

Kuroiwa, James USA

[00:00:13.83] JAMES KUROIWA: I was born in Lihue, Kauai in 1942, July.

[00:00:21.44] MARK FRANKLIN: Is that-- what island is that?

[00:00:23.12] JAMES KUROIWA: Island of Kauai.

[00:00:24.47] MARK FRANKLIN: Kauai. And who are your family members, your mom, and dad, and brothers, sisters?

[00:00:29.15] JAMES KUROIWA: I had, yeah, my mom and dad. And I had three brothers and two sisters. And I'm the oldest among the six.

[00:00:37.68] MARK FRANKLIN: What did your dad do?

[00:00:38.79] JAMES KUROIWA: My dad was a mechanic for Grove Farm plantation.

[00:00:44.10] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you still consider that your hometown?

[00:00:46.26] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes. Kauai was another country area that was very laid back. And I guess you can call it typical Hawaii. When you come from the neighboring islands, Honolulu is town. And anywhere else is the country.

[00:01:08.04] [LAUGHS]

[00:01:12.44] JAMES KUROIWA: Secretary-- General Shinseki, from kindergarten, we were together in the same classroom, the same teachers, all the way through graduating from Kauai High School. And he went to West Point. And I was trying to get into the Air Force Academy. That's why the two years at the University of Hawaii in Air Force.

[00:01:37.37] For some reason, I could picture myself flying in a fighter jet. [LAUGHS] I used to have all this model aircraft stuff hanging from my wall. But anyway, when I got the news that my eyes were bad, I had to wear glasses, I said-- I kind of shucked that. I was on-- at the time, too-- the rifle team, small bore rifle team, the Army Reserve rifle team.

[00:02:06.38] But Shinseki was very special. I relayed this story at the National Veterans Network when we were putting the Congressional Gold Medal together. And I thanked him. I says, most people don't know this. So Rick, thank you very much. Because you went to New Jersey as an exchange student your junior year.

[00:02:34.28] That opened a slot in the Varsity basketball team. And I got a slot. [LAUGHS] I played basketball for Kauai High School.

[00:02:44.34] [LAUGHS]

[00:02:49.14] MARK FRANKLIN: As the United States started to get involved in Vietnam, did you have any sense of the war at the time, of what was going on?

[00:02:54.69] JAMES KUROIWA: Not that much, no.

[00:02:56.55] MARK FRANKLIN: Were you-- were you drafted, or did you volunteer?

[00:02:58.83] JAMES KUROIWA: I volunteered. I was a student at the University of Hawaii at the time. I went to ROTC with the Air Force two years. Then I dropped out. And my senior year, I was one of the lucky ones that, before I graduated, before the second semester started, I was offered a job on the Big Island. So to take care of my military requirement, I enlisted in the 100th, 442nd prior to graduating.

[00:03:32.73] MARK FRANKLIN: So you enlisted in which unit?

[00:03:34.53] JAMES KUROIWA: The 100th Battalion, the 442nd Infantry. Then I would satisfy my draft requirement.

[00:03:41.58] MARK FRANKLIN: So you knew you were going to get drafted?

[00:03:43.01] JAMES KUROIWA: Eventually, after I graduated, yes.

[00:03:45.48] MARK FRANKLIN: When you enlisted, what MOS skill did you enlist for? Did you get to choose, or did they tell you?

[00:03:51.56] JAMES KUROIWA: Kind of-- because it was an infantry unit to begin with, they told me. So I enlisted as 11-Charlie.

[00:03:59.05] MARK FRANKLIN: A mortar-- 11-Charlie was a mortar--.

[00:04:00.77] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes, yes.

[00:04:07.21] JAMES KUROIWA: Basic training at Fort Ord, California. It was really good. [LAUGHS] I'm kind of giggling, because what happened is there was 40 of us that were pulled out in the early group that went to basic training. And we didn't know what was happening. But the 40 of us were selected to be leaders of the next basic training unit. So we went through a week of training, leadership training, different kind of things. And then they selected us to be the leaders of the next basic training unit.

[00:04:41.62] And I was selected to be the 1st Platoon sergeant. Three weeks later, I get promoted to E-7. And I became the assistant SDI for the basic training unit. The SDI is the senior drill instructor. And they were the ones that took care of the whole company, marched them out, got them ready, set up in the morning, make sure everything was in line.

[00:05:07.71] MARK FRANKLIN: So you went from enlisted private to E-7 in how much time?

