

Wilson, Samuel US Army

[00:00:14.30] SAMUEL WILSON: Let me tell you two things. Number one-- you mention that we're in the birth place at Hampden-Sydney. We are seated in what was the law office of my four times great grandfather who was one of the original founders, if not the original founder. He hosted a planning meeting the first weekend in February of 1775 right where we are seated to conceive, plan, and develop for execution the task necessary to bring this college into being.

[00:00:52.29] So this college is six months older than the Declaration of Independence and it was founded by the same patriots-- Englishmen-- not Americans because we hadn't become a nation yet-- as those indeed including some of those who signed the Declaration of Independence and later helped to formulate and sign the document, the Constitution and its Bill of Rights. Two of our original trustees were Patrick Henry and James Madison. So at least I wanted to acquaint you with where we are and the fact that you're on patriotic ground.

[00:01:33.14] MARK FRANKLIN: And amazing history at that. Thank you very, very much for that history.

[00:01:36.60] SAMUEL WILSON: Now as to the second part of my answer-- I was born 12 miles from here on a 150-acre corn, tobacco, wheat farm. I went to a small country high school, graduated in late May 1940. On the 9th of June 1940, I believe it was a Sunday, I was in parlor in the farmhouse which was our home, twiddling the dials in mid afternoon-- we would call it surfing the channels today-- when I heard a man speaking.

[00:02:21.74] I noted that it was not an American accent. It sounded like an English accent that I had heard before. I was listening to WPTF from Raleigh, North Carolina, "We Protect the Family," that particular station which still exists. The speaker was Winston Churchill and it was a rebroadcast of his speech on the floor of the House of Commons on the 4th of June, the day that the British Expeditionary Force and the French First Army were evacuated from Dunkirk.

[00:03:08.58] If you recall the speech which the words that have been lifted from it are, "We will fight them on the beaches, in the fields, on the landing grounds and the hills and the streets. We will never surrender." I looked around and said, where's my hat. That is what gave the impulse, provided the impulse for my getting into military service.

[00:03:40.52] SAMUEL WILSON: The next day was a Monday. It rained all day. I climbed up in the loft of the old stable to read, but I couldn't get away from those words that were echoing in my head leading up to the "We will never surrender." I knew enough about what was going on in the world to know that the Western world was in trouble, at least that free part of the Western world, including ourselves.

[00:04:06.64] So along about night, I couldn't stand it any longer. Without saying a word to anybody I set off down the farm lane on the right old country road, ran through some thickly forested woods several miles into the town of Farmville. Company G, 116th infantry was gathered there for its drill night that evening. Must have been drill night.

[00:04:31.48] I went in, raised my right hand, all 139 pounds soaking wet. Lied like a rug. Told them I was 18. I was 16. And that is how I got into uniform. SAMUEL WILSON: The unit was trained at Fort Meade.

[00:04:57.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, Fort Meade.

[00:04:58.44] SAMUEL WILSON: Yeah. There's a little wrinkle here that might be of interest to you. When they were asking me about the things that I studied, what skills I had and so on, I mentioned that I had studied music and that I played a couple of stringed instruments and banged away on the piano, and that I also played the clarinet. And they said, oh, we've got ourselves a bugler. I said, oh, no, no, no. You kiss a bugle or a trumpet, but you put the clarinet in your mouth, and you use your tongue to make the proper kind of noises. They said, son, a horn is a horn, you are our bugler. It took me three months to get rid of that bugle. I had to find my replacement in training.

[00:05:43.92] My Christmas present given to me along about Thanksgiving was to exchange my M1A1 bugle for a 1903 Springfield, be promoted to PFC and become lead scout in the rifle squad. We were federalized, brought into federal service on the 3rd of February, 1941. We trained for three weeks out of the armory in Farmville and then moved by train up to Fort Meade, Maryland by this time as an active Army unit, and our basic training and so on was accomplished there.

[00:06:27.98] Scouting, patrolling, long marches. Our battalion commander was from over in the valley of Virginia. He was very much an aficionado of Stonewall Jackson. He wanted us to be able to move like greased lightning. So we went everywhere at sort of a jog or trot. And we did move fast and we moved great distances.

[00:06:49.81] So he marched the dickens out of us every chance he got, took us on forced marches at high speeds, which stood me in good stead later. We spent a lot of time on the range, firing all of the various infantry weapons. We learned, of course, everything about the school of soldiering, extended order drill, formations, signals that would allow you to get quickly into the right kind of combat formation if you were in the field and were fired upon, that kind of thing. MARK FRANKLIN: Right. SAMUEL WILSON: These are things I took very much to heart. I was promoted to corporal, then to sergeant, then to staff sergeant. And wound up doing a lot of teaching myself as a noncom, which I loved.

[00:07:37.23] MARK FRANKLIN: Right. You found yourself with Merrill's Marauders behind enemy lines in Burma.

[00:07:44.52] SAMUEL WILSON: That was after I had graduated from OCS, had been kept back from my class for one year to teach light infantry tactics, raiding by infiltration, scouting and patrolling, these kinds of subjects there on the red hills of Fort Benning Reservation which meant that I had a year to contemplate, conceive, and teach the very things that I was going to be required to do in Burma. A very, very fortuitous combination which meant that I was better prepared than I otherwise would be.

[00:08:22.72] So I wound up in Merrill's Marauders as a first lieutenant, initially as a rifle company executive officer, and subsequently after a few weeks became the intelligence and reconnaissance-- one of the intelligence and reconnaissance platoon leaders of the Marauders. I and another I&R platoon leader were used frequently directly by General Merrill on missions for the whole unit.

[00:08:51.51] MARK FRANKLIN: And that was a counterinsurgency mission. That was--

[00:08:54.42] SAMUEL WILSON: No. No. It was more direct action than counterinsurgency.

[00:08:59.52] MARK FRANKLIN: I see.

[00:09:00.27] SAMUEL WILSON: We were behind the Japanese lines. The Japanese were almost on the border of India. India was in a state of seething political unrest. The Japanese were toying with the idea of extending their reach into India, although they were already vastly overextended themselves.

[00:09:21.01] Stilwell on the other hand felt that the American objective in Southeast Asia and in China, Burma, India was to keep the nationalist Chinese fully involved in the war and to ensure that the one million Japanese who were then occupying huge swaths of Chinese territory would be held there and would not be able to be transferred back to the home islands to assist in the defense of the home islands when the inevitable invasion by the Allied forces, mainly American forces, occurred.

[00:10:09.60] So his immediate goal was to reopen the Burma Road. We were trying to get supplies to Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Army, but we were flying them over the Hump in C-47s and C-46s and providing only a trickle of what was needed there. And we could only provide the tonnage over land that Chiang Kai-shek needed. And so Stilwell felt that the key to that part of the war was to get the Burma Road open and to be able to move supplies from India across Burma into Southeast China to Kunming and that general area so that Chiang Kai-shek could continue to fight the Japanese sufficiently successfully that he tied them down where they were.

[00:11:07.08] MARK FRANKLIN: I see. Now do you think-- and we'll get to your experiences in Vietnam a little later. But it sounds like some of those experiences probably helped prepare you for what was to come later when you served in Vietnam.

[00:11:18.12] SAMUEL WILSON: Very much so.

