

HELVEY, ROBERT ARMY

[00:00:16.54] MARK FRANKLIN: I'd like to get a little background bio information before we get to your experiences in Vietnam. Let's start with when and where you were born.

[00:00:23.71] ROBERT HELVEY: Here in South Charleston, West Virginia. Charleston, West Virginia. My mother was a nurse at-- she graduated from Kanawha Valley Hospital. It's no longer open. But she was from Montgomery, and her family were miners and things like that.

[00:00:47.23] And I only saw my grandfather one time. He sort of faded away. But her mother died of consumption at the age of 33. That's TB or something like that. And she died a very slow, painful death apparently. So my dad came from Bluefield, West Virginia.

[00:01:18.13] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh.

[00:01:18.94] ROBERT HELVEY: And his father was a blacksmith. And then he took over the maintenance for the Horseless Carriage taxi cab company. So he became a mechanic as well as a blacksmith. And he died at the age of 42 of a heart attack. And he-- it's not mentioned too much, but I think he was involved in a lot of drinking.

[00:02:03.23] The first time I went in the military I was in the Reserves. They had a Reserve unit down here in South Charleston and I took this six month program. I think they called it the RFA Reserve Forces Act, '55. And what that was is you go six months active duty and then spend 7 and 1/2 years in the Reserves.

[00:02:26.27] Well, I always knew I was going in the Army. So I was going to sign up for three or four years or whatever and my dad said, why don't you try this. He'd been talking to the guys at the plant. And if you like it, you reenlist. If you don't like it you haven't made --

[00:02:51.92] MARK FRANKLIN: You haven't lost anything.

[00:02:52.60] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, a life's-- to anything. Though I still wanted in the Army. So I went through ROTC. I graduated from Marshall University.

[00:03:00.89] MARK FRANKLIN: Which one? Which university?

[00:03:03.32] ROBERT HELVEY: Marshall

[00:03:04.12] MARK FRANKLIN: Marshall, yeah that's right around here?

[00:03:05.30] ROBERT HELVEY: In Huntington.

[00:03:06.17] MARK FRANKLIN: OK.

[00:03:06.95] ROBERT HELVEY: And I was a distinguished military graduate so I got a regular Army commission soon as I came in.

[00:03:15.62] MARK FRANKLIN: What do you think led you to want to join the Army? You were pretty directed to do that?

[00:03:20.54] ROBERT HELVEY: I like being in the woods. I like to hunt. I like to go on hikes, and you know it's just natural.

[00:03:29.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Natural for you.

[00:03:30.13] ROBERT HELVEY: It was natural. John Wayne may have said something to do with it. I'm not sure, but-- [LAUGHS].

[00:03:37.91] MARK FRANKLIN: So you received your ROTC commission in what year?

[00:03:42.56] ROBERT HELVEY: 1962.

[00:03:45.65] MARK FRANKLIN: So 1962, it's early on in the Vietnam War. Did you have any sense about what was going on in Vietnam at the time?

[00:03:52.40] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh, I wanted to go, but I first went to Fort Benning for the officers basic course. And then I went to the airborne course. And then I was supposed to go to the Ranger course. But when I signed in at the Ranger course, this admin gal said, you're not supposed to be here. And I said, well, here's my orders. She said, your orders were changed yesterday and you're needed in Korea. And I knew that was bullshit.

[00:04:28.40] The problem was that there were some West Point graduates and they got priority. So the non-West Point graduates got booted out so they could come in. And since I was going to go to Korea anyway, they just upped my--

[00:04:47.69] MARK FRANKLIN: Accelerated your--

[00:04:49.25] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, accelerated my thing. So I went over there.

[00:04:51.98] MARK FRANKLIN: How long did you serve in Korea?

[00:04:53.72] ROBERT HELVEY: Thirteen months.

[00:04:55.85] MARK FRANKLIN: And what was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam during that time.

[00:04:59.87] ROBERT HELVEY: What I was reading in the paper, basically, we had a guerrilla war going on. And it seemed like it was a pretty relaxed outfit, the MACV, and just advisory. But there was one article I think in Life magazine or something that featured this one West Point guy. He used to play football. And he was featured in a Life magazine story. So and I thought, man, that looks fun.