[00:05:12.55] JAMES KUROIWA: 3 weeks. [LAUGHS] We wore an armband. But I was under the control of the senior drill instructor. And he was a master sergeant and Korean War veteran, excellent-- Sergeant Acton.

[00:05:29.08] MARK FRANKLIN: So the training, the basic training-- assess the quality of the training.

[00:05:33.70] JAMES KUROIWA: It was excellent.

[00:05:35.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Any one experience stand out in your mind from that first eight weeks?

[00:05:41.46] JAMES KUROIWA: Not really, just that maybe one of them was calling the man out for formation in the morning. And I blew a whistle, and everybody came out into formation, the whole company. They were a little slow. So I sent them all back to the barracks and I blew the whistle a second time. And they screwed up again. So I sent them back to the barracks. And the third time, they were all on time.

[00:06:10.29] MARK FRANKLIN: After basic, where did you-- did you go on for additional training?

[00:06:13.67] JAMES KUROIWA: Additional training, it was just a short training with a-- actually, an ordnance company. It was-- because, I don't know, they made it shorter. So just two months, eight weeks. And then I came back to Hawaii.

[00:06:26.91] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, you were enlisted as a 11-Charlie, which is a mortar-- what kind of training-- when did you go to that training?

[00:06:36.04] JAMES KUROIWA: After I came back to Hawaii.

[00:06:38.00] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, so you got that training here?

[00:06:39.57] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes.

[00:06:39.92] MARK FRANKLIN: And who did you do that training with?

[00:06:43.05] JAMES KUROIWA: Primarily myself. They gave me the field manual. And they said, study this, because you're going to be the FDC.

[00:06:52.77] MARK FRANKLIN: You trained yourself? And an FDC is?

[00:06:57.13] JAMES KUROIWA: Is fire direction control. They plot out all the deflections and elevations to set up the gun up to get it on target.

[00:07:07.60] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, which type of mortar were you working on?

[00:07:09.10] JAMES KUROIWA: The 81s.

[00:07:09.91] MARK FRANKLIN: 81 millimeter ones. So now, how long before you get orders to Vietnam?

[00:07:17.94] JAMES KUROIWA: Four years.

[00:07:18.85] MARK FRANKLIN: So you were in Hawaii four years?

[00:07:20.38] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes, I was in Bravo Company at the 100th Battalion.

[00:07:29.38] JAMES KUROIWA: 1969, end of February through November of '69.

[00:07:37.46] MARK FRANKLIN: So it wasn't a complete year?

[00:07:38.91] JAMES KUROIWA: No, President Nixon at the-- it was about September of that year, '69, made a decision that all National Guard and Reservists were to be pulled out of Vietnam. And so we were all in that group.

[00:07:54.66] MARK FRANKLIN: So you went over with the 442nd?

[00:07:56.67] JAMES KUROIWA: No. Yeah, I went over 442nd and got assigned to the 101st the second day in Vietnam. I left out of Hickam Air Force Base on Braniff Airlines. And we flew to Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines, and got to see a little bit about the-- Clark. And then from Clark into Tan Son Nhut in Vietnam.

[00:08:20.40] I looked around and I says, just like Hawaii. I mean, the mango trees and lychee trees, all those kinds of things, I said, boy, just like Hawaii. From Tan Son Nhut, they bussed us over to Bien Hoa. There is-- what they called the assignment area. So we were there for one night and then got assigned the next morning to the various units.

[00:08:50.07] And just so happened, my name was the first one they called. It was kind of interesting. We were standing in formation, and they mentioned the 101st Airborne Division, Staff Sergeant James Kuroiwa. And I said, oh, here we go. [LAUGHS]

[00:09:06.30] From there, we just went across the street, because they have a rear 101st training area. And we processed over there, about four days, four or five days.

[00:09:18.33] MARK FRANKLIN: Was there any kind of orientation training?

[00:09:20.53] JAMES KUROIWA: Oh, yes, a lot of orientation, besides looking over the weapons, the different kind of situations that we're going to be in. Because the 101st was located in I Corps. And Bien Hoa was located in the-- III Corps. So the situation would be slightly different. So they wanted to brief us to make us aware of what was going on.

[00:09:43.08] And then we had the weapons familiarization to go through all the different ones. So I was assigned to Echo Company, 1st of the 502nd. The 1st was being changed from 1st Battalion to 1st Battalion (Airmobile). And then the 502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne.

