

Kremer, Paul US Army

[00:00:13.42] PAUL KREMER: I was born in October 28, 1948, in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. Mom and dad, and I had two older sisters and an older brother, so I'm the youngest of four.

[00:00:25.59] MARC HENDERSON: Where do you consider your hometown?

[00:00:27.72] PAUL KREMER: Fort Thomas, Kentucky.

[00:00:29.09] [CHUCKLES]

[00:00:35.12] PAUL KREMER: I was drafted. I guess I was 19.

[00:00:40.37] MARC HENDERSON: And what year was that?

[00:00:42.19] PAUL KREMER: 1968. My brother had been drafted like two years before that, so I don't know that I really paid a whole lot of attention to what was going on with the military or anything like that. I know I had heard about Vietnam in high school, when we took classes and things like that, history and that. But I really didn't get that in the know and how things were going or what direction everything was going in at that time.

[00:01:15.65] MARC HENDERSON: Did your impressions about the draft change after you had been in the military for a bit?

[00:01:20.27] PAUL KREMER: No, not really. Like I said, my older brother had been drafted. And so I just figured at some point I would be drafted into the Army and I would serve my country as every American should.

[00:01:34.94] MARC HENDERSON: What was your sense about the Vietnam War before you entered the military?

[00:01:39.03] PAUL KREMER: Well, like I say-- of course the news media back in 1967/68 isn't what it is today, where it's-- everything is just laid out. So I didn't personally pay a whole lot of attention to the news. I didn't read the newspaper. But like I say, I did hear some about it in our high school classes, about what was going on there. But I really didn't get into to it that much.

[00:02:12.17] PAUL KREMER: I did basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia. I was drafted. Well, I went in on June 5th, 1968. And naturally in Georgia it is very hot, so I

had to adjust to the climate change from where I was in Kentucky. My MOS was 11 Delta 40.

[00:02:32.55] MARC HENDERSON: And what's that?

[00:02:34.24] PAUL KREMER: Well, I took basic at Fort Benning, and then for my AIT I went to Fort Knox for armor training, cavalry training, that type of thing there

[00:02:44.20] MARC HENDERSON: So did you get to pick your MOS, or was it chosen for you?

[00:02:47.22] PAUL KREMER: No, it was given to me. Yes. In basic training at Fort Benning, we did the normal things that everybody does as far as basic goes, with-- but a week of that was jungle training. I guess preparing us to go to Vietnam, if we got called to do that. So everything else was normal, except for one week we did have training in jungle warfare. And they introduced us--

[00:03:19.21] The first basic training that we had was M14 and then the week that we had for jungle training, we had an M16. We trained on that. So the drill sergeant that I had was Sergeant Ross. He was very strict, very hard, but fair. And then there was a couple of other drill sergeants that you had at different times for doing different things. And sometimes I felt like they tried to overreach and do tougher things on us than we really needed.

[00:03:56.35] But I mean, basic was OK. I didn't really have any real issues with it. I mean, we did bivouac and all that kind of thing. And we qualified on the M16 and then the M14. That was pretty much normal stuff. AIT we trained somewhat on tanks. We drove deuce-and-a-halves, and Jeeps, and personnel carriers. I was trained on all of that. We got an Army driver's license for those kinds of things.

[00:04:31.82] And while I was in AIT I was approached by one of the sergeants asking me if I wanted to go to NCO school. And so I thought about it for a day or so and I said, yes, I would go to NCO school, which was right there at Fort Knox. So at the end of the AIT we changed buildings, and we started to do the NCO type structure of how to order troops to do things and all that kind of thing.

[00:05:07.29] MARC HENDERSON: So you were a Shake 'n Bake?

[00:05:08.80] PAUL KREMER: I was a Shake 'n Bake. Yup, that's what they called us.

[00:05:11.83] [CHUCKLES]

[00:05:13.39] I turned 20 years old, I guess, when I was in NCO school. So there I was, a 20-year-old Soldier and preparing myself to command troops. Some were older than I, and I wasn't quite sure how all that was going to pan out. But the training that I received there was good. It taught you how to do those sorts of things and--

[00:05:44.59] MARC HENDERSON: Can you give me some specifics?

[00:05:47.00] PAUL KREMER: I guess, some of it was raising your voice to a tone that would bring to attention other troops that you had there. And the discipline type things. You had to go by strict guidelines. You couldn't waver and say, well, you can get away with that or not. So I think those kinds of things were instilled in us in NCO school, even though it was kind of a rush to get into that part fast. But those kinds of things, I think, really made me a better person and a better leader, trying to be a leader there.

[00:06:28.46] I know at the end of NCO school we had to do a nine-mile run, but every mile, we had to stop and call in artillery or some type of exercise that we had to do that. And that was a really hard thing to do, to run nine miles real hard. And then in your training, remember how to do a certain procedure. But I think the training was really good. It really instilled in us leadership qualities.

