

Jordheim, Roger Army

[00:00:13.52] ROGER JORDHEIM: Born and raised on a farm, ranch close to a town named Walcott, North Dakota, which is population 100 people. And we lived about eight miles west of there. So I grew up hunting, fishing, riding horseback. We had a couple hundred head of cattle and grew up outdoors. Some of those skills and experiences of deer hunting, for example, in the woods of our farm came in very useful in the jungles of Vietnam.

[00:00:45.67] I went to a one room country schoolhouse for eight years in my elementary education, and then on to Walcott High School, which had a total of 28 kids in it, 14 boys, 14 girls. Four of us went to Vietnam and I'm the only one left alive. Two KIA, one MIA.

[00:01:09.38] So that's the first time I really realized there was a war going on in Vietnam. And in fact, they were all drafted after high school. I went on to college and enrolled in ROTC. So when I graduated in '69, I was commissioned a second lieutenant. And the day after Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, I went in the Army.

[00:01:38.13] I wasn't concerned about it because I was already in ROTC. ROTC-- you know, I saw my buddies go and not come back, they were all drafted, they were all enlisted. And I thought, what the hell? I might as well be an officer, maybe it's better. Turns out it wasn't. Plus I got \$50 a month for beer money, which always came in handy. Which I supplemented by giving blood every six weeks. So I had plenty of money to buy beer, I was a member of a fraternity, and so I had a big social life. But we had ROTC drill every Friday morning at 7:00 o'clock and I was a good cadet.

[00:02:23.93] And by that time, it was becoming a TV war. Plus I was a pallbearer in a couple of funerals while I was in college. So it was something I was then cognizant of. I started following it. North Dakota is a pretty conservative state and North Dakota State is a pretty conservative college.

[00:02:47.78] So yeah, there were some people that protested. In fact, sometimes I'd be out drinking with my fraternity brothers on Thursday night and Friday morning, bright and early, I'd put my uniform on and they'd be throwing eggs at me as I left the frat house. So there were people that were-- I don't want to say militant, but they certainly were antiwar. But it was in the minority. For the most part, North Dakota is a very patriotic state.

[00:03:19.24] In high school, it was a non-issue. And then through the course of my four years in college, it began to dawn on me that there was a real war going on in Vietnam. I still didn't know, geographically really, where it was. But I knew that friends had gone and been killed. So it was not a kind place to be.

[00:03:48.94] I remember sitting in the officers club in Fort Knox, Kentucky when I first went in, I was an armor officer. So AOB, Armor Officer Basic, was in Fort Knox. And I was sitting in the officers club during my round of the lottery, my year, and my number was 314. In North Dakota, they never got above 60. So there's no way I would have ever gone into the military. But by that time, I was in uniform.

[00:04:17.83] Meanwhile, a lot of my fraternity brothers, who did not want to do anything in the military, ended up getting drafted with low draft numbers. And some of them got shipped to Vietnam, some went to Korea. But I blew through four years at NDSU not really thinking about Vietnam. I was 21 years old and I was 22 when I went to Vietnam. I was, comparatively speaking, pretty young.

[00:04:54.30] There was really nothing. I mean, I went back and proposed to my wife and she said no. The Walcott boys don't have a very good track record coming back, or going to Vietnam and not coming back. And I had been assigned as platoon leader to the 12th Armored Cavalry in Fort Carson, Colorado, and the Cav was coming home from Vietnam. APCs and tanks didn't do well in the jungle or the rice paddies.

[00:05:20.22] So I assured her that, as a cavalry platoon leader, chances of me going to Vietnam were virtually zero. But somewhere during the course of that period of time, I was selected to attend military intelligence training at Fort Holabird in Baltimore, Dundalk. So I went there for-- I think was three months, for MI training. And that's the first time I was exposed to the Phoenix Program.

[00:05:49.26] So that was part of my training. When I went to Vietnam, I trained with the Navy SEALs in Vung Tau on demolition, specifically how to set up ambushes with Claymore mines. But most of my training was with regard to being a platoon leader, in a conventional combat branch of the service.

[00:06:11.06] So it was thought out. I thought my name just came out of a hat. Because there were only two of us from Fort Carson that went, and there was 40,000 Soldiers there. So it was--

[00:06:27.18] MARC HENDERSON: It wasn't something you volunteered for?

[00:06:28.65] ROGER JORDHEIM: No, it wasn't, but I didn't say no. I was selected and they said, this is what we want to do. And I go, OK.

[00:06:41.71] GVN, the government of Vietnam, South Vietnam, was divided into provinces and districts and villages, which is very comparable to the US. You know, the provinces were states, the districts were counties, and the villages were like towns. And they explained to us that the Viet Cong had, over the course of the last four or five years, had set up what's called the Viet Cong infrastructure, the VCI. And that they had a shadow government in South Vietnam. And that our job was going to be to collect intelligence on the VCI, specifically the senior ranking cadre, and identify them through dossiers.

[00:07:27.30] There were various means that we collected intelligence on them, primarily through informants, who we paid, and then we mounted operations against them to-- the euphemism was to neutralize them. And you could neutralize them by capturing them, by getting them to chieu hoi, which means to turn sides, or to kill them. And that's what we did.

[00:07:56.64] You have to appreciate now, I'm thrown into a small village with nine other guys, nine Americans, that was it, and you know, surrounded by Vietnamese. We lived with them, we

fought with them, we worked with them. So no I had no idea about any of that. And the language barrier was difficult and frustrating. And my interpreter was shot six weeks in the country and not replaced.

[00:08:23.19] So I had to learn Vietnamese. And by the time my tour was done, I could sit at dinner, we would be invited out to dinner with some of the people that we worked with, they introduced their families to us, we became a family. And I could speak, I could talk politics, I could converse with them.

[00:08:43.40] Now, the good news is I worked with the PRUs, the Provincial Reconnaissance Unit, which was the action arm of the Phoenix Program. They were the ones who did the missions, the neutralization missions, and I accompanied them on all of them.

[00:09:03.74] So they already had worked with several Phoenix officers prior to me getting to Duc Pho. And so subsequently, they knew enough broken English, and combine that with my broken Vietnamese, I was able to communicate effectively without an interpreter, and got better and better and better at it. Once you get immersed in a society, you learn to survive there. And learning to communicate is one of the first things you have to do.

[00:09:36.54] I remember it like it was yesterday. You know, getting off the plane at Tan Son Nhut in Saigon. I flew out of Travis Air Force Base, just east of Oakland, and we flew to Anchorage and then we flew to Yokohama or somewhere in Japan and then on into Saigon. And I remember getting off the plane. And first of all, it was just sweltering hot, it was July of 1970, so the temperatures were always over 100 degrees, extraordinarily humid.

[00:10:05.70] And the first thing that really struck me was the smell of rotting fish, which I learned quickly was actually nuoc mam, which is the Vietnamese condiment for everything. It's like salt, pepper, ketchup, mustard. They put it on everything. And it's made out of rotten fish. So that's what Saigon smelled like to me when I first got off, and that was a scent and smell that I lived with for 12 months.

[00:10:39.09] They make nuoc mam by getting a giant funnel, a big metal funnel, filling it full of dead fish and leaving it out in the hot sun. And as the fish would rot, the oils would collect in a-- like a masonry jar and they put different types of herbs and spices in it. And they put it on all their food, everything had nuoc mam on it.