[00:10:03.37] It was quite interesting. I walked into the battalion headquarters. And the first sergeant looked at me, he says we need a Recon Platoon sergeant, and you coming from Hawaii, you fit the position perfectly. And I said, oh well, here we go. Then he changes it. He says, no, no, he says what was happening, they were converting a four deuce, because they were airborne at the time.

[00:10:29.02] And they were going airmobile. And with the airmobile, there wasn't any four deuce required. So I was going to be working with converting a four deuce section into an 81 section. Four deuce is a heavier mortar. It has almost twice the distance of the 81.

[00:10:45.58] MARK FRANKLIN: A lot bigger too.

[00:10:46.72] JAMES KUROIWA: A lot bigger.

[00:10:47.19] MARK FRANKLIN: They have a bigger base plate, and--

[00:10:48.82] JAMES KUROIWA: Oh, yes, so you put it in a helicopter, you would have problems moving around.

[00:10:52.45] [LAUGHS]

[00:10:53.98] MARK FRANKLIN: Those were primarily vehicle mounted, right?

[00:10:56.41] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes, yes.

[00:11:02.84] MARK FRANKLIN: What kind of responsibilities consumed most of your time?

[00:11:07.03] JAMES KUROIWA: Primarily training, because changing a mindset of a four deuce section into an 81 section. And what was interesting is we had a platoon leader, and a platoon sergeant, and myself, the third in line. And the platoon leader, after three weeks that we were in combat, went on R&R and never came back. Something had happened to him. And I-- still to this day, I don't know.

[00:11:35.40] The platoon sergeant cycled out in about five weeks. And there I was, I took over the section. [LAUGHS] I had the whole thing as an E-6. [LAUGHS] Oh, it was wonderful. I mean, that experience no one can take away. I mean, they came from all over the United States, including Guam. We had a Guamanian, part of our group.

[00:12:06.69] JAMES KUROIWA: We got along really fine. I mean, no problems. And one of the situations was a-- we had a base-- what I call a second squad, squad leader. And a genius, because I saw his personnel record. I got to see all these guys, and see where they fit. And his

name is Clint Madsen, dropped out of school in Michigan State his freshman year, enlisted in the Army to find himself.

[00:12:45.47] And he became-- and he was my squad leader. And we played a lot of chess. We found out that we had a common like, playing chess. So every break we had, we played chess with the magnetic board. We carried it around. And every time we stopped, we started playing. But Clint Madsen, we talked a lot. And he went back to school.

[00:13:14.33] MARK FRANKLIN: So who won most of the time?

[00:13:16.38] JAMES KUROIWA: At the beginning, he did. Then he couldn't beat me. You get to-- you just got to know each other's moves after a while. So you had to be a little bit different. But anyway, Clint Madsen went back after he got out. We communicated with each other. We played chess over the mail.

[00:13:35.22] But he went back to school, became an anesthesiologist, and did really well in Wisconsin. So I'm really happy about that. [LAUGHS]

[00:13:45.15] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think you formed relationships from folks from other social or racial backgrounds that you might not have done had you not joined the military?

[00:13:53.25] JAMES KUROIWA: Oh, yes, with Hawaii, it's more Asian and some Caucasian. I have Caucasian friends we grew up with. But some of the other racial groups, we don't have any contact. Two of my squad leaders were blacks, one from Michigan and one from Louisiana. And even my FDC, I had one. All college grads, I mean, they were sharp. [LAUGHS] And we became very good friends.

[00:14:32.21] JAMES KUROIWA: We dug holes, filled sandbags, built our own bunkers. All the 81s with the 101st, because of the change with the airmobile, everything we moved by helicopter. And the longest they would stay in one position would maybe be 10 days. And then we'll pick up and move. So we would just take apart-- or another unit would come and take over our position. And we'll move to a new area.

[00:15:00.73] We were on fire support basis. But we were moving around a lot from base to base. Because we were involved in the A Shau operation, the first part of my four months. The second part, we were attached to the Americal Division. And we were down south, Da Nang. And did a lot of operations over there.

[00:15:23.91] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, tell us something about one of those. The A Shau Valley.

[00:15:26.60] JAMES KUROIWA: First of all, the A Shau Valley is beautiful. Because we were on fire support bases. And you could look down the whole valley. I mean, it's huge, like Hawaii. [LAUGHS]. I was in country 10 days when we started the operation.