[00:05:36.65] So anyway I went to Korea, served with the 7th Cavalry Regiment.

[00:05:44.96] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, right.

[00:05:45.83] ROBERT HELVEY: Garryowen.

[00:05:46.85] MARK FRANKLIN: That was your first assignment--

[00:05:48.17] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[00:05:48.71] MARK FRANKLIN: --to the 1st Cav.

[00:05:50.51] ROBERT HELVEY: So when I arrived in Korea it was cold. It was almost dark. And we landed on one of the side runways. And I looked out and there was fricking bombed out buildings still. They hadn't fixed it up yet.

[00:06:14.27] And I went through town, and-- you know, the inversion, and all those charcoal fires. There must've been a million charcoal fires going there, everybody sitting beside the street, cooking. And jiminy, I could hardly breathe. But then we went on up to the 1st Cav Division and then went to Paju-ri where the 7th Cav was located.

[00:06:43.93] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, first thing, as soon as I decided I was going, I started reading. Sun Tzu said, know yourself, know your enemy, you know the outcome of 1,000 battles. So my view, who are these people? And where do they come from? And what's their culture and this, that, and the other. So I didn't suffer culture shock when I went in because, you know, it-- there was this one guy Buttinger, Joseph Buttinger. He wrote a real good history of Vietnam.

[00:07:21.88] And that's the first time I came across this idea that the Vietnamese had been fighting for 1,000 years, so this is nothing new. And so it put me in a listening mode and more attention. But Bernard Fall-- you know, was Street Without Joy and Hell in a Very Small Place. And there was one other one. But anyway-- oh, Larteguy, The Centurions, and The Praetorians. He had real insights in, you know, intercultural-- how they handled this, that, and the other. But particularly Bernard Fall.

[00:08:07.93] MARK FRANKLIN: So you did a lot of self-study before you even went.

[00:08:09.90] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:08:11.26] MARK FRANKLIN: And then what other kind of training did the military give you?

[00:08:16.21] ROBERT HELVEY: They had a course called the Military Advisory Assistance Course. And that was down at Fort Bragg, did a little bit on military assistance, how the advisory teams were organized and what we could expect as advisers.

[00:08:39.31] And so then they moved our language training, had six weeks at Fort Bragg. And then they sent us to Monterrey for the additional six weeks. And then we took off.

[00:08:54.73] MARK FRANKLIN: Did that language training help? Did that serve you?

[00:08:56.83] ROBERT HELVEY: I think it did. I think it did. Because then we knew what we were getting into. But it was very, very relaxed. Very relaxed. We arrived in the middle of the night in Saigon and the buses took us downtown Saigon. And had all these White Mice, the Vietnamese police.

[00:09:26.24] MARK FRANKLIN: When was that? When did you arrive in Vietnam for your first tour?

[00:09:31.45] ROBERT HELVEY: '67. July of '67, or-- June or July of '67.

[00:09:38.20] MARK FRANKLIN: What were your first impressions getting off that aircraft? What did you think?

[00:09:42.91] ROBERT HELVEY: It stunk. I was not prepared for that very high humidity. And I guess how fast garbage, you know--

[00:09:52.37] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[00:09:52.66] ROBERT HELVEY: --disintegrates. And I was supposed to go to a hotel. And we stopped at one place, and the guy said, no more here. So we went about three hotels and the guy said, this is your hotel. And I got there and I woke up the clerk. And he said, well, we don't have any rooms, but I can put you up in the hallway. So he got out an Army coat and I slept on that Army coat. And I was pissed.

[00:10:26.08] But everything else-- they gave us briefings and issued our weapons and all that stuff. And then this is where the relaxation occurs. Well, go out there to the airport and go to base of operations, and see if you can't get a flight up to Da Nang.

[00:10:48.60] So on my own I caught a bus, went out to the airport, went over there, and then landed at Da Nang. And I said, where's the MACV headquarters? And they said, well, it's up there on that hill. And so a Jeep came by and I got a ride to the top of the hill. Very relaxed.

