

## **Swift, William USA**

[00:00:12.83] WILLIAM SWIFT: I was born November the 18th, 1949. Well, I was born in a little place called Mesic, M-E-S-I-C, North Carolina. And it's right on the Neuse River, the Pamlico County Sound. And it's in Pamlico County, North Carolina, which is close to Craven County in New Bern. It's the home of Pepsi-Cola, and it's the first recognized city in North Carolina to be the capital.

[00:00:46.89] We were surrounded by a lot of military bases-- Camp Lejeune Marine Base, Cherry Point Marine Base. And I'm right next to the little place called Hoboken, North Carolina, which is where John F. Kennedy landed his boat during the World War II timeframe. And it's just a historical area, and it's right on the Atlantic Ocean.

[00:01:16.92] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, it's just a sister and I, and we're 10 years apart. Small family, in a small community-- everybody knew everybody. Everybody would spank everybody. And I come from a Baptist-type community, church.

[00:01:32.76] And I went to Pamlico County-- I went to Pamlico Central High School for a year, and of course, I went away to a boys' high school for a couple of years. And then, I come back, and I walked with Pamlico County High School.

[00:01:52.02] I'm one of the first 11 black, African-American students to walk at an all-white school in 1968. Back then, we were-- across the river was-- they considered the colored school, which went back to years and years and years before that. Well, my sister, being a worldly person and in the Air Force, she convinced my parents that it was time for me to get out of that type of community, stop going through the back door, sitting in the back of the bus, and learn some things.

[00:02:25.56] So I did. I went to New York, went to an all-boys school. And it was quite an experience, coming from North Carolina. So when I had enough credits to graduate, my parents wanted me to graduate in front of the people in the county.

[00:02:44.46] So when I went back to graduate, they said, well, you have to-- you can't go back with the colored kids. You are selected to go to Pamlico High School, which was quite a disappointment. And it was an experience. So 11 of us, in 1968, was the first to graduate as a group.

[00:03:07.81] And then, of course, history followed it right after that. I joined the military, being surrounded by Marines, Navy, and of course, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, which is right in Goldsboro down there. And it was a fascinating thing to see those people in uniform all the times.

[00:03:26.47] I mean, of course, the uniforms were different back in the '60s and '50s. But it was just something just special. Then, I brought-- we took a couple of field trips right here in Fayetteville. And to watch people jump out of an airplane was just something that just took the breath away from you.

[00:03:48.04] I mean, you just could not wait. And I-- during my early years-- late years in high school, I couldn't wait to get to that age when my parents would give me permission to join the military. And immediately, I checked airborne, because I wanted to be jumping out of that airplane. And I enlisted.

[00:04:10.54] DEVON HARDY: So what was your sense of the war before you went to Vietnam, since it was going on-- ?

[00:04:14.14] WILLIAM SWIFT: Excited. Couldn't wait to get there. WILLIAM SWIFT: Right here, Fort Bragg. Oh, it was a rough basic training. The temperature that you see outside now was the temperature that I went through basic training in. We got up early in the morning, sometimes three, four o'clock in the morning.

[00:04:36.75] We would run Long Street. We would run all the way out to the church out here on Long Street. And I was in B31, which is right down off the old Division Road, and I think as of right now, there's only my barracks and the supply room that's still standing.

[00:04:55.95] Everything else is modern, beautiful four-story buildings that-- no more World War I or World War II barracks down there, as everything is just modernized. It's really beautiful. But basic training was rough. The reception station was right here on main post, Fort Bragg.

[00:05:16.68] Of course, we left from Raleigh early, early in the morning, and arrived at Fort Bragg. And even in the morning, it was, I would say, 85 to 90 degrees. And we walked from there straight to the area to be issued uniforms. Got our uniforms, and we walked, marched right on down the street. There was no vehicle carrying you. You walked, you ran-- and in boots, I must say.

[00:05:52.99] DEVON HARDY: And how much weight were you carrying, too?

[00:05:55.18] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, it's hard to say, because you had two duffel bags. I would say over 100 pounds. [CHUCKLES] It was 13 weeks at that time. We graduated from here. The next day, you were shipped to Fort Benning, Georgia for jump school.

[00:06:16.86] DEVON HARDY: Now, can you talk about jump school, what that was like? Because you seemed to be excited for it.

[00:06:19.32] WILLIAM SWIFT: Oh. Jump school was something that even gives me chills now. I'm-- 40, 40-plus years ago. Jump school was-- the first couple of days was detail and getting up. And, oh, the first thing you see was what we call black hats.

[00:06:37.17] It was the gentlemen that were putting us through, instructors, and they all wore black hats, white T-shirts, pretty white, crisp T-shirts, shined boots. They would wake you up, oh-dark-thirty in the morning, and they would put you to bed late, late at night. And it was constantly running. We would run five and six miles in the morning.

[00:06:58.68] We would come back. We would put on spit shine shoes. We would put on starched khaki pants and fatigues. And then, we would go right out to training. And we would train up until the lunchtime. Sometimes we would be so dirty and so funky, we had to go back and we showered again and changed clothes for the afternoon training.

[00:07:20.40] And it was constantly just like that. And you get-- first, you get your ground-week training-- mostly PT-- and they learn you a few things about airborne. And then, you go into your second-week training, which was tower training.

[00:07:40.44] And then, your third-week training was just one day of PT, and all your five jumps. Once you get your five jumps, you're officially what we call a novice jumper. That means you have your five jumps, you get your certificate, and you were off to an airborne organization.

[00:08:02.55] DEVON HARDY: So it was a three-week--

[00:08:03.99] WILLIAM SWIFT: It was a three-week training.

[00:08:06.27] DEVON HARDY: And what was the second week?

[00:08:07.92] WILLIAM SWIFT: The second week was tower week, where you get into this 60-foot tower, the 250-foot tower. That was scary. [CHUCKLES] That was quite scary, because that was about the highest I had ever been in my life.

[00:08:22.78] I had never flown a plane and been in a plane yet, so that was quite an experience to be-- and of course, we had the best training, the best emergency training and instructors in the world, so you wasn't afraid of anything happening. You were just more afraid of what the people around you had told you before you ever jumped. That was the thing-- listening to that other people.

[00:08:51.12] DEVON HARDY: And how is the actual jumping experience during that third week?

[00:08:53.76] WILLIAM SWIFT: Oh, it was sweet. I mean, I have cold chills now, thinking about it.

[00:08:58.17] DEVON HARDY: So you enjoyed it.

[00:08:59.28] WILLIAM SWIFT: Love it, and would do it again now at 67 years old.

[00:09:03.54] DEVON HARDY: Did all of that training-- did that prepare you for Vietnam?

[00:09:07.68] WILLIAM SWIFT: It most certainly did. And I went, of course. My first airborne unit was the 101st Airborne. And it was based out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky. So I left Fort Campbell, Kentucky and went to Vietnam.

[00:09:26.46] DEVON HARDY: So you went-- after jump school you went straight--

[00:09:28.59] WILLIAM SWIFT: After jump school, I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. WILLIAM SWIFT: I was a little over 18, not quite 19 years old. I arrived in Vietnam in early '69. And it was a day of-- even though it's hot out here today, or 100 degrees today, it was nothing like Vietnam.

[00:09:57.13] The heat, the smell-- was something that I had never, ever dealt with in my 18-plus years. It was something that you never, ever forget. Arriving there, not only the heat and the smell, but also the sound-- the artillery sound.

[00:10:18.28] Immediately, when you hit, the first thing they say was, go to your bunker. We didn't even know what a bunker was at that time, except the little foxhole that we learned to dig here in the States. So you learn very quickly what war was all about.

[00:10:36.40] DEVON HARDY: And how did you arrive there from Fort Campbell to--

[00:10:39.04] WILLIAM SWIFT: We went from Fort Campbell to San Francisco. And we stayed at San Francisco for five, six days, and we went to a San Francisco Giants baseball game. Got to see Willie Mays.

[00:10:59.44] And I don't know if that was good or bad, or that was jinx or whatever, because-- but it was something that they did traditionally. We got to see the Golden Gate Bridge, go over that, and come back, processed. And we got on American Airlines, I believe it was. Oh, Tiger-- Tiger flight, whatever that was.