[00:11:19.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah.

[00:11:19.95] SAMUEL WILSON: We were behind Japanese lines. And in most instances when we bumped the Japanese, we were outnumbered. So we had to rely on the combat multiplying factor of surprise, good intelligence, again speed marches and mobility I referred to earlier, to be able successfully to stand up to the Japanese. We were fighting mainly the Japanese 18th Imperial Guards Division, the victors at Singapore who had come across to Rangoon and

marched north, had acquitted themselves extraordinarily well driving Stilwell and two Chinese divisions out of Burma. This was in 1942.

[00:12:07.24] So we had a we had a tough enemy. We were in his is backyard, and he didn't like it. So what I'm leading up to is the assistance and support of the indigenous population was the sine qua non to our survival, let alone successful operations. That particular factor emerged as one of the most salient factors in the war in Vietnam.

[00:12:44.82] MARK FRANKLIN: Absolutely. Sure.

[00:12:46.26] SAMUEL WILSON: Except in Vietnam, the situation had been reversed, and the Marauders and the VC have been playing the same role.

[00:12:55.47] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah, I see. But you were well prepared for that because you had done that.

[00:13:02.67] SAMUEL WILSON: Yeah. The fact that we had been teaching the same kinds of things that we would be facing in Burma was a great advantage. And then what we learned in Burma was a great advantage for me from then on.

[00:13:25.28] SAMUEL WILSON: As you know, there are lulls in combat. There are times when there's no firing, when you are resting, recuperating, repairing equipment, cleaning your weapons, and so on. We had such periods in the rear areas of the Japanese end of Burma. On those occasions, we would sometimes set up our wireless radios, the SCR-284 for example, and experiment with the antenna around on trees and bushes and so on, orienting them in different directions to see what we could pick up from the outside world.

[00:14:07.82] It was amazing what we could pick up, especially when we were at altitude, when we went up in the mountains of Burma, the spurs that extend down from the Himalaya range. On one occasion, it was just before our third mission. We were kind of on our last legs, morale was down, and we'd lost a lot of people. We bivouacked on a mountain pass, a kind of a glade, a flat area, set up our radio that night, built fires because the monsoons were rolling in and there were clouds between us and the valley the Jap was-- the Japs were in the valley, but they couldn't see our fires through the cloud, and we knew it. We were wet and tired and hungry. Gave us a chance to warm up and dry out.

[00:14:53.66] And we began to play that game with the radios, put our aerials up and we began to pick up Radio Free Rangoon, which was a joke because it was on the Japanese controlled Radio Free Manila, another joke, BBC, some Chinese language stations. I knew only a few words in Chinese, but I could pick it up enough to know that they were speaking Chinese, and others around the world. And one station coming in, rattling indistinctly through the static, was in a language I'd never heard before.

[00:15:37.41] And one of my muleskinners was of Russian ancestry. And he said, wait, wait, wait, that's Russian, let's see what they're saying. So we fiddled a little bit, brought it in a little more clearly. And he began haltingly to interpret what was being said. They were talking about

the Battle of Kursk, which took place in August 1943 and was a turning point in the war on the Soviet-German front.

[00:16:07.29] And it was a propaganda broadcast. It was designed for homefront consumption and homefront morale and so on. But as he talked, I realized more fully something I'd already felt-- that that was where the war was really being fought, on a front that extended between 2,000 and 3,000 miles involving from 100 to 150 divisions on either side, a war being fought on a scale and scope that we could hardly imagine where we were of human suffering and so on involving huge swaths of the population.

[00:16:51.00] I sat there and it dawned on me, we're pipsqueaks. We're a sideshow. It's all the war we can handle right here because one man firing and being fired at is all the war anybody wants. But I listened to that. It dawned on me, here we have a whole nation really fighting and sacrificing, dying by the thousands. Actually, they eventually lost 26 million as you are aware.

[00:17:20.93] I stood up by the fire and I said to my guys, you know, fellows, when this is all over, I am going to be a captain, I'm going to study Russian, I'm going to get myself assigned to Moscow as an assistant military attache, and I'm going to find out what motivates a people to fight, to sacrifice, persist in these horrible conditions so long. One has to try to understand what are the dynamics at work. And I'm going to go find out. And I did.

[00:18:00.76] MARK FRANKLIN: So it was your interest in the Russian people that led you that direction.

[00:18:05.23] SAMUEL WILSON: Absolutely. It was my interest in the Russian performance during World War II which was only possible because of the Russian peoples' willingness to sacrifice for the Motherland. I wanted to comprehend that. I wanted to get a mental rope around that.

[00:18:23.42] So three years later, I was a captain. I was in Columbia University in the School of International Affairs Russian Institute for a little over a year. Then I went to Europe for three years plus as a language and area student and became a FAST program graduate, Russia, later, FAO.

[00:18:44.45] MARK FRANKLIN: Very good.

[00:18:45.94] SAMUEL WILSON: I was the defense attache in 1971 in Moscow. I was the first general officer to inherit that portfolio as the defense attache with all the other attaches answering to me.

[00:19:05.87] SAMUEL WILSON: My 37 years of military service divided roughly into two parts. One part was Intelligence, the other part was Special Operations. Insurgencies, counter insurgencies, revolutionary wars, raids, direct action missions, a la the Delta Force today, or the SEALs, or what have you. The individual who influenced me the most in that area was an Air Force officer by the name of Lansdale. He retired as a major general. I knew him as a colonel.

[00:19:47.17] I eventually became his deputy when he was the assistant to the secretary of defense for special operations. This was during the period 1961-63. Lansdale had become a legend for what he achieved working with President Magsaysay, Ramon Magsaysay in the Philippines, taking care of Hukbalahap threat, the communist insurrectionists in the Philippines. He subsequently went to Vietnam and began doing the same thing with Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam.

[00:20:27.49] Lansdale was a revolutionary. He was somewhat doctrinaire, but he had a number of precepts about wars down at the lower end of the spectrum that were as much political in nature as they were military. And he understood the dynamics in that kind of war-- the economic factors, the psychological factors, the cultural factors, the sociological factors and so on.

[00:21:05.68] He wrote about them, and he loved to talk about them. So I sat there listening to him for a couple of years, and we would travel together. And so we became very close friends. And it was he who influenced me the most in that area.

[00:21:27.80] I actually got to know him best when I graduated from the Command General Staff College in 1959 and was assigned as the director of instruction at the US Special Warfare-- US Army Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. And the commandant, an elderly colonel, a really great man by the name of George M Jones, asked me one day what did I think of our counter guerrilla capability. I said, it's very, very poor, we don't understand it.

[00:22:04.73] He said, don't you think it takes a thief to catch a thief? I said, you mean a Special Forces man to catch a guerrilla? And he said, absolutely. He said, can we develop some doctrine in this area? Can we develop maybe a course of instruction? I said, I can hear Lansdale's approval right now. He said, would you take this in tow? I said, absolutely.

[00:22:28.52] So I pulled together a bunch of very bright young captains and majors and we developed a course, a 12-- I think a 12 weeks course as I recall, in how to handle revolutionaries, insurgents, guerrillas, and so on. How does a government handle that kind of internal threat, that kind of subversion, political subversion, and guerrilla tactics being employed against you?