[00:11:07.49] MARK FRANKLIN: So your first assignment was with MACV?

[00:11:10.33] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[00:11:10.75] MARK FRANKLIN: Talk about that and your duties associated with it.

[00:11:13.36] ROBERT HELVEY: OK. Well, after I got to Da Nang and said hello, I never had to go back to Da Nang. So I caught a plane up to Hue. I was going to be assigned to Advisory Team 3, which was in Quang Tri.

[00:11:30.13] So I got the milk run flight to the airstrip inside the Hue citadel. And that's where I got dropped off. Then I had to figure out how to get to the MACV compound, which was across the river. And I went over there. So I stayed there for a couple of days.

[00:11:47.89] And then they had the milk run mail truck, a pickup truck. And that was going to take me to Quang Tri. And after we got about three or four miles outside of Hue the driver says, sir, you may want to put your head down till we get past this curve up here.

[00:12:10.36] And he said, you see that mound in the middle of that rice paddy? He said, there's a sniper over there. And every time I come by here, he takes a shot at me. And I thought, well, OK. And didn't seem to matter, you know, whether we-- me, I'd have sent the fucking division over there and bulldozed the island away.

[00:12:31.33] But outside of Quang Tri, there was a body laying right beside the road, big guy. And I said, what the hell is going on here? He said, that was a Viet Cong. He got killed last night. And here it was the afternoon and the body's still there.

[00:12:49.01] And so I got into the compound. And my boss, who was a Marine Corps captain, Donald Meyers, he was already out with the battalion. And Butch Swanton, who was the Australian, he was the assistant adviser and I was an assistant adviser. So Captain Meyers always wanted me to be with the lead company, Vietnamese company. And of course, Swanton stayed with me so that Meyers knew everything that was going on with the lead company.

[00:13:26.50] And what would happen is Meyers would hear what the battalion commander was ordering his company to do and he would tell me. Then I could tell him, you know, whether or not it was happening. And if it wasn't happening I'd tell Don, it's not happening. And then a couple of minutes later, that company commander would hear from the battalion commander. So I was sort of a snitch. But--

[00:13:55.75] MARK FRANKLIN: Or you were a liaison.

[00:13:57.09] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. So I spent most of my time-- whatever lead company was, I would shift over to that company.

[00:14:05.13] MARK FRANKLIN: So when you say lead company, what was your duty with that company? It was a Vietnamese company?

[00:14:09.97] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[00:14:10.63] MARK FRANKLIN: So they would go on a mission, you would accompany them?

[00:14:12.64] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[00:14:13.48] MARK FRANKLIN: Talk about that. What would that mission look like? A typical mission.

[00:14:15.78] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. I would stay close to the company commander. And when we would make an attack, he would be right behind the lead company and I would be with him. And that way, Don could know why we're not moving. And one of the company commanders wasn't too aggressive, and so they needed to be pushed. So Butch and I would just move right up to the front.

[00:14:46.97] Now see, there was an unwritten rule, don't you ever let your adviser get killed. So if we moved to the front, so did the company commander, and the company started moving. So it didn't take long before we settled into a good routine and these guys did fabulous work. And the battalion commander was a Roman Catholic. And Western ideas and things like that are very different from the Buddhist culture. And I think that's one reason why maybe our battalion was pretty damn aggressive.

[00:15:34.06] MARK FRANKLIN: Was there any one mission that sticks out in your mind while you were an adviser with MACV that you still recall today?

[00:15:40.79] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. On the night of the 19th of October, 1965. We had gone-- We were moving into a new area. And a couple of days before, we had an Arclight, a B-52 strike, to come in to hit this target down in the Ba Long Valley. And the strike was going to be at 0300 hours. So I was sitting in my poncho hat, looking at this-- my watch. And it got-- my watch said 0300 hours. There's nothing. And I called my base in Quang Tri, where in the hell is the Arclight?