[00:11:23.09] And from there, straight to Alaska. From Alaska, right into Yokota, Japan, and then right into Bien Hoa, Vietnam. My initial duty, I'm ashamed to say, was to go and burn waste. That was my initial duty in Vietnam.

[00:11:46.36] I was an E-4, which was-- had a little bit of rank, and of course, I learned very quickly to take charge. So I didn't have to do that but a few days, and they put me in charge of that. And then, I went through an interview.

[00:12:03.79] And through that interview-- I didn't realize what the interview was. I just volunteered. And they said, sit down here. You're going for an interview. And I said, well, what am I going to get to do? Go home early?

[00:12:16.48] And they just laughed, of course. And they said, no, what you're doing is you're going through combat tracker team. And I said, well, what is a combat tracker team? So I learned how to visually track the enemy, constantly, night, day, through rain, through water, through triple canopy jungles, ocean, I learn how to track the enemy with my naked eye.

[00:12:45.28] And along with that training, they sent you through dog handler schools, so I was one of the first to go through dog handler school. And that also, when the dog could not track or the dog was moving too fast, then you had to visually track yourself. And that was very unusual, and that's what a lot of people totally forgot about, that we were the first to make contact with the enemy.

[00:13:16.21] Because if there was an ambush blown or if there was sniper fire or whatever they were called, we were the first to call-- to go out and find that particular thing. Training was 12 weeks, and it was in Bien Hoa, Vietnam. And they sent me to Malaysia to learn some jungle expert training. Oh, I think six weeks. And then of course I had a week in Manila, Philippines, R&R.

[00:13:55.38] The training was real training, because you were there, and certain things could happen during the time that you were training. And the good thing about it, being a young person, as I look back on it now, you didn't fear anything, and you challenged everything that they would put out in front of you. And of course, me, of color, I really, really-- I had some very, very good instructors and leaders to say, go do it. Don't let nothing hold you back.

[00:14:32.82] Because being raised in the South, you always had that fear. Well, should I get in it or should I not get in it? But I had, and I must say, I had white instructors and leaders that pushed me all the way to where I am today.

[00:14:48.81] Because the leaders we had back in those days, they were Vietnam veterans. They were leftover Korean War veterans, and a few were World War II veterans. And they had all of this good, nice things that I have on today.

[00:15:09.85] They had that on, and you just couldn't wait to sew that on your uniform. So it was something. And I just kept pushing myself, pushing myself. And being a young man, like I said, there was no danger.

[00:15:32.48] DEVON HARDY: Now, were you a combat tracker for the rest of your tour? Was that--

[00:15:35.78] WILLIAM SWIFT: For the rest of my tour-- that tour-- rest of that tour.

[00:15:39.07] DEVON HARDY: How many tours did you have?

[00:15:40.43] WILLIAM SWIFT: I did two tours in Vietnam. My second tour of duty, I was in military intelligence. And I was a door gunner for the commander of the aviation. And of course, that was volunteered.

[00:15:58.08] Second tour was down South Vietnam, called Can Tho. I was in 1st Aviation Brigade. Well, my first tour, I was with 101st Airborne, and I was called out with the 1st-- the 187th Airborne, 101st unit.

[00:16:18.06] And we were in the A Shau Valley in Vietnam. And they had received enemy fire, and they had the ambush. And of course, we jumped right on the mission. You don't ask no questions. You just go.

[00:16:35.44] We rappel then from a helicopter, because it was-- helicopter couldn't land. And after rappelling in for a period of time-- it took so long under fire to rappel in, bring the dogs down. That's what you were worried about-- more the dog, than you were yourself.

[00:16:53.72] Making sure the dogs were saved, we rappelled them out of the helicopter and come on down. Now, me-- my dog rappelled with me, because he had gotten so used to the harnesses that we had made for him. We called it jerry rigged. And once he'd get that harness, he knew he was coming out of a helicopter.

[00:17:14.07] And we rappelled down together. I got my-- went and reported in and got my mission, what I was supposed to be doing. And they told me they had several things that happened, and here was the trail. Immediately, I put the dog on the trail.

[00:17:29.63] The jungle got so thick that I was afraid the dog, being a Labrador, very small, he would get underneath, and I would get caught, or the people behind me would get caught. So they sent a person with me with a machete-- two people, matter of fact-- and their job was to cut an area that I could walk through. Even though the dog could go under, they needed to cut that area where I could walk through, which was quite dangerous.

[00:18:00.74] And as we went-- I don't know how many kilometers it was at that time. I would say a couple of klicks, because it was like three or four hours. My dog alerted to let me know that it was danger ahead. I told the commander, I said, sir, I said, well, this is-- my dog was alerted.

[00:18:20.00] It's time that I turned the mission over to you now. Let your people move forward, because it's just the dog and I. We're out front, 150 yards or meters or whatever it was in front of everybody else. And I said, something opened fire.

[00:18:33.80] Well, his word was to-- I want a KIA, and our mission was to get one, and I don't want you to pull off this mission. So, managed-- as a good Soldier, I continued the mission.

[00:18:50.31] Now, what I did do was put the dog behind me and put him on a shorter leash, because I had him on, originally, a 25-foot leash. And I put him on a shorter leash. And he still tried to get in front of me to let me know that danger was ahead. Because Labradors did not bark, did not make sounds, unless their handler was really, really in danger.

[00:19:14.17] So he barked twice, and I knew that was trouble, that something was really happening. Well, as I turned to signal that it's really bad up front, it just opened up. And all I know is that I was trying to protect that dog. That was our main thing.

[00:19:35.01] And I was able to push the dog away from me. When I did, I got hit in both legs. So they were shooting very low. They had to shoot low, because they know it was triple-canopy jungles. And they know the only way you could do it was to come under. You couldn't go over it.

[00:19:51.45] We covered for each other so quickly. Once the person said, he's down, he's down, they didn't waste no time getting-- covering me and calling the medevac and medevacked me out. And of course, my main thing was, what about my dog?

[00:20:10.17] I wasn't so worried about myself. I really didn't know how bad I was hurt. But I wanted to make sure that dog-- so they did-- they sent that dog along with me.

[00:20:21.10] DEVON HARDY: Where did you both go to recuperate?

[00:20:23.50] WILLIAM SWIFT: We went to Camp Eagle medic evac center, and that's where they did the surgery. So it was quite a day. And it was on the 23rd of February, 1970.

[00:20:43.49] DEVON HARDY: Did you see the dog again?

[00:20:45.08] WILLIAM SWIFT: Oh, yeah, they stayed right by my side. Every day, they would bring him over.

[00:20:52.44] DEVON HARDY: Were his recon days over, or did they--

[00:20:56.23] WILLIAM SWIFT: No, no. There was not-- mine was, because I had to stay at a hospital for a while. But what they did was when I got rid of-- when I was able to walk, I was able to-- a new handler come in, and I was able to get those two together, so to merge the new handler and them together, which-- the dogs knew their job. It's just that the people had to learn the dogs, even today.

[00:21:29.12] DEVON HARDY: How long were you in the hospital?

[00:21:31.47] WILLIAM SWIFT: I-- about 40-some days. Almost 40-some days.

[00:21:40.40] DEVON HARDY: And then, you went back to the States?

[00:21:41.96] WILLIAM SWIFT: No, no, I went back to my unit. And of course, you couldn't do-- I couldn't do very much back in my unit. And then, they said, well, you're getting so close to DEROS time, which-- come back to the States.

[00:21:58.10] What we're going to do is, we're going to process you down to another hospital, and then let the doctor determine that you can fly, walk, and send you back to the States. After getting out of the hospital and bandaging up my legs, and where I was really, really-- they sent me back to Dwight D. Eisenhower's Hospital in Fort Gordon, Georgia.

[00:22:22.38] So I come back to Fort Gordon, Georgia to get medically-- and then, they would give you these certain profiles, and I said, no, I don't want a profile. Because I want to go to drill sergeant school. And they said, well, OK, well, if you can show us that you are physically fit, then we'll send you to these different schools.

[00:22:41.74] So then, I start being a young person, being a young NCO, which was a young sergeant at that time, they call it. I started going to leadership schools. And after going to leadership schools and working my way up, and of course, being a weapons person, I was in charge of all the weapons.