[00:15:52.12] So from Hawaii, to getting checked in and everything else, into combat in 10 days. Our unit was the point of moving into the A Shau. And we started what they called the Fire Support Base Veghel operation. And Charlie Company flew over us to get into Veghel.

[00:16:20.30] And we were back at Bastogne, the Fire Support Base Bastogne. And then the helicopters started coming back with the bodies. And that's why 81s were around the helipad. So we had to unload the bodies. And it made me realize, all of a sudden, here we are in a war.

[00:16:42.93] It was American bodies coming back. Because they did make a short run to drop off the bodies. The wounded, they would bring them all the way back to the hospital. And that was my first experience. And the next day, we followed Charlie into Veghel. And we set up over there.

[00:16:59.65] We were right next to the top. We were the first ones in. Well, Charlie Company was the first one in, and we came in and set up the 81s together with the TOC, the Tactical Operations Center, the S3. And we became like a security for them. Then the 105s and then the 155s came in as they brought in equipment and keep on building on the fire support base.

[00:17:28.51] MARK FRANKLIN: Describe how a fire mission would come in and the process and the procedures that would lead to you supporting the unit.

[00:17:36.55] JAMES KUROIWA: The first alert comes from what they call a forward observer. And we have forward observers assigned to the four line companies, one each, the RTO, radio operator. And they will call the FDC. And as soon as I hear them-- and my call sign was 1-8 Bravo. That stayed throughout my whole Vietnam tour.

[00:18:01.12] So when I heard 1-8 Bravo, I knew that there was a fire mission coming in. And I'll answer the radio. And they'll say we got a target. And they'll send over the grids, a grid of their location and a target location, and an azimuth with the direction with the compass.

[00:18:22.33] And then my FDC-- as they're sending the information in with the grids, I'm passing it on to my-- so I had three what they called computers. They were the ones that operated the board. And so that the three guys would be plotting all the information down.

[00:18:42.88] And then once they get that information, as they were putting that information together, I would alert the guns that we have a fire mission. So everybody gets set up and the guns would be ready to go. And by the time they get set up, the FDC gives me the information about what they call the deflection, and elevation, and the charge, whatever it's going to be to hit the target.

[00:19:07.54] But why we had three, too, is that they all checked each other. When a target came in, all three did the calculating. And they says I got deflection, certain deflection, check, check. A certain elevation, check, check. So we tried to stay away from making any mistakes. And besides, before we fired that first round, I was in contact with what they called the artillery officer that's in TOC in S3.

[00:19:36.82] And I give them the target that I received from the FO. And he'll clear it. Because he knows where the helicopters are flying around. They've got air strikes with other line companies and everything else is. And he'll make sure that target is in an area that is fairly clear of friendly. Then once he gives me his initials, I wrote it down as part of the record.

[00:19:58.91] And then we can go ahead and fire that first round. Then the FO would adjust from that first round. He would bring it closer to the target. Or a couple of times, we were lucky, and he hit the target right on the first round. He said, fire for effect.

[00:20:14.47] [LAUGHS]

[00:20:18.33] It's an excellent weapon. A lot of people don't realize. But if you can play with it, if you understand what it can do, it's wonderful.

[00:20:25.47] MARK FRANKLIN: Not a lot of fun to carry on your back.

[00:20:27.57] JAMES KUROIWA: [LAUGHS] Like I was saying, just load it in a helicopter and move. And one interesting thing is that over that short period of time I was working with the four deuce 81s, during my training here in Hawaii at Schofield, I had a E-7 Sergeant, Victor Ng. And he knew the 81s.

[00:20:48.50] And I used to question him every day and try to learn every little thing I could about the 81s. So when I went to Vietnam, and I could explain to the guys how to do the different things, they said, Sergeant Jim, are you the one that wrote the book?

[00:21:06.37] [LAUGHS] It came out that way--

[00:21:11.40] MARK FRANKLIN: You knew your stuff.

[00:21:12.36] JAMES KUROIWA: I knew my stuff.

[00:21:14.01] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you-- did you have the time for a recreation? And if you did, what did you do other than playing chess?

[00:21:19.89] JAMES KUROIWA: [LAUGHS] We were lucky once. We went to this-- they call this Eagles Beach, the 101st Airborne, our in-country R&R area. But they assigned us to be security for the Navy. There's a Navy-- at the city of Hue, in the harbor-- there was a Navy fuel storage.

