

Norton, Bruce US Marine Corps

[00:00:13.77] BRUCE NORTON: I was born in Providence, Rhode Island. Our original home was in Warwick on Baywood Street, and then my father, who worked for the Narragansett Electric Company, moved to a small village in Rhode Island called North Scituate. It's about 10 miles outside of Providence.

[00:00:36.33] MARC HENDERSON: Where do you consider your--

[00:00:37.02] BRUCE NORTON: That's where I grew up.

[00:00:37.59] MARC HENDERSON: --your hometown?

[00:00:38.53] BRUCE NORTON: Yes.

[00:00:38.98] MARC HENDERSON: OK.

[00:00:39.95] BRUCE NORTON: I have an older sister, Marilyn, and a younger sister, Carolyn. And Marilyn lives in Westerly, Rhode Island, and my sister splits her time with her husband, Joe, between Gainesville, Virginia, where their son Benjamin and his wife live with their two daughters, and a place down in Florida at Palm Coast. And those are my two sisters.

[00:01:10.13] BRUCE NORTON: I had gone to school in Boston, and as I've told a couple of people, at one point in my second year, I had a professor tell me, Mr. Norton, never have I seen anyone work so hard and have so little to show for it. And that was a subtle hint that college was not the place for me at that time.

[00:01:32.79] And of course, every parent in America wanted their kids in college to avoid going to Vietnam. So my grandfather had been in World War I, my father had been in World War II in Guadalcanal and the Philippines. And I thought, you know, now it's my turn. So I went down and enlisted. I enlisted in the Navy and became a hospital corpsman.

[00:01:58.48] MARC HENDERSON: How old were you when you enlisted?

[00:02:00.16] BRUCE NORTON: 19.

[00:02:02.10] MARC HENDERSON: And I'm sorry, what year was that?

[00:02:05.91] BRUCE NORTON: 1967.

[00:02:07.68] MARC HENDERSON: OK. What was your sense of the draft before you enlisted in the Navy?

[00:02:12.39] BRUCE NORTON: Well, you know, I don't know that I had a sense for it. After I was in, people had told me that they had been drafted. Other people, other gentlemen, had

received draft notifications and then went down and enlisted, because they were going to go, usually, in the United States Army.

[00:02:30.63] But there were many people who went to a draft induction center, and they were told, OK, we have enough for the Army, and you, you, and you are now in the United States Marine Corps. And the reaction was, whoa, wait a minute. That's not what we came down here for. And they said, sorry, but the Army quotas are full and you're next.

[00:02:52.56] So yeah, I mean, there was a draft on, and I think the media made a lot more out of it with-- later on when people were burning draft cards and protesting against the war, but early on, and I say early on for the war for the Marines, '65 and '66, there wasn't that foreboding experience of I'll burn a draft card or be defiant against going into the military.

[00:03:20.14] '70-- you know, '69 and '70 were much different when you had Kent State, and a lot of those things were not made public to us when we were in Vietnam. You didn't hear about it. I was explaining that to my wife the other day.

[00:03:41.15] If you remember the musical Hair, and they had the song, and part of the song was, oh say can you see my hair? If you can-- can you see my eyes? If you can, then my hair's too short. That was censored out of the playing of the song, because they thought it was unpatriotic. So there was that kind of censorship back then, 1969 and '70.

[00:04:13.11] BRUCE NORTON: I went to Great Lakes, and that was in the summer. We went through a series of training there, and then I went to Naval Hospital Corps School at Great Lakes and that was four months. And I went home at Christmas, and after a short period of leave I went down to Camp Lejeune, and went to the Marine Corps' field medical service school.

[00:04:40.51] And that was a three week course for a hospital corpsman on how to function in a Marine rifle platoon. After that, I received orders to Naval Hospital Newport, Rhode Island, and was a corpsman on Ward D, which was a dirty surgical ward for guys who'd come back from Vietnam, and they had some kind of an infection from being wounded-- normally, being wounded-- arms or legs or gut shot.

[00:05:08.41] And there were a bunch of us who said, look, we didn't sign on to be here at Newport. We wanted to go to Vietnam. We'd been trained to treat Marines. Let's go. So we went down and volunteered to go to Vietnam, and two months later, the orders came in. And that was-- off we went.

[00:05:29.77] MARC HENDERSON: Boot camp and A school at Great Lakes, do you have any memorable--

[00:05:34.32] BRUCE NORTON: Sure.

[00:05:34.66] MARC HENDERSON: --experiences from that you'd like to share?

[00:05:35.95] BRUCE NORTON: The senior enlisted guy, what the Marines would call a drill instructor, our-- he was a first class machinist mate, and his name was Clark. And we'll never forget Clark, because he was on board the Forrestal when McCain's jet fired that rocket that set fire to the ship. And he was cited for pushing 500 pound bombs over the side where they'd stack them up to load them on these aircraft, and received the Silver Star while we were there at boot camp.

[00:06:11.91] So there were-- our boot camp platoon, if you would, was 289, and there were probably-- let's see, I'm guessing now-- about 80 of us when we started. I'm not sure what the attrition rate was. It wasn't that high, and then we all went to these separate commands afterwards. But for those of us that were going to hospital corps school, we stayed right there.

[00:06:36.84] So you learn the fundamental stuff of being in the Navy, the uniform rigs. We did a lot of drill with the 1903 Springfield. There were classes-- [COUGHS] excuse me-- classes on firefighting, and they put you in compartments that were full of smoke, and you had to learn how to move with a bunch of people so there's not a panic to get out of a compartment that was full of diesel smoke.

[00:07:06.03] And you know, we had swim qualifications, and so it would prepare you as a very junior seaman to go on board a ship or to another command. And they knew that you knew virtually nothing about life in the Navy, but they were there to teach you when you came aboard.

[00:07:26.40] MARC HENDERSON: Did you know you were going to be a corpsman before you entered?

[00:07:29.31] BRUCE NORTON: Yeah, the recruiter had said-- I had originally gone down to join the Marine Corps, and the gunnery sergeant that was supposed to be there, for whatever reason, did not show up. So this Navy chief saw me waiting for him, and he said, what are you doing? And I said, I'm waiting for the gunny.

[00:07:46.32] And he said, well, look, he's not here. Why don't you let me tell you what the Navy has to offer, because we can offer you educational benefits, and based upon your background, and you go in-- you were trying to get in a pre-med program, we can get you in-- was selling me this story-- as a hospital corpsman, and you'd be an E-2, which was like a PFC rather than an E-1 or a private. So you'd get a higher rate of pay, and you'd probably only do three years instead of four.

[00:08:24.68] So I said, OK, let's do this. So I did, and then I went home. I didn't have a car. I hitchhiked home. It was like 60 miles, and explained to my parents when they said, how's school going, that I said, well, I'm not in school anymore. And you could have heard a pin drop. What do you mean? I said, well, I've enlisted.

[00:08:54.84] And my father said, in what? And I told him, in the Navy. And to do what? I said, I'm going to be a hospital corpsman. And he happened to have a newspaper, the Providence Journal, and in it, he turned this around, he said, look at this, and it said, US Navy hospital corpsman awarded 2,000 Purple Hearts for Vietnam. He said, that's what you joined to do?

[00:09:25.40] And it was silence. My youngest sister was there, my grandmother was there, and he-- I don't think he was happy with this. He had seen war and thought like any parent protecting their kid. Of course, ask any 18-year-old, they know everything and your parents don't know anything. And I just wanted to get away from all that, and go out on my own, and I did.

[00:09:55.34] MARC HENDERSON: Did you know you were going to end up in the Fleet Marine Force?

[00:09:57.80] BRUCE NORTON: Well, like I said, they took so many of us to go to the field medical service school, and that was run by Marines and corpsmen who had all been in Vietnam, all of them. And it was a prep so that if there was a shortage or they needed the draw, they had a ready supply.

[00:10:15.98] MARC HENDERSON: So that was normal for corpsmen to go to that?

[00:10:17.56] BRUCE NORTON: It was normal. Yes, sir. And that's exactly what happened. They said, well, you're an 8404, which we called a bush technician, which was the MOS of the Navy for a hospital corpsman and would go with the Fleet Marine Force, wherever that was. So that's how all of that occurred, and then I got the orders to go to Vietnam.

[00:10:41.10] MARC HENDERSON: Did those schools, A school and then the bush corpsman school, did those schools prepare you adequately for Vietnam?

[00:10:51.81] BRUCE NORTON: Well, I think they did. It was all a foundational type thing. We didn't know-- the A school was pretty much how to operate in a hospital, different things, because you would go on to different schools if you want to be a lab tech or X-ray tech. But if you were going to be, what we called, a ward coolie, a guy that went to a naval hospital to work on the wards, once you got there, you learned the routine of the ward, that they had an AM shift, a PM shift, and the night shift. And then you met the nurses, and the doctors, and the patients.

[00:11:33.30] And what your normal routine would be of changing beds, passing out medication, taking people down to surgery, bringing them back, bringing people onto the ward that might be a medevac that would come in. So you get into the routine of how the ward functioned and what your responsibilities were.

[00:11:55.53] But the smart thing that they did was when we had volunteered for Vietnam, they said, OK, you're going off the ward, you're going down into the emergency room, and you're going to be in the emergency room until you go to Vietnam, so that you can see what trauma is like should it come in to the naval hospital.

[00:12:13.50] And occasionally it did, automobile accidents or little kids that had some kind of injury from a broken arm, broken wrist, broken fingers, those kinds of things. So that you would kind of mentally prepare yourself for people in pain and discomfort and how you would deal with it. Or would you not deal with it, because you weren't qualified to deal with it? You know, something that was very serious.

