

Van Riper, Paul

[00:00:15.94] PAUL VAN RIPER: I was born in Brownsville, Pennsylvania. I have a twin brother. He also was a Marine. We lived in western Pennsylvania in and around mainly Pittsburgh most of my life.

[00:00:28.14] I entered the Marine Corps in 1956. I went to boot camp at Parris Island. Came back and went to college, a little college in western Pennsylvania, uniquely called California State College at the time, but it's in Pennsylvania. Graduated and was commissioned in 1963. First tour in Vietnam was as lieutenant. I was 26 years old.

[00:00:55.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members at that time? Were you married?

[00:00:58.45] PAUL VAN RIPER: No, I was single. On my first tour when I went out as an adviser with the Vietnamese Marine Corps had just my brother and no other siblings. My dad had been too young for the First World War and too old for the Second World War, so we had no immediate family members, though obviously extended family a lot who had served in World War II as well as Korea.

[00:01:23.95] JOE GALLOWAY: And you consider your hometown to be?

[00:01:27.02] PAUL VAN RIPER: Brownsville.

[00:01:34.03] My dad, early in the Korean War when my brother and I were about 12 years old, stopped one evening for my mom to go into a grocery store, a newspaper boy came up to the window to sell him a paper and he bought one and unfolded it. At 12, my brother and I were just becoming interested in what was happening around the world, and news. And he unfolded the paper and he said, well, boys the war is going to be over pretty soon. And this was in late June or early July. And we said, why is that dad?

[00:02:05.41] He said, well, the president's decided to send the Marines. And we said, what are the Marines? And he told us, that most American citizens would, what his view of the Marine Corps was. It intrigued us. And I think from that point on, we had this desire to join the Marine Corps. Now, in those days there was the pressure of the draft, and so when we left high school we knew the likelihood of being drafted was pretty high. But we elected to enter the Marine Corps through a Reserve program and then go off on active duty.

[00:02:33.11] JOE GALLOWAY: But you were entering as enlisted.

[00:02:35.94] PAUL VAN RIPER: Yes.

[00:02:37.01] JOE GALLOWAY: And how long before you went to officer?

[00:02:41.53] PAUL VAN RIPER: Went to recruit training at Parris Island in the fall of 1956. This was a six-month program. Went off active duty in the spring of '57, returned to college, and

then when I finished college in 1963, I was commissioned and went down to Quantico OCS and then through the basic school, back into the active ranks for almost 35 years.

[00:03:13.43] Before I went to Vietnam, I had been through the Marine Corps basic course at Quantico. I had been a platoon commander, executive officer, and worked in the S3 section in a battalion, 2nd Marine Division at Camp Lejeune. While I was there, I received orders to go to Vietnam as an adviser. Went temporary additional duty over to Fort Bragg and went through what was called the Military Assistance Training Adviser course (MATA).

[00:03:43.19] And I believe at the time, it was about six weeks. We learned a little bit of Vietnamese. We got an overview of the war, learned different foreign weapons as well as older US weapons such as the M1 and BAR. But having come in '56, I was familiar with all those weapons.

[00:04:06.60] I had been under fire before in Santo Domingo. Now, that was very limited hostile fire, but I knew what the sound of incoming rounds was like. I had a feeling of that sickening feeling in the pit of your stomach when someone's shooting at you, so combat wasn't brand new to me.

[00:04:25.50] Saigon was an intriguing city, a city you could easily fall in love with. When we got there, those advisers who had been there for a while would show us the city and kind of get us oriented for about a week, and then we joined our units. And so it was the sounds, the sights, the smell, all intriguing. But having been overseas with the Marine Corps into the Mediterranean, into the Caribbean, it wasn't like I was unused to entering a foreign culture.

[00:04:52.92] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your initial duties?

[00:04:55.55] PAUL VAN RIPER: I was the assistant adviser to the 3rd Battalion of the Vietnamese Marine Corps. Now, their battalions were fairly large, they ran about 700 or 800 marines where most of the Vietnamese army unit-- their battalions were around 300. We only had two advisers, a captain and lieutenant. So I was the junior adviser and would normally be with the executive officer of the Vietnamese battalion.

