

Draper David U.S. Marine Corps V4

[00:00:15.80] DAVID DRAPER: I was born at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, January 7th, 1950. DAVID DRAPER: Family as a young child, home life was dysfunctional. My mom seemed to like the nightlife, and so there's some question as to who my biological father is.

[00:00:50.91] But when I was 1 and 1/2, my parents separated. My mother drove to San Francisco, which was her home with her mother. And a year later, my father had to come get custody of us, and he took us to Nashville, Tennessee to stay with relatives.

[00:01:17.34] MARC HENDERSON: Where did he go? I'm sorry.

[00:01:19.49] DAVID DRAPER: I don't remember a lot about things I did or so, but we stayed on my uncle's farm, me and my oldest sister, which she would have been-- I have to think about when she was born-- she would have been about eight, seven or eight years old.

[00:01:40.59] And my father was in the Marine Corps, and he was trying to locate housing for us in Portsmouth, Virginia, where he was staying at the base. And so eventually that came about, and we moved there with my older sister and my two half-sisters.

[00:02:07.97] All my sisters, which were three, were all half-sisters by the same mother. And I was by a different father. Two of my sisters were by a different father, another one by a different father. And so he came out and he raised us. In 1955, he came back from Korea.

[00:02:32.36] He had been stationed at Treasure Island, California for a year. And he brought us a new stepmother, which looking back was the Wicked Witch of the West. I'm not sure how they say that. But anyway, I had a family unit. And both parents in their early 50s were alcoholics.

[00:03:08.46] MARC HENDERSON: Sounds like you moved around a lot. Where do you consider your hometown?

[00:03:12.78] DAVID DRAPER: Sheffield, Alabama from where I graduated high school. In 1959, we were moving to New Orleans. My dad was going to be based there for a while. My oldest sister Diane was-- got married on the 18th of June, and we moved on the 20th.

[00:03:39.84] And we moved to New Orleans, lived there for three years. My dad retired when he had 20 years of military service in as a Marine. And my oldest sister at the time had graduated high school. And she opted to stay in New Orleans, or realistically she was forced to stay in New Orleans. And she was not part of us moving to Tennessee.

[00:04:12.78] MARC HENDERSON: How did you end up in the Marine Corps? Did you enlist or were you drafted?

[00:04:16.90] DAVID DRAPER: I enlisted. I didn't have much choice. My dad was a Marine. It was a career.

[00:04:22.78] MARC HENDERSON: And how old were you when you enlisted?

[00:04:24.57] DAVID DRAPER: I was 18. I enlisted. I was not yet graduated from high school.

[00:04:31.17] MARC HENDERSON: Was that 1968?

[00:04:32.43] DAVID DRAPER: 1968. I didn't know why it happened or whatever, but a buddy of mine told me he joined the Marine Corps. He said, you need to go with me on the buddy plan. And so it didn't take a whole lot to convince me. We were kind of a dysfunctional home with two alcoholic parents.

[00:04:56.98] We enlisted in the Marine Corps for three years. And I was a senior in high school. This is in early May 1968, and I'd been accepted to go to the University of Tennessee School of Banking. I don't know what led me there. That was out of state tuition, and I didn't know how I was going to be able to afford it. But this seemed like a good alternative, and so I joined.

[00:05:31.35] MARC HENDERSON: How much did you know about Vietnam before you enlisted?

[00:05:36.87] DAVID DRAPER: I didn't pay attention to it. I wasn't into news. And I didn't much care for it.

[00:05:46.60] MARC HENDERSON: What about your impressions of the draft? Did you have any impressions of the draft before you enlisted?

[00:05:52.20] DAVID DRAPER: No. No.

[00:05:53.61] MARC HENDERSON: What about after you enlisted? And after being a Marine, did you form any impressions?

[00:06:01.08] DAVID DRAPER: No, not really. If a person wanted to enlist, that's fine. If they were drafted, they needed to step up and do their duty. It's a great honor to defend your country, and it's not something you should go to Canada for. DAVID DRAPER: I went to boot camp at MCRD in San Diego. I don't know how I got to West Coast. My dad went to Lejeune.

[00:06:45.74] MARC HENDERSON: What was your MOS?

[00:06:47.18] DAVID DRAPER: I came out of boot camp as an 0311.

[00:06:50.63] MARC HENDERSON: 0311 infantry?

[00:06:52.37] DAVID DRAPER: Grunt. Grunt.

[00:06:54.86] MARC HENDERSON: Now, did you choose that or did they choose that?

[00:06:57.05] DAVID DRAPER: They choose everything for you.

[00:07:02.10] MARC HENDERSON: Did you receive any specialized training?

[00:07:06.32] DAVID DRAPER: No. I went to advanced infantry training. I went to battalion infantry training. And I was due to go to-- home for 30 days leave, and then I could go to staging and come to Vietnam. But my buddy being the patriot he is, he decided to go to Recon school. And he talked me into it. So we both went to Recon school.