[00:07:06.71] PAUL KREMER: I was 20 years old when I went to Vietnam. It was May of 1969. We went by airplane. It was Flying Tigers Airlines is what took us to Vietnam. We left from California, we stopped in Anchorage, I guess to refuel. We stopped in Japan to refuel, and then we flew directly into Bien Hoa in Vietnam. And I remember flying in there and the whole aircraft got hot. Just the heat from Vietnam really, that was my first exposure to some real heat that penetrated the aircraft. And it was night when we were flying in.

[00:07:49.97] And I remember looking out the windows of the airplane and seeing blasts, mortar fire or whatever it was going off in the horizon of Vietnam. And when we got close to landing, they gave us instructions on as soon as we landed we needed to get off of the aircraft as soon as we could and go to this sheltered area, because that was a prime time for the enemy to attack when new troops were arriving in Vietnam. So we disembarked the aircraft quickly and got into the shelter area. And then they gave us more instruction.

[00:08:37.71] I was a replacement. Yeah. Once we got off, we got into the shelter, they gave us an instruction. We had to exchange all of our greenbacks for in-country money. And then we loaded on smaller buses, they weren't real large buses. They were smaller buses. And I remember they had wire going across the windows,

because they said sometimes the people would throw rocks and things at us as we were going to our place where we were going to stay that night.

[00:09:11.01] I guess it was another-- I'm not sure. I don't know the whole specifics of Bien Hoa and the surrounding area where the Army was based, but I know we had to go through some villages to get there. And we got off of those. And we were showed a building to go into. There wasn't-- there wasn't any cots or anything. It was just a floor. One other thing, when we got off the airplane, we had to get our duffel bags. And I looked and looked for my duffel bag. It wasn't there. Somehow, it didn't get on the airplane coming over with me.

[00:09:50.76] So all the duffel bags were gone. And so I just had to go without it. All I had was a personal bag that I had. So once we got to this building, and we went in there for the night-- and it was night or early morning the next day, I don't know what it was-- but we went into this building, and we just slept on the floor. And the next morning, they called us. We got out in formation. And that's when they told us where we were going.

[00:10:16.20] I guess they decided what troops were needed. Whether an NCO needed to be going somewhere. I guess that's how I got chosen for the 2nd of the 17th Cav, 101st Airborne Division. So once they called out your name, and they told you, you were going to the 101st, you went into a group. So if you're going the 1st Cav you went into a group. And that's how I was assigned to a unit in Vietnam.

[00:10:43.74] From there, with 101st they took us to another section of this camp that was close there. And we had maybe five days of additional training once we got there. So again, when I got to this other area of the camp, we had tents. We were just in large tents there, but we did have a cot to sleep on.

[00:11:11.57] And I remember the first thing once I got to that area there that I wanted to do was take a shower. I was so hot and sticky from the weather there in Vietnam that I wanted to get a shower. So I did. They had the showers outside, which was just gravity fed water out of a boat that was sitting on top of a building. But I took a shower, and I felt better there.

[00:11:38.20] Once I got out of the shower, and I got dressed again, I was just as sticky as I was before. So the shower didn't do me any good. But I remember that aspect of it, so--

[00:11:48.61] MARC HENDERSON: Were you ever reunited with your duffel bag?

[00:11:51.90] PAUL KREMER: I was after I got to Delta Troop. And we had came back from a mission. And this was probably three months later. When I got back to Camp Eagle it was laying there with my name on it. So I got my duffel bag back after about three months. But I had to be reissued all my gear. All my clothing and all that had to be reissued once I got to my unit. So then I had a little extra clothes.

[00:12:21.66] [CHUCKLES]

[00:12:25.45] MARC HENDERSON: So, you were at Camp Eagle and what areas did your unit-- did you serve in?

[00:12:34.74] PAUL KREMER: A Shau Valley. I mean, we were in that area lot. Khe Sanh. The whole top there. I mean, we were near the DMZ, An Loc I think it was. I don't remember all those names. And I don't think we ever-- other than the A Shau Valley, we really didn't know where we were. At least, I didn't. Maybe some other people higher up did.

[00:13:05.96] But when we were called out for a mission, we just got our gear, got on our choppers, and they took us there. So we couldn't have mapped it out ourselves. But I'm sure, like I say, the people above us had an idea on where we were going, but that whole top near the DMZ is where I stayed my whole time.

[00:13:32.59] PAUL KREMER: We had a hooch, I think the Seabees had came and built. It wasn't anything elaborate. It was just plywood and two by fours. There was no windows. It was just screens. And when the monsoons would come they had some wood that would go down. It was on a hinge, it would come down.

[00:13:54.43] In there, we had cots, and they were like-- the one section for the NCOs-- I think we could get about six NCOs in this one section of the building-- and those cots were double-decker. They stacked them on top of one another, one lower bunk and a higher bunk. So that's how they got six. It wasn't a very big area, maybe 10 feet by 20. I don't know if it was that big, but that was our sleeping conditions when we were in camp.