[00:05:26.39] When we were on operations, which seems where we spent most of our time, we had little time off. The Vietnamese battalions had four companies, and they would generally move in two columns. So the captain would be with one column with the battalion commander, I would be with the other column with the executive officer. The purpose of that was if one of the columns became engaged, the other could maneuver to provide support. They never got caught with the entire battalion in one location.

[00:05:57.62] JOE GALLOWAY: What was the food like?

[00:05:59.35] PAUL VAN RIPER: I enjoyed the food except during holidays. We only had Vietnamese food, we had no other rations. We had to eat with them. We lived with them, there wasn't any ability to-- because for example, during the day when we moved, there were only

Vietnamese around me. At night I would see the captain and we could converse in English and have a little bit of our own cultural identity. But 90% of the time we were with the Vietnamese.

[00:06:26.22] It was on the holidays when they would take the fat from the backs of pigs and those sorts of what they considered delicacies that I was a little more squeamish. But I eventually downed everything they had. But the daily rice and vegetables were-- chicken was pretty good.

[00:06:42.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did you have quarters or were you mainly in the field?

[00:06:50.75] PAUL VAN RIPER: We were mainly in the field. The units were stationed just outside of Saigon. So when they would come back to their base camp, they would go have a leave period. The marines would go off with their families and the battalion would be in a semi-stand down. We would go back, and we had a hotel room in Saigon mainly just to store our gear. We'd clean up and you might have three or four days or maybe if you were lucky a week or so before you were back out.

[00:07:23.92] I liked the Vietnamese. I have to say I actually loved the Vietnamese people. They were a warm people. They were an engaging people. When I was wounded, the corporal who was assigned as my bodyguard and helped me with preparing rations and stuff, he stood by me. He helped get me out. The training of their marines was first class. I never had any concern about being with them that they would leave me or that they wouldn't stand and fight.

[00:07:57.14] JOE GALLOWAY: And that opinion lasted throughout your tour?

[00:08:01.13] PAUL VAN RIPER: It did. And that understanding of the Vietnamese, a little bit more about their culture, how they thought about the war, what their experiences were at that stage of their lives, the young marines as well as the officers, served me well when I came back several years later as a company commander. I thought I was much better prepared as a company commander to deal with the Vietnamese because of that adviser experience.

[00:08:29.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your language proficiency during that year pick up considerably?

[00:08:35.90] PAUL VAN RIPER: It did a little bit. We were never truly conversant. Fortunately a handful of the senior officers did speak English, so we weren't trapped in just trying to make use of our limited Vietnamese. But it helped when you were talking to the young marines. I would walk the lines at night and I could sit down and talk to a marine simple things like directions, time, food, et cetera.

[00:09:05.87] JOE GALLOWAY: What issues, events, and responsibilities consumed most of your time? First tour.

[00:09:13.36] PAUL VAN RIPER: The first tour as an adviser, the officer I was advising had been a master sergeant with the French army at Dien Bien Phu. He had been captured, been released, joined the South Vietnamese army, had been with them for some time before he moved over to the Vietnamese Marine Corps.

[00:09:33.44] So there wasn't much in terms of small unit actions in terms of tactics that I could offer to him. What I was able to do was provide supporting arms. I knew how to control supporting arms. I could bring in helicopters, gunships, ask for artillery, close air support. And also bring in medevacs when they were unable to get their own medical evacuation helicopters.

[00:10:03.36] JOE GALLOWAY: What area of operations did you serve during that first tour?

[00:10:09.38] PAUL VAN RIPER: The Vietnamese Marine Corps, just as the Vietnamese airborne, were more of a strategic reserve. They did not have a permanent area they worked in. They moved throughout the country. And so we worked a lot with the ARVN airborne. My first experience was up in what was called I or First Corps Tactical Zone. I spent a lot of time up there as well as outside of Saigon in what was Third Corps.

[00:10:36.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions that you participated in during that advisory tour.