[00:07:37.50] MARC HENDERSON: So before we talk about Recon school, because that sounds fascinating to me that the two of you were able to go together, but do you have any memories or memorable experiences from boot camp or from infantry training?

[00:07:56.03] DAVID DRAPER: A lot of things stick out. We got to advanced infantry training, and we had to wait for the company to fully form. And so we did mess hall duty for a couple of weeks. And then we had the opportunity to do guard training for two weeks, where we would go to this guard site, which was ammo dumps, and we would walk our post for four hours, and then we get off for four hours. I mean eight hours.

[00:08:34.76] And then we did this for two weeks. And the most memorable time I had was I was on the furthest ammo dump on the road, and in the middle of the night a mountain lion decided to visit. And here I was with a weapon and a magazine but told, under no circumstances load your rifle.

[00:09:06.71] I loaded my rifle. And he kind of walked away. He didn't ever get closer than probably 50 feet. I don't know if he saw me or not, but I saw him. And so the rest of my time on guard duty was well alert. And I remember that.

[00:09:29.57] MARC HENDERSON: Did you get in trouble for using your weapon?

[00:09:32.00] DAVID DRAPER: I didn't shoot. I didn't fire a around. But I didn't tell anybody either. So maybe we need to delete that.

[00:09:40.90] MARC HENDERSON: No, you're fine. Thanks for sharing that. And so your buddy, what was his name?

[00:09:48.74] DAVID DRAPER: Billy Dan Franks.

[00:09:50.81] MARC HENDERSON: And so he wanted to go to Recon school, and just what did he have to do to convince you to go with him?

[00:09:58.19] DAVID DRAPER: Well, not much. It's always better to have somebody with you, so we went together.

[00:10:03.92] MARC HENDERSON: Now tell me about that school.

[00:10:07.17] DAVID DRAPER: The school was-- we got back to that school on December 31st, Christmas-- New Year's Eve. And we started pretty much immediately after that. And we

had a lot of running to classes. We had a lot of classes on compass reading, and moving at night, and things like that. And they gave us some classes in rappelling.

[00:10:48.97] MARC HENDERSON: So it sounds like a lot of specialized training.

[00:10:55.52] DAVID DRAPER: It is more specialized training.

[00:10:57.68] MARC HENDERSON: So maybe this is a good time for you to explain what a Recon Marine is, and what Recon training was preparing you for.

[00:11:08.48] DAVID DRAPER: OK, a Recon Marine will go-- they serve many purposes. But ours was-- in Vietnam was mostly you go out and you try to detect any enemy movements. If you find trails, what kind of overhead? Would they be spottable from the air?

[00:11:30.86] What kind of trails were used, whether they were wide trails or well packed trails, and just detect any movement you can among the Vietnamese. And if you could, there was opportunities where you could call in air support. Most of our areas that we patrolled in Vietnam were not in range of artillery, but we did have fixed air support as long as the weather was fit.

[00:12:03.83] And that's pretty much what we did. We were supposed to be out there seeing, looking, seeing what we could find, but not being seen ourselves.

[00:12:14.00] MARC HENDERSON: OK. Did you receive any other specialized training before you went off to Vietnam?

[00:12:21.26] DAVID DRAPER: Not before I went. I went to the grunts in Vietnam. And I was there in the grunts for six months before I went to a Recon unit. And when I went to a Recon unit, it was 3rd Recon Battalion, and we went for really two weeks of training. A lot of it was like-- Recon teams are small, so you need somebody to know medical training.

[00:12:56.42] DAVID DRAPER: We left March 1st of '69. And we went and stopped in Hawaii. Then we stopped again in Okinawa. We had a few days in Okinawa to get our shots and everything in order. Then they sent us to Vietnam. And they landed on the tarmac and opened the door, and I just remember the heat hit me and the smell of Vietnam. And it was unlike any other that I've experienced.

[00:13:32.03] And we went down the ramp to the tarmac. And they told me-- I can't remember exactly how I got in to find out where I was going-- but they told me I was going to the grunt unit. I went to my company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines. And I was there in their company for about two days before I got on the helicopter and they took me out to a hilltop.

[00:13:59.21] And we landed there at a good hilltop. And we had to walk over by the ridgeline, about a mile, to another one, and we had to carry supplies over there. And that's when my life began as a grunt.

[00:14:21.97] DAVID DRAPER: We would go on patrols two days, and be on hill security three days-- one day. And it was something we got to-- the grunts were not near as self-disciplined as Marines, as Recon Marines. It was just a different atmosphere. Now that I can look back at both Recon and the grunts, Marines are really disciplined if they're in Recon.

[00:14:52.42] You learn that. You have to be. You can't talk on patrol. You can't smoke. You can't leave cans or cigarette cans here and there. You have to bury everything. And we had a really good commander in 3rd Force Recon that taught us this stuff, that taught us things that we needed to know.

