Eve, and I got drunk. And the next morning, it was a hot, hot day, and my head was throbbing all morning. And I chose to sleep in. I couldn't get out of my cot to go to that event, and I was always disappointed.

[00:33:44.12] MARC HENDERSON: I think that was his 1969 Christmas tour. Does that sound about right?

[00:33:49.05] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. Yeah. It would have been it. And I was so disappointed.

[00:33:56.03] MARC HENDERSON: Any other holidays?

[00:33:56.96] WILFRED HANSON: Well, there was an emphasis on winning the hearts and minds of the Vietnamese population. So they needed a qualified person to become the squadron civil affairs officer. And so by becoming a staff officer, I had the ability to go on two R&Rs.

[00:34:25.55] So right after I took over, or in the transition before the old officer left, I was able to go to Bangkok, Thailand, and visit with a fellow who had been at Claremont McKenna with me. He was a Thai person who was on a fellowship at Claremont. And so I spent some quality time in Bangkok.

[00:34:59.61] And then later on, while I was a civil affairs officer, and we had already found my replacement, they had an opening for somebody to go to Sydney, Australia. And I was available, so I went to Sydney, Australia. And the thing I liked about Sydney-- it was a large bay. Larger, but you know, I came from Newport Beach, Costa Mesa. So it was like being at home with English-speaking people.

[00:35:41.07] But the downside was leaving there to come back to Vietnam. And that was a real downer, where I had another month to serve there. And it just-- that was the most depressed I think I was in Vietnam, coming back after being in Australia.

[00:36:08.52] MARC HENDERSON: How long into your tour did you switch over to civil affairs?

[00:36:12.15] WILFRED HANSON: About six months in. And the civil affairs officer, Captain-- I forget-- the captain who was running it was going back. And so they needed someone.

[00:36:28.77] MARC HENDERSON: Did you get any formal training to do that, or was it all kind of OJT?

[00:36:32.13] WILFRED HANSON: OJT. The local people wanted to rebuild a school that had been destroyed during the Tet Offensive. And I had a interpreter, and so I coordinated the US furnishing supplies for it. When it was completed, then the

current commander of the squadron got to bring it-- to come in by helicopter as a photo opportunity, and you know, enhance his portfolio.

[00:37:07.15] MARC HENDERSON: Any other projects?

[00:37:08.50] WILFRED HANSON: The Vietnamese had a gal that had a chronic disease. And so we worked to get her to have medical assistance and specialists. But it was too late, and she passed away. And I was invited to the funeral and so I have a picture of that.

[00:37:33.59] We had Kit Carson Scouts. These are former NVAs who had agreed to work with us. And so got to attend some-- at least one wedding in that. And in between, I got to do a little sightseeing in the city of Hue.

[00:38:02.32] So I got some opportunities. I mean, the average GI was restricted to the base, except where you were being deployed to the field. And so I got to see a little more of the country.

[00:38:27.51] WILFRED HANSON: You know, there were nice people. I mean, there obviously were Viet Cong in the middle of them. But the major-- I think it was Major Tre or Trung, or something-- that I worked with on the school. And no, I had good feelings. You know, when I found out that Vietnam fell, I mean, I worried about how these people-- you know, what happened to them.

[00:39:07.41] And I guess it's the same situation today in Afghanistan. I mean, you know, how many of those people are we going to allow in this country? And are we going to see people lined up on rooftops, being evacuated by helicopter?

[00:39:28.43] MARC HENDERSON: What was your impression of the Kit Carson Scouts?

[00:39:33.24] WILFRED HANSON: It seemed to work. When I was in the 1st Platoon, we had a scout. And they were out front, and we had rifles trained on them. So they knew that if they did anything, that they would be the first to feel our wrath. This happened toward the end. So I guess I didn't really have much opportunity to work with them.

[00:40:08.76] MARC HENDERSON: What about the wedding you attended? Was there anything unique about that? What was that experience like?

[00:40:14.10] WILFRED HANSON: Well, just the different foods. And you know, you try something, and it looks appetizing, but it might be pure lard, or something. And they had their share of bugs running around.

[00:40:29.31] MARC HENDERSON: So do you have any specific memories of the popular culture?