[00:11:01.29] I went to Vietnam 184, weighed 184 pounds, I came back 138, so I lost almost 50 pounds while I was there. And I'm a picky eater anyway, I'm a meat and potatoes eater from North Dakota, from a ranch. We just ate stake three times a day. And there was fish, occasionally some chicken, maybe a little bit of pork, but basically a lot of rice and nuoc mam. So I never really adapted to the diet in Vietnam.

[00:11:30.54] I also had amoebic dysentery for two weeks and I lost probably 15, 20 pounds just during that time frame. So the eating part was even more difficult after a while than the language barrier. But we lived in this compound, an old French compound that was built in the '50s.

[00:11:53.04] And we had two mama sans that had been there for four or five years working with Phoenix and working with the advisory teams. So they did all of our cooking for us, they cleaned our clothes, and they were great cooks, so it was comfortable. It wasn't particularly secure, but it was comfortable. You couldn't drink the water, so we boiled all of our water and made it into tea. So I drank a lot of tea while I was there.

[00:12:27.35] We had a minefield around the entire place. There was 10 of us living in there plus the RTOs, the radio telephone operators, who were primarily Vietnamese. And some other-- the village chief, the district chief lived in our compound. It was the securest place in Duc Pho.

[00:12:45.98] There were no American bases. The closest American base was about seven miles away. So we were on our own and we were dependent on not just us providing our security, but the Vietnamese as well. And you become wary of the Vietnamese immediately. You never really knew who was friend or foe. But there were some you held close to you, that you trusted implicitly.

[00:13:12.29] And so we had a minefield that went all the way around it. And my first night in the bunker that-- we had five officers and five NCOs. And the officers were in two rooms in the basement area and the NCOs were on the first floor. And the first night I was there, it was hot and humid. And I was laying there, and I'm just completely disheveled. And a rat runs across me.

[00:13:37.16] And I hate rats. I'm afraid of rats and spiders, which in Vietnam, there's a lot of. And they are big, they're not little. So I said, I don't want to live down here. So I went up to what was previously my interpreter's headquarters. It wasn't headquarters, it was a room, but it was on the top floor right in the fighting bunker that we had on top. And it was cool up there and the air was fresh. And they said, when we get attacked, that's where they shoot the RPGs, is at the gun portals.

[00:14:06.32] And so I strung up netting around there, chain link fence, just standard chain link fence as a shield for RPGs. Because the RPGs would hit, they would explode before they got in to the bunker. And that's where I lived for 12 months. It was a pretty nice area. It was much better than being in the basement with the rodents.

[00:14:28.98] I carried a camera with me the whole time I was there. And one of them shows along the top of our bunker, we have 10 Claymore mines with the det cord running off it and they're all numbered. So when we were attacked, each one of us manned a certain defensive position. And I had responsibility for 7 through 10.

[00:14:58.52] So yeah, we were attacked. We got attacked typically at night. The VC didn't come after us during the day because we had gunship support. But at night, helicopters weren't as effective. But they dropped flares and lit up the compound. So we could see the Viet Cong.

[00:15:18.16] And yeah, we were blowing off Claymore mines and they were trying to come through the minefields. And yeah, we got attacked multiple times. The chain link fence twice stopped RPGs. The DSA, or the district senior adviser, Bill Ward said, you guys from North

Dakota, you've got some good ideas. And it worked. I was never wounded in the compound. In fact, we only took one casualty in the compound.

[00:15:46.09] The Vietnamese that protected us fought ferociously for us. And we had a lot of armament, so we were pretty good at protecting ourselves.

[00:16:00.27] Yeah, I was two weeks in Saigon, three days I think it was at Vung Tau. It was a truck ride over there, it was short. So I was two weeks in Saigon. In fact, I remember laying in the officer BOQ, the bachelor officers' quarters. And I had seen the movie-- I'm trying to think of it, with Charlie Sheen?

[00:16:23.28] MARC HENDERSON: Platoon.

[00:16:24.39] ROGER JORDHEIM: No, it is the other one. Actually, it wasn't Charlie Sheen, it was-- No, it was his dad, Martin Sheen, Apocalypse Now. So his job, as it comes out in that movie, was a Phoenix adviser on his first tour. And he's laying-- as the movie starts, he's laying in his bunk looking at this fan that's slowly oscillating on the ceiling, flashing back to his first tour. And I found myself like on the second day, laying on my bunk looking at exactly the same thing. And I thought, good God, this is what's going to come ahead.

[00:16:58.74] But yeah, just two weeks, you learn some pig Latin, if you will, in terms of Vietnamese, and you learn about the structure of a district, which we're heading towards. And they draw names as to where you go. And everybody wanted to be in the delta, III Corps or II Corps or IV Corps, because that was the most pacified section of South Vietnam. The worst was up in I Corps, which is right on the DMZ. And so that's where I ended up.

[00:17:31.87] And I remember my friends who I-- you know, there was probably 10 of us, 12 of us came in at the same time. Oh God, Jordheim, you drew the short straw on this one. So I went up there. I was anxious, to say the least. I was lonely, I was homesick.

[00:17:59.77] It was all via mail and most of it was with my wife and my mom. We had no radios, we had no landlines, no phones, no other form of communication other than mail, and mail would come in by helicopter. So you wouldn't hear anything for a couple of weeks, and all of a sudden, you'd have like 20 letters.

[00:18:19.51] Again, going back to North Dakota being a pretty conservative area and certainly the area that I came from was conservative, so I got almost no news whatsoever with regard to the war in Vietnam. They intentionally didn't discuss that with me. But Cheryl wrote. And my mom was a prolific writer, she wrote me every day.

[00:18:43.70] So I stayed in touch with home. And as I said, I told them all I had a desk job. I didn't want them worrying about me. And I don't think they did. I don't think they worried about me.

[00:19:10.81] I remember complaining once that the air conditioner didn't work properly. Shit, we didn't have any air conditioners, but it sounded good. No, we stayed in touch almost completely by letter, that was the only way to communicate.

[00:19:27.89] MARC HENDERSON: What about news from home, did you guys have a TV or did you get newspapers?

[00:19:32.62] ROGER JORDHEIM: No, we had none of that. You got to appreciate where we're at, we're in the middle of nowhere. We don't have ice. We drank beer, we had ice, somebody out in the village would get it. And you'd look at it and you could see flies and bugs in the ice cubes and you learn to drink your beer fast, before the ice melted. So we didn't have a lot of luxuries.

[00:19:59.94] It was under CORDS. It was formerly ICEX, and then they changed the name to Phoenix. Actually, Phoenix started off as counter-terror.

[00:20:07.85] MARC HENDERSON: What year was that?

[00:20:09.21] ROGER JORDHEIM: '66, '67. It was the brainchild of William Colby, Bill Colby, if you remember that name. He ultimately became director of the CIA. He saw what was happening early on in terms of the VCI ramping up their shadow government. And so he designed the Phoenix program around that to interdict, to try to disassemble the Viet Cong infrastructure.

[00:20:36.90] So we spent an awful lot of time on intelligence gathering. I ran an informant network, I paid by the kill, by the capture, by the weapon. And so most of the intel we got was really pretty good, plus the PRUs that I worked with on putting all of this together to develop dossiers on senior VCI cadre, they'd heard and seen it all before. They had a pretty good pulse on what was BS and what was real.