[00:14:31.53] Now, we did at one point move north. I think it was that An Loc area. We moved up there to a camp. I mean, it wasn't really much of a camp. I mean, we had some concertina wire going around it. But all we had there was a tent. It was just a big tent. And we had cots in there, too. So we went up-- it was very close to the DMZ, and we worked up there for a month.

[00:15:01.71] Again, we flew in helicopters out from that area. We were naturally pretty much on call all the time. If someone got ambushed, or if a troop needed back

up, whatever the thing may be. A mission on our own. They had those smaller Huey choppers that go out, and they would look for activity. And if they would spot the enemy, then they radioed back to us and say go hit this area, and we'd go out.

[00:15:39.61] We also had-- we set up an ambush outside in Bravo sector of the section of Camp Eagle that we were in. We had concertina wire going all around, and bunkers. But someone would go out and set up an ambush to try and catch the enemy if they would be walking by. It would go on a rotating basis.

[00:16:01.56] So I as an NCO would pick about five or six troops to go out and recon the area during the daylight, not really specifically pinpoint a spot, but we would find a spot where we felt a little bit of cover, and we would set up-- we would remember where we went and then when it got dark we would go through the wire and set up for the night and see if we'd see some activity out there.

[00:16:34.58] That was part of the activity that we would do during the day. And other times, I mean, we'd have exercises there at Camp Eagle if we didn't have a mission to go on, where we'd pick up an area if it got dirty or something like that, we'd police the area. And we also had Jeeps and deuce-and-a-halves. And as an NCO had, I was assigned a Jeep and a driver.

[00:17:05.19] And actually we had to do some maintenance on that to check all the oils and things like that in the vehicles. We had-- we had C-rations when we were not at Camp Eagle. The food-- if we were at Camp Eagle, the food-- the cook-- we had pretty good cook. I mean, he did a real good job of fixing meals for us.

[00:17:34.08] And I know sometimes when we were out in the field, they would bring our food out to us. The one meal that I remember a lot was roast beef and potatoes. They would bring those out in those big metal canister like things and serve us out there if we were staying out for a while. So the food, as far as I was concerned, was pretty good. I mean, I didn't have any complaints with the food.

[00:18:06.53] MARC HENDERSON: How much time did you have to yourself?

[00:18:09.65] PAUL KREMER: There was downtime where we could write letters home or socialize. Some evenings when we knew we weren't going to be doing anything, there was some USO shows that would come on Camp Eagle, and we'd go to those in the evenings. And we would do some drinking, some beer and whiskey, play some cards, so it'd be hard to put a number on it, but I had a fair amount of time where it wasn't all--

[00:18:46.40] MARC HENDERSON: Did you get to take R&R?

[00:18:48.20] PAUL KREMER: I did. I went to Australia, Sydney, Australia for R&R. A funny thing, you have a number of places that you can go. Hawaii would have been nice, but they wanted all the married guys to go to Hawaii. And I wasn't married then. So I chose Australia because I wanted to go somewhere where I could talk to people in English. I didn't want to go to one of these other countries because trying to do that Vietnamese talk and I never did get into that real well.

[00:19:19.87] Australia seemed like a nice place to go, so that's where I went for my R&R.

[00:19:24.43] MARC HENDERSON: Do you have any memories of the pop culture, books, music, or movies from your time there?

[00:19:33.41] PAUL KREMER: Yeah, there was a radio station in New York City that I think would send you a tape. It was one of those big reel to reel tapes. They would send it to a troop over there. And we got those pretty regularly, maybe once a month, we would get one. And they would have the top 10 songs of that week or month.

[00:20:00.73] And so a lot of those songs that I hear here, I can remember and relate to Vietnam. So that was kind of like a little uplifting thing to hear some music that was being played back in the States.

[00:20:15.87] MARC HENDERSON: Do you remember any specific holidays while you were there?

[00:20:19.94] PAUL KREMER: Well, I remember Christmas. Mainly because Bob Hope was at Camp Eagle, and I wasn't chosen for the show. I was chosen to guard. Yeah, I was on guard duty while he was there. Me and my squad were on guard duty. So I remember that just because of that. I could hear the music and stuff. We were close enough to hear that. That was Christmas '69.

[00:20:51.26] Yeah, but other holidays, not so much. It was just another day. I don't remember anything specific about them. PAUL KREMER: I mostly was dealing with Army. I didn't have a whole lot of interaction with other troops. It's kind of funny being in Vietnam and knowing what can happen, you really didn't get real close to a lot of people because you never knew what was going to happen the next day.

[00:21:34.10] The guys that I had in my squad were really good for the most part. I still have friends-- friendships with them today. Several of them, anyway. And they were excellent Soldiers. They did what I asked them to do and told them to do. So they were real good. As far as above me, there was an NCO that I didn't particularly

care for, just his way of handling things and his attitude towards what we were doing there.