[00:15:19.54] MARC HENDERSON: So before we get to that, when you arrived in Vietnam and you ended up in a grunt unit, how were you assigned? Did you know what unit you were going to before you got there, or did you go as a replacement through a repo depot? Or did that happen in Okinawa?

[00:15:38.77] DAVID DRAPER: The truck stopped, and that's where I got off. And they said, you go right in there. DAVID DRAPER: We were out in the field most of the time. When we first-- flew me out, I was on a hilltop. There were two hilltops close, my company, Kilo Company. And we were running patrols off there. This was really close to the DMZ. And we were running patrols.

[00:16:08.32] And life during the day-- that third day, when we didn't run patrols, we were playing cards. And there wasn't a whole lot to do.

[00:16:25.51] MARC HENDERSON: How much time did you have off, to yourself?

[00:16:33.58] DAVID DRAPER: If you wanted to write letters home and stuff, you had some time. Some of the guys would write home and get packages. And they'd share the packages, and that was really neat. My parents were a little different. But they would write a letter once in a while, and that was kind of a big deal if you ever got a letter at mail call.

[00:17:05.08] MARC HENDERSON: So what was your living conditions? Your living conditions, you were telling me about that.

[00:17:12.31] DAVID DRAPER: As far as I remember, we were on a hilltop. And of course, you come down the hilltop a little bit, and we were stationed around the hill. And there were two person holes, fighting holes. You have your foxhole there for your comfort. Usually, you had your helmet and flak jacket real close to that hole, so you could grab it as you jumped in.

[00:17:41.71] You would tie your poncho with another person's. And you would make a little covering over your head that was big enough to sit under. And you'd try to dig a trench around it, so the water would run off, and you could stay halfway dry. And you slept on the ground.

[00:18:01.83] MARC HENDERSON: How was the food?

[00:18:04.03] DAVID DRAPER: Do you like C-rations? That's what it was, and very seldom did we get any hot food.

[00:18:15.52] MARC HENDERSON: And that was for several months?

[00:18:17.26] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, that was for six months. We didn't get any cold beer, cold drinks, cold water, none of that. Every once in a while, we'd have to get a team together to load up canteens. And you'd give your canteen.

[00:18:35.74] And when it was your turn, you'd go down to the stream-- It was a pretty good hike down to the stream-- where you would get fresh water. And then you'd bring it up, deposit it, check it out to whoever had canteens. And that's how you got water.

[00:18:51.01] MARC HENDERSON: How did you end up in a Recon unit?

[00:18:57.43] DAVID DRAPER: In September, this was early September, we were on patrol, company sized patrol. And I have no idea what we were-- we never knew what we're looking for. But we weren't company size. And I just got word to get all your gear together. And earlier I'd been to-- just a couple of weeks earlier I'd been to Landmine Warfare School, how to blow things up.

[00:19:31.78] MARC HENDERSON: And that was in country?

[00:19:33.01] DAVID DRAPER: That was in country. That was in Quang Tri. And they-- there seemed like there was one other person, but they lowered a rig, and you just get in and put your arms around it, and they pull you up out of the jungle. And I had no idea where I was going. And I was going back to Quang Tri to the 3rd Force Recon.

[00:20:06.61] MARC HENDERSON: So you literally got plucked out of the jungle and taken to be a Force Recon Marine.

[00:20:13.05] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, I can't tell you where they took me to, dropped me off, but somehow I got to 3rd Recon Battalion. They trained us for almost two weeks. And then we went to 3rd Force Recon, which was right there. And that's how I got there.

[00:20:30.64] MARC HENDERSON: How did your living conditions change?

[00:20:35.16] DAVID DRAPER: They changed pretty good, in the sense that when I was in the rear, we had an actual hooch to live in with an actual bed and a mattress. And the guys there were so good about getting your gear together, about what you need to take, what you need, how you needed to be prepared for going out in the field.

[00:21:01.60] And I mean, it's just we took care of everybody. And so I went through two patrols out of Quang Tri, which they drove us up north to Con Thien. And we would go out on patrol close to the DMZ. And we had no activity on those patrols, but I learned a lot.

[00:21:35.86] From the time I got to 3rd Force, it was probably a couple of days to get all my gear together. Everybody helped you make sure you had what you had to do for your patrol, and you just take care of each other like that. And before the 1st of February, I probably had time for two patrols to go out of-- we walked.

[00:22:07.55] They drove us up to Con Thien and dropped us off. So I had two patrols. And I gained a good knowledge of what I needed to do. And they discipline you on how to do hand signals, no talking, make no noise. When you go out on patrol, you eat out of these C-ration cans.

