

Forsyth, William USN

[00:00:13.85] MARC HENDERSON: When and where were you born?

[00:00:15.35] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Lynn, Massachusetts, 1948. December 20, 1948. My whole family kind of like grew up working at the General Electric plant and the River Works, they called it. My grandfather was chief electrician at the River Works. My father apprenticed under him as well as other several people. That became the family trade, if you want to call it. Myself, my other brother David, we all followed kind of in his footsteps and my grandfather's.

[00:00:45.13] MARC HENDERSON: Oh, that's great.

[00:00:45.68] WILLIAM FORSYTH: And we grew up in Peabody. Well, I live in Wakefield now, but that's what was my Homestead before I went into the service.

[00:00:56.62] MARC HENDERSON: How old were you when you went into the service?

[00:00:58.93] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Seventeen-and-a-half.

[00:01:00.88] MARC HENDERSON: And you were telling me earlier about a program.

[00:01:03.23] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, it was called the Kiddie Cruise. I actually signed my dad's name to enlist because I wanted to have a choice, figuring that the Navy would give me a roof over my head and three squares a day. Well, I didn't know what the Army was going to do or the Marine Corps. But that was when I was a junior in high school. And the only requirement was to graduate from high school, go and get sworn in. And then at September of '66, I went up to Great Lakes after swearing in again and did my boot, which was, at that time, 12 weeks.

[00:01:41.95] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Some of the things you knew as a Boy Scout. Some of the things you knew as common sense. But it was like if you were asked to guard a trash can in the middle of the aisleway or the companionway up on the second floor with a broomstick, I'd go like, what am I supposed to do with this? But then you learned your orders. You learned to obey. You learned to do the best that you could until you get your rear end chewed out, so-- which was the best way to learn it. So--

[00:02:12.88] MARC HENDERSON: Do you do you remember a specific incident where you got your rear end chewed--

[00:02:16.81] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, sir.

[00:02:17.36] MARC HENDERSON: --and you learned your lesson?

[00:02:18.82] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I was a squad leader and we had just gone to lunch, I believe it was, and went out to the compound where we did our exercises in between the barracks. And all of a sudden, we had an inspection. And the chief came along and said

everybody open up your pockets and peacoats because it was cold at the time. And one of the guys had coffee crumbs in his pocket. And he says, you.

[00:02:47.30] And I went up to the dirigible hangar and I had to march probably-- actually, run-- I don't know-- 50 times for five nights for an hour or whatever it was. And that was his way of getting even because I didn't inspect my guys. That was kind of funny in a way, but then again, it was my fault, so-- then the other things that we did was trying to get the cleanest barracks.

[00:03:15.29] And we stole one of those mop and bucket squeeze things and had that up on the ceiling and everybody-- how do you keep the floor so clean? So one of the guys figured it out and we did it. So it's stuff like that. But again, it was common sense things. It passed quickly.

[00:03:32.97] MARC HENDERSON: And when you enlisted, did you go in knowing what rate you were going to assume?

[00:03:38.28] WILLIAM FORSYTH: No, no, that was actually decided when I got out of-- graduating out of boot camp. They designated whether you'd be a fireman or a seaman apprentice. And then they also designated where you were going, my duty station, which was the USS Ogden (LPD-5) in San Diego, California. And that's all I knew about it.

[00:04:04.32] MARC HENDERSON: So you went there as a striker?

[00:04:05.69] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, sir, apprentice, yep.

[00:04:08.12] MARC HENDERSON: And did you go there straight from boot camp?

[00:04:12.26] WILLIAM FORSYTH: No, actually, my uncle who was in the Army at the time had just moved up from Panama to Colorado Springs. So on my trip from Boston to San Diego, I swung in to see him because I hadn't seen him-- I don't know how long. But that was like four days and then I went to San Diego and got there a few days early and I spent my 18th birthday out there before I went on board. Yeah, he was a command master sergeant-- a command sergeant major, ASA. It was like 46, years 47 years.

[00:04:50.18] MARC HENDERSON: And did he give you any words of wisdom as you were going off to the Navy?

[00:04:54.86] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yeah. What, you joined the Navy?

[00:04:57.50] MARC HENDERSON: Yes.

[00:04:57.98] WILLIAM FORSYTH: But he introduced me to a command master sergeant out at Fort Devens, out in Shirley. And he was a big, big colored gentleman. And he's sitting at the desk. I didn't know how tall he was or whatever, but he got up. And as he's getting up, he says, I just got one question, why are you going in the Navy? And I told him, like I just said to you, it's three squares and a roof over my head in the Navy. He says, I like that answer and sat down. He says, you can sit. And we conversed for about a half hour, and a total gentleman.

[00:05:30.20] MARC HENDERSON: What was the sense of the Vietnam War at the time?

[00:05:34.22] WILLIAM FORSYTH: It was chaos and the fact that a lot of people here did not have any respect for anybody in the service. We were kind of like crapped on everywhere we went. I just couldn't understand that. And I'd signed up thinking I was doing the right thing. Just didn't know.

[00:05:56.34] MARC HENDERSON: What was your impression of the draft?

[00:05:59.78] WILLIAM FORSYTH: They gave me no choice. I thought I was going to be thrown into a line of people, eeny, meeny, miny, moe, and that's how I thought it was going to go. And I mean, that's what I kind of thought it was going to be like. And I didn't know if I did have a choice or not. But I said, look, this is why I signed up at the Navy office.