[00:21:07.51] And so our intel, when we planned and mounted a mission, our contact rate was 75, 80%, whereas a standard line unit, you know, GI, US line unit, maybe were in contact 10% of the time. And it's because they didn't have intelligence. We had local, current, accurate intelligence.

[00:21:38.43] So we spent a lot of time, to answer your question, analyzing this information and planning missions. And then mounting them. We'd load up in a helicopter and we'd go in. We ran-- I was responsible for what's called the DIOCC, the District Intelligence Operations Control Center, which is where all the intelligence was gathered and where the missions were planned.

[00:22:02.13] So I spent-- not a lot of time there. I had an assistant who spent a lot of time in the DIOCC, that was just not my style. I was more along the lines of getting the finished intelligence and then figuring out how to execute. So we spent-- we'd get intel in, we'd get hot intel in. A chieu hoi would come in or an informant would come in and they'd say, alright, the village chief in Tapan Nam is going to be in this hut at this time for a meeting.

[00:22:28.90] And so we would spend a day figuring out how do we get in there without them seeing us and hearing us come. Because that's one of the main problems with the GIs, was the VC and the NVA knew they were coming long before they could be effective. With us, we jumped on them.

[00:22:50.70] So I was trying to think, when I saw that question, what did you spend your time doing? And it went by so fast. But I put it in perspective by-- I've got two air medals. You got an air medal for every 25 combat aerial assaults that you were on. So I did 50 of those, at least 50 of them. So that's 50 days out of 360 and they probably were half of the missions that I went on, the other half were walk-in missions.

[00:23:20.52] So I probably did over 100 missions, military operations. And so when you sit back and think about it-- because you didn't do a lot of fighting on weekends, that was one of the neat things about being an adviser. The work kindly stopped on Saturdays and Sundays. So if you look at 250 days out of the year and 100 of them you're involved in combat missions, and probably another 100 days of planning those missions, that took up most of your time.

[00:23:50.46] Plus we would go early in the morning. Daylight we would be out on a helicopter and we'd be going. So you go to bed early, you wanted to be sharp. The days went by remarkably fast.

[00:24:06.90] And some of that is just etched indelibly in me, like Catch-22. I think I read that book twice while I was in Vietnam. Woodstock was 69, that was huge at the time. Santana Abraxas just came out, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. I still hear that music and it takes me right back to Vietnam. I listened to a lot of music.

[00:24:28.68] I had a boombox and we had a generator that ran about four hours every night, not during the day because it was only one generator. And friends would send me cassettes, they had cassette recordings, that's how long ago it was. And so I listened to that music, I had headsets. So I'd lay in bed and I'd read letters.

[00:24:53.99] And it's like everything else you get with experience, you get better and better at it. And I got good. But I was not effective for the first couple of months because I was afraid. And then the last couple of months, I was afraid again. But in between there, I was really effective.

[00:25:14.99] I went on my first ambush just short of a month in country. I was two weeks in Saigon and a week in Duc Pho. And then the PRUs came to me and they said, all right, it's time. We got some good intel.

[00:25:28.07] So we went out and-- right on the South China Sea. It was gorgeous, it was at night. I set up an L-shaped ambush with Claymore mines. They'd never used them before. And sure enough, four or five VC came down the path right along the ocean on their way to a meeting. And I blew the Claymores.

[00:25:50.39] As soon as you hit the Claymores, you open up and you spray everything. Then-- stops. And then all you can hear is screaming and moaning and gurgling. And then we waited,

which we normally didn't, but we were close enough to our compound, we were only a couple of miles away that night.

[00:26:08.90] And in the morning, we went out there and there were four Viet Cong dead and a couple of blood trails. So we hit them hard. And I remember the PRUs, it's the first time they'd seen me in combat, and they were really pleased with what they saw. They were pleased with the results, they were pleased with my performance. And you know, they were clapping me on the back. And I was empty.

[00:26:43.92] MARC HENDERSON: Were you pleased with yourself?

[00:26:47.66] ROGER JORDHEIM: Yes, I think I was. But I didn't reflect on it until later that I'd killed people. It's the first time I had ever killed anyone. And I couldn't tell my family, so I wrote a letter to my pastor back in North Dakota and I told him what I'd done. And I tried to reconcile with God giving us all life and then some of us taking it, and it was-- you know, he used my letter, to a certain extent, in some of his sermons.

[00:27:28.32] And he wrote me. We stayed in touch. And he helped me through that. It's like anything else, after you've done it a few times, you get better at it and you get calloused and you lose some of your humanity. And the next thing you know, it's like you've got a license to go deer hunting, and so let's go get some deer.

[00:27:48.96] So no, I got pretty hardened while I was in Vietnam. I mean, the eight months that I was really pretty effective. And it didn't trouble me, but it troubles me now. And I repressed those feelings pretty effectively for many, many years. I mean they were always there and things will trigger it, but I managed it. I buried it, and I managed it.

[00:28:18.12] And while I was in Vietnam, the advisory team-- because my group, my PRUs, were the best. The other guys were MAT team advisers, military advisory training, and they trained the RF/PFs, the Ruff Puffs, the regional forces, popular forces, they were the peasant army, if you will, the South Vietnam. They weren't the ARVN, we had nothing to do with the ARVN.

[00:28:42.78] But my other buddies were with the MAT teams and they didn't see near as much action as I did. So I was--

[00:28:49.44] MARC HENDERSON: What was a MAT team?

[00:28:50.98] ROGER JORDHEIM: Military advisory team. They were two-man teams, an officer and an enlisted man, and they went out and advised and trained the Ruff Puffs, the RF/PFs. But they were inept. They were well armed, but every time they got shot at, the first thing they did was drop their weapons and run.

[00:29:10.98] So I was kind of-- well, my nickname was Lieutenant VCK, Viet Cong killer. So people now started to want to go with me on missions. And one in particular, my NCO, Tom Moore, great guy, still is one of my best friends, we stay in touch.

[00:29:37.39] So he begged me. He was the guy that went to the DIOCC and really did the nuts and bolts of the intelligence gathering, and filtering through everything, and developing dossiers. And so he asked me, can I go out with you? And so we're on a-- which I thought was just a walk in the park mission into a village where we're going to-- we had some documents, so we knew that there were some low-level people in there. And on our way in, we were ambushed.

[00:30:07.63] And make a long story short, Tom lost his leg. Oh God. He was in shock. I was right beside him and I could see that his leg had been blown off. So he asked me several times, Roger-- because we were all on first name basis, we were a really tight team. NCOs and officers, no one lorded over anyone. We just got the job done.

[00:30:35.38] Roger, am I OK? And I go, yes Tom, you're fine. I'm getting the gunships up, I'll have a Dust Off in here as soon as possible. So I took off his belt and I tied it around his leg. And we got gunships on station, they sanitized the area, and I got a Dust Off in.

[00:30:56.36] I put Tom on my back and I ran to the helicopter. And I turned around and I threw him onto the helicopter. And it's the first time he looked down and he saw that his leg was gone. So the last thing he said to me was, Roger, you lied to me. And I didn't see him again for over a year, he was at Valley Forge Veterans Hospital going through rehab. And then he came and stayed with us, we were living in Richmond, Virginia at the time. And he stayed with us.