[00:22:29.60] You have to dig a hole to hide to C-ration cans. You tried to hide any evidence that you were even there. That's what we did. And in the meantime, we tried to detect any sounds, sights. We'd record any observations we could make of what the coverage, the tree coverage, the canopy was, whether it was a lot of tree coverage or just elephant grass or whatever. So I had enough time to learn that. It's kind of a rush deal.

[00:23:11.38] DAVID DRAPER: OK, let me do the grunts first. There were friendships, but there weren't close friendships. And there was kind of cliqueish people, and you weren't so close to everybody. I don't know if I would feel comfortable going on a Recon patrol. No, I don't know if somebody's going to cut my back.

[00:23:42.34] Recon was totally different. When we went on patrol, and there were six of us on patrol at night, one of you were awake and the other five were sleeping. And you just gave your safety to somebody else, and you trusted them. And hopefully, I would be the one that would-- I know they trusted me enough. I'm going to stay awake. I'm not going to fall asleep.

[00:24:13.12] I've got to take care of my buddies. And that's the way Recon was out in the field. And our camaraderie in the rear, which wasn't a whole lot of time, but we laughed with each other, played cards. We played any kind of games we could get.

[00:24:39.46] We had some music that we'd get on these big tape reels. And we'd play it. And we were just close. We were close in the rear, just like we were close in the bush. And so when we ran patrols, we depended on each other.

[00:25:13.79] DAVID DRAPER: I don't think I read any books. There weren't many movies. The reel-to-reel tapes, it was just music that kind of interests the current generation. I know Woodstock was going on in '69. And when I got home, I didn't know-- what is Woodstock? I didn't know anything about it. And I don't care. No big deal.

[00:25:49.16] MARC HENDERSON: What about racial tensions or turmoil amongst the Marines that you served with? Did you ever see any of that or encounter any of that?

[00:26:00.62] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, it seemed like in the grunts, the blacks would kind of hang by themselves and they wouldn't really associate too much with the whites. But that changed in Recon. That wasn't so. We were one family, and we took care of each other. And we didn't have that many blacks, but it didn't really matter. They were just like us.

[00:26:30.05] MARC HENDERSON: Now in Recon, were you strictly in I Corps area?

[00:26:35.60] DAVID DRAPER: Yes. Just north in I Corps. We went in A Shau Valley. And later on when I was in 1st Force in the Thuong Duc corridor, and we went on patrols there.

DAVID DRAPER: It was outstanding. You take from Alex Lee, which was our commanding officer, and Hisler, Captain Hisler and then Lieutenant Coffman, Lieutenant Morris they were all-- they trained us.

[00:27:12.80] When we first got to Phu Bai, we had training every day. We had training. We had exercise, and they were teaching us every day how to survive.

[00:27:24.12] MARC HENDERSON: Did that leadership change much? I mean, I know individually it changed. But did the spirit or style of leadership change from 3rd Force to 1st Force Recon?

[00:27:40.37] DAVID DRAPER: Yes, I think their way of thinking was different. Because in 3rd Force, when we went out in 3rd Force, you had a team leader, assistant team later, two radio persons, an Italian Charlie and another, sometimes a corpsman or not.

[00:28:01.77] And it doesn't matter if an officer went on patrol with you, the team leader, corporal, whoever was in charge, and the person most experienced, most knowledgeable was in charge. That changed when we got to 1st Force. And usually it was the officer was in charge.

[00:28:25.92] It doesn't matter if he had two patrols or none, he was in charge. And that was a dangerous situation. And I had a patrol leader in 1st Force that liked to walk trails. And that was a big no-no. And for me--

[00:28:46.43] MARC HENDERSON: Why was that dangerous?

[00:28:48.83] DAVID DRAPER: Dangerous? That wasn't our mission. Our mission was to go out there and detect who was out there, to find out who's out there, see if there's any base camps, anything we could destroy by means of being unseen. And he would keep us on a trail.

[00:29:07.61] And when the gooks were going from one location to another, they used the trails. And that was dangerous for us. But sometimes you just can't tell anybody anything, because their rank is so much higher.

[00:29:23.24] MARC HENDERSON: Is that because being on the trails, inevitably you would be seen?

[00:29:27.02] DAVID DRAPER: Yes, definitely. And that wasn't a good thing. That wasn't our mission to be seen.

[00:29:32.77] MARC HENDERSON: Sure, how about your leadership in the line company when you were in K Company?

[00:29:37.10] DAVID DRAPER: In the grunts? I don't remember any officer being in charge of anything. There may have been delegating authority to the squad leader or whatever, but it wasn't anything that I knew about.

[00:29:58.71] MARC HENDERSON: How about your NCOs?

[00:30:02.13] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, there were some good and some bad in the grunts.

[00:30:04.97] MARC HENDERSON: Sure, can you give me an example of a good and a bad? You don't have to name names.

[00:30:10.16] DAVID DRAPER: Oh, I don't remember names.

[00:30:12.80] MARC HENDERSON: It's been a while.