[00:06:27.88] WILLIAM FORSYTH: We were put in what we called TDY area because we weren't assigned to a division, being electricians or the boiler man or machinist mate. So I was on there for about a week and a half. Actually worked for the mess decks, painting, cleaning, whatever. And then I was interviewed by the chief engineer who was looking to replace some of his boiler men that he'd just lost through attrition.

[00:06:56.57] And I said, sir, I says, I don't know anything about boilers, but I know wires. And he said, well, explain. And I said, well, since I was five, six years old, I helped my dad, my grandfather before he passed doing stuff. I said that's all I can say. I said, I don't know the ifs, ands, and whys, but I'm willing to learn. He says, I'll give you six months. Well, three-and-a-half years later, I walked out as an E-4 and an electrician mate. So I guess I proved myself.

[00:07:24.39] MARC HENDERSON: Yeah, sounds like you made the most of your enlistment.

[00:07:27.02] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I tried.

[00:07:33.56] MARC HENDERSON: What was it like your first time at sea?

[00:07:36.95] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I'd been around boats as a kid, so it really wasn't that bad. We left San Diego to Hawaii, Hawaii to Okinawa, Okinawa to-- I believe we went to Japan for a few days and then we went into Vietnam for 90 or 180 days, whatever it was. But that was actually in 1967 because by the time we got from San Diego in '66, it was '67. So it was January-ish, February '67.

[00:08:10.52] MARC HENDERSON: How long had you been part of the ship's company before you guys went on that Westpac?

[00:08:16.85] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Probably about maybe four weeks it was--

[00:08:20.02] MARC HENDERSON: So you really went right from bootcamp right into--

[00:08:22.42] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yep, right on the ship and right out. And that was the sense of what you had, is that we had to get over there for whatever reasons. And that's kind of like the gist of everything that you felt. OK, everything had to be-- there was a reason for it until you get a little bit older, a little bit wiser, and figured out, OK, some of the stuff was common sense but yet it was things that you were asked to do but was repetitious. And that's when I got a little bit wiser, like I say, 18, 19, a little bit smarter in between the ears. But--

[00:08:57.68] MARC HENDERSON: Salty.

[00:08:58.34] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yeah, I guess that's a better way of saying it, yes, Marc.

[00:09:01.97] MARC HENDERSON: How many deployments did you do?

[00:09:04.46] WILLIAM FORSYTH: We did, I believe, it was either eight or nine.

[00:09:09.65] MARC HENDERSON: OK. Westpacs?

[00:09:10.58] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, Westpacs. And we were actually stationed most of the time off of Da Nang up going up North with an LSD and an LPH, which was a helicopter carrier. And the other ship was of the same design as ours with the well-deck going in the water and releasing Mike Boats. But we stayed together as a group and we always worked together as a group. Then the biggest group that we had was during Tet of '68.

[00:09:44.39] That's when the New Jersey came alongside of us. There was all kinds of chaos going on for like 48 hours or whatever it was. It was just tremendous. WILLIAM FORSYTH: Our ship was built in '65 in Brooklyn, New York. It was fairly new in comparison to an awful lot of them. It was clean. Food was, I'll say, 80% decent.

[00:10:13.46] And we had a good crew. We all got along. I was with-- I think it was maybe like 35, maybe 40 of us as electricians and IC-men. We became a real knit group, you know?

[00:10:28.91] MARC HENDERSON: What's an IC-man?

[00:10:29.90] WILLIAM FORSYTH: An IC-man is inner communications, inner ship communications. He takes care of the phones, the alarms.

[00:10:36.77] MARC HENDERSON: What was your berthing like?

[00:10:39.23] WILLIAM FORSYTH: We actually had fairly decent ones where we had a compartment underneath the bunk where it swung up and you could stow your-- whatever time of the year it was-- if it was summer or spring, and then you stowed all your winter and other stuff in another area. But ample room and it was comfortable. I mean, it wasn't like having a Hilton bed but you got through it.

[00:11:01.43] MARC HENDERSON: So you were sleeping on a mattress, not canvas racks?

[00:11:03.48] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yeah, right, it was actually a cushion mattress, a rubberized mattress, not like what we have on the Case and Young. Very comfortable in that respect. We had cooled air. Not air conditioning, but cooled air. And working in the engine rooms was the hottest part. I mean, it was usually like 120 degrees down there. But most of our bunk areas were like in the 70s, comfortable again. So--

[00:11:32.27] MARC HENDERSON: So could you tell me what general quarters is and what you did for general quarters?

[00:11:36.37] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yep, General quarters, my first part of it was going down to the after switchboard room, manning the after switchboard room. As time went on, I went down for six months down in after steering, which is down above the rudders, which is like one of the most vulnerable parts of the boat-- ship. Then I progressed up to running switchboard number one, which had total control of all our four generators and our emergency generators.

[00:12:08.33] And then that was basically where I was, is just the engine rooms for general quarters. And I did do-- signed up, volunteered for when we had atomic weapons brought on the ship, so we were told. I mean, we drove for it and all that, dressed for it. They gave you the fire suit that the guys would wear out on the flight deck to protect themselves and then they took duct tape and taped you up around the neck and the cuffs and your boots.

[00:12:42.66] And I said, I don't know if this is cool or not, but it's what we did and we just learned how to maneuver it down there and the safety precautions if something was to happen. All we knew was there was a big, brown box that came out on the deck-- out on the pier, and we hauled it up on the ship. So other than that, I didn't know nothing. The ship was about just under 600 feet, I believe, long.