[00:23:06.96] We got very excited about it because we knew what the Russians were doing. I was very, very familiar with the Khrushchev speech of January 1961 where he talked about *voiny natsional'no osvoboditel'nyye*-- wars of national liberation. This is exactly what Lansdale was talking about. This is what George M. Jones was talking about. Now I was being asked to come up with something, some ideas that we could teach and put into practice that would help us to be more effective in assisting countries, especially in the Third World, where the Soviet Communists were actively acting as revolutionaries and trying to overthrow existing governments.

[00:23:53.58] It was interesting. The Army was not receptive to what we were doing. They felt we were engaging in political warfare. They felt that it smelled of commissars and so on. And when I developed the course and we set it up and were ready to teach the course at Bragg, the Army wouldn't support it.

[00:24:17.85] John N. Irwin, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, ASDISA, came down, was briefed on it, underwrote the cost of the first course. The first course that was taught was foreign officers only. There was not an American officer in the course. Our dilemma there at Bragg in 1960 when we were putting this rather revolutionary, or I should say counter-revolutionary maybe, course together and causing some controversy within the Army because it was unconventional, it was unorthodox. And to some it smacked of introducing too much in the way of political dynamics into what we, as military men, were going to be doing, and in this case, teaching.

[00:25:13.11] So we were faced with the question of what to call it, what do what we had done. To call it counter guerrilla was too narrow, did not embrace the scope and sweep of the problem. To call it counter resistance was semantically unsound, psychologically unsound, because we had been so solidly-- in World War II, so solidly on the side of the resistance that somehow counter resistance did not resonate as a term.

[00:25:58.06] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[00:25:59.08] SAMUEL WILSON: To call it counterrevolutionary was even worse because we were saying in our coursework and so on that we were the true revolutionaries. And that was one of my favorite debates with my Soviet interlocutors, put them down and tell them they were a bunch of fakes and prove that we were the revolutionaries. And I used this a lot in Vietnam.

[00:26:25.90] So finally, about two o'clock at night, I guess there were about seven of us there in my office, and I had blackboards around on the wall. I stood up at the blackboard and I wrote, counter hyphen insurgency. And one of the guys said, hey, that's it. Let's call it counter-insurgency. Abbreviated COIN. So the term has stuck and became a buzzword very quickly in Washington.

[00:26:50.00] MARK FRANKLIN: So you created the term counter-insurgency?

[00:26:52.55] SAMUEL WILSON: We created the term counter-insurgency, yes.

[00:26:55.30] MARK FRANKLIN: You and those officers that you pulled together to figure out how to do that course.

[00:26:58.24] SAMUEL WILSON: That's right.

[00:26:58.97] MARK FRANKLIN: Wow.

[00:27:01.27] SAMUEL WILSON: So that was sort of part of the background as we faced the situation in Vietnam.

[00:27:12.82] MARK FRANKLIN: How did you wind up in Vietnam?

[00:27:18.30] SAMUEL WILSON: It's a little complex, and I'll try to make it simple.

[00:27:20.58] MARK FRANKLIN: OK.

[00:27:21.78] SAMUEL WILSON: My wife was an invalid and would have difficulty taking care of the children in my absence. And one of my children, my daughter, was handicapped. And so it looked as though I was going to have to ask on compassionate grounds that by going to Vietnam for the required tour be postponed until I could get my family situation in better shape.

[00:27:52.70] About that time, the position came open in Vietnam in the US operations mission. They called it USOM. It was actually USAID. It was a position occupied by a fellow name of Rufus Philips, a wonderful, wonderful guy, a great American. His book incidentally Why Vietnam is a very, very useful book for anybody to read.

[00:28:23.65] He had set up a program and he had set up what he called the Office of Rural Affairs. And he had set up a program that addressed the insurgency/counter-insurgency situation involving the Vietnamese and the Viet Cong down at the rice-roots level, at the village hamlet level. And it was beginning to show some progress.

[00:28:55.43] Through a series of unfortunate circumstances, none of which he was responsible for, he had come home and had not been able to return. And so they were seeking someone to take his place. Again, a little complicated-- they were casting around and interviewing people. I was one of those interviewed,

[00:29:16.75] at the recommendation of Lansdale. And I was chosen then to go to Vietnam to take this job, eventually this job. I went in for the first several months as the deputy in this job and then took it over subsequently after several months as the associate director of USOM for field operations. And that encompassed educational programs, medical programs, agricultural programs, transportation programs, public safety programs and so on. All of these things that have to do with local infrastructure.

[00:29:59.93] MARK FRANKLIN: And all development.

[00:30:00.89] SAMUEL WILSON: And all related to development.

[00:30:03.98] MARK FRANKLIN: Yes. What year was that?

[00:30:05.63] SAMUEL WILSON: This was 1964.

[00:30:07.16] MARK FRANKLIN: When you first went over and it's part of the development.

[00:30:10.19] SAMUEL WILSON: That's right. In 1964. So that is how I happened to go to Vietnam. Now at that time, I was a lieutenant colonel, and a fairly junior lieutenant colonel. Although I had been picked out of zone for my colonelcy, nonetheless my uniform was hanging in mothballs in the closet as I accepted this job because this job involved responsibilities that would require much more seniority. I had much more seniority than a lieutenant colonel.

[00:30:51.13] So I was under the provisions of a rather obscure piece of legislation called PASA. You may be familiar with it. Participating Agencies Service Agreement. It's sort of similar to and may have derived its origin from the British system of brevetting people for jobs where you take a man of a lower rank and given the rank that applies to a particular job, he holds that rank as long as he's in that job, when he comes back, he moved back down to his original rank.

[00:31:27.34] In this case, this lieutenant colonel was placed at the pay grade level of a class one foreign service officer when he went to Vietnam. And so that was the rank, that was the title, and those were the circumstances that took me to Vietnam. And it also made it possible with increased salary and so on and the kind of support that the State Department and the Agency for International Development could give enabled me to be able to expend the necessary resources to take care of my family situation. Indeed, I put my daughter in a school for the handicapped down in Louisiana, my oldest son was then a senior at the University of Alabama, my other two sons, including the one sitting behind you there, went with their mother to Baguio in-- the summer capital in the Philippines for two years while I was doing part of my time in Vietnam. And I was able to get over to see them about every six or eight weeks for at least a weekend just to make sure things were going all right. So the government, the US government so to speak, invested time and resources and special consideration in me, and it was incumbent upon me to justify that expenditure.

[00:33:06.12] SAMUEL WILSON: The layout of the city of Saigon and the architecture and my first provincial capital that I visited and then going down to a hamlet in a village reminded me of the atmosphere that I had known in France. The same kind of roofs, same kind of house style, and a lot of the same kind of atmosphere, a lot of the same cuisine.

[00:33:42.04] So in other words, what I'm saying is the French influence was evident. If you looked for it, you could see it, you could feel it. So it was there. And there's a point, I think, to be made here. This led to the question in my mind of whether that was good or whether that was bad as far as the war itself was concerned.

[00:34:09.58] On balance, it was disadvantageous. Vietnam had bifurcated into two social aggregations. There were the Francophiles who were French educated, spoke French in some instances better than they did their native language, who were the bureaucrats, the people in charge, the people of wealth and prestige and power, especially in the military. They were occidentals in many ways. You only found the Orientals as opposed to occidentals when you got down to the level of the village. And that's where the Viet Cong were.

