

## **Edwards, Robert US Army**

[00:00:13.55] ROBERT EDWARDS: I was born April 6, 1938 in Trenton, New Jersey. I grew up there through elementary school and prep school, and eventually ended up at Lafayette College, graduating from there in 1960. I went through the ROTC program. I got my commission as an infantry second lieutenant then.

[00:00:36.84] MARC HENDERSON: So you had two choices?

[00:00:38.11] ROBERT EDWARDS: I chose infantry.

[00:00:45.62] ROBERT EDWARDS: I was an only child. Father was Robert and mother was Margaret.

[00:00:51.28] MARC HENDERSON: And what do you consider your hometown today?

[00:00:54.47] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, I moved around a lot in 23 years of military service. I'm currently living and have for the past 33 years in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Solebury Township near New Hope.

[00:01:08.96] MARC HENDERSON: How did you end up in the Army?

[00:01:10.51] ROBERT EDWARDS: Way back when land-grant colleges, in return for funds from the government, would require all their freshmen and sophomores to participate, if physically qualified, in the ROTC program. So I didn't have much of a choice. I was healthy and it was a school requirement.

[00:01:36.80] But I found that the more I experienced Army things, and especially the instructors I met, I got motivated. So that towards the end of my sophomore year when they were looking for students to go into the advanced course, which if you completed that you would have a commission, I applied for that and was selected.

[00:02:05.03] I was 27 years old when the 1st Cavalry Division deployed to Vietnam.

[00:02:10.58] MARC HENDERSON: And you had been in the Army for a while?

[00:02:12.62] ROBERT EDWARDS: I had been in the Army for five years. Entered the day after my graduation from Lafayette, spent three years in Germany. I came back to the States and was assigned to Fort Benning.

[00:02:27.59] They put me in an assistant staff job as a promotable lieutenant to captain. Put me in a staff job, and a couple of months later, one of the infantry battalion commanders came in and asked the question that you love to hear, how would you like to command a company? And I said, absolutely. Let's go right now.

[00:02:50.28] And in late April of 1964, I took command of C Company, 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry, which was a 2nd Division unit. That unit was soon loaned for test purposes to the 11th Air Assault Division, which was the unit that was testing the use of helicopters in replacing wheeled vehicles for everything you want to do on a battlefield.

[00:03:23.96] MARC HENDERSON: So in the early 1960s as a young Army officer, what was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam?

[00:03:31.96] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, in 1960, Vietnam was barely in the news. But as the years passed it moved up in prominence in the news headlines to the point that while I was still in Germany, as a infantry first lieutenant probably by then, they were seeking volunteers. But then there were no American units there-- it was all an advisory effort.

[00:04:07.55] MARC HENDERSON: Did you attend any special schools as part of your ROTC training?

[00:04:11.19] ROBERT EDWARDS: Not any special schools. The standard training the summer between your junior and senior year was six weeks of basic training. So I did that.

[00:04:29.38] It was not fun, but you developed a comradeship with the rest of the guys in the advanced course. So I enjoyed the people, both the students and the instructors, and that led me to apply for the advanced course.

[00:04:47.88] The first stop for all officers is their branch basic course. In my case, it was the infantry officer basic course, eight weeks at Fort Benning. I then stayed at Fort Benning and went to airborne school, made the five qualifying jumps, and in November of '60 was finished schooling and deployed to Germany, which then had a huge Army presence.

[00:05:13.74] I mean, we had two corps and four divisions and two armored cavalry regiments and tons of supporting units because it was Cold War time. We weren't thinking about Vietnam. We were worried about the East Germans and the Russians coming across the border and starting World War III.

[00:05:36.27] MARC HENDERSON: Back at Benning when you were testing out the airmobile tactics, you guys invented the tactics, right?

[00:05:47.29] ROBERT EDWARDS: It was a revolutionary new concept that the Army was testing. And they started with a very small headquarters, an infantry battalion, I think an artillery battery, some helicopters, and some support units.

[00:06:08.19] And they would train for a while and then they would increase the size of the unit, so they went from a battalion to a brigade. And eventually, several months prior to the big division level tests, they took one brigade with all its supporting units from the 2nd Division and loaned it to the 11th Air Assault Division so that by the fall of 1964, it was almost a full division for the testing.

[00:06:46.23] The testing was successful. The Army decided to make an airmobile division a part of the Army force structure. They had then to decide what unit it is going to be. And the decision was made to bring the colors of the 1st Cavalry Division back from Korea and it would become the 1st Cavalry Division Airmobile.