[00:30:13.58] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, I remember there were a couple good ones. One of his names, his was Collins. He was a big black guy. And he was pretty sharp. And he was a good team leader. He would be one I'd go out with. Another one, his name was Polock, and-- I guess because of his name-- but he was smart. He'd been there for a while, and he was smart.

[00:30:47.72] So you learned to depend on those guys. And I walked point in the grunts. And I walked point in Force Recon. They give you your direction. They tell you what they want to do, and you're supposed to lead them there. And so those are two that I would really trust.

[00:31:14.33] There was another guy that I can't think of his name. He was from Steubenville, Ohio. He may have been OK. But the rest of them, I can't mention. I don't want to. I've forgotten about them, and I don't want to remember.

[00:31:31.91] MARC HENDERSON: That's fair. So you mentioned walking point. And it sounds like you preferred it. What made you volunteer to do that?

[00:31:41.87] DAVID DRAPER: I don't know. Because when I got to 3rd Force Recon, and we did our training in Quang Tri, I had a couple of patrols. And then we moved to Phu Bai, and we were going through all the training. And we were getting our first patrol together in November.

[00:32:08.80] And I so bad wanted to go out, that I volunteered to carry the secondary radio, which you don't usually have much to do. But it is a responsibility in case the primary fails. But it was a lot of extra weight. And I was small then. I was about 6 foot and weighed about 165 pounds. But I was so wanting to go out that I volunteered to do that.

[00:32:40.91] And then the next patrol after that, I went with our team leader that was-- we called it Bird Dog and another individual. I walked point on that. And I loved it ever since, because you're the first person to see anything. You're first person that's going to know that something's wrong.

[00:33:08.86] And to our good team leaders, we didn't walk on trails a lot. So we didn't get into that situation where we had to make a decision to pull the trigger. And we had some good patrol leaders in 3rd Force. 2nd Force was-- I mean, 1st Force was not much different, but you can't avoid trouble if you're staying on the trails. And so we had some difficult times there.

[00:33:45.90] MARC HENDERSON: Do you remember using or being impressed by any technology, or medical advancements, or anything that was revolutionary then, but we take for granted today?

[00:34:06.89] DAVID DRAPER: I really don't think so. I think for weaponry, we had the grenade launcher that we called "The Blooper." And it was a good weapon. But I don't think of anything-- we carried M16s, the rest of us. We carried grenades. So nothing really changed for the year and a half I was over there, as to what you had available to use.

[00:34:34.28] MARC HENDERSON: Freeze dried meals?

[00:34:36.29] DAVID DRAPER: Oh, yeah.

[00:34:37.93] MARC HENDERSON: Why don't you tell us about those and how those are different?

[00:34:40.67] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah. What we had before was C-rations, and they were mostly cans. And cans make noise. And so that's what you had to do. And they weighed more than the K-rations, we called them. I don't know what the K stands for.

[00:34:59.27] But anyway, you could just add a little bit of water, and you could cook it, you could heat it, and make a hot meal. And during the moon-- I'm trying to say moonson.

[00:35:20.03] MARC HENDERSON: Monsoon?

[00:35:20.63] DAVID DRAPER: Monsoon. I got my words mixed up. The hot meal was good. And you could just put a little bit in there. And they were much lighter to carry. And you could have a whole meal. It was less weight.

[00:35:38.06] MARC HENDERSON: And how did they heat up?

[00:35:43.02] DAVID DRAPER: Some people used heat tabs, but we used C-4, which was an explosive. But you could tear off a bit of C-4, and light it with a match, and it would just flame. It wouldn't blow up. And we would take our C-ration cans, you could take one, and poke some holes around the bottom where some air could get through. And you put a little cup on top, and it would heat up the water.

[00:36:09.89] And if you were in a good, safe, secure area, you could have a hot meal. And it made a lot of difference. It was good for us.

[00:36:24.77] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have a favorite K-ration meal that you would always try to get?

[00:36:29.71] DAVID DRAPER: Gee, the only one I remember is chili con carne. And it was OK. I'm not picky, so they were all pretty good. DAVID DRAPER: The first worst day I had was probably about March 5th. I got assigned to a grunt unit.

[00:36:55.47] MARC HENDERSON: This is 1970?

[00:36:57.00] DAVID DRAPER: 1969, March. And me and another guy, he was from the Bronx, both of us about two days in country. And they decided it would be a good idea to put us on guard duty in a foxhole out on the perimeter. And I spent all night seeing things move around out there. It was just constantly. And we were both petrified the whole night. But they put us both together in one hole, and we didn't sleep a wink.

[00:37:33.43] We were alert all night. We were just scared, just scared. The other night was June the 21st, 1970. And we were on patrol in Thuong Duc area, and we'd come across a mortar. We found a mortar pit. And so our team leader was writing a little note to the NVA telling them thank you for this mortar tube. We appreciate it.