[00:12:41.07] A hospital corpsman could do stitches on another Sailor if his hand was cut, but if it was a dependent little girl, a doctor was going to do that, because they had the skill to do that that we did not have. But overall, once you left that and went into, say, Vietnam, now you had what was called a Unit One, which was an emergency first aid kit. And you put those things in it that you felt you would need in the bush and get rid of the stuff that you wouldn't need. And you were prepared for an emergency traumatic event.

[00:13:25.07] MARC HENDERSON: What are some of those items that you got rid of and what are some of the items that you added more of?

[00:13:30.79] BRUCE NORTON: Well, they gave us some strange things. They gave us IV bottles, and we thought, we're not going to use those, because you're not going to spend the time with some guy on the ground giving him a slow drip IV. If he's wounded, you want to get him out of there as fast as you can. Now, if it's nighttime and there's not going to be an evacuation, and you can start an IV, they gave us serum albumin, which was in a big gray tin, kind of a sardine can key kind of thing.

[00:14:02.23] But that rarely happened, not with a Recon team. With a grunt platoon or with a company first aid station, sure, but not with a six man reconnaissance team. So you would have hemostats. You would have battle dressings. You would have band-aids. You would have pills that you would give them for malaria that they would normally take once a day or once a week. You would have simple things that might come in handy, tongue depressor kind of stuff, but mostly it was bandages, band-aids.

[00:14:42.67] You weren't really set up to do suturing. You know, you're going to medevac the guy out, and he was going to go to a hospital. But that was dependent upon the weather and if a helicopter could get in and medevac someone out. So just imagine for the normal person what you'd carry in your car if there was an automobile accident, what you could have with you to treat someone who is injured in an automobile accident.

[00:15:09.10] You would learn to do-- how to make field-expedient splints if someone had a broken leg or shot through the leg where you would have tape, and that was a lot of tape, to tape up a rifle next to their arm or leg and be sure to take the magazine out and make sure the weapon wasn't still loaded, because that happened on occasion. But it was to secure someone, keep them relatively calm until they could be medically evacuated, and that was the job of the 8404 corpsman was you are the first on the scene to render first aid. That was your job.

[00:15:51.70] MARC HENDERSON: Do you do you have a one experience when you were a ward coolie that you'd like to share? Is there one that stands out?

[00:16:00.25] BRUCE NORTON: Sure. I mean, yes. There's one. Well, there's more than one, but there were these two Sailors. One guy was named Harold Lessenger and the other gentleman was named Rick Angus. And Angus had been a patient with a broken arm, and he had a window cast on his left arm. And Lessenger here was a boilerman, and he had gotten drunk and had fallen down, and someone had stepped and broken his ankle.

[00:16:35.06] So they became patients on Ward D. And they were surrounded by a bunch of Marines who had come back, who had been shot up. Well, they were given liberty, meaning they could leave the hospital, and the first time out, the only time out, Angus got to his car, and they get drunk. And they roll the car over down a hill, and they both got badly injured.

[00:17:11.67] And I was working nights, and I was at the desk. And it's a 26 bed ward, so we had 13 beds on each side. And down at the far end were double door elevators. And I watched the-- you could hear the elevator door open and then what looked to be like a sea bag was out on the floor. And I thought, well, that's unusual. You don't just throw a sea bag out there.

[00:17:38.47] So I went down, and it wasn't a sea bag, it was Angus. And Angus was covered from head to toe in blood. And I said, Angus, where's Lessenger? And he said, he's in the head, and he's dying. And I said, OK. So I went in to the head, and Harold Lessenger was standing in front of a urinal, and his nose was over on the side of his face where he'd gone through the windshield. And he was cut to pieces where he'd crawled through the glass to get out of this car.

[00:18:15.57] And in their drunken stupor, they were going to go back and get in bed and wake up in the morning and everything was going to be OK. So the nurse was a nurse by the name of Sandy Bosom. That was her name, real name. And I called her and said, you've got to get down here. She had three different wards to check on as she roved around the area of the hospital.

[00:18:41.85] And she got Angus in a wheelchair and then Lessenger in a wheelchair and took them down to the emergency room. And they sewed them all up and brought them back up. And Dr. Juncan was the doctor of the ward, and in the morning, there was still blood all over the sheets. And he just kind of shook his head, and he said, jeez, was it worth it? Was it worth it to go out and get drunk and roll your car?

[00:19:12.42] So I mean, that was-- I played a kind of a minor role in this thing. I literally grabbed a bag of bandages to wrap up Lessenger's nose on his face. But I mean, when you see that for the first time, you think, OK, do you panic or do you do what you're supposed to do and try and help the guy? So yeah, that was one story, one of the big events at the hospital that day.

[00:19:42.84] MARC HENDERSON: You said that you volunteered to go to Vietnam.

[00:19:45.26] BRUCE NORTON: I did.

[00:19:45.57] MARC HENDERSON: So was there some event that kind of got you--

[00:19:50.22] BRUCE NORTON: Yeah, you could sit there and say, OK, I've been assigned to Naval Hospital Newport. That's a three year tour. I didn't want to sit on a ward for three years. By then I'd be out never having seen anything, and Newport was home. That was 40 miles from home. So it's not like join the Navy and see the world, it was like join the Navy and go back home. I didn't want to do that.

[00:20:12.99] So I said, it's not my cup of tea. I've seen home. Let's go see something else. So a bunch of us-- I say a bunch-- I think it was like six or seven of us all signed the papers to go overseas.

[00:20:29.51] MARC HENDERSON: Was it a difficult process administratively or was it just the kind of thing that you just said, hey, I want to go and--

[00:20:34.67] BRUCE NORTON: No.

[00:20:34.98] MARC HENDERSON: --and they were happy to have you.

[00:20:36.41] BRUCE NORTON: During the Korean War, they used to have what was called transplacement battalions. An entire battalion would go at a time, and that was in the Army and also in the Marine Corps. But in Vietnam, at least for me, the initial guys went over as a unit. 3rd Marine Division would go over, joined by the 1st Marine Division, and the battalions would all go in, but after a while, now in 1969, you'd go over by yourself.

[00:21:06.65] So I flew from Providence to Travis Air Force Base and left Travis and went to Okinawa, and then you were in staging at Okinawa. So they get-- staging was like a planeload of people. So it would be-- I'll make up the number-- 200 guys, and that plane would leave Tuesday morning at 9:00, and then the next stage was the next planeload. Well, while you were on Okinawa, they found menial tasks for you to do.

[00:21:38.49] And you also get your shots. So they would line up 200 guys in a great big gym, and everyone was to turn around and face the wall and drop your trousers, and you'd get a gamma globulin shot. And all the rumors of what this thing was for, like it was incredible.

[00:22:01.03] It was supposed to make sure your blood clotted in case you get shot. It was none of that stuff really, but the rumors fly around as to what this is. And one guy says, well, this is what it's for. And another guy said, oh, it's for malaria.

[00:22:17.61] And so everyone got the shot, and you could tell those that got it because if they hit that sciatic nerve, you looked like Chester on Gunsmoke limping around with a right leg. But yeah, it was interesting because they'd bring out the syringes in the stainless steel buckets, and they'd have like, jeez, 50 or 60 of them in a bucket. And they'd just go right down the line shooting all these guys in the butt with a gamma globulin shot.

[00:22:48.66] MARC HENDERSON: Did you know what it was for?

[00:22:50.34] BRUCE NORTON: No, I didn't-- I still don't know what it was for.

[00:22:52.86] MARC HENDERSON: [LAUGHS]

[00:22:53.34] BRUCE NORTON: I'd have to find out what the GG, gamma globulin, shot was. But yeah, everyone had to have one. You had to have one before you get on the plane. It's was so silly.

[00:23:03.30] MARC HENDERSON: And did you fly from Okinawa into Vietnam on a commercial plane or was it a military-- ?

[00:23:09.96] BRUCE NORTON: No, it was a MACV flight. You know? And early morning flight, I think we landed at I'd say like 8 or 9 o'clock. It was that tropical hot blast of air that you get on an airfield where it's all JP-4 or JP-5 jet fuel, and the smell. And everyone remembers it. Their first sense is that sense of smell of what is this place all about?

[00:23:43.32] So we got off the plane, and we went into this large hangar. And it said 1st Marine Division, and there was great big red arrow, and there was a couple of guys at the desk. 3rd Marine Division. And, all others. So there were three. So my orders said that I was to report to the division surgeon of the 3rd Marine Division.

[00:24:08.12] So I'm thinking, division surgeon, this is probably a captain or commander. So I go up to the desk, and he said, OK, Doc, you need to go to Dong Ha. OK. So he said, pick up your gear, and see if we can get a flight to Dong Ha.

[00:24:31.00] And I'm like, I don't even know what Dong Ha is or where it is, but fortunately, this Marine colonel was behind me, and he said, look, he said, come with me. I'm going up to Dong Ha, and we're going down to, what was called, Teeny Weeny Airlines. And Teeny Weeny Airlines had a big Snoopy dog out in front with the goggles on and the ascot or a silk scarf. And they were C-130 flights that would go up to Dong Ha.

[00:25:04.87] And that's where the division surgeon's office was located, in a tent. But from the airfield to that tent was about three miles. So the colonel, he's off in a Jeep and I'm standing there. So I said to some guy, how do I get down to the division surgeon's office? He said, well, that's down at the headquarters, and it's down that road about three miles.

[00:25:34.47] So I started walking, and as I'm walking, I hear something coming up behind me and it's a tank. The guy stops, where are you going? I said, down to the division surgeon's office. And he said, climb aboard. So now I'm riding on the outside of a tank, and there's a bunch of signs on-- nailed to a post, G-1, G-2, division surgeon. And that's where I got off.

[00:26:06.19] MARC HENDERSON: So there's a post with a bunch--

[00:26:07.38] BRUCE NORTON: Yeah.

[00:26:07.48] MARC HENDERSON: --of signs on it.

