

Herrera, Raul USN

[00:00:13.80] RAUL HERRERA: I was born in San Antonio, Texas on Veterans Day, November 11, 1946. I had two stepsisters, but I never knew them as that. They were my sisters. My parents were born exactly a year prior to me being born, on their anniversary I was born. On their anniversary. We lived in the barrio of San Antonio, in the poor neighborhood. I didn't know I was poor because you just get acclimated to the environment that you're brought up in.

[00:00:44.91] The creek nearby was our playground, we rolled down the hill on tires and did all sorts of things that kids normally do in those neighborhoods. And I went to Catholic school for 12 years, elementary school at Sacred Heart, Holy Cross High School. I graduated in 1965.

[00:01:10.22] RAUL HERRERA: My parents, again, were not able to afford further education for me. So I decided on my own without telling them to go visit the recruiters at the post office next to the Alamo. And I went to all the different recruiters. And the Navy is the one that struck me the most, they had the best to offer. I wanted to be an architect. My father had wanted to send me to tech high school which was a technical school and they had an excellent drafting class. But my mother wanted me to continue with the Catholic education, so Holy Cross here I come.

[00:01:52.49] But at Holy Cross they had a small architectural drafting class, if you will. And I happened to win first place in a lakeside resort drawing. And eventually when graduation time came it was time to decide, well I can't go to college, what am I going to do? The Navy accepted me. I volunteered for four years based on the promise they made me. They promised me drafting A-school. So I signed and went home and I told my parents, and of course, Mom and Dad, especially Mom, she just broke down, because it was just a total surprise to them. So that's what got me into the Navy. I had no idea about the war that was going on in Vietnam at that time, I just wanted to further my education

[00:02:46.50] BRIAN KUMNICK: Wow, you get to go to A-school for drafting?

[00:02:51.17] RAUL HERRERA: Funny that you ask. I'm embarrassed, but this is the truth. I get to recruit training camp in San Diego, and as part of your basic training you go through the first phase. And when you get issued your uniforms, they've been stored in warehouses and in mothballs, so the young recruits that first come in to Naval Training Center in San Diego, we were called mothballs, because we reeked. If we were downwind, they knew we were coming.

[00:03:26.00] When we crossed over a small bridge into upper class country as it was called, we went to classification in an auditorium. The auditorium was filled and they handed out sheets and it listed all the schools available. And the man in charge, a chief, a Navy chief said that he was going to call out the list of schools that were closed, and he happened to say draftsman A-school. And I raised my hand. I said, excuse me, I signed because I was promised drafting school, and everyone started laughing. This isn't funny, this is serious. I gave four years of my life for school, you promised me.

[00:04:15.19] Well, needless to say we walked out of the auditorium, and the upperclassmen they've already been through it, they knew the pain and agony we were experiencing. So as we

were exiting the auditorium they kick off with a little jingle, and the little jingle went, mothball, mothball, don't feel blue, our recruiter screwed us too. That's the story.

[00:04:50.45] RAUL HERRERA: In the Navy you have rates, they call them rates. And I still was determined to be a draftsman, and they call them draftsman strikers. OK, I was an E-3 after I got out of boot camp. And when they told me that I could no longer go to school, that's the way it was, I told my drill instructor the story, that I had won a first place drafting contest, et cetera. He allowed me to make a phone call home, and I told my parents what had happened and I asked them to send me the drawing. And they did along with three letters of recommendation from the principal, Brother Harold, and my drafting teacher, Brother Stanley-- Brother Edward, pardon me, and the architect who judged the drawing. And with that I was allowed to go to classification once again.

[00:05:49.42] And as soon as they saw the drawing and the letters of recommendation, suddenly door number 3 was open wide again and drafting school was made available to me. But they offered me two years on the job training in San Diego instead. Your choice. I learned the lesson never pass up an education. Because I was given the two years on the job training in San Diego, but that turned to just a little over a year because then I received sudden orders to combat boat training, PCF boat training across the bay in Coronado. And that's what happened.

[00:06:33.80] That was from February of 1967 to April of '67. I went home for a number of weeks and then had to report to i believe it was Seattle, Tacoma area. There was an Air Force base there that we flew over to Vietnam. And of course, the training in Coronado was extensive, it was brutal. We went through survival, evasion, resistance, and escape, SERE training.

[00:07:09.74] As a matter of fact, in Coronado we trained right alongside the SEAL team forces. Of course, we just moved aside whenever they came storming by, those guys were just way beyond our training. Nonetheless, we had an experience interesting that the training in-- we're going to a tropical zone, hot, hot, hot. And we're sent to survival training in Whidbey Island in Washington, cold, cold, cold. And I learned a lot, I learned a lot in survival training.

[00:07:50.27] My ethnicity, Mexican-American, proudly to say, got me into a lot of trouble. I was feisty, skinny as a string but feisty. And when it came time to be caught by the "enemy" if you will, we were thrown into POW camp. And it was my turn to go into the interrogation room. And as you and I are sitting here the man was much closer to me. The first thing he'd ask was how many troops do you have-- how many boats do you have? All the different questions they needed to-- and he said in an accent similar to a communist style accent, intimidating.

[00:08:40.30] And immediately according to what we had learned the week passed was that you give your name, your rank, your service number, your date of birth, and that's it according to the Geneva Conventions. And so I looked him straight in the eye and responded that way. Well, just as I was finishing he punched me in my chest and threw me up against the wall, it was right behind me. I was sitting on not a chair but a configured two-piece 2 by 4 in form of a T, and you had to balance yourself on itr, and that's what it was.

[00:09:16.69] That just tore me up. I got up from that floor immediately, and I just looked at him like I was going to attack him. And he said, sit. And so I sat, but I leaned in to him. And he kept asking me more and more questions, and I kept repeating. Raul Herrera, SSN-- boom, this time in the face, punched me down again. This went on about maybe three more times. Finally on that last time he stood up and looked over me as I was on the floor, and he called an end to the training, to the program. He put a pause to the program and he spoke in regular English, and he says, don't ever do that if you're captured by the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese. Don't ever do that. Don't ever fight them because all they want to do is take the fight from you. And I said, oh.

[00:10:11.90] So that ended that particular event, but I learned a great deal. And of course, we were without food for a week. We were without food, and you start hallucinating, you start thinking wild things. And then of course, there was an intimidating man, the sergeant major. He was a tall-- I believe he had to have been Native American, but he was tall and he was a brute, and he played the role of the sergeant major quite well.

[00:10:43.88] When we were captured before going into the prisoner of war camp we were stripped down to our shorts. Pardon me, in the Navy they're skivvies if you will, for accuracy here. And we were making sure-- they were making sure that we had no paraphernalia, no nothing, contraband, weapon, et cetera. And they marched us out into the courtyard, and it must have been the corral at one time because they were horse stalls, open horse stalls to one end, and one by one we were marched into those horse stalls. And there was a puddle where the horses had been and it was icy water and we were thrown into it, I was thrown into that puddle. And the only thing I had on besides my skivvies and my boots was a knit watch cap that the Navy issues.