[00:13:09.78] We carried about a third of a battalion of Marines, all of their equipment to supply them, food and everything, for 30 days. We had a big well deck where we had nine LCMs. LCM is a landing craft with a big flat door on the end that you could land the guys on the beach where you saw in like World War II films. In World War I, they were smaller. We had capability of landing two Chinooks. So we could take 16, 18 guys off to fly them in behind the guys that landed on the beach so they converged on each other.

[00:13:46.37] Most of those operations were-- they'd go in for like 20-some-odd days, maybe 30. And we'd go back in and pull them out. The only regrets were is that the area that they went in, they went back to again to recapture it again. They were not allowed to progress. And why? I don't know. It's one of the downfalls, I think, of what happened to us over there. But I mean, other than that, like I say, the ship was comfortable.

[00:14:14.75] I mean, if we got into real stormy weather, because of having the well deck that sunk down so you could drive the boats in and out, she had a rounded rear end and she'd go up on a high water and just slide back down the water then come back out and do the reverse and punch its bow down in the water. Had the experience of my mentor-- he was a second class electrician, Danny Chase--

[00:14:41.60] he and I decided we'd join one of these three typhoons, go up on this signal bridge and see what it was like to be outside till we were asked to get our asses inside because we didn't realize how bad it really was. Then you go, uh-oh. So we actually took the wheelhouse, went underwater. And that was like half a deck down below where we were standing. So I said, all right. At the same time when we're asked to go in, we just kind of like ran in. So I mean, again, it was comfortable to me.

[00:15:14.85] Some guys were constantly seasick. You learned how to take your mess tray and put your elbow in it and had your coffee and you would eat with this hand or whatever hand and sipped on your coffee and made sure everything didn't shift around because it was moving. We were at 55 degree list and the ship was only designed to do 50. So OK, but you learned how to angle yourself. Like you say, you walked the walls. But it wasn't that bad.

[00:15:42.18] MARC HENDERSON: And when you were operating off the coast of Vietnam, all your time was spent on the ship, right?

[00:15:48.80] WILLIAM FORSYTH: No. My last five, maybe six months I was volunteered to go on an LCM unit that was stationed on the ship. And I got to get on the-- be part of the crew that was the emergency boat. If one of the other boats got stuck or broke down, we were going to tow you back to the ship. And I acted as their electrician, doing repair work specifically for them.

[00:16:16.61] Part of our job as being an electrician on the ship, you learned the batteries. You learned boat work. You learned motors. You learned controls. You learned to run the switchboard, the emergency generators, the big generators. So you get a good variety. And I said, look, I'd like to do that just to get off of the boat every once in a while. One of those trips that we did deployments was-- we were on our way back, I think like about 150 days,

[00:16:44.60] and probably 12 hours into going back to wherever we were going to go-- I forget now-- but we made an absolute U-turn and went back and spent another 40-some-odd days, which made the deployment like 190 days. And the tensions were like-- we've had enough of this. And that was another reason to get off the boat, just to get away from a few things.

[00:17:14.63] WILLIAM FORSYTH: We would find somebody that was from the North Shore area or from this general Boston area and tried to get friendly, tried to help them out as best you could. And then it got to the point where when you started losing a few of them, you kind of like didn't know if you should have that camaraderie or not. But we did our best and got through it. A couple of guys didn't come back, one of my best friends.

[00:17:49.67] The craziness is we made it over like the seven or eight times, he was an electrician also. He was from San Antonio, Alfredo Molino. Played softball. One day, he gets a softball to the side of his head, and he had like a rupture in his head, and that was it. And my other friend, like I said, was an IC-man. And the three of us-- that was Pete Peterson. And that was most of it, going through all this shit and how did that happen?

[00:18:29.33] MARC HENDERSON: So in America at the time, there were a lot of social and racial tensions. Did any of that make its way to the ship?

[00:18:39.44] WILLIAM FORSYTH: There were clashes with no matter what you were. It only might have been a spur of the moment thing where something happened and it just kind of like got to and you just took it out on the closest person. But there was no bigotry-- or however you want to say it-- back then, not at all like it has been the last four or five years in the world.

[00:19:03.38] MARC HENDERSON: How much time did you have to yourself?

[00:19:06.41] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Most of the time, we probably had like maybe six hours a day, give or take. I mean, most of that time was at sleep, but we worked together as mostly like in the motor shop, if you want to call it, when we repaired motors. There was four of us doing that. Up in the battery locker, which took care of the forklift batteries, there was two of us there at one time. Then it became just myself.

[00:19:34.32] The boat locker, which was just for the boats, regular car batteries, if you want to call it, just myself down there at that time. But again, we all helped each other. And if the IC-men needed help pulling wire or we needed help doing something, we all worked as a team. And-- excuse me-- most of the officers I had were decent enough that allowed us to do all of that in a little bit of freedom. Our chiefs were great, so--

[00:20:07.11] WILLIAM FORSYTH: The officer I remember was Borowski. He was from New Hampshire. He was a 90-day wonder. He gets sworn in as-- for ROTC through college is how I picture it. But he was good in the fact of, I won't say compassionate, but understanding because he was only a couple of years older than I was, all right? And didn't know anything about engineering. Didn't know anything about electricity.

[00:20:36.21] Tried to teach him what I could, knowing what I knew, which was very, very little because all my schooling happened afterwards because of the GI Bill as I learned as I went down the road, I guess, you want to call it. The chiefs, they had been around for quite a while. Sometimes there were stirrings. But most of the time, there was a lot of free time. One of the officers was a white hat, a Mustang. He'd come through. And he was good.