[00:07:13.50] We started testing and I got my company in late April or May of '64. We trained all summer of '64. Had the big division level tests in the fall of '64, and then continued training while the Army did all its evaluations of what the tests proved or didn't prove. And in June or July of '65, President Johnson went on television and said, today I have ordered the 1st Cavalry Division, or I think he called it the Air Mobile Division, to become combat-ready in six weeks and to deploy to Vietnam.

[00:08:04.09] So we got on a ship and the whole division moved by ship, old aircraft carriers for the helicopters, old transport ships for the troops, and it took us about a month to get there. We were on the United States Military Sea Transport Maurice Rose, a ship they usually used to haul dependents to and from Europe-- they put them on this troop movement assignment.

[00:08:38.98] A very uneventful sea voyage. The most interesting thing was that we were deployed on a one-year tour. The first month on the boat, counted towards those 12 months. So by the time we actually landed, we had only had 11 months left.

[00:08:58.84] MARC HENDERSON: How was the food on the ship? Memorable?

[00:09:02.05] ROBERT EDWARDS: No. Well, it was fine. They were used to hauling families and troops to Europe, so they had the feeding situation, and the whole routine-- we had lifeboat drills, and it was an uneventful trip.

[00:09:28.23] ROBERT EDWARDS: We landed-- well, we arrived on the east coast of Vietnam off the town of Qui Nhon. We arrived in the middle of the night, got up the next morning, and looked out and saw this very lush green landscape. And later that day, we disembarked in the LSTs, made not a combat landing, but we were transported from the ship to the beaches by LSTs.

[00:10:04.92] The helicopters had been unloaded from the aircraft carriers. They were ready to haul us into the middle of the country. And we ended up in a piece of land by a very small town, maybe a hamlet, called An Khe. There was nothing there. There were no roads. It was just a big spot in the highlands.

[00:10:32.64] An advance party had gone over and done some preparation, an advance party, maybe 1,000. Funny thing about that, that advance party was led by one of the assistant division commanders, and he got the advance party together and said, we're not going to have bulldozers scraping away all the undergrowth here because then we'll just have dust or mud. We're going to do it by hand, and I want it looking like a golf course. Hence, for a long time, the airfield was the golf course.

[00:11:10.57] And the whole division of 16,000 troops, 400-plus helicopters, and all the other stuff were in that base camp.

[00:11:19.46] MARC HENDERSON: What were your first impressions?

[00:11:20.95] ROBERT EDWARDS: Oh, hot, muggy, very green. That was about it.

[00:11:28.30] MARC HENDERSON: What were your initial duties?

[00:11:30.51] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, the first thing we had to do-- the whole division had to do, was set up the base camp. Because when I said there was nothing-- there was nothing there. There were no roads. The tents weren't up yet, so that-- for about two weeks, we established a base camp.

[00:11:53.65] There would be units out on a close-in perimeter during the night. I don't think anybody was ever attacked. But eventually with the base camp underway, we started small patrols from the base camp area out and in-- nothing overnight.

[00:12:11.77] Then we advanced to running actual airmobile operations. Most of those operations initially went back to the east towards the coast. Minor skirmishes with the enemy but nothing significant at all. That all changed by about late October.

[00:12:36.63] The NVA at that time had amassed the equivalent of a division-- three regiments. It was inside Vietnam, very close to the border. And their plan was to conduct an assault on the Plei Me Special Forces camp. Not so much to overrun it, but to cause the Vietnamese to send a relief force to help that camp out.

[00:13:13.51] So they started their siege of the camp. The relief force that they expected was organized. But what they didn't expect was the commitment of an artillery battalion from the Cav in support of that relief force. So when they tried to ambush the relief force, they were less than successful. And they broke off the attack on the Special Forces camp, they broke off the attempted ambush of the relief column, and they withdrew back towards the Cambodian border.

[00:13:52.09] At that time the commanding general of II Corps-- I can't think of his name now-- told General Kinnard, who had been commanding the 11th Air Assault Division and the 1st Cavalry Division since its inception, he said, go find the enemy.

[00:14:11.18] Once we got the base camp established to the point that where we had at least a tent to sleep in and the mess halls were functional and the quartermaster corps had the laundry and shower and bath up, and the engineers were putting in a perimeter road and the airfield was getting established, then we started doing combat operations from An Khe base camp out into the surrounding area.

[00:14:45.63] ROBERT EDWARDS: With the 2nd of the 23rd-- in being re-flagged as the 1st Cavalry Division-- became the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry, which thanks to George Armstrong

Custer had a pretty good reputation, good or bad, in the Army. But when they started the air assault test, they made sure that the units participating didn't have a lot of personnel turnover.