[00:22:17.21] Sometimes I think he brought the stateside type of structure to Vietnam. And I didn't care for that. It was more relaxed over there than it was rigid here in the States. So there was one that did it that way. One of my really good friends was JD Pike. He was an E-6. So I was in E-5, he was over me. And he was a really good guy. I felt that I could trust him.

[00:22:54.47] And anything that he would tell me to do, or I know that he would be right with me. And he was an African-American, but he was really a good guy. And I had a real good friendship with him. He has passed on. I didn't get to see him after Vietnam. I actually had invited him to my wedding. And he had intended to come. But then something came up, and he wasn't able to be there, but he had passed away before we started having these reunions and I really, really feel bad about that.

[00:23:30.92] He wrote me letters after I-- I left before him in Vietnam. He wrote me letters afterwards. He even wrote a letter to my girlfriend, who is now my wife. It was just that personal touch with him that I enjoyed. I had reached out to his wife, or my wife had reached out to his wife years ago, after we found out that he had passed away. And she, I guess maybe was still having a hard time with him passing away, and she didn't really want to connect with us after that. So that's where that's at.

[00:24:06.47] MARC HENDERSON: Did you form friendships with men or women from different racial or social backgrounds during your time in Vietnam that you might not have otherwise had if you had stayed a civilian?

[00:24:18.25] PAUL KREMER: I'm sure I did. Yeah, I made several friendships with other races that I cherished. They're really, really good people. It's not the color of you. It's the person inside. And I did, I made several friendships that are still going today. So I like that.

[00:24:50.67] MARC HENDERSON: Did you witness any sort of instances of social turmoil or tensions between American troops?

[00:25:01.52] PAUL KREMER: I did not. I didn't see any of that. I mean, we were all brothers. From Delta Troop, I don't think I could have been in a better unit than I was in. Everybody got along well. We worked well together. We did what we had to do. So I didn't see any conflicts in my time there.

[00:25:29.22] MARC HENDERSON: Can you elaborate on some of the missions?

[00:25:32.47] PAUL KREMER: One that kind of sticks out a lot with me is again when we were-- I think we were up in An Loc, and we were working out of that really small camp, we flew the choppers into an area where they wanted us to check out some caves, and we usually went in like four choppers, probably 20 to 24 guys on a platoon would go to check this out.

[00:26:06.90] And on this mission, the choppers couldn't land because the ground wasn't level. So we had to jump out. They got low to the ground to the grass level, and then we had to jump out. And then they fly away, and then we'd regroup, and we'd go on. With this mission, once we did that, we had to cross a little bit of a river. I don't remember how long it was now.

[00:26:36.20] It may have been like 20 yards. It was a flowing river. And it was like waist high. So we naturally carefully walked through the water to the other side. And then we had to walk down a ways and then come in, and then we saw the caves up in this one area. Lieutenant Jones, who was a platoon leader there. He was in charge. He had an E-6, Sergeant Vedder, he was with me there. I was an E-5. And we came up on these caves, and we were looking for a way to get up to them because they were high up.

[00:27:19.13] And so we were all marching in checking them out real, real closely, and all of a sudden we got to opened up on. There was Viet Cong up in the cave area. So we all hit the ground and started to return fire. And as I was shooting, a hand grenade landed about six feet in front of me. They were throwing hand grenades at us, plus firing at us, so I just put my head down and had my helmet on naturally and I counted to 10. We're supposed to count to 10 waiting for the-- I was waiting for the blast to go off from this grenade.

[00:28:01.49] And I got to 10, and it didn't go off. So I started doing the low crawl backwards, and I got behind a tree, and naturally was continuing to fire on them. So I don't know if that hand grenade went off or not, but I got out of the area before it did, if it did. And once they stopped firing at us, and we regrouped a little bit, Sergeant Vedder was alongside of me. He was shot.

[00:28:30.92] During this whole thing as it was going on, Lieutenant Jones stood up and pulled the pin on a hand grenade and threw it up into the cave area. And we were all telling him to get down because he was a target for them. But he cussed out a little bit, and then he finally got down, and he didn't get hit. But Sergeant Vedder, he was shot. And I don't remember, it's kind of a funny thing.

[00:28:58.74] My memory has-- from that time, Vedder being shot, I don't remember what happened. I cannot remember getting back to where we got dropped off. My

memory picks up when I'm back at the area where the choppers were going to come in to lift us off. And I have no explanation for that. My memory is just erased. Because I know we had to get Vedder out, and we had to cross the river again. But I can't remember.

[00:29:31.63] And what I remember about getting back to where we were dropped off was when someone would get shot or killed, and a lot of times it was the point guy, it was difficult to get another person to take lead and walk point again. So I remember standing there and trying to convince another one of my Soldiers to walk point.