[00:31:31.25] And so we subsequently have become the very best of friends. And it took us maybe 20 years before we could ever sit down and talk about that day. And he didn't really know what happened, I knew exactly what had happened. But I remember he said to me, he was laying-- he woke up and he was looking up at this beautiful blue sky and brilliant sunshine. And he said to himself, some dumb son of a bitch stepped on a landmine. And it was him, but he didn't know it. The shock will do that to you.

[00:32:10.83] I look back at it now, and he should never have been there. He should never have been there. That should have been me, not him. And you learn-- they're all these various situations, you learn just how random life is. Life is daily. You can do everything right and still be wrong.

[00:32:34.20] There's an incredible amount of luck associated with surviving combat. Not bravery. Oftentimes it boils down to just luck. And it's not just staying alive, it's also staying in one piece. 80% of our casualties for US troops in Vietnam were below the waist, it was all landmines and booby traps. And I saw a lot of that.

[00:33:01.12] And a village maybe had 100 to 200 people in it, maybe, in the middle of nowhere. I mean, we couldn't walk to them. You could walk to them at night, but not in the daytime. Not like Tet, not like Hue, not like Saigon, not like any of those areas where they actually did experience house-to-house fighting, no. We fought in houses, but they were straw huts.

[00:33:33.68] We tried to go for the biggest ones first, you know. I mean, the government was formed-- we had a district chief who was a colonel, Vietnamese colonel, and Duc Pho had a district VCI chief. We got him while I was there. And each hamlet had a finance guy, a

transportation guy, a supply guy, they had their government just like the GVN, the government of Vietnam. They were very sophisticated.

[00:34:09.65] So we typically went after the money guys and the propaganda guys because they were going to villages at night, and they put on a little show. The Vietnamese were very simple people, so singing and dancing was big for them. And they'd put up a little stage and they would have puppet shows and stuff.

[00:34:28.67] And then proselytize the villagers and say, you know, the GVN comes in here and they bomb you, and they take you out of the land that you've lived on and your ancestors lived on for 100 years, and they move you to these pacification villages. And if you join us, if you join the Vietnamese, we're going to keep you here on your land. And ultimately, we're going to win this war, so you might as well be on the winning side.

[00:34:54.71] So we knew oftentimes when these things were happening. And so we'd either get them coming into the village or we'd get them going out at night.

[00:35:12.36] In terms of allies, yes, I worked with the ROKs, Republic of Korea, called the Tiger Brigade. And the ROKs, the first thing they do when they go in to an area is to let everybody in that area know that they are there, and that they are in charge. And they are the baddest asses there.

[00:35:30.36] And so day one, we killed a Viet Cong. And they slit him open and they cut his gizzard out, or his liver, rather. And each one of them took a bite out of it, right out of the man's body, and they handed it to me.

[00:35:47.97] So what you learn in those advisory situations is you don't lose face if you can avoid it. So I took that man's liver and I put it in my mouth. And I pretend like I took a bite out of it, I didn't, but I had blood all over my lips. So I handed it back to him and again, a huge cheer goes up. You know, the American is one of us.

[00:36:14.64] They were brutal, they were unbelievably brutal. And they didn't care who they killed, they just were killers. And so I saw numerous occasions where innocent civilians were killed. And I only worked with them for a week and I didn't care to work with them anymore. They weren't as professional as we were, nor as discriminating. They were killers and they wanted to make their mark, that's pretty much what it was.

[00:36:41.85] And the Aussies, the Aussies were great. The Australian special forces were part of Phoenix as well. And frankly, we had a good reputation in Duc Pho, so there were several allied special ops guys that would come in. And the Aussies-- we thought we were good drinkers because we drank a lot of beer, but we were amateurs compared to the Australians. Those guys were party animals and professionals and just wonderfully good guys. Plus you could communicate with them, which is nice.

[00:37:19.95] A lot of the other allies-- I didn't work with any Thais. I worked with Montagnards. I worked with Pathet Lao. I was telling Brian, there were two top secret programs

in MACV in Vietnam. One was Phoenix, and the other one was SOG, the Studies and Observation Group. I went on a couple of SOG missions. And you feel sometimes safer even in the most dangerous situations just because of the people that you're with. And that's a lot of what I experienced. But-- quality special ops people.

[00:38:00.65] I guess we kind of considered they were beneath us. We had all the assets, we got all the helicopters, we had the intel. Guys would come to us because we knew what we were doing, the ARVN really didn't. I mean, I'm sure there are some very, very good ARVN units, I didn't spend any time--

[00:38:18.50] although one night, I was at an outpost that I shouldn't have been at. They asked me to come out just to kind of show that the Americans are here and they're supporting you. And so I went out and spent the night. Sure as shit, we got attacked, middle of nowhere, hill in the rice bowl. Got overrun. And so I E & E'd out of there, myself and two other Vietnamese.

[00:38:48.78] I lost my rifle. One of the cardinal sins you commit in war is losing your weapon. I lost my weapon. And I stumbled and bumbled my way through several kilometers that night through rice paddies. And I made it back to QL1 to another RF/PF outpost. And they took me in without shooting me as I was coming in.

[00:39:14.77] MARC HENDERSON: How did you manage that?

[00:39:18.12] ROGER JORDHEIM: Luck. If I had stayed there-- I mean, it was-- the Viet Cong had the upper hand immediately. They were in the wires before the sentries even knew it, so it was over before it really even started. I was in a bunker and all hell breaks loose. And I get up and I can see right now they are amongst us. So I ran, I was a coward that night.

[00:39:45.24] But if I had stayed, I'd be dead with everybody else. So I can't remember how many were killed that night, a lot. But I do remember just being incredibly embarrassed the next day. But they issued me another M60 and--

[00:40:02.75] MARC HENDERSON: I was going to ask you. Were there any consequences for losing your weapon?

[00:40:07.14] ROGER JORDHEIM: No, they knew-- the situation was well known to the advisory team. And the two American units that were-- whatever, 10 miles away, they knew us because we interfaced with their S2, their intelligence officers. And they were the ones that supplied us with the air assets, both the Hueys for the combat assaults and the gunships.

[00:40:41.61] So when something went wrong with MACV in Duc Pho, they knew about it because they'd heard that we'd been overrun. But they thought our compound had been overrun, not the outpost. And we got radio traffic that Dakota seven zero, that was my call sign, he made it out. But I'm glad that I did what I did or I wouldn't be here.

[00:41:22.44] But 90% of my time was spent with PRUs, a Provincial Reconnaissance Unit. There was nine of them and we tried to always have two Americans on every mission, oftentimes

it was just me. But they were the best, they were professionals, they were special forces, they had been doing this for a long time.

[00:41:44.04] They took care of me, they kept me safe. Mainly because I was their lifeline to air support, which was paramount. When you're in the middle of nowhere, you've got to have air support. And so I was good on the radio and I was good with maps and I could do that really well.

[00:42:05.28] So when the shit hit the fan, oftentimes the first thing they did was they would assign somebody to lay on top of me and keep me safe. They knew where their bread was buttered. Plus we became personal friends. I'd go to their houses and meet their wives and children and have dinner with them. The camaraderie was amazing.

