

Sandoz, James USMC

[00:00:14.06] JAMES SANDOZ: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, February 9th, 1947. I don't know what I'd say about my family. We were a family, a good family, a happy family. My father Walton Sandoz and my mother Elizabeth, and I had two older sisters and a younger brother. And my father was too old to serve in the military in World War II, so he joined the Merchant Marine. And he had to abandon ship from a kamikaze for that. And he didn't talk much about it.

[00:01:00.04] JAMES SANDOZ: I supported the war. Well, obviously, or I wouldn't have enlisted. But I supported the war and thought we were doing the right thing and wanted to contribute. The draft as it applied to me was before the lottery, you know. So the draft-- what was the person called?-- the director of the draft board, local draft board or whatever. Mary Murphy she was. And she's the one that basically decided who went and who didn't.

[00:01:36.07] And there were rumors that somebody is still working at the Giant because they know Mary Murphy. But I don't know if that's true or not. And I was classified as 4-S, which is divinity student. And I was classified as that because the college I went to, which was Mount St. Mary's College, had a seminary attached to it. Mount St. Mary's College with the same name, but the seminary. And so they thought, for some reason, that I was in the seminary. So I didn't bother correcting that because I knew I was going to enlist.

[00:02:17.26] MARC HENDERSON: And so what drove you to enlist? What inspired you to enlist?

[00:02:20.95] JAMES SANDOZ: Patriotism, duty, and I wanted to test myself. I wanted to see how I'd do.

[00:02:44.99] MARC HENDERSON: So you chose the Marine Corps.

[00:02:52.37] JAMES SANDOZ: So I enlisted for three years. The draftees-- two years is not enough time to train a Soldier in two years for much. So most of them went into the infantry. But I got to go to communications school.

[00:03:08.90] MARC HENDERSON: Did you choose that?

[00:03:09.92] JAMES SANDOZ: No, it was just-- you take a bazillion tests the first day or two and they decide what you're competent for, where they'd get the best out of you. And they decided I could learn Morse code. So they sent me to comm school.

[00:03:32.79] MARC HENDERSON: And what year did you enlist?

[00:03:35.75] JAMES SANDOZ: 1966. I signed the papers while I was still in college and-- probably April, thereabouts-- and delayed entry. So then in August, I went active, went down to boot camp.

[00:03:53.70] MARC HENDERSON: Where did you go to boot camp?

[00:03:54.77] JAMES SANDOZ: Parris Island. I mean, the boot camp was hell. It's supposed to be hell. And making it through that was, you know, I'm sure it's part of the psychology. It makes you proud to be a Marine, you know? And the friendships that I made in boot camp didn't last long because after that we went our separate ways. So I never got to see these guys.

[00:04:18.39] MARC HENDERSON: I imagine you went to that A school. What was that school like? What were some of the other things?

[00:04:23.39] JAMES SANDOZ: That was an ITR, infantry training regiment. And that was fine. That was kind of fun. That's when you pitched the tents and you learned how to shoot the different weapons and all of your-- you know, boot camp was all discipline and history and stuff. And so ITR was a lot of fun. And you know, well, like I say, you got to fire these different weapons and you got to just sleep out, you know, camp out. It was just kind of fun.

[00:04:55.04] We had to wait a long time to get into a platoon, I guess, of Marines that were going through the training. Otherwise, we sat around. I forget what they called us, Easy Company, I think, something. Casual Company, that's what they called us, the Casual Company. And so you just hung around the barracks and picked up trash, about it, until they formed you up into a platoon.

[00:05:26.00] MARC HENDERSON: Did you go to a unit before Vietnam or did you go over to Vietnam as a replacement?

[00:05:31.19] JAMES SANDOZ: No, I went into a unit. I went into 1st ANGLICO, which is Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company. So we directed air strikes some days. But I was naval gunfire, so we directed the ships' gunfire. And so the naval guns-- Vietnam is such a narrow country that the Navy-- the naval guns were quite effective. And left 300, you know, up 300, whatever, and got them on target. And I did most of that, almost all of that from the backseat of an O-1 Bird Dog, an observation plane. And I love flying in those planes.

[00:06:13.43] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have to go through any special training to do that?

[00:06:17.50] JAMES SANDOZ: No. No. Hop aboard, that was my special training.

[00:06:24.77] MARC HENDERSON: Sure, and it was basically you and a radio talking to the ship.

[00:06:28.22] JAMES SANDOZ: That's right, and the pilot, of course. Yeah. And there was a stick in the back seat. It was front and back. And the stick in the back seat, I think that's standard for any airplane that has a passenger in the back. So if the pilot gets shot, you can take over, which, of course, fortunately, I never had to do that.

[00:06:49.43] But the pilots always gave us stick time. They wanted us to be able to not crash into trees. And that was fun, of course. Yeah. Yeah, backseat of those airplanes, I felt absolutely safe. I felt no danger. People shoot at us sometimes, you know, didn't scare me not one bit. And I

don't know why. I mean, wasn't a whole lot of armor or anything. But I just felt safe in that airplane. JAMES SANDOZ: In May, I went to ANGLICO in Hawaii, Kaneohe Bay.

[00:07:27.92] MARC HENDERSON: The unit or for training?

[00:07:30.86] JAMES SANDOZ: It's a unit. But of course, they train you in that unit. But that's the actual unit. When you finished comm school, at the end of it you got a list of individuals and where they were going. And a bunch of us went to ANGLICO from my class in comm school.

[00:07:48.56] And we were pretty tight. We were tight in comm school, then in Hawaii, and then a dozen of us got sent to Vietnam at the same time. And we got separated, and not only separated, but only three of us out of the 12 stayed in ANGLICO. And the rest went to an infantry unit. Excuse me.

[00:08:18.24] MARC HENDERSON: As forward observers?

[00:08:19.59] JAMES SANDOZ: No, as radio operators.

[00:08:21.50] MARC HENDERSON: OK.

[00:08:21.99] JAMES SANDOZ: I got a secondary MOS in Hawaii of naval gunfire. And the other two of us, the two others who stayed in ANGLICO got that MOS too and the rest of them didn't. But we didn't do a darn thing different in Hawaii. I had no idea why those people didn't get that MOS or why I did. So anyhow, that's just what--

[00:08:44.91] MARC HENDERSON: So you mentioned getting there in May. Was that May 1967?

[00:08:49.44] JAMES SANDOZ: '67, yeah.

[00:08:50.94] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah?

[00:08:51.71] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah, yeah, to Hawaii, yeah.

[00:08:53.37] MARC HENDERSON: And how long were you in Hawaii before you went to Vietnam?

[00:08:56.16] JAMES SANDOZ: About six months.

[00:08:57.21] MARC HENDERSON: OK.

[00:08:57.45] JAMES SANDOZ: About six months. I was a-- I don't know, asshole is probably the right word. I wrote a letter to my commanding officer, which is verboten. You have to go through the chain of command to speak to him. And I told him I was sick of Hawaii, I wanted to get to Vietnam. That's why I enlisted. So the next group out, man, I was on it. So it worked. And I didn't get in any trouble. I got yelled at a little bit, but that's all.

[00:09:31.16] MARC HENDERSON: How did you get there? Was it a military plane, a civilian plane?