[00:16:29.84] And about that time, I heard the loudest vacuum cleaner in the world, and then the explosion. And it pulled the tent pegs out of my tent. You know, the concussion-- And so at daylight, it took about two hours to get down off this mountain and get down in the valley. There were body pieces up in the trees, and-- B-52 strikes are fantastic, you know, as long as they're not coming on you.

[00:17:08.63] So we built a fort. This is close-- right to the edge of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And they were coming down through this area, so they wanted to put a fort out there, a little mud triangular fort. So we put the fort in. And I was out with one of the companies and Don was fiddling around with a .45 to clean it, and the spring popped and hit his eye. So he had to get evacuated. So I had to leave the company and come back so I could stay with the battalion commander.

[00:17:42.29] And about 10 o'clock, mortars started coming in. And I said, wait a minute, that's not supposed to happen. [LAUGHING] So we hadn't gotten all the punji stakes in, but we had the wire in and the Claymores set up. But they broke through and we had a moat with all the sticks in it, and they got inside. And so we had the trenches. And I put my RTO on this side of the bunker, and I got on this side of the bunker so the trenches-- And it was sort of SOP, nobody moves. If you get penetrated, you don't move, you just shoot anything that moves.

[00:18:34.70] So we were shooting in either direction. And the beautiful thing about it, we had what we called cowboys. And these were teenage punks that the police would police up outside the theaters and this, that, and the other, and they would haul their ass out to us and we used

them for laborers. And among that group were a couple of Vietnamese veterans. They knew how to operate machine guns, they knew how to-- all that stuff. So as the fort started getting overrun, you knock out the corners. So the corners were knocked out. And these Vietnamese punks, long-haired punks, took over those machine guns. And that saved us, that really saved us.

[00:19:28.34] So I sent my report in. And a couple of days later, a Chinook helicopter came out and took them all back. That was their reward, that was their reward. But man, it was a very pleasant surprise. Because you always hear, these guys don't fight, they can't fight, they can't fight. But here, these guys were fighting. So that tells me they knew how to do it and probably had experience at doing it.

[00:19:59.27] MARK FRANKLIN: What was your impression of the ARVN, the regular forces in the Vietnamese army?

[00:20:06.90] ROBERT HELVEY: I didn't have a lot of experience with a lot of different units. But the 1st ARVN Division had a reputation of being one of the better divisions in the army, because we were up north and they'd been fighting regular army North Vietnamese for a long time, right on the edge. So they knew how to do it.

[00:20:35.67] MARK FRANKLIN: So your first tour was in 1965?

[00:20:38.10] ROBERT HELVEY: Yes, '65, '66.

[00:20:40.39] MARK FRANKLIN: '65, '66. Where did you go after your first tour?

[00:20:44.02] ROBERT HELVEY: I went to the Armor Officer's Career Course at Fort Knox. And they were happy to see me leave.

[00:20:56.61] MARK FRANKLIN: Fort Knox was happy to see you leave?

[00:20:59.65] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. We had night firing exercise in the tanks. M48 or M60, something or another. No, it wasn't the M60, I think.

[00:21:13.34] MARK FRANKLIN: M47 maybe?

[00:21:14.60] ROBERT HELVEY: I don't know. But we had this night exercise. And they got these little computers for the elevation and this, that, and the other, and you turn the computer knob. And the sergeant was sitting in the turret. And, you know, you had the night sights and you could see what was going on. And I got excited and I ripped-- turned that damn thing and ripped it off the wall. And they said, Captain, get out. You passed, just don't get back in."

[LAUGHING]

[00:21:51.23] MARK FRANKLIN: Let's talk a little bit about your second tour, which was 1967 when you arrived?

[00:21:56.48] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[00:21:57.17] MARK FRANKLIN: Now the country is going through some social turmoil, there are civil rights movements beginning to start up. Did you witness any kind of tensions, racial tensions, when you came back the second time in Vietnam, between troops?

[00:22:10.67] ROBERT HELVEY: Racial tension? I had one black sergeant, he was my RTO. And he was sharp, good guy, really good guy. And I didn't notice we had racial problems. Of course I wasn't in an American unit at that time, but--

[00:22:31.16] MARK FRANKLIN: How about the second tour?