[00:11:40.45] And the sergeant major came, and I had my dog tags hanging from my neck, but I also had my-- as a matter of fact, if I may-- I still have it, my St. Anthony medal that my parents had given me when I left for Vietnam at the airport. And so when the sergeant major approached and he saw that he grabbed it, and he just uttered some obscenities totally degrading my faith and so on. And the next thing I knew I was flat on my back in that puddle. And the sergeant major put his heavy boot up on my chest, he pushed it up, pulled my watch cap over my face and poured water up my nose until I was just about to drown, I was thrashing everywhere.

[00:12:34.68] Eventually, more torture went on and kicking and so on. And finally, he kept asking questions and again I kept repeating, Seaman Raul Herrera, serial number. The sergeant major turns around to his goonies and he says, kill him. So the two goonies that he had with him grabbed me by my ankles upside down and crashed me through a thin layer of ice, 50 gallon barrel drum and shoved me down into the water. And I thought-- by that that time, with nothing to eat for a week you're delirious. You know you're going to die. And so they pulled me out in time but that was very traumatic. Very, very traumatic.

[00:13:22.72] RAUL HERRERA: They flew us to Cam Ranh Bay and there was a Swift Boat base nearby. And we were sent there because from that location they sent the crews to different locations in Vietnam. And each crew by the way was made up of six individuals, five enlisted men and one junior boat officer. And so the crews were-- you trained as a crew. I was part of Crew 74 Alpha in Coronado. And we stayed together as a crew.

[00:14:02.07] However, we were missing one crewman, and we picked him up off once we got in country, as they say, in Vietnam. And the Swift Boat organization already had bases established in Da Nang, which was Coastal Division 12. Chu Lai was Coastal Division 16, Qui Nhon, Coastal Division 15, Cam Ranh Bay, Coastal Division 14, Cat Lo near Saigon, that was Coastal Division 13, and An Thoi, that was Coastal Division 11.

[00:14:45.15] BRIAN KUMNICK: And which one were you sent to?

[00:14:46.95] RAUL HERRERA: We were sent to Da Nang. We were flown to Da Nang.

[00:14:50.43] BRIAN KUMNICK: Up north.

[00:14:51.18] RAUL HERRERA: Up north. And from there is where we trained with experienced crews. We went out individually. For example, I was sent as a radioman, that was my job on the Swift Boat. Again, I'm a draftsman striker. There was no drafting table on the Swift Boat. There was a combat chart on table-- combat chart table, but no drafting table. So I learned radio and radar, and those were my duties.

[00:15:20.08] And so I was sent out on a crew, I didn't know, but I had to shadow the radioman, radarman and see what his job was, his pre-patrol activities, et cetera. And that went on for about a week and then we got together as a crew and we went out with an experienced boat officer, that he guided us. And of course, they would send us out to the-- just on the outside of the base, on the harbor basically, to do our patrol, to get our feet wet if you will. And once that was established, then we received orders to go south to Chu Lai for temporary duty. Well, that turned into a full year. We stayed there in Chu Lai.

[00:16:09.78] And we had an interesting crew, our boat officer was Lieutenant Bergen-- Lieutenant Junior Grade Edward Bergen. Our lead petty officer was Bobby Don Carver, Boatswain's Mate First Class Bobby Don Carver. Next in line was our enginemen, Engineman First Class Ronald Reinhart. Our gunner was a torpedoman third class, Robert Middleton. I was the radio radarman. And the seaman that we picked up in Da Nang was Timothy McNamara.

[00:16:46.92] I had an interesting story to tell about the boatswain's mate. In today's world of 2019 so many things are politically correct, but my boatswain's mate knighted me with the moniker of Bean. Not acceptable in today's time. But in today's time I like it when people call me Bean, especially my fellow Vietnam vet brothers. Because Carver when I first met him in Swift Boat training, when we came together as a crew, when I approached him and Mr Bergen they were already standing there in the group, he looked me up and down. And he looked and he twirled his reddish handlebar mustache and rubbed his belly a little bit, and he says, what's going on, Bean? I was shocked a little bit, but knowing his height and his posture, I wasn't about to attempt to try to do anything else but just not respond.

[00:18:11.07] In fact, it reminded me it was an issue of ethnicity for me. It was shocking because in San Antonio I grew up in the barrio and we were all accustomed to each other and we lived within the confines of the barrio. So our ethnicity was never in question, but suddenly I'm having

to face this shocking remark by this man. It reminded me of when I went to register for the selective service, filling out the forms and there were many.

[00:18:52.90] There was a black sergeant with a little Smokey the Bear hat on and with a stubby cigar that he was smoking, and he told us if you have any questions, raise your hand. Well, right out of the chute I raised my hand. He marches over and he looks down at me and he says, what your question, son? I said, Sir, I don't see what a check for Mexican. God's honest truth. Call it naive, whatever it was I was happy being called Mexican. Mexican-American preferably, but that's what I felt we were.

[00:19:32.41] American first, but proud of our heritage and therefore Mexican because I came out of the barrio. He shook his head and said, son, just check Caucasian. That left me in worse problems because what the heck is a Caucasian? No one ever told us that, we didn't have lessons in ethnicity at school. But nonetheless, I dealt with it. I was Bean from there on.

[00:20:06.37] RAUL HERRERA: Well, not only I was the radio and radarmen, I was also responsible for cooking. We were on 24-hour patrols. I'm talking now that we're in Chu Lai, we're an established crew and we're going out let's say possibly three or four patrol areas out of Chu Lai. Each both had a certain range of distance 2, 3 miles along the coast. South Vietnam, we patrolled 1,200 miles of coastline, in all those different divisions, all those coastal divisions that we had to secure. Swift Boats were 50-foot aluminum hulled boats that were almost shelf ready to some degree.

[00:20:52.09] How did Swift Boats come about? Up until 1965 the United States was already involved in the Vietnam conflict to a certain degree. And there was always suspicion that North Vietnam was resupplying their forces through the sea. And there was even some of our own Navy military folks didn't quite believe that, they felt that the arms were coming through inland, they were coming inland from the north.

[00:21:32.10] On February the 16th, 1965, Lieutenant Jim Bowers, Army helicopter pilot was asked to fly a medevac mission from Qui Nhon to the field to pick up a Special Forces officer that had been wounded, not critically but wounded. And so he did, he picked him up and he flew out towards the coast. The conditions were the low ceiling so he was going toward the coast where he could ride the shoreline safely south, and he was headed towards the 8th Field Hospital in Nha Trang.

[00:22:11.46] As he was getting close to that point he needed to veer to the southwest over Vung Ro Bay peninsula. The bay was a interesting bay, it wasn't open to the sea. There was a peninsula that paralleled the shoreline that hid the bay. So as he's flying over the cape-- there was a peninsula that he flew over. As he flew over, him and his co-pilot, they took a second look down on the water and they swore they saw a moving island. So they circled around and went lower, and as they approached what they thought was an island, trees, they started getting enemy fire from it.