[00:09:34.91] JAMES SANDOZ: It was a civilian plane. We got leave to go home, and then met in Oakland. And from Oakland, we got on a commercial flight and then-- all the way to Vietnam. Because I was on that airplane in-- that was my return trip after I extended, I was on that airplane when the Jets were playing the Colts in Super Bowl III. And of course, I was a Colts fan. And of course, the Jets kicked their ass. So that was a foreboding, I guess, of going to Vietnam. So went there and landed in Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Vietnam.

[00:10:21.25] MARC HENDERSON: In 1968?

[00:10:22.38] JAMES SANDOZ: In '67. End of '67, that was-- we got there before Thanksgiving.

[00:10:27.54] MARC HENDERSON: OK.

[00:10:28.74] JAMES SANDOZ: And so we stayed in a hotel in Saigon. And the ANGLICO headquarters, of course, was in Saigon, a different place. And that was fun, you know. First thing we did, the first night we were there we got shitfaced. And commandeered the-- I forget what they're called, but those bicycles with the seats in the front.

[00:10:56.19] Those poor guys, the poor owners of those bikes were not real happy with us. But we didn't damage anything. So we made out all right. And so we were there for, I'm not gonna swear to it, but about a week. And then--

[00:11:11.58] MARC HENDERSON: What were your first impressions of Vietnam? Saigon?

[00:11:17.27] JAMES SANDOZ: The smell was overpowering. It was-- I think-- cooking I think is what we were smelling. And it was foods that none of us were used to, none of us had ever heard of or smelled before. So that was a powerful awakening, I guess. I don't know.

[00:11:38.27] MARC HENDERSON: What were your initial duties?

[00:11:40.61] JAMES SANDOZ: Didn't have any. Just hang loose until we got assigned. Well, ANGLICO headquartered in Saigon, but there were teams from ANGLICO in every coastal area, almost every coastal city, but not quite. And so I don't know if I could have requested an area, a particular city. But I didn't know about it. And I wouldn't have known which one anyhow.

[00:12:07.75] MARC HENDERSON: What was your rank?

[00:12:08.96] JAMES SANDOZ: I was a Lance Corporal. JAMES SANDOZ: So went from Saigon to Nha Trang. And Nha Trang, I don't know if you know much about it, but Nha Trang is a beautiful-- still is a beautiful city. And it was called the Atlantic City of the South China Sea. And nice hotels. And we worked out of the Grand Hotel, which is a nice, beautiful hotel, marble

floors, marble walls. It was really a great place. We had offices there, of course. And the radio shack was on the roof.

[00:12:53.03] So that's where we did most of-- all of our communication, but most of our work. We would also, before we went out there during the day, somebody would just get assigned to plot the ships, where they were and which ones were coming, which ones were not, for the general's briefing, which our officer in charge gave. So you know, it wasn't just relaying messages. It was a little bit of work work, too.

[00:13:22.96] And that was a beautiful city. My living conditions were shamefully good. You know, it really did, it made me feel guilty. We called it a hotel. But it was a big house with a balcony. And it was like four stories high. And we all had our own rooms and foot lockers-- not foot lockers, locker lockers. And we kept ammunition and weapons in those lockers. And we had our own Jeep. So we'd ride back and forth to the hotel where we worked. And it was great. It was great.

[00:14:01.22] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have hooch maids?

[00:14:02.18] JAMES SANDOZ: Of course. You don't expect us to clean up our own mess, do you?

[00:14:06.53] [LAUGHING]

[00:14:09.86] MARC HENDERSON: How was the food?

[00:14:11.73] JAMES SANDOZ: The food was good. We could eat-- I was starting to say we could eat in the mess hall, but I don't remember eating in a mess hall. I'm sure we did. We could eat in the restaurants. And the restaurants were all good. And there was a USO-- yeah, USO that sold hamburgers you could get there. And they were actually about the worst food there.

[00:14:37.44] And the native food-- I'm fortunate. I like foods, different foods. And so I enjoyed the meals. You know, and I don't know any of the people that I was with that didn't enjoy them. But if you were real-- what's the word? Close minded or something with your food, you would be unhappy there. But I loved it.

[00:15:06.53] MARC HENDERSON: So were you living out in town or was this an extended part of the base?

[00:15:10.82] JAMES SANDOZ: Right downtown. Right--

[00:15:12.69] MARC HENDERSON: And you would just go on to the base to fly?

[00:15:17.20] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, not to fly out of the base, but to-- in fact, I didn't do all that much flying in Nha Trang. I did most of that up in Tuy Hoa. But I did fly out of Nha Trang. So we'd have to go to the airfield for that maybe a mile away from the hotel.

[00:15:36.52] MARC HENDERSON: So what precipitated the transition from Nha Trang to Tuy Hoa?

[00:15:42.13] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, they needed a team up there in Tuy Hoa. And so the officer in charge, Lieutenant Vandiver, naval lieutenant, he sent me. But he sent me with a Jeep. And it was immediately after the Tet. The Tet happened and those of us that were living downtown got into the midst of it and without authorization.

[00:16:14.60] And so immediately after the Tet, Vandiver split us up. So there were three of us, mainly. And so I went to Tuy Hoa, somebody went to Phan Thiet, I think. And somebody else stayed there in Nha Trang. But he separated us in a heartbeat. And so that's what precipitated it.

[00:16:38.26] And that was a MACV compound. And that was great. On the MACV compound, I was rooming with a team. And I forget the names of these teams, what they were called. But they would go to villages with modern medicines, you know, Band-Aids and eye drops and ear drops and stuff, and soap, and teach the villagers whatever they could about that kind of stuff.

[00:17:04.53] MARC HENDERSON: Like a MEDCAP?

[00:17:06.79] JAMES SANDOZ: I think that was it. And there was a driver, a translator, the medic. But they showed me around. I had a great time with them. They were good people. Yeah, so they're there and then-- oh, and they knew the mayor. So we'd eat at the mayor's house sometimes. It was just wonderful. It was great.

[00:17:31.13] And so I stayed there every day, every morning, whatever, two or three hours in the back of the airplane. In the afternoon, same thing, a couple of hours in the back. And finally I said, I can't do this anymore. You know, there's a war going on and I'm not participating. So I requested to transfer, extended and requested to transfer up to Quang Tri.

[00:18:02.96] MARC HENDERSON: So what was your experience during Tet, 1968.

[00:18:08.83] JAMES SANDOZ: It was surreal, you know?

[00:18:10.81] MARC HENDERSON: Where were you?

[00:18:12.13] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, we were downtown in our hotel. And it was kind of funny. One of the guys had his paid girlfriend in his room. And the rest of us just were there. And then at midnight, boom, boom, boom, all these fireworks and people shooting their weapons into the air-- a celebration.

[00:18:38.08] And so that woke us up. And we went out on the balcony and watched. And the girlfriend wanted to shoot the M16. She wanted to fire in the air and celebrate. And that dumb ass let her. And I'm thinking, oh God, we're all dead. She's gonna aim that at us. But she didn't, she just shot it in the air.