[00:40:32.43] WILFRED HANSON: Well, there are certain songs that we-- you know, the Korean and Filipino groups that came through there, they would always sing Peter, Paul, and Mary's "Leaving On a Jet Plane," or "We Got to Get Out of This Place," by-- I forget who sang that. Yeah. There were--

[00:40:58.98] MARC HENDERSON: Is that The Animals?

[00:41:00.54] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah, I think so. So yes, there was definitely some popular music. You know, we needed to be entertained.

[00:41:17.37] MARC HENDERSON: Were there any specific operations that you participated in or witnessed?

[00:41:22.12] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. I don't know that it was a named operation, but I have it down as Hill 916. And anyway, late in the day, we were called to reinforce one of the other companies-- reconnaissance platoons. And we were to-- they had discovered signs of enemy activity on this hill in the A Shau Valley, and so they flew us in to reinforce, so we could do an RON-- Remain Overnight.

[00:42:04.90] We got there late, or it was getting fairly late. And so I met with the other platoon leader to establish our deployment. And one of the specific questions I asked him was, have you reconned the area in front of our position? We were kind of on a ridge, and on a higher hill.

[00:42:36.40] And he had said yes. And so when I went back to my platoon leader, squad leaders, I said, you know, it's late. We need to dig in, and we might need to forgo searching the area in front of or around us, which was our normal SOP so we could establish our perimeter and dig in. And I got my radio operator to, OK, dig us a foxhole.

[00:43:21.67] But anyway, so I went around to make sure that the perimeter was intact from the inside. And then, I guess, while deploying our Claymore mines, one of the guys detected a tunnel. And so the squad leader came back to me and said, hey, we have a tunnel in front of us. We really should look at that.

[00:43:52.97] And so I said, yeah, let's do that. And so I got a machine gunner. I got the squad leader and another guy, and we-- I decided to leave my radio operator behind, digging the foxhole for us. And so we went out front. And I guess we went about 20 yards outside the perimeter when grenades started going off.

[00:44:32.80] And I looked to my right, and my machine gunner was on the ground in convulsions, having been hit by enemy fire. And then a grenade thudded in the bush next to me. So I instantly hit the ground.

[00:45:01.54] The grenade went off. And then I kind of backed up, and another grenade went off below me. And I actually saw the grenade before it detonated, and so I flattened out against the ground. And I did get hit in the chin, but it just seemed like a weak grenade. It did not seem like a US-version grenade.

[00:45:36.44] And so then there was kind of a channel. And so my squad leader was below me, and we both kind of went in this crevice, which led into a tunnel. And at this point, every time there was a movement, you know, another grenade or two went off, and they were firing. Now, whether some of it was coming from my platoon, and the other from enemy, that, I-- you know, it was in the confusion.

[00:46:22.88] And while this is happening, the sun goes down. So I mean, it was amazing how quickly it became dark. And we knew that we didn't want to go toward our perimeter, because our own people would shoot us. And we didn't know what was going on in front of us.

[00:46:45.65] And initially, there was some moaning from the guy who was in the point. But he was kind of over the cliff, so to speak. And then we didn't know where the other guy was. We assumed maybe he was-- we knew one guy was dead, and we didn't know where the other guy was.

[00:47:19.31] But every time we tried to-- we were on a slant, on gravel, and every time we made a noise, another grenade would go off. And we really didn't-- I mean, we were in a very vulnerable situation. A grenade in the right place, and we were toast.

[00:47:42.05] You know, that was the one night that I stayed awake all night without any trouble at all. But sometime in the early morning-- you know, like one o'clock or so, or maybe it was later than that-- anyway, the air-- jets started dropping bombs. But you know, unless you know where you're dropping them, they don't do any good. And in this case, where our unit was 50 yards away, you know, they can't drop bombs. So it's almost useless.

[00:48:24.41] We had to wait for the helicopter gunships, which can maneuver closer in. Somewhere in the middle of the night, all of a sudden, we heard some scrambling in front of us. And it turned out there was a tunnel and a hole. And this guy that we didn't know what happened to came down the hole, and I had my M16 on him, ready to shoot him, because I see-- you don't know whether it's friend or foe.