[00:21:06.77] He knew what it was like to be on the other side of the fence. The two engineering officers I had during that time, they were fantastic, allowing me to do what I did, again, as being not knowing anything about boilers and getting into the E gang, which I loved. I mean, that was my thing. I actually, as part of that, went to-- I said a few minutes ago-- the GI Bill. I went to school for two years. I've done it ever since my whole life and just retired 12 years ago, 11 years ago. So it was quite a career.

[00:21:44.69] MARC HENDERSON: So when you did have time to yourself, what did you do for recreation?

[00:21:49.21] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Well, read and studied so we could go up through the ranks. When I went from fireman apprentice, I had to take the exam for fireman. I had to take the exam for E-4. And I was almost ready to take the E-5 and that's when we did the early out and I had a little disruption with the executive officer. I'd been home here. That was-- my brother graduated high school. And I had like 44 days of leave, so I said, well, let me take a month.

[00:22:21.34] And I came home here for a month and grew my mutton chops in. My hair was long. The guys called me and said, hey, promotions are out for E-4. Why don't we all do it together? That was Pete and Fred. So I flew back. I was going up the gangway. I didn't know who was behind me, but it was the exec. And I signed in. And the JG that was on, he goes, oh, shit. And I said, what's up? And the exec swings around he signs in and he says, you, down to the barber shop line.

[00:22:53.49] I said, yeah. As soon as I stow my gear, sir. He says, no, now. Now this is like five past seven. The barber shop don't open till nine. Inspections and promotions were at one p.m. I said, if that's what you want, sir. He said, what'd you say? I said, if that's what you want. And five minutes later, he was down there to make sure I was in line with my gear. So I had one of my guys just grab it-- my buddies, throw it on my bunk, took care of it afterwards.

[00:23:23.26] And when it came time to sign out, when they did the area release, I was very adamant that I was getting off of that boat and getting out. And it was only because of him. Again, the captain, fantastic guy. My engineer, Billy Graham was his name. We treated each other with total respect. And I called him Billy. He called me Billy. When it came time to sign out with him, the exec sitting down at his desk, he said, well, tell me why you're going.

[00:23:54.47] And I said, can I say something off the record because you're going to get really bullshit? And, yeah. I said, it's because of you. And I wasn't saying it like I just did. I said a few other words. Bill Graham heard this. His office was right next door. He came screaming in, thinking I was going to go across the desk. Same time the captain hears this. And he comes in and he says, as soon as you're through, come in and see me.

[00:24:23.50] When I went in to see him, he says close the door, Billy. The relationship we had is he used to sunbathe like I did or tried to at times. He had a rickety old chamois chair. And one day as he went to sit down, he put his ass through it. I said, I know what to do. And I had one shipped home, from home, and I gave it to him. And then it was all right, we swapped suntan lotions we were using.

[00:24:51.43] But he became an admiral finally and he was part of your outfits over in Iraq doing the amphibious landings and stuff, Captain Carroll. Again, a total gentleman where the exec was not. But anyway, at that time, it was kind of crazy. I could have gotten \$10,000 for signing over, cash. Big chunk of money. But I said, nope, didn't want it. I had other things to do.

[00:25:20.84] MARC HENDERSON: You read? You read a lot for some of your recreation or off duty time?

[00:25:24.38] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yeah, just whatever books were flying around. And we had a library. Most of the time, it was tech manuals and, again, studying for promotions and trying to figure out things. I was always one to take things apart and try to figure out why they worked or whatever, so--

[00:25:42.29] MARC HENDERSON: Can you tell me the areas that you knew that the ship was operating in?

[00:25:47.84] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yeah, we operated quite a bit north of Da Nang, landing the guys, mostly always in the same area. Again, my last four-and-a-half, maybe five months on the LCMs was the only time I went ashore, except for rec time in Da Nang. I can't tell you much about what went on except the aftermaths of the battles, if you want to call it that. Having to offload the helicopters with the dead kind of got to me.

[00:26:20.18] Ship's company was asked to volunteer. What would happen is the Chinooks would go in, try to pick up everybody they could. I mean, they did the medevacs for us and the ones that had passed secondly. And so they could transition them back to get more because they were still in somewhat of a firefight or whatever. They had to get them off the ship again. And then from the hospital ship, either the Hope or-- I can't think of the other one--

[00:26:50.03] MARC HENDERSON: The Sanctuary or Red--

[00:26:51.62] WILLIAM FORSYTH: It could have been the Sanctuary, yes. I'm not sure. But anyway, they would take and bring them over to there or they flew them into Da Nang. I'm not sure exactly of that. But they had to do it quickly, so we volunteered to help them when we were off duty. And most of our duty time, when we were there, was like eight hours on and eight off. You could free rein on your off time and you did whatever you could. And if they needed volunteers, you volunteered, which you thought was the thing to do.

[00:27:23.87] MARC HENDERSON: Do you remember any named operations your ship participated in?

[00:27:27.29] WILLIAM FORSYTH: No, not off the top of my head. But I mean, when the ship got decommissioned, they gave us a pamphlet that was probably about 60 pages, about two-by-three pamphlet that had the highlights historically of what the ship did. Quite a few of those operations were in there. I have two of what we call our cruise books, which had an awful lot of the operations in them.

[00:27:57.33] But the only time I get to look at them is at our ship's reunion, which we've had a couple. But because of COVID, a couple were canceled. I didn't make the one last year, but I'm definitely making the one down in Pensacola this year for sure, only because the group that I was with, there's probably about 35 of us that were on the ship together. And they were the first startups of-- they were the plank owners. And I was not a plank owner, but I was like second crew, second-and-a-half crew that came on board.