[00:35:04.76] So there was a gap between these two layers of society. And psychologically, politically, the Viet Cong possessed a huge advantage. There was a saying in Vietnamese that the emperor's laws stop at the village gate. And then Vietnamese will flip that on you in a hurry. They're very aware of their traditions, their sayings, and their history.

[00:35:37.04] And I began to realize more and more and more that that was a weighty saying. When you got to the village gate, the emperor's laws stopped and you entered a different world. Unfortunately, sometimes you were entering the world of the Viet Cong. So despite our vaunted power, despite all our wealth and technology, we were at a disadvantage in a war that involves

insurgents and counter-insurgents, where political, economic, sociological, psychological, cultural, ideological factors played almost equal roles.

[00:36:26.54] The military was not the primary role as far as I was concerned. And we were trying to fight this war with a major emphasis on military means. So that almost sets you up to lose.

[00:36:45.79] MARK FRANKLIN: But you were over there doing and working with the State Department with USAID, USOM at that time, doing development projects to kind of counter some of the effects and influences of the Viet Cong. Was that the objective of the mission?

[00:37:04.19] SAMUEL WILSON: Stated simply, our objective was to make local government more effective, for all that kind of connotes. That's a weighted statement.

[00:37:14.41] MARK FRANKLIN: And by local government, you meant at the village level.

[00:37:17.08] SAMUEL WILSON: At the village level, the hamlet and village level. And to a degree, district level. And that little qualification, district level, is an important one in the case of Vietnam, which I hope we'll get to.

[00:37:36.56] We felt that we wanted the man behind the water buffalo to realize that the government, as opposed to the Viet Cong, could do and would do a better job in assisting him to raise his quality of life and to provide a better future still for his children. Now if he became convinced that this was so, then there would be no reason for him to sacrifice to support the Viet Cong because his support to the Viet Cong was at some risk. And they were harsh, they were cruel, they were demanding, their taxation rate was extraordinary. It was high.

[00:38:33.27] MARK FRANKLIN: The Viet Cong taxation on the local people.

[00:38:35.28] SAMUEL WILSON: Viet Cong taxation on the local people. And if they found someone who would not collaborate or was dragging his feet, they would be very cruel to him. Possibly even execute him as an example. So draconian, I guess, is the right term.

[00:38:55.08] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[00:38:56.13] SAMUEL WILSON: Not always. It varied from Viet Cong commander to commander and province to province somewhat. But the big point I want to make is that there were two layers to the society, two groupings of society. We were aligned as far as I'm concerned with the wrong group. If politically, strategically, it had been in our interest to support the Viet Cong, the war would have been over in less than a year.

[00:39:41.90] SAMUEL WILSON: I had essentially my own program with USOM involving all of these developmental efforts that I hinted about. They were much more involved than we've been able to go. The program was a successful one. And the Vietnamese we're responding to it.

[00:40:08.27] We had problems, of course. We had problems of corruption, some of the things that we were trying to get down to the people were being siphoned off by greedy local officials, that kind of thing. And we saw instances of corruption that we weren't able to handle, but gross favoritism, inept people being moved to higher positions as favors by nepotism.

[00:40:35.54] When Ambassador Lodge invited me to come over and be in effect his chief of staff and had me appointed to the first rank of minister, he said, in effect you'll be my deputy. There will be times, many times, when protocol-wise I'm invited to more than one thing. I will send you to take my place. And he did that often.

[00:40:58.49] In fact, I'll never forget the one big meeting when McNamara had come. I was sitting in the front row. And Lodge was up on the stage with McNamara and a number of other officials. Lodge saw me come in and as I took my seat, he pointed to me and did this, got up and left his seat and had me come up and take it. And the guys who knew me and knew what my real military rank was were aghast that he would do that sort of thing. I tried very hard not to let that get in the way.

[00:41:37.22] When I became-- the title was United States mission coordinator. My job was to coordinate various programs alongside the one that I had been running. That meant programs of the Central Intelligence Agency out in the countryside, that meant information programs of the joint US public affairs office, the USIA institution in Saigon, making sure that their programs were congruent with and blended together with programs of other agencies and so on.

[00:42:28.86] This was a very serious problem in our effort in Vietnam. There were two really serious problems. And there are others, but I hope we get a couple of these, and this is the first one. There was more than a tendency, there was the practice of agencies represented in Vietnam-- USIA, AID, CIA, and various parts of the military and the services and so on-- trying to control the efforts of their people on the ground in Vietnam. Their people on the ground on Vietnam we're stovepiped back to them in Washington. And for a long time, no serious effort was made to break these stovepipes and ensure that they worked together as a team.

[00:43:39.91] MARK FRANKLIN: So there was no unity of command.

[00:43:42.10] SAMUEL WILSON: Unity of command. You took the words right out of my mouth. In bureaucracies, communications flow in two separate ways-- vertically, and if it's run properly and you've got a good commander who understands, the right things flow along that pipeline, and horizontally. And that is more often than not where things break down in an organization. And when you find an organization which seems to be floundering, where things are not going well, the first place to look as far as I'm concerned is lateral communications.

[00:44:27.05] So the man on your right and the man on your left know what you're doing, what you intend to do, and you know what they're doing and what they intend to do, and you talk to each other. And when you get that, you get a unit functioning at this level. When that is absent, you get a unit functioning at this level. That was a very serious problem in Vietnam. And it never was completely rectified.

[00:44:55.02] But my job, when I came in to work for Lodge as US mission coordinator was to address that problem, to try to get a unified effort. And for ten months, I worked at it. I made limited progress, but I didn't really make a significant difference. I got ballyhooed and lionized for the few things that we did get done. I picked the easy things first just to try to get a little momentum.

[00:45:36.47] So as we were approaching the end of about ten months, I asked Lodge and also asked for Westmoreland's concurrence to let me go down to Long An province for six months and to run everything that America had anything to do with in that province myself-- military, paramilitary, intelligence, information programs, developmental programs, everything. And I said, if I can prove to you that unity of command is an almost sacrosanct principle, then maybe we can translate it and export it to other provinces, and we'll begin to get somewhere in this war. They let me do it.

[00:46:41.96] It was rough. But I went down on November. My results were briefed four months later-- I asked for six-- to President Johnson in Guam when he flew out there for a conference on Vietnam, 15th of March, 1967. He said, this is the way I want the war fought in every province in Vietnam. CORDS-- civil operations revolutionary development support-- was born at that point.

[00:47:17.16] And CORDS, while it had some failures, it eventually worked. And after the Viet Cong expended themselves on the Tet Offensive in 1968, CORDS really went to work to exploit their defeat. And by late '71 to '72, you could get on your bicycle on the shore of the South China Sea and ride all-- down in the delta-- and ride across to the Cambodian border, unarmed, and feel perfectly safe. So of course CORDS worked, but worked belatedly.

[00:47:59.64] At that point, the North Vietnamese militarized the war and began to bring in heavy stuff. But we had over geared as we-- the pendulum swing phenomenon-- we had over geared, I believe, in the direction of COIN. And we had worked so hard to reorient the ARVN, the South Vietnamese military, that they had lost a bit of their conventional combat edge.