[00:26:08.20] BRUCE NORTON: There's a-- we have a couple of different types of tents. There's a GP tent, which is general purpose, and a CP tent, which is smaller. And there's a sign that said, division surgeon. So I went in, and there was like a second class corpsman, and he's sitting behind the desk. And he said, you checking in? I said, I am. And he said, good, good. He said, sit down.

[00:26:35.07] So I sat down next to this field desk, and he said, hey, let me ask you a question. So do you know how to swim? I said, yeah, I know how to swim. He said, good. He said, are you afraid of heights? I said, well, I'm not particularly fond of them, but I'm OK. And he said, well, that's good. He said, we want you to go over to 3rd Force Recon. They had a corpsman that was badly wounded there last night, and we want you to replace him. I said, OK.

[00:27:06.78] So he said, but first-- this was on a Sunday morning-- he said, you're going to go to the 3rd Recon Battalion and spend the night there, and in the morning, they'll take you over to 3rd Force. So I went over to the 3rd Recon Battalion, and I run into two guys who I had known from the Naval Hospital Newport. And they said, come on, come on, come on in here. Drop your gear, and we'll take you over to 3rd Force, which is on the other side of this barbed wire. You can see it like 200, 300 yards away in the morning.

[00:27:44.47] He said, but don't go anywhere, and make sure you're right here at 7 o'clock, that night. I said, OK. So I said, what's up with 7 o'clock? Everyone kept looking at their watch. He said, we're going to get a rocket attack at 7 o'clock. I said, how do you know? He said, because they do it every other night at 7 o'clock. They'll fire three or four rockets at us. And these are B1-2s. These are big rockets.

[00:28:11.40] So sure enough everyone's playing Back Alley Bridge, and they stopped the games at about five minutes before 7:00. And they all start wandering towards these two big bunkers that everyone is supposed to crowd into. And yeah, and they-- incoming rockets. So that was interesting. No one got-- no one got killed or wounded.

[00:28:36.13] The next morning, they took me by Jeep for like a 5 minute ride over to 3rd Force. And I get out of the Jeep and reported in to first the first sergeant. His name was Lonnie B. Henderson. He had been a ski instructor at Bridgeport, and he was 6 foot 8. And he was-- you thought something was weird, because he's at his desk, and you're standing up, and he's at eye level with you. And he was just that tall.

[00:29:08.47] And he said, the senior chief, Navy chief, will be here in a couple of minutes. He'll welcome you in, and then I've got Corporal Swiderski who's going to show you around, and you'll get your gear, and you're going into 3rd Platoon. Yes, sir.

[00:29:27.95] So that was the conversation. That was it. Swiderski took me around and grabbed all the gear. We went to a hooch, said that's your rack. And he said, lay out all your gear, and I'll show you what you're going to need and what you're not going to need, which he did. And two days later, I was crossing the demilitarized zone with a six man reconnaissance team.

[00:29:56.75] MARC HENDERSON: What were some of those items that you needed and didn't need?

[00:30:00.56] BRUCE NORTON: OK, in 3rd Force you did not wear a poncho. You didn't have it over your head, not out in the bush, because it would reduce your vision and your hearing. So that wasn't going to happen. They gave you like a mess kit. Well, you're not going to eat out of a

mess kit. You're going to eat cold food out of a can or what we call long rats, the dehydrated rations.

[00:30:30.46] There were articles of cleaning gear that you would or would not take, but all this was in lessons learned. You'd break out the rifle, and they'd say, OK, you're going to tape your cleaning rods to the outside of the rifle. You're going to take a piece of white tape and put it on the front sight, so if it's at night, you'll have something to focus on if you're in a firefight at night.

[00:30:55.66] You won't need six pairs of socks. You'll only need two. You'll need electrical tape because you're going to be taping up your trousers over your boots to keep leeches out. And it was this whole litany of things that Swirderski, who had spent many, many days out on patrol, it was all from lessons learned.

[00:31:16.75] And they-- in 3rd Force, you were taught these things, and then you were expected to teach them what you knew. So the radio operator taught you all about the radio, how to pre-set frequencies, how to change the battery, how to clean the handset. You taught him everything you knew about first aid. Team leaders would teach you map and compass, all the different coded things. We had whiz wheels and shackle sheets, because you would change your frequencies at certain times.

[00:31:51.22] And it was a big learning process, but by the time you had a couple of patrols under your belt, you felt very much at ease. That first mission was quite different than that, but the team leader was a guy by the name of Chapman, Tom Chapman, and he became sergeant major at Quantico years later.

[00:32:18.18] Unfortunately, he had some kind of a genetical abnormality where no one-- no male in this family lived past 60. And they found him face down in the snow at the stables at Quantico. He'd gotten out of the Marine Corps, had become a contractor and was married, had a couple of daughters and lived in Stafford, Virginia. And he went to feed these horses and check on them one morning and got out of his car, and face down on the snow.

[00:32:50.18] BRUCE NORTON: We had a sick bay, and all the corpsmen would be in the sick bay by, say, 7 o'clock in the morning. So if some guy came in with a cough or a cold or jungle rot, things that we could treat in there, no problem. But that sick bay was always manned, because at any time if a team came back and someone had been wounded or had shrapnel from the-- Chinese grenades were cheap, and they'd splinter all over the place.

[00:33:19.21] You'd take the shrapnel out of them, and yeah, they were fit for duty. Luckily, they weren't blinded or a big chunk could have killed them. But those things, I wouldn't say were routine, but they did happen enough times so that that was always manned. And you could go back and replenish your Unit One with fresh gear or something that you had used up.

[00:33:40.64] So normally it was-- if you were assigned to a team in the morning after breakfast, after chow, you would do what was called IA drills. IA drills were immediate action drills. So the team, six guys, would suit up, not with everything, but with what we called a rig, which was

your suspenders, belt, canteens, first aid pouch, and your weapon, and bush cover, and trousers and boots and all.

[00:34:14.44] And you would move out in a particular direction, and within the company area, other guys would have blank firing adapters on rifles. And they would take you-- they would ambush you, and you would respond ambush right, ambush left, forward or back. Everyone had an assigned position as to what to do. Some guy might put down a Claymore mine, and they'd run it back so many feet. Point man would be on automatic, so you knew where automatic fire was coming from.

[00:34:49.28] And there were all these lessons that you had to learn, because the majority of guys are right handed. So when you carry a weapon and you're walking with it, it's pointed to your left. So if an ambush occurs on your right, you're going to go right across the back of someone in front of you.

[00:35:07.09] Well, how do you prepare for that? I mean, you have to mentally be thinking of that. If you're fired upon, you just don't fire it this way and bring it around. You have to stop and turn and conscious of the fact that the guy behind you is doing the same thing. Some guys move forward and some guys move back, so it's a defense in depth. You fire and pull back, but terrain dictates what you can and can't do. If you're up against a rock, you can't pull back. Now what do you do?

[00:35:38.35] So they would have all these scenarios of, let's say, a water barrel would be to your left. Now you can't back up. What are you supposed to do, go to the right or go to the left? And you'd practice these things so that they would become second nature to you in the event of an ambush. What do you do if someone is shooting at you or a bunch of people are shooting at you? Well, the only way to break an ambush is to go through it. You can't run back. You're still being shot at, and you can't go to the sides, the flanks are covered. You've got to break it.

[00:36:13.46] So now it's forget the rifle, grenades, so you throw hand grenades out to blow a hole through that group of people that are shooting at you. And it takes a certain amount of courage to face people that are shooting a rifle at you trying to kill you. But you practice it.

[00:36:30.20] Now, whether you conduct yourself that way when the real event happens, that remains to be seen. But they wanted you to be able to go through an ambush and go through three or four magazines. And at the end, you could go back and pick up your magazines and trace your route to that degree, whether it was a pistol or a rifle.

[00:36:54.62] So the training was continuous and intense, but we had great, great leadership and great instructors. They were very, very competent. And I'll get to talk about Bucky Coffman in a little bit, but you'll see how well trained they were. Quang Tri was our rear area, and we would go out to Con Thien.

[00:37:19.28] And Con Thien was the furthest base to the north, and out in front of it was the Ben Hai. In Vietnamese, song means river, so Song Ben Hai on the map, it means River Ben Hai, and that was the center of the DMZ.

[00:37:34.83] So you would have a couple of clicks, a couple of kilometers, on one side and a couple on the other, and our mission was to go out-- the first one was to go out and see if we could find out where these rockets were coming from and see if they had any Caucasian advisers with them, because they would be in technician's coats. They were not going to be dressed as NVA. This is how we were briefed anyway. We never saw that, but we got into-- well, I'll tell you in a nutshell.

[00:38:10.57] Sergeant Chapman takes off, and we go through the wire out of Con Thien, and the Army had to bring us through a minefield. And they say goodbye, two guys go back, and now we go off across the DMZ, which has no trees, because it's all been covered over with Agent Orange. So it's all scrub and rolling hills, and it was very, very hot. So water was always your consideration.

[00:38:41.09] So there was Chapman, Peterson, Fuhrman, myself, Dan Brown, and Alexis Perry. Perry's still alive. I thought he might be here for this reunion, but that's another point. So I'm the new guy, and I am told, you say nothing. There's no talking, so you say nothing. You do nothing without the consent of one of us or the team leader, what's called the TL or the ATL, the assistant team leader.

[00:39:16.99] MARC HENDERSON: And at this point you had been in Vietnam for two or three days?

[00:39:19.60] BRUCE NORTON: Three days, but they needed corpsman, and they needed guys to go out across the DMZ. There were orders that came from very high above, very, very high above, to maintain two teams always on the DMZ. And that was our job at that time.

[00:39:39.71] So as we were crossing the river, Chapman loses his rifle in the river. So now we have to take what we call a Swiss seat, which is a nylon rope that everyone carried. Everyone wore their gear the same, identical, so that if you were wounded at night, I knew where your first aid kit was, I knew where your flares were, I knew where your magazines were, your water, your food, your pack, everything, and you knew where mine was. And you knew where my Unit One was and what's in it.