[00:42:30.78] When you think of the average American unit, they were wary of all Vietnamese. They thought all Vietnamese were-- pardon the expression, they were all gooks. Well, they were not. I mean, there are some really, really good Vietnamese. In fact, the Vietnamese people as a whole are wonderful people. They're industrious, they're enthusiastic, they've got great attitudes. They're very simple people, but they're hardworking, and they're earnest. And all they want to do is to be left alone.

[00:42:57.34] The majority of them, especially those in the country, didn't care who won the war. They've been involved in war for 100 years. They had fought the Chinese, they fought the Japanese, they fought the French, now they're seeing the Americans. They're tired of going out to their rice paddies and stepping on a landmine and some unexploded ordnance and losing their leg or losing a child.

[00:43:20.01] They just wanted to be left alone. Just to be simple farmers, that's all they wanted.

[00:43:23.85] And when we went back, seven, eight years ago, whatever it was, that country is flourishing. There are 85 million people in Vietnam and 80% of them are under the age of 25 years old. And it's a very industrious country. They love life. And they love it especially now because they're not involved in any more wars right now. They didn't care if they were communist, they have no allegiance to the Communist Party.

[00:43:55.41] In fact, today, 20% are members of the Communist Party throughout all of Vietnam, North and South Vietnam. The rest of them, the 80%-- just leave me alone. My life is fine right here growing my rice, I'm educating my kids, and I'm having a good time. That's all I ask for.

[00:44:18.09] We were protected. The village chief, our Thu Ta, Colonel Chung was his name, he had his own bodyguards, hand selected, handpicked bodyguards. This is not a big compound. This is a pretty small compound right in the center of the city. And the cities had less than 1,000 people in them, way less than 1,000 people.

[00:44:39.63] And we had, like I said, the minefield all the way around, concertina, Claymores. So you know, we were pretty secure. So those people protected us to the point where we slept

well at night, we really did. I felt safe in that compound. I mean, there were times when we were attacked, but we knew what we were doing.

[00:45:08.32] There were bodies 20 feet from our compound in the morning. Plus we'd sprayed that whole area with our M16s and M60 machine guns. So no, nothing ever got in. No one ever got in to us. They would lob mortars into us all the time, but they didn't penetrate the roof.

[00:45:35.97] We ordered it by the slick, by the pallet. They would-- that's a good question. We would order-- you've got 24 cases of beer at a time. And we would always hope for PBR, Pabst Blue Ribbon. But more often than that, we got Carling's Black Label, which is swill beer, it's terrible beer.

[00:45:57.09] But I learned quickly that all beer pretty much tastes the same when it's warm. If you get cold beer, there is a difference. But yeah, it came in by helicopter, a pallet at a time. And we'd run out to our landing zone and you could hear guys going, ah shit, it's Carling's again.

[00:46:22.34] We had a little bar set up. And we had a Vietnamese bartender. We had some of the comforts of home, we really did. So it wasn't like everything was sheer terror all the time. There was a lot of good times with your pals. And we were all on a first name basis. And the leadership was excellent. We had a really rock solid senior district advisers.

[00:46:51.50] And like I said, everybody was pretty highly educated. So our conversations were not necessarily about politics, they were about a wide variety of things. It was-- mentally, there were some gymnastics that went on. I mean, you had to be relatively sharp to stay in there, mentally.

[00:47:14.07] And we played basketball, we played a lot of five on five. We had a hoop in the middle of the compound and we also played volleyball. But our biggest problem was, especially in volleyball, where the ball would go up over the top of the bunker and down into the minefield and we could never get our balls back. You know, you look down there and you'd see an array of athletic balls that you couldn't go get. So we go, well, that's the end of the basketball game today. We got to get another basketball.

[00:47:49.25] The guy that preceded me was a CIA officer, that's when they ramped this thing up in '70 and they started taking the CIA officers out. There were called FSOs, foreign service officer. That was their cover, but they were all CIA.

[00:48:02.51] So he stayed there for about two months, Dave Turilla. He had his wife there. And so-- MARC HENDERSON: In the compound with you? ROGER JORDHEIM: Yeah, it was strange. So he really helped school me. He no longer went on any missions because the CIA said, you can't do that anymore, the Army guys are going to do that. But he schooled me.

[00:48:31.93] So I had that interface with Dave in terms of teaching me really how to be a good Phoenix adviser. And then every month, in that same helipad, a black helicopter would come in and a guy would get off. It was like watching the opening of M*A*S*H. A guy would get off with a Hawaiian shirt on and shorts and flip-flops and hand me a handful of piasters, because

every month I send an invoice into CORDS and detailed how much money I needed for my informants.

[00:49:04.63] This is the results we had this month. So many killed, so many captured, so many weapons taken. And so once a month, those guys would come in with money and I would pay my guys. The irony of it was amazing to me.

[00:49:21.67] Every time somebody got medevacked out or killed, I ended up being the duty officer. So I would take personal belongings, I would write the letters to their family. And I'd take their belongings to Saigon or to Da Nang. And as a part of that, I would meet with CIA officers and get debriefed. So I did that maybe six times.

[00:49:46.12] So I'd sit in the officers club in Da Nang with three or four CIA officers and they'd ask me all kinds of questions. Not questions that you're asking me, but the specifics, the nuts and bolts of how it's going.

[00:50:01.24] What do you think is pacified? What percentage do you think are VC? And how do you know this? Where are you getting information from? And how do you go about getting a guy to chieu hoi? How do you go about developing the relationship that you've got with the Americans to the point where they can't wait to go with you?

[00:50:18.55] Because oftentimes, I'd have a squad or-- a recon platoon squad with me, including the platoon leaders, American platoon leaders. And they loved going with me because they knew they were going to get in the shit just about every single time. And that's what they were trained to do. And they were tired of humping around the jungle and being shot at and stepping on landmines and never seeing the enemy. So they liked to count noses, they liked to see the chips fly, if you will.

[00:50:47.56] But I didn't have that much contact with the CIA, with the personnel. You knew when you were because they were completely different than the military group. And it was kind of a breath of fresh air. And they always bought, they always bought the rounds for you.

[00:51:06.03] You know, I was in student government. I was president of the fraternity, I was-- I think I have-- and Vietnam really enhanced this-- I have what's known as presence. At the time, it was called command presence. But I've had it all my life and it really, really was enhanced in Vietnam.

[00:51:30.13] In its simplest sense, presence is simply a combination of charisma and authenticity. And as long as you're authentic with people, people are going to like you and people are going to, for the most part, follow you. So that's something that's kind of always come naturally to me. And I really have I think my mother to thank for a lot of that. She had an awful lot of presence and I'm very much like my mom. And it's not like you make an effort to do it, it's just something that, like I said, comes naturally.

[00:52:03.64] So yeah, I was not the highest ranking officer, but I was pretty well respected. And I was respected amongst the senior officers within the American units that I worked with. They trusted me with their people and that was a big issue.

[00:52:29.27] So one of my good friends was Pete Barili. He was a first lieutenant, recon team, 11th Light Infantry at LZ Debbie. And we went on numerous missions together. He-- they loved to go with us.

[00:52:44.54] And so one day we're out, we are doing a search and destroy. Pete and I are in a blocking force and he's got three guys with him. My PRUs are going through the village and a VC soldier comes out, two of them-- no, three of them came out, all with AK-47s. We shot two of them. One guy keeps running down the trail. Pete gets up, three of his guys follow him, he runs after him.