[00:38:23.16] And me and Gabe were front security. And before we could get up and leave, we heard some voices coming. And then this Vietnamese came through on the trail, through some elephant grass. And I never forget the horrified horror he showed on his face as he saw us and turned around. And we both fired. But he didn't fall right there.

[00:39:07.16] And so I got up, and went to follow him on this little trail that goes through elephant grass for just five feet. And it opens up to a wide open ditch. And I've got 60, 70 pounds on my back. It took me a while to get up. And I went through the little bit of trail. He didn't have a weapon on him.

[00:39:36.55] And he was sitting in a ditch, just leaning up back against the ditch. And he just looked pitiful, like he was so hurt, he couldn't move anything. His buddy was the second man, I guess. And he had a rifle. But he had set the rifle and propped it up against his buddy and did not have it in his hands.

[00:40:08.90] And when he saw me, he just jumped up and ran. And as I looked down-- this is a dry creek bed-- as I looked down a bit to the bed, there were three others running in there, too. And I shot the first three I could. And the fourth one disappeared into the woods before I could fire.

[00:40:36.21] And then I remember this was Lieutenant Corbett, who everybody liked, but he was a trail follower. And he asked me, what do you think about him. Do you think we can take him back?

[00:40:56.13] MARC HENDERSON: The wounded man?

[00:40:57.25] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah. And he did not-- I told him, I didn't think he did. He was so pitiful. He couldn't get up. He couldn't move. But the whole time, I never saw a drop of blood on him. And he asked me, do you think we can take him back? And I don't think he would last on a patrol unless he just-- they took us, extracted us in. I didn't.

[00:41:26.58] And the words he said to me, Lieutenant Corbett, he said, go ahead and kill him. He said, go ahead and kill him. And in my mind, his life, his fight was over. There was nothing he could do to stop me. Anyway, that stuck with me for all these years. And it's horrible to me. DAVID DRAPER: Looking back at the best day I had was when I went to 3rd Force Recon.

[00:42:08.37] MARC HENDERSON: Being plucked out of that jungle?

[00:42:09.95] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, I got taken out. And I learned to kind of bond again, to bond with real people. These are people that would save my life, that will help me get through the next six months, just like I would help them. And we did that.

[00:42:34.88] But looking back, I knew my home situation. I didn't want to go home. So I said, I'll come back for 6 months, go home for 30 days, and come back. And I came back, and I found 3rd Force has been deactivated. And I go to 1st Force, but the good thing I found out is some of the same people were there with me, some of the people. And that was good. And it takes each other working together to get through it.

[00:43:15.68] MARC HENDERSON: Were you able to ever work with your buddy who had joined Recon?

[00:43:19.73] DAVID DRAPER: No, never have. And when we got back home, we never talked about Recon. We never talked about it. We knew what we had been through when you talk. There's some scary times. I remember one night when it was raining, I saw shadows everywhere.

[00:43:45.71] And the PSIDs that we put out would detect footprints, wouldn't do any good because it was raining. And then when daylight hit, they told us their emergency extract. We didn't know what was going on. But the Vietnamese were close, and the Cobras that were flying support for our helicopters were firing over our heads.

[00:44:12.32] And they lowered us a spy rig to get us up. We all carried that little harness that we could put on our bodies to hook up to a spy rig. We'd used it in practice, but not in real life. And so that was what saved us that day.

[00:44:36.74] MARC HENDERSON: What was the spy rig?

[00:44:38.63] DAVID DRAPER: It was just a kind of rope. It was webbed, and it was a rope webbing. And every so often, there would be two rings, two D-rings for you and your buddy to hook on to each one. And then others to hook on to the next one up, and they lower it all down, and slowly raise it up. And they brought us up through the trees, and it was a lifesaver.

[00:45:10.37] MARC HENDERSON: And the PSIDs that you mentioned, why don't you tell us how those worked?

[00:45:14.99] DAVID DRAPER: The PSIDs were something you just planted in the ground. And I can't remember now, whether they had some kind of line going back to a detector or not, but they would detect any footsteps. A lot of times along the Ho Chi Minh they would drop PSIDs, which were a lot larger. And when they would come into the ground, they'd embed in the ground. And they could detect any movement along that trail.

[00:45:45.11] MARC HENDERSON: They were seismic sensors, right?

[00:45:47.99] DAVID DRAPER: Kind of. For just footprints is what we used them for. And they were helpful, except on rainy nights, and too much rain drops and everything, you couldn't tell.

[00:46:01.31] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah. Before I go too much further, is there any other specific patrols that you want to talk about or describe?

[00:46:20.72] DAVID DRAPER: There was a good patrol when we made contact. But we made contact with two Vietnamese. As soon as they saw us, they turned around and ran. That's always good. That's good for us, too. We had times that when-- Doc Norton will remember.