[00:21:46.59] And we had to go in with the 81s to secure that area. But it was primarily shoot fire illumination rounds. And it was for four days. So the guys could really relax and stuff for four days. It stretched out to 10 days. And what happened was that we were receiving orders that we would be pulling out of the upper part, the northern part of A Shau. And then we were going to be assigned to the southern part with the Americal Division, the two battalions of the 101st.

[00:22:21.74] And when we left this Eagles Beach area, we went almost directly to a C-130 and flew down south. I mean, they took us right out there. But it was-- in-country was nice. And I was fortunate to get R&R, two R&Rs. One in September, I went to Hong Kong because my wife is Chinese.

[00:22:47.89] And they say don't go to Australia. And Indonesia was cut off. And it was Philippines and Hong Kong. So I chose Hong Kong. [LAUGHS] And that was nice.

[00:23:02.14] MARK FRANKLIN: So you enjoyed it.

[00:23:03.31] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes.

[00:23:03.75] MARK FRANKLIN: How long were you there?

[00:23:04.75] JAMES KUROIWA: For the four days.

[00:23:08.03] MARK FRANKLIN: What did you like most about Hong Kong during your R&R.

[00:23:10.88] JAMES KUROIWA: There was a movie, Suzie Wong, the way back. And I took a tour. And they brought us to all the areas that they filmed it. And it was really-- [LAUGHS] to get to see for it with my own two eyes. I took a lot of pictures and stuff.

[00:23:29.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have any other specific memories of the popular culture back in the States at that time?

[00:23:34.55] JAMES KUROIWA: Not that much. A little from Hawaii, because my wife used to send me articles.

[00:23:40.64] MARK FRANKLIN: Any one song that stands out in your mind that you hear that reminds you of back there.

[00:23:45.94] JAMES KUROIWA: Not really. I love The Field. And they don't play too many-- no, no, not that much.

[00:24:01.21] JAMES KUROIWA: When I lost my first man. It was an accident. We were held up down south near Chu Lai. And we had a heavy rain, real heavy rain. And one of the bunkers collapsed. And two guys got-- two of my guys were in there. And we had to remove all the sandbags and clear out the area. One of them survived. The second one, we had a heartbeat when we sent him on a medevac.

[00:24:38.34] But as he was going to the hospital, they called back that he had passed away. And my guys all understood that. For some reason, because I was in charge, I mean, I didn't have a lieutenant or a platoon sergeant. So I had to take an inventory of his personal belongings to send them back to the company headquarters.

[00:25:05.89] And I cried. I mean, you're putting all his-- even 50 years later.

[00:25:20.96] MARK FRANKLIN: Those are the things that--

[00:25:21.89] JAMES KUROIWA: John De Guerre, Houston, Texas. But that was my worst.

[00:25:34.69] [LAUGHS]

[00:25:39.68] JAMES KUROIWA: I had many, many, many good days. Maybe the first one would be beating Clint Madsen the first time in chess. He couldn't stand it.

[00:25:53.09] [LAUGHS]

[00:25:55.45] But what was interesting is that our executive officer was-- wanted to challenge me on a chess game. So we played. And I stalemated him three times in a row. And then he pulls out a card, Louisiana State Champion. [LAUGHS] He said, Sergeant Jim, you're a pretty good chess player. [LAUGHS] That was quite interesting. But you could tell that he knew what he was doing.

[00:26:36.48] JAMES KUROIWA: We were on a fire support base, Lash. And Alpha Company was our security. And they pulled out. And then the ARVN-- 1st ARVN, Alpha Company-- came to replace them. And they were security for the fire support base. And what was really interesting is that as our guys are going out, the Vietnamese ARVN guys are coming up.

[00:27:04.44] And I hear all these chickens, and ducks, and the clanging of pots and all this stuff coming up the trail. I said, what the heck is going on? They carry their livestock with them. They have them in their rucksack. Yeah. [LAUGHS] Just so they have fresh food, I guess.

[00:27:27.96] But the best part was-- it was-- an adviser was from Australia. He was a major. And he and I got along really well. And then I found out that the ARVN had instant rice. They had freeze dried rice in Korean, South Korean rations. And we had lerps, and C-rations or lerps. And the ARVNs loved the C-ration.

[00:28:00.92] So I traded with them, because my guys don't like the C-rations. They'd rather have the lerps. So we traded C-rations for rice. And you just put hot water in there, fold it up for a little while, or maybe you go two, three minutes, and instant rice. Then you get the chili lerps, and you cook it. And you mix it up with the rice. Put the Tabasco sauce in there.