[00:15:20.39] By the time we got to Vietnam, we had been together for well over a year. And I'm telling you the battalion commander, the battalion S3, two company commanders, most of the senior first lieutenants had all worked together for a year. We were to be the--

[00:15:44.10] MARC HENDERSON: Like a family.

[00:15:45.75] ROBERT EDWARDS: Yeah, we were like a family-- we were tight. You knew who was good and who wasn't. So we had a solid unit. And when later on when we get talking about our performance at X-Ray, that was part of the reason why we were successful against an overwhelmingly large enemy force.

[00:16:12.14] MARC HENDERSON: How about any racial or social tensions?

[00:16:14.06] ROBERT EDWARDS: No. I won't say that didn't come later, but at that time, no.

[00:16:25.30] MARC HENDERSON: How much time did you have to yourself back at An Khe?

[00:16:29.03] ROBERT EDWARDS: Not a lot. Part of the base camp setup included-- not the first thing, but eventually-- included the clubs where beer was available at night. But you stayed busy. If you were in a base camp you were trying to improve things in the base camp-- if you weren't in a base camp, you were out looking for the enemy and the beer didn't go with you, obviously, and you were living on C-rations and you were patrolling around looking for the enemy.

[00:17:02.70] MARC HENDERSON: And you mentioned clubs, what other things did you or your troops do for recreation?

[00:17:09.42] ROBERT EDWARDS: Clubs, movies, outdoor sets.

[00:17:14.20] MARC HENDERSON: What about other pop culture? Do you remember any other music or songs that take you back there?

[00:17:20.08] ROBERT EDWARDS: No. I'm not a songster at all. I'm sure the troops had-- by then the little portable radios were available and they would be listening to their music, but, no, I'm not into music.

[00:17:36.27] MARC HENDERSON: Any books in particular?

[00:17:36.94] ROBERT EDWARDS: No.

[00:17:37.49] MARC HENDERSON: No? Are there any memorable--

[00:17:40.94] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, wait a minute. Let me go back.

[00:17:42.32] MARC HENDERSON: Please.

[00:17:42.86] ROBERT EDWARDS: One book, and we started this on the ship coming over. Bernard Fall's *Street Without Joy* was our textbook. And we only had a couple of copies, but-- so you got it, you read it as fast as you could, and passed it on to the next guy. Because his story was about the French experience in fighting the Viet Cong, and there were a lot of lessons to be learned from that book.

[00:18:09.78] MARC HENDERSON: So it was more professional rather than leisure reading.

[00:18:12.78] ROBERT EDWARDS: Oh, yeah. You were reading that to learn how to fight, not for fun and games.

[00:18:19.59] MARC HENDERSON: Amongst your troopers, did you have any Vietnamese speakers? Anybody go to language school?

[00:18:23.49] ROBERT EDWARDS: No. At the battalion level, there was an assigned Vietnamese linguist. He stayed with the battalion command group. But that was the extent of it.

[00:18:38.62] MARC HENDERSON: Any memorable holidays?

[00:18:40.74] ROBERT EDWARDS: No.

[00:18:43.05] MARC HENDERSON: There were no Christmas celebrations or Thanksgiving turkeys or-- ?

[00:18:46.12] ROBERT EDWARDS: No. Well, no because the Ia Drang battle, which we'll talk about later, occurred in mid-November. I was wounded. I was gone before Thanksgiving arrived. My Thanksgiving in 1965 was spent at Valley Forge General Hospital.

[00:19:12.21] ROBERT EDWARDS: Let me pick up on the North Vietnamese effort to attack the Special Forces camp, to ambush the South Vietnamese column. And then they assume they were going to be successful in those, and then they were going to move across country from west to east and split South Vietnam in half. But the presence of that artillery battalion in the initial stages of what was called the Pleiku campaign, that changed their view of things and the whole picture.

[00:19:48.70] So once General Kinnard was told to go find the enemy, he deployed the 1st Brigade, and they searched around Ple Mei for probably about two weeks. They had a lot of small unit combat and clashes. They were very successful.

[00:20:13.09] Then in early November-- about the 10th of November, the 3rd Brigade, which included the 1st and 2nd Battalion of the 7th Cavalry plus a battalion from another brigade, we were alerted to go and replace the 1st Brigade in the search around Ple Mei and Pleiku.

[00:20:40.21] So we landed. We moved from An Khe to Pleiku on the 10th of November and spent the rest of the day on the 10th, 11th, and 12th looking for the enemy, not finding them. And then on the 13th-- one of the assistant division commanders, General Knowles, was commanding the Cav units up there-- the battalion would be given an area of responsibility.