[00:10:44.49] PAUL VAN RIPER: It seemed we were in firefights routinely. There are only a few that stand out. One, I'd been there a couple of months and the Vietnamese actually attacked a hill with fixed bayonets. I had never seen that before, wasn't sure I was going to see it again. But it convinced me that even in the modern age there's a role for the bayonet on occasion. So there's none that stand out obviously, except the day that I was wounded.

[00:11:14.65] We were assigned to this mission that the senior adviser felt was more appropriate for police than it was for military units and he complained about it. I often kid him since then because it was a heck of a firefight, consumed-- in a sense of commitment of several battalions of Vietnamese forces.

[00:11:39.97] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a hell of a police action.

[00:11:41.79] PAUL VAN RIPER: It was. It was-- some sort of a sensor device was put on a collaborator who went into a Viet Cong camp, and therefore the Americans were able to locate where this camp was. They wanted to ensure that nothing leaked out. So they took our battalion, an airborne battalion, and I believe some other units into a soccer stadium. That's what we were briefed. Nobody left the soccer stadium.

[00:12:10.06] The Army Huey helicopters came in, picked us up, and flew us right into this area, and we went in to try to close off and engage the Viet Cong there. Well, we no longer-- no sooner we hit the ground-- we had two companies forward, I was with the two companies forward, when we got into a heck of a firefight.

[00:12:31.88] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were wounded.

[00:12:33.57] PAUL VAN RIPER: I was directing US Army gunships. At that time, we didn't have the Cobra. We had simply Hueys that were armed. I was directing them to bring fire onto the Viet Cong positions. I would get down behind a rice paddy dike and then when the aircraft came over, I would get up to see where they were heading and be able to provide directions on

their next run. And one of those I stood up, obviously a Viet Cong had drawn a mark on me and he shot me in the stomach just a little left of center.

[00:13:06.25] JOE GALLOWAY: I believe you brought something along that illustrates that.

[00:13:11.25] PAUL VAN RIPER: I did. This is the belt I was wearing that day and this is where the bullet went through. And many people don't understand the power of small arms. But if you can see this raised portion, that was actually flat. That's the foot pounds of energy of a round going through as it bent that.

[00:13:34.22] It went through other than my spleen-- and my intestines, hit no other vital organs, came out on my back left side sideways. And I actually have a scar that looks like a bullet on my left side. So I kept that as a souvenir. I didn't turn that back in to supply after I came back from Vietnam. I have a similar souvenir from my second tour as a company commander.

[00:14:00.99] JOE GALLOWAY: When you evacuated wounded, where did you go? And what was your experience like?

[00:14:11.57] PAUL VAN RIPER: Well, my experience-- I was hit, spun me around several times, I was laying in the corner of a rice paddy dyke. Young corp-- Vietnamese corporal came over to me. The senior adviser had heard that I was hit on his radio as did the Army warrant officers who were flying the two Hueys. One of them actually came and set down maybe 100 feet from me, took some rounds through the front of the cockpit, the Plexiglas. He picked the helicopter up, turned it around so the rear was towards the enemy. I crawled over and got in.

[00:14:46.23] Now, when he lifted off I had this horrible thought because the shock had actually spread from my stomach to somewhere around my knees to my upper chest. And the shock was moving out of the body, and I knew it was becoming more localized. I knew someplace in my stomach I'd been hit.

[00:15:04.59] And then I thought, what if it was my ammunition pouch, or bounced off and I'm not really wounded? So I pulled up my jacket to see the bullet hole. And believe it or not, I was relieved to see the bullet hole because these two warrant officers had risked their lives to lift me out. And if it had simply been a shock from hitting something and bouncing off, I'd have been awful embarrassed.

[00:15:28.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go from there?

[00:15:30.72] PAUL VAN RIPER: They took us to the 3rd Army Field Hospital in Saigon. Great care, operated on there. And the senior Marine adviser in Saigon promised me that I would stay, be able to recover, and later he would put me on some office work till I could rejoin my unit.