[00:40:13.28] So we hooked up these lines, and he went out and would drop down in the water, underwater, and feel the bottom until he found the rifle, which he did. So he didn't get in big trouble for losing an M14. We continued on, and Fuhrman, James Fuhrman came down with prickly heat, and he was scratching himself so badly that his arms were bleeding. And he was making too much-- you don't want to move a lot. So all the scratching stuff will catch someone's eye.

[00:40:50.41] MARC HENDERSON: What's prickly heat?

[00:40:52.07] BRUCE NORTON: Well, it's a condition, and it feels like all these needles are all over your arms or particularly where you wear your 782 gear, down your back and around your sides where the nylon-- where the belts are. And it doesn't affect your legs, but your chest and

arms and neck. And unless you've got something like Benadryl or calamine lotion, which I had both, it's going to affect the motion of the team.

[00:41:23.91] So I said, we need to get this guy out of here. So he was my first medevac. And they sent out a CH-46 helicopter to pick him up and take him out, and he was covered in calamine lotion when he left. And we split up all his gear, all his water, took his ammo, and he went back with his pack and rifle.

[00:41:45.68] And I'll get to more of that later on, but we move out, because that helicopter has now compromised where we are. And we had made a stop that afternoon, and Frenchie is behind me. And we're all cammied up, and I'm looking down, it's not a trail, but it's kind of an old path. And I looked and I said-- I motioned to Frenchie and he came-- he comes right up here, and I said, I think that's a tunnel.

[00:42:21.53] And he looks and he said, jeez, I think you're right. So he tells Chapman. He says, I think we're headed right towards a tunnel. Well, it was, but what it was is the opening bunker of a tunnel complex of like six bunkers full of anti-tank mines, North Vietnamese. They were Russian actually. So we called back to the rear and said, look, we found hundreds-- well, dozens-- of boxes, crates of these mines.

[00:42:55.08] And they-- some idiot in the back says, well, we want you to take a sample and bring them back. We said, we're not carrying a 20 pound anti-tank mine, you know? We've only been out here three days. It's a seven-- you're out of your mind. You need to send out a grunt-- engineer platoon and blow this stuff or get it out of here and use it. But that we found it. Get it out of here.

[00:43:20.84] So when we left the complex-- and we carried a Nikonos II underwater camera. We'd taken pictures of the tack marks to show what they were, and the bunker. We all had the grid down as to where it was located. Well, all of them. There was a stream, and it was just a little tributary from the river. But what the NVA would do is they would have one guy up here and one guy down here, and they were watching the water. And if the water changed color, it's because someone had crossed it or an animal it crossed it.

[00:43:54.23] So we'd left the complex that afternoon, and somebody yells, contact left, and there were like six NVA maybe 50 yards away. And they took us under fire. We fired at them, but we continue on to get the hell out of there. Well, they chased us, and that night we spent in a bomb crater.

[00:44:23.21] And we had-- it's a signal light. It's orange, and it blinks, and it's a real high intensity light. And you put it into the barrel of the M79. So they had OV-10 Broncos, prop driven aircraft, flying overhead suppressing the NVA from coming in on top of us. So we survived the night no problem. They didn't get that close. And then in the morning, they said, we're giving you an extract. It's going to be a brown package, which is two CH-46s with Cobra gunships coming in to suppress any fire-- suppress fire around you and get you out of there.

[00:45:06.35] So the first 46 comes in and lands. The second one is orbiting, and as we run on board, and we sit down, the whole back of the 46 fills up with smoke, because they had fired-- well, they fired an RPG into the back cowling of that helicopter. So the pilot and the co-pilot and the crew chief and gunner run off the back, and we're thinking, well, they're assessing the damage. No, they had run to the other CH-46 that had it landed. And Chapman said, pull the .50s. Pull the .50 caliber guns out, and off we run now into the next CH-46.

[00:45:47.38] And Alex Lee was in there telling that pilot-- he was our commanding officer. He was a major-- that he would not take off until we and those two .50 cal were on board, which they did. And not moments after that helicopter took flight, the Phantoms had come in and naped-- put napalm on that 46 and burnt-- just destroyed it. So we went back to Quang Tri for the debrief, and that was first mission. And then they continued on and different missions, different things happened.

[00:46:36.36] BRUCE NORTON: Alex Lee was a sixth generation Californian, very, very smart, super smart individual, was a test parachutist and test diver, infantry officer, had already had a tour as a company commander in Vietnam with Colonel Utter's battalion and came to the 3rd Force. Our executive officer was Norman Heisler, Captain Heisler. He had been a drill instructor and prior enlisted and just a super individual. He's from Louisiana originally.

[00:47:23.51] And our operations officer was a first lieutenant by the name of Clovis C. Coffman and went by Bucky, Bucky Coffman. Bucky Coffman had come up from the ranks from private then to first lieutenant, ultimately retired out of the Marine Corps as a colonel. He had been awarded the Navy Cross, three Silver Stars, five Bronze Stars, and seven Purple Hearts. And that was pretty impressive to us.

[00:47:55.39] As the operations and training officer, the emphasis on the word training, he had been there. He had done that. He had trained with the Gurkhas. He had trained in Malaysia and Thailand, was also a test parachutist and diver and went to the field. He would do the op check, operational check, on team leaders to make sure they were capable, as did Alex Lee. But yeah, Coffman was a piece of work. He was-- they loved the guy. I mean, you either loved him or you hated him, but most of us really admired him.

[00:48:37.33] We moved from Quang Tri down to Phu Bai, and we cemented some new teams. So my team leader was Teddy Bishop, and Teddy Bishop came from Lufkin, Texas. He'd been in college for a couple of years and enlisted in the Marine Corps. The next guy was Paul Keaveney. And Keaveney was the old man. He was a 27-year-old lance corporal, so he was like the oldest guy in the platoon. He was as old as some of the officers were or older.

[00:49:11.62] And Keaveney had a-- I mean, I could go on and on about Keaveney, but he was our blooper man, our M79 grenadier. And if I did this chronologically, I don't want to go off track, but so there was Bishop, and there was Keaveney, and there was Kegler, who was our point man. Donald Kegler came from Nacogdoches, Texas-- and myself.

[00:49:42.26] And then we picked up David Draper, who will be here, and Guillermo Silver, who is now deceased, and James Fuhrman. And that was our team. Sometimes guys would go

with another team, but normally there was a nucleus of at least four or five of us. So we were pretty tight until we went out on multiple, multiple missions at the Hai Van Pass outside of Da Nang.

[00:50:14.38] And then we got into the A Shau Valley in December, January, and February. And I was selected to go to scuba school, and the day that-- well, one of the days that I was in scuba school was the day that our team, which was codenamed Snaky, went out to the A Shau. Two days earlier, another team had gone out and they were ambushed.

[00:50:46.63] And during that ambush, Chester Mollett, Sergeant Mollett, was killed, Adam Cantu, Hutchinson, Kennedy. Everyone was killed with the exception of Sexton and Ventresca. Ventresca came from Italy. There were two guys from Italy, Tony Attanasio and Giuseppe Ventresca. But Ventresca had been hit between the eyes with an AK round, but it went under his scalp and out the back of his head.

[00:51:19.52] Sexton was a lance corporal radio operator, and we all carried a Ka-Bar on our left side with the day/night flare taped to it. And he had taken an AK round that went through the day/night flare, broke the Ka-Bar blade in half, ricocheted off a bone in his chest, and then the bullet stuck in the sheath.

[00:51:43.16] He had fired every man's weapon, all magazines, all grenades, and he was down to one magazine and one grenade. And he wasn't going to be taken alive. And it was these guys from 2nd and 17th Cav and a Blue Team that came out and rescued him. Now, Tommy got the Navy Cross.

[00:52:06.05] And then two days later, our team was ambushed. And I was in the company rear going through scuba school. We had pre-scuba school before I went to the Philippines, and Fuhrman had taken my Unit One to be the acting corpsman. And we got the radio call that the team have been hit badly, and Garcia had been killed, Bishop was killed, Fuhrman was killed, Keaveney had been wounded five times. And Silvit and Murray were the two backup guys, communicator and tail end Charlie.

[00:52:47.85] Keaveney took the first round of the ambush in his right leg about four inches above his knee, and as the blooper man, he was trying to fire and put out this machine gun that was trying to kill everybody. And the second round hit him in the right arm and took out the muscle in his right arm. The third round went through his utilities and blew out the muscle in his left arm, and then the fourth round hit him in the right side and went out by his spine, but didn't hit his spine. And then the fifth round hit his .45 and set off two rounds inside the magazine wall of the .45.

[00:53:28.44] So he could not fire the weapon anymore. This is over like a 2 and 1/2 hour period. So they activated this Blue Team from 2nd and 17th Air Cav to come out. But Keaveney was on the radio, and he got fixed-wing to come in and bomb and strafe this NVA company that had-- they had walked across the front of that company.

[00:53:56.03] Keaveney ended up with the Silver Star, and of course, I, to this day, have always felt badly that Fuhrman, who had taken my spot, had been killed. But the night before, Fuhrman had received a tape from his wife, and it was the sound of a family reunion for Thanksgiving and Christmas and the sound of their son who he never met. And then he said, after listening to that tape, he said, you know, I just don't feel right about tomorrow. He said, I just don't think it's going to work, and of course, he was right and was killed.

[00:54:39.00] But that's one of those things that happened and very sad, and you wonder what could these men have accomplished if they'd all come home, all 58-plus thousand of them. But the missions were exciting. When I went to 1st Force after scuba school, they decided they were going to disband the company.

[00:55:06.79] So they said, what do you want to do? I said, what can I do? They said, well, you can do a second tour. I said, all right, I'll do a second tour. I'll go to the 1st Force, because some of the guys that I knew from 3rd Force were going over to the 1st.