[00:18:58.30] And then we went back to bed. And it seemed like-- it seemed like minutes later, 15 minutes, maybe a half hour later, we heard mortar rounds. And you can tell the difference. And we said, holy shit. So we geared up. We said, well, let's see what's going on. And so we grabbed a couple of grenades each, our weapons and ammo and M16s we were carrying. And we went out.

[00:19:35.73] Now this place where we were, and there were other military quarters like ours and they all had a-- we called them Filipino guards. I don't know if they were Filipino or what. They didn't look Vietnamese. And they would stand out there. There was a sandbag semicircle in front of the door. And they just sat there and they didn't do anything. But after Tet, boom, they were gone. Never saw them again.

[00:20:02.77] And so we went-- I'm stupid. I didn't even get my boots on. I just wore my flip-flops and went down to the street. And it was like spokes of a wheel, maybe five roads coming off. And on the one road, there was a machine gun up that road somewhere. And that machine gun was shooting anything that got into that circle. And so we-- oh, and there were electric wires down on the ground and, you know, sparking. And the artificial illumination was yellow. And it was just surreal. It was really weird.

[00:20:50.62] But anyhow, we said, we can't let-- we gotta shut that machine gun up. We gotta either tell him to not shoot or knock him out. We didn't know if they were enemy or not. So I said, OK, well, I'll go up there. So I leave those two guys and go walking up the street. And I hear this, dung lai, dung lai, which means "halt" in Vietnamese.

[00:21:10.93] And I'm looking around, looking around. And honestly, my stupidity is what kept me alive. If I had had any more awareness, I'd be dead. So anyhow, I look around and I see these three Viet Cong in their Viet Cong uniform with the tire tread sandals and the black pajamas and the straw hats. And I was convinced then, I am now too, that they were a family, a father, son, and grandfather.

[00:21:43.69] And the son was maybe 13, 14 years old. They're talking to me. They've got their-- they had one carbine, M1 carbine between them. And they were approaching me and pointing the carbine at me. And I'm going, I'm an American. I was so stupid. I'm an American, you know, I'm on your side. And so they got to me.

[00:22:05.50] And then I finally realized these weren't friendlies. So I'm standing there and they're standing there and the grandfather with the carbine is pointing it at me. And the kid comes up. They send the kid up to take my weapon. So the kid's yanking and I'm yanking. I said, fuck it, out loud. And I yanked the M16 and sprayed them all. And I still see that kid's face.

[00:22:53.98] But I ran back to the other two, leaving my flip-flops behind 'cause I just went-- running. And I told them I just killed a kid. And so we all went up there. And so the kid was lying dead or dying. And one of the others was lying dead or dying. And the third guy wasn't anywhere. So we followed a blood trail to a hooch. And one of the guys that I was with went in and the guy reached for a gun or something and they killed him.

[00:23:32.93] So we had that M1 carbine. And we said, well, let's see what else is going on. So we walked past a Air Force compound like ours, you know, similar living. And they were just standing around. I said, do you have a weapon? No, they didn't have a weapon. So we gave them their carbine, which only had like three or four rounds in it. But I figured it was better than nothing. So that's probably on one of their mantel pieces now.

[00:24:12.24] So we walked past an MP compound and asked the guys, what's going on here? And whoever it was we were talking to, one of the enlisted men said, you should have seen it, there was a company or a platoon of NVA marching in formation down the street. Finally, we yell and they turned around and started shooting. And then they ran into this house. And so the street's here, MP compound, and then on the other side of the street is the house.

[00:24:48.69] So we go to the house. And the MPs didn't have any weapons with them. They were outside in the compound, but they didn't have any weapons. And so we go to the-- so we go across the street. I happened to be the first of the three of us there. I look over this wall and there's a NVA standing in the doorway.

[00:25:06.45] So I aimed and fired. I thought I was on full automatic. I was only on semiautomatic. And if I had have known that, I would have adjusted my plan, I guess you would call it, but I didn't. And so I fired one shot, I said, oh shit, and ducked down behind a wall and put it on automatic. And then I stood up, foolish, to shoot at him and he shot at me first. And the bullet actually hit the top of the wall and shattered.

[00:25:38.91] And most of the little tiny specks of blood in my arm up and down. And then the main part of the bullet went into the magazine, the empty magazine I had in my pocket. And so that stuck in, stuck there. It was stuck through the one side and dented the other side. And that hurt more than the wounds. I mean, it was just so scary.

[00:26:06.12] So we stayed there and we shot at these guys in the house. I don't know how many there were in there. And there was a Korean compound. So there's this house with the NVA in it. And then the next house was a Korean compound where-- I think the Korean general lived there. But they were Koreans and guards. And so they came out to join us. And they brought a case of grenades.

[00:26:32.31] And the Koreans, God bless them, they were good soldiers, but they couldn't throw a grenade very well. So they throw it and they're rolling. And then we just, god damn it, and we just took the grenades and they let us throw 'em, we threw them. One Korean was prone position firing through a gate. And he got it right in the middle of the head. And it was horrible.

[00:26:59.34] But so I went across the street to the MPs, I said, give us some grenades. They said, we can't do that. We're not authorized. OK, fine, you know? What can you say? So we stayed there for a couple of hours. And Fauser, the guy with the girlfriend, he joined us. He came afterwards. And that was something that was really stupid of us, was leaving him alone. We should have woke him or interrupted him.

[00:27:29.73] And so we didn't get into any more fire fights really. There was a pack, an NVA or Vietnamese pack, on a windowsill of this house. And so we said, we can't let that stand. So we go up. And again, I always happen to be first. And I had my M16 and a grenade. And in basic training, I never threw a grenade. I was sick that day.

[00:28:09.80] But anyhow, they were a lot more powerful than I expected it to be. I threw one in and it just blew the heck out of it. And then an Army truck came by. And I don't know who they were. I don't know, I just don't have any idea. But we said, we need some backup here. Can you guys help us out? Oh, sure.

[00:28:29.06] And so that's when we went and I threw the grenade. And we had our gun set up and we were firing. And I turn around, that Army truck's gone. I swore if I ever saw that guy, I was gonna punch him right in the face. Of course, now if I saw him, I wouldn't know him. I'd shake his hand. But his face was embedded for a while in my mind.

[00:28:50.21] So we went back to the headquarters at the Grand Hotel. And the guards there, the MP guards, they were-- what's the word? Glad to see us. Proud of us, something like that. You know, it's like, yeah, we're in this, you know, because we were considered the same. And so we went up to our officer in charge and reported back to him.

[00:29:21.62] We were all scuzzied with our weapons. And he just kind of shook his head. He said, oh, I hope you got that out of your system. And Fauser said, it's not in my system, sir. It's in my blood. He died about a month later in a Spooky crash. He rode up in a Spooky.

[00:29:43.58] MARC HENDERSON: So your efforts that night, they don't sound like they were organized at all or coordinated with any-- you guys just kind of went out on your own--

[00:29:51.32] JAMES SANDOZ: That's exactly what we did. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That's what we were trained to do.

[00:29:56.81] MARC HENDERSON: And then after that you were sent up to Tuy Hoa?

[00:30:00.02] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah, the next day or two, yeah. In fact, they were still shooting in Tuy Hoa. In fact, I went up to Tuy Hoa, I got my Jeep. I'm driving up and the Army guy got in the Jeep with me, I'll tell you where. There's the Army and Viet Cong or VC on either side of the road shooting at each other.