[00:48:59.29] But it turned out to be one of our men. So we had three of us, then. And there was one-- there was an entrance from the top, and then there was an entrance from the side that I couldn't see down, and then the entrance where Sergeant King and I were. And we were that way until daybreak. And then at that time, we heard walking at the entrance where my guy, O'Connor, I guess was in.

[00:49:44.57] And so all of a sudden O'Connor fires. But it's just a click, because he hadn't chambered a round. And then you know, I'm trying to look around the corner and see what's there. And so then he chambered a round and shot the-- reportedly a North Vietnamese officer.

[00:50:13.22] And then the next day, you know, everything went quiet. And we figured it was time for the reinforcements to come forward and find us. And all of a sudden, out of the clear blue, we hear, you GI!

[00:50:34.97] And you know, the three of us are looking at each other, thinking, oh, my god. It's the NVA, you know? And so we're deciding, you know, what are we going to do? Are you GI? Come out! You know?

[00:50:51.77] And so while we were debating-- because all they had to do was drop a hand grenade in there-- and then, all of a sudden, there's an English voice. They all-- hey, if you're down there, get out, or we're going to drop a grenade. And all of a sudden, we start screaming.

[00:51:15.89] And so the other part of that, was which was pretty sad, was part of the explosions that went on every once in a while-- in the morning, my platoon sergeant heard rustling in front of the position. And he threw a grenade. It hit a branch and bounced back, and it riddled his side. And he later died from those injuries. And while the medic was attending to him, he went berserk and charged the position, and was gunned down.

[00:52:05.51] MARC HENDERSON: The medic was?

[00:52:06.26] WILFRED HANSON: The medic was, yeah. I mean, it was totally because he just lost it and charged the position. And so you know, Captain Rees was happy to see O'Connor, King, and me alive. You can imagine, you know, back at

Delta Troop, they were thinking that they lost seven people, and it was bad enough losing four.

[00:52:44.46] MARC HENDERSON: Do you remember their names? The medic and the sergeant?

[00:52:46.77] WILFRED HANSON: Stockbauer, Sergeant Torres, Rivera, and William Bobo. Those are the people who died.

[00:53:02.24] MARC HENDERSON: And were the voices that you heard come out-- were those the reinforcements?

[00:53:10.41] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. They brought in an Army unit.

[00:53:15.21] MARC HENDERSON: US Army or ARVN?

[00:53:16.83] WILFRED HANSON: No, no. US Army.

[00:53:19.23] MARC HENDERSON: How about the quality of your leadership?

[00:53:21.24] WILFRED HANSON: Well, there were different people. I mean, I worked with Captain Rees, and he was first-rate. You know, a West-Pointer who went on to become, what, a major general in the Reserves, a distinguished Army career. You know, that was a real bonus of luck of being assigned.

[00:53:48.75] And you know, Blair was a dedicated career Army guy. Those are the two people I worked with the most. Really, I had turnover on the NCOs. My platoon sergeants, they-- the second one, Walker-- William Walker, came in. He was a black sergeant and very qualified. Unfortunately, after I left, at Khe Sanh he was killed in an ambush.

[00:54:33.60] And our troop commander-- and I forget his name just handy-- but he was top-notch. You know, he was very respectful and decisive and organized, you know, and as a young lieutenant, he provided continuity and leadership.

[00:55:01.61] MARC HENDERSON: What were some of the other types of missions that Delta Troop was responsible for doing?

[00:55:09.38] WILFRED HANSON: One of the things that we did a lot of were providing security for downed aircraft. And so we would go out there. They would try to find a spot as close-- that they could-- we never had to rappel in. There was usually a spot where they could land us. And we'd go just make a perimeter around it, and

then they'd decide what they want to do with the aircraft-- maybe send a Chinook in and just haul it up and carry it away.

[00:55:51.41] And I didn't bring a picture, but sometimes we would go to a fire base where they had a cleared area of land. And they would want to fly in some howitzers and do a surprise artillery mission, and on quick notice. And so we would go in and kind of search the area, and then they'd bring the artillery in by helicopter, and fire off a bunch of rounds, and then take off.