[00:22:59.84] All the college kids that came through ROTC right out of college, my job was to teach them to shoot properly, and also to dress properly. My two jobs was marksmanship and to

put them in the right dress and show them how to wear their uniforms. So one day, I come by. My first sergeant said, here's a copy of your orders.

[00:23:27.65] And I said, well, where am I going? He said, back to Vietnam. And I went there. I was a little disappointed that I had to go back to Vietnam. So after going through Seattle, Washington, and Fort-- they call it Fort Lewis-- I returned to Vietnam, still a young man in my 20s.

[00:23:50.19] And I didn't know what my job was going to be, because I had so many jobs and experience. And I knew I wasn't going to be a dog handler again. So they said, well, we'll put you into the S2 area, which is the intelligence section.

[00:24:05.61] And of course, a lot of the jobs, I can't talk about on the air, but that was a great job, real good job. And then, the commander said, OK, you're so good. Would you like to volunteer to fly? And I said, yes, sir.

[00:24:23.32] I never turned down a job in the military. And I always taught my Soldiers to do the same thing. And so he said, you want to fly? And I had that opportunity to fly into some really, really-- things that I never want to have to think about again. But it was an experience as a door gunner.

[00:24:45.45] DEVON HARDY: When was your second tour?

[00:24:47.34] WILLIAM SWIFT: From 1972 to 1973. WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, you become very, very close. And I think you get closer to war dogs than you do to your own house and family dog. Because you know the value of that dog. And he don't just protect you. He protects many, many men and women.

[00:25:17.33] In that unit, of course, we didn't have no women back in those days. But he-- even now, I'm pretty sure. There were something like 4,000, I believe-- if I'm correct, somewhere in the range-- that never returned to the States. Because during the-- right after the war, we just turned them loose and did not bring them back to the States.

[00:25:44.96] And that was a-- and I just found that out just a few years ago. I did not know that. I thought they was all shipped back to the States. But they weren't. And so now, it's a different story. A much different story.

[00:26:02.07] DEVON HARDY: Do you know how many were in country at one time?

[00:26:05.21] WILLIAM SWIFT: No, I do not. I know we were based up on the units. We call it divisions. I know the 101st Airborne, we had dogs-- so we had two sets of dogs. Actually, three sets of dogs.

[00:26:19.55] We had the mine-and-tunnel dog, which was the same dog. You had the tracker dog, which was my dogs. And then, you had the scout dogs, which were all German shepherds. See, German shepherds were all scouts. They were big. They were too big to--



[00:26:35.66] And some of them were quite a monster to hallow. And we had Labradors. And the mine-and-tunnel dogs that we had was hound dogs. But they were some of the smartest dogs that you ever wanted to see.

[00:26:51.28] And I don't know why enough writeup is not on about the dogs. Because they were our lives, even back in the time. Now, when the first part of Iraq started, you didn't have that. I don't want to jump this far, but you didn't have that. And then, of course, later on, I understand now that you have them.

[00:27:19.72] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, the day-to-day activity, of course-- it goes to the animal. The first thing you had to do, they would wake you up in the morning. We had 75 dogs out in our little 557th Tracker Team that we were in.

[00:27:34.91] And the first thing in the morning, they knew it was time to eat, and they would wake you up, and you had to go out. And it was just like in this room here or in your house. We had to keep things clean.

[00:27:50.69] I mean, it had to be really, really clean. So you go out. You feed your dog. You walk your dog. And we kept the dogs apart, even though they were out there.

[00:28:01.58] But the 5-5-7-- I don't even know how I'd come up with his name. We had the 5-5-7 tracker team, and then we had the 1st Brigade Scout Dog Team, which was two different platoons. But we were right there together.

[00:28:18.74] And we were-- the trackers, we took care of the tracking situation, visually and dog, and we also took care of the mines and the tunnels on that side. And then, of course, scout dogs, which were German shepherds, were trained in every area. So there were times that we all went out together, and that was one outstanding team to go out together.

[00:28:47.42] And it depended upon the terrain. If it was flat land, or if it was at the top of a fire base, where we could get around and get around good, we worked very, very, very good together. But if it was triple-canopy jungles, scout dogs did not do very well into those. We had to bring in tracker dogs.

[00:29:11.24] Because they got down, and they were on their-- I mean, they were on their bellies. And they went down, and of course, the handler had to get on his belly to follow that dog. Yes, you did. And that dog would look back at you to make sure that you were following him right along.

[00:29:29.75] It was almost like a communication, sign language, that you just don't speak. And that's the part of learning your dog so well. You knew when he were thirsty. I carried food for the dog. There were times that I didn't even eat myself, but I had to manage to make sure my dog had food.

[00:29:55.09] We weren't supposed to give them C-rations. Back in those days, it was C-ration. It wasn't MREs. But there was time that I would open the can, and I would make sure that he'd

get a little bit of this. And I would talk to him, and I would tell him that we don't have much and don't know how long we're going to be here and when the next supply is.

[00:30:15.87] But here's a little bit. And we had the canteens, the two-quart canteens, and I had a little cup that I had made-- plastic cup. And I would take it out of my pocket, and he would drink that little bit of water, and it was almost like a child. And he went, OK, and I'd better stop now, because I don't know when I'm gonna get no more.

[00:30:35.87] And of course, you know, but it was really an experience. One lady told me before-- said, you know, you should write a book. You should write a book. And I don't know how many are still living today. There's one in Conyers, Georgia, which is Gordon Myers.

[00:30:56.42] And I talked to him last week. As you get on up, and then you'll find out why I went to Georgia. I got a very unusual thing my wife and I do now. But I talked to him last week, and he pretty much knows I'm not a Facebook person, but he's on Facebook.

[00:31:13.91] So he knows-- he follows the people that-- and we had several that was killed during that time. But I would love to run down, all of us during that time that I was over there. And we were different. We had several-- I think a couple of Mexicans. We had one Puerto Rican.

[00:31:34.96] We had one Jamaican, a guy named Bill. He sang with the group called-- that made the song, "Oh, Happy Day." We had-- there was-- and then, of course, myself and Gordon, which was African-American. And then, it was the group.

[00:31:54.13] And we were very, very close, very close. We went to the PX. We couldn't put the dogs on-- if we put the dogs on the truck together, the German shepherds, we had to put muzzles on the German shepherds, because they were so jealous of the tracker dogs. So we had to take your little tracker dog, even though he was grown up, and take him like a baby.

[00:32:20.87] Get away, German shepherd. Get away, this is my dog. So you had to be very careful, because they were powerful, German shepherds were. So you put a muzzle on them to keep them from getting to your dog. And German shepherds had to be muzzled to travel in a helicopter. Tracker dogs did not.

[00:32:38.92] DEVON HARDY: How were you matched with your dog?

[00:32:41.29] WILLIAM SWIFT: You were matched with your dog when you went through-- once you graduated from visual tracking school, they took you over to the dog pound. And they'd say-- they'd call the dog's name. My dog's name was Tucker.

[00:32:57.55] They'd say, this is Tucker. Tucker, this is Bill Swift. And they would call the dog's name out, and your job was to open that cage and see, did you have enough nerves to go in there with that dog.

[00:33:15.66] Now, it was a little different than Labradors and German shepherds. And I opened that door. I opened that cage, and that dog immediately jumped up to me, and we never departed since.

[00:33:29.93] Everywhere I went, Tucker was with me. I would go to-- we had a movie, a little drive-in movie in Camp Eagle in Vietnam. We would go watch a movie. And it was ran by Seabees, if you know what Seabees are. And we would go and put our truck there, and we would watch the movie.

[00:33:51.24] And that dog would sit there the entire time and watch the movie. And when we leave and go back, start going back to our unit, he would fall asleep. [CHUCKLES]

[00:34:03.48] DEVON HARDY: What movies were you guys watching together?

[00:34:05.19] WILLIAM SWIFT: Oh, back then, Lord have mercy, that was in '69 and '70. I can't even remember some of the movies we'd be watching. But the most interesting thing to carry the dog to was a concert.

[00:34:18.66] Everybody had concerts back in those days. So we would-- of course, the German shepherd handlers would muzzle their dogs, and they would carry them, and they'd get a little restless. But the labs seemed like they never got restless. They would just sit there and sit there.