[00:30:24.71] He said, yeah, just go through them, just go through 'em. So we did. No injuries. And there was a Army captain with a LAW-- do you know what a LAW is?-- yeah, shooting at a bunker-- or not a bunker, but like a locker or something, a steel structure maybe 100 yards away and with the LAW, you know.

[00:30:53.00] And he was just sitting up there completely exposed. I really had a lot of respect for the guy. And he blew the place up. I don't even know if there was anybody in it or not. But he did get a hit.

[00:31:10.42] MARC HENDERSON: So tell me about your leadership in ANGLICO. So you had an officer, a Navy lieutenant. Was he good? bad? What made him good or bad?

[00:31:22.34] JAMES SANDOZ: I liked him. I liked him. He looked out for us. He did his job.

[00:31:34.53] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have NCOs?

[00:31:36.24] JAMES SANDOZ: There were some NCOs, but they weren't directly-- well, they were at Nha Trang. So they were in the chain of command there, but they pretty much left us alone. But, you know, in fact they were just people. Every morning, we'd report. And we would say, where is the boat? to our officer in charge. And he would say, it's on the ship. Every stinking morning. So I went up to Tuy Hoa, flew in the back seat.

[00:32:18.84] MARC HENDERSON: Are there any particular named operations that you remember flying, ANGLICO missions?

[00:32:24.84] JAMES SANDOZ: I had no idea what operations we were in, in any of it. You know, just had no idea. I looked in my records. I got my personal records. And it listed a gazillion operations, but I didn't know. So when I was in ANGLICO, traveling up and down the coast, we would go, we'd call it a daisy chain.

[00:32:48.21] The patrol craft, PCF, Patrol Craft Fast, had an area that they would patrol. And then another one would have the next area. So we'd get on the one closest to us and then hop off of that to the next one headed down and then all the way down to wherever we were going. And that was a lot of fun.

[00:33:06.85] But one of them had a POW on board. And this poor guy, he was so scared, you know? He was just shitless scared. And it was chilly, I believe, I think I remember. But I reached for a cigarette to give to the guy. And the crewman said, don't give him a cigarette.

[00:33:30.91] I said, fuck you. I gave him a cigarette, which I had to hold for him because his hands were behind his back. But I don't want to-- there was no reason for him not to have a cigarette. He was gonna have enough discomfort coming his way. So but that's a digression, I guess.

[00:33:52.28] MARC HENDERSON: So you mentioned the PCFs, the swift boats. You were using those as transportation up and down the coast?

[00:33:58.03] JAMES SANDOZ: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, and that was fun, you know? It was a lot of fun.

[00:34:05.83] MARC HENDERSON: What were your impressions of the Sailors on those boats?

[00:34:08.11] JAMES SANDOZ: Oh, they were great. They were like McHale's Navy. They just-- they didn't give a shit. The boat was armed with a 50-caliber and a 81-millimeter mortar, of

all the things to put on a boat. Yeah, they were great. I enjoyed them. And they welcomed me when I was aboard. It wasn't like, oh, Christ, we got another one, you know? It was friendly.

[00:34:34.19] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever interact-- in hopping from boat to boat, did you ever interact with the Coast Guard boats?

[00:34:39.88] JAMES SANDOZ: No.

[00:34:40.18] MARC HENDERSON: The 82 footers?

[00:34:41.92] JAMES SANDOZ: No. Is the 82 footer a cutter? I have no idea.

[00:34:46.24] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah.

[00:34:48.82] JAMES SANDOZ: In ANGLICO we fired the Coast Guard cutters a few times. They had a 3-inch gun. And so we would use them sometimes. JAMES SANDOZ: I didn't work with many Sailors at all, except for the officer in charge. But the Marines, I loved them. I mean, they were good guys. They went through the same training that I went through. And we counted on each other and trusted each other.

[00:35:21.72] MARC HENDERSON: So you wanted to transfer. Was it normal for somebody to do that?

[00:35:24.82] JAMES SANDOZ: It was easy. You know, I put in the request, extended my tour, put in the request. And when you extended your tour in Vietnam for six months, you got 30 days leave. And that was a nice incentive, too. So I went on my leave. Had a good time. Reported back.

[00:35:47.67] And when I reported back, they flew me to-- I don't remember where I reported to, but I flew through Okinawa back into Vietnam. And so they sent me up to 3rd Force. Now the transportation then was pretty much standby on military aircraft and pretty reliable, actually. We used to get to where we wanted. And so anyhow, I got there, got-- I don't remember how I got to 3rd Force headquarters.

[00:36:26.62] MARC HENDERSON: Did you get to choose that in your request, that you wanted to go to 3rd Force?

[00:36:30.12] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, I said Force Recon. I didn't know it was 3rd or what. And so reported and they said, welcome, what's your MOS? 2533, radio telegraph. He said, well, try to stay alive till Monday, will you? So I said, I'll try.

[00:36:52.56] MARC HENDERSON: What was it about Force Recon that appealed to you, that you--

[00:36:56.01] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, it's the elite of the Marine Corps. And I wanted to see if I could do it. Now I did it, but I did it through the back door, you know? I don't know if I could

have gone through all the training that these guys that started out in Force Recon did. I just don't know. But I didn't have to, so--

[00:37:17.76] MARC HENDERSON: What was your introduction like?

[00:37:21.54] JAMES SANDOZ: It was interesting. And I didn't know this at the time, but down at ANGLICO flying in the back seat of airplanes, your boots don't get too scuffed. And so I had pristine boots and uniform pristine. And so my glasses, I wore dark glasses, dark rims. And so I was termed, as I say, not aware at the time, but I was termed the company accountant.

[00:37:55.71] But they accepted me because I was from ANGLICO. And ANGLICO feeds Force Recon. Because ANGLICO is also an airborne outfit. And so there's a respect there. So my transition wasn't so hard. Oh, on the way out of ANGLICO, they promoted me to corporal.

[00:38:18.33] Now at the time, you know, there's this table of operations or something where you're only allowed to have so many corporals, sergeants, staff sergeants, whatever. And they didn't have room for a new corporal the whole time I was there. But on the way out the door, they said, ah, here's your stripes, you know? So I wound up back in their TO. And it was good for me.

[00:38:41.26] And so my first patrol, my first team leader was Kevin Jones. He was a good guy, very intense. And he pulled me aside before the first patrol. He said, listen, you outrank me, but I'm in charge. I said OK. I'm not gonna tell you how to do this job. I ain't never done it. So we got along fine. And that was good.

[00:39:10.74] MARC HENDERSON: What were the sorts of things that Force Recon teams did?

[00:39:14.73] JAMES SANDOZ: Mostly observe. And that was our mission, observe and report. Some of the team leaders would see a couple of NVA soldiers and decide to ambush them. And they would do that. And then the rest of the NVA soldiers that were in the area would come after them. So we lost a lot of men that way.

[00:39:38.88] And the first patrols I ran were along the shores of the Qua Viet River. Qua Viet River is where we were. But there was a beach. Or I guess that was the South China Sea, I don't even know, but the beach with white sand.