[00:56:41.52] On one of those incidents, it was a deserted little Island in the middle of some river-- I guess it was a river. And so we were there, and we landed in one spot. And we were walking along this dirt road to get in our positions. And I noticed it looked like the nose cone of an artillery round poking in the road.

[00:57:22.41] And so I called halt, and I showed it to my sergeant. And all of a sudden, you know, the squad behind me, oh, a booby trap. Let's see it! And before I could say, you know, get back, everybody wanted to see it.

[00:57:48.39] Well, Captain Rees was not that far away. And all of a sudden, he's seeing my unit go from dispersed deployment to hanging out in one spot. And he comes running up to me, and he's about ready to step on this thing. And I just instinctively shoved him back. And you should have seen the expression on his face, like, you know?

[00:58:23.31] And you know, I point down there. I said, you know, sir, you're about ready to step on this thing. And anyway, we dispersed then. And then they brought in a demolition unit. And it was a live artillery round. Now, whether it would have actually exploded if he stepped on it, you know, who knows? But this is what happens in warfare. Things can be self-inflicted.

[00:59:05.51] WILFRED HANSON: At Fort Knox, they had optical sights for night vision. But it was rudimentary at that time. You know, now, in video games and stuff, you see how great it is. But back then, it didn't really impress me as much. Although at Fort Knox, when I was dealing with tanks, it was in the training brigade. And the training brigades are last in line to get new and improved equipment.

[00:59:51.65] You know, obviously, the troops in Germany and the Fulda Gap have the best of the best, and the training company is pressed to have a complete assortment of the usual stuff. In Vietnam, you know, the M16, by the time I got there, it was pretty well-functioning. I had no problems with my rifle. But at the beginning of the war, there were all these stories about sand, and people are having weapons that are freezing.



[01:00:36.63] The one thing that-- you know, constantly, in OCS, they did talk about keeping equipment ready. And the guy, Rivera, who died, he borrowed the .45 from the medic to look at the tunnel. And apparently, that weapon jammed. So again, you know, your combat people are maybe more attuned to keeping their weapons than an auxiliary member, like a medic, which Stockbauer was. WILFRED HANSON: Well, that was Hill 916.

[01:01:43.83] MARC HENDERSON: Sure.

[01:01:44.28] WILFRED HANSON: I mean losing-- I still think about Stock-- or about Bobo. And the one of the ironies on Bobo is the guy who should have, or would normally have been there, was assigned to KP. And you know, I commented that on the beginning of the day, when we were assigned ready reaction force. And I was told by the NCOs that, well, it's this guy's normal time to serve in the kitchen, and so find one of your other people to be the machine gunner.

[01:02:36.43] And so I pulled Bobo out of another unit. And I think about that quirk of fate-- that a guy that would have just arrived, practically. But you make these assignments as a platoon leader. And you know, Rivera was the one who wanted to investigate that tunnel, and he borrowed the .45 from the medic, and you know, these chains of events that you don't have any control over.

[01:03:18.25] I had another mission. I guess-- well, referring to unintended consequences-- I had a radio operator that was a good guy. And I decided to promote him to squad leader, to sergeant. And I think on our first mission with him as a squad leader, he was walking point with a veteran sergeant who was getting ready to rotate back to stateside.

[01:04:10.39] We were single file on a jungle trail. And all of a sudden, a shot rings out. And Sergeant Harry Yingling-- he had decided to veer off the trail without coverage from the support guy. And apparently, there was a trail watcher who felt threatened, and shot him right through the heart-- one shot, silence.

[01:04:57.88] And the backup guy didn't fire a shot. And you know, everybody hit the ground, and nothing. And so I ran forward with the medic. And oh, I guess the word came down-- medic, medic. And there he is, just laid out on the trail.

[01:05:26.32] I guess that was the saddest moment. I mean, he was my radio guy. And we had a bond. And I promoted him. And you know, he lost his life, for what purpose?

[01:05:47.84] You promote someone because they deserve it. And he was happy to do it. But to see a guy's life snuffed out like that-- and we didn't even fire a shot. You know?