[00:28:25.84] [LAUGHS]

[00:28:27.32] Out in the field, chili rice. JAMES KUROIWA: Very limited contact. For the nine months I was there hardly any contact at all. The time I spent most with them was almost a whole day. I was a security for a MEDCAP team, the captain was a medical doctor. Then we went into a refugee camp-- Montagnards-- to treat them, and see them, and all that.

[00:29:04.35] My first experience was kind of interesting. Soon as he drove in, all the Montagnards, the refugees moved away. They didn't want to get close to me. So my interpreter

goes, Sergeant Jim, they think you're Korean. They had some kind of fear. Maybe the Koreans treated them differently, or whatever. I said, no, no, tell them I'm American. [LAUGHS]

[00:29:33.18] After he explained that to the refugees, then I was OK. But it was really interesting. I said, just like as you're going down there, they're partying away. So what the doctor called me in the hooch, he said, Sergeant Jim, come, you've got to take a look at this.

[00:29:55.83] It's this elderly lady, I would say maybe in the 50s, 60s. And he pulled down the eyelid, pure white. And he says it should be pink or slightly red. And when it's pure white like that, they don't have enough iron in their system.

[00:30:15.06] And he says this, these ladies are so bad, he said, they shouldn't even be walking around. And they were still functioning, and doing their job, and everything else. He says, it's just amazing. So he was giving out a lot of iron pills and stuff to help them out. To the local, the refugee people, yeah.

[00:30:40.55] JAMES KUROIWA: As far as--

[00:30:41.52] MARK FRANKLIN: Letters back home to your wife?

[00:30:43.20] JAMES KUROIWA: Every day.

[00:30:43.92] MARK FRANKLIN: Every day?

[00:30:45.03] JAMES KUROIWA: My wife-- I was married. My son was a year and a half. And we wrote to each other just about every day. So every once in a while, you don't get the mail, it don't comes on a regular basis. So it comes all at one time, maybe it is five letters. So I would arrange it by date. And then start with the oldest one and read it, and then go to the next one. But it was always nice.

[00:31:13.50] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you ever tell them, write back about what you were doing and things you were seeing and all that?

[00:31:18.09] JAMES KUROIWA: No. I only wrote nice things. In fact, my wife, she sent me an article from the Advertiser. And she says, please don't lie to us. And she sends an article. And it's the 101st Airborne in a contact, Hamburger Hill. But it was a different unit. It wasn't us. We were down south in Chu Lai. So I had to explain to her, it's different units. It's the 101st, yes. But it's not us.

[00:31:50.74] [LAUGHS]

[00:31:54.02] MARK FRANKLIN: Did she write much about what was going on back home?

[00:31:56.69] JAMES KUROIWA: Oh, yeah.

[00:31:57.20] MARK FRANKLIN: In '69, there was a lot going on in the States back then.

[00:31:59.36] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes.

[00:31:59.90] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you hear about that news?

[00:32:02.27] JAMES KUROIWA: From Hawaii, the Hawaii part, yes. MARK FRANKLIN: How did-- did that affect you in any way? JAMES KUROIWA: It got me mad. When you're way far away, like that, you say what in the world are these guys in Hawaii doing? Don't they understand?

[00:32:22.60] JAMES KUROIWA: What happened is that just-- things were kind of quiet at the time. So it was the end of October. And we already had the word-- the word was coming down that they would probably send the Reserves and National Guard home. And we were-- and the fire support base was nothing going on. We were sending patrols out and nothing was happening.

[00:32:50.89] But the first sergeant called me up. He said, Sergeant Jim, nobody's taking this R&R position. I said what R&R? He says to Hawaii. I said, is that right? He says, I'll tell you what, you take it. So in the nine months I was there, I had two R&Rs. And I took it. But we didn't have enough time to let my wife know that I was coming home.

[00:33:17.81] So when I was in the Philippines-- actually, we flew into Guam and from Guam to Hawaii for the R&R. When I got into Guam, I called home. And she wasn't happy at all.

[LAUGHS] She wasn't happy. Came into Hawaii. I said, oh no, what I'm going to do now. What she was concerned about. November, I'm coming home. Then I got to go back to Vietnam again, because the full tour is going to take all the way to January until the next year.

[00:33:49.36] And she says, look, you've got to go back again. So why you come back?

[LAUGHS] But things worked out really well with the timing. I came back-- R&R. When I went back to Vietnam, the order had come down that the Hawaii guys were-- the National Guard and Reservists were all going to go home.