[00:15:52.63] What actually happened was the 25th Infantry Division had massive casualties one day, flooded the hospital, and all of us were flown out to the Philippines and eventually back to the States. I know at each stop I protested that I was not supposed to be going back to the States and of course the doctors would look at me and laugh.

[00:16:14.92] The other interesting thing I've always thought Van Riper is sort of an unusual name. When we were being evacuated from Saigon, a soldier picked up the litter from the bottom, and those days they had white name tags, the Army did, and his name was Van Riper. And I said to him, Soldier, that's my name. I think he thought I was delirious or something and never responded, but that was ironic to have that happen. But eventually back to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital where I stayed for a month or so before being discharged.

[00:16:48.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Where was your brother during this time?

[00:16:50.91] PAUL VAN RIPER: My brother had come into Vietnam a little behind me. And he was in a different location. I can't remember exactly where. They informed him, but I think I saw him once before I left.

[00:17:05.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, when they discharged you from the hospital, what did you do? Did you turn around and go back?

[00:17:11.88] PAUL VAN RIPER: No, I went to see what we call the monitor. That's the officer that headquarters Marine Corps assigns you. And I walked in and said, you've got to get me back out to Vietnam. He reached over and pulled open a drawer in his desk, and in there was a stack of envelopes with letters.

[00:17:26.49] And he said, these are letters from all the lieutenants who want to go to Vietnam. You've had your three or four months. But I was-- went out I'm thinking October, was wounded in February. He said, you've had your few months. When all these officers get their tour I'll think about sending you back. Interestingly, a few years later when I got orders to go back, I went to see the monitor, and said, your predecessor had a drawer full of letters of folks who were wanting to go to Vietnam. Is it still there? He said, no. It's gone.

[00:18:02.99] In between my first and second tour, I was assigned to the Basic School where I taught tactics, led student platoons, three of them, through the school. My final assignment there was to teach company tactics, which obviously was great preparation. From there I went to the Amphibious Warfare School, which teaches use of supporting arms, staff work.

[00:18:27.71] So I probably could not have had a better preparation than I did going back out. I'd served as a lieutenant in a rifle company, been an executive officer, here I was teaching tactics, already been in combat, been through a staff supporting arms school, and I go back out. So it was an outstanding preparation for command of a rifle company.

[00:18:49.02] JOE GALLOWAY: But now your duty is very, very different. Before you were an adviser to the Vietnamese, now you're going to command a Marine company in combat. Tell me about that.

[00:19:01.64] PAUL VAN RIPER: Well, several things in addition to what I've related. I was fortunate. The initial Marine units that went in were up to their table of organization strength. Then there was an intervening period where units became not decimated, but actually maybe

reduced 25, 30%. When I got back, there was another wave of Marines coming in, many of them veterans.

[00:19:27.30] So I had a unit that was full strength, which I think at that time was a little over 200. So we ran somewhere around 215 Marines in a rifle company, which is fairly large. And except in the immediate aftermath of actions, I would always be brought back up to that. All of my platoon sergeants were veterans of one tour. I even had several squad leaders and one fire team leader who had been-- were on their second tour. And my executive officer had had a stateside tour so he wasn't a young officer. He-- even though first combat, he had some experience.

[00:20:05.80] JOE GALLOWAY: And what was your area of operations?

[00:20:08.77] PAUL VAN RIPER: We operated-- I was with the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. I had a company, Mike Company. At that time the Marine Corps battalions had four rifle companies. And we operated outside of Da Nang in the First, or I Corps.

[00:20:28.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions you witnessed, participated in in this tour?

[00:20:35.73] PAUL VAN RIPER: Again, there was a lot of action. I think in the time I had the company, which was about 10 months, we had 100% casualties. By that I mean obviously not at one time, but if you count the casualties and replacements, both wounded and killed, 100%.

[00:20:52.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Rollover in personnel.

[00:20:53.80] PAUL VAN RIPER: Rollover in personnel. So a lot of action. There are a number of them. One in particular, I asked early on when a platoon of Vietnamese field forces, which were sort of a cross between National Guard and state police, became available if they would attach them to my company, which the battalion commander did. The other companies didn't seem to want them. Again, from my previous experience, an adviser, I had a great affection for the Vietnamese and welcomed these-- this extra platoon. And so they would do a lot of the searching for us and give us a lot of intelligence.