[00:55:22.74] And we had apprehensions about 1st Force. You know, it's just that kids-- to try to explain it-- you play for one team, and you hear about another, and now you're going to go to the other team. And you think, jeez, these guys were never very good, or they're not going to be up to our standards. Or will we not be up to their standards? So this was kind of that mentality.

[00:55:48.96] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. Sure.

[00:55:49.71] BRUCE NORTON: But we went with them, and it was a good time. The company was pretty squared away.

[00:55:59.04] MARC HENDERSON: Did your routine change at all?

[00:56:01.11] BRUCE NORTON: Yeah, they trained differently. They had a couple of officers. I had one officer that went to the field, and that was not a good thing. He had not a clue as to what to do. He hadn't been in the field before. He made a lot of mistakes, and it came to a head. And so he called me out, and he said, I hear that you've told other guys in 3rd Force that you didn't like the way I ran the patrol. I said, that's right.

[00:56:29.81] And I said, and if you don't like it, Lieutenant, we'll go and see the XO. And he said, let's go see him. So Captain Heisler, who had been the XO, had been on the drill field with this guy. His name was Norm Centers, and Captain Centers had a big purple-- what do they call it? Rosacea, birthmark, on his face. So of course his nickname was Grape.

[00:56:55.77] So he said, report in. The captain will see you now, so you knock on the door. And you wanted to see me? I said, yes, sir, I do. And he said, what's going on? I said Lieutenant Stamm and I are having a falling out, and I want out of this company. And he said, why? I said, well, number one, I've got more time in the bush than the entire team you put me with combined, OK? I've got like 21 long range reconnaissance patrols. Most of these guys have one or two. Stamm has none.

[00:57:34.47] When we went out we brought an NVA scout with us, a Kit Carson Scout. He saw seven guys and never reported it to Stamm or to anyone else. When nighttime came, we had come across a hut and Stamm wanted me to go in and check the hut so he could sleep in it and not get wet. And you could just see the smoke coming out of Centers' neck.

[00:57:59.19] And I said, and then we went down through the stream, and they had all these punji sticks coming off the stream. And he wanted us to continue on down there. And I said, I told him to stop, because if we came under fire, all we could do was go into these punji sticks, not back up and go around. We didn't put them there. Let's avoid them.

[00:58:20.41] And the last thing was, before the helicopters came to get us, he popped a yellow smoke to signal where we were. Now, see, you never do that. You never do that. The last thing is if the helicopter pilot asked for smoke to identify you, because they have the same colored smoke as we do. You don't pop smoke because now they're just waiting for that helicopter to land. It's going to be a target for mortars.

[00:58:49.72] So it was, OK, you're dismissed. Stamm, get in here. You will never go to the field again. Yeah, and that was it. But not long after, we lost Phleger. He was killed and eaten by a Bengal tiger.

[00:59:06.85] Phleger was a sergeant. He was a communicator, which is a great thing for a reconnaissance guy to be, because you don't have to have someone carrying a radio. All the good-- in my opinion, all the good team leaders carried their own radios, so there's no breakdown in communication or what is being transmitted. You know, what did he say? What did he say? You know exactly what's being said.

[00:59:32.80] So this team, the team's name was Rock Mat, and it was May of 1970. [COUGHS] Excuse me. They went out, and they were to be inserted up on a higher piece of ground to get up on high ground and observe this valley below to look for movement. And the helicopters put them in low, and they had to go up, I think it was probably about 2,800 feet from sea level.

[01:00:05.44] And by the time they get up to the top, they were exhausted, and-- because you're carrying 70 pounds of gear easily. And it was so steep that they could not sleep in the typical pattern that we made called a harbor site. You would-- all your gear would be put in the middle. You'd sleep feet in, head out, and you'd have your rig on, your weapon, and you'd have Claymore mines, normally, around you with a, at that time, state of the art device called a PSID. The PSID is a personal seismic intrusion device, and it would pick up, as a sensor, the vibrations of footprints.

[01:00:45.69] So if you stepped on the ground, you had a receiver, and you would have four of these north, east, south, and west, and it would beep, say twice to the north, three times to the east, four times south, five times to the west. So if it went like beep-beep, beep-beep, beep-beep, beep-beep-beep, you knew that they were moving from north to east.

[01:01:10.35] Well, they couldn't do any of that, so they had to sleep head to toe. And it was about, I say it was about 9 o'clock at night, and they got the report from Corporal Jackson, who I

went to scuba school with, that the team leader-- excuse me-- had disappeared. He goes, what do you mean disappeared? We heard him scream, and he's gone.

[01:01:35.26] Now, it's pitch black, and the thing is, what do you do? What do you do? Your team leader, who is last in line, because he's counted everyone to go up on this ridge, screams, and you can't find him, OK? You can't turn on the flashlight. You can't call out his name. You can search closely around you, but it's pitch black. And you don't know what you're searching for. All you know is you heard a scream and he's not there.

[01:02:11.63] So in the wisdom of the people back in the rear listening to this on the radio said, well, he had just gone to Hawaii and married his childhood sweetheart, maybe he took LSD and had a reaction and fell off the side of the mountain. That was nonsense. So all you could do is go on 100% alert all night, which they did. And in the morning, they found his poncho liner and bush cover, which was bloody and drag marks down the trail.

[01:02:44.34] So they get their gear together and they slowly move down the trail, and they see a boot sticking out by a bush, and it's what's left of Phleger. And they see it, and they can't really believe it. And then off to the left is this Bengal tiger who is guarding his dinner. So in typical reconnaissance fashion, they fired at this tiger, and the thing ran away, and it didn't do anything to it.

[01:03:16.78] But we got Phleger's body back, and they told his wife he'd been killed in action, which is true. But I don't think they wanted to get into the specifics of being killed and half devoured by a tiger. The week later, not even a week later, it was maybe three or four days later, another team from 1st Recon Battalion was being extracted from pretty close to the same area. And this is an amazing story.

[01:03:49.24] Sergeant Larkins, it was Larkins and Dougherty, team leader and assistant team leader. The lieutenant is in the helicopter, and Larkins is at the back of the helicopter counting packs to get everyone in. And he looks, and here comes this tiger, and he gets down into a kneeling position and fires a magazine into it. And the thing's rolling around on the ground, and the team runs off the back, cuts bamboo and comm wire, and trusses the thing up and runs it back on the helicopter. And the pilot's saying, get that goddamn thing out of here. They said, oh, no, we're taking it back with us.

[01:04:25.27] So they radioed back to Da Nang they're bringing in this tiger that had attacked-- tried to attack them. And I've got photographs right on this phone of that tiger and the autopsy, and everyone started to, at the LZ, throw down money to create enough funds to have that tiger made into a rug for Larkins.

[01:04:48.85] But there's a famous photograph in Sea Tiger magazine, and I mean, you feel terrible for Phleger, but that's what happened and could happen. And we would say if you've got NVA and a tiger in the same grid square, it's going to be an interesting night. So just one of those stories.

[01:05:10.08] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever witness any social tensions amongst team members?

[01:05:17.58] BRUCE NORTON: No. No, I think we were too professional for that. I remain friends to this day with Keaveney. I'm his son's godfather. He's my son's godfather.

[01:05:30.21] I keep in touch with as many of these guys as I can, and we've all remained close friends. There are people who served in the company who didn't go to the bush, but they were in the company, and that's all that matters. I mean, we had our own cooks, we had our own mechanics, we had our own clerks, so not all these guys are leaving a typewriter or a radio to go out in the bush.

[01:06:03.52] BRUCE NORTON: In Quang Tri, we lived in a hardback. It was about as big as this room with a tin roof, sandbags on the top, and holes in the floor in case rockets came in you could get out and under it for some protection. And you had a metal rack with a sleeping bag or, what we called a, rubber bitch, which was a-- [PHONE RINGING] sorry, God bless. I'm going to shut this thing off. It won't interfere again-- a rubber mattress.

[01:06:40.24] But in the bush, there was no sleeping bags. It was a poncho liner. I'm sorry. Yeah, it was a poncho liner. It was the only thing you had to keep you warm, so you slept close together and conserved body heat. Down at Da Nang we were back in a building like this, and there would be like six guys to a-- maybe seven in a little hut like this, and that was it.

[01:07:13.51] In the bush, it was quite different. You slept on the ground. You didn't have a poncho. You just had a poncho liner, and you tried to stay as quiet as possible. Our mission was to go and find the enemy and find out where they were going and what their intentions were. It was not to engage them in firefights. I mean, six guys were not much in a firefight, not when you're looking at a company as an example. This is, I think, a fine example of how well we were trained.

[01:07:54.00] MARC HENDERSON: Sure.

[01:07:55.35] BRUCE NORTON: It was November of 1969. We had gone out to an area away from the A Shau Valley, and we were just going out on a routine reconnaissance mission. And we had practiced what's called a Gurkha-style ambush. And that Gurkha-style ambush is you find a trail-- I mean, certain things have to happen-- you find a trail, and the trail has to make a hard right hand turn or a hard left hand turn. You put an automatic rifleman or a machine gunner where the trail turns, and you have four or five people on one side of the trail and one man on the other side.

[01:08:47.16] And the idea is when a group, let's just say it's four people, come down that trail, who's in charge of that group? It's not the number one guy. He's being told which way to go, and it's not the tail end Charlie. It's number two or number three. So how do you determine that? By their haircut. By the way they physically look. If they have a pistol and not a rifle, if the carrying gear and not carrying gear, maybe an officer who doesn't want to carry gear.

[01:09:20.69] So you make a determination of who the leader is, and now you're going to grab him. So the way you do it is the guy on the far side of the trail will dive across that trail and take him out. And as soon as the machine gunner sees him go across tackling that guy, it happens so quickly, he'll fire this way and shift to the right, and everyone else will fire and kill everybody else. Now you've got your guy, and you're going to get an immediate extract.