[00:48:32.18] SAMUEL WILSON: I can give you some little vignettes.

[00:48:33.97] MARK FRANKLIN: Yes, please.

[00:48:36.38] SAMUEL WILSON: I have in my mind a picture of a hamlet school, a new building with little benches and little desks and a little stack of books. Vietnamese teenage girls, or in their 20s, in their white ao dais standing there to greet students coming in for the first day. Little kids come in with big eyes, looking around, wondering what's going on. And they are shown to their respective seats and desks. There's a stack of books.

[00:49:18.49] And the wonderment in the eyes of those kids when they opened the first books they had ever seen, as far as I was concerned, brought tears to my eyes and made me say to myself, it's worthwhile. This is worth it, this is worth it. However, social economic mobility lies there. If they will learn, they can rise, they can improve their lives.

[00:49:45.50] MARK FRANKLIN: It's a great, great memory. Thanks.

[00:49:47.84] SAMUEL WILSON: That was one thing. Seeing some of the farm to market roads being improved, that we helped improve, and the traffic on those, the bustle of people going to markets with pigs and chickens and ducks and all kinds of produce and so on and selling them in local markets and arguing and exchanging and so on-- seeing the local economic dynamic at work freely also was-- that's something I can see--

[00:50:22.63] MARK FRANKLIN: And that was facilitated by our efforts to improve the road networks and--

[00:50:25.23] SAMUEL WILSON: Oh, absolutely. We did all kinds of things.

[00:50:28.27] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[00:50:28.81] SAMUEL WILSON: The things that they brought to the market-- well, improved rice seeds, better rice harvest, more rice to sell, more variety, greater variety of vegetables, larger, bigger, more nutritious, improved strains of poultry, of swine and pigs-- there was a story incidentally. Those were things that helped improve the economic level.

[00:51:01.75] Let me back off and say we identified five things that were important to the man behind the water buffalo. And we didn't just sit down and scratch them out quickly. They derived from an early association with Lansdale. They derived from our work on counter-insurgency at Bragg, and they derived from seminars, informal seminars that we would hold in my quarters in Saigon at night, involving high ranking people, both Vietnamese and American and some foreign presence, trying to figure its dynamics out, where were the levers, that kind of thing.

[00:51:44.52] Out of all this emerged general consensus that the man behind the water buffalo had, if you will, five levers. Five levers. There were five things that were very important. There may have been more, but these were the five were settled on. First was security.

[00:52:04.07] He wanted to get out of the crossfire. Harassing and interdicting artillery fire was the bane of his existence. It played havoc with his livestock and his poultry, it frightened his family, it brought very little in the way of results. Every once in a while, a round would hit a hut, destroy it. There were occasional casualties among innocents from it.

[00:52:33.18] So he wanted to get out of the crossfire. If he got caught in a fight between the Viet Cong and the ARVN, he'd get chewed up. So he said, make the war go away from my area. I need security for myself and my family. And I'm going to vote for that group that provides me that security.

[00:52:58.79] OK, so you want to put your Popular Forces, your Regional Forces, your Field Police, even your Provincial Reconnaissance Units and so on, with all of these we worked to provide the issues of public safety. That was the first. Second one was social justice. Whatever you want to call it-- social justice.

[00:53:27.30] MARK FRANKLIN: Rule of law, or something else?

[00:53:28.56] SAMUEL WILSON: Absolutely.

[00:53:29.31] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[00:53:30.07] SAMUEL WILSON: Even a four-year-old child instinctively recognizes a bad situation and will say in his squeaky voice, that's not fair. Fair, fairness. Corruption was endemic in Vietnam-- Vietnamese society, especially among the upper layer that I've described. And when he would go to the market and sell his produce and come back and have to go through a police checkpoint and have half his profits taken away from him allegedly as taxation, that was a blow to him.

[00:54:10.09] He would listen to that Viet Cong agent who would sneak into his hut that night and talk to him about getting rid of those police and that checkpoint. Social security, and there are many, many aspects of that. But I will simply tell you, I have seen a simple peasant, the man behind the buffalo, water buffalo, willing to sacrifice his security in the interest of social justice for himself and his family. So that social justice is not an idle term. It's a very, very important lever. Very important dynamic.

[00:54:46.30] Thirdly, and I've already referred to it-- education. Educational opportunity. The man behind the water buffalo realized that if his children could be educated, they could achieve things that he who could not read nor write would be able to achieve. There was a socioeconomic ladder to climb, and education was the passport that allowed you to get to that ladder and start climbing. He knew that almost instinctively.

[00:55:20.34] So our investment in educational activities and so on, part of the overall nation building or developmental process, was very, very popular. Made a difference. And there were times when the Viet Cong would make a mistake. We'd open a new school and kids would start. They'd come in one night and blow it up. And the locals would put up a sign, put up a sign saying, thanks to the VC, our children will not go to school this fall. So you can see clearly how important that is.

[00:55:53.45] Thirdly, health services. The most rudimentary health services. Teaching them all about sanitation and personal hygiene, also providing what we called maternity dispensaries, little field clinics at the village level staffed by people who weren't doctors but who were given nurse training and first-- how to handle first aid and how to administer the kinds of medicine and so on, and some sort of a system that would allow them to do refer a seriously ill patient whose ills lay beyond their ability to administer to-- refer them to a slightly higher level where there would be more sophisticated care available.

[00:56:46.77] The man behind the water buffalo could bring his wife who was pregnant and about to give birth to a child to one of these little clinics and take her into one of the bashas where there would be a very primitive kind of birthing table so to speak where the woman could lie there on this table at proper angle with their feet in stirrup cups, give birth to a baby, be disinfected and sterilized and so on on-- her body, and the baby cleaned up and so on. And they

would be kept there for a couple of days until bleeding would stop, and she'd be all right and the baby healthy and crying to be nursed. And she would go home, recovering rapidly with a healthy baby and a beaming husband. The man behind the water buffalo would say, I'm for that. You get on his side if you do that, or he joins your side when you do that.

[00:57:50.28] I guess the last thing I would mention would be economic opportunity. Trying to provide ways and means and guidance to him in such a way that for the investment of his time, labor, materials, he could get a decent return. And that, of course, involves a raft of small enterprises and pursuits. And we were loaded in this area.

[00:58:31.65] And as they begin to succeed and live better and eat better, the local government then would be more effective. And they were more responsive to and willing to give their allegiance to the local government, which was allegedly an extension of the government in Saigon.

[00:58:58.86] SAMUEL WILSON: To find out some Vietnamese whom you trusted was in fact an agent on the other side. That would be-- that was one of them. Another bad memory was to discover, at least among some Vietnamese, that there is somehow a streak of cruelty, a streak of vengeance that exceeds what we can accept or live with in our society. I recall in an operation to recover a Viet Cong village, to bring it back in the government fold down in Long An province, that was at Rach Kien. The PR unit, public reconnaissance unit-- provincial reconnaissance unit down there had captured some Viet Cong, I think three or four, and summarily executed them and beheaded them. They took the heads of two of the Viet Cong and put them on the railing of a small bridge in the center of the village of Xa Rach Kien-- Rach Kien-- so that the people would see them.