[00:28:31.32] And out of that group, there's 35, 40 of us still left. And we try to see each other. In fact, as part of that, there's three other friends that live Salem, New Hampshire, Wakefield, New Hampshire, and Saugus, Mass. The four of us get together once a month. We had a fifth one. He lived down in New Bedford, Lenny Mellow. He just passed away, I believe it was a year ago in February. But we were tight, so--

[00:29:07.22] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I didn't really know any other ship. I had been on a destroyer that came in for July 4 in Marblehead Harbor. My aunt owned a lobster house and restaurant that provisioned some of the things for the captain and the officers mess. And I got

invited on board and got a real good tour of the complete ship, my sister and my brother. The guys were really good about doing that once they knew who I was or related to.

[00:29:39.26] But that was the-- I'd been on the Haida, which was a destroyer up in Canada, but that was way after the fact. I'd been on a couple of subs, the Sea Wolf that used to be up in Salem, Mass. I believe it's down in New Bedford now with the Massachusetts. Other than that, really, I didn't know what to tell you or how to describe what was cutting edge.

[00:30:05.03] The guys that were on the Tripoli, which was an old World War II recommissioned LPH, that was a total shithouse from my understanding. And they were under total repairs all the time, where we only lost something because it got-- wasn't worked correctly. Somebody damaged it, trying to do something they shouldn't have been doing. But for the most part, we were able to fix things and, again, and being on an older ship, I don't know, you know? So-- [CHUCKLES]

[00:30:43.29] WILLIAM FORSYTH: It was seeing what was going on during Tet because we knew it was total devastation. Particularly when the New Jersey came alongside, we probably came port to starboard and I got a chance to go up on the boat deck which is above the flight deck and watch it as it went by. And as she was coming down on us, she was firing the forward gun and midships. Then the forward gun stopped, midships, and aft gun.

[00:31:15.23] And then forward and midships stopped, aft gun stopped, and then forward started. But seeing all the missiles, all the things that New Jersey was throwing over there and everybody else in the world. And my understanding was the biggest thing that had happened since World War II as an amphibious and operations and whatever deployment. That was just mind boggling.

[00:31:48.86] I just thought about, number one, the destruction, and that's all I'll say before I get emotional. Once in a great while, we'd have a big cookout and we had a little contest amongst us, how many steaks we could all try to eat at once one after another. That sort of stuff. I got it up to five, and that was it. So, but anyway, it was small, but in comparison to what I had been used to afterwards. But we had what we-- when you cross the dateline, we had celebrations there.

[00:32:27.47] MARC HENDERSON: Wog Day?

[00:32:28.58] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, it was Wog Day, and it was an unnamed for going over the other line to which I still have the certificates for.

[00:32:36.65] MARC HENDERSON: A Golden Shellback?

[00:32:37.85] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, Shellbacks. We decided it was-- the signal division, I believe it was, decided that one of the kids, the Hawaiian kid, had his sister send out a bikini bathing suit. So we found out about that. Being stupid electricians we were, well, we grabbed a sheet and made like a smock out of it and put Pillsbury on the back of it with the half-assed Pillsbury sign.

[00:33:07.11] And I have a picture of that in the cruise book and with my kerchief over my head as the old lady of the crew, you know? And we got to stand up on the bow. You could hear the other guys whistling for her but go like, get out of here, kid, you know? But we all had a laugh. I mean, those were the good times of it, which there seemed to be, I'll say, 40% good times and 60% BS, if you want to call it that way.

[00:33:43.95] WILLIAM FORSYTH: We had the ROKs on board. For probably like two-and-a-half days, we brought them aboard so they could rest up and get some good grub. We had a couple SEAL Team units that were detached to us off and on. We had the LCM guys, which I ended up being a part of at the end of it. But as far as the Koreans, you didn't interact with them. They were tough cookies. I mean, to me at the time they appeared to be even tougher than any of our Green Berets, but they were on the same par.

[00:34:19.13] SEAL Team guys, they were UDT then, not SEAL Team. But they were their own gig. They actually would blow up some of the destruction-- or destroy some of the things that the Vietnamese sent down the rivers so that we couldn't get our boats up the rivers. And they'd blow them up and then they would capture snakes for the antivenom or the venom for the anti-poison or whatever you call it.

[00:34:48.42] MARC HENDERSON: On the ship, what would they do that was different than the rest of you?

[00:34:51.36] WILLIAM FORSYTH: They'd sit back and just, every once in a while, had a swim. We actually had this-- speaking of a good time, is we had swim call every once in a while where we'd lower the back deck, the doorway for the well, and swam off of that. And they had one of our ship's boats, but we had a guy in there with an M1 which was a friend from New York, Frank Ciro. Says, Frank, what's with the M1? He says, so in case the sharks spill. And I said, I'm on the boat. I get on the boat and stayed on the boat, and that was it, my swimming time was off.

[00:35:24.51] I said, I'll go off the beach but I wasn't going to do it out in the middle of the ocean. So I still have this quagmire about sharks, so-- . WILLIAM FORSYTH: Every once in a while when we pulled into Japan, USO had a set up where you could make a three minute phone call. Always got letters once or twice a day for mail call from my family.

[00:35:56.91] MARC HENDERSON: Is there a memorable care package that arrived?

[00:35:59.28] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Hell, yeah. You'll laugh about this one. We did electrical work for what they called Rich's department stores, which was like a Marshall's but a lower key. The guys that sold all the nuts and stuff, the candies, we knew most of the people in the store. Again, we'd done quite a bit of work for them for a long time. But anyway, my dad went and bought a five pound can of pistachio nuts.