[01:09:52.97] So we're set up watching this stream, and here comes this one guy. And he comes out of the stream, and then there's the second guy. And they're looking up and down the stream, then a third, and they're all uniformed, and then a fourth guy. And they're moving across the stream, and they're moving toward us.

[01:10:13.90] So we think, here's our chance. These guys are 350 yards away. Let's do it. So we put Kegler down at the far end. He's going to be the automatic rifleman. Bishop's going to make the grab, and we're going to open up. The last guy down is Fuhrman watching that stream.

[01:10:33.79] So we're all in position, and Bishop is not from me to that wall away where I can see his face, and he can see mine. But we're down, and you can't see us. And that trail is thick and it is pouring down rain. And now, we're figuring, OK, they've got to be getting closer. They've got to be getting closer. If they-- lots of times they would talk, so you'd hear the singsong chatter.

[01:10:59.70] And we looked, and Fuhrman, all he does is do this-- freeze. That's the hand and arm signal, because there's no talking. You don't speak when you're out in the bush. So freeze means don't do anything. So Fuhrman sees it, Silver sees it, I see it, Bishop sees it, Keaveney sees it, Kegler sees it, and here come the four guys.

[01:11:27.82] And now you start to hear this clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, clink, and they are the point man of a 67 man NVA company that is going to go between myself and your photographer. Pouring down rain, and that rhythm of infantry slogging through the rain, if they'd stopped to pick up firewood, stopped to take a break, we wouldn't be having this conversation.

[01:11:54.51] But no one panicked. No one jumped up to surrender. No one yelled, let's take them or something idiotic like that. They moved away, and I'll tell you, you could hear your heart beating just in anticipation of anything going wrong. You're just so keyed up, but it didn't happen.

[01:12:22.00] So the strength of the team comes from the team, not an individual. You can have a great leader, but everyone has to be in sync with that, and that tells me that we were well trained not to react badly to something that could have been a very, very bad thing for us.

[01:12:39.98] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. How much time to yourself did you have?

[01:12:45.31] BRUCE NORTON: A lot.

[01:12:45.64] MARC HENDERSON: In your off duty time.

[01:12:46.12] BRUCE NORTON: A lot, I mean, if you were-- we did everything together. We ate together. We slept in the same hooch together. We talked amongst ourselves. Now, there are times when guys wanted to go off and write a letter, or guys wanted to go play cards with some of the other guys they knew. No problem. But it was a very tight organization. And--

[01:13:08.95] MARC HENDERSON: What did you do for recreation?

[01:13:11.68] BRUCE NORTON: They played-- they could box. There was boxing, football, some baseball. We had weights that guys made, homemade version of weights.

[01:13:23.53] MARC HENDERSON: Was boxing for fun or to settle disputes?

[01:13:25.69] BRUCE NORTON: Oh, no, no, no. I never saw any disputes being settled. It was just for fun. Byron Tap was the heavyweight boxing champ of the 1st Marine Division when he came to us, and he taught boxing to us, the skills of boxing. Jim Tate was another boxer. He was a staff sergeant. He was a supply guy.

[01:13:46.18] They were just super guys, and they would teach you, not like get in the ring and I'm going to beat you up kind of thing, but let me show you what a jab is all about, or a right hook, or how to set your legs, or an uppercut, or why you throw continuous jabs to set up a guy for a punch. And truly, the art-- they knew it-- of boxing.

[01:14:09.10] So everyone appreciated that, and we'd go out and try it. They had gloves, and they had a head protection gear. And you weren't out there trying to beat the guy, but occasionally you get punched in the face because you didn't keep a guard up. But it was all training, but it was fun. And it was-- I say training-- it was an education. So the--

[01:14:35.05] MARC HENDERSON: How about pop culture? Do you remember any books or movies or songs that bring you back?

[01:14:42.03] BRUCE NORTON: We did not see-- in 3rd Force, we never saw a movie, not one. They had one USO show that Bob Hope had done in Da Nang, and they had a lottery of four or five guys that went down there to see it. I never saw Bob Hope, ever.

[01:15:06.01] So we didn't have any movies. We had a lot of guys that had books-- a lot of discussions about things. We didn't have a chaplain, so there weren't any-- now, there was a church there at Phu Bai, and you could go to a Sunday service if you-- I want to say if you were Catholic. Most of them, the Vietnamese churches, were Catholic, but it was probably non-denominational.

[01:15:31.66] So they-- I remember we went there at Christmas Eve, and they brought in a bunch of Vietnamese kids who sang Christmas carols in English. But it was like, we didn't really have time to go down to the church. If a couple of guys went down there, great. Good for them. But it was mostly the radio or guys who would have those-- all kinds of stereo equipment that they would buy, Pioneer and all state of the art stuff.

[01:16:07.81] MARC HENDERSON: Mostly reel-to-reel?

[01:16:09.13] BRUCE NORTON: Yeah, and those guys rotated. They would sell it to someone or leave it, and you'd inherit someone's radio. And they had-- remember the character that Robin Williams played of the guy that would do, Good Morning, Vietnam? We'd listen to him, and--

[01:16:24.21] MARC HENDERSON: Adrian Cronauer?

[01:16:25.45] BRUCE NORTON: Yeah, he was just on TV. That movie was just on last week. It was great. But yeah, we'd get Stars and Stripes newspaper. We'd get Sea Tiger, which was a Marine publication. And if you get anything from home, guys would get it in the mail, LIFE Magazine or Newsweek. Those are the things that I remember.

[01:16:53.89] MARC HENDERSON: What did you think about the reporting was, for Stars and Stripes, was it accurate or too censored?

[01:16:59.71] BRUCE NORTON: I think it was really-- personally, I think it was censored heavily. It might say, a Marine patrol was taken under fire last week and suffered four casualties. Well, there's a lot more to that story than that. And that was it, because they weren't announcing deaths and casualties unless they had to kind of thing or someone caught wind of it.

[01:17:31.96] BRUCE NORTON: If new guys came in, and they were conscious of things that were happening politically, because you've got to remember, some of these guys were 18, 19 years old. All they cared about were fast cars, past girlfriends, weaponry, and were they going to go to the bush or were they going to survive. They didn't-- and I don't mean to be condescending to them-- excuse me.

[01:17:58.10] They didn't have really the time, acumen, to think about politics, the media, and how things were presented. I think once they got back home, they found out how things were. But to me, the press has always seemed to be leftist in its leaning, and I think if you go back and read some of these old LIFE and LOOK magazines, all these guys have an agenda as to the story they want to tell.

[01:18:32.53] Some of them are quite good about-- you know, Joe Galloway or the Ia Drang Valley, I think it was a shock to a lot of these guys. The reporters had heard things, and then when they went and witnessed it for real, it was like, wow, we had no idea this is what was going on. Whether they could tell that story or were allowed to tell that story, I don't know. I mean, this was happening at pay grades far higher than I ever saw.

[01:19:04.42] So just imagine if you had a son, or a daughter, a son, in Afghanistan, what are you going to send him? Now that's a lot different today because of the capability of social media to get stories out. But you're going to send him the local newspaper from home, whatever that says, and the books that he may want. And you're not going to send-- you would probably not say, gee, you know, everyone thinks you're an idiot for being over there. What are you doing there? You're an embarrassment to the family. I mean, there are guys who'll be here this afternoon whose family said those very words to them, which is kind of sad to me.

[01:19:52.57] MARC HENDERSON: How much news from home did you receive?

[01:19:55.27] BRUCE NORTON: Well--

[01:19:55.35] MARC HENDERSON: And how did you communicate with your family?

[01:19:57.26] BRUCE NORTON: Well, through letters, obviously. You were allowed to use, what they called, a MARS station. And at a particular time at night, I can remember like on a Sunday night, you would call, and it would go to a ham radio operator and be relayed on to another one close to home. And they would call your house at the telephone number you gave them, and someone would go, hello? And you'd go, hello. Over. And they'd say, is this you? Yes, it's me. Over. Where are you? Well, I can't tell you that. Over.

[01:20:29.43] And it was-- but you'd hear the voice of your mom or your dad, or sometimes the phone would just ring because they'd be out. You'd think, gee, I waited in line for two hours to just to say hi and let them know I was OK, and no one answered the phone. But that's the humor of those types of situations.

[01:20:54.14] BRUCE NORTON: We were not told the names of these operations. Until several years later, you would find out that if your unit was put in for a Presidential Unit Citation, some of those things that you participated in, and I didn't, but like Dewey Canyon or some of those things. It'd be years later. I didn't even know we were doing that, because you weren't told that at a lower level. Maybe at the battalion level all this is all part of a big operation called whatever they call it, Pegasus or Dewey Canyon, or-- but if you were just a little tiny fish in a great big sea, and you had no idea of what you were participating in name wise.

[01:21:44.76] BRUCE NORTON: Worst day. Well, I'm sure my worst day is we were told the team had gotten ambushed, and that was February of 1970. And the first sergeant got me out of this class I was in. There were about 20 of us in this class. And they were going to select, I think, four of us to go to scuba school.

[01:22:11.45] And first sergeant came in and he said, literally said, Doc, come with me. And I thought, oh, jeez, what have I done? And he said, get in the Jeep. And he said, I'll tell you straight away, he said, Bishop, Garcia, and Fuhrman are dead. And he said, but the first guy you're going to get is Keaveney. He's still alive, and you will not let anyone touch them or touch their gear. And he said, I'll be with you. Do you understand? I said, yes, I do.

[01:22:41.19] So we went down the airstrip and around to the back side of the-- I think it was called the 85th Evac Hospital, and this Huey came in, and Keaveney was on it. He was bandaged up thanks to-- Tom started, and some of these other guys. In fact, they'd put him on a jungle penetrator. You know, it's a teardrop that comes down and they hoist them up, and he fell off of it as he was going up.