[00:30:12.61] And then after that we got picked up, and we got taken back to our camp, our tent area on that mission. What I remember finding out is that we had killed 13 enemy at that point there at the cave area, so--

[00:30:32.61] MARC HENDERSON: And so your troops were reluctant to take point? What does it take?

[00:30:38.76] PAUL KREMER: It's just a lot of convincing. Some guys are eager to do it. I think they have that risk taking ability that they want to do. But it's just a matter of talking someone into it. Convincing them that they're the guy that we need to lead us and not get us all killed. That's the only thing that you can do. Another mission, if you want me to give you another one, I can.

[00:31:18.57] We were returning from a mission, from Eagle. We left out of the Eagle went out on a mission, and I don't remember what it was. But we were flying back, it was later in the day, and the pilot of the chopper said that there was a downed aircraft, and they wanted us to go in to get the pilots out. And we were the only helicopter that was set up to rappel. This was such a wooded area that there was no way the chopper could land. So they wanted us to rappel.

[00:31:59.10] So we always carried our rappel gear. So we got it ready, and they threw the ropes out once we got to the area where they were going to drop us off. We didn't have a radio. We told them we didn't have a radio. They said that they would drop a radio into us once we got on the ground.

[00:32:16.82] So there were six of us on the chopper. Sergeant Pike was with us. The chopper went over to this area, and it had been I guess bombed a little bit, so there were some trees that were knocked down. So he took us to this area. We threw the ropes out. And the way we rappelled was one guy was standing on each side of the rudder and jump, so to keep the helicopter balanced.

[00:32:46.66] So the first two guys jumped, I was going to be second on the right side. I got out there. And I couldn't pull the rope up to put it through my D-ring. I told them, I said, I can't get the rope up. And the pilot thought that I was afraid to rappel. But I couldn't get the rope up to put it through the D-ring. So couldn't convince them of that.

[00:33:12.40] So then I went ahead, and I jumped down, and I was hanging on to the rudder with my hands. And then I put the D-ring around the rope, even though it really didn't do any good. Because we usually looped it so that it would have some resistance. So I did put the D-ring around the rope, and I had rappel gloves on. And so then I just slid down the rope that was taut.

[00:33:39.13] Well, what happened was the chopper was too low. It was in a tree. The guy got stuck in a tree. So when I came down, I slammed right on top of him. But I didn't hit him in the head. Our D-rings just kind of looped on top of one another. So there we are in this tree, both of us hanging. So I pulled out my machete and I cut the rope, so that we could both fall to the ground.

[00:34:02.41] And then the next guy is out, and naturally the rope was short, and he wasn't happy when he got down there. So once all six of us got on the ground, and the chopper flew away, they did drop in a radio. So I put that on my back. And then we had to go look for this chopper that had been shot down. And it was in a valley. We kept walking down this valley.

[00:34:29.65] And one thing I remember is there was an M16 laying on the ground. And I had the radio on, I had my M16, my rucksack, and all this, and I should have picked the M16 up, but I thought we've got to find this chopper first. I'll pick it up on the way back down. So we went on, and we finally found the chopper. It had crashed into a hillside.

[00:34:55.95] One of the pilots, he had died. The medic went over to him to try to check him out. But he was dead. And he couldn't get him out of the chopper. The seat belt was in such a twist that he couldn't get the seat belt loose. So I told him, I said, well, just give me your scissors. So I took a scissors, a surgical scissors, and I cut the seat belt. And then we got him out of the chopper. And the other one was OK.

[00:35:26.82] So then we radioed that we found the chopper, and we needed to be picked up. And they told us that the enemy was coming on us. And they needed to medevac us out. So they brought a medevac in, and naturally we had to carry the body to an area where this medevac could at least drop the seat. That's how we got out of there.

[00:35:54.74] They dropped the seat, and I don't remember if one went out at a time. I just can't remember how we all got out of there. I know I was like the last person to get on the medevac. And I remember the hoist bringing it up and getting up to the helicopter and getting into the medevac. The guy who had died was laying right there. And I just had this eerie feeling about getting on top of him to get into the chopper. It just gave me like an eerie feeling that I was doing this, so--

[00:36:38.92] But then we got out of there. And we stopped at a smaller hospital. We dropped off the body. And then we went back to Camp Eagle. And I remember being questioned about the delay of getting out, rappelling out of the chopper. And again, I explained everything to the best of my ability. I could normally do a rappel. But that was another rougher experience that I had there.

[00:37:16.30] MARC HENDERSON: Is there any issue with the rifle that didn't get picked up? No issues?

[00:37:24.35] PAUL KREMER: No. I felt bad that I didn't take it with me, but we had to get out of there when they told us to get out of there. So just left the M16 laying there on the ground. I guess, probably went into enemy hands. But--

[00:37:44.29] PAUL KREMER: The one thing that I remember is night vision. I don't know, it was new technology to us. I'm not sure how long the Army had it. But it was like-- it was like a cylinder. I don't know, maybe this big and about that long that was night vision that we would take out. I remember only a couple of times taking it out, and using it in the jungle at night.