[00:36:31.37] They found out it was coming to me so everybody wrapped it up and signed their names. It was just like, wow. With everything that was going on at home, just 180 out. And there was a cake my mother had sent over for my birthday. And a good friend of ours from church, she

baked it. But anyway, what they did was they put a bottle of Seagram's 7 in it. So that New Year's--

[00:37:03.38] MARC HENDERSON: Inside the cake?

[00:37:04.43] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Inside the cake, yeah. That New Year's, four or five of us were able to have a few swigs for New Year's and-- till the first class-- Dick Davis was his name-- he'd come in the IC room, a room about this size. He could smell it. He could smell It probably five miles away. He says, I don't like what's going on here. I says, good, go out the door and close the door. I was just a third class at that time. We had clashes, but this day today, we get along very well, you know?

[00:37:35.06] But it was just the way things went. But that was one of-- the two best ones I can remember.

[00:37:43.28] MARC HENDERSON: So you mentioned that memorable New Year's. Do you remember what year that was?

[00:37:46.98] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I believe it was '68.

[00:37:48.60] MARC HENDERSON: So '67, '68?

[00:37:50.46] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, somewhere in there, yeah.

[00:37:52.65] MARC HENDERSON: And then are there any other memorable holidays that you remember at sea?

[00:37:59.54] WILLIAM FORSYTH: We always had Navy birthday, had Marine Corps birthday, had like, again, the cookouts with the steaks and--

[00:38:08.24] MARC HENDERSON: What set those birthdays apart?

[00:38:12.67] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Just being over there, I guess, at the times we were over there. I think one time for Navy birthday and then we were in Long Beach for the Marine Corps birthday. And again, I didn't know that many of the Marines except for maybe two or three. And out of those three, again, two of them didn't make it back.

[00:38:32.93] MARC HENDERSON: What did the ship do to celebrate those birthdays?

[00:38:36.20] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Again, a cook out, carnival atmosphere. As electricians, we made stupid electrical games where you took a hoop and you had a couple of wires. And if you did it, it short circuited a buzzer or whatever it was. And for the ship's mess or-- how do I want to call it? You volunteered a buck or a quarter in the kitty so we could have the next party, you know? That sort of thing. And every department and every division like boatswain's, they try to tie this knot.

[00:39:09.50] And God only knows what it was. Nobody could do it, you know? So you ended up trying your best and throwing another quarter in. But you know, and like the night before Tet, that was the same atmosphere where we had a carnival, where we had a band. They had all kinds of dignitaries come on board as part of it. The USO was there a little bit just to get you out of the doldrums of what might be happening in the next couple of days. Well, just again, that stuff broke it up, the monotony, if you want to call it that.

[00:39:48.13] MARC HENDERSON: How much of what was going on in the United States-- the political turmoil, the social turmoil, how much of that news made its way to the ship?

[00:39:58.45] WILLIAM FORSYTH: The Army, the Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, they all put out a monthly magazine. And this one would depict some of the things like the school riots on campus or anti demonstrations.

[00:40:12.93] MARC HENDERSON: Was it an all hands thing?

[00:40:14.47] WILLIAM FORSYTH: No, it was something else. That had quite a bit of stuff, but I think a lot of it was edited so you really didn't get both sides of the story. Like, I find today's news is edited so badly. You're only getting what they want you to hear. And I say that in respect. Nothing to do with what we're doing here, but you may have heard of the Moors. They were defunct anti-country country that-- they came up Route 128.

[00:40:47.35] Well, five of them ended up in my backyard over the other side of my fence on July 4, two years ago. I got interviewed by Channel 4, Channel 25, Channel 5. I told it how I saw it, how I felt. That's not what was aired and what I have recorded. And I was so BS, I still am to this day. And I respect how you are asking and I know it's not one sided.

[00:41:21.72] Those guys were one sided, only what they want you to hear, what they think the people should hear. Let's get off of that.

[00:41:29.76] MARC HENDERSON: Did you ever observe any pro or antiwar demonstrations?

[00:41:34.47] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Not per se. I just saw it when we came back into San Diego. We'd see stuff on TV.

[00:41:39.51] MARC HENDERSON: What was that experience like, coming back and seeing--

[00:41:41.76] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I just couldn't understand it. And again, one of the times I'd come home on leave, I went to a party with all friends that I'd gone to grammar school and high school with. And at that time, I was only going to be home for a weekend so I didn't bring any of my civilian clothes home, which I wasn't supposed to come home for the weekend, but I flew home anyway. I was in uniform the whole time I was here. I was kind of like asked why I was wearing my uniform, why I was there.

[00:42:10.76] Why did I sign up? Why did I do this? Why am I doing that? I just got so-- baloney-- that I just said have a nice life, guys. And I left and went home. Again, these were

friends. There were, you know, OK, good luck to them. They went to college and I respected that. I didn't want to go to college and I did what I did. But there was no respect on either side of that fence.

[00:42:39.60] MARC HENDERSON: So what sort of reception did your family give you when you came home?

[00:42:43.20] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Oh, it was always wonderful. My mom would tell stories. She'd go to Stop & Shop. And the guy that-- she always went through the same aisle. And the guy would say, hey, Billy's coming home. She'd have \$175 worth of food where most of the time, it was only \$75. You know, that sort of-- because she fed me well. My dad was very good, too, so--

[00:43:15.56] MARC HENDERSON: So tell me about leaving the Navy. You told me why you chose to get out. What year was that?