[00:22:33.27] ROBERT HELVEY: The second tour? I didn't have any problems.

[00:22:38.83] MARK FRANKLIN: Did-- you think you formed friendships with folks from other backgrounds that you might not have if you hadn't joined the Army?

[00:22:47.06] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh, the Army-- you know, yeah, I made all kinds of friendships. But in my company, we had two or three blacks, black sergeants. And I got a story to tell you on this. When I took over the company, the company commander had been relieved for incompetence.

[00:23:13.88] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, talk about the unit first. What unit did you go to?

[00:23:17.02] ROBERT HELVEY: Alpha Company, 2nd of the 12th Cav. And the battalion commander was Collier Ross, Lieutenant Colonel Collier Ross. He retired as a three-star general. And I thought he was a pretty damn good commander.

[00:23:32.78] But this guy-- when I joined the battalion, Colonel Ross told me that as soon as another company commander got killed or wounded, I could be able to take over. And I had to fight hard to get in there because when I arrived at An Khe, those little IBM cards spewed out my card and said I was going to be the headquarters and headquarters company commandant, division. And I said, I'm not taking that job. He said, well, this is what the card said. I said, I don't give a fuck what it said. I'm not going to do that. I want a company. And he said, well, you'll have to see the G1.

[00:24:16.65] So about 8 o'clock at night or so, I got in to see this guy. And apparently he was told, you know, somebody is pissed off out there, wants-- so I walked in, and there was Charles Lamb, who was the S1 of the 7th Cavalry Regiment in Korea.

[00:24:34.66] MARK FRANKLIN: So you knew him?

[00:24:35.78] ROBERT HELVEY: I knew him. And he said, Bob Helvey, come on in. What can I do for you. And I said, I've got to have a rifle company. I didn't come over here to be a commandant. And so he called his assistant to bring a list of the units that had the most captains killed in the past week or so. So 2nd of the 12th apparently rose to the top of the list. So he said, you're going to the 2nd of the 12th. So that made my day.

[00:25:07.64] So I went from there to-- I flew to Bong Son, and the battalion wasn't there. They were at Dak To. If you remember, about that time, they had this big fight at Dak To and the whole division got involved in that. So I flew up there. I found a way to get up there. And I go over to the operations tent at the airfield and I said, where is the 2nd of the 12th? He said, sir, they just left. They flew out on C-130s. They're going to Bong Son, I think. I think they're going to Bong Son. Then he said, but their trains are here. And he told me where the trains were.

[00:25:53.91] As I am on my way over to get the trains, there's a group of Soldiers led by this major coming down the side of the runway. And that was Victor Bullock, who was the S3, the assistant S3 from the 7th Cavalry Regiment in Korea. And he tried to convince me to join his unit. He was in the 5th-- something of the 5th Cav. I said, no I'm going to go over there.

[00:26:26.59] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, when you say trains, you meant the combat trains? So describe--

[00:26:29.09] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, combat trains, logistics.

[00:26:30.76] MARK FRANKLIN: OK, yeah.

[00:26:32.26] ROBERT HELVEY: So I go over there and go to the trains and introduce myself. And then a helicopter comes in, and it was Colonel Ross. He jumps off the helicopter and I introduce-- oh yeah, we've been looking forward to seeing you. Take the trains to Bong Son. You're going to be the headquarters company commander until we get an opening. And I wasn't familiar with Bong Son.

[00:27:00.52] So anyway, I got a map and a Jeep and we went to Bong Son. I got to Bong Son, where is the 2nd of the 12th? People were saying, 2nd of the 12th? I don't know. So I went over to the 1st Brigade, I saw their operations tent. And there was the operations deputy officer, Captain Richard Kent. We had gone through this advisory course together a couple of years before. So here both of us were now in-- well, anyway. And I guess that's the beautiful thing about being in the Army. Once you've been in it for a few years, you've met everybody, and you will run into all these people.