[00:21:13.60] A typical plan was to divide it up by companies-- give each rifle company a section. The rifle company would land somewhere in there. It would send out platoon-sized patrols, look around, try to find the enemy. But after three days, no one had made any contact with the enemy. And General Knowles was getting nervous and he wanted to do something, and he got permission to change the search area.

[00:21:45.16] This was strictly an American 3rd Brigade. And once they change unit-- 3rd Brigade operation. Three infantry battalions, supporting artillery battalion, and combat support units, engineers, signal-- all the stuff it needs to support the infantry.

[00:22:04.48] Anyway, General Knowles was itching to find a fight, and after three days he got permission to change the search area. And he told the brigade commander, Tim Brown, to conduct a battalion-sized air assault to the west close to the Cambodian border on the next day, the 14th.

[00:22:28.22] So A and C Company were out in the field, B Company was securing the brigade command post when we all got a warning order that said that tomorrow morning the 14th, the 1st of the 7th will conduct a battalion-sized air assault into an area in the vicinity of a big mountain complex called Chu Pong Mountain.

[00:22:55.72] So on the morning of the 14th, Colonel Hal Moore and his command group took two helicopters escorted by two gunships on a recon of the area. They tried to make the recon look like a normal resupply mission, so it didn't fly low and focus on one point-- they flew rather high but close enough that they could-- they were looking for a landing zone and they found several.

[00:23:29.16] They came back to where the battalion headquarters was, by that time all the company commanders and the staff were gathered to receive the operations order. This is the morning of the 14th.

[00:23:45.75] They picked out a relatively small but the biggest clearing at the base of Chu Pong Mountain and gave it the codename X-Ray. And the plan was to put the diversionary artillery preparations on to other areas, but to concentrate a final preparation on the X-Ray landing zone.

[00:24:14.09] The artillery fired for I think maybe 20 minutes. The aerial rocket artillery came in on the heels of the tube artillery. They made rocket runs. Then the helicopter gunships came in and they made their run. And they were followed by eight Huey helicopters carrying as much as they could of B Company, which was the assault company.

[00:24:38.36] MARC HENDERSON: Now these tactics, the preparation of the battlefield, moving in, the arrival at the landing zone, had that become normal?

[00:24:50.01] ROBERT EDWARDS: That's what we spent a year training to do, except there was no enemy and there wasn't any live ammunition. But the techniques-- that's what we practiced to doing. So it was like the final act when we really did it against an enemy and with live ammunition.

[00:25:12.66] MARC HENDERSON: And how often had you done this in Vietnam leading up to X-Ray?

[00:25:18.65] ROBERT EDWARDS: We had done small scale versions of what we did. But this was the first time that the whole battalion, three rifle companies, and the combat support company were going to land in the same landing zone.

[00:25:35.81] MARC HENDERSON: Thank you.

[00:25:36.59] ROBERT EDWARDS: So close on the heels of that last machine gun gunship run came the first eight helicopters of B company, as soon as they landed and lifted off-- and going back to training, that was another thing we did, landing and quickly getting the troops off the aircraft, away from the aircraft, off to the sides of the landing zone, out of the way so the next lift can come in.

[00:26:00.75] MARC HENDERSON: And you were with C Company, right?

[00:26:01.92] ROBERT EDWARDS: I was C. We were the third guys in. The plan was artillery preparation, assault company lands. They secure the LZ until this follow up company. A Company comes in. As soon as A Company can take security of the landing zone, B Company starts to look out, search for the enemy. As soon as enough of C Company had arrived, then B Company would join A Company in the search.

[00:26:27.69] MARC HENDERSON: Got it.

[00:26:29.60] ROBERT EDWARDS: And eventually, the plan-- and the plan quickly went south-- when my company, C company, landed and there was enough of D Company to secure the landing zone, then we were going to search the lower edges of the mountain.

[00:26:50.06] All right, let's go back to B Company. B Company gets in, they search around. They don't find any NVA but they found one prisoner. He might have been a deserter, other people argue that he was actually a scout, but they captured a guy. And the interpreter that was with Colonel Moore interpreted him, and Colonel Moore said the interpreter got this scared look on his face because what the prisoner said was there are three battalions up there on that hill and they very much want to kill Americans.

[00:27:27.98] I think that really got everybody's attention. So when A company came in, B company started to look for the enemy. And they went off to the north of the landing zone and they made some contact, light contact at first. And from then on, it was a series of multiple engagements by various companies.