[01:23:08.18] Anyway, he got put into the hospital, and I mean, they took, literally, took him away in a gurney to operate on him. And then the next helicopter had the bodies of Garcia, Bishop, and Fuhrman. And I had to take their bodies off the helicopter, strip them of all their

gear, all their radio stuff, all the secret stuff, radio frequencies, and that kind of stuff. Not that anyone around there was going to do anything bad, it was just that we wanted to protect our own and not say that the army of the Vietnamese were moving the dead around.

[01:23:54.00] And I was to escort them down to Graves Registration where they knew they were dead, and from there, they would embalm them, and more or less, box them up and get them out of there. And that was a very difficult thing to see of guys that I had been with for almost a year, like losing three brothers and then just a couple of days earlier five more.

[01:24:20.22] So everyone was kind of down, and they were really down when that happened. So that was on a Tuesday, because Thursday, we had a Memorial service. And so I was asked to give a eulogy for Bishop, and the whole company was there. It was a eulogy for everybody. So yeah, that was a difficult day.

[01:24:49.36] When you think back on it, it wasn't like you wanted revenge, you know? Like, let's go out and kill a-- you know, that never-- I don't think that was ever mentioned. It was more like, wow, this has really hit home that there are bad guys out there. And if we make a mistake, and that was a mistake when Garcia got up on a trail, it'll cost you your life or the lives of your fellow team members. And you've got to pay attention to what is going on around you all the time, everything, and it's tough to do.

[01:25:24.14] But if you want to come back successfully, that's what you have to do. And there's no violation. You don't smoke after 4 o'clock? You don't smoke after 4 o'clock.

[01:25:39.55] There was no drug use. I never saw a day of anything like that. I mean, I've seen the movies. I've heard stories of units. Mostly these are rear area guys that are bored to death, but-- Now, were there guys who went to Australia that smoked marijuana? Sure.

[01:26:00.16] I mean, I'm not that naive to think that that never happened, but there was no drug use in the field. They'd kill you. I mean, first sergeant came out, and he said, let me tell you something. He said, if you think about using drugs, and drugs was then marijuana. It wasn't cocaine or anything. There was no crystal meth back then. He said, your parents will never read about the six boots on your back holding you down on the grenade.

[01:26:30.56] And everyone went, holy-- you know, this is what the first sergeant's saying at formation. Don't get involved with anyone like the air wing guys who might want you to smoke dope. OK, first sergeant, loud and clear. No problem. So I never saw it. There was no great discord in the company, and I mean, I say we were spoiled. It was as professional as you could be, and everyone adhered to it.

[01:27:03.73] MARC HENDERSON: You brought up Graves Registration?

[01:27:05.80] BRUCE NORTON: Yes, sir.

[01:27:06.25] MARC HENDERSON: So if you could paint a picture for us, was there-- what was the process for that--

[01:27:16.18] BRUCE NORTON: Well--

[01:27:16.99] MARC HENDERSON: --and for making sure that guys got Purple Hearts? I imagine you played a role in that.

[01:27:24.53] BRUCE NORTON: Well-- well, on a couple of occasions we had a team that had come in. They'd been in contact. They had been on the receiving end of a couple of grenades, and guys had multiple flecks of shrapnel in their face. And I said-- Coffman had come in there with them.

[01:27:47.70] And I had hemostats, and I'm trying to remove these things without any kind of anesthetic at all and no lidocaine. And you just put it in a little emesis basin, and you could hear the thing clink. And he said, well-- he said, that's a Purple Heart. And I said, really? He said, yeah. He said, absolutely. He said, the guy was wounded in combat. He said it could have taken his eye out. I said, it sure could.

[01:28:13.89] So our process would be-- we had everyone's medical record, so you would highlight that that they had been wounded, and from that, that's where the Purple Heart was generated. But it was generated from the adjutant or the S1, the admin section. But verified by the fact that in their health record, it had shown that they'd gone in and been treated for wounds.

[01:28:41.19] Now, Graves Registration, I had only visited that a couple of times. And it was-- I mean, these guys were really, really good at what they did, and they were very, very professional. It wasn't a rush kind of thing, because sometimes, now you have to imagine, they might bring in four, or five, or six guys that are all dead, helicopter crash, or shot to pieces.

[01:29:07.27] But everyone was gowned up, and gloves, and they treated them-- it was so much respect, and they would clean them. And then it would go through the process of embalming, and that's all that I saw. I never saw them put a body-- they would put them in a body bag and then put them in a casket, and then after that, I have no idea exactly what happened to them. But it was a group of people.

[01:29:37.42] A job that I would not want ever of every single day, nearly every single day, you're going to be faced with treating the remains of someone who had been killed. You know, jeez, talk about a reason for PTSD. There's one right there.

[01:29:57.26] I mean, but just like the guys that were at the hospitals in triage units when helicopters would land, and I saw this one time down at-- NSA was called Naval Support Activity, Da Nang. It was the Navy hospital in Da Nang. And a 46 came in and the guy-- the stretcher team ran out and brought this guy in to triage and a corpsman brought in both his legs in both boots, been cut with a Daisy cutter booby trap and-- right at the knees.

[01:30:25.67] And they had both his legs and couldn't do anything for him. They were just mangled to pieces. But one event like that will change your mind about a lot of things.

[01:30:43.25] BRUCE NORTON: Well, it may be selfishly. I get medevacked out to Yokosuka, and I think when that C-141 Starlifter left Da Nang and the wheels go up, you could hear this, from all of us who were patients, this kind of cheer. You know, like, that's over. I'm not going back any time soon.

[01:31:12.49] I mean, I knew that, ultimately, I was going home. I was going to Yokosuka. I was there for a couple of months and then got home, flew into Seattle, and then ultimately got home. And that was an experience in itself. But most days were kind of good days, you know? You made your day. It could be not a bad day, but some days are better than others.

[01:31:39.24] And there was a lot of doom and gloom during the monsoon season, which was pretty much from October to March where just rain like you've never seen it rain before. And you know, spirits are not happy unless the sun's out and shining, and there was a small window for you to go out and patrol and even worse one for you to get out of there, because they could only come and get you when they could see you.

[01:32:06.60] So lots of times you were extended, and you had no food. You might eat candy bars and have water, and that was it. You were out of food. So you just suck it up. That's what-- nothing's going-- there's no hand that's coming down from a cloud to give you something to eat.

[01:32:25.26] It's if you have disciplined yourself not to eat a lot and just take it easy, so to have some in reserve, good. But if you're hungry, and you eat it all, well, you're going to pay the price, because other guys will have food. They may share it with you. They may not, but that's an individual decision.

[01:32:52.05] BRUCE NORTON: 1st Force, we had a couple of Australian SAS guys that came out. They-- I have no idea what two guys were doing from Australia. They had left our area and went off into the bush. We found it odd that they had their radios shut off and they would only turn them on when they needed to transmit. Ours were on 24/7, and that's why we had to carry a lot of extra batteries.

[01:33:21.27] We dealt with KC, the Kit Carson Scouts, the turncoats from North Vietnam that-- my experiences with them was not good. I didn't trust him. He had his family with him with two kids, and he'd go through packs and take extra C-rations that guys didn't want to feed his family.

[01:33:44.57] And just, to me, if the guy had already turned once, what's to keep him from turning the second time? So you were kind of leery of him. So he went out-- I went out twice with this guy, and that was it. I wasn't happy with being with him. And that was it. I mean, we had no forward air control, no Navy spotters. It was just Marines and a couple of corpsmen in the company.

[01:34:22.53] BRUCE NORTON: I had almost no contact with them whatsoever. We, at Quang Tri, we were in a compound, all concertina wired off. We had our own barber. There was a woman who would wash utilities and then dry them over buffalo chips, so you smelled like Vietnam. But there was no conversation. I mean, you could pick up a couple of words that they

would say or phrases, but I never knew any Vietnamese. I had no interaction with them whatsoever.

[01:35:05.75] So some of these guys that go back to a village and say, oh, do you remember me? or I remember you when you were little. I mean, that's great if you were in a CAP unit, Civil Action Program unit, where you could establish a relationship, but we didn't. The people that we saw out in the bush were all viewed as non-friendly. And I mean, we found people out there that were, we called them wood cutters, and they were people that lived out there, but they were no threat to us. They were just Vietnamese people that had a little farm kind of thing.

[01:35:42.60] MARC HENDERSON: In the DMZ?

[01:35:43.30] BRUCE NORTON: Sir?

[01:35:43.81] MARC HENDERSON: In the DMZ or--

[01:35:45.34] BRUCE NORTON: No.

[01:35:45.73] MARC HENDERSON: Or--

[01:35:45.85] BRUCE NORTON: No, around the A Shau Valley. And they were no threat. We never bothered them. They didn't even know we were there, and there was no reason for us to do anything with them, to them, or for them. So it was just hands off, and no contact whatsoever.

[01:36:05.65] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. Is there anything else in country you want to talk about before talking about coming home?

[01:36:12.78] BRUCE NORTON: No. No, I think if I were to summarize it, I was-- today, at 73-- immensely proud of being in that company. It was a life altering experience. The officers that we had were outstanding. They would do anything for you. They didn't tolerate nonsense, but you knew that right away. They were there to teach you, to help you, to guide you, so that you could be promoted.

[01:36:45.78] They took care of their men. If there were awards, they would be awarded. If there was non-judicial punishment, well, that happened on occasion too. But it was fair, and everyone knew it. So I think that's why we still remain a tight organization today, and I think it's a legacy that's handed down to reconnaissance Marines that came after us, and they tell us that. So we're very proud of that.

[01:37:20.40] BRUCE NORTON: I had no papers other than orders. I had no driver's license. All that was lost. So I landed in Hartford, Connecticut, and that was as close as I could get to home. So I went to a, I think it was Hertz rental, and I said to the girl there-- I said, I'd like to rent a car.