[00:46:41.78] We were on the radio relay for-- I can't remember whether it was Hill 510. I'm amazed at all these guys that will tell me-- we're talking, and talk about Hill 510. Where was that? Yeah. But we had some good times when we were on radio at least. But we were a security detail, and we were there for security first.

[00:47:11.50] MARC HENDERSON: What were some of the things that made it a good time?

[00:47:16.10] DAVID DRAPER: One thing, playing cards.

[00:47:22.69] MARC HENDERSON: What was your favorite game?

[00:47:24.28] DAVID DRAPER: Back Alley.

[00:47:25.66] MARC HENDERSON: Back Alley. I've not heard that one.

[00:47:28.69] DAVID DRAPER: That was big over there. And nobody here knows how to play it. And I don't even know how to play now.

[00:47:34.15] MARC HENDERSON: I usually hear Spades.

[00:47:36.28] DAVID DRAPER: It's similar. But it was a good game. And just the closeness we had. DAVID DRAPER: There was a unit there in Phu Bai that I think may have been Koreans. But everybody stayed away from them. And we didn't mess with anybody. We didn't bother anybody, and we stayed to ourselves.

[00:48:14.54] I remember they were there. On the way to chow hall and back, they were there. You didn't antagonize them anyway. I never had any contact with ARVNs There was a couple of teams we had go out that did have them, a scout with them, but I never did.

[00:48:41.48] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever have any contact, or did you use a Kit Carson Scout?

[00:48:49.94] DAVID DRAPER: Not on any teams I was on there with. There was none.

[00:48:58.01] MARC HENDERSON: What was your impression of the local population, the civilians? Any interactions with them, or have any impressions?

[00:49:08.21] DAVID DRAPER: The only interaction I had was in Da Nang and 1st Force. And you had to guard everything you had with you. They'll steal it. And it's just a way of life for them to try to make some kind of gain in life. But interactions, no, I couldn't tell whether they were for us or against us.

[00:49:41.42] DAVID DRAPER: We didn't have the internet, so I couldn't use that. And there were some people that could make a phone call home, but I never did that. So letters were the only way.

[00:49:55.70] MARC HENDERSON: And how much news about the war you were fighting in did you receive?

[00:50:04.27] DAVID DRAPER: We may have received some, but I never paid attention to any of it.

[00:50:08.11] MARC HENDERSON: What about news about what was going on at home, whether it was politics, or social movements, civil rights, antiwar movement, or any of that?

[00:50:19.61] DAVID DRAPER: Nothing. Nothing that bothered me or that influenced me at all. I was always thinking we were doing a good job. We were patriots. But some people have their different opinions, and they're welcome to that.

[00:50:36.04] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever notice any antiwar demonstrations, or personally witness that, or--0 around the bases in San Diego, or while you were growing up, or in Vietnam?

[00:50:46.42] DAVID DRAPER: No.

[00:50:49.50] MARC HENDERSON: And is there anything else you want to share before we start talking about headed home from the war that we haven't talked about?

[00:51:02.37] DAVID DRAPER: No. Finally that reality hits. There's no more extensions. You're going home. And I really didn't even give a whole lot of thought, what's my future hold? I didn't know. I didn't think about it much.

[00:51:18.96] MARC HENDERSON: What year was it when you went home?

[00:51:23.22] DAVID DRAPER: I was discharged in October the 12th, 1970.

[00:51:31.17] MARC HENDERSON: And that was straight coming back from Vietnam, and then you were discharged?

[00:51:34.80] DAVID DRAPER: I went straight to MCRD in San Diego. They processed me out, and here's your ticket. DAVID DRAPER: I think early August, they started prepping me for my physicals and stuff to get out. And it was just like one day, you get your stuff, we're taking you to the airport.

[00:51:59.95] MARC HENDERSON: What was the plane like going home? Was it a military plane or civilian plane?

[00:52:06.91] DAVID DRAPER: I'm thinking it was civilian, but I don't know for sure.

[00:52:08.71] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. And they flew you right to San Diego or did you go somewhere else?

[00:52:11.77] DAVID DRAPER: Went to Okinawa. And I think we stayed there a day or two, and then came on to Miami, then to San Diego.

[00:52:23.08] MARC HENDERSON: How was your reception when you got home? Did anybody meet you, happy to you see you?

[00:52:28.85] DAVID DRAPER: My mom and dad were at the airport to meet me. And we drove home, and that was it. I'm home. And what to do now? DAVID DRAPER: Well, I found out it wasn't good to be a Marine or any veteran at that time. That they were thought poorly of. And it was a time I got a job with the highway department. They called it transportation back then.

[00:53:06.95] We were a survey crew. And I worked out in the woods away from everybody. So that was OK with me. Nobody really bothered me there, and I didn't care.

[00:53:19.12] MARC HENDERSON: Did your experience in Vietnam change you or affect your life at all?