[00:53:05.75] I yell at him because I know the area and I know it's heavily mined. And as soon as the words came out of my mouth, they tripped a 105, booby trap 105 unexploded round, and killed three of them and severely wounded the fourth. This is, I think, my worst day in Vietnam.

[00:53:28.10] So I set up a defensive perimeter. I called in gunships, got in a Dust Off, and we had to pick them up. We had to pick up the bodies in pieces, arms, legs. And Pete-- I found Pete, just his torso, his head was gone, arms, legs, gone. But I knew it was Pete.

[00:53:53.72] So I picked my buddy up and I threw him on the helicopter. And to see four guys that are so alive and professional, good Soldiers, make a stupid mistake, and that's all it takes. And like that, it's all over. It's all over. That's the randomness of it.

[00:54:27.36] Yeah, we did a lot of crazy things together. And he never made it, neither did two of his guys. The other guy had lost one arm and both legs. That was the end of that story. And for two months, it was the end of me working with the recon platoon because then they didn't trust me. I was responsible, I was in charge. So in their minds, I was responsible for that horrible accident. And that's the truth, I was. I didn't do it, but I couldn't prevent it.

[00:55:08.07] So that was a lull in the action with the LZ Debbie boys in recon platoon. But I was still running with LZ Liz and their recon guys. So life went on, we continued all of our missions. But that's how relationships get shattered.

[00:55:29.56] I can remember all kinds of really, really bad days with death and carnage and I had a hell of a time coming up with good days. And one of the really good days, and I sent you a picture of this, it was-- our team helped build a Catholic orphanage in Duc Pho. And you look at the picture and it's just heart-- all these little kids with no parents, all been killed in the war, and the Catholic nuns came in and we helped them build an orphanage. And I was over there and I took a picture of them.

[00:56:02.51] And you can see how I was probably, maybe the first American they'd ever seen. And I don't know that they had ever seen a camera. They were maybe five, seven years old and that's it. I remember that as a heartwarming story.

[00:56:15.98] I remember Christmas of 1970, where-- it was the first Christmas I'd ever been alone. In fact, I spent all my-- all those holidays alone except for-- your just-- no family. You've got your family of fellow Soldiers with you, but that's different than having your family with you.

[00:56:36.54] And so this Christmas Eve, we got shitfaced. And we went out into the village, which you never, ever did at night, and we Christmas caroled the local brothel. There was a whorehouse there. And we were singing Christmas carols to them. And they loved it, they lined up, they couldn't believe that the crazy Americans were out Christmas caroling them.

[00:57:05.81] And I remember distinctly, we were singing Silent Night. And we got to the verse round yon virgins and I thought of the irony associated with that. And I remember it to this day. Then we went back to the compound and-- you know, M16s have got red tracers and AK-47 has got green tracers. And we had all kinds of AK-47s around.

[00:57:29.32] If fact, some nights on missions we carried AK-47s. We looked like the enemy, we wore black pajamas. We were VC. And so we fired them, crossing tracers, red and green. And it was as close to celebrating Christmas as we could get. So I smile when I think about it. But there weren't a lot of good times. Other than the relationships that you enjoyed and you made with your fellow-- we were a really, really tight team.

[00:58:06.08] And so that's-- really the best was the relationships. I enjoyed while I was there and unsurprisingly, once the tour was over, everybody scatters to the wind. I've stayed in touch, very close touch with Tom Moore and with another gentleman by the name of Bruce Bower, both of whom I had to medevac, both of whom were wounded. But the rest of the group scattered to the winds. It's over, you know. You get on a plane, it ends just as fast as it starts.

[00:58:40.56] It was I think back in February of '71. I had been in Vietnam for like eight or nine months. Cheryl and I had been married for less than three months before I went over there so we'd never really lived together. And I went on an operation, combat assault, where I'm in on the lead helicopter. And we go into a hot LZ, we're being shot at. And I'm exiting one side, my RTO is exiting the other side. And the pilot decides it's too hot, so he pulls back on the stick.

[00:59:10.08] And I don't know if you realize how fast helicopters go up. Anyway, I couldn't get back in the helicopter so I fell. I fell about probably around 15 feet. I had a pack and rifle obviously and fell flat on my back and was knocked out for a short period of time. And we're all by ourselves and we're surrounded by Viet Cong.

[00:59:32.91] But fortunately, I've got a radio. So I was able to get the gunships on station, they sanitized the area, and they brought in a bird to extract us. So I got out of there safe and sound with the exception of I cracked a vertebrae in my back and skinned my entire back up in the fall. And the following week, I meet my wife, then of three months, for R&R in Hawaii.

[01:00:00.04] So she writes me and she says, I've decided that we're not going to do it the conventional way where we go to a Oahu and we sit on Waikiki with a whole bunch of other

military guys. She said we're going to go to Maui, the island of Maui, which I'd never heard of before. And she said we're going to camp out.

[01:00:18.33] And I said, you know, I've been camping out for nine months, I would really like to have like a bed and a shower for a week. So we compromised and she put herself in the Maui Lu resort, which was a individual-- literally a grass hut just across the street from the ocean. And it was idyllic. I mean, it was some really, really great memories with an incredible woman.

[01:00:51.21] Claymore mines were such an upgrade with regard to ambushes, especially mechanical ambushes where you'd set up an L-shaped ambush, and you didn't have to hold on to the det cord, you know. You're tethered to the det cord if it's not mechanical. So you only get away maybe 100 feet, that's pretty close to a major ambush.

[01:01:10.83] But with mechanicals, you could be a click away. All you do is wait for the noise. Because you have trip wires and you've got blasting caps and you've got Claymore mines. You've got an entire squad in there waiting to ambush someone and no one around. You just leave, they're just mechanicals. That technology I was impressed with.

[01:01:33.60] I was impressed with Spooky, I don't know if you've ever heard of Spooky. It's a C-130 armed to the teeth. They can fly over a football field and in 30 seconds, put a round with every square foot in that field. And so there were several times where we had Spooky on station. And it was scary, I mean really scary.

[01:01:56.46] And then you think, well thank God they're not shooting at me. I mean, it's pretty close and it's deafening, and it's a kill zone that no one's going to come out of. That technology compared to M16s and M60 machine guns and-- it was like using peashooters compared to that.

[01:02:13.80] But other than that, we worked with PRC-10s and standard, run of the mill radios that weren't particularly good. But we didn't have-- like special ops has got to today, the technologies that they've got. The GPS and the fact that they can talk freely, they don't have to use RTP, radio-telephone procedure, because the enemy is always listening in, so you're talking in code basically. Now you can say anything you want, no one's going to understand you anyway.

[01:02:44.66] So no, it was a lot of low-tech stuff. In fact, one of the pictures that I sent you is of a punji pit. You wouldn't think about it, but that's what the VC had. They had punji pits covered with bamboo sharpened up, covered with human feces. And you'd step on it, you'd cut your leg. And within an hour, you had gangrene, it was infected.

[01:03:06.23] And the IEDs that they-- that's a common term today, but back then there were booby traps. And there were made out of Pepsi cans and all different kinds of things that-- they were so industrious. They'd find an unexploded bomb, they'd tear it apart, take all the patina out and make booby traps out of it.