[01:37:43.98] And she said, well, how can I help you? I said, here's my problem. I don't have a driver's license. I don't have any insurance. I just got back from Vietnam today, and in a roundabout way, and I'd like to get home and see my parents.

[01:38:04.02] And she said, OK, here's the deal. I'll rent you a car. We'll use my driver's license as the source, and you bring it back to Hertz in Providence the next day. I said, you got a deal.

[01:38:18.81] So I drove home, and the lights are off. This is about midnight, and I knocked on the back door. No one answered, so I thought this is not right.

[01:38:34.47] So I went down into the village, which is about a mile away. There was a payphone there, and I called home, and my father answered. And I said, hey, I was just at the house. Are you guys-- you must be at home. He said, yeah, where are you? I said, I'm in the village. I'll be back up to the house in about two minutes.

[01:38:58.21] So now the lights are on, and he came down, my grandmother came down, and my mother came down, and they're, oh, how are you? How was it? And I said, look, I-- I really don't want to talk about it, really. Not now, not right now. I said, I'm just glad to be here, and I said, where's Carolyn? My younger sister. And they said, well, she's up at Nancy and Katie's house. They're having a party up there tonight.

[01:39:30.42] And I said, OK, I want to go up and surprise her. So I went up to Katie's house, which is about five miles away. And all these cars are there, all these kids in high school. And I walked in, and she said, I knew that you would be here. I said, really? And she said, yep, I just knew. They knew I'd been hospitalized. They got the message. She said, I knew that you would be here. I said, well--

[01:40:01.13] So there were three guys, Charlie Hopkins, Pat Sullivan, and Wayne Andrews. They had all been to Vietnam. Pat had been at Khe Sanh. Charlie had been in Hue, outside of Hue City. And Charlie had been wounded and had gone to Naval Hospital Newport.

[01:40:22.52] And so I came home, and they said-- I had a nickname-- and they said, you know, well, how was it? And I said, ah, you know how it was. And they said, what do you want to do?

[01:40:35.63] And I said, you know, I just don't feel comfortable right now. And they said, let's go climb the Presidential Range, and we'll start at Mount Katahdin in Maine. And I said, when you want to do this? And they said, well, let's go tomorrow in the morning. I said, well, I don't even have any civilian clothes and stuff except what might be in the house. They said, don't worry about it.

[01:41:04.64] And so I said, I made this girl a promise. I've got to bring this car back to the Hertz rental place by the airport in Providence. They said, OK, we'll follow you. So I told my parents, I'll be back. Don't worry about me. I will be back in a couple of days.

[01:41:23.44] So we went up and we climbed Mount Washington, Liberty, Lincoln, and Mount Katahdin, and we spent like five days just climbing. Because these aren't big mountains at all. They're 5,000 feet.

[01:41:37.95] Then I came home, and I said, OK, if you want to talk about it or ask me questions about it, I'm comfortable now, and I'll be glad to answer your questions. And that was kind of the

homecoming. So I had orders to the Fargo Building in Boston. I was still in. I was a second class corpsman, because I'd been promoted twice.

[01:42:04.11] And then I started to reapply for college. My company commander, Alex Lee, wanted me to go back and get a college degree and take a commission in the Marine Corps, and be an infantry and reconnaissance officer. So I went to the College of Charleston to get away from all of the antiwar stuff that was happening in Boston. Keaveney was there. He was teaching at Boston University.

[01:42:35.99] And the rest is kind of history. But I took a commission, did 23 years as an infantry and reconnaissance officer, retired, then was the director of the Marine Corps Command Museum in San Diego. Then I went to the Citadel for eight years as a Marine TAC, TAC officer. And then I went to Quantico to write doctrine, and they had known that I had written. And I've been-- I went to the FBI and the-- the DEA to write for them, and now I'm at the Marine Corps University in-- at the Lejeune Leadership Institute as the Senior Writer of Case Studies.

[01:43:27.13] MARC HENDERSON: Did you--

[01:43:27.76] BRUCE NORTON: And that's it.

[01:43:28.15] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have difficulty adjusting to life after the war?

[01:43:31.39] BRUCE NORTON: No. No. I mean, you know, I-- there are some things that I tolerate well, some things that I don't, but I was not a rah-rah Marine Corps kind of thing, but I thought that I had learned enough skills. I'll put it to you this way. There were friends, close friends, around me who were killed, and I wondered often why not me? Why me? Why am I here and they're not?

[01:44:08.28] And I think to validate my own question and answer it, it's maybe because I had something to teach them in a way-- in different ways to teach them, through writing or through example, and that's why. So I've been, I say, successful. I've now had 12 books published from Random House and Naval Institute Press and Academica Press.

[01:44:36.27] And people read these books, and they learn a lot, not just what I did. That was a very small portion, but other men who have done admirable things and it sets an example for them, for kids, to read and say, jeez, I don't want any part of that or others would say, you know, I'd like to be a part of that.

[01:45:03.78] BRUCE NORTON: Lessons that I learned for future generations. Wow, I mean, there was a lot of trust that had to be both ways. They had to trust you, and you had to trust them. There was a lot of integrity. Integrity is not like-- it's like pregnancy. You don't have a little bit of integrity and it's going to grow. You either have it or you don't.

[01:45:35.57] And that stuff about courage, that's having the brains to understand what your fears are and be able to overcome them. You know, if you told a kid we're going to put 70 pounds of gear on your back, and we're going to put you in a helicopter and take you and a

couple of your friends out and put you in the jungle, and there are 40,000 guys out there who are trying to kill you, and we'll be back in a week. Most people would say, I don't want any part of that. I don't even want to put on the gear let alone get in the helicopter.

[01:46:09.10] But that, I mean, in a nutshell, that's the kind of thing we did, but we enjoyed it. We looked forward to it. We were safe amongst ourselves, and you learn to trust people. And you learn very, very quickly, and you learn by good example and bad examples. And the bad examples were just as valuable as the good, of saying, I'll never be like that guy, or I will never do that, because this is the price you pay.

[01:46:42.48] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the war is remembered today?

[01:46:45.27] BRUCE NORTON: Wow. I don't know. Now, and you know, so many years have passed. 51 years for us have passed, and I don't think it's taught. I don't think it's-- I watched the Ken Burns documentary on Vietnam, and then I was asked to be on a panel in Fredericksburg, and they had a couple hundred people there.

[01:47:09.72] And they had one guy who was in combat service support, whatever that means. He was a West Point grad, a black retired lieutenant colonel, and his experiences were much different than mine. And they had an FBI-- he is one of the gentlemen-- he's pretty famous guy-- who does profiling, or did profiling, for the FBI, and he was in Vietnam. Then they had a nurse, and then they had an active anti-Vietnamese-- anti-Vietnam war protest woman, and it was all good.

[01:47:49.13] And I said, you know-- when they asked me specifically about it I said, here's what I think, just my thoughts. I said, but when this woman and Ken Burns put together this documentary, and you can form whatever opinion you want, ask yourself this, how many Medal of Honor recipients came out of the Vietnam War?

[01:48:12.62] OK, and we'll just say the number is 30. How many did they interview? None. How many Navy Crosses were given? 723. How many did they interview? None.

[01:48:31.43] To be fair, how many Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded? 1100 and some. How many of those men did they interview? None. So why didn't they ever tell the story about what it was like to be in combat fighting for the Vietnamese? Never was brought up. It's all political stuff.

[01:48:51.98] So you have to really unveil the onion. If something interests you, really look at it from multiple sides, not just one side, because they have, in my opinion, an agenda. They want to sell you something a particular way, and you have to really question that.

[01:49:11.49] So maybe the answer is question authority. Don't be afraid to ask why. Why are we doing this? Now, there's a good thing for future generations. We want you to go to this country and fight. Why? Not that they wouldn't, but why? What's the gain? What's the end state of what we're going to do?

[01:49:37.60] BRUCE NORTON: Well, the first time it's kind of moving. To me, you back up, and you look at this slanted pyramid shape, and you think how sad it is that we don't know what these people could have done for this country to make it a better place to live at the expense of their life. You know, all those lives lost.

[01:50:03.31] But I mean, I've been to the cemeteries of France, same thing, World War I, and World War II. And you think, when are we going to get the message that the military is the armed mind of the state, and some moron sitting in Washington decides we're going to send a regiment of Marines into a country to quell something. You know, guy's never been shot at, and maybe not so fast. Maybe that-- if your son was in that group, would you be so quick to do that? I don't think so. So question authority?

[01:50:49.59] MARC HENDERSON: Have you heard about the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[01:50:56.18] BRUCE NORTON: Well, I'm not sure. I mean--

[01:50:58.37] MARC HENDERSON: Sure.

[01:50:58.61] BRUCE NORTON: I hear about a lot of things with the Vietnam-- we've all been given pins to recognize Vietnam service, and they had a recognition the other day, a couple in March, at Quantico, and I think there were like six of us that showed up. And they had it at the commissary, and it was, I say blatantly, pathetic.

[01:51:24.04] They had like a little bag, and they had a bottle with no screw cap on it, and it was in a bag. And they had some kind of trail mix crunch bar kind of thing. And it was like, what is this? Who needs this? They had a chaplain that was there, and that was fine. And they had the base sergeant major and just thank us all for serving.

[01:51:47.62] And there were a couple of guys I know, Army, Navy, Marines, and we all walked out of there, like, really? I mean, they wanted to give you a fake flowered lei to wear around-- you know, what is that all about? What's that?

[01:52:04.03] So I don't think there's a lot of thought put into it by the people who weren't even old enough to remember it, and you think you're going to pacify somebody by giving them a plastic bottle and a little bag with a rainbow on it. It doesn't make much sense. Give them nothing other than say, we want to commemorate your service and think about the people that you were with and didn't come home. And we're glad you're here. Thank you very much, and now let us pray, and that's it.