[00:28:00.16] But the most important thing was that two things happened. A platoon of B Company saw some enemy out in the distance. They pursued and pretty quickly that platoon was surrounded and cut off and had suffered significant casualties. Platoon leader killed, platoon sergeant killed. Command fell to a young three stripe sergeant, a squad leader by the name of Ernie Savage, who I think you're going to talk to later today or tomorrow.

[00:28:41.99] So the mission went from looking for the enemy to we found the enemy, now we have a cut off platoon and we've got to get those guys back. By the time I landed with C Company, A and B we're trying to get to Ernie Savage and that platoon, but they were being held back, and suffering--

[00:29:08.84] One of the-- there were a number of advantages we had over the Vietnamese, but one of our advantages was that we had a new field radio called the PRC 25, a backpack radio. It replaced the old very unreliable PRC 10.

[00:29:23.84] So from the time John Herron and B Company landed, I was monitoring the command net. So I knew what was happening and I knew that by the time we got in it was going to be hot LZ. And it was.

[00:29:39.23] As soon as we landed, Colonel Moore grabbed me. He said, forget searching the mountainside. You take C Company and block to the south. And fortunately, I had almost my whole company on that lift in, probably around 90. We moved off the landing zone to the south, got inside the tree line. I put three platoons on line facing south, and within 15 or 20 minutes, the whole line erupted in fire.

[00:30:15.63] The enemy commander had directed one of his battalions to attack the landing zone from the south. And one of the key decisions Colonel Moore made when I landed was where do I send C Company? He's got two companies up to the north trying to get that platoon back, but the south is open and the east is open. He made the right decision. C Company landed about 1:30.

[00:30:51.10] MARC HENDERSON: On the first day.

[00:30:52.00] ROBERT EDWARDS: On the first day.

[00:30:55.00] 20 minutes after we established that blocking position we were attacked. But we had the advantage that we were down. We had scraped some shallow shelters. We had pretty good fields of fire. But most important we had 12 105 howitzers, and we had Air Force assets to call on.

[00:31:18.58] For artillery I had a forward observer sergeant, and for Air Force the battalion had a Air Force officer forward air controller. They were controlling those fires-- my worry was the guys on the ground.

[00:31:36.80] General Moore writes in the book, C Company stopped the most serious attack of the afternoon. This story is in a book about that thick.

[00:31:49.73] MARC HENDERSON: Sure.

[00:31:50.06] ROBERT EDWARDS: So I can't tell the whole story in an hour.

[00:31:52.79] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. And that's OK.

[00:31:53.72] ROBERT EDWARDS: But I would advise anybody that's interested to get a copy of the book *We Were Soldiers Once-- and Young* and read it--

[00:32:01.07] MARC HENDERSON: Absolutely.

[00:32:01.92] ROBERT EDWARDS: --and forget about the movie.

[00:32:10.43] ROBERT EDWARDS: There were no MARS-- the stuff. There were obviously no computers. This was 1965. That's ancient history from where we are now. But no, mail and packages. It took a long time to get there, but there would be packages, cookies and that stuff would come in.

[00:32:32.78] MARC HENDERSON: How much news did you receive about what was going on in Vietnam while you were there?

[00:32:43.23] ROBERT EDWARDS: I don't recall hearing any news.

[00:32:45.89] MARC HENDERSON: You never saw in the newspapers or radio?

[00:32:47.15]

[00:32:48.14] ROBERT EDWARDS: You focused on your own-- I won't say problems, but your own situation. And if you were deployed out in the field looking for the enemy, that's what you focused on. You don't worry-- way above my pay grade other things were happening, but I'm worrying about 120 guys and keeping them safe.

[00:33:14.78] MARC HENDERSON: Were you still single?

[00:33:15.89] ROBERT EDWARDS: No, I was married and had a son. I married a US schoolteacher in Germany on my tour there. Had our first son there. They were staying with my family in Trenton, New Jersey.

[00:33:28.78] MARC HENDERSON: And what did you tell them while you were writing letters?

[00:33:33.73] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, first, you don't want to tell them how rotten things are. I'm safe. Don't worry about me. But you also got to remember that this is November. We've arrived in mid-September and it's now mid-November.

[00:33:51.96] MARC HENDERSON: Just a couple of months.

[00:33:53.38] ROBERT EDWARDS: Just a couple of months. Right.

[00:33:54.49] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. And the political situation back home, of course, was not anything to pay attention to.

[00:34:03.07] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, you knew about it but you couldn't influence it. You worry about the things that directly affect your situation.