[00:38:12.46] MARC HENDERSON: The Starlight scope?

[00:38:13.35] PAUL KREMER: I think that's what it was, yeah. And I'm not sure how good a technology it was. You could see through it, but it wasn't real clear. You had to request it. Like I say, I only remember once or twice actually having it with us to use. So that was really the only high-tech thing that I can remember that we had there.

[00:38:44.33] PAUL KREMER: There was more than one. Another one that really sticks out, we were out there following a trail, looking for the enemy. And we had a larger-- I think we had two platoons this time for whatever reason, but we were going up, we were following this trail, and there was probably maybe five guys ahead of me on this trail and a lot behind me.

[00:39:25.48] And all of a sudden, we heard this three round burst. And we all hit the ground naturally. And that's all it was. It was just a three round burst. And then we found out-- or we looked ahead, and the point guy had gotten killed. Harry Yingling

had taken three shots, I think to his chest. He was killed instantly. And that was a tough one. You know, you wonder why him. We were all right there. But I guess the sniper had just chosen the first guy.

[00:40:09.21] And the world kind of stopped at that time. For me, it just-- it really hit home. So that was a tough one.

[00:40:28.46] PAUL KREMER: We went to Eagle Beach for a day for swimming along in the water, and that was kind of a fun day. They loaded us on deuce-and-a-halves, and we got to the beach, and we got swim trunks. And we played-- we played a little bit of football on the beach. And we swam in the South China Sea. And we went into like a hooch, and we did some hobbies. We put some models together. And it was just a fun day where we didn't have to worry about being attacked or going to attack somebody. So that was probably the best day that I had there.

[00:41:15.62] PAUL KREMER: We backed up the Marines quite a bit. If they'd get into trouble, we'd go out and help them out. So that's why we have some of them here at our reunion. They wanted to come and thank us for being there to support them and getting them out of some hairy situations. So the Marines were probably more of a normal thing that we would run into.

[00:41:40.30] MARC HENDERSON: The Force Recon Marines?

[00:41:41.80] PAUL KREMER: Yes. They were in our area for the most part. So we would support them. Again, another mission-- one of them that we had-- they had gotten ambushed by the Viet Cong, and we went out there. I think there were six Marines. And by the time we got there, naturally, most of it was over with.

[00:42:07.68] But we had to carry some of their bodies out. One guy didn't have a scratch on him. All the rest of them were shot up. Just funny thing is how that happened, and we got them out of that. We got the one guy out, I should say, alive. We would call in artillery. We run a larger ambush. The trail from North Vietnam coming down, soldiers and that, so we had a real-- again, like a two platoon ambush set up along this one ridge. And sure enough they, the Viet Cong, were coming down the trail.

[00:42:55.32] And we called in some lighting from one of the ships offshore. That was pretty far in. But we called flares, and they lit up the sky for us. And so we shot them up there pretty good. So that's about the extent of activity with other service branches.

[00:43:23.26] PAUL KREMER: We were called to guard a train area, train station area that was out in a civilian area. I mean, we really didn't talk to them much. They would be walking by and stuff like that. But I really didn't have much interaction. We did have some scouts I guess that had come to our side. North Vietnamese scouts that gave us intel. And then they worked with us when we' go out, on some missions.

[00:43:58.48] A lot of times, we'd have them walk point because they would know the area better, or they could smell, or sense, or something like that.

[00:44:07.60] MARC HENDERSON: Did your impression of the Vietnamese change during your tours?

[00:44:11.20] PAUL KREMER: I think, for the most part, the ones that worked with us were pretty good. I mean, one of them I know when we were out on one mission, he was real hesitant. But he wouldn't tell us why he was hesitant. I guess he knew the enemy was close, so that he would just kind of stay back. He wouldn't do what you should do. Say, well, they're over here, or, watch this. He just wasn't a good representative of that person to do that kind of thing.

[00:44:53.02] As far as the Vietnamese, I was always very leery of them. I think most of the men were either on one side or the other. So when we'd go in the villages, it was either like old men, or women, or kids. That's for the most part, the civilians that we saw there. But you really couldn't trust-- I couldn't sense a trust in any of them, because you just didn't know what side they were on or how they would react or anything, so I was real fearful of them.

[00:45:32.20] PAUL KREMER: Letters. I used a MARS station to call my girlfriend, who's my wife now, Sandy. And that was one of those deals where it was a shortwave radio. You just say, over. I remember going to that MARS station once and calling her. It's kind of strange where you say, I love you, over. And that kind of thing. So it was real short.