[00:23:03.77] It was a trawler, it was a fishing trawler, an ammo-laden fishing trawler, camouflaged with palm trees and shrubs and everything. And that was the first time the proof

that the North was resupplying their troops by the sea. That finding, the trawler in Vung Ro Bay was the catalyst for the creation of Operation MARKET TIME, Task Force 115. And Task Force 115 was delegated the responsibility of coastal patrol preventing enemy infiltration from the sea. That's where Swift Boats came in. And it was fast tracked, very, very fast tracked.

[00:23:56.88] Prior to Swift Boats coming in country, the Coast Guard with their 85-foot WPBs, Coast Guard cutters were modified with mortars and additional armament and shipped over. 17 Coast Guard cutters made it to Da Nang and to An Thoi. So they were the first smaller craft in the Vietnam conflict. However, there was a special need for-- a greater need rather to have a smaller craft to be closer inshore. And the search began, and they found a boat that was already in use in the Gulf of Mexico. Sewart Seacraft.

[00:24:44.59] Sewart Seacraft out of Berwick, Louisiana I believe, they had these boats manufactured for the oil companies. They only had the pilothouse, and the back was just a flat deck, and that's where they transported pipe or equipment, supplies, and men as well from shore to the oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. So a contract was let out to the Sewart Seacraft to manufacture 101 Mark I Swift Boats. And that's how eventually the first Swift Boats PCF 3 and PCF 4 made it to An Thoi at the south of Vietnam. An Thoi is part of the island of Phu Quoc, Phu Quoc Island at the southern tip of Vietnam. And so they went there.

[00:25:42.69] And coming out of the LST that took them there, they didn't have time to rest because they had a special call for fire support from a Special Forces base. So immediately they were put into action and they were successful right from the beginning. The unfortunate story behind PCF 4 is that on February the 14th, Valentine's Day, the Swift Boat family in MARKET TIME had their first loss. PCF 4 and the crew fell victim to a booby trap.

[00:26:17.43] The Viet Cong had placed a Viet Cong flag on a floating-- flotsam anchored down to the bottom, shallow, within 100 yards from shore, and the waters were rather shallow. The crew had already taken down the flag before and they just considered that it was just harassment by the enemy. You looked ashore and you saw no one. The enemy is letting you know that, we're here and you don't see us, harassment move.

[00:26:53.92] Well, this day they approached it and the crew decided to well, let's lob some grenades, let's see if we can send off a secondary charge, let's be careful. They did a number of times right on top of that location. Nothing. So they approached. As they approached from the starboard side, the starboard side of the Swift Boat. The seaman grabbed the knife. As he was cutting the lanyard off that flag the explosive mine detonated sending the boat up and the crew along with it killing three men immediately and mortally wounded another. Only two survived, out of the six only two survived.

[00:27:39.64] So that taught us a lesson. These first boats and crews that went over there, they were actually writing the operations manual for actual field combat for our Swift Boats. And they were lessons learned that while we were in training we heard about those tragedies as well. And then of course in Chu Lai we had at least four patrol areas that we took care of in our area. And so my duty as a radioman was to continue my flashing light, continue my flashing light lessons. We were given a little black square, something about this big. And you squeezed it and

it was a circle that had little slots, it was black but behind it was white. So when you did this you could see that it was flashing light, and that was my duty and responsibility.

[00:28:45.55] There is a story that goes with that. Later on towards the end of my tour we were on patrol with a new boat officer. And he called us all to general quarters, I mean this boat officer was very, very young, inexperienced completely. And he called us all out of sleep, it was during the middle of the night, he called us out. General quarters, general quarters, there's a trawler, there's a trawler coming, there's a trawler coming. So we undid the machine guns, we got ready to open fire on this vessel, and I looked at the radar. I said, sir, that's an LST. It's a transiting LST, sir. No, no, no. Man your battle stations, man your battle stations. I said, sir, it's an LST, it's transiting south to north. It's going to Da Nang. And he says, anyway, he says, well send them some flashing light. I said, uh oh, flashing lights? Well, I grabbed a light that has a trigger and I clicked, dit, da da dit, da da dit, di dit dit, dit, da da dit, da da dit, di dit dit.

[00:30:02.73] And so the man on the LST he flashes something back, and so the boat officer tells me, what did he say? What did he say? I said, well, I don't know? He says, what do you mean you don't know? He says, what did you send him? I said, Eddie. He said, Eddie, what do you mean Eddie? So I guess that's the only flashing light I know because when I was in San Diego there was a radioman, friend of mine that every who went on base his name was Eddie, and he was practicing flashing light and he kept saying, dit, da da dit, da da dit, dit.

[00:30:38.82] Anyway it was just a comical-- one of those comical things. It wasn't all ducking bullets and agony, there was a few things that became comical, but that was one of them. So in addition to my radio and radar duties, I was a cook. So in the mornings before patrol I'd have to go to the commissary and pick up stores. I usually asked my boat officer what he wanted and I'd pick up sandwiches or steaks or whatever.

[00:31:10.29] Oftentimes, we'd come alongside bigger ships, destroyers, and they'd give us ice cream or they'd give us steaks or sometimes they'd give us lobster or whatever it was. So we ate well when we could, when the seas were favorable. And we could anchor off in a cove somewhere and eat. But other than that we usually had sandwiches, we'd have sandwiches. And I don't remember clearly, but fellow crew members tell me that we'd had soda pop as well, canned soda or what the guys called bug juice, which was Kool-Aid, usually red. But that was my duty.

[00:31:51.87] Of course, we each had our own duties prior to going on patrol. The engineman took care of his engines, warmed them up, I checked the radar-- radar, radio communications, made sure we had the proper chart for the patrol area we were going to. The seaman made sure that we packed all the stores and everything was stored away properly and the lights were working, the running lights for night vision and so on were working. So we all had our responsibilities. The gunner made sure we had ammunition, mortars.

[00:32:23.67] On the Swift Boat, on the top of the pilothouse we had what we called the gun tub and on that gun tub we had a pivoting twin .50 caliber machine gun arrangement. On the fantail we had an 81 millimeter mortar within a single .50 caliber machine gun mounted on top in a piggyback fashion they called it. This mortar was unique in that it had the capability of your

standard drop and fire mode or you could hand load it, put it in trigger fire mode, hand load it, level it off, and fire. So that's basically what my duties were.

[00:33:09.42] BRIAN KUMNICK: Very good. Now how many Swift Boats were at Cu Chi?

[00:33:13.74] RAUL HERRERA: At Chu Lai?

[00:33:14.31] BRIAN KUMNICK: Chu Lai, sorry.

[00:33:15.72] RAUL HERRERA: At Chu Lai we had in the range of maybe 12 to 15 Swift Boats. It varies because of engine problems or one boat had to be taken somewhere else for repair. Chu Lai was not as big as Da Nang, Da Nang was the main repair location. Out of Da Nang there were also other small detachments in Cua Viet and in Hue, up north of Da Nang, there were two locations. But in our area, again, at any one time 10 Swift Boats at the minimum.

[00:33:55.75] BRIAN KUMNICK: And did you get to be pals with all of the different crews or did you kind of stick to your crew or how did that work?