[01:00:32.89] And I came on the scene when a reporter from Der Spiegel-- Der Schpeegal-- was taking photographs of these heads. And one of the PRU soldiers had just lit a cigarette in the mouth of each head as though they were-- the Viet Cong were smoking. And the fellow from Der Spiegel was delighted because he knew that this was one photograph when he sent it back to Germany they was-- people were going to see. And they laughed. They thought this was funny. I thought it was horrible.

[01:01:15.27] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah. And worked against your efforts.

[01:01:18.16] SAMUEL WILSON: Oh, absolutely.

[01:01:19.17] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah. That does not help your effort. Yeah.

[01:01:22.53] SAMUEL WILSON: The Viet Cong in Long An pulled a successful night attack against a PRU unit, one of the very, very few they succeeded to pulling. And they captured a couple of Viet Cong. They eviscerated one of them and removed all of his innards. They just took them out of his body but kept them in the juxtaposition that they're in when they're inside the body. And they carefully arranged the inner organs against a thorny hedgerow so that someone coming up the path to the hedgerow would see a man but no skin, no bones, just the inner organs arranged with the external part of the body missing.

[01:02:12.68] And they thought that this would be-- this gruesome apparition would affect Viet Cong morale. Whether it did or whether it didn't, whether it made them more angry than it made them afraid, I'm not sure. But it was gruesome. It was not the sort of thing that we would tolerate.

[01:02:30.24] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[01:02:31.68] SAMUEL WILSON: There were numbers of examples like that. Now they were in the minority of instances, but they happened. They happened country wide. The Viet Cong did them also. So they were, as far as I'm concerned, quite unprincipled in visiting their hatred upon each other to a far greater extent than our culture could tolerate.

[01:03:06.49] SAMUEL WILSON: Not too much. There was a British representative, Sir Robert Thompson, who had been one of the architects of the successful British experience in Malaya, their counter-insurgency experience against the communists there. A man who understood doctrine, understood the dynamics of this kind of war very well. He and I spoke a common language.

[01:03:30.80] I knew him well, liked him. I forget the name of the Australian. Not quite as gifted, a captain, but I liked him. And so I worked with them. As far as the various troops were concerned, I had relations with the various divisions commanders, but I didn't stay in Saigon. I slept in Saigon from time to time. I was in each of the 44 provinces continually, always checking on.

[01:03:59.08] The troops only do well those things the boss checks, and I know that. So I was always moving around to make sure we were making the best possible use of Uncle Sam's largesse. And that with them largesse, what lessons that they could learn and could apply. The largesse by itself were just gifts. It didn't mean a thing unless they were part of a coherent program.

[01:04:24.41] So I wanted to make sure that the program and its aims and the gifts that were fused together. And that meant going out and checking all the time. So I wore out a number of old C-45's flown by Air America and also a number of helicopters doing that. And I spent the night many times in villages just to see how things went at night.

[01:04:50.04] MARK FRANKLIN: All right.

[01:04:50.50] SAMUEL WILSON: I learned long ago, and I know you've learned the same thing in your experience-- you can fly into an area, be met, escorted, and given briefings and so on, charts and that kind of thing, any questions, and escorted back to your helicopter and fly away and say, these guys are world-beaters, when really they're losing, they're losing badly. But if you stay the night, you hang around long enough, that face has to come off, reality begins to emerge, and you begin to get the truth of the matter.

[01:05:25.06] So I found even though it was a little dicey at times sleeping on a rice paddy berm in territory that was contested. Nonetheless, that was where you learned how the war was being

fought, who was winning, and what was going on. My question was always, hey, what's going on.

[01:05:47.05] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[01:05:47.62] SAMUEL WILSON: And that's exactly what I wanted to know. So they would say, here comes Mr. What's Going On.

[01:05:54.16] MARK FRANKLIN: Is that right? MARK FRANKLIN: Your assignment was a one or two year posting?

[01:06:03.49] SAMUEL WILSON: Three.

[01:06:03.91] MARK FRANKLIN: Three year posting. So '67.

[01:06:06.13] SAMUEL WILSON: '67.

[01:06:07.69] MARK FRANKLIN: And your wife was in the Philippines.

[01:06:09.88] SAMUEL WILSON: She was in the Philippines for two of those years.

[01:06:11.98] MARK FRANKLIN: OK. So you were able to have contact occasionally.

[01:06:16.10] SAMUEL WILSON: That's right. Every six, eight weeks or so, I would hop in a small jet and flit over and spend a weekend with her and the boys and go out and hit a few golf balls or ride a horse or something like that. They were in Brent Episcopal School, a very highly rated school. So the family was well cared for, well taken care of. And it enabled me to remain long enough hopefully to make a difference. The one year assignment, as far as I'm concerned, was the bane of our existence in Vietnam.

[01:07:01.06] SAMUEL WILSON: I had an aged cousin who called herself my grandmother. She lived in Washington DC up by Rock Creek Park on Connecticut Avenue. She maintained a clipping service for me, and she would send me a big package of clippings about every two weeks. And I would spend almost all night for a couple of nights going through them, devouring them. That was my primary source of information as to what was going on.

[01:07:32.56] I also had good relations with a number of our newspaper people like Joe Galloway. I knew what they were being told from home, also knew what they were reporting. So I wasn't in a vacuum. I had some feel for what was happening at home. I knew that it wasn't complete, but I didn't feel that I was in another world.

[01:07:56.62] MARK FRANKLIN: Did that news have any effect on you on the way you conducted your business in--

[01:08:02.17] SAMUEL WILSON: Worried me a bit in that it was fairly clear to me that the American people didn't understand the war.

[01:08:07.18] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[01:08:07.90] SAMUEL WILSON: But they didn't understand the war because a number of the people who were fighting it didn't understand it either.

[01:08:14.99] MARK FRANKLIN: And you're talking about in Washington as well. Yeah.

[01:08:24.82] SAMUEL WILSON: In terms of pay and allowances and quarters and access to transportation and so on in Vietnam, I lived pretty high on the hog. I tried to compen-- felt a little guilty about it. I tried to compensate for that, at least partially, by getting out and getting in the middle of things and sharing some of the risks. So I never ran into anyone who seemed to resent the fact that I was living quite well. I had a beautiful house and servants and so on.

[01:09:06.13] When I came home-- that was a decision, incidentally, I'd made. I could have remained in the Foreign Service at a fairly high rank. And I don't know whether my ministerial appointment would have continued, but that would have been there on my record. And I could have exchanged my military profession for the Foreign Service.

[01:09:30.31] And I debated it. And I decided I feel more at home in the military. It's a culture that I understand better. It's closer to my farm boy roots, so to speak. So I came back and commanded a Special Forces group.

[01:09:47.71] But coming back, we didn't hop on a crowded plane and fly second class, exchange planes and so on and map sitting up. We came back on the SS President Cleveland, sailing from Manila, across to Hong Kong, and then to Yokohama and then to Honolulu and on to San Francisco. And in San Francisco, they unloaded my 1965 Chevrolet Impala convertible.

[01:10:28.48] And my wife and two boys and I got in it and drove leisurely across the country to Fort Bragg. Well, I put back on my uniform not knowing too well how to wear it. But coming back that way, I was spared what some people encountered when they came through in uniform, coming through an airport.