[00:34:20.59] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, I talked about the PRC 25 radio. We had the M16 rifle. We got it like two weeks before we went to Vietnam. We got a little bit of range work in at Fort Benning. We did a lot of firing off the stern of the ship on the way over. I don't care what they say about the M16. If you took care of it, it was an excellent rifle.

[00:34:48.12] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, I talked about the first day in X-Ray. By late afternoon of the 14th, after a day-long struggle to do this and the arrival of a re-enforcing rifle company, Colonel Moore was able to have a 360-degree solid perimeter around X-Ray.

[00:35:16.01] Our mission changed from finding and fighting the enemy was holding that LZ because that's where we were going to get resupplied from, that's where the wounded were going to go out of, and that's what we had to protect.

[00:35:35.89] So again, by late afternoon, there were four rifle companies and a combat support company deployed in a ring around X-Ray. Pretty quiet night on the night of the 14th and 15th.

[00:35:50.65] On the morning of the 15th, Colonel Moore got on the radio and told the company commanders, number one, I want you guys to meet me at the C Company command post. We're going to figure out how to get to Sergeant Savage. Because twice they tried to get to him the first day and twice they were repulsed.

[00:36:13.48] He ended up with a Distinguished Service Cross. He probably should have gotten something higher.

[00:36:19.08] So the morning of the second day, Moore said, meet me at the C Company command post, we're going to plan an attack to get to Sergeant Savage. But first I want you to send a small patrol from each platoon out to see what's out front. And late on the morning of the first day I had gotten a re-enforcing rifle platoon, so I now had four platoons on line, my three plus the 2nd Platoon, B Company, 2nd of the 7th.

[00:36:48.86] Each platoon had about 25, maybe 30 guys at the most. We were under strength because we were-- here's a political thing and this is going to put everything out of focus.

[00:37:05.65] When the decision was made to deploy the Cav there was an election coming up. And the last thing President Johnson wanted to do was piss off the Americans, so he did not extend tours, did not mobilize the Reserves or National Guard. So when we sailed for Vietnam, we sailed with men who when they got to Vietnam within two weeks, they were leaving. Their service obligation was up. They were going home.

[00:37:43.95] But the replacement stream hadn't made the right calculations. So I authorized 164 men. I had probably maybe 140 on the roster, maybe a little less than that. But you had guys that had minor injuries, they couldn't deploy, they were back at the base camp. We were getting hit with malaria.

[00:38:08.50] So I went into X-Ray with five officers and 106 men. So we were short. But even in training we practiced, which you never had everybody. So you adjusted to working with lesser numbers than the TO&E says you're supposed to have.

[00:38:32.82] So we're at 6:37 o'clock in the morning of the second day, those patrols go out and no sooner had they gone out then my whole front erupted again. And I could only contact--on calling them I could only make contact with two platoon leaders, the two platoons as I look out on my right. Their patrols got back and they were back in their positions.

[00:39:02.40] The enemy attack of probably a couple of hundred, maybe 250 North Vietnamese focused on the area of my 1st and 2nd Platoon and very quickly they were engaged in some violent fighting, hand-to-hand at times. But again, I'm going to go back to Moore's book and it says, by 10 o'clock the surviving NVA were withdrawing. C Company line had held through a combination of personal-- it's kind of hard to talk about it sometimes.

[00:39:52.46] All right, we had personal acts of bravery and unit discipline. C Company over a period of two and a half hours started with five officers and 106 men. At the end of a violent hand-to-hand two and a half hours of that kind of combat, there were no unwounded officers and there were only 49 unwounded men, but the line had held.

[00:40:23.60] The enemy was withdrawing and the bodies of hundreds of NVA littered the bloody battlefield. I was wounded during that period, couldn't get back to the-- anybody that stood up got shot. I finally got out of that command post hole and back to the aid station after about two and a half hours. That's the end of my time in Vietnam.

[00:40:55.56] We were short of medics, but we had a doctor and two senior aid men in the aid station at the command post. They grabbed me, put IVs in both arms, and pretty soon I was on a helicopter and into the evacuation chain. Utmost admiration for everybody in that system.

[00:41:17.63] So I think this started at what was your worst day. Morning of the-- November the 15th, standing up, throwing a grenade, and getting hit with a small arms that fortunately came in my left shoulder on an angle, hit the scapula, broke the scapula, and went out. Not a penetrating front to back wound, but serious enough that I had to go back to the States to get a skin graft, begin PT, and all that sort of stuff.

[00:41:53.90] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, I'm not sure I had a best day. There were some that were more tolerable than others.

[00:41:59.57] MARC HENDERSON: Did you take any R&R?