[00:34:01.18] RAUL HERRERA: Well, yes we did have camaraderie. We'd patrol for 24 hours and then we'd come back in for 24.

[00:34:11.39] BRIAN KUMNICK: And what would you do for your 24 off?

[00:34:13.49] RAUL HERRERA: We happened to be fortunate. Right outside our barracks was the Straw Elephant. It was the enlisted men's club. The young crewmen up to let's say E-3 rating could go to this particular club, referred to as the EM club, enlisted men's club. The higher up petty officers, second class, first class, they had the Acey Deucey club, a different part of the base. And of course the officers-- the chiefs had their own club as well, and then the officers had their own club.

[00:34:57.56] So the Straw Elephant was just right outside our barracks. And it was like a native African hut of sorts because the roof was made out of thatch, open to the sea, and of course, we had the USO shows coming by. A lot of bands out of the Philippines, young lady bands. It was a hoot, it was a hoot, we let our hair down. Mentioning the hair brings up another interesting thing.

[00:35:32.87] In Da Nang everything was the uniform of the day. You had to be in your denim bellbottoms, your boondockers. your chambray shirts as I'm wearing now, similar to that, your Navy hat, et cetera. In Chu Lai, it was totally different. Not that we were rebellious of sorts, but the minute we were out on patrol or even before we'd take off our basic uniform and put on our shorts and we'd walk around the boat with our flip-flops, no shirt.

[00:36:19.35] And I've got one picture that was taken of me where I borrowed a fish from one of the fishing junks that we were inspecting. And for some reason I don't know why, but we had a rod and reel, deep sea type fishing rod and reel. And I took a picture. I borrowed the fish, it was a big fish, and I hooked him still with my rod and reel. And I've got my shirt, similar to this, wide open, it wasn't buttoned down, I had-- you basically called them Daisy Duke type, they were

short, short and my boondockers, and my hair was like that young boy that Tarzan had, Bamba. Was it Bamba? Right? It was all curly and just completely not appropriate. And I said, how did I get it? And that's basically how a lot of us were.

[00:37:15.69] We'd come alongside of a destroyer, an official blue water Navy type, and the boat officers up above would yell at us to get into uniform of the day. And we'd give them a certain salutation sign. That's how we were, we were a strange group of Sailors, on the edge, but we knew what we were doing and we did our job well.

[00:37:48.50] RAUL HERRERA: Things that take me back there besides music if I may, in terms of flashbacks, when you hear of veterans not necessarily just of the Vietnam War or any other war, flashbacks are real and there's certain things that trigger those flashbacks. For me one of the things that triggers me back immediately is the smell of diesel fumes, diesel engine fumes. Our Swift Boat was powered by two Detroit diesel V12 engines. And that certain smell that comes-- if you're ever trailing behind a 18-wheeler you can smell that diesel or a dump truck or something, you can smell it. And that immediately takes me back because that's-- on our Swift Boat dock that's all you could smell, diesels.

[00:38:45.20] Another thing that triggers me like many of the ground troops is the sounds of helicopter blades. Your first instinct is to look up and look for the bird and it just takes you back because you've left so many memories there and came back with so many memories as well. But as far as music is concerned, while in training the song that rings most to me is the Buffalo Springfield, For What It's Worth. That was very popular, that group Buffalo Springfield. And it's interesting because it was very much associated with the war protest movement.

[00:39:30.71] I must say this, prior to going over to Vietnam I still wasn't very much in tune to the war protesting movement. It really hadn't kicked off, it was started. I believe in doing research. I've learned that the SDS group, I think it was called, got its start around that time. And there was a lot of protests starting. But being in the base in Coronado, at Naval Amphibious Base in Coronado, and concentrating on our training, we really didn't pay too much attention and we weren't faced with any protesters, so it wasn't that obvious to us.

[00:40:13.98] But interesting about that song, Buffalo Springfield's For What It's Worth, "there's something happening here" and so on. If you know the lyrics, it motivated, it was almost like an anthem for the protest folks. It turns out that no it wasn't about protesting Vietnam at all. It was about a protest, yes, but it was a protest about the curfews at the Strip, Hollywood, the Hollywood Strip. The policemen, because the kids were getting rambunctious and just roaming the streets at night, the city council decided to put a stop to it so they put a curfew. The kids rioted.

[00:40:57.14] Buffalo Springfield happened to be at the Strip, for a performance or whatever, and saw all the commotion and everything else, and they saw the police. That's the truth behind that particular story. BRIAN KUMNICK: That's interesting. RAUL HERRERA: Yes.

[00:41:16.21] RAUL HERRERA: Well, the best day is actually an afterthought if you will, of the previous events leading up to this best day, if you will. Again as I mentioned Operation

MARKET TIME was designed to prevent the infiltration of enemy ships coming, resupply ships from the North. Prior to that Vung Ro Bay incident that I mentioned earlier, it was discovered later on in research after the war that the North, up until that time that, that Vung Ro trawler was discovered, they had already had 122 resupply missions coming into South Vietnam. Very little known fact.

[00:42:13.32] They had a well-established infiltration group in Vietnam. They first started with small boats then they expanded and eventually wound up with huge 120, 130 foot steel hull trawlers. We were the last line of defense. We were on the shore, from shore to maybe 3 miles out. Further out were the WPBs, the Coast Guard cutters. Beyond that were destroyers, MSOs (minesweepers), and so on.

[00:42:45.32] On July the 11th, 1967, a surveillance aircraft out of Cam Ranh Bay was patrolling along the coast in the Chu Lai area. And they spotted a suspicious contact, and they went down and it's called, they rigged the contact, that's the term used by these aviators, naval aviators. Commander Branscombe, Max Branscombe, took the flight-- took the plane down and approached the vessel from stern.

[00:43:23.81] And he had his cameraman ready to take pictures. As it turned out it was a steel hull trawler. And what made it suspicious was that it was heading perpendicular to the shoreline, south of Chu Lai in an area called-- the province was Quang Ngai province. That location is where the village of My Lai is located and also the Batangan Peninsula is located there at the mouth of the Song Sa Ky, Sa Ky river.

[00:44:04.16] There was no port and this vessel was heading straight towards that area. So that was cause for alert. And sure enough, they took pictures, they radioed Saigon MARKET TIME headquarters, and Saigon headquarters radioed Da Nang headquarters. Commander Charles Stephan, he was in charge of the northern surveillance group. And that sent his unit into red alert, because any time a vessel is heading towards shore and we were expecting to confront trawlers. He ordered the USS Wilhoite, destroyer-- Commander Hayes was the captain--

[00:44:49.16] to intercept this vessel, approach it from the horizon and at first light the following morning, approach it, circle it, take pictures, identify it, et cetera. And the Wilhoite was a radar picket ship. Its mast-- its radar unit way up the mast. And so it was more definite that this vessel was going beyond suspicious, it was a trawler. Da Nang reported to Saigon, so on and so forth. After the destroyer, the Wilhoite, took pictures of the trawler, it circled it and went back towards the shoreline because the trawler had turned around and gone further out to sea. So the Wilhoite made believe as it was going back to the Vietnam coastline, the shoreline, and it didn't. All it did was it went beyond the horizon.