[00:43:22.02] WILLIAM FORSYTH: That was October 7, 1969. I was fortunate in one way. There was a family that moved out to California. They moved into Garden Grove. I knew the oldest sister. I didn't know the younger one. The younger one was a couple of years younger than me. But their family moved out there. And one of my first times coming back from Nam, I made a phone call up to them and I said, I'm off for the day and I know how to get there.

[00:43:49.70] And I took the Greyhound up, spent the day. Well, from that time on, every time I was home back to the States, I was invited to come up for the weekend or whatever time I had off. They lived in a big, beautiful apartment complex, swimming pool. It was like a second family. Got to use the spare car. My guy friends would pick me up right outside the front door, and that's how we got back and forth from San Diego.

[00:44:21.38] That was very enjoyable. And I ended up staying there after I got out, which was the long of the story. I spent almost a month out there. My dad took sick. He had gotten a twig in the joint of his elbow and they isolated him. He had some blood disease or something where they wouldn't even let my mom in the room. And I said to a friend of mine at the time, he wanted to take his car, bring it back to Chicago for his sister.

[00:44:51.22] He was-- knew he was going back to Nam. So I said, I'll drive back with you and I'll fly from Chicago to Boston. And he got more and more critical. So I finally marched into the hospital, and I was home. And I've been home ever since. And I always said, hey, should I have gone back to California and lived with Jerry and Candy, or the Beatty's, done this or done that? But then I still probably would have seen the friends. I wouldn't have the family I have today, et cetera. So--

[00:45:28.50] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I grew up quite a bit very quickly. I still act like a kid at 74, or almost 74, but took things a lot more serious, particularly when it was a critical thing like, we'd get into-- I won't say total command position, but to be able to show people this is the way you go. I've been involved in a couple of minor fires, but fires that it could have got out of hand.

[00:46:00.72] People were in the building. And I happened to be taking care of this place that was prone to have fires and just told everybody-- because everybody was in chaos-- just, hey, here's what you got to do. And then we started shutting power down and doused the fire before the fire trucks even got there. I mean, those sort of things is what I learned. And safety was another big aspect of that as-- total respect of anybody that had a gun in their hand for whatever reason.

[00:46:35.38] And if I could, I'd back them up if the reason was correct. If they're on the other side of the fence, get the hell out of my way because you're going down. That's how I was taught.

[00:46:46.90] MARC HENDERSON: Did your experience in the Navy shape the way you think about veterans returning from combat today?

[00:46:55.13] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, very much so. On the ship and the USO, we were treated with a lot of respect. Off the ship, in civilian, no. But today, there's a lot, lot more respect. I think I mentioned it to you earlier, I got-- I'm sorry, to Ryan that I took my grandson the first time to a hockey game here at the Garden with my daughter and my son-in-law.

[00:47:26.26] Companionship with the usher that had to sit us down. We're sitting down the ice and a bunch of people, and he says, I'm going to have to come down and help you. He goes, you're awfully familiar. I said, the only thing I can think of is that you must have been at an antique car show. He says, yeah, I had a '39 Chrysler. I said, wait a minute, red, right? He goes, yes, more burgundy. I say, OK. Anyway that happened. Well, the next thing I know, I'm up on the jumbotron, seven, eight, maybe nine times. I don't know.

[00:47:55.52] But everybody that was sitting around me would push me and say you're up there again you're up there again. Long and short of that with respect to civilians today, everybody that walked out of there when I was leaving with my family, thank you for your service. And that was like-- I wanted to hide, but I was-- it got to me. Well, if that happened in '69, it would have been a lot better.

[00:48:27.15] But today, even when I volunteer on a Case and Young, people come on board, thank you for your service. And one of the gentlemen a couple Saturdays ago, which was kind of nice, he says, I got time to spend with my day but to meet another vet-- I said, well, you get time to spend with your son. My father didn't, so-- we did for a few years, but he and I were just getting to know each other. And he understood.

[00:48:59.09] The last few years of my life I've become a little bit more emotional about things because I delve into it and thinking about things like that. And it just pissed me off really in the beginning. Some days it still does. But one of the good aspects, we had gone out to see the congressman from-- I'm trying to think. He was a lieutenant. He dedicated the Vietnam Memorial--

[00:49:27.70] MARC HENDERSON: Kerry?

[00:49:28.18] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Kerry, yes. Thank you. Same time when he was talking, a lone dove flew over my head and there was a sail behind me that had a '52 Chevy all painted up with the American flag. Well, my first car was a '52 Chevy. Well, the whole shit and caboodle became very emotional. And when they played taps, I just-- but ever since that point in time, things like that are getting to me.

[00:49:58.07] MARC HENDERSON: So what do you think the war means to your generation?

[00:50:04.42] WILLIAM FORSYTH: To vets, we tried. I think the leadership should have been there a little bit stronger and let us march forward, continue on, get the job done. Well, because of whatever reasons, we were asked to come back, pull back, go back, lose more lives. At times, it seemed needless. But then again, you, as a 17, 18, 19-year-old kid, you said you're doing your best to fight this communism.

[00:50:38.22] And that's how I looked at it. But again, when it became needless, I didn't like that at all. I still don't, particularly the stuff that goes on today, the last 100 and some odd days.

[00:50:51.62] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think the war is remembered today?

[00:50:54.38] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Not as good as it should be. It's not taught in school. None of the history that you and I grew up with per se of the world and our era of time. It's not there. And it should be there. That's what this country is founded on. No matter what we've done and wherever in the world that we've always been there to help other people. But yet, sometimes we don't help ourselves. But yet it's not taught. And the respect is not there for this country.