[00:53:26.68] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, I think it's because we learned that we're all in this together. You got to take care of your buddy. You got to teach others how to carry on when you're gone. It's a camaraderie that you develop for years. These guys are meeting year after-- well, every two years. You have your friends that you have this deep relationship with. And you love this time you spend with them.

[00:54:00.40] When I went to the first reunion that Recon had in 1972, Doc's first book came out. I mean, I left San Diego thinking this is where I want to be. This is more like home than home is. These guys have been so great to us. They've treated us so very well.

[00:54:29.26] MARC HENDERSON: Talking about of delta troop?

[00:54:30.91] DAVID DRAPER: Yeah, that's a good bunch. And if I got time to know everybody, all the units, pretty much. We did-- we were a team. It took everybody.

[00:54:44.70] MARC HENDERSON: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about combat veterans returning today?

[00:54:54.63] DAVID DRAPER: They're amazing. They're heroes in what they do. I've seen videos of Marines, Army going into buildings, going into homes, don't know what's on the other side of the door. They're amazing. They're beyond brave.

[00:55:19.50] And they're doing it for me, and for you, and for our country, and they're not appreciated. I feel sorry for them. They sacrifice arms and legs. And I'm sorry that they're not more appreciated. We ought to be doing everything we can for them.

[00:55:52.38] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think the Vietnam War meant to your generation?

[00:55:56.34] DAVID DRAPER: To my generation? For me, it gave me feelings that I have now, that I love my country, I love my flag. I will never kneel for it. And I love the Americans that have given their lives. So many, too many men and women have died for our country to let people kneel before the flag and dishonor it.

[00:56:32.82] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[00:56:39.44] DAVID DRAPER: I don't know. I know how I remember it.

[00:56:42.47] MARC HENDERSON: How do you remember it?

[00:56:44.12] DAVID DRAPER: I remember it as a war that was fought from Washington. And they were willing to sacrifice men and women, instead of doing the right thing, instead of trying to win a war. We could have won it very easily if we'd been turned loose, just like they could in Afghanistan or Iraq. But we're pawns to the people in Washington.

[00:57:19.70] And I might add, not just men and women, but animals, too. That's sad to see animals get crippled in war for me. I love animals.

[00:57:31.33] MARC HENDERSON: Did you work with animals in Vietnam?

[00:57:32.74] DAVID DRAPER: I did not. I did not. We had a dog that hung around our area. And I don't know if I fed it anything, but it hung around. And it just loved being around us. I guess it was the only dog that liked us.

[00:57:54.57] MARC HENDERSON: Did you take any lessons from your experiences in Vietnam that you'd like to share with future generations?

[00:58:05.88] DAVID DRAPER: I wish future generations would be more willing to serve their country. We used to say the "Pledge of Allegiance" for a reason, and we don't do that now. We're so good for so many people. We've made a difference in so many human's lives. And we've got so much more to do. And it all comes from our hearts to serve our country, to serve our fellow human beings. I'm just proud to be American, and that I can do that in some way.

[00:58:47.79] MARC HENDERSON: Have you ever been to the Vietnam War Memorial?

[00:58:51.03] DAVID DRAPER: I have. One time.

[00:58:52.93] MARC HENDERSON: What were your impressions of that?

[00:58:55.19] DAVID DRAPER: Well, it was just sad. It was sad in the sense that there had to be a name up there for every person. And it's sad for a lot of families that have to say, that's my brother or that's my father.

[00:59:17.91] Those names represent a real live person. I wish there wouldn't be any names up there. But the memorial itself is great, just like the Korean War Memorial that was dedicated not too long ago. So we need to honor those people for the sacrifice they gave. DAVID DRAPER: Oh, gee, I don't know if I have or not.

[00:59:55.55] MARC HENDERSON: The Vietnam War Commemoration. So that's the office that I am representing. And you're taking part in one of our programs today, our oral history program. And one of our main objectives is to thank and honor Vietnam veterans for their service on behalf of the United States.

[01:00:24.05] And so we had this pin made to thank you for your service. And on the front it says, Vietnam War Veteran. It's got a star for each of the Allies that also fought alongside us. It's got an American Eagle or the bald eagle on the front. But the most endearing part to me is what it says on the back. And it says, "a grateful nation thanks and honors you for your service."

[01:00:55.49] So if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to pin this on you if you don't mind. And then, why don't you go ahead and stand up. You want me to put it on your collar or just on your shirt? How about we put it right here?

[01:01:08.63] DAVID DRAPER: Wherever you want.

[01:01:09.62] MARC HENDERSON: Let's put it right here, and then you're welcome to move it. So with that, sir, I'd also like to give you a coin.

[01:01:18.23] DAVID DRAPER: Wow.

[01:01:18.59] MARC HENDERSON: And I'll shake your hand for it. And say, thank you very much for the interview. I really appreciate you sharing with us.