[00:45:57.20] Because this trawler, this vessel didn't have radar. As a matter of fact, it wasn't even flying any flag of origin, making it even more suspicious. It had crates on the deck and so on. It was 120 foot steel hull trawler, olive drab green, olive drab type color. So Saigon ordered the Wilhoite to continue shadowing this vessel as it continued going further out. The vessel eventually wound up anchoring east of the Paracel islands, a great distance from the Vietnam

coast. And again the destroyer, the Wilhoite, just laid beyond the horizon, just watching it, just watching, cat and mouse game, cat and mouse game. And it stayed there for a good while.

[00:46:59.92] On the 14th of July, 1967, the trawler raised anchor and made its way back towards the coast. The destroyer, the Wilhoite, continued shadowing it. When the destroyer, the Wilhoite, first made contact with it, it was on the morning-- it was past midnight on July the 12th. The radarman on the Wilhoite gave it the name Skunk Alpha, because in the Navy any unidentified contact is called a skunk. In the Air Force I believe they call it a bogey, bogey at 2 o'clock, for example. Well, this was a skunk and this was the first one of the day, alpha. The second one Bravo, Charlie, Delta and on down the line. So that's where this particular vessel was codenamed Skunk Alpha.

[00:48:04.38] So the shadowing continued all the way. Then the commander, Stephan in Da Nang, started formulating a intercept mission. There was suspicion because where it was first detected they would be coming south of Chu Lai, our patrol areas. And by that time our boat officer was well known for knowing the area like the back of his hand. So he volunteered us for the mission. We didn't know, the crew didn't know at that time that he had done that.

[00:48:47.07] Commander Stephan organized an intercept plan consisting of the Wilhoite, the destroyer, the USS Gallup that had just come to the patrolling areas in Da Nang. The Gallup is a gunboat by the way, has got turbine engines, fast moving vessel, race car of the Navy. And there was a need for another vessel. The psychological warfare officer for I Corps, the northern corps-- sector of Vietnam, he went to Commander Stephan and suggested that a PSYOPs team, psychological operations team, a speaker team, be made part of the mission so that in case they had to approach this vessel they could use their speakers to issue commands at this particular vessel.

[00:49:49.13] Commander Stephan really didn't want to make it part of the mission, but yet bottom line he wound up doing it. But he said, yes, let's go ahead and do it if you can find a Coast Guard cutter that's available for the mission. Well, he did find one, it was the Point Orient. The lieutenant, Saunders, is the skipper of that patrol boat. They were in the process of painting the inside of it, but he decided that he'd take the mission, but he wasn't told what the mission was. He just has we have an urgent mission are you men capable? Is your boat ready? Yes. OK.

[00:50:28.82] So the last unit in this operation was going to be a Swift Boat. But which one? It couldn't be determined because-- it would only be able to be determined as the trawler made its approach inland, and then whatever boat was in that area. Because the year before as a matter of fact, before we came to Vietnam there had been one trawler that landed along the shore north of Mui Batangan, the Batangan Peninsula. So there was more speculation that it would be in our area. And that's when Mr Bergen volunteers for that mission.

[00:51:13.72] So that particular day we went out on July the 14th on our patrol. And we were in the-- our call sign was Same Drink Delta November. Our patrol areas out of Chu Lai were the Same Drink call signs. Same Drink Charlie, Same Drink Delta, Delta November, Same Drink Echo. The Delta November patrol had the mouth of the Sa Ky river in the center of its patrol

area. It was just to the north of the peninsula and to the south, all the way up to the Song Tra Khuc river, which is the river going into Quang Ngai.

[00:52:03.55] And so we continued our patrolling, and I'd say about maybe noontime after having lunch or whatever it was, I got a coded message and Mr Bergen in his book bag in his satchel, he had a decoding device, that we had to decode the message. And it was basically a message indicating that we were part of an intercept plan, a task force, a special group. And it was coming from an individual code name Impair.

[00:52:42.34] As a matter of fact, when the message came over the radio, Same Drink Delta November, this is Impair, blah blah blah. They had to challenge us to make sure that we were who we were. And when that was taken care of after Mr Bergen finished the radio communications with him, he called somebody else up on a smaller radio we had, says, who the hell is Impair? He didn't know. Impair comes on with the regular radio and he basically says that we're in conflict with regulations. His dialogue, his radio communications were not appropriate. So he was in trouble, but he didn't know who Impair was. Eventually, we found out that it was the commander, Commander Stephan, the big boss in Da Nang.

[00:53:34.27] And so messages continued coming establishing the position of the-- identified us as a particular vessel in play, it gave us positions. We were behind the trawler, we were supposed to be-- it was actually is going to be like a V shape. The trawler was leading the way towards shore, we were behind the trawler on the starboard side, the Coast Guard cutter was on the port side behind it, and then outside of that was a destroyer, the Wilhoite, and the gunboat, the Gallup.

[00:54:11.83] Well, nothing could be done until the trawler crossed the 12-mile territorial limit line of South Vietnam. It had to be inside the 12-mile limit. When it went beyond the 12-mile limit then Commander Stephan-- who is now aboard the Wilhoite, he was transferred out to it-- he gave the order to the Coast Guard cutter, the Point Orient, to begin broadcasting, give up your arm's message. So the cutter pulled close enough to the vessel that they could blast those messages loud enough. They had two sets of speakers, so they heard it but they ignored it. The trawler continued. The trawler continued.

[00:55:03.94] So as we got closer to shore we were ordered by Impair to fire warning shots across the trawler's bow. It was definitely an enemy vessel, we were about to engage an enemy vessel. That's when the adrenaline starts pumping, because when you know that we're shooting at a target they're possibly going to shoot back, but you carry out your duty.

[00:55:30.79] I was standing in the pilothouse next to the boat officer. The boat officer was sitting in the elevated chair at the helm and there was like maybe a foot and a half or so to the bottom of the inside of the pilothouse. And I was watching the radar. He says, Bean, keep an eye on the radar. Make sure-- there was a hazardous flat rock. We called it out to sea from the river mouth. Very, very dangerous, because there wasn't any buoy or anything close to it, it was an outcrop of a rock, very hazardous, and we wanted to make sure that we didn't run into it.

[00:56:13.00] The seas had been calm up to then, but as we got closer to shore the seas picked up and we were starting to pick up echoes from the waves, and pretty soon the trawler was lost. Eventually, and this is interesting because in doing my research for the book that I'm writing-- that I've written rather, I was able to get my hands on the actual tape recording of the communications between all the vessels.

[00:56:45.36] The man that had the psychological warfare speakers on board the Point Orient, he started tape recording all the communications after they stopped sending the message out, he started recording the communications. And I've got it clearly where my boat officer calls out to Impair. He says, I've got one fast moving contact moving fast towards the river mouth. Request permission to go get him.