[01:03:24.02] Our technology, which is pretty basic, rote stuff today compared to their technology, from their perspective, was awesome. Especially helicopters. They were scared to

death of helicopters. So we had all the technology, we had all the firepower, we were pretty well-armed. Those poor guys, they had very little, but a tremendous amount of courage.

[01:03:54.21] The week before I left, I went on a major hairy mission. I had an NCO with me and he said, you know, Lieutenant, what are we doing? We've made it this far, why are we going out on this? And I said, because it's our job and because the PRUs need us, and they lay their life on the line for as long as they live, not just for 365 days. So it's our job to support them and that's what I'm going to do, I'm not going to force you to come with me. He went with me.

[01:04:26.62] And it was a successful mission and we took no casualties. But yeah, right up until a matter of-- now, I got a one week early drop. It came as a complete surprise. One day I get my orders, I come back to the camp and I get off a helicopter. I go back in and the RTO says, Lieutenant Jordheim, we just got your papers, your DEROSing next week.

[01:04:50.26] It happened that fast. You didn't even get a going away party. You just-- you were gone. And you get on the airplane and they get out of Vietnamese airspace, and they tell you you finally have left Vietnam and you just go, wow. How did I get through that?

[01:05:22.23] I did for like one week. This guy comes in. He was so green. And he was terrified. And I knew-- you know when you meet somebody whether they're going to be good or not. He wasn't going to be any good. I can't remember his name, but I can tell you that he was not going to go out on any missions.

[01:05:42.90] His job was to run the DIOCC, and he was going to sit there and run the DIOCC. This was in June of 1970. If you did something really spectacular, sometimes the PRUs were to make awards to you. And typically they were ears. So I had a jar full of ears in some type of formaldehyde, I don't know what it was.

[01:06:12.45] Now, I'm not proud of this, but it wasn't my custom. I gave that jar of ears to my replacement and he was speechless. He couldn't comprehend that. And looking back on it now, he was right. But that was the special ops custom for the PRUs. And it happened.

[01:06:50.25] But to answer your question, that was one of the things I realized very quickly that he wasn't going to be-- the PRUs didn't have their Phoenix adviser like they'd had for a year. And those who preceded me were good as well. But you had to take care of those folks, that was your job.

[01:07:14.10] One amusing story that I just thought about in terms of a memory, a fun memory, weird memory, because there are a lot of weird things that happen in foreign lands, especially if you're in combat. So it's Tet, 1971. And as I said earlier, the war really-- it was a congenial thing, like on weekends you don't need to fight. And so Tet happens. Tet, as you know, is the Vietnamese new year, Asian new year, but especially big in Tet.

[01:07:44.62] So I'm at a village and I am-- now, there are two Americans, but I'm the ranking American as a first lieutenant. So I'm seated right next to the village chief at this long table with, I don't know, 20, 30 guys at it. So the village chief is at the end, I'm to his right. And we're

drinking beer, PBR this time, the best. And I noticed there's a hole in the corner of the table but I don't say anything, but I know it's there because I almost dropped my beer through it. So I was cognizant it was there and I kept my beer over here.

[01:08:18.02] And then halfway through this huge celebration, because then they would find meat to eat, this guy comes out with long leather gloves and a monkey. And so he takes the monkey and he puts the monkey's head up through the hole in the table, and cracks the monkey's skull open with a wooden mallet. And the monkey is going crazy, because I don't know that the monkey knows what's going to happen, but he doesn't want to be held like this and he sure as hell doesn't want to have his head stuck up through a hole in a table. Bam.

[01:08:52.91] So the village chief reaches in with a little spoon, there are two little bowls, two little silver bowls, and he scoops out half the monkey's brains and puts it in his little bowl, and he puts the other half in my little bowl. And it's steaming, it's steaming.

[01:09:08.81] So the village chief-- it's only one little spoonful, he takes it and he eats it, and the place goes up for grabs, cheering him. Now it's my turn, and now the place is dead silent, the whole table. I remember looking down the table because Sergeant Morton was on the other end, he's just shaking his head.

[01:09:28.67] So I take my monkey brains out of my little silver spoon, I pop it in my mouth, and I swallow it, just like that. But I don't show that I swallowed it. I make it look as though I'm chewing it and savoring it. And then I kick it back with a big swig of Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. And the table erupted in cheers. The American is one of us.

[01:09:55.43] I didn't lose any face over that, it made me even more popular with my counterparts. But that's so weird. You think about being immersed in a culture that is completely foreign to you, eating foods that are foreign to you, speaking languages that are foreign to you. That's just a part of it.

[01:10:23.85] They're all highly decorated. I mean, those guys should have gotten a lot more medals than we should have because they didn't have the resources that we had to wage war against us like we did against them, and yet they kicked our ass and they beat us in the final analysis. So you know what? Kudos to them.

[01:10:41.04] So yeah, we're on a mission in Tapan Nam And every time we go to this village at Tapan Nam, we're in the shit, every time. That's the place I mentioned to you earlier that we visited with my family back in 2015, where we came into this Vietnam or Viet Cong graveyard, cemetery, honoring 100 at least, maybe more, in this little village, 100 or so of their sons and fathers had died in the war.

[01:11:08.49] So we're in. We've got intelligence on cadre. We go in on a combat assault. They drop us outside this ridgeline and we come under fire immediately. And so we maneuver around and my buddy Kak. I see this guy come out from behind a hut with an AK-47 and he shoots Kak, my good friend, my Vietnamese PRU good friend, my best friend.

[01:11:33.99] And so I shot him. And Kak was only wounded, he ended up in the hospital but he survived. So we go over after the dust settles around this, and the chief of the PRUs, Mr. Chung, goes, Lieutenant, you've just killed a Viet Cong hero. And he has a uniform on, an AK-47, and he's got a medal.

[01:11:59.46] So without reading it, he said it's a hero award, because he could read the medal, he pins it on me. And there's a picture of me in Tapan Nam honor being awarded this medal by the PRU. And I didn't know really anything about it until I got really home and then I looked it up and it's a hero level two for killing Americans. And it's inscribed right on the medal. And he was hero level two, which means he had killed at least two or more.

[01:12:32.49] In terms of-- weren't a lot of proud moments where you could really take pride in what you'd done, but I was proud that I had his medal because he wasn't going to kill any more Americans. That was the end of the road for him. And of all the medals that I have, I probably cherish that one more than any of them.

[01:12:55.23] Over the course of the last 10 years maybe, it's become popular to be a veteran. My first 20, 30 years after Vietnam was never popular. Vietnam War, as you know very well, was a very unpopular war. And so when you came back, veterans like myself, you buried it.

[01:13:17.28] You didn't talk about it. I hadn't looked at any of these pictures, I've still got I don't know how many. Cheryl saved all the letters that I wrote her from Vietnam, 700 probably, I don't know. Maybe not that many. It's a lot. It's a huge hat box. But I still have not been able to bring myself to read those letters.

[01:13:38.28] But it's changed today. Now it's-- people recognize veterans, including Vietnam veterans. It's taken a long time, but now it's cool to be a veteran. So I never--

[01:13:56.19] MARC HENDERSON: How do you feel about that?

[01:13:56.91] ROGER JORDHEIM: Well, I feel great about it, I feel great about being a veteran. I guess deep down inside, I've always been proud about it, but I never really wanted to talk about it. And I didn't want to talk about medals because there's a tremendous amount of death and chaos associated-- and carnage associated with all of them. But now you can do it.