[00:45:56.83] But that was the only time when I was in Vietnam that I called her. But then when I went on R&R, I called on a regular telephone from Australia. And I talked to my mom and dad, and my sisters and brother, and Sandy, so-- But Vietnam, it was just mostly letters. It's the only real communication. I mean, there's no texting like there is today and all that kind of fancy stuff. But in the letters, it would take a while, probably a week would maybe be normal, or more, to get a letter from home.

[00:46:31.60] MARC HENDERSON: How much news did you receive about the war you were fighting in?

[00:46:40.24] PAUL KREMER: I never got anything from my family as far as that goes. How the war was going. We would get Stars and Stripes newspaper once in a while. And I think 101st had their own newspaper that we would get a copy of to read.

[00:47:00.38] MARC HENDERSON: Was it censored, or did you think it was pretty accurate? Did you know?

[00:47:06.30] PAUL KREMER: I didn't know. Yeah, I didn't know. So my--

[00:47:13.74] MARC HENDERSON: Did you hear any news of what was going on in the States as far as politics, or social issues, or-- ?

[00:47:24.59] PAUL KREMER: Yeah, from time to time when one of our guys would go home and come back, they would give us some insight as to what was happening. But as far as getting it from anybody else, I can't remember that happening. I mean, we were pretty much there to do our jobs. And-- get into the whole political aspect of it.

[00:47:54.24] We had one guy in camp that he was always saying the peace talks are happening, we're going to get out of here. And I just hated to hear that from him, because I knew he was just talking. It wasn't anything concrete. But that's about as much news as we got. PAUL KREMER: In 1970, I think is when they started, or maybe earlier, they started drops. They were trying to, I guess, get the troops out of Vietnam.

[00:48:30.75] There was a poster billboard at our camp, at Camp Eagle, and I guess a clerk would put names out there saying when you would be leaving. That's pretty much how I found out that when my time was going to be up. They had a big party for me. The night before I left. Yeah, my platoon, JD Pike, Lieutenant Jones, they all got together, and we went to one of the bar, club areas, and they gave me a pretty good send off where I-- they had a party for me. And it was a whole lot of drinking. And I pretty much got sick.

[00:49:12.92] [CHUCKLES]

[00:49:14.07] They had to help me back to my hooch that night, I know. And I was really happy and sad to see I was leaving some of my really good friends there. But the next day I got up and got my stuff, my duffel bag, and packed up. And we flew out of Phu Bai is where I flew in from. When we got to the 101st, I flew from Bien Hoa to Phu Bai, and then when-- I took a Jeep to Camp Eagle. So it was pretty much the same way going back.

[00:49:54.08] I went to Phu Bai, and I had to stay there for like a day or two. And then your name had to appear on a manifest for a flight. And then I went to Bien Hoa. And again, I was there for a few days again waiting for my name to appear on the manifest to fly out of there. And then I flew directly to Fort Lewis, Washington.

[00:50:23.39] That's where we flew into. And I remember getting off the plane and kissing the ground. I was so happy to be back home. And I'll be honest with you. I mean, I was afraid from the day I got there to the day I left. Because all the training that I had before I got there, I knew I was going to be in a combat situation. And even while on Camp Eagle, we would get mortared at night. And it hit pretty close at times. And so you were unsure of-- from day-to-day how things were going to be.

[00:51:00.51] So when we got to Bien Hoa and I got on that plane to come home, it was really a good feeling to get out of that war zone and know that you were going to be safe again. We got the Fort Lewis, and it think it was probably like 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, and they fixed us steak and eggs in the chow hall. I remember going in there at that time of the morning, and eating because we hadn't eaten for a while.

[00:51:31.07] And so at Fort Lewis, we had to turn in-- I was getting out. I was like within a month of getting out of the Army. So rather than send me somewhere for a month or two, they just decided to end my career there. So I just turned all my equipment in. And got my uniform. They size you for a new uniform.

[00:52:00.56] And then I had to get my flight. I guess, I flew out of Seattle to San Francisco. And then I flew home, probably through Chicago at that time. I don't think there was a direct flight from San Francisco to Cincinnati. My whole family was at the airport to meet me as I got off the plane. And back then they didn't have the ramps. You had to come down the stairs. And then walk into the terminal. And Sandy, my girlfriend at the time, came running out to meet me.

[00:52:42.30] And all my-- the rest of my family was in the airport. So it was really good to see them. And one thing that stood out, my dad, he wouldn't come to the airport when I left. But he was there when I came back. And my mom said he couldn't see me leave, so-- And then when I got home, they had a party for me, so that was good.

[00:53:15.77] MARC HENDERSON: Any run-ins with demonstrators or anything like that?

[00:53:21.28] PAUL KREMER: I didn't have any of that coming home. Like I say, I flew from San Francisco, I guess to Chicago, to Cincinnati, and I didn't see anything.

[00:53:29.89] MARC HENDERSON: How about during your training or around the bases in Vietnam, was there ever any demonstrators or demonstrations that you witnessed?