[00:27:54.55] So anyway, he found that they were up at the top of this mountain, and the only way to get there was to fly. And so I got a helicopter, went up there and flew and joined the company. So I was a headquarters company commander until Captain Cooper, who was the A Company commander, he got wounded pretty badly in the legs, so he had to go out. So Ross told me that evening, after a few weeks, that, you're going to take over A company Be ready to go at first light in the morning.

[00:28:26.80] Well, at first light in the morning-- you know, I was awake almost all night, goddamn, I got it. And he says, Colonel McDonough is sending his guy down to take over that company. And he said, I'm sorry Bob, but, you know, he's the colonel. I sat there for another month, almost a month. And the first sergeant of the A Company, I'd known him, and he said, we've got a company commander out there that is going to get killed. And so I said, hey look, you've got to talk to Colonel Ross about that. Don't talk to me about it.

[00:29:14.99] And he talked about it. And basically, what had happened was that the men were ready to kill him for the simple reason that he didn't know how to lead. And he felt that he was showing a lot of disrespect to the Soldiers. And so Colonel McDonough sent a message down through the battalion, to send Colonel-- or Captain So-and-so back to brigade headquarters because we've got an urgent mission that only he can accomplish. So a little while later, Ross says, you're taking over Alpha Company.

[00:30:04.38] So I went over there and this guy was standing there. And I looked behind him back over through here, and it's just little groups of people just sullen. And he said, you can have these fucking people, they're no good. I said, OK. And so I asked Ross if he'd let me have that company two or three days without any other missions, just let me work them to see what I need to do and who I can trust and this, that, and the other.

[00:30:39.11] So I took them up on the mountain. And that first night I said, "This is where we're going to stay. And, you know, first platoon, two-- ten to two, two to six, six to 10-- so I've got a nice perimeter. And I waited till just-- I didn't have to say anything else. And I waited till just before dark, then I went out and checked the perimeter. And if we'd have gotten attacked that night, we'd have all been killed. They hadn't done shit.

[00:31:10.79] And so I got up to this one guy, Sergeant Love, Ranger Love, black guy, big husky fella. And I looked around and I said, you've been to Ranger school? He said, yes sir. And I said, is this what they taught you? I said, this is terrible. He said, yes sir. And he said, would you go away and come back in 10 or 15 minutes, and then check my position? And when I got back to him, it looked like something out of a Fort Benning demonstration. Everything was there. Fields of fire were marked, little aiming stakes in the side so that machine guns don't go too far left or right. And the Claymores were in, and everything.

[00:32:00.75] And I said, Sergeant Love, why? What happened? You're fully capable of running this platoon. And he said, sir, nobody has ever checked our positions at night. Nobody. He said, you are the first one that seemed to care. And I said, well, I care a lot, Sergeant Love. Get the rest of these guys squared away. And I think he talked to people and that maybe they've got a different company commander in. And those guys, they were good troops, they were really good troops. They just didn't have any leadership.

[00:32:46.16] And you know, we had a rule over there that when you're in the field, you wear a steel helmet. So we were out walking along the edge of a rice paddy and I see this one guy with a baseball hat on. And so I stopped and I said, hey you, without a hat on, or without a helmet, get over here and see what that is. And he looked at me. And I said, get in there and look down there in that rice paddy, I think there's something down there. And he was about like this in the rice paddy. And I said, take your hat off. And he took his hat off. And I said, now, put it under your goddamn foot.

[00:33:35.01] He just looked at me. And he did it. And other people started laughing and cheering. Because I wasn't doing anything mean, but there was a lesson that was gonna be learned there.

[00:33:49.92] MARK FRANKLIN: He's not gonna wear that hat again.

[00:33:51.03] ROBERT HELVEY: He's not going to wear that hat again. So it was easy to get some teamwork going. And I think as far as leadership goes, you have to be competent. And you can't bullshit these guys, they know when there's somebody competent coming in. And they like people to know that their commanders care and try to look out for them. And they like to know that if they need help, I'm there. And we'll get our wounded out of here.