[00:34:08.96] MARK FRANKLIN: So did you have to go back to Vietnam to come home again?

[00:34:11.63] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes. So I went back there. But what was nice is that I checked in with my company. And they said, look Sergeant Jim, there's nothing heavy happening. So I just went out to visit my guys, came back, checked out. And I was down south in Bien Hoa getting ready to go home. But it's three weeks before I was going to leave. So I just was enjoying myself down south. I told Patty, I'm not going back in the combat area anymore. I'm back in the rear.

[00:34:46.25] MARK FRANKLIN: So talk about that final journey home.

[00:34:49.42] JAMES KUROIWA: Oh, that was crazy. That was the end of November. And you get a whole bunch of Hawaii guys, National Guard and Reserves, some 300 of them, put them all in one aircraft. It was a party from Tan Son Nhut to-- we went to Misawa in Japan. And then came to Hawaii. But it was a party all the way through.

[00:35:22.45] And it was a commercial flight, Continental Airlines. So even though the airlines, the personnel were just enjoy-- partying with us. I mean, all the guitars and the ukuleles, everything was going on.

[00:35:40.35] MARK FRANKLIN: What was your reception like when you got home?

[00:35:43.47] JAMES KUROIWA: No reception. And that was kind of funny. They even for visitors, that we-- they didn't-- I guess the Army didn't let them-- my wife didn't know exactly when I was going to come in. In fact, she had instructions-- most of them had instructions not to go to Hickam, but to wait until we get up to Schofield Barracks.

[00:36:06.41] And we flew into Hickam quietly. Then we loaded the buses. And the bus windows were all blackened out. And they explained to us that they were antiwar people outside the main gate at both Hickam and Schofield Barracks. And you kind of wonder is-- Hawaii, we're all Hawaii. What in the world's going on? The world changed in nine months.

[00:36:39.47] But they quietly drove us all on the buses, the 300 of us, different buses. And we went up to Schofield. And we got assigned to go back to our units. Checked out, and that's where my wife was the next morning. They came over and picked us up and stuff. And then we went home, short leave, until we got released in December.

[00:37:06.41] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, did you stay in? Or did you did you stay in the Reserves or the Guard?

[00:37:09.77] JAMES KUROIWA: I stayed in one year. I signed up for one year, extended a year. I finished my first six years and then extended one, so seven years.

[00:37:20.36] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have any trouble adjusting to life afterwards?

[00:37:23.27] JAMES KUROIWA: No, not at all.

[00:37:25.47] MARK FRANKLIN: What did you do after you-- after that one year, what did you do?

[00:37:28.47] JAMES KUROIWA: I started up a construction company, landscape construction. And that's one of the reasons why I dropped out of the-- after the one year, I said, the time-- because I've got a new company-- it just wasn't working out. So I dropped the Reserve and built a landscape company.

[00:37:51.20] MARK FRANKLIN: You stay in touch with any of the veterans and the men that you served with?

[00:37:55.04] JAMES KUROIWA: A few. As far as here in Hawaii, yes. But the mainland, the guys in Vietnam that I was with, a few of them. There was one, David Haney, that's another story by itself, but-- see when I went in country, there were two E-6s. The other guy was Jimmy

Doloughy from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. And he was a NCO Academy grad, top grad. So he was given an E-6 rank, brand new, 22 years old.

[00:38:36.43] Here I am, 26. So he, in his mind, he says Sergeant Jim's an E-6. So he must have been in longer than I. So I'm going to hang around with him. And then we became pretty good friends. And we checked in together, went through the whole thing. He got assigned to the Alpha Company with the same battalion.

[00:38:57.10] And he was ambushed. They got ambushed down south and got killed in July, July 9th. But anyway, years later, back home, I get an email from a Noreen Doloughy. And this was maybe 25 years later. And I just, this-- I don't know who Noreen Doloughy is.

[00:39:31.86] And Jimmy never explained to me he was married and had a little daughter. Then about a year later, I said, just for the heck of it, I will respond to it. So I responded, because we were going to go to Washington, DC for the World War II Memorial dedication. And the Vietnam had events going on to the Vietnam Memorial.

[00:39:57.84] And we made contact. Then we were going to be there at the same time. So we made arrangements that we meet at the Nurses statue. Then my wife and I were sitting on one side. And just so happened she and her boyfriend were sitting on the other side. And we had each other's cell phone number. So I said, Patty, I says, I think that could be Noreen.