[00:57:13.54] And then J.G. Saunders on the Coast Guard cutter, the Point Orient, he says, affirmative Delta November. That's your man. Let's go get him. And Mr Bergen, I clearly remember, it just gives me chills, he says, Roger, I'm on my way. And so sure now we started going after it. The trawler was in front of us and we were behind on this side, eventually, we moved our way to the trawler's port aft side and we started firing our machine guns, Bob Middleton, the gunner up in the gun tub, he opened up and it was brutal, and sure enough soon enough we started receiving fire from the trawler as well.

[00:57:58.41] There were helicopter units from Chu Lai that were providing illumination rounds as well, and they requested that, because we had been firing our mortar for illumination. And we didn't know that the helicopter units were above us. We didn't know. And our illumination wasn't working quite well where it should have been. It was the darkness of the moon as a matter of fact. The trawler knew what was going on. And they came in after the darkness of the moon.

[00:58:33.24] So we engaged the trawler somewhere around maybe 15 minutes after midnight on the 15th of July. So the trawler kept firing at us, and we fired at it. and as we got closer Mr. Bergen ordered the boatswain's mate, Carver, and our engineman, Reinhart to trigger fire, we were that close, we were getting real close to the trawler, to hand load a round of high explosive, HE 81 millimeter mortar, and fire it. And the tape-recording I have has Mr. Saunders on the Coast Guard cutter saying, he fired that one a little bit low, he missed his mark. And sure enough, it landed in the water and exploded.

[00:59:19.54] And so we continued firing machine guns and meanwhile again, Mr. Bergen tells the fantail to load a white phosphorus round, we called it a Willie Peter round. And he did, hand loaded it, and trigger fired it. And this time Carver took accurate aim. And the trawler is here and we're here, he fired the 81 millimeter mortar round into the trawler's pilothouse. That caused a bright glowing white flame and it ran aground. The trawler lost control and ran aground at the mouth of the Sa Ky river at the tip of the Batangan Peninsula.

[01:00:08.34] And we still kept getting fire from the vessel. At this time we were within 75 yards of the vessel exchanging gunfire. We circled back and crossed over to the starboard side behind the trawler and continued our firing. This enraged the folks on the USS Gallup because they wanted to continue-- to start firing on the vessel with their gun mounts. And he was told not to because-- I remember the communications, he's complaining to Impair because we can't fire

because that Swift is in the way. So that's proof enough that we were just toe to toe with the trawler. Of course the Point Orient was heavily involved in it as well, firing at it from its position.

[01:01:03.28] Finally, all settled. We got the word to pull back because the Korean Marines, the Blue Dragons, they claimed that area was theirs. And if the trawler landed in their area that trawler now was theirs. And so they were threatening with artillery rounds to the mouth of the river to keep us away because it was their trophy.

[01:01:33.00] Long story short, comes daybreak, and of course we had already expended all of our ammo. We were dry. So at daybreak we headed back to port, and so did the Wilhoite. I believe the gunboat, the Gallup, they stayed around as well and the destroyer, the Wilhoite, they also stayed because Commander Stephan was still there. But we headed back. We got to Chu Lai. Right before getting into the harbor there around Rosemary Point entering the channel,

[01:02:08.73] Mr Bergen said, Bean, give me the broom. What does he want the room for? I gave him the broom. He went up on the top of the cabin behind the gun tub where the radar mast was, and he secured that broom to the radar mast. It was a clean sweep. It is a reference in war somewhere that some victor in a war in the high seas did the same thing. So Mr Bergen knows his history and that's what that reference was, it was a clean sweep. And all the Swifties that were in port that morning were all waiting for us at the pier with cases of beer, and it was a big celebration. That was a great, great day for us. No one was hurt on our side, we received about maybe three or four slugs on our boat. We did get hit, but nothing serious.

[01:03:15.03] And Admiral Veth, the commander of Naval forces in Vietnam, he came to Chu Lai along with I believe Captain Cho, he was the commander of Naval forces of the South Vietnamese Navy. They came up to Chu Lai to view-- more than 90 tons of ammunition was unloaded at Chu Lai once the trawler was taken to Chu Lai. And so it was a thrill to see these people there at the at the pier, at the deepwater pier.

[01:03:48.09] Later on, we received word from Da Nang. Mr Bergen told us to get ready, that we were heading to Da Nang for an awards ceremony that was being planned. We were told to get our dress whites, our uniforms, our dress whites. And so that's all we were told. So on the 19th in Da Nang, there was a huge celebration next to the city hall pier. We found out that they had taken the trawler and cleaned it up, best they could. It was a burnt carcass, the burnt remains of the steel hull vessel. They had the anti-aircraft guns amidship, they had them there, the machine gun on the fantail behind the pilothouse.

[01:04:37.08] And so we were all lined up. And interestingly enough, it was an awards ceremony. I wondered why there is that many military men being decorated or congratulated or whatever. There were Koreans, there were South Vietnamese, there were few US Navy and Army, I just didn't know what was going on. Turns out the sirens are heard from a distance, and the streets were lined with children and men and it was Premier Ky who had come up to personally congratulate us and decorate us, along with chief of state, Nguyen Van Thieu.

[01:05:20.68] So there we were. And they had of course several things to say. And of course, Ky and Thieu, I believe were taking advantage of the situation because it was about the time that the elections were coming up in South Vietnam. So I'm sure it had to do a little PR work in there. Nonetheless, to be decorated by the chief of state, it was an honor and a privilege that I'll never, never forget. It's just amazing. It was a thrill. I'll never forget that. That was the greatest day I think I've had in memory of Vietnam.

[01:06:01.13] RAUL HERRERA: This happened July 15, July 19, in that time frame. After that our patrols got boring. It's like, what do you do now? But we continued our mission, checking junks day after day, day after day. It grew monotonous. But on December the 6th was a very black day for our crew and our division in Chu Lai. We were assigned a psychological warfare mission in the same area where we captured the trawler.

[01:06:38.64] And we had a PSYOPs team, two Army types with loudspeakers and a tape. It was a spooky, spooky tape in Vietnamese, wandering soul, I believe it's called, where this individual-- and you hear some wailing in the background, agonizing wailing. It was morbid, very, very awful. But it talks to the enemy soldier.

[01:07:12.16] It tells them you need to go back to your homeland, you need to go back north because your family is waiting for you there. What if you die here? Supposedly there is a myth or something that your soul will wander forever, if you're not buried in your homeland, according to their culture, their traditions. Of course, I didn't know that at the time, but in researching it that's what I've come to find out. Now it makes sense all that wailing, that intimidation.

[01:07:49.97] Well, it worked because-- let me back up a moment this is something very important. We broke for lunch off of the mouth of the Song Tra Khuc. As I mentioned, it's the river leading into Quang Ngai. And as we were sitting off-- we went off and just put the engines on neutral and just kind of floated along with the waves. There was a lumbering albatross that approached us from the south. And as it reached our boat, it circled our boat twice, and then it went off and sat on the ocean, no more than 30 yards away from us.

[01:08:40.30] And the boatswain's mate, he was a salty Sailor. the boatswain's mate, had 15, 18 years of service already. Tattoos, the naked lady that he could make her dance with doing his biceps, and the sparrows on his chest, the tattooed chain on his wrist. His son, his new son Kevin on his arm as well. A true salty Sailor. He told Mr Bergen this is not good, this isn't a good sign.