[00:51:28.46] All the wars that we've had, if you want to say-- let's say 15 of them, these kids don't know a damn thing about them. My daughter was at the end of that. And she asked questions. A gentleman a couple of years older than-- he interviewed me basically kind of like you did for his high school class because they were discussing it.

[00:51:59.23] There was also a young lady that went to BC. As part of her-- I think you call it an essay, or thesis, excuse me, she interviewed me for about two or three hours and she ended up getting an A-plus on it, my understanding. And it really delved into my mind trying to answer her questions like yourselves, trying to be as honest and how I feel about it.

[00:52:30.03] When those things happen, it was, again, getting better because people want to know and I think this is going to all help also.

[00:52:40.56] MARC HENDERSON: Is there a lesson that you would like to-- the lesson that you learned during your service that you would like to leave for future generations?

[00:52:50.24] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Well, I think, if we're going to get into a fight, war, good reasoning should be behind it. But whoever makes that decision, stand behind the guys that are fighting it and let them do their job. Don't tell them how to do it. They know better than anybody. It's like you or I telling a cop how to do his job or a state police. You don't know all

their ins and ends and outs. Nor do a civilian that-- OK, he might be the secretary of defense-- and I'm not knocking him.

[00:53:27.08] Some of them have been there, some have not. And the ones that have not, they don't know what's going on. WILLIAM FORSYTH: I was odd. I have gone to one, two-- two of them. First one was in Peabody High School. They had the portable one. Second one was in Wilmington. Third one was in Stoneham, Mass.

[00:53:57.09] Two of those occasions, I was with my daughter. At both of two of those occasions was one of my shipmates. Because of the two gentlemen that passed as Marines that got me thinking about joining the Navy because they were Marines, my daughter got to present them a rose and I presented the second one. And very nice.

[00:54:27.78] MARC HENDERSON: You mentioned knowing a few of the men whose names are on the Wall.

[00:54:34.61] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes.

[00:54:35.27] MARC HENDERSON: Is there anything you want to say about those gentlemen so that-- to their families?

[00:54:42.32] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Just bless them both. They didn't deserve what they got. One, to be there like about six weeks or so and the other one about six months. It was not-- everybody should have come home. And I know not everybody is going to, but to lose the 58-odd thousand that we have, that was-- it should never have happened. God bless all that serve for what they do.

[00:55:15.91] And for kids to do it today, there was a need for us to do it at my age, so we thought and I still think. There's needs today. There should be more incentives for them. They should be treated a lot better than they are. Talking with the exec off the Constitution when you guys were in Iraq and Iran, the food they got sometimes was deplorable, stuff like that.

[00:55:48.62] It means a lot that they get treated well. And that's how they can respect what they have, what they're doing. My thoughts. WILLIAM FORSYTH: There was a gentleman that came up on the pinning exercise that we had on the pier at the Constitution a few months back. I did get a pamphlet on some of the stuff he has. I also have some information from my VA rep in Wakefield. He's got me tuned into a lot of things.

[00:56:25.23] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think about our commemoration?

[00:56:27.41] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I think it's fantastic. The more that people know about this, I think the world is going to be better off, particularly in the United States, people that just don't have the knowledge or they're not taught it again. And they should be taught it. And the more they know about it, the more understanding might be there at some time of what we were trying-- excuse me-- of what we were trying to do.

[00:56:53.31] And again, I think that anybody that wants to and tries their best to fight this communist sort of atmosphere, God bless them, and just make it happen. We don't need it in this world.

[00:57:08.99] MARC HENDERSON: So you mentioned you were at a pinning ceremony a couple of months ago.

[00:57:11.63] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes.

[00:57:11.99] MARC HENDERSON: Did you receive a pin?

[00:57:12.92] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Yes, I did.

[00:57:14.21] MARC HENDERSON: I don't see it on your hat.

[00:57:15.47] WILLIAM FORSYTH: No, because it's on one of my other ones. Actually, I've been to maybe four or five. And that was the fifth one. And each time, I've gotten one. And I'm very happy to have gotten it.

[00:57:31.04] MARC HENDERSON: I'd like to give you another one today just so you can add it to this hat.

[00:57:34.97] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Well, I will put it on. It's my second one today.

[00:57:39.20] MARC HENDERSON: Oh, really?

[00:57:39.89] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Our esteemed gentleman in the background presented me with one downstairs. But thank you.

[00:57:44.71] MARC HENDERSON: Well, I'll respect that. But I do want to tell you about the pin if he didn't. Did he share with you about--

[00:57:50.99] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Well, at the first one, it was depicted. And thank you to Mr Obama for instituting all of the things that have happened since then for that. The first one, again at Melrose, the mayor of Melrose, he read the whole document and proclamation and a couple of times it's happened. And I get bits and pieces. And we had one at the VFW in Saugus also.

[00:58:25.05] And we were presented the book, which was really cool, and a pin and a thirty-aught-six shell for whatever reason that was. But it was a keychain sort of thing.

[00:58:37.66] MARC HENDERSON: But I do, sir, if I say nothing else, I just want to say that the pin really is a representation of a grateful nation, so thank you.

[00:58:49.59] WILLIAM FORSYTH: Thank you very much. Thank you, thank you, Marc. It means a lot to me.

[00:58:57.16] MARC HENDERSON: It's honest and sincere, thank you.

[00:58:59.43] WILLIAM FORSYTH: I know it is. Thanks.

[00:59:01.53] MARC HENDERSON: And thanks for sharing with us today.