[00:40:24.35] And I dialed her number. She goes-- picks up the phone. We knew right away. And she's looking across. Now, what had happened for her, she explained that for 30 years, she never asked her mom about the dad. So one day she-- now she's 30-- almost 30 years old. She says, Mom, can you explain to me about Dad?

[00:40:53.90] And that's when she says the mom took out a box with all this information in there. And that's when all the names had popped up, because her dad wrote about it. And she searched through all this stuff-- so she found my email address-- but among some of the other guys that served with us together in Vietnam.

[00:41:14.37] And we got together, spent the whole day together. And we still contact-- with each other. We send each other Christmas gifts. She's become like a daughter that lives over in Pittsburgh. And whenever certain kind of special events happen, we send each other emails.

[00:41:36.57] She was eight months old when her dad died. And that's what was interesting. Because I could explain to her-- I could help bring some closure for her. Because I could explain about the dad, and the short period that I knew him so well. And as we were walking down the mall in DC, she has this sunburn lotion thing. I said, you're just like your dad. He was so white in Vietnam, he had this white thing all over his face to protect him from sunburn.

[00:42:16.89] [LAUGHS]

[00:42:23.05] JAMES KUROIWA: It gave me a lot of experience, as far as knowledge of how things work. It gave me a bad taste on politics. And I got involved in politics later. It can change the whole country if you don't watch out for it.

[00:42:45.24] And that-- a special incident, General Schwarzkopf-- I was watching a news clip, and he was having a briefing among all the other generals and stuff from all the allied forces in a tent. And there were two Marine security outside the tent. So they finished the meetings.

[00:43:09.37] So everybody was coming out, all these generals. And he was in the back. And he walked out with them, too. And he stopped, turned around, went back, and began talking and conversing with the two Marines. And I says, that's a special general. That's the guy that's going to win the war. [LAUGHS] I just picked it up from that point. I said, they're special leaders.

[00:43:41.94] MARK FRANKLIN: How did your Vietnam experience affect the way you think about or view the Soldiers coming off the battlefields today?

[00:43:48.90] JAMES KUROIWA: Oh, a lot of respect. Even today, every time-- see, I was fortunate. I got to serve in two storied unit, the 100th Battalion, 442nd as a Reservist and the 101st in combat. And every time I go-- if I go to the PX, or the commissary, or whatever, and I see a Soldier walking around, and he has a combat patch, 101st Airborne, I'll stop and talk to him. Still today.

[00:44:15.91] [LAUGHS]

[00:44:19.60] MARK FRANKLIN: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today among Americans?

[00:44:25.28] JAMES KUROIWA: I think a lot of it has been forgotten. A lot of it has faded away. Even this commemoration they're having this week, Memorial Day and stuff, it's nice. But I must share that for me-- see, my son served. He was the adjutant for the 3rd Armored Cav when they went into Iraq.

[00:44:52.24] And it's the same position that Shinseki had. So he had to talk to me about it. And went down and visited Jason, as he was a major at that time, an adjutant. But they came-- they went home after Iraq, their tour. And they had a parade at Colorado Springs. And Jason sent me pictures, two Vietnam vets from the crowd. He was in the lead. So he went up we thanked him for the service. And I said-- [LAUGHS]

[00:45:29.22] MARK FRANKLIN: Are there any lessons you took from Vietnam that you'd like to pass on to future generations?

[00:45:35.23] JAMES KUROIWA: Primarily the political issue, because I looked at it-- we did our job. And we did it well. And politics took it away from us. They ended the war without any real victory. And I think that for me, that's what hurts the most. And that's why when Schwarzkopf and what they did, I just-- all right. [LAUGHS] America is back.

[00:46:15.12] JAMES KUROIWA: I love it. I got the rubbings of my 14 friends that got killed over there.

[00:46:21.16] MARK FRANKLIN: 14?

[00:46:21.76] JAMES KUROIWA: Yes, and laminated them all. And keep it all in a special place.

[00:46:33.97] JAMES KUROIWA: It's kind of faded right now. I'm not participating in any of them. But I look at it over-- to be honest, [LAUGHS] the thing that bothers me the most, because I was involved in a Congressional Gold Medal with the World War II guys, and I got to talk to all these World War II veterans, 100/442 and MIS, and how humble they are in getting this recognition 70 years later. And I'm thinking about, us Vietnam guys, the same thing. Why 50 years later?

[00:47:10.72] [LAUGHS]