[00:34:37.55] Well, 1969, I carried my dog to see Bob Hope. And we sat. We went out front and center on the PSPs-- those things that you-- planes land on. And we got in there three o'clock in the morning.

[00:34:58.22] And my dog and I, and a couple of others were with me. And we waited for Bob Hope, and we waited. So about an hour before-- I think it was Bob Hope, Connie Stevens, or Connie Francis.

[00:35:09.41] And I didn't see the Rockettes that year. We did see the Gold Diggers that year. And the dog sat there with us. And about one hour before the helicopter landed with Bob Hope, they made us move from the front, halfway in the back, and let all the litter patients, the hospital patients, come up front-- after sitting on that hard thing for, I bet you, three or four hours. I was very upset about that.

[00:35:39.54] But we still got to meet Bob Hope, got to shake hands with him. Not much, just a finger tip with him. And you know, he was so crazy. You didn't want the camera on you, because he would say something crazy about you. So that's the kind of person he was back in those days.

[00:35:56.87] But it was an experience. The show was great. You know, he put on-- I don't know how many hours. But between Connie Francis and Connie Stevens, and the rest of them, it was outstanding. And that was my first Hollywood, I would call it, type situation.

[00:36:17.75] And it was good. It was really good, you know. And you see Bob Hope with the big caps on, like boonie caps, and the vest like we have now. And it's something that I think we emulate many times over and over again. Because he was so shocked.

[00:36:33.38] And that golf thing in his hands, yes. That was something else. And that was-- that was our Christmas present-- 1969, that was my Christmas present. Mm-hmm. Oh, I would do it again if he was living, yes.

[00:36:50.65] DEVON HARDY: Did he acknowledge the dogs, out of curiosity?

[00:36:53.50] WILLIAM SWIFT: Yeah, I can't tell you what the things he said, but he definitely-- he acknowledged them. And he played with them, some of them. But you-- I know you're not old enough to know Bob Hope, but you read about him and you watch some of the videos, and he was a character, I tell you.

[00:37:11.77] And the people that was with him-- a lot of comedians that was with him, you know. And they made us laugh, of course. And then, I think a little while right after that, we had incoming rounds. And they had to get him out of there real quickly by helicopter.

[00:37:30.13] And it wasn't big, but it was just enough that we knew to go back to our regular mission. But it was-- Vietnam was something. It was-- I don't know how much you've heard of it, but it was truly an experience.

[00:37:51.45] WILLIAM SWIFT: My first tour-- when I finally got to a unit and they taught me the things to look for, mostly while you were on a mission. They'd tell you about the weather, whether it was a monsoon. I think the monsoon quickly arrived when I started going out on missions.

[00:38:13.80] And to make sure that you was-- you carried clothes with you, or you kept them dry, and things like that, making sure that when you were on a mission, you listened, you watched, you did everything that you were taught to do to stay alive and keep that dog alive.

[00:38:35.43] That was the key thing. But we were very, very close. We would wash each other's clothes. We would take the details from each other. We didn't-- we were in 1st Brigade headquarters-- we were attached to 1st Brigade headquarters, which had the dining facility up on the hill at Camp Eagle, where we were located.

[00:38:59.39] So we did a lot of cooking. We had the Seabees to take a grill and make us a grill. And we didn't eat the regular food up there that they had. We would do a lot of cooking. We would take the sliced pork out of the cans, we would barbecue that, and of course, peaches in the can was one of our favorites-- a fruit cocktail.

[00:39:23.81] And the C-ration was something. We had, I think, five cigarettes in a box of C-rations. And I think they were either called Lucky Strikes or Pall Mall-- I'm not a smoker, but I remember there were little cigarettes. And we would save those cigarettes, and we would trade those cigarettes for lumber, or for other things, and you got beer.

[00:39:49.32] I'm a non-drinker, also. So we got Black Label beer, and we would take that beer, and we all get it together and said, all right, we need to build us a hooch, or we need to have so many sandbags. And we take that up, and we give it to the Seabees, and Seabees got all that equipment, because they were in construction, engineers.

[00:40:09.21] And they were glad. They didn't get that little extra stuff we did. And it was an exchange. It was really nice.

[00:40:18.21] DEVON HARDY: Can you tell people who may not know what a Seabee is?

[00:40:21.84] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, the Seabees-- they're part of the Navy, but yet, they are not Navy. Seabees are construction people. And I think, if I'm correct, they have to have some experience before they actually enlist.

[00:40:41.10] And I don't know what rank they come in as, but I know they come in a little higher than us. It's almost like my latter part of my career, JROTC students, come in as an E3 or an E4 or E1, E2, depending upon the levels that it was in. But the Seabees were-- they could do anything, they could build anything.

[00:41:04.86] They had explosive teams. They could come in, and they could blow up a few things, and then help you rebuild that particular area. So they help us build our what we called hooch back in those days.

[00:41:19.68] And we didn't even have beds. We had a big piece of wood that raised up if you was on the top bunk. And if you was on the bottom level, the guy-- he had stayed up all the time. But if you was on the top bunk, you raised it up with your mattress.

[00:41:40.80] And you would clean it up each day and put your mosquito net over it, so you didn't get in it at night and mosquitoes would be eating you alive. But they took care of us. I mean, they also-- they were just talented people in all areas, not just in engineering.

[00:42:00.96] They could do mechanic's work, change tires. And that was not our profession. But we had what we call a 3/4-old German truck, and that was our get-around truck. And all of us had that, got to use that vehicle.

[00:42:18.23] And sometimes all 16 or 17 of us would get on that vehicle, and we'd go to the movie, along with the dogs. It was-- that's how close we were back in those days. Go shopping to the PX. And we didn't even have enough room to bring our baggage back.

[00:42:35.65] Because back in those days, you go to the PX, the first thing you got was a Yashica 35 camera, and a reel-to-reel. That was the thing that you-- and I still have mine today. Yes, I still have the camera, still have the reel-to-reel.

[00:42:51.03] And then, of course, mine was the ones where you had to-- it was one hour music on one way, then you had to click it, and then it goes one hour back on the other side. But then, later on, they come where they automatically flipped over for you, just like everything else.

[00:43:08.26] And then, we went from reel-to-reel to eight-tracks. And then, from eight-tracks to cassettes. And now, your world. I know you may have heard of Wolfman Jack. He brought all the music on back in the day-- Wolfman Jack.

[00:43:24.62] And he spoke to us. Remember the movie, Vietnam? And he told us about it, and Wolfman Jack also-- he was the one who predicted that by the year 2000, a car would be \$50,000.

[00:43:38.72] And we all thought he was crazy to say-- just another Wolfman Jack crazy story. But cars were \$50,000 by the year 2000. But Wolfman Jack, he brought on all the music that you don't hear now, that kids should listen at, like what the war is going on right now in Iraq-- Marvin Gaye music. You know, Marvin Gaye made a song for his brother, "What's Going On." That was during that time.

[00:44:08.03] Freda Payne made a song, and I listen at it today, "Bring the boys home, and bring 'em back alive." Tyrone Davis made a song, "If I Could Turn Back the Hands of Time." So all that music back in those days is still fresh today when I hear it.

[00:44:26.64] It's just like-- make you want to dance. And at least, you could understand it, rather than what the music you hear today. But that was our favorite back then. My second tour I got to meet Sammy Davis, Jr. down in Can Tho, his wife.

[00:44:49.00] And not only did I get to meet him by being the crew chief for my commander's bird, I got to be their escort. So I escorted Sammy Davis, Jr., his wife, around to the dining facilities and places that they were authorized to see, rather than the secret spots of Can Tho.

[00:45:11.16] And he was quite-- also a character. And people do not know how funny Sammy Davis, Jr. was back in the day, he and his wife. And it that was really, really something. And we got out there, and he tried to show us a few steps.

[00:45:30.30] And of course, it was very hard for us, being in full gear and trying to protect him, and trying to dance like he could-- a little small guy, you know. And my second person that I got to meet was James Brown. The first time I got to meet James Brown was in Can Tho, Vietnam.

[00:45:51.72] And he put on a show that I never forget to date. And I think that's why I enjoyed going to Fort Gordon, Georgia. When I found out-- when he started talking about his hometown and where he was from, and when I found out I was going to Fort Gordon, Georgia, I went, wow, that's James Brown's home. I'm really excited about going there.