[00:34:31.47] MARK FRANKLIN: Talk about-- now that you're Alpha Company commander, 2/12th-- 2nd of the 12th-- talk about your first mission.

[00:34:37.92] ROBERT HELVEY: Jesus, they all just sort of blend. You know, you're doing so many missions that if they find-- if intelligence finds some activity over here, the only thing you get is a goose egg on your map and get on the damn helicopters.

[00:34:53.96] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, one of them is you led a recon with about 13 other guys to kind of scout out enemy positions.

[00:35:00.65] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh, that was a lot later on. That was during the Tet Offensive.

[00:35:04.47] MARK FRANKLIN: Right.

[00:35:05.68] ROBERT HELVEY: We had started this operation without artillery support, without air support, and without our basic packs. We were told to drop our packs and they would come up later. We did that a lot of times so we could carry more ammunition. And then when a log ship came out, they'd bring our packs.

[00:35:29.90] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, go back and start with the beginning of this mission. What was the mission?

[00:35:33.11] ROBERT HELVEY: OK. We were to go down and relieve the Marines at the citadel in Hue. And we were going to attack the northwest corner of the citadel. It's only about 15 miles, 20 miles away. But it took us almost a month to get there.

[00:35:58.59] MARK FRANKLIN: You going on foot the whole time?

[00:36:00.35] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. But that wasn't the problem. The problem was that we had called back to the brigade, the battalion commander called back to the brigade, because we had identified this tree line that we had to get to, and it was occupied. And we could tell it was occupied. And so Sweet called back and said, any way we can get some artillery support? The clouds were too low for direct air support. He said, No. He said, you will attack now. And I was standing beside him. You will attack now.

[00:36:44.39] MARK FRANKLIN: And Sweet was the battalion commander at this point?

[00:36:46.67] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. And Sweet was upset about that, but you got to do it. And so when we started across there, we took a lot of casualties, a hell of a lot of casualties. And then once we got inside that tree line, we found out we were surrounded. They came in behind us and let us walk in. And what we had done, we had approached the Tri-Thien-Hue Front headquarters. It was a corps-like headquarters. And they had the palace guard and all that stuff around there. We just ran into a-- well, anyway.

[00:37:23.87] So after that was taken care of, that's when Sweet told us to take this night march. And we slipped through the enemy lines at night. And man, there was one time-- my company led it. And I had a guy named Comancho, Puerto Rican guy. Fearless, absolutely fearless. So he was the lead guy on this battalion marching, two by twos, you know, through these rice paddies, zigzagging.

[00:38:01.42] MARK FRANKLIN: How did you find that? How did you find that opening? How did you find that way through?

[00:38:08.02] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, the enemy didn't occupy the rice paddies. They stayed in the tree lines beside the rice paddies. And so we knew that the rice paddy was going to sort of go like that, dogleg, approaching the river. So Sweet decided we're going to go in the middle of these damn rice paddies. Because they always have these little walls, barriers that hold the water. So we went through that, crossed the river, and then got up on the mountain, and with no casualties. We'd lost a bunch of them the day before.

[00:38:51.57] So a couple or three days later, after we'd gotten good food and some sleep, we went back down that mountain and went back over to the same area we were before to clear that area up and get on the road. And that evening, we left about 2 o'clock in the morning and we couldn't get across this bridge. Every time somebody would get across the bridge, we were stopped.

[00:39:21.15] But I wasn't leading at the time, because I think the battalion commander said, you've had your share leading. Now we're going to let somebody else do it. Well, nobody else did it. And he said, Bob-- by that time I was Bob-- he said, can you take care of that fucking bridge? Yeah.

[00:39:44.79] So I went back to the bridge, did my own reconnaissance, and then took four or five guys with me. We went upstream and we crossed the stream, 100 yards or so away from there. And we got there without getting caught. So then it was a matter of coming down and throwing grenades in foxholes as we were coming down to the--

[00:40:09.34] So we got there. And I had the guys to stack the bodies up on the bridge. And the guys put 1st Cav packages in their mouths. So when Sweet-- I said, Sweet-- Colonel