[01:10:54.19] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[01:10:55.15] SAMUEL WILSON: I also was invited a number of times both locally here, including out here at Hampden-Sydney, to give talks when I was on leave. So I tried to explain what was happening in Vietnam, what was going well, what was going poorly. And so I found that I was reasonably well received.

[01:11:17.54] I was aware of the undercurrent of suspicion, unrest, and in some instances, downright hostility toward what was happening in Vietnam. But I seldom encountered that directly. I read about it, I saw it on television and so on. But it did not affect me personally.

[01:11:45.19] It did my son who went to Vietnam, came back as a captain. He walked into it the moment he landed in San Francisco. So I was aware of it as far as he was concerned.

[01:12:00.00] MARK FRANKLIN: Were the two of you serving at the same time?

[01:12:02.01] SAMUEL WILSON: No.

[01:12:02.68] MARK FRANKLIN: So he served later.

[01:12:06.51] SAMUEL WILSON: He went over in 1971.

[01:12:08.37] MARK FRANKLIN: OK. MARK FRANKLIN: Talk a little bit about some of those lessons that you brought with you from Vietnam that might--

[01:12:19.39] SAMUEL WILSON: I came back to command the 6th Special Forces Group over in the Middle East and Fort Bragg. And I was able to-- It was a very turbulent period. Replacements were just going constantly to Vietnam, not unit-wise, but individual replacements, and being reassigned, being assigned wherever the pencil happened to point when they got there. So the turnover there at Bragg was very high.

[01:12:56.49] One of the things that I did was to ensure that those people who were going back to Vietnam knew what they were getting into. At Bragg, it was almost impossible to have a coherent training program because of turbulence and because of the post, what we called post support, and the guys called pinecone pickup details. And there were guys who were going back to Vietnam who'd never been on the range since basic training and all that kind of thing.

[01:13:36.87] I made myself initially unpopular by taking all the cooks and KPs and mechanics and so on on Saturdays and Sundays and running pocket exercises through what we called our Viet Cong village there in the swamps there at Fort Bragg. And my son sitting behind you actually went with me on one and remembers it well out there in the moonlight with star shells and concussion grenades and all that sort of thing.

[01:14:15.75] We'd wrap up these exercises at the bleachers down at the Gable demonstration area Sunday morning, late. I'd have the kitchens bring some donuts and coffee out and the guys would be sitting there all sweaty and bleary eyed and fatigued and sleep ridden and very angry at me. And their mothers and their wives twice as angry. And I would say-- after I would summarize the exercise and things I hope they've learned, I would say, gents, I know you hadn't wanted to do this, you thought it's a kind of chickenshit. And I want ask you a question. How many of you expect to be back in Vietnam in the next six months? And a few hands would go up. I would say, 12 months. And few more hands would go up. Hold your hands up please. 18 months. And by that time all hands would be up.

[01:15:14.25] And I would say, that's why I took your weekend, to try to give you a little bit of a feel for what you can encounter because maybe if you remember the few things that we've tried to point out here tonight, you'll come back from Vietnam. And your mother who's so angry with me right now will be pleased to welcome you back. At that point, the hand would go down and I'd see an occasional nod. And for some years, I would get random letters from guys who would say, I'm so glad you did that.

[01:15:52.06] This is what it meant to me. I learned this, I learned that, or they'd give me an example of something they picked up. And I realized, it was only a snippet of training. But it was just to say, I don't want you to be caught totally surprised like jumping into a pool of ice water, but just kind of know what it looks like, what it smells like and what it feels like and what you can expect.

[01:16:16.57] MARK FRANKLIN: And it was enough.

[01:16:18.13] SAMUEL WILSON: So that is something I was able to bring back from Vietnam and give to these guys.

[01:16:26.50] MARK FRANKLIN: How about your experience in Vietnam and in the military? How do you think it affects the way that veterans are returning from combat today? Is there an application there? Do you think there's a correlation?

[01:16:46.33] SAMUEL WILSON: I don't think there was a feeling of national shame. But I think thoughtful people who may even have been a bit unkind to returnees from Vietnam themselves in retrospect as they learn how it became almost a national phenomenon. I think you said, hey, this is not right, these guys didn't want to go to Vietnam any more than we'd want to go to Vietnam.

[01:17:13.38] But the commander in chief, our president, asked them to, and they went, and they served, they risked their lives, they risked the loss of limbs, they risked being crippled for the rest of their lives, but they went. And in most instances did the best they could or at least did what they were told to do. And they need to be appreciated. We don't need to lionize them and put them on pedestals and so on and worship them like gods,

[01:17:45.58] but we need to sincerely say thank you and demonstrate our thanks. I think that kind of thinking began to permeate through segments of American society and is present today at a higher level than it was during the war. The fact that it is present today at a higher level than during the war. You see troops coming back through civilian air terminal and people standing up and applauding.

[01:18:23.82] I wear my old CBI-- China-Burma-India-- veterans cap sometimes and I'm sitting in an air terminal or in a hospital office or something and somebody will stop by, stick their hand out and say, thank you for your service. This wasn't happening during Vietnam, but it's happening now. And it's a good thing. And it is to be nurtured to where it happens more often. It's good for us as a people to recognize those who sacrifice.

[01:18:58.05] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think that what we're seeing today and the gratitude that's expressed towards our service members today is a result of maybe not guilt, but a recognition that the Vietnam War generation didn't get that, and do you think it's a reaction to that or do you think it's more?

[01:19:13.20] SAMUEL WILSON: I think we don't want to say that is the reason. That is one of the factors, and a very strong factor, not by itself. But I think our public media have picked up on

it a little bit and have helped. Not all, but some of them. It's not the sole reason that veterans today are recognized better, but it influences our current attitude.

[01:19:42.48] MARK FRANKLIN: Are there any lessons that you would take from Vietnam that you would want to pass on to generations today, today's generation?

[01:19:49.59] SAMUEL WILSON: Yeah.

[01:19:50.76] MARK FRANKLIN: And future generations.

[01:19:51.95] SAMUEL WILSON: There are a number of lessons. One-- initial reasons for getting involved in Vietnam were good. We did have faulty intelligence and we had faulty assumptions. But a country was about to be taken over, and the people taking over were communist inspired and supported. And it was during the Cold War when it was the free world and communism were nose to nose, locked in mortal combat.

[01:20:40.29] I know. I was in the middle of it for 40 years. So in other words, what I was trying to say, it was valid. Valid. Our injection of ourselves into the Vietnam fray was valid. Our methodology was poorly thought out. We lacked the doctrine, our strategic goals were hazy, our intelligence assumptions were faulty, and we were trying to back a government and a hierarchy whose time had passed. And so consequently, we were trying to make something work that wasn't likely to work, and we didn't know it.

[01:21:35.26] Secondly, we thought we knew everything. We thought that with the application of US military power, nothing could withstand us. I'm describing arrogance. Arrogance in Vietnam was our Achilles' heel. And a lot of good men died because of arrogance in Washington.

[01:22:04.38] Although the original purpose was worth their being there. This becomes kind of nuanced, if you will, but it has to be, because Vietnam is not a simple question, the war in Vietnam. We didn't recognize that Vietnam was two societies. We were allying ourselves with the society whose day was over.