[00:46:12.12] But I had some very exciting days in Vietnam. It had some lonely days and some work days that you follow your mission. But in Vietnam, the entertainers took care of us, and I mean, they made us happy.

[00:46:35.43] My first tour was all combat. Combat, combat, combat, combat. And my second tour was-- a lot of times, it was-- the entertainment people who would come and visit-- they were

able to-- of course, they had the girlies, girlfriends, and things that they could sign in on Sundays.

[00:46:58.29] And there's something that, when I was in my first tour, it never, never, ever happened. Of course, they could take you to-- you could go to Saigon, and you could go dance and go to a bar, or go to Long Binh and places like that. That never happened during the first tour. It was all combat, all combat.

[00:47:19.02] So I think if the second tour had been-- the first tour had been like the second tour, I think I'd have stayed in Vietnam a long time. But no, it was quite interesting. It was-- the second tour was a lot of administrative things.

[00:47:38.37] You had so many things. And of course, we were downsizing and coming back home. My barracks, just like this black stop here, on the other side of that wall was the mortuary affair. That's where they carried the dead.

[00:47:58.55] And that's the first place-- when the person died, they would take them right behind-- and the only thing that separated us was a big shield of burlap bag. And a lot of times, I would be sleeping in my barracks, and they'd come in, and it's-- uh, don't get along. It's just another one.

[00:48:20.25] And you would turn on over and go back to sleep and think nothing of it. That was my second tour. I didn't have that first tour. We were very, very tight the first tour. But the second tour, I didn't know a lot of those people, because I was also-- the 5th Special Forces-- or the 7th Special Forces-- was on our site at the same time.

[00:48:43.24] So it was a lot of people down in that particular area that I didn't know like I got to know when we were up north. It was totally different. The second tour was in the Mekong Delta. And my first tour was all the way up close to Hanoi, Phu Bai, Evans, all into that area.

[00:49:03.11] It was a different city. It's just like going from New York to Florida. That's how much different it was. So, but it was totally, totally different. I enjoyed the second tour, but I was glad to get home.

[00:49:25.62] WILLIAM SWIFT: Donut dollies-- they had a setup where you could call. And if you called home, they had to teach the people on the other end to use radio procedures, to say, "over," when time for you to talk, and then, one time for-- vice versa, they say, "over."

[00:49:42.63] And that was something, because my mom was just rattling right on and on and on and on, and asking me questions, and she'd never say, "over," so they didn't click it over where it would give me a chance to talk. So it was-- back in the day was quite unusual.

[00:49:58.65] DEVON HARDY: How else did you communicate with your family?

[00:50:01.77] WILLIAM SWIFT: Through letters. They got-- I think they got our letter quick, because we had free mail. We didn't have to pay for mail. But we didn't get theirs very quickly,

because she sent me a pineapple cake, and I think it took two months or three months to get to me for my birthday, November the 18th.

[00:50:26.00] So I got it sometime like January. And I was so happy to get it. All I did was scrape the mold off the pineapple, and enough that I could still eat into the cake. [LAUGHS] That's how excited you would get.

[00:50:43.57] And of course, the Girl Scout-- I'll never forget they had a-- from Coos Bay, Oregon, they had a Girl Scouts that used to send-- baked cookies and stuff and send it to us. And they was-- they almost-- it was nice when they got to us.

[00:51:00.33] We had a newspaper called Overseas Weekly. I think it was called Overseas Weekly. And The Star, Military Star, I think it was called. And Wolfman Jack-- and that's how we found out what was going on back home.

[00:51:15.80] We just-- we didn't have no TVs. We purchased TVs and things. Zenith-- I don't know if you remember what a Zenith TV is, but it's one of the best TVs you can ever get. I don't know how they got it into Vietnam, but we were buying them like you wouldn't believe.

[00:51:35.48] And they were black and white, no color. And I bought a couple of those and sent them home, but we had no hookup to hook it up in Vietnam, other than music. That's all we had. We never got to watch-- I never got to watch a TV or nothing on my first tour, my first tour.

[00:51:59.13] It was in 1972, my second tour, and I was shocked that they had televisions in Vietnam. I went to Long Binh, and I happened to go by an office. I was on my way to use the bathroom, and I looked in that office, and there was a TV. And I said, man, they got a TV in there. And I was surprised. I hadn't seen that, out of two tours, my first time.

[00:52:29.94] WILLIAM SWIFT: Second tour-- second tour. It was best to get to meet all of those people, and I got to do a lot of things that I didn't do in Vietnam the first time, because it was so mission, strictly, that I just couldn't do it.

[00:52:50.33] WILLIAM SWIFT: Quite a few of those days, even though I didn't get hit, but we had some bad missions in Vietnam. I worked with the Marines. I worked with the 1st Marine Division out of the Da Nang, I think they called it Lang Co Bridge or somewhere down there.

[00:53:07.82] I worked with them. The 101st-- you can see, the 101st-- I'm so proud of them. They were very visible in Vietnam. And if somebody said, we need something, and you had 101st patch on, they didn't mind sending you.

[00:53:26.57] And of course, like I said, being young, we didn't mind exploring the new things, and we did. And so I worked with the 1st Marine Division, and they didn't have dogs. That's why we worked with them.

[00:53:40.76] And they were crazy. Their protocol and their Geneva Convention was not regular Army. I'll tell you that. And so a lot of their missions were very scary that they wanted you to do.



[00:54:01.62] To put it nicely was that they wanted kills, and they didn't care what they get to get a kill or a KI or captured VC. And that area that they were in was mostly what they call Viet Congs. We didn't go through, like up north, where you had NVA uniform-type people there.

[00:54:26.75] It was the little Montagnard boys and the little ones that we thought we could trust by working with us, and they were not all the time. They weren't to be trusted.

[00:54:41.56] DEVON HARDY: Actually, can you explain who the Montagnard troops were?

[00:54:45.59] WILLIAM SWIFT: They were the ones that fought against us last month. This month, they gave up and they turned themselves in, and said, OK, I can help you, tell you where the enemies are. I can tell you where the booby traps are. I can tell you where the mines are located.

[00:55:07.12] And a lot of times, they were very, very good soldiers. We had to put trust in them like we do any other country that we go to. And I've had a couple of good ones. Now, dogs did not like them, because they had the same smell as the enemy.

[00:55:27.27] So the Labradors would be kind of finicky about them. But the German shepherd would bite them. So we had to make sure we keep them away from the dogs. It was a different ballgame.

[00:55:44.33] But for mission goals, they were good. They were very good navigators. They knew how to travel the mountains. They knew exactly where the booby traps were set and how to get around them.

[00:56:00.71] And the reason being, I guess, because some of them set them there, you know. It may not be true, but that's in my mind, that's what I believe. We had a few of the ARVNs, which was on Camp Casey. But most of the ARVNs were at the higher level.

[00:56:17.05] They wasn't at the level that I was located. See, I was at the bottom, and everything came through us. And by the time they got up to the other levels, it was all administration and the ARVNs were dressed in nice, pretty clothes, and so forth and so on. So no, I didn't have very much. Only the Montagnards-- and few of those.

[00:56:42.69] WILLIAM SWIFT: A couple of Philippine Army people that worked with us, that had been in Vietnam for years. Thailand-- that was with the Special Forces that went over in the early years before the war-- not war-- before the Vietnam conflict had actually commenced.

[00:57:02.25] I worked with a couple of them and their sons, and their cousins and things like that. And the Australians-- we had Australians. And they were excited to work with us, because they had never seen dogs or how we worked in anything before.

[00:57:20.01] And the thing that I watched-- I noticed about them, they were different. And I said, they're weird. They got their hats turned up on the side, and we called them Australian bush hats. So they were-- it was a different ballgame.

[00:57:37.08] They were the type of people that-- mostly that I worked with-- that didn't think they could be killed. And like a fool, we followed right behind them, being young Soldiers. You know, we would always say that the airborne was-- that we lead the way, and we tried to lead the way.

[00:57:53.86] But all the ones that I had was-- they were tracker experts. They were jungle experts. Or else, they were tunnel experts in different Asian countries. And I don't know where they got the training or how they did it, but they were good. It was good.