[00:39:56.40] And one of my first patrols, I was the tail-end Charlie. And when I was in Recon, everybody switched jobs. You know, it wasn't I was a communicator, so I had to just do that. It didn't work that way. It's just take turns relieving each other, learn how to do the other person's job, and relieve the boredom a little bit.

[00:40:23.05] But I was tail-end Charlie. And so I'm looking behind me, looking behind me, and I turned the way I was going and my patrol disappeared. I said, oh my God. So I, uh-- I'm creeping up towards them. Now Neery, one of the members, he is a smart guy. He saw I was missing, so they were watching for me. So I wasn't gonna be shot at when I showed. And so that was OK, but it was really scary at first.

[00:41:00.37] And we had the Starlight scopes, which-- the serial number 1, I think. They were the first issue. And so it's two dimensions, in green. So the team leader was carrying it. And he looks and he says, we got two coming. So two Viet Cong, NVA, Vietnamese, anyhow, were coming towards us, one about four or five feet behind the other. So we're waiting. I said, oh Christ, you know, you get the first guy and the other guy's gonna shoot you.

[00:41:38.27] But it turned out it was I think a grandfather and grandson standing side by side. But because of the height and because of the two dimensions, it looked like one was behind the other. And so we captured them and turned them in to the Vietnamese authorities. I felt sorry for them.

[00:42:00.81] MARC HENDERSON: So when you captured them, they, in essence, become POWs. Did you interrogate them there on the spot?

[00:42:06.90] JAMES SANDOZ: No, no, we didn't have an interpreter. And so we couldn't have done that. And they were-- I don't think they were VC. I think they were just trying to get a jump on the fish or something. And of course, I could be wrong about that. But I wasn't particularly worried about them. And they weren't armed. So capturing is maybe overstating it, you know, detained maybe.

[00:42:35.10] MARC HENDERSON: How did your living conditions change once you went to Recon?

[00:42:39.21] JAMES SANDOZ: They changed considerably. So in Recon, we had hutches. And they were fine. But the one-- the big difference, the huge monumental difference between II Corps and I Corps was that in II Corps, everybody got a ration card. And on the ration card were electronics and beer and liquor. And the liquor was the last page of the card. And down in II Corps they kept that page on the card. So I could go into the PX and buy a fifth of Jack Daniels or something. But up north, they tore that off if you weren't a staff sergeant or above. So we couldn't get easy access to booze. And that was a big disappointment.

[00:43:28.35] MARC HENDERSON: And the leadership for Recon?

[00:43:30.60] JAMES SANDOZ: Leadership, upper leadership sucked. It was nonexistent. I was there-- now these guys, these other Marines that are here, they were under the command of Bruce Lee was the CO. And Bruce Lee knew what the hell he was doing. I had five different COs in the 10 months I was in 3rd Force and none of them were Recon. They had no idea. One CO went to a team and said, listen, on your LZ out, if you see any good looking plants, dig 'em up for me, will you? I said, yes, sir, we will. Of course, they never dug up anything.

[00:44:13.44] MARC HENDERSON: What about the NCOs in Recon?

[00:44:15.54] JAMES SANDOZ: They were good. NCOs were from the ranks. So they knew what they were doing, at least all the ones I dealt with, there was no problem. But like I say, there weren't that many. My team leader was a Lance Corporal. And the team leader, I forget what the rank is supposed to be, but it's a lot higher than Lance Corporal. Yeah.

[00:44:38.52] MARC HENDERSON: How about, how much time did you have to yourself?

[00:44:42.78] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah, in ANGLICO, I had evenings off most of the time. It rotated radio watch at night. But most of the time, I was free from whatever time we got off, 4 o'clock or whatever until the next morning when I had to report. So there was a lot of leeway. And in Recon, we would get a warning order. That's what you're going to be doing.

[00:45:14.22] And so we'd get the warning order on day one. And we'd go and get the gear that we need, you know, clean up our rifle, clean up the gear or whatever else we needed. And day two, we'd go out to the bush, almost exclusively by helicopter, but not exclusively. And then-- so we go out and then stay out, generally it was four nights, and then come back the fifth day, which depended a lot on the weather.

[00:45:46.94] A lot of times we couldn't leave. There was no way to get out. There was no way to get the helicopters in. And then we'd clean up our gear, shower. And the next day or two, we'd get our new warning order.

[00:46:03.53] So we were back in the rear probably 30% of the time, probably, maybe even higher. I felt like I was a REMF. Do you know what a REMF is? I felt like it was a REMF in ANGLICO and I felt like I was a REMF in Force Recon because I always got showers. I always got a hot meal.

[00:46:29.18] MARC HENDERSON: Do you want to explain what it is?

[00:46:31.11] JAMES SANDOZ: [LAUGHING] Rear-echelon motherfucker. So-- some of those guys were the pits, really.

[00:46:46.01] MARC HENDERSON: What made them so poor?

[00:46:48.47] JAMES SANDOZ: Because they were hotshots. They weren't going into the bush. And they-- I don't know what they thought. They thought we were stupid or something for getting trapped into combat. I don't know. But they just didn't make me happy.

[00:47:06.73] The worst one that I ever encountered in the history of the universe was a sergeant in Okinawa when I went to the NCO club. I could go to the NCO club because I was a sergeant by then. And so I'll tell you this, in 3rd Force we had an enlisted man's club. And it was a cement floor bar where you'd get the beer on little tables and chairs. And so what we would do is we would-- each of us go, you run and get two beers at a time.

[00:47:51.79] So we'd go up and get our two beers, bring them back to the table. Get back in line. Get two more beers. Bring them back until they ran out of beer. So we'd start drinking after we had a table full of warm beer by now. And so the first sip was always foam. So all of us did this. The first sip, take a sip, spit it out on the cement and then drink the rest of the beer.

[00:48:13.98] Well, when I was in Okinawa, I guess on my way home, I went to the NCO club. Nice, you know, they had slot machines and carpeting and fancy stuff. And so I ordered my beer

and I sat down. I took the first sip and spit it out on the floor. And I wasn't thinking, you know? It's just, that's what I did.

[00:48:39.24] So a couple of minutes later, these two gigantic Marines came over, the biggest Marines I ever saw in my life. And they said you gotta leave. So they escorted me out. And I said, how come they send two of you guys after little old me? He said, there's never any trouble if there's enough of us, you know?

[00:49:04.11] But this little bantam sergeant came by and pointed his finger at me, you gotta have some more manners. You gotta-- I said come on out here and we'll discuss it. And of course he wouldn't come out and discuss it. Yeah, pussy. And an arrogant pussy. I don't mind pussies. But arrogant pussies I hate. Dumb ass.

[00:49:26.69] MARC HENDERSON: What other sorts of things did you do in Vietnam for recreation?

[00:49:31.96] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, we read. There was special services, I think they called it, where you could get models to put together or cars, I don't know, different things. I didn't do any of that. So I guess my recreation consisted mostly of reading. They showed movies. I don't know how often they did. But there was an outdoor area where they could show these movies. And so we would do that too. And of course, the EM club, a great source of recreation.

[00:50:10.47] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have a reel-to-reel or a radio?

[00:50:13.96] JAMES SANDOZ: I didn't. A lot of guys did, but I didn't. I'll tell you a story, if I may, not about me.