[01:22:35.24] We didn't recognize that there was a revolution taking place in Vietnam. We allowed it to become-- almost allowed to become a monopoly of the Viet Cong. The programs with which I was working, and others with me, had the design of saying, we're the revolutionaries.

[01:23:00.35] During my subsequent tour in Moscow as the defense attache, they would make all kinds of accusations about American imperialism and what we were doing in Vietnam. I would shoot them to ribbons. I would say, hey friend, tovarishch-- comrade-- you don't want to talk to me about Vietnam. You haven't been there. I've been there. I've been there and I've slept on the ground, in the mud and the swamps, and I've been shot at there and so on.

[01:23:28.91] I've gone days and nights without sleep in Vietnam. I know what's going on in Vietnam. You guys don't. They would finally-- some of them would say-- they would break

down and say, well, the North Vietnamese are a little difficult. They're imperialisticheskiy. Imperialisticheskiy. They're little fascists.

[01:23:49.64] They want to take over Southeast Asia. And they don't care about the allies' interests whatsoever. They are solely for themselves. When I reported that back to Washington, it was an interesting little tidbit.

[01:24:02.30] MARK FRANKLIN: I'll bet.

[01:24:03.05] SAMUEL WILSON: Yeah. But arrogance, ignorance-- a deadly combination. So my advice to kids is learn to listen. Learn to listen. And don't just listen, memorize it. Listen critically. Listen and learn. We can make this a better world if you understand what's going on.

[01:24:31.97] And if you have the moral precepts and so on that this society was founded on, if you take them seriously, we're going to be all right. But listen and learn. And take things seriously.

[01:24:49.08] SAMUEL WILSON: We are imbued with that in our military, in our schools and colleges. Press on. Press on. May look bad, but if you keep going, it'll work out. Keep going. Press on. In other words, be optimistic. Don't communicate your fears and so on to where the troops hear them. Be positive.

[01:25:15.12] Armed with that, the people in Vietnam at the very lowest levels both with troop units and in our advisory effort-- I need to say more about the advisory, too-- would try to echo Marshall Foch. They might have outposts being overrun regularly and so on, but tomorrow's going to be better. We're doing this, we're doing that, and we think we're going to be successful, and we always see some signs of approaching success, that kind of thing. Okay?

[01:25:58.25] That goes to the next echelon. They'd look at it, and they'd say, ah, that's too negative. Let's pick this up a little bit, put a little shine on it. So their attitude instead of 19 Viet Cong casualties, they said, I bet more in the bush that probably got hit that we didn't count. Let's say 49. You kick it up to the next level, and that happens all the way up through MACV until he gets to Washington.

[01:26:26.81] As a result, Washington has an exaggerated view of our successes and a artificially diminished view of the things that are going bad. That phenomenon was present even in the 1950s and continued practically throughout the war. It didn't involve everyone. There were commanders who tried to report accurately and faithfully.

[01:27:09.06] But this was a disease. Even in CORDS, when CORDS got started and Ambassador Robert Komer took it over as the first person in charge, they were addicted to statistics. And they had a very, very complicated reporting form. Guys would take four or five days to do the monthly report. Called it the Hamlet Evaluation System, something-- they called it the HES report, and there was a saying made by some exasperated province adviser who said, you could read the HES reports at 10,000 feet by the light of the burning villages.

[01:28:00.63] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[01:28:01.26] SAMUEL WILSON: So there was a flaw in the reporting system and it harmed our effort. Bad news was suppressed, good news was exaggerated. And I think most any thoughtful person who was involved in Vietnam at all would concur. He might have some qualifications or different examples or whatever, but would concur. That's one thing we learned. From the very beginning, report the truth, facts.

[01:28:36.60] The other thing I spent a good deal of time on, and still do a bit of work on, is the military-- especially the Army-- the military emphasis on command in order to be advanced. My feeling was and still is that there are people in advisory positions who-- let's say a colonel, in an advisory position in a Third World country, developing nation-- can make a difference that is of far greater weight and significance to United States foreign policy and national security interests than that commander of the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne division.

[01:29:39.39] MARK FRANKLIN: I do.

[01:29:42.89] SAMUEL WILSON: When I got back to Bragg, we started a new school. We called it the Military Assistance School, MAS. And we developed a 16 week program. We called it the Command-- it was Military Assistance Officer Command and Staff Course. And we tried to package in that everything we had learned about military assistance, military advisorship, and what is required, the necessity for humility, the importance of learning the local culture and the local language and being able to communicate cross-- and influence people in a cross-cultural sense and so on.

[01:30:31.33] I've felt that for years and years and years, and I think it's even more applicable today. In our Vietnam experience, we have some examples of it working. We have a lot of examples where it didn't work because we didn't take it seriously, and didn't put the right people out, and didn't orient them properly or employed people who were not, personality wise, suitable as-- George Patton would not have been a good military adviser.

[01:31:00.99] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[01:31:01.74] SAMUEL WILSON: So those are some of the things I think we've learned. When we actually got a program established called MAOP, Military Assistance Officer Program, that was strictly for advisers, modeled somewhat on the FAST program, but not the same thing. FAST program more intelligence oriented, this more operationally oriented. I was given membership card number one in the MAOP program.

[01:31:37.29] So I was both a FAST program member and a MAOP program member. When the FAST program folks in intelligence learned it, they asked me-- they said, you got to-- had to be one or the other. We'll remove you from the FAST program if you want this program that you've got going or the other way around. You can't be in both. I wrote Westmoreland whom I'd gotten to know very well. Westmoreland changed it. So I'm the only person there who was a member of each program. But that was made irrelevant because the two programs were merged. no longer FAST and MAOP, but FAO.

[01:32:21.55] MARK FRANKLIN: So that was the birth of the Foreign Area Officer program, the MAOP, the convergence, the mix, blending of the FAST and the MAOP. How about that.

[01:32:29.20] SAMUEL WILSON: The scope of the concept of FAO is now broader than the FAST program.

[01:32:37.03] MARK FRANKLIN: Absolutely. It's operational, it's intelligence, security assistance, and the policy side. All of that together.

[01:32:44.14] SAMUEL WILSON: And it's a magnificent program.

[01:32:52.10] MARK FRANKLIN: Sir, are you familiar with the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War commemoration?

[01:32:55.73] SAMUEL WILSON: In general terms. I know that Congress has appropriated some money, has directed that this could take place, and that there will be a number of programs associated with it. Beyond that, I know relatively little about it.

[01:33:11.48] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, of course, the mission is to thank and honor Vietnam War veterans and their families for their service, valor, and sacrifice. And to give them a thanks that they did not receive when they came home 50 years ago.

[01:33:23.15] SAMUEL WILSON: Certainly fits in the context of what I was just saying.

[01:33:25.46] MARK FRANKLIN: Absolutely. It does. And so based on that, do you have any additional thoughts on that program that you'd like to share or--

[01:33:35.54] SAMUEL WILSON: Absolutely. I think it is a good program. I think it is a marvelous idea. And it does not discharge the public responsibility to those who sacrificed in Vietnam, it does not discharge the public responsibility to those who lost loved ones in Vietnam, but it does say, we recognize the valiant efforts of these people who serve their country. And I think to do it in this sweeping way is entirely appropriate and will be good for the country.