[01:09:14.26] Later I found out, Mr Bergen tells me that there is a book, I believe, something about the ancient mariner, The Rime of Ancient Mariner. And it talks about the albatross flies the seas looking for sailors, the souls of sailors, dead sailors. And so they spend their time over the ocean looking for the souls of dead sailors and that's why the boatswain's mate just didn't like it, he knew the story, knew the myth.

[01:09:50.43] On our second journey we approached the river mouth of the Song Tra Khuc and we turned to the right, or going north towards the Batangan Peninsula. And that's the My Lai shoreline as well. There are three small villages, little hamlets next to each other side by side.

The Co Lay, Co Lay 1, Co Lay 2, Co Lay 3. One boat officer, Mr Bob Bulger, he code named that area, the Co Lay Corral. He had a firefight there, a quite brutal firefight there. And he always told-- be careful.

[01:10:41.26] So we passed Co Lay 1 and the broadcasting begins. Nothing. And pass Co Lay 2 and still nothing. atwin .50s are pointing towards the beach, the gunners looking at binoculars down the coast. The boatswain's mate, Carver, he's behind the single .50 on the fantail. And we've got other individuals with machine guns and AR-15s and so on pointing towards the beach. Mr Bergen, by the way, is on the fantail.

[01:11:14.20] Our engineman was a replacement engineman, Jim Schneider, Engineman Third Class Jim Schneider, who was taking the place of our engineman, Reinhardt, who was on R&R, I believe in the Philippines. And so he's driving the boat, Schneider is driving the boat, and I'm in the pilothouse with him looking at the radar, making sure the-- and looking at the fathometer, making sure we've got enough water clearance to the bottom.

[01:11:41.58] And I've got earphones, a little speaking system, and so does the gunner on the pilothouse, and so does the boatswain's mate, Carver, on the fantail. And Middleton in the gun tub tells Carver in the fantail, say, hey, I've got a subject on the beach up ahead. Says, where? Where's he at? And then he figured out, no, I better not tell him because if I tell him where he's at he's liable to tell the boat officer, and he wants to stop, and it didn't look good to the gunner up there. Something is wrong, something is very suspicious here. It's too quiet. No activities on the beach, nothing. Nobody is out from the hamlets, nothing. The hooches, nothing.

[01:12:27.81] And Mr Bergen was in front and off to one side of the after mount. He had gotten a .30 caliber machine gun, and we had mounted it on the stanchions on the port side. Well, Carver convinced Middleton to tell him exactly where. And so Carver found the individual, one man, black pajamas and a Vietnamese cone hat, just standing right at the top edge, ridge of the sand dune. And as we continue moving forward, as we're passing Co Lay 2, we get opened up with three ambush positions from the beach, forward, midship, and behind us.

[01:13:26.35] I saw a line of rounds hitting the-- kicking up sand and then water just like you see in the movies, it was coming straight for the pilothouse. The last thing I remember was a bang. The last round that that individual fired hit the frame, the window frame right in front of us. Not in the middle, just right on the top edge of it. Broke through the metal frame, gasket-- window, gasket, and metal frame, and dropped right in front of us on the dash.

[01:14:03.31] It threw me back. I got up. And the engineman asked me if I was OK, everything was fine. And before long I heard gunner say-- because we couldn't hear the machine gun in the back firing. And then gunner made the observation that boatswain's mate was hit. He got hit. And so, Carver and Schneider and Reinhart, the three of them, were very, very close very, very close drinking buddies basically.

[01:14:35.08] And so Schneider and Bergen, Mr. Bergen, at the same time hit the starter engines, because our engines went dead. Because Schneider and Mr Bergen attempted to put the throttles down and hard. Schneider in the pilothouse, Mr Bergen on the after controls, because we had

after steering as well. In so doing, they put too much fuel into the engines and the engines went dead. But took I guess maybe 20 seconds or so, or less, felt longer, but Schneider eventually got the engines going, he pushed forward gently and took us out to sea. And then told me to take the boat out to sea and he was going to go back to the fantail and see what was going on.

[01:15:25.33] The front windshield was shattered in front of me. I had to stand off to one side and steer that way because you couldn't see out the front, it was just totally shattered. And the anger just got to me, I wanted to see what was going on back there. I looked ahead and I couldn't see any interference, no fishing boats, nothing out ahead of us. So, I mean, call it my immature-- I was 21 years old already. Yes, I just turned 21 in November. Still I consider it immaturity, stupidity, I don't know, stupidity.

[01:16:04.36] I put the Swift Boat on automatic if you will, and I ran out the pilothouse and to the back. And I stopped right at the back edge of the Swift Boat cabin. And I saw Carver laying there in a pool of blood and machine gun cases everywhere. I just froze, I was in shock and then the anger kicked in. And Mr Bergen saw me, that I was there. And he said, Bean, get back to the pilothouse, take us out, call medevac, call medevac. So I shook it off a little bit and then I went to the pilothouse and I called what they call flash traffic. Flash traffic, you call it out, flash traffic. And that means that you're going to just break all sorts of regulations and tell people where you're at. We needed a medevac chopper, a Dust Off to come to our rescue.

[01:17:04.54] Well, we had a whip antenna. Our radio whip antenna was too high to have a helicopter even attempt to hover on the aft of our Swift Boat, so I radioed the destroyer that was out in our area. And they started coming towards us, and we went out to sea towards it. I called in for a medevac, a Dust Off chopper and got that going. Once I got all that information going and told the destroyer that we were heading out and they were coming towards us, I went back out again.

[01:17:41.45] But I grabbed my M79 grenade launcher and I loaded it and I went to the fantail, and I fired off a round. And that startled Mr Bergen. And Schneider was already cradling Carver, and his shirt was all drenched in blood, and Carver was just-- nothing there. The anger just continued. Bergen yelled at me and screamed to me, what are you doing? I loaded another round and fired away. I just had to release my anger. I was so-- if I could I would have walked on the water to just-- I wanted to go out and reach that person and just tear his heart out. It just overwhelmed me. And so, that's the worst day that I had in Vietnam. We had a memorial service for Carver.

[01:18:42.41] Before that, of course, we took Carver up to the destroyer, we came alongside, and they hoisted a basket down to us and the medics came down and hoisted him up. And then the Dust Off chopper hovered over the fantail of the destroyer and then picked him up and took him over. And then we headed towards back towards Chu Lai, and as we did they were in the process of loading him up on a destroyer. And as they did, the helicopter flew over us and just kind of like toggled their wings on one side. I took it as a sign of Carver telling us goodbye. That was the most unfortunate time for us. Traumatic, very traumatic.

[01:19:33.31] And as a matter of fact, his spirit is the one that-- his spirit haunted me. Honest to say, his spirit haunted me for many, many years after I came back to the States. I thought that-- I worked for an engineering company on a survey crew and then a draftsman, finally got my draftsman job. I was married, had two children and I'd see veterans on the streets and some of them were scruffy and I thought they were really affected by war and maybe they'd seen a lot more than I had. I felt fortunate, I thought that I came back saying everything was good for me, and I thanked God that I was OK. But eventually I started having difficulty taking showers. Even to go to the bathroom, I didn't want to close the door because I'd feel Carver's presence around me.