[00:50:22.03] MARC HENDERSON: Please.

[00:50:23.47] JAMES SANDOZ: This guy bought a Sony reel-to-reel, took all the guts out of it and loaded it up with .45-caliber bullets-- weapons, .45-calibers plus the rounds plus a couple of grenades, taped them to the sides and all and sent it home. So it got home safely, you know. His father or whoever he sent it to wrote back and said it's here.

[00:50:46.00] This other guy did the same thing, but instead of putting munitions he put a poncho liner, which were prized beyond belief, you know how popular they were. But he sent one of them home. And he got caught and he got brig time for it. And it's just-- I guess that's how the die rolls.

[00:51:08.41] MARC HENDERSON: Why was the poncho liner so prized?

[00:51:10.81] JAMES SANDOZ: I'm not sure. It was new. It was a new thing. And getting one, and we did get them for the bush, was a real treat. Because it would actually keep you warm in the monsoons, which were when it was impossible to be warm. And so-- and in the monsoons, the radio had to stay dry. It didn't matter if the operator was drenched, but the radio had to stay dry, which I didn't argue with that. I wanted that radio.

[00:51:44.29] JAMES SANDOZ: Not personally. They had these, I guess, motion detectors that they would lay out. And they could tell if there was movement in that area. But I never dealt with them. But some teams went out and I think inserted them. And they would go out and check them sometimes.

[00:52:08.69] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, I had, as a member of ANGLICO, I had interactions with them. I worked with the ARVNs more than anybody else. But I also worked with Koreans. And I don't know, I loved them both. The ARVNs were undertrained and not as trustworthy. And the Koreans were reliable. We trusted the Koreans.

[00:52:44.15] The Koreans, it was pointed out to me, I don't if it's true, but it was pointed out to me that the Koreans today, meaning at that time, were like the ARVNs at that time were during the Korean War. You know what I'm saying? Am I making sense? Yeah, but I worked with the Koreans. I lived with them for a month. And don't ask me where, because I forget. And I liked them. I liked them.

[00:53:20.81] But I liked the ARVNs, too. I liked them. One guy, I'd get him gasoline. So the gas depot, you'd go in, American, you go in, you grab the pump, and fill up your tank. And other tanks if you wanted, the five gallon jerrycans. And so I'd always fill up a jerrycan or two extra for him. He probably sold it to the NVA, I don't know.

[00:53:54.68] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, in Nha Trang, the interaction with the local population was at the bars, and mostly the prostitutes. That was about it. I mean, there wasn't any friendship there. I mean, we were friendly, but there wasn't any friendship development. In Tuy Hoa, I told you I was working on that team and they would have lunch and invite me with the mayor. And so we did interact more with them. And they were terrific. They were terrific.

[00:54:34.76] JAMES SANDOZ: The worst days are the days that you get the shit scared out of you and maybe get wounded. But you survive those. And so the worst days were when you lost somebody that you knew and especially if it was a close friend. And-- and I gotta admit that none of my close friends were killed when I was there. A friend of mine, a team leader, I was his assistant team leader, Alan Bierlein, we came back from one patrol we got shot at out.

[00:55:15.04] And we were sitting on top of a bunker smoking cigarettes. And one of us turned to the other and said, you know, we could have been killed out there. And we both just burst out laughing. I mean, it was just such a ridiculous statement. Of course, we could've been killed out there. That's what we're going out there for, jeez. But it's funny that I remember that.

[00:55:43.80] JAMES SANDOZ: See, I hate to admit this, but my best day was probably Tet. Coming back alive. I'd been proven, been tested, and passed the test, you know. That's probably it. Most days, they just run together.

[00:56:04.51] JAMES SANDOZ: Well, letters. But when I was in Nha Trang, our radio was on the roof. And a MARS station was on the roof. It was used to call home. And so the operator on the roof right next to us would talk to a ham operator in Des Moines or Saskatchewan or somewhere in the continent.

[00:56:28.46] And that person would call your home collect. And the charges, of course, they always accepted them. At least my family did. I'm sure most of them-- And then you could talk to them on the radio and get it patched in into the phone. So it's just really neat. So I got to call a couple of times through that.

[00:56:48.71] And of course, letters. I don't remember writing a lot of letters. And yeah, I felt bad about that, at the time even sometimes. Because you should keep in touch. So my remembering was that I didn't write any letters. But this guy I went to high school with who didn't serve, he told me, we were having lunch one time, he told me, he said, I've got some letters that you wrote me from Vietnam. And he had like 14 letters. And it was really fun reading those. I didn't remember writing them.

[00:57:32.04] MARC HENDERSON: What were the kind of things that you wrote about?

[00:57:34.20] JAMES SANDOZ: About everything, boot camp. Because it wasn't just Vietnam. And radio school, I drew little pictures, one picture was a stick figure with a question mark coming out of the head and a radio labeled radio, and me. But I didn't remember that, you know? It was really, really neat to reread those or to read them. Yeah.

[00:58:07.80] MARC HENDERSON: How much news about the war you were fighting made its way to you?

[00:58:12.54] JAMES SANDOZ: I don't know. Because I never paid attention to the news. You know, I didn't trust them, for one thing. And I don't know.

[00:58:22.83] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. How about news about what was going on in the United States, whether it was politics or demonstrations? Did any of that news make its way to you?

[00:58:33.64] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah, some did.

[00:58:34.77] MARC HENDERSON: What did you think about it?

[00:58:35.92] JAMES SANDOZ: I didn't pay a lot of attention. The--what do we call them? peace mongers, that's what we called them. [LAUGHING] Goddamn peace mongers. Yeah.

[00:58:52.01] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever personally witness any demonstrations in the States or in Vietnam?

[00:58:59.40] JAMES SANDOZ: No, I want to say no, I'm sure I didn't. Now, wait a minute, first year back, I went to school at the community college. And there was a demonstration or two there. It was-- what was that called? There was one day in particular in '69, but it was a nationwide strike. I don't remember.

[00:59:27.59] But then my professor said I'm going to be here because I don't want you to be here. I want you to be able to boycott. So I'll be here, but I'm not expecting anybody to show up.

And he was encouraging us not to show up. So I went to his office when the thing was going on. And he wasn't there.

[00:59:52.82] So the next time I saw him, I said you're a liar. And I dropped the class. I'm not gonna speak for anybody. I'm just gonna speak for me. But my feeling was that these protesters wanted-- their primary exclusive goal was to save their own ass. And that was my belief. And it was reinforced when the draft went away, then no more protests.

[01:00:28.63] JAMES SANDOZ: When I went home, I was discharged. That was the end of my service. But it reminds me of, I think, a funny story. I went through ANGLICO, 3rd Force for a long time, and I was getting salty. And the CO wanted us out for PT every morning at 6 o'clock.

[01:00:53.05] So one morning I said, I'm not getting up for PT. So I stayed in bed. And the second lieutenant came by, saw me in bed. He kicked me in the feet and he said, are you sick, Marine? I said no, sir, I'm just tired. And so he wrote me up. And I was up for a promotion. I was a corporal then, but I was up for a promotion.