[00:21:33.13] On one particular occasion, they had intelligence that a 60 mortar was buried in the walls of a hooch, of a Vietnamese home out in the rice paddies. We went and began to tear it apart and found nothing. Attached to this home was a bunker for safety, which was not unusual. We took the top off it, looked inside, nothing there.

[00:21:58.12] I was standing a few feet away when out of the middle of what I thought was a pile of dirt. The pile of dirt wasn't any more than maybe 24 inches by maybe 48 inches, and about two feet high. Out of the middle of this comes the barrel of an AK-47. There was a Vietnamese field force soldier leaning over, scraping away dirt, and it caught him and just killed him immediately.

[00:22:25.56] All of us of course hit the ground. And then I looked up to see what we called ChiCom (for Chinese communist) grenade in the air. It landed between my radio operator and myself. At that moment I made the decision I was not going to fall on top of it. My radio operator went to the right, I went to the left, the grenade went off.

[00:22:47.67] I got a little bit of shrapnel in my hand, didn't think much about it. Rolled over. And what had-- it was a secret compartment that two Viet Cong were in there, almost in a prenatal position, just scrunched down in there. They came out and went different directions. I shot the one that went to the left.

[00:23:08.76] And then about an hour later, I felt something scratching my head and I took my helmet off. And to my surprise, I saw this hole. Now, this little figure, we used to-- if you had a confirmed kill you put a little figure on your helmet. I saw this and I looked inside and it had come through-- had gone through a little metal clip at the time was right here. And the metal clip, very similar to the other metal clips, which subsequently fell off was bent in and was scratching me on the head. That's what it was. That about as close as you can come without coming.

[00:23:47.63] What's interesting, having shown you the belt before, now the helmet, the only thing left is a pack. And my twin brother said to me, if you get some damage to your pack with a shrapnel or a bullet, you'll have messed up a complete set of field gear for the Marine Corps. You've only got one part of your kit to go.

[00:24:10.21] I often tell my wife that if it was not for the casualties, I would live a Groundhog Day. That is, I would be a company commander every day of my life just for the comradeship of those Marines, their professionalism, being close to them, being in love with them, knowing how they respond, doing something you felt was worthwhile, and doing it for a people that you thought deserved American aid. I would just do that over and over with the obvious exception of the casualties.

[00:24:46.21] JOE GALLOWAY: There's no more responsible job on Earth than that of an infantry company commander.

[00:24:53.43] PAUL VAN RIPER: Absolutely. That's true. I think that's the best assignment-- best job you could ever--

[00:24:56.70] JOE GALLOWAY: You topped out when you got there.

[00:24:58.37] PAUL VAN RIPER: And when I came back there was a period when I wondered if I wanted to stay in the Marine Corps because I felt that that was the zenith. And in retrospect, though I commanded all the way up to a division of Marines, of 18,000 Marines and Sailors, the zenith of my career was a company commander.

[00:25:15.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Every promotion above captain, every job above company commander, you go further away from the troops.

[00:25:24.05] PAUL VAN RIPER: Yeah, further away.

[00:25:25.02] JOE GALLOWAY: And there are people buffering you. I don't know any industry, any other place where they give that kind of responsibility to someone who's 24, 25 years old.

[00:25:40.44] PAUL VAN RIPER: 150 to 200 Soldiers or Marines and you literally-- you have their lives on-- as your responsibility.

[00:25:47.16] JOE GALLOWAY: You know all their names and you know their wives' and kids' names.

[00:25:51.18] PAUL VAN RIPER: I was going through a little green book I kept last night of names and the faith they had, the names of their hometowns, their wives' names, kids' names.

[00:26:00.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Still have that book?

[00:26:02.14] PAUL VAN RIPER: I still have the book, yeah.