[01:14:22.78] For example, a country club that I'm a member at, on Veterans Day they started a program where they created storyboards for each veteran. And there's 55 of us at the club. I didn't know but a handful of them, now I know all these other people who were veterans, many of whom served in Vietnam.

[01:14:38.83] It's kind of like they're just in the woodwork, but now they're coming out because the people of the United States support us, they recognize us. I go to Home Depot all the time and Lowe's, I am just a project guy. And you get discounts at Home Depot and Lowe's, 10% off. It was no big thing, but I do it, and I show my veterans card because invariably, they say thank you for your service. And no one's ever said that for 40 years, but now people do.

[01:15:12.73] And also when I see veterans, active duty current veterans, I sometimes tear up. Because a lot of those guys and gals go off, far away countries, and I know exactly how they feel. It's a lonely feeling, it's very lonely. And I really respect them for doing that.

[01:15:46.36] And I'm just extraordinarily pleased to see these guys at airports where people say come on over, let me buy you a drink. They give up their seats in first class for them, and that's the way it should be. It shouldn't be-- that is one of the things I think we learned in Vietnam was that the country didn't support the war at all. And by extension, they didn't support the troops.

[01:16:08.09] Now, I think that even if people don't support-- the populous, and there's a lot of people in America who don't support wars, and that's fine, but they still respect the troops for going overseas and doing their job. And that's the approach our country should take, and it didn't take it with the Vietnam veterans. But it's taking it now in spades, and that's a good feeling.

[01:16:43.30] You know, I was lucky because I came back to a small, conservative community. That they'd say, well Jesus, we thought everybody that went to Vietnam died. Jerry's gone, Benny's gone, Rodney's gone, what the hell are you doing back here?

[01:16:56.92] And all those slides that I had, I was asked to speak at the Lions Club, at the veterans clubs, at Lutheran brotherhood at our church, I showed slides of Vietnam. And this was well before the Vietnam War was over. And so I was kind of a local celebrity for a while, I was treated really, really well. That part of the transition in terms of the recognition and the acceptance was easy.

[01:17:25.95] Now, the hard part was putting behind me all the memories, most of them bad, and the carnage associated with it. So you repress those feelings, you bury everything as deep as you can and you just go on about your life, and I was good at that. But I was welcomed home.

[01:17:52.90] I can remember flying back from California and Cheryl met me, and my mom and dad met me, and my brother and his wife met me. And I had my uniform on and I had a chest full of medals. And so they would say, what did you get those for? And I took them off, never wore them again. I didn't want to talk about it. There's just so many bad memories associated with them.

[01:18:24.08] But my re-entry to the world, as we called it, was very good. Now, I was-- for several months, it took me a while, I was super alert all the time, I still am. And I always watched where I walked, I was always alert, I was wary. And so it took me a while to get over that.

[01:18:50.45] I remember 4th of July, I came back just before 4th of July, in June, and we were in Fargo, North Dakota and fireworks went off. And I dived behind a car-- dove behind a car, took cover. That was just my first instinct, we are being shot at. But after a couple months, I got through that pretty well.

[01:19:14.35] Well, one is treat veterans, especially active duty veterans, with honor and respect, they're just doing their jobs. That's something that our country needs to understand. And also to

understand just wars, the concept of a just war. What wars are just, World War I was just, World War II was just. Vietnam was not a just war,

[01:19:37.37] Iraq was not a just war. You can make an argument that Afghanistan was, and to a limited extent still is a just war, but whether you agree with our nation's policy in terms of war, you have to support the people that fight it. That's one thing that I'd pass on.

[01:19:56.89] I'd also pass on to the younger generation that they need to understand some military history. Why is this nation free? What about the Rangers at Normandy, or the Marines in Guadalcanal, or the Air Force pilots in MiG Alley in Korea, or the folks at Chosin Reservoir, or the Marjah Marines, or the Fallujah Marines.

[01:20:19.52] I'll bet you most young people today, whether it's high school or college, don't know anything about any of those things. And a lot of good men and women were killed and wounded and their lives altered irreparably during those wars. And that's one of the reasons that this nation enjoys the liberties that we have today.

[01:20:42.23] So I'd like to-- I guess in answer to your question, I'd like to see our country suck it up more in that regard, and I think we're in the process of doing that. I also learned that life is daily. It's random, it's scary random. It has a lot to do with luck, whether you live or die. And so enjoy every day you can, live it to the fullest and go to bed and hit it again at a dead run the next day.

[01:21:21.01] I developed a personal saying, I don't even know where the hell I got it. But my motto as an individual is, anything worth doing is worth overdoing. And it's going to be etched on my gravestone, and that's how I feel about life. I made it through and dammit, I'm going to enjoy every second of it now. And I'll squeeze it as hard as I can.

[01:21:50.34] It was a heartbreaking experience. I did that by myself, 30 years ago maybe. You can go look up by names and date of death, et cetera. So I know seven, maybe nine guys on there, and I got through about six of them. And I reflected on 30 years that I've spent walking around the face of this earth, great years, a great family, a good career, I mean, everything's idyllic. And these guys missed out on all of that, all of it, because they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

[01:22:41.22] Again, the randomness of a full and enjoyable life as opposed to getting it cut short at 20 years old. So I couldn't get through all of them. I got through quite a few of them, but I was in my own world. I mean, I was all by myself. There were people everywhere, but I was all by myself.

[01:23:06.94] And I didn't care what feelings were coming out, but I just remember it was heartbreaking for those poor guys and how fortunate I was to be standing on this side of the Wall.

[01:23:26.29] MARC HENDERSON: Have you received a Vietnam veteran lapel pin?

[01:23:29.42] ROGER JORDHEIM: No.

[01:23:30.73] MARC HENDERSON: Can I give you one today?

[01:23:32.24] ROGER JORDHEIM: Sure.

[01:23:34.00] MARC HENDERSON: After World War II, the government gave returning veterans what they called, affectionately, the ruptured duck. Have you ever heard of that?

[01:23:45.17] ROGER JORDHEIM: No.

[01:23:45.92] MARC HENDERSON: So it was a diamond-shaped patch that they would wear on their uniform and it basically said you are returning from the war. And it had an eagle in the center, and it kind of looked like a big duck.

[01:24:01.91] ROGER JORDHEIM: OK. So I'm getting a duck?

[01:24:04.90] MARC HENDERSON: No, but it's very similar to that. On the front, this says Vietnam War veteran. It's got an eagle. And then it's got six stars, one for each of the allies. And then on the back it says, on behalf of a grateful nation, we thank you for your service.

[01:24:22.57] ROGER JORDHEIM: Great. No, I've never-- I don't think I've ever seen it.

[01:24:26.03] MARC HENDERSON: I want to thank you for your service.

[01:24:27.86] ROGER JORDHEIM: You're entirely welcome. Thank you for recognizing me.

[01:24:29.87] MARC HENDERSON: Can I pin this on you?

[01:24:31.19] ROGER JORDHEIM: You may. There it goes, right by my Bronze Star.

[01:24:39.68] MARC HENDERSON: Thank you.

[01:24:41.35] ROGER JORDHEIM: You're entirely welcome.