[00:42:00.76] ROBERT EDWARDS: I didn't take any R & R. Maybe the best day was when we finally got the Officer's Club in operation and we could get a cold beer instead of a warm beer. Things kept getting better. The longer you were there the more things improved.

[00:42:20.55] MARC HENDERSON: Tell us about being medevacked.

[00:42:22.24] ROBERT EDWARDS: I never lost consciousness until I got to the hospital in Qui Nhon. Well, the scheme was out of the battalion aid station, flew out, thrown into a lift ship-- no litters or anything just get him in, get him out, take him to the division medical station. They triaged there, and eventually by late afternoon of Monday the 15th, wounded at around 7 o'clock, by late afternoon I was back in the evacuation hospital at Qui Nhon.

[00:43:03.50] The tent wards weren't air conditioned, but I can remember being taken into the operating room and it was cold as hell because it was air conditioned. I woke up the next morning, a shoulder all wrapped up. Spent a day or two there. Got on an airplane and we go to Clark Air Force Base.

[00:43:24.98] MARC HENDERSON: When you were evacuated, were you with the rest of the men from LZ X-Ray at this time?

[00:43:30.53] ROBERT EDWARDS: Yeah. Oh yeah.

[00:43:31.79] MARC HENDERSON: And what was your mode of transportation from Vietnam to Clark?

[00:43:37.95] ROBERT EDWARDS: Medevac ships-- I don't know what the model-- Air Force medevac ships. Helicopters eventually to Qui Nhon, then fixed wing

[00:43:48.98] aircraft to Clark,

[00:43:54.29] to Travis Air Force base in California, on to your destination hospital in the States.

[00:44:01.34] Here's a decision I really regret. When I got to the Philippines, they came around and said, do you want your wife to be notified? I don't think I was thinking clearly, but what I thought was, Jesus, if she gets a telegram, she's going to think I'm dead. So I said no, don't tell her. When I get to a phone I'll call her.

[00:44:33.53] Well, my wife was reading about stuff in the paper that C Company was annihilated and there were no survivors-- she thought I was dead. So I get to California and the Red Cross lady said, would you like to call home? So she dials the number for me and my wife relates the story, she said she answers the phone and the lady says, this is the Red Cross at Travis Air Force Base, we have your husband here.

[00:44:58.37] My wife thought they had me in a box. She didn't say anything. So the Red Cross lady finally said, well, do you want to talk to him? That's when she knew I was alive.

[00:45:12.21]

[00:45:13.37] ROBERT EDWARDS: It took me a long time to live that decision down.

[00:45:17.62] MARC HENDERSON: I bet. Was that about a week later, a month later, how long--

[00:45:21.51] ROBERT EDWARDS: It was-- I was wounded on Monday morning, the next Monday morning I was in Valley Forge Hospital waiting for a skin graft.

[00:45:32.06] MARC HENDERSON: And did you get to choose to go back to Pennsylvania or did--

[00:45:35.12] ROBERT EDWARDS: Yes. Depending on the severity of your wound, some hospitals take really serious-- and you didn't have a choice. But I could have gone to a number of places, but my wife was in Trenton and I knew Valley Forge was close so I chose Valley Forge.

[00:45:52.00] MARC HENDERSON: And following your recovery and you return back with an active duty--

[00:45:58.10] ROBERT EDWARDS: I was back on active duty by mid-January, back to Fort Benning because I was waiting to go to the Army career course, captain's course. I was still doing PT, and fortunately the physical therapist at Valley Forge said, the best thing you can do for your shoulder is swim.

[00:46:18.88] You know what I did for six summers as a teenager? I was an aquatic instructor at a Boy Scout camp. So swimming was my thing. And my new boss at Benning while I was waiting to go to school, I said, I need an extra half hour so I can get some good swimming in at lunchtime. Fine. Do it.

[00:46:39.87] MARC HENDERSON: Following your return from Vietnam, did you ever encounter any protesters?

[00:46:46.70] ROBERT EDWARDS: No, that was later. I went to the career course in August of '66, finished it in August of '67. I went to an ROTC assignment at the Ohio State University. By January of '69 I was back on orders to Vietnam. This time on the advisory side of the house.

[00:47:20.25] And here's an interesting story. I get to Vietnam in early April of '69.

[00:47:29.38] MARC HENDERSON: What was your rank?

[00:47:30.81] ROBERT EDWARDS: I was a major now. So the assignment guy said, where do you want to go? I said, I want to go back to an American unit. He said, no, you did that. Now you had to be an adviser. He said, but the best thing I can do for you is I can send you to any area you want to go. I know II Corps. Send me back to II Corps.