[00:26:09.87] That's hard to do because best day and worst day are sometimes the same. So in my first tour, the worst and best day were the day I got shot. Because obviously getting a serious injury like that, best day because if I ever had any doubt there was a God, I lost all doubts that particular morning, no doubt. In a fraction of a second, I knew there was a Lord. So that was a good day.

[00:26:40.59] The second would have been in 21, 22, 23, February, 1969, what was called the post-Tet Offensive. It was after the '68 February Tet Offensive-- post-Tet Offensive, '69. Company got into a tremendous firefight, did very well in terms of what it did to the 141st NVA Regiment. Lost a number of Marines, but one of the ones we lost won a Medal of Honor.

[00:27:10.71] The platoon he was with, the platoon commander and the corpsman both won Navy Crosses. And there were a number of Silver Stars out of that platoon. So to see that kind of courage on display. And I was right there behind them as they engaged the enemy in this case, literally hand to hand. Worst day, but seeing that performance, also best day.

[00:27:39.31] The Republic of Korea, the South Korean marines were in the general vicinity of where we were, so occasionally we would operate next to them. But other than the liaison, no close involvement. We would occasionally see an Australian adviser, particularly on my first tour, but no actual operations with them. Just-- we'd bump into them.

[00:28:08.00] On the second tour I had a wife. I had married between the two. I was in Vietnam longer than we'd been married. My gunnery sergeant who was-- is always very close in the Marine Corps when you're in the field with the company commander, he always told my bride that he's-- in our first two years, he slept with me more than she did, which was absolutely true because we would sleep right beside each other in the field. I'm sorry, the question again?

[00:28:39.68] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:28:43.44] PAUL VAN RIPER: The only contact was by mail. I tried a MARS, which was a ham operator, one time. In the entire 15 or 20 minutes that was supposedly a conversation, I might have had a half sentence or two that I understood from my mom and dad and my wife. It was more frustrating than anything else. So it was all by mail. And it ran best case seven days between the mailing a letter and receipt, normally somewhere between 10 and 14 days.

[00:29:17.79] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you get about the war from home?

[00:29:22.27] PAUL VAN RIPER: The only news we got was Stars and Stripes. Occasionally somebody from home would write something, generally we ignored it. We were so caught up with what was happening in our own world that this was almost a make believe land, the so-called real world.

[00:29:44.16] JOE GALLOWAY: So that news had very little effect on you?

[00:29:46.94] PAUL VAN RIPER: No. There were the antiwar demonstrations. I think we were disgusted with those who were involved, but in terms of affecting morale or-- we just ignored it.

[00:30:01.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe what that was like coming back.

[00:30:04.56] PAUL VAN RIPER: Well, let me tell you about the first tour, because the local paper in Pittsburgh ran a story. The storyline was to the effect of, Viet Cong Break Up Twin Act, because my brother was still there and I was home. My mom and dad, after that, received some of the most offensive mail. They received copies of this paper with just the most lewd, offensive comments written across it. They got telephone calls about baby killers, all those sorts of things. It was--

[00:30:40.99] JOE GALLOWAY: You were in the hospital?

[00:30:42.24] PAUL VAN RIPER: This was after I got out. I was in hospital before I got home but then when I came home it was just very discouraging. And I remember when I went through the MATA course at Fort Bragg, they showed us movies of French soldiers returning to France and being accosted and yelled at and abused. And we all said to our self very smugly, that would never happen in the United States, only to see a few years later that and much worse.

[00:31:12.40] The second tour my wife actually had to get an unlisted phone number because she got harassing phone calls, which when I got home I didn't know her phone number, which made it a little bit difficult for me to call her and tell her I was home. I had to call my parents, get her new number and call her. What I've always thought is ironic, many of those who served in Vietnam were drafted, had no ability to affect what was going on, yet they were castigated by their fellow citizens.

[00:31:46.30] Since Desert Storm right up through our campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, our military has received the respect and proper treatment it should, yet they're all volunteers. It was just kind of twisted the way our fellow countrymen looked at us.

[00:32:04.86] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years?