[01:06:14.31] Anyway, yeah, I was saddened by that. And that's the problem. If you have a unit and you get to know some of the guys, since I was only in the field for less than six months, and people are rotating out. But I did want to include his name here, because his untold story.

[01:06:58.32] MARC HENDERSON: What would you say to his family if they were watching this?

[01:07:04.96] WILFRED HANSON: He was a good Soldier. He did his job. And he was willing to walk the point on that particular trail. And that's why we were over there. We were over there doing our duty.

[01:07:27.99] WILFRED HANSON: Probably going to wine country in Sydney. I flew in a private, small plane to a winery outside of Sydney on, you know, a beautiful, Southern California-like day. It was a tour.

[01:07:51.66] MARC HENDERSON: OK.

[01:07:52.42] WILFRED HANSON: You know, you go and sign up for a tour, a wine--

[01:07:55.90] MARC HENDERSON: Was it through the USO, or through--

[01:07:57.64] WILFRED HANSON: Probably, yeah.

[01:07:58.82] MARC HENDERSON: Something like that?

[01:07:59.27] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. You know, with the US military, and all these things going on, there was all these-- you know, maybe the domino theory was inaccurate, but I firmly believe that we pumped so much money into the economies of South Korea, Taiwan, Philippines, and Australia, and Singapore, and Bangkok that they became more vibrant places because of their support of the US effort in Vietnam.

[01:08:47.39] WILFRED HANSON: I didn't. I was lucky to get outside. You know, I was a lowly first lieutenant. I mean, only because I was in civil affairs did I get outside of Camp Eagle.

[01:09:07.86] WILFRED HANSON: I sent some audio recordings. I sent letters. You know, my mother would write me every once in a while. Sister-in-laws would send some goodie boxes-- you know, homemade cookies, and stuff like that. But I didn't have a spouse, or a steady girlfriend that I maintained contact with.

[01:09:38.03] MARC HENDERSON: How much news did you receive of the war that you were fighting in?

[01:09:41.93] WILFRED HANSON: Well, I received the Stars and Stripes on a daily basis. And it seemed like we had pretty good information. It was probably censored, but you know, it was the news that I wanted to hear.

[01:10:00.11] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. How much news did you receive about politics or movements back home, whether they be antiwar, or civil rights, or any of that?

[01:10:11.96] WILFRED HANSON: Well, you know, my memory is clouded, because what was after I got back, and what was during, and what was fore, I really don't have it right. I just know that in-country, in a combat situation, you're focused on your people, your fellow officers, and our mission.

[01:10:42.50] Now, in my mind, my mission was focused on getting us all back alive. I never really felt like taking the hill was accomplishing much. But taking the hill and keeping everyone alive, that seemed like my major goal.

[01:11:08.72] After reading some books afterwards-- you know, in recent years-- I see that career military people, they had a purpose. You know, filling out their portfolio. It was needed to have a satisfactory or exemplary combat situation. And so when Captain Rees presented me the opportunity to go to civil affairs, he commented on that there are some lieutenants that would like the 1st Platoon position, because it gave them combat experience, whereas I was planning on getting out of the Army, period, as soon as I returned from Vietnam.

[01:12:09.68] Because I only had a couple of months left in my 3-year commitment, I wasn't going to have to serve stateside. I was going to leave Vietnam and directly muster out. So that made sense. So now that I look at it retrospectively, I'm thinking, why did I put myself in harm's way?

[01:12:40.13] MARC HENDERSON: What was the general feeling of the population, of the local population around the base, about the war?

[01:12:49.47] WILFRED HANSON: You know, I never asked that question. I mean, I think the GI was present, and they were supportive of it. In I Corps, it was the one corps that when the Tet Offensive occurred, the Viet Cong surfaced. And as a result, it was decimated.

[01:13:18.31] And I guess it was part of the NVA strategy, is they wanted to control, period. They didn't want an active Viet Cong. And so they were essentially sacrificing the indigenous Communists with the idea that the North would dominate the situation once the war was won. So yes, the people were, I think, committed to staying out of North Vietnamese hands, and we were helping serve that purpose. So it seemed like our relations were quite good.

[01:14:09.43] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever personally witness any demonstrations, whether they be antiwar or, like I mentioned, civil rights or--

[01:14:22.71] WILFRED HANSON: Amongst the local population?