[01:20:36.91] And to be honest, I wouldn't go out. I would go days without taking a shower, because I couldn't-- I couldn't draw the curtain because I felt his body around me, and I knew that if I opened my eyes I would see his face, his bloody face in front of me. And in those times, you couldn't share those things with anyone. So I just held that in all along, but I continued to be in denial. I lived through-- I worked my way through it and I just continued trying to convince myself that I was OK, but the incidents continued.

[01:21:47.51] It wasn't until my wife's grandmother, all her family is from Greece, an island in Greece called Lemnos. Lemnos, Greece. She paid for all of us to go to the homeland in Greece. And while I was there I was near a village called Vatos, I believe, along the shoreline in that island of Lemnos.

[01:22:23.40] And I had my son Anthony in a little umbrella stroller and we were playing with a little sand crab, we had a blanket. I went away from the family, they had a big Greek feast at the little village there. And I sat there and I saw the-- there was a fishing boat very similar to the Vietnamese junk's that we inspected.

[01:22:54.93] And of course, the flashbacks came, and of course, the feelings and things of Carver came back. And I started wondering, what's going on? Why does he keep haunting me this way? Maybe he wants me to share the story of what we accomplished, maybe he wants me to convey to his family that his death wasn't in vain, that because of his accuracy on that mortar on that 15 of July 1967 day, he took down that enemy ship. It was a shot, whether by chance or whatever it was, he did it. And more than 90 tons of ammunition and supplies were kept from enemy hands. How many free world forces lives were saved because of what he did? A true hero.

[01:23:55.62] And maybe he wanted me to share that story, to tell the Swift Boat story and what brave Sailors did on those tiny boats. And so when I came home I told my mother about it and she grabbed a shoe box full of letters that I had written to them. I put them in chronological date order and the last number, the last letter I had wrote to them was 79, a boat number, 79. I started getting a chronology of the Vietnam War during that timeframe, from April '67 to April of '68, the chronology of current events in the United States. Merging them together, I prepared an outline.

[01:24:43.42] I didn't consider myself capable of writing a book but the drive took me towards that end. At least trying to figure out if that's what he wants me to do. Maybe it's real. He's really contacted me, he wants me to do it. Who am I not to follow his orders?

[01:25:00.85] [LAUGHS]

[01:25:03.79] And so when I actually started writing the first lines, those incidents in the shower stopped. And I haven't had them since, I haven't had them since.

[01:25:21.32] BRIAN KUMNICK: That's amazing.

[01:25:21.92] RAUL HERRERA: So it's all coming full circle. And so, again, I stayed in denial about all these things that were happening to me. I was fortunate after years the Swift Boat veterans started connecting with each other. And there was an organization formed, the Swift Boat Sailors Association. I was invited to be a board director early on and there was a big celebration in Washington DC at the Navy Museum.

[01:26:05.87] BRIAN KUMNICK: The Memorial, or at the Navy Yard?

[01:26:08.45] RAUL HERRERA: At the Navy Yard, at the Navy Yard there was a dedication. PCF 1 and PCF 2 were found in Panama and brought back to the United States and refurbished. And PCF 1 is at the Navy Museum at the Navy Yard as well. So we gathered and I became a board member and eventually secretary and after that vice president and when our president, Tom Forrest, passed away I took over as president and served for a number of years as president. But it has been a long run, been a long run, I can't believe it's 52 years now, 52 years later.
BRIAN KUMNICK: That is quite a story.

[01:26:53.57] RAUL HERRERA: Yes sir. BRIAN KUMNICK: Wow.

[01:26:54.16] RAUL HERRERA: And a matter of fact every Veteran's Day I think of our brothers, we lost 50. We call them our honor crew, our Swift Boat honor crew. We like saying that they're still on patrol. So we lost 50 Swift Boat Sailors. Not all to combat, interestingly enough, not all to combat. Some of them accidents, some of them were accidental drownings. We had a number of Swift Boats that were capsized during the monsoon up in Hue. It's a very, very difficult time for a Swift Boat. But it's a strong brotherhood, a strong brotherhood of individuals that we meet every two years and share sea stories. They're all true.

[01:27:45.50] BRIAN KUMNICK: [LAUGHS] Of course they are. BRIAN KUMNICK: Do you look up Carver's name?

[01:27:54.62] RAUL HERRERA: Oh, yes. When we went to that reunion in '95 when we had the dedication of PCF 1 we went there. I've got a website that has information, I've yet to upload the videos to some of those, but yes, there was a-- matter of fact, interesting that you mentioned about the Vietnam Wall. The local TV station, the CBS affiliate in Houston, channel 11 KHOU TV.

[01:28:29.24] I was doing a reading of my work in progress at a bookstop, at that time they were still a bookseller. And they heard about it and they sent a reporter. And I guess word went further up and there was a gentleman who-- his name was Sylvan Rodriguez. He had a first Sunday show, a program, and it was dedicated to the minority community in Houston, and they would feature certain individuals, tell their story. So they heard about me and they invited me for an interview, and I shared my personal film footage and so on, slides that I had, of course, back then it was super 8 film and Kodak slides and so on. And they made a wonderful interview of that moment.

[01:29:21.56] And then they found out about 1995 dedication, and they flew up to Washington for that dedication as well. And so there was a second interview airing by that channel as well. And I hope to soon be able to load that up to the website as well. RAUL HERRERA: I don't know much of the details, but I know that they're collecting pictures and interviews and oral histories as well. And I know Mr Galloway is very much involved in that, and so yes, I'm pleased to be part of it, very pleased, very honored to be part of it. Thank you for the opportunity to share my story. Thank you very much.

[01:30:08.02] BRIAN KUMNICK: We're very grateful. BRIAN KUMNICK: So this is the Vietnam War Commemoration's pin. In World War II, all the veterans got what they called the ruptured duck, which was a little pin for all the veterans of World War II.

[01:30:26.38] RAUL HERRERA: OK.

[01:30:27.13] BRIAN KUMNICK: But Joe always says that his five uncles and father and everyone had one of those. You couldn't get elected dogcatcher in America in 1946 if you didn't have one. So we made one for you guys. And it has the eagle on the front and on the back it says, a grateful nation thanks and honors you.

[01:30:48.24] RAUL HERRERA: Oh, wonderful.

[01:30:49.36] BRIAN KUMNICK: So our job is just to welcome you home.

[01:30:52.66] RAUL HERRERA: Thank you.

[01:30:53.48] BRIAN KUMNICK: Thank you for your service, and for doing your duty and for all the goodness that has come from it. So there we are.

[01:31:06.38] RAUL HERRERA: I'm official now.

[01:31:07.29] BRIAN KUMNICK: You are official. You are a--

[01:31:10.07] RAUL HERRERA: Thank you so much.

[01:31:10.64] BRIAN KUMNICK: Wonderful pleasure and privilege.

[01:31:12.86] RAUL HERRERA: Pleasure meeting you. You as well.