[00:32:10.45] PAUL VAN RIPER: When some of these Marines that were in the company came into their 40s, early 40s, I think it dawned on them that probably the most important thing they'd ever done in their life was to serve in the Marine Corps, and particularly to serve in combat. And one of them got a hold of me-- I was in Okinawa on assignment at the time-- and wanted to have a reunion.

[00:32:34.79] He was traveling for the company he worked for-- when he'd go to a city, he would go to the library, get a phone book, go through the phone book, and look up names. He had a roster of all the Marines that had been in the company. And in the blind, he would call and say, this is Jim Meyer. Is your name so-and-so? Yes. Did you serve in the Marine Corps? Yes or no.

[00:32:58.62] And he'd would-- And he'd found about 15 or 20 Marines who had been in the company. And I promised him when I came back from Okinawa we would get together, which we did. That's grown into a reunion every other year since about, I guess, 1988. We've had a reunion every other year. It's always the same.

[00:33:19.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Just your company, or battalion?

[00:33:20.49] PAUL VAN RIPER: Just the company, yeah. Company.

[00:33:22.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life?

[00:33:27.13] PAUL VAN RIPER: Other than the what I mentioned earlier, that to me had been the peak of my career. And I wondered if I would enjoy being a Marine in a peacetime environment or even if it was combat at a higher level. Took a year or so to adjust to it. Yeah, there's things I want to do but, that was it nothing equivalent to what we call PTSD now.

[00:33:51.14] I think a lot of that might have been because-- but now a lot of the Marines who were in the company clearly had PTSD. They were the ones who left active duty. I think just being on active duty, being around other Marines who had similar experiences, it must have been a sort of therapy. We just talked about. We told stories and talked about it. And it was part of our life.

[00:34:14.78] I've never had a nightmare. I've never had any cold sweats. Whenever a car backfires I don't hit the ground. So none of that registers with my experience.

[00:34:32.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting influence on your life, or changed you in some way?

[00:34:45.80] PAUL VAN RIPER: As I mentioned before, in terms of increasing my faith, being absolutely convinced there is a God and that He looks after-- my first tour. The second tour, just

the day to day courage, perseverance, of the Marines. They set an example. I always felt from there on out that I had to strive to-- for those who lost their lives, strive to lead the sort of lives that their loss, the loss of their families provide for us.

[00:35:17.30] JOE GALLOWAY: In the end what did this war mean to you and your generation?

[00:35:23.60] PAUL VAN RIPER: We never felt we lost the war in the sense that most Americans do. Politically, we lost it. Certainly strategically we lost it. But the war we fought, the Marines I go back with to these reunions are every bit as proud of their service as those who fought before them and those who fought afterwards. In their world, in a rifle company, they felt what they were doing was worthwhile.

[00:35:53.28] The two times that I've gotten a lot of calls from them other than the normal calls I get occasionally was after Mr. McNamara put his book out and said that he never truly believed in the war, and he kept the two sets of books. They were absolutely incensed by that book. And I got calls, sometimes late, 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, folks upset.

[00:36:18.59] When Chesty Puller's son, who had been severely injured, wrote a book and won a Pulitzer Prize, they always looked to him as he had overcome something very difficult, very successful. When he committed suicide, it hit a lot of them. And again I got phone calls from them that they were disturbed by it.

[00:36:38.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Are there any lessons you took from the war that you would like to pass on to newer generations of Americans?

[00:36:48.44] PAUL VAN RIPER: I guess there's a whole bunch and there's a lot in terms of-- for young Soldiers, Marines in terms of tactics and techniques and procedures, but I over the years had the opportunity to do that. For Americans in general, I would say treat every other human with dignity. You don't have to agree with them politically, you don't have to agree with any of their views on life, but there's no excuse for not treating every other human with dignity, and actually love all your fellow human beings. Life is precious.

[00:37:20.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Even Bob McNamara?

[00:37:22.14] PAUL VAN RIPER: As much as I dislike what he did, I would treat him with dignity if I had a chance to run into him.

[00:37:31.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, general.

[00:37:32.65] PAUL VAN RIPER: Thank you, Joe. Appreciate it.