[00:58:16.24] DEVON HARDY: Did you have any interaction with our other two allies, the New Zealanders, and then the Republic of Korea? The ROKs?

[00:58:22.63] WILLIAM SWIFT: Not until I went to Korea. I did spend a tour in Korea, and I had nine Koreans that were assigned to me. And I think they was called KATUSA-- whatever you call them. And they were all educated, but they didn't have any military experience.

[00:58:45.57] They were all college graduates. And they learned a lot, I'm sure, from me, because I stayed on them individually back then. But now, they were sharp. I had one who was lazy, kind of lazy.

[00:59:03.54] And he liked my blonde girls, and I had to let him know very quickly, if you go-- like my blonde girls, then you'll like this bald-headed first sergeant. And so he left them alone, but he was fascinated with-- I don't know why.

[00:59:21.00] He told me one day, he said, oh, they're different, they're different. I said, they're Soldiers. Because I had females in my-- a lot of females. I had 80 females in my company. And it was totally unusual for me, being a combat Soldier.

[00:59:39.52] See, I left here. I was in XVIII Airborne Corps, from Fort Bragg. And I had come down on levy to go to Korea. So when I went to Korea, they were going to put me in a ceremonial company, because all my ceremony experience as drill sergeant.

[00:59:56.83] And I said, no, I want to go to 2nd Division. And they said, well, people cut their arms off to stay in Seoul. Well, I'm a combat soldier. I want to go up where the action is. And so I went to 2nd-- they finally let me go to 2nd Division.

[01:00:11.07] And then, when I got to the 2nd Division, the position that I wanted was not open as first sergeant. And they let me work around the area until it was open. When I got there, they said, well, you're going to headquarters, 2nd Aviation.

[01:00:28.62] And I went, I'm combat. Why send me to aviation? Well, we cannot keep a person in there for a lot of reasons. And I was the only combat Soldier in the aviation, about 800. And in my particular company, I had 300 people in my company.

[01:00:47.01] And they were either aviators, pilots, or they were female. And my boss was a female, and it was the first time I had encountered that in the military. And I think I had 18, 19 years in the Army.

[01:01:02.07] And so she and I, we had a lot of conversations, nightly conversations on how I should act and how she should accept me, because it was different. It was totally different.

[01:01:16.08] DEVON HARDY: And when was this? When were you in Korea?

[01:01:17.37] WILLIAM SWIFT: That was '87 and '88. That was just before Desert Storm. WILLIAM SWIFT: But the end of my second tour, I also made history, because I was the first one on the plane to come back during the ceasefire. I think it was 28 January-- whatever day it is. You can check later and see.

[01:01:46.94] But I know it was something like that, and it's on the calendar, on the national calendar. We were the first on the plane. And it was so hectic and nerve-wracking, that we couldn't even carry bags.

[01:02:02.35] The only thing you carry was your paperwork on your next post you were going to, and one shaving gear. I don't ever know what happened to all my gear, because when the plane arrived, we left out of Cam Ranh Bay. When the plane arrived, we was told, whatever you got on your body, you carry it.

[01:02:26.31] Anything else, you leave it. Because the plane will not cut off. It's going to be few, because they were so worried that they were going to bomb us, which-- they did bomb the day before Henry Kissinger signed the ceasefire. And so when we got on-- we were just standing there.

[01:02:45.04] And as we got to-- we flew from Vietnam to Thailand. We got into Thailand. There were-- we were getting ready-- we were already booked on the flight to fly back to Travis in California.

[01:03:01.57] But there was a lady there, a Vietnamese lady, and two kids. She had two kids with her. I guess she had just married a GI. Well, they was going to let her fly or let one child fly, and two seats had to be empty for two emergency US GIs that was flying back.

[01:03:21.51] So they was going to either kick two of her-- her two kids off, or her and a child off, and so another guy and myself volunteered to let her and her two kids have our seats to fly to Travis. And they put us in a hotel, and I can't even remember-- somewhere, a beautiful area in Thailand-- for two days until we was able to fly from Thailand to Travis Air Force Base.

[01:03:47.94] The homecoming back to Travis after the ceasefire was an unusual one. Because most of the time, your plane taxis right up to where you get off. Well, we were, I would say, as far as from here to almost Virginia, at least 50, 60 miles away.

[01:04:11.46] They didn't want the news people to interview us, because we were the first ones back from-- after the ceasefire. And of course, we didn't know what to say. And I guess that was the main reason.

[01:04:27.07] We didn't know what to say, and they wanted to keep us from saying anything that we should not be saying, and let Henry Kissinger and whoever was Secretary of State during that time-- let them talk. So we were bused from the airport-- from the airplane, not airport-- airplane, to different airports in San Francisco in California.

[01:04:53.43] And we never did come to the terminal. So we were-- both tours-- the end of both tours was kind of weird, because-- I'd hate to go back, but coming back my first tour, I came back through Washington.

[01:05:10.62] And of course, that was the time when all the draft dodgers were against us for going to Vietnam. They treated us like animals. And we came into the airport, and they were up on a ramp, and they threw feces on us. They threw beer on us.

[01:05:29.32] They threw beer cans at us-- big guys with beards and things, you know. You kill babies-- I mean, they just-- they just gave us a-- they gave us a rack over that you wouldn't-- it was the worst homecoming that you can ever believe. And when a Soldier tells you that, it is definitely true. And that was April 1970.

[01:05:54.47] And I was on-- I was on crutches, because I had been messed up. And you wouldn't believe, even with the crutches, I was still trying to fight. Because I was a mean person. I mean, a lot of people come back from war. But you go to war at a young age, and you mature very quickly.

[01:06:15.71] And then, you come back, you expect open arms to come back to the States. Oh, it was not true. It was not true. They actually had to get the MPs, security guards, and everything, and separate us from that crowd that was up there.

[01:06:34.38] That was my first tour. That was in 1970. And it was all over. It wasn't just Washington state. But I know that for a fact, because I was there, and the second coming back was totally different. It was almost like you wasn't even in the States.

[01:06:49.08] You didn't get no thank-you or return or anything. It wasn't like when I come back from Desert Storm. Oh, god, when I came back from Desert Storm, one of my Soldiers got a brand-new car in Bangor, Maine.

[01:07:04.17] But it was totally a different ballgame-- the difference in Vietnam and years later, which-- I'm glad for the younger Soldiers. But it was different. So we went to-- I think I went to an airport. I don't know what kind of airport the bus carried us to.

[01:07:22.14] And they would just say, where you want to go? And what do you know? I mean, I'm from North Carolina. I don't know about California. Just get me to an airport that will get me to the East Coast.

[01:07:31.86] We went to an airport somewhere in San Francisco. And there was a guy there with a plane that could-- the plane could hold six people. And he said, I will fly you all to the East Coast back there. I'll fly you to Virginia-- that's where my family is-- for \$3,000 apiece.

[01:07:55.86] And we did not hesitate. \$3,000, just dished it right out, each one of us. And he said, the only problem is, I have to stop several times for gas-- a few. And I think he said he flew up-- the weather was bad, so we flew up to one of the Dakotas. I don't remember which one.

[01:08:18.80] Then, I think we flew back to Las Vegas, so we could fuel up and we could do it. But anyway, it took several hours to get from the coast, but we wanted to get away from everything else. We had-- what did I have on my second tour? Khakis-- I had khakis, just like the pants I have.

[01:08:36.44] That's the uniform we wore back then. And we went to-- the last stop was in Atlanta. And we flew from Atlanta to Richmond, Virginia. I got to Richmond, and I caught the old crop duster-- you remember what that used to be-- from there to New Bern, North Carolina.

[01:08:57.18] My first tour when I arrived back, my parents had re-- and I'll take you back a little bit. My parents had received notification from the Army that I was wounded. Well, how communication is in a little small country town-- we had what we called a party line. I don't know if you know what that is.

[01:09:24.05] And back then, there's people on this side, the people on that side, and the people in the middle. You all got the same line. You can say hello, and everybody in the house know what you're saying. Well, that one person's supposed to have one ring.