[00:53:41.15] PAUL KREMER: I did not see any of that. No.

[00:53:43.66] MARC HENDERSON: Was it difficult readjusting to life after the war?

[00:53:47.36] PAUL KREMER: I think you pretty much just hid it. Because when I came back there really wasn't any talking to anybody in the Army, where you think they would help you get back into civilian life. None of that. There wasn't anything. So you just kind of all held it all inside. I worked at a printing company when I was drafted. So when I got back, after I was home about a month, I went back to the printing company and started working again, just like nothing had ever happened.

[00:54:26.80] So I think that hurt a lot of Vietnam veterans that there wasn't any talking to somebody about what you saw or what you did. Because that kind of lingers inside for a while. And I mean, even going back to work, really nobody really talked much about you being in the service and what you did. They didn't question anything.

[00:54:55.07] I mean, there were some hard times there. And I think a counselor probably could have helped a lot of us if we would have just been given the opportunity for that. Myself, I still have nightmares of the things that I went through, and my wife has to wake me up out of that at different times and bring me back to reality. Because it affects you.

[00:55:28.80] It really has a thing with your mind where you're in that situation where it can really hurt.

[00:55:40.27] MARC HENDERSON: How much contact do you have with fellow veterans over the years?

[00:55:44.66] PAUL KREMER: I worked with some after coming back, but then I lost my job in the printing company in 2008. And I applied to the VA for a job because I was like 59 years old, and I wasn't ready to retire. So I started working at a clinic, a VA clinic. And that's where I started meeting a lot of Vietnam veterans coming there.

[00:56:24.97] I've got a lot of really good friendships from that era, where I worked there for about seven years, and guys like me would come in, and we could talk about things. And it really, really did a lot of good, I think. And then we started having our

reunions with Delta Troop in 2003, so I've connected with them for the past 18 or so years.

[00:56:51.56] So that's been good. It's a brotherhood that you cherish. And you know what they did, and they know what you did. And you can kind of find comfort in that.

[00:57:08.17] PAUL KREMER: I think military training is good for anyone. It gives you discipline. And it's not always that structured, but you know what's right and what's wrong. And I think that it makes you a better person. I know I went in there, and I wasn't the most outgoing person, but it taught me how to be that type of person. How to get out there and do things, and manage people, and get the best out of them rather than dogging them down or just shying away.

[00:57:48.16] And I think that's a big benefit to having a military training like that. And I think it's made me a better person.

[00:57:56.10] MARC HENDERSON: How did your experience affect the way you think about veterans returning from combat today?

[00:58:02.78] PAUL KREMER: I hold them in high esteem. I think when you're called to duty for your country, no matter what it is, I think that you follow that, and you do that in the best way you can. I think is very, very, very good. It's probably the best thing that you can do in your life is to serve your country and do what's right.

[00:58:27.43] Two of my sons, my oldest and my youngest, the oldest one is still in the Army, he's a colonel. He's got like 28 years in. My youngest son-- that's Paul senior, or Paul junior-- Matt is my youngest, and he served 20 years, and he retired, but my oldest son is still active duty. So I'm proud that they followed in what I had did, even though I did not direct them in any way. I did not pursue them to follow me into the Army, but real proud that they did what they did. That's about all I got.

[00:59:13.54] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think the war meant to your generation?

[00:59:16.91] PAUL KREMER: Looking back on it, it was more political than anything. At that time, I had no realization of that. How it was controlled, how we couldn't do things, we had to stop, we weren't allowed to do certain things to carry a mission through, to stop. So that leaves a bad taste in my mouth that you can't do the job that you're told to do. And then they stop you from doing it. So I think that hurt our generation in that respect.

[00:59:55.75] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the war is remembered today?

[01:00:00.16] PAUL KREMER: Sadly, it's said that we lost the war. And that hurts, being a Soldier in a war when they say you lost the war. We did the best that we could with what we were allowed to do. And my feeling is we didn't lose the war. That's how I live with it, that we did not lose the war in Vietnam. The politicians are what caused the outcome.

[01:00:32.41] PAUL KREMER: I went there in 1988 for the first time. Took my whole family. We were up there. And it was hard. And I've been there many times since. My son Paul has been stationed in that area twice. So I visited the Wall several times since. And it's very hard every time I go there, and I look at the names of the people that I knew, who were in my unit. It's very difficult. Very moving, very moving.

[01:01:09.60] I like it. I think it looks-- it does a good job. It represents us well, and I'm happy with the design. Yeah, it's good.

[01:01:22.84] MARC HENDERSON: Our primary goal is to thank and honor Vietnam veterans and their families for your service.

[01:01:28.92] PAUL KREMER: OK.

[01:01:29.62] MARC HENDERSON: So we're here today to thank you and sir, I with a heartfelt, from the bottom of my heart, I want to say thank you, and welcome home.

[01:01:37.68] PAUL KREMER: Thank you.