[01:01:19.02] And I found this out through the company clerk who knows everything. So this lieutenant, my promotion was-- the first sergeant and the CO were talking about it. And this lieutenant said, you're not gonna promote him. He was disrespectful or whatever. And the first sergeant said, the fuck we aren't. We're promoting him. So I got promoted.

[01:01:46.92] And so I was due to leave in a few days. And this lieutenant came up to me and said, well, Sergeant Sandoz, congratulations. He says, I'm gonna put you in charge of making sure everybody is out for PT, classic OCS training. I said, don't you worry, sir. As long as I'm here, those men will be out there at 0600. No worries. And then he said, well, you're getting kind of short, aren't you? I said, yeah. He says, well, when are you leaving? I said, tomorrow. You could see the smoke coming out of his ears.

[01:02:22.90] So my friend Dwayne Neery, he was probably my best friend over there, close. And he was in language school, which was in Da Nang. And I came down from Quang Tri. So I stopped in to see him. So we sat behind one of these logs behind the hooches and we drank beer. I don't know where we got the beer. But we got the beer and we're drinking the beer.

[01:02:49.24] And his boss or instructor or somebody came by and said, you're in trouble. You're not supposed to be drinking. You shouldn't be drunk all the time, blah, blah, blah. And he takes us to the-- I want to say, MP compound. I don't know whether it was. But it had a desk like a cop place. And we had our two half beers there.

[01:03:12.36] He said, listen, you're drinking on duty. We've got the evidence. He says to me, you're gonna be winding up staying here longer than you want. And I really didn't care. I said, I don't care how long I stay here. But he says, well, we got you. So I wasn't worried about it, but I was worried about Dwayne getting in trouble.

[01:03:29.69] So anyhow, this guy turns his back and Dwayne and I look at each other. We each grab the beer and drink it down. Put the empty can there. He says, and we got the evidence. He picked up the empty can. And he said, oh fuck. And that was the end of that story.

[01:03:46.68] So anyhow, I went there. And then I went to-- I flew to Okinawa, but I don't remember where I took off, probably Tan Son Nhut, probably Saigon. So we had our duffel bags with everything in them, personal stuff and some other uniforms, you know. And they were stored there while we were in Vietnam. So we picked that up. We actually found it, you know, and picked that up and then flew back to Twentynine Palms.

[01:04:21.60] I don't know if we flew directly there or not. But that's where we wound up. That's where we were waiting for all the discharge papers. And they had this little class for-- because everybody there was getting discharged. So it was a class-- what you can do with your MOS. So he gave people advice that had different MOSs. And he got to me, he said, radio telegraph operator, he said you can drive a taxi. He said, I'm sorry, that's all I got.

[01:04:57.94] MARC HENDERSON: So what did you do after the Marine Corps?

[01:05:00.28] JAMES SANDOZ: I got a job right away in a factory making paper cups. I worked here for a couple of years. And then I went back to school.

[01:05:10.88] MARC HENDERSON: Was it difficult to get a job?

[01:05:12.79] JAMES SANDOZ: No. You know, I never have been the brightest person. But I applied for this job and I got it. And I didn't look anywhere else. The job paid \$2.16 an hour. And it was \$0.16 more than anybody else because I worked the night shift, 11:00 to 7:00. So the base pay was \$2 an hour, \$0.08 if you worked 3:00 to 11:00 and 8 more cents if you worked till midnight. But I was happy with that.

[01:05:45.62] MARC HENDERSON: What year was this that you were discharged?

[01:05:47.87] JAMES SANDOZ: This was 1969. And at the factory, after about a year, they promoted me to foreman. And my salary went up to 600 bucks a month. And that was a goddamn fortune. That was-- I didn't have any expenses. I was living at home. That was good. And--

[01:06:15.19] MARC HENDERSON: This was back in Baltimore?

[01:06:16.58] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah.

[01:06:17.42] MARC HENDERSON: What was your reception at home like after Vietnam?

[01:06:22.63] JAMES SANDOZ: My home was, you know, thrilled. I mean, my family, is that what you mean?

[01:06:27.65] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah, did they know you were coming and did they throw a party or any of that?

[01:06:31.25] JAMES SANDOZ: No. They had a bit of throwing a party because they're not party people. But I didn't tell them. And they knew I was coming home soon. But I didn't tell them when I was coming. I took a taxi from the airport and knocked on the door.

[01:06:57.45] They were glad to see me. Yeah. And my friends, they were glad to see me. None of them were antiwar demonstrators. I don't know how they felt towards the war, but they didn't demonstrate anyway. And I was thinking about this recently that about half of my friends, high school friends, went in the military. And about half didn't, they went to college.

[01:07:21.13] And those of us who went in the military don't feel any resentment to them, the ones that didn't. They had their opportunity. They took what they had, you know? No big deal. So you know, they welcomed me, patted me on the back, bought me a beer, and it was good.

[01:07:45.31] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have difficulty adjusting to life after combat?

[01:07:51.83] JAMES SANDOZ: No, because I just put it out of my mind.

[01:08:00.16] MARC HENDERSON: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans?

[01:08:05.11] JAMES SANDOZ: A good amount. I mean, you know, these reunions. And I'm a member of the VFW. I don't go anymore, but I used to participate I guess a reasonable amount. I spent 30, 35 years pretending I never heard of Vietnam or the Marine Corps. And I was teaching at the university for a lot of that time.

[01:08:33.27] And then two buddies from Recon got a hold of me. And they talked me into going to a reunion. This was 2000. Talked me into going to go into a reunion in San Diego. And I went and it was life changing. I was now a veteran. And I now accepted everything I did, you know, and became proud of it.

[01:08:59.62] So it was-- I really was impressed. I'm glad they did that. But I got a call from an anonymous call or something that said, I got some friends you served with. You want to get in touch with them? I said, no. But I talked to them directly. So I couldn't do that.

[01:09:25.43] JAMES SANDOZ: I think at this point most of us have forgiven everyone else. I think the antiwar people don't resent or hate us anymore. And I don't think we hate or resent them. And I think the Gulf War was a major influence on the attitude towards Vietnam veterans. There were people against that war. People against every war.

[01:09:53.77] But they didn't go through the baby killer name calling or anything like that. And I think it was scripted that way. I don't think they believed that the new guys weren't baby killers, but I think it was scripted that way so as not to piss off the general public. But in any case, that's what I think.

[01:10:18.53] MARC HENDERSON: Did your experience as a combat veteran influence the way you think about combat veterans returning home today?

[01:10:27.89] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:10:28.91] MARC HENDERSON: How so?

[01:10:29.38] JAMES SANDOZ: Yeah. Welcome home, brother. You know, I've been there. Glad you made it.

[01:10:45.33] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[01:10:49.50] JAMES SANDOZ: In America? I think it's remembered as a mistake, I think. JAMES SANDOZ: I've turned into a real baby. I mean, I burst out in tears for just about anything, I mean, yeah. And this is included in that anything. But I went to the Wall, from the time-- from the Friday before it was officially opened until recently, maybe five years ago, every year on Memorial Day Saturday, there, the rest of the time.

[01:11:35.95] And the first time I went-- it was the second time, I took my family. And I said, I don't know what's wrong with me. But my wife won't go back. She said it was just too much for her. And the kids, I take turns taking them one at a time, one each year.