[01:09:37.94] They answered the phone. And the other two were supposed to mind their own business. But the people were so nosy back in those days-- gossip, you know-- they all listened at the phone. Well, I had checked, when I was in Vietnam, not to inform my parents if I got wounded.

[01:09:59.63] Only otherwise-- KIA. Somehow, it got screwed up, and they said-- they called my parents. So they was explaining to my mother the truth-- that I was not going to lose my leg. It was not going to get cut off, and so forth, so on-- both legs, of course, at that time.

[01:10:20.93] But the gossipers on both sides that was listening on the phone turned it around completely. And my mother's name was Nancy. Nancy boy just lost one leg. And by the time it got to church the next Sunday, they think Nancy boy is going to lose his other leg.

[01:10:41.74] So when I arrived home-- and this is why I'm saying this-- when I arrived home sneaky that night, the first time from Vietnam, the first thing my mama wanted to see after I surprised her and everything-- and she threw string beans all over me, because she was snapping string beans.

[01:10:59.78] She wanted to see my legs. Why do you want to see my legs? She wanted to see, did I still have my legs. So I had boots on, jump boots, because-- being airborne.

[01:11:11.87] I had to unscrank all of that stuff, pull up my pant leg, and break that starch-- which, I hated to break that crease-- and show my mama that I was-- and then, of course, that Sunday, I had to go to church and physically pull up my pants, so that the entire church could see that I had both legs. Because the rumor had been around so bad that both of my legs was taken off.

[01:11:39.05] So that's what the Vietnam War, my first tour, ended right then and there. All because of a party line. And I told-- ooh, I was disgusted. That's what you get for talking your parents into telephones.

[01:11:53.35] Because they didn't have telephones when I was in high school. We didn't have telephones. So I said, well, before I go to Vietnam, I'm going to give you all a phone, just in case I can call. And I only got to call twice.

[01:12:04.12] DEVON HARDY: Can you describe, for both different homecomings, your reception that you receive from your friends and family?

[01:12:09.46] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, the family was great. Friends was great. Glad to have you back home. It was the people in the city you arrived in that I was a little-- I was very shocked about-- particularly Washington area. Because I didn't know very much about Washington.

[01:12:25.87] But I knew that we had to be-- we was briefed. Be very careful about-- they call them the draft dodgers, the ones who went to Canada or wherever they went back in those days. Be very careful about them.

[01:12:37.27] But I didn't think we were coming in-- that they would be that nasty towards us. And I'm going to tell you. I said today in the-- the only reason we didn't do more damage is, we didn't have weapons. Because we were some mean individuals back in those days.

[01:12:56.27] And they would have been hurt, hurt, and-- and they didn't have anything except cans and beers, and what they put in the beer cans to throw on us. I mean, but that was-- I'll never forget that. That was terrible. After I arrived home from my second tour, I went to Fort Riley, Kansas.

[01:13:15.41] And of course, they found out that I was in the military intelligence section. They put me right in that section in Fort Riley, Kansas. But me, as gung-- I'm sure you heard the word, gung ho-- as I used to be, it was good assignment.

[01:13:33.68] They wanted me to be in an office all the time, and you had secretaries and things, and go into vaults and secret-- top secrets and everything and those. I wanted to be out with the troops. I wanted to get dirty. I wanted to get out in the field and things.

[01:13:48.41] So I eventually went to the Big Red One, called the 1st-- the 1st of the 18th Vanguard. The Big Red One, Fort Riley, Kansas-- and then, from there, it was a mechanized

unit-- tracks-- and I had never really been into a unit where you had a vehicle to get around with, you know. I'm used to running and walking in airborne. So it was something totally different.

[01:14:16.85] And in that particular unit, we got to travel a lot around mostly Europe. I went to Europe six times in three years with that particular unit. Germany, we went to Belgium, we went to Austria, all those different places. It was really something.

[01:14:43.67] DEVON HARDY: Was it difficult adjusting to life after you returned home to Vietnam?

[01:14:48.41] WILLIAM SWIFT: Second time, no. The first time, yes. I actually hated people, I must admit. And it took my preacher back home, and my mother, and a few health specialists-- mental health doctors-- to get you back on track again and to let you know life-- I didn't want to be around people. I'd rather be around-- be by myself.

[01:15:15.65] I did a lot of running. I was a runner. I was a non-smoker. I never drank. And so I didn't have that social interacting like most people do-- go to the club and party. I didn't do those things. I was a dancer. I could go and dance.

[01:15:32.49] But I just sort of pretty much stayed away from a lot of those type things, because it meant being around people, and they asked you questions, and you couldn't talk then. You wouldn't talk about no Vietnam back in those days, and-- unless it was a bunch of guys, and we was trying to out-talk the other one about what was going on.

[01:15:52.50] Otherwise, if you would come in and we were talking, we would shut up. You wouldn't get nothing. You know, we just talk about ourselves, and then leave that alone. So that was a very, very much adjustment period.

[01:16:04.42] And I must say, I went down to the Arnold Palmer golf course down in Augusta, Georgia. And they got to talking down there, and a couple of the professionals-- Arnold Palmer himself, Lee Trevino. And they said, you young Soldiers just come back from Vietnam? We're going to take care of everything for you.

[01:16:29.17] And then I learned how nice people could be. It just-- it took golfers to merge us back into the homeland of what it's all about. And it was, you know, come on out here to the golf course. I couldn't hit a ball nowhere. Throw it better than I could hit it.

[01:16:47.40] But they were so relaxed. They were just-- they'd get around the course, and I drove my boss down several times. And he said, come on in. Come on in. You'll learn something.

[01:16:57.99] And it was-- I tell you, it was relaxing. If you ever get to-- I know you may not get to go to one of those type golf course. But if you do, it's very relaxing. I go now. I even go out to Southern Pines right today. I don't live far from Southern Pines out here.

[01:17:15.88] DEVON HARDY: So when was that? That was in between your first and second tour--

[01:17:18.57] WILLIAM SWIFT: That was at the end of my first tour. My boss said he wanted me to drive him down to the golf course. And so when I drove him down to the golf course, I would sit in the car and read the paper. I've always been a paper reader. And I would sit in the car, and I would read the paper.

[01:17:34.19] So he'd tell me, come on. I want you to meet somebody, some professionals. And they'd get to talking, and they talked about everything except war. They talked about life. They talked about the struggle that they had.

[01:17:47.98] And then, it made you think, you know. If these guys can deal with all of this, we might-- we're back home now. We don't have to worry about Vietnam. We can deal with that.

[01:17:58.47] And I told my doctors and things down there about things like that, and they pushed me to do more of that. Be more interested to do things.

[01:18:07.54] DEVON HARDY: And did you?

[01:18:08.34] WILLIAM SWIFT: Oh, yes, I did. I did.

[01:18:10.12] DEVON HARDY: And what else did you do?

[01:18:10.59] WILLIAM SWIFT: And I picked up running. That's what I picked up-- marathon running. Ks-- 10Ks, 5Ks, and 10 milers. I was a runner, and got involved in those.

[01:18:22.51] And everywhere-- I would go to Atlanta to run. Wherever there was a race-- I never won, but I just loved the run. Running was my life back to-- coming back from Vietnam.

[01:18:37.63] DEVON HARDY: Well, along those lines, how much contact have you had with your fellow veterans over the years? I know you've talked about that a little bit.

[01:18:43.09] WILLIAM SWIFT: Oh, quite a bit, quite a bit. We contact each other. And a lot of them contacted my parents before they passed, and found out where I was located. Of course, I was located right here. And people didn't know where-- we didn't have the internet and everything then.

[01:19:00.41] And so over the years now, they just-- they blast me on the phones, and we get together, and that's-- we'll get together next month, in Norfolk, Virginia. It's the 101st Airborne Convention. It's the 73rd or 74th year that they celebrate it.

[01:19:20.71] And they also celebrate the 51st Vietnam Homecoming. Now, we don't know how the Navy going to roll out the red carpet for us, because that was the thing. They said, come on up here, and we will give you a celebration like you never had.



[01:19:38.99] So we're excited. My wife is-- my wife is packing now to go up there. But last year, it was in Nashville. And it was-- and we went from Nashville to Fort Campbell. We had the Vietnam Homecoming on Campbell-- the 50th.