[01:14:24.99] MARC HENDERSON: Well, either in Vietnam, or on bases in the United States?

[01:14:29.64] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. No, I didn't. I did not. WILFRED HANSON: I arrived as a first lieutenant, and I was a first lieutenant when I was preparing to leave, which was, I think, late March or early April of '70.

[01:14:50.80] You know, I was offered-- if I wanted to extend another year, I could make captain. And really, when you think about the US Army prior to Vietnam, making captain in three years was unheard of. But it was happening. And then people were making major in five years.

[01:15:17.01] You know, so there was some attraction of that. I mean, so instead of just being Lieutenant Hanson for the rest of your life, I could have been Captain Hanson. And you know? But anyway, I was committed.

[01:15:34.96] I had three years. I figured that was enough of a break from Harvard Business School. And I wanted to get on with getting my MBA and getting a career started.

[01:15:50.67] MARC HENDERSON: Did you know well in advance when you were leaving, or was it a last-minute surprise that you would leaving early or leave late?

[01:15:58.11] WILFRED HANSON: No, the company clerk advised me a month in advance. The part that was a surprise, though, is I was expecting to leave about two weeks later. But the company clerk gave me a date, and I didn't protest it.

[01:16:27.14] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. What was the flight home like?

[01:16:30.59] WILFRED HANSON: Oh, well, it was apprehensive all the way to Cam Ranh Bay, because you kept thinking, well, a mortar round-- you know, you read all these stories that this guy is-- you know, his last night in-country, and there's a surprise mortar attack, or this or that. And so it was apprehensive all the way until boarding the plane and being airborne toward home. Then you start to relax.

[01:17:02.99] But when I got home, I had lost weight, and I was really pretty thin. And I was jumpy. And I just kind of slunk back into civilian life. And I talked to one of my high school buddies, who had come back from being in Germany just as a draftee. And he was living on unemployment insurance. So he was telling me how to apply for that until I got back to school in September.

[01:17:55.67] MARC HENDERSON: You flew into Travis.

[01:17:57.92] WILFRED HANSON: No, I flew into-- I think it's Camp Lewis, Washington. I think-- yeah.

[01:18:03.74] MARC HENDERSON: Did they out process you directly from there?

[01:18:05.93] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. I just kind of showed up, and there were no fanfare. And people, family members, saying, you lost a little weight, there. Are you OK? And the whole thing was pretty low-key.

[01:18:29.25] MARC HENDERSON: So you said you went back to school?

[01:18:31.76] WILFRED HANSON: Yes. Yes, yeah.

[01:18:33.26] MARC HENDERSON: And--

[01:18:37.53] WILFRED HANSON: And actually, I didn't claim unemployment. Actually, a friend told me about a public accounting firm was hiring interns. And so I showed up and said, hey, I'm going to graduate in a year. Any chance of getting a summer job? And I was able to get a summer job, and so--

[01:19:05.85] MARC HENDERSON: Were you ever able to leverage your experience in civil affairs?

[01:19:09.51] WILFRED HANSON: No. No, but it so happened that the managing partner of the local office of Arthur Young and Company, he was named Hanson as well. No relation, but he was an Orange County conservative, so at least there was somebody that appreciated a returning veteran. And it helped that I was going to graduate from Harvard Business School with an MBA within 12 months.

[01:19:43.36] So that all worked out. So I had the GI Bill. And I had some managerial experience. And I was ready to go.

[01:19:56.53] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have any difficulty adjusting to life after the war?

[01:20:01.96] WILFRED HANSON: No. I adjusted pretty quickly. Although the one incident that I do remember is I had rented an apartment, and a former OCS buddy of mine decided to come visit in Newport Beach. And he spent the night on my couch.

[01:20:28.61] And early in the morning, he decided to go out on the patio. And he walked into the screen door, and there was this racket-- click, click-- when he ran into the screen door. And I jumped out of bed and hit the ground. You know, it sounded like a rifle-- what do you call it? Chambering the rifle.

[01:21:01.31] It just took me out of a sound sleep. And I thought, well, I guess I do have a reaction. But that's the most PTSD that I've ever had, really.