[00:47:50.12] They fly me up to Nha Trang. I get there late on an afternoon. I go to the Officer's Club that night and the first guy I run into is that same battalion commander who asked me four years earlier, do you want to have a rifle company? He said, what are you doing here? I said, I just arrived and I'm looking for a job. He said, I've got an opening. I worked for him again for six more months in a boring staff job at Nha Trang.

[00:48:22.32] My worst day in Nha Trang was when I was playing touch football at noontime and I fell in the sand and scraped my knee.

[00:48:29.82] MARC HENDERSON: How had the living conditions changed from your first time to 1969?

[00:48:35.03] ROBERT EDWARDS: The worst day I had was-- there were a couple of worst days at Nha Trang-- was when the office air conditioning broke down and you had to have fans. We worked from 7:00 till noon in this advisory-- and I moved papers from the inbox, worked on them, and put them in the outbox. Then we took a two-hour break, went to the beach, worked from 2:00 till 7:00, went down to the Officers Club and had a drink, ate dinner, watched a movie, went to bed in a BOQ, and did the same thing over again the next day.

[00:49:11.03] MARC HENDERSON: How much contact have you had with your fellow veterans over the years?

[00:49:14.76] ROBERT EDWARDS: A lot. People getting shot at together tend to bond, and because of the savageness of the battle we were in we bonded better than others.

[00:49:31.26] And starting in about 1990 the 1st of the 7th-- the LZ X-Ray veterans, started gathering in an annual reunion. And we've been doing that for however many years it is since early '90. Unfortunately, the COVID thing has canceled our last two. But we got together and told the same war story. It got better every year.

[00:50:03.73] ROBERT EDWARDS: I don't think it changed me. It was something I managed to get through. I learned a lot of lessons. I was with Hal Moore for 19 months and I commanded C Company for 19 months. When I finally got my own battalion, when I had something to work on, I tried to think, what would Hal Moore have done?

[00:50:34.92] MARC HENDERSON: Did your Vietnam experience affect the way you think about veterans returning from war today?

[00:50:47.57] ROBERT EDWARDS: No, it didn't change the way I think about them. Initially, they were treated like-- I won't use the dirty words, but like dirt. Eventually, the American public came around to realize that these guys weren't making political decisions. They didn't start the war. They were following orders. They were doing what the civilian leadership of the government was telling them to do, so recognition started to come.

[00:51:19.02] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think the war means to your generation?

[00:51:23.54] ROBERT EDWARDS: It was our war. For better or for worse, it was our war.

[00:51:28.27] MARC HENDERSON: Now you had mentioned lessons that you had learned from Hal Moore that you took from him.

[00:51:33.01] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, I think what I want to talk about is how did 450 guys defeat 2,000. Well, a number of things. We had Hal Moore's leadership. The 1st of the 7th-- we talked about this-- had been-- the majority of the leaders and NCOs had been together through all that training for a year. We were tight. We knew what to do.

[00:52:08.55] We had outstanding fire support. We ended up with 24 105 howitzers supporting us, tons of fighter aircraft. We had it and we knew how to use it. We talked about the success of being able to communicate.

[00:52:30.93] The North Vietnamese, they didn't have all that vast fire support, they had terrible communications, and for some reason they kept attacking the same small area of the perimeter. Had they had the capability, and maybe the tactical skills to attack that perimeter at multiple points, I'm not sure I'd be here telling my story.

[00:53:00.66] MARC HENDERSON: Are there any lessons you'd like to pass on to future generations? Any advice?

[00:53:10.82] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, let's limit it to military advice.

[00:53:13.42] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. How about to a company commander 100 years from now?

[00:53:17.29] [LAUGHTER]

[00:53:17.98] ROBERT EDWARDS: No, I'm going to talk about things that-- if you can keep units together and keep the same people together for a while, they just become so much more effective.

[00:53:36.11] The other one is and these guys like Colin Powell and Norm Schwarzkopf when they got involved in the Gulf War, they mobilized people, the Guard, the Reserve. They pulled units from everywhere.. They went into Southeast Asia or wherever it is-- the Mideast, I guess-- they went in with overwhelming force. And the length of those wars showed it. They were very quick wars.

[00:54:16.68] ROBERT EDWARDS: Well, it's hard to stand there and read the names of guys that you spent time with, a lot of time with.

[00:54:29.93] ROBERT EDWARDS: Oh, I think it's a long time coming and it's an excellent-- not a show, but it's an excellent tribute to the guys that fought there.