[01:12:03.07] And two things happened at the Wall. One thing with my daughter, she was about five, maybe six. And she was acting up. And I said, listen, babe, you gotta show respect. These people were people that died in the war that I fought in. And her eyes got as big as saucers. She said, you fought in the war? I said, yeah. She said, what planet did you fight for? You know.

[01:12:45.72] And then I took my son. And he was probably eight or nine at the time. We were at the Wall facing the panels. And this woman about my age, she said, so do you know anybody up there? I said, yeah. She said my husband's up there. I said, I'm so sorry. And we hugged. And we hugged for minutes.

[01:13:19.43] And her son, grandson was there with his son, her grandson, I'm sure. Very young, four or five maybe. They all just sat around. They didn't have any idea what to do and neither did we. But we finally broke up the hug and went on our way. But that was a powerful thing.

[01:13:48.25] JAMES SANDOZ: It was a patrol. We got the warning order. And so Alan Bierlein, my team leader, and myself, this fellow named Medevac Mochelle. He was called Medevac because he was medevacked out of about three patrols, never injured, never wounded. He got malaria and pneumonia and sprained his ankle. So we were always glad to have him because we figured if anybody is going to get injured, it's gonna be him. So he was a sponge for that.

[01:14:21.08] But also a gunnery sergeant from the motor pool came up to Alan. He knew Alan. And he said, listen, you gotta take me out on this patrol. They want to get rid of me. And if I'm at

a flight, they won't be able to. So Alan asked me, did I mind? I said no, I don't mind. So it was Mochelle, Bierlein, myself, and this gunny.

[01:14:45.28] And so we were on a normal patrol. And we noticed some animal traps. And we were supposed to get pulled, that night was our extraction. We saw these animal traps. And we went up to a place where we looked, and called in, and asked to extend our patrol another night. And that takes them a little bit of work. Because you gotta make sure there's no artillery planned for that area or anything else. So that was fine.

[01:15:24.91] And we were in this copse of trees, small trees. And there was-- we were hidden, but not protected by those. And a trail going past us. And Mochelle and I went to look for a harbor site, which is where you spend the night. So we go up and there's a big hill down. And we're up here. And I look and I see marching these NVA Soldiers in uniform. And it looked like approximately the whole NVA Army is coming our way.

[01:16:06.61] So I push Mochelle down, I get down, and we crawl back to where we were, tell Alan. We only have seconds. We tell Allan, look, these guys are coming. So Alan decided, and it was smart, we were just gonna let them go by. Just don't bother them, they won't bother us, which I think was a good idea, except that when one of those guys, I think the leader of the NVA, there was maybe a dozen, dozen and a half of them, when he took off his pack, he turned around and Alan and he made eye contact. So Alan opened fire.

[01:16:53.11] But before then, the rest of the troops had sat down for lunch right on the other side of that copse of trees. And I was kneeling there with my rifle. And Mochelle was kneeling behind me with his rifle right at my ear. And the gunny was there. So we were ready to let them go or let them have lunch and go their way.

[01:17:20.06] But that's when Alan and this one guy made eye contact. And before that happened, there was an NVA soldier leaning against the trees, that copse of trees, and actually against my knee. He was kind of sitting on my foot, but certainly leaning against my knee.

[01:17:45.70] MARC HENDERSON: How long was he there?

[01:17:48.19] JAMES SANDOZ: Not real long. Maybe a half a minute, maybe about a half a minute.

[01:17:52.60] MARC HENDERSON: But he never noticed you?

[01:17:53.80] JAMES SANDOZ: No. No. I'm surprised he didn't hear my heart beating. So but he did notice us. And we opened fire. And we pretty much wiped those guys out. But then there were other guys coming up, other NVAs. And we were running down this path.

[01:18:11.62] And we did the Australian Peel, which is a maneuver. I guess it was developed in Australia. But point person empties his-- point person empties his magazine, peels back behind the other members, how ever many there are. The next guy empties his, et cetera, and it goes down that way. So we did that.

[01:18:38.99] And then I threw a grenade. And it either hit a branch or I hit my arm or something. But it didn't go very far. And the gunnery sergeant got wounded from that grenade. Not serious, just a little bit of shrapnel. And he was tickled pink. He was so happy. For a career Marine, it's great to have a Purple Heart, you know? So he was happy.

[01:19:04.64] And we went down a hill looking for a zone where the chopper could pick us up and there wasn't any. So we had to go back to the original spot. And the chopper came in and came in hot. And there were Bird Dogs, at least one-- there was a Bird Dog overseeing us. I don't know which model plane it was. And he was reporting lots of rifle fire, lots of muzzle flashes. And I don't know what they were shooting at. That's what the--

[01:19:34.49] MARC HENDERSON: Presumably you, right?

[01:19:35.93] JAMES SANDOZ: Presumably, but we were back a ways from them. They couldn't see us, I don't think. I don't remember any bullets whizzing by.

[01:19:43.58] MARC HENDERSON: Maybe they were shooting at him?

[01:19:45.11] JAMES SANDOZ: Maybe, they could have been. Yeah. And so then a bird came and picked us up there. And that's it. That's it. We made it back.

[01:19:56.21] MARC HENDERSON: Was it normal for your teams to remain overnight an extra night, to request an extra night?

[01:20:05.36] JAMES SANDOZ: I don't recall anybody else doing it. But I don't think it was unheard of. If there was a reason to stay around, you stayed around. And a funny bunch of men-- they didn't say, I can get out of here, watch the clock go down so that I can leave. They wanted to do the mission. They wanted to see what the heck was going on.

[01:20:28.28] So yeah. That's just that's how it worked. And so that NVA leaning against my leg made me a bit of a legend in some people's eyes. Undeserved, because I didn't-- it really wasn't anything. And Mochelle opened fire with his muzzle right at my ear. And those are pretty loud.

[01:20:55.53] MARC HENDERSON: So what was going through your mind while he was leaning on you?

[01:20:59.51] JAMES SANDOZ: It's hard to admit, but I was wondering how I'm gonna get these guys bodies back, my friends.

[01:21:07.34] MARC HENDERSON: You didn't expect to make it out?

[01:21:08.97] JAMES SANDOZ: I didn't expect the team to make it out. But I wasn't thinking about my body, I was thinking about me getting these guys out, which was pretty foolish. But that's what I was thinking. And I didn't have to, of course.

[01:21:22.56] MARC HENDERSON: Well, thank you, sir. Thank you for sharing that with us.

[01:21:26.67] JAMES SANDOZ: You're welcome.

[01:21:32.30] MARC HENDERSON: Have you heard of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[01:21:35.35] JAMES SANDOZ: No.

[01:21:36.22] MARC HENDERSON: So it's the office we're from. And our office is a DOD office. And we've been kind of tasked on behalf of the DOD and the nation to thank and honor Vietnam veterans for their service. And so one way we do that is with a lapel pin.

[01:22:03.13] And so I would like to give you a lapel pin today. On the front is the bald eagle. And it's got five stars, one for each ally. And the words on the front say, "Vietnam War Veteran." But to me the most endearing part is on the back. And it says, "A Grateful Nation Thanks and Honors You."

[01:22:27.79]