[01:21:15.59] MARC HENDERSON: And how much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years?

[01:21:21.23] WILFRED HANSON: That one individual, because he decided he liked Newport Beach so much he moved there. And then with these reunions. WILFRED HANSON: I guess it gave me a little more perspective on evaluating what the government says versus what's happening in the real world, and I guess an appreciation for the members of the military and their perspective on protecting this country and the necessity for having a qualified military.

[01:22:12.41] I guess in Vietnam, I recognized that the rivalries between the services do the country a disservice, because the Air Force wants credit for what they're doing, and the Army wants credit, and the Marines-- I mean, I came away with the view that, do we really need a Marine Corps? You know, all the infrastructure? And so I'm skeptical about-- I've always been skeptical about the efficiency of our money, and kind of the military industrial complex. But anyway, if the government can stay out of my daily affairs, so be it.

[01:23:14.38] MARC HENDERSON: Did your experience in combat affect the way you think about troops returning from combat today?

[01:23:22.44] WILFRED HANSON: Yeah. I think that the people should be-- in fact, I volunteered for an outfit for a while-- VetNet, which is a part of an organization called Working Wardrobes, that help veterans transition into worthwhile career opportunities. Yeah. I mean, people have put their lives on the line.

[01:23:54.33] And I guess the other thing that really impressed me is that for all the wars we've had, there's this unappreciated cost of PTSD and physical-- and it seems like VA tries to weasel out of responsibilities for exposure to chemicals, other-- I mean, it just-- we owe the veterans medical care, with the things that we expose them to. And yeah, I don't think Congress and the VA-- it seems like VA-- well, some people in some companies used to say that the personnel was the anti-personnel-- or HR, human resources, is anti-personnel, because they're trying to minimize the company's expense at the expense of the well-being of the employees, and I think that especially with the Trump appointees, it seems like they're trying to weasel out of the responsibility that the country has for its returning veterans.

[01:25:32.90] Maybe we've minimized the amount of people that get killed, but they're injured, they lose limbs, they're mentally defective. And so I'm not a reformer, but I certainly support efforts to take care of these people and aid the transition to well-paying jobs.

[01:26:04.76] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the war is remembered today?

[01:26:11.43] WILFRED HANSON: I think everybody has their own war. And I mean, I know I resented the fact that when Clinton came along, I just couldn't believe that the American public would vote for somebody that weaseled out of-- but then, privileged people from privileged families all had an escape, for the most part. I mean, that wasn't 100%, but you look at the statistics of who was over there, and it definitely shows that rank has its privilege.

[01:27:01.02] I would have thought that Bush would have recognized that you don't willingly go into another country and think you're going to solve-- or change that country into a Western democracy. And 20 years later, we're finally getting out of Afghanistan. And you know, we're going to have all these recriminations about how we let these people down there. And I mean, just last week, there was a bombing-- like, 50 kids were killed in Afghanistan.

[01:27:53.58] The opposing side doesn't believe that women should be educated. Well, I mean, by our withdrawing, it's going to go back to-- so, maybe the Taliban won't be able to march in with tanks, but I think most educated people think that when's the fall of Kabul? It's not if, but when.

[01:28:31.56] And I certainly think that Biden should start processing, bringing in people that were local supporters of us, because they're going to be executed once the Taliban takes over. And we're a big country. We can absorb the elite of that country. And they'll make us stronger, and that would be the right thing to do.

[01:29:17.53] WILFRED HANSON: It was very, very touching. And I looked up the - Yingling and some of the other people. My youngest daughter went there, and I gave her the names. And she smudged-- they do a charcoal rendition of it.

[01:29:42.96] I still remember, though, I was-- I forget what the discussion with my daughter was. And I was describing something that I did over there. And she says, oh, I thought you were a war hero. Like she was disappointed that I didn't do more.

[01:30:02.67] So anyway, I thought it was well done. It was brilliant. But I also like the addition to it with the group of Soldiers. And in Newport Beach, we have our own little memorial, which is one Soldier. And it's nice to see in the uniform, the accouterments-- the gas mask, and the M16, and, you know, it's nostalgic.