[01:19:55.46] And then, of course, we went to the Grand Ole Opry from there. So it was really interesting. Make me really appreciate and do more for the ones who's coming back now. Like, for instance, the USO here on-- at the-- well, we still call it Pope-- Pope Field out here when they come back.

[01:20:16.40] We go out, and we help them. We pass out cookies to the wives and kids, and we hold the kids while the wives run out and meet their husbands and things that-- something I didn't know of when I was a younger person. Because a lot of us wasn't married back in the day. When we came back from Vietnam, we weren't married.

[01:20:38.15] And a lot of young Soldiers today are married, because they already received their education, and they come in the Army, and they're 23-, 24-year-olds. We were 20, 21 years old, coming back from Vietnam. So it was a different ballgame.

[01:20:55.11] And then, we come back from Desert Storm. Like I say, we come into Maine, and, oh, they rolled out the carpet like you would not believe. I was shocked. And I think it was only, like, three of us in the whole battalion that were Vietnam veterans.

[01:21:12.23] And we talked about that-- that, boy, are we jealous to see the greetings that these kids get now, for six months. And some of us were two years and three years, and we did not get a greeting at all.

[01:21:28.47] DEVON HARDY: What do you think the Vietnam War means to you and your generation?

[01:21:31.95] WILLIAM SWIFT: That's pretty much everything we all know. Because we studied Vietnam, and American history, world history. We knew how Vietnam got started. We went back in those times. The history teacher quizzed you on it.

[01:21:50.40] We knew the ones that were coming back from Vietnam from the different counties. We knew what the medals meant back in those days and how much they cherished it, coming up in our days, whereas today, it's just a uniform for kids. But back for us, it was life.

[01:22:09.25] We heard it in church, because your English teacher was your Sunday school teacher or your history teacher. So you constantly, constantly were educated about Vietnam and how important it was, and what they were doing over there.

[01:22:27.57] DEVON HARDY: Well, along those same lines, how do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[01:22:32.10] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, I think recently, good. But until we realize how many of us were dying out, and then that takes you back to World War II-- we look around, and there's

not very many living. And so they say, well, look, the next war group is-- they call us the old people.

[01:22:54.06] The old people is Vietnam, and we have to start doing things. So I don't know. I guess, four or five years ago, they started the Vietnam big push, like they did the World War II. And the nicest one we've had was in Charlotte-- Vietnam returned. That was three years ago, called The Vietnam Homecoming.

[01:23:18.20] And it was really, really nice. I think it must have been 75,000, 80,000 of us up there. And there were Viet-- and in fact, I took pictures with that. Must have been 100 ARVNs, Montagnards, in a day.

[01:23:35.64] And they had their uniforms on, and I took pictures with a lot of them. I mean, I was shocked. And some of them said they lived in Fort Smith, Arkansas, because I believe there's a lot of places where they returned to when-- '75, when it actually ended.

[01:23:54.72] But there was a lot of-- over there. And then, of course, they had their section, they had the totally disabled section, and then they had the section that we was in-- guys could get up and walk around. And it was really, really nice.

[01:24:14.21] And they brought in a motorcycle group-- must've been 400 or 500 motorcycles-- to serenade us. And they just went around the track, around the track, for hours and hours and hours. It was really touching.

[01:24:29.76] And then, of course, last year, in Fort Campbell, the 50th was good. Because we had the first guys that went over there. There's a lot of them still living. They went over by ship.

[01:24:41.09] And I had not met all that many people. I didn't know that many were still living, that went over by ship. And the stories that they heard-- I just had to sit back and listen. And then, I'm excited now, because next month, I get to see the same thing over again.

[01:24:59.30] DEVON HARDY: How would you want current or future generations to remember the Vietnam War?

[01:25:03.62] WILLIAM SWIFT: Well, I would like for them to realize that-- the kids today for instance, high school and college kids-- your grandfather is that age group like my age group in the '60s, most likely. Remember them. Quiz them. Ask them questions.

[01:25:24.61] Come out here to the wall and find out things about it. And you got everything on the internet now. You've got everything you can look at. There's no excuses for you not to be aware of what the situation is.

[01:25:41.84] And learn the difference. Learn the years. Learn why we were over there. Well, they're not going to tell you all of that. But learn the right way of how to explain and communicate to people back and forward on what it's all about.

[01:25:57.89] And by the way, I am on the-- my palm is on this wall out here as the 100 veterans in North Carolina. I don't know if you've seen it or not. It's on the-- it's on the other end down here. Go past General Shelton's statue, and that section out here-- you got 100 palms on a wall.

[01:26:17.36] And they represent 100 counties in North Carolina. And I represent Scotland County. And each one of us has got four palms of the people that support us. And my wife's palm is out there-- my coworker, and two of my former students.

[01:26:36.67] See, I taught JROTC for 20 years. So two of my former students, I brought up, and they're out there on that wall. Yes, that's quite interesting.

[01:26:46.49] And of course, the only problem is there's no names on it. It has no names on them out there. But my wife, being an art teacher, she followed the process of how he moved my arm to tell me-- of course, she tricked me, too.

[01:27:03.93] She didn't tell me I had to leave my arm in that thing for four hours to make my palm. I wouldn't have done it. And so she took pictures of all of that, and she knew exactly what the palm-- now, all the palms out there, they look old, because that's the way they're-- bronze, I mean-- that's the way they're finished.

[01:27:23.16] And we're all right-handed, except one, and he lost his arm in Vietnam. So when you go out there and look, there's a left hand up there. And then, all the ones that dropped down the palms-- they have passed away. So you are surrounded by history. [CHUCKLES]

[01:27:48.13] DEVON HARDY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?

[01:27:50.86] WILLIAM SWIFT: Yes, yes. And each time, it travels-- the portable ones. If it's within 100 miles, I will go to it.

[01:28:01.94] DEVON HARDY: What are your impressions of the Wall in Washington?

[01:28:04.67] WILLIAM SWIFT: Very touching. And I tell you, I got to meet the young lady that orchestrated everything. We got-- I got to meet her. I took my daughter, her senior year in college, which had to be '98-- '98. I carried her up in '98, so she could actually see and touch.

[01:28:25.60] I have two cousins on there, on that Wall. And I wanted her to see and meet the person that she could relate to. And it really was something. And I know I just sent pictures of my cousin that's on that Wall. And he was killed in the 173rd Airborne.

[01:28:45.46] And then, when I went to-- when I started teaching at Marlboro County High School, one of the students was telling me about-- her uncle had been in Vietnam. Well, I had them to write an essay on My Most Impressive Relative.

[01:29:04.68] And she wrote it, and I thought she was getting a little bit out of hand. I didn't think everything that she read-- that I read was true. It was true. He was one of the most decorated guys in South Carolina.

[01:29:16.21] And he lost his right arm, half of his right leg, right eye, and all his inside, of course. And he did not get the Medal of Honor. He got everything else but the Medal of Honor. And he was in a unit where the commander said, because of the color of his skin, he would not get the Medal of Honor.

[01:29:38.81] So he passed away two years ago, and I am still fighting to get that Medal of Honor. Now, before President Bush left office, I wrote up, and they said, well, we'll pass it on to the next president. And when President Obama first took over, whatever office that read it said, we need an eyewitness.

[01:30:02.86] Well, that was extreme, because that was in '66, and it's hard to find. So we found one person who was with him in Utah, but he was in assisted living and had no memory.

[01:30:18.29] So we are still trying to find somebody in his unit that could just say, well, this is what he did. Because the writeup alone is enough to give you the Medal of Honor, you know.

[01:30:30.37] DEVON HARDY: Well, I hope you continue that fight.

[01:30:31.96] WILLIAM SWIFT: We will. I will. I most certainly will. But so my wife and I are going to stop-- I have not seen the Korea wall up there. So we're going to go next month, and we're going to see the Korean War-- and of course, Martin Luther King area. I have not seen that either.

[01:30:54.58] WILLIAM SWIFT: Somebody did a great job. Only thing I can say-- and nothing bad against him-- is why wait so long? Because it should have been done a long time ago. A long time.

[01:31:08.51] DEVON HARDY: Well, Mr. Swift, I can't thank you enough for your interview. So this has been a pleasure.

[01:31:13.88] WILLIAM SWIFT: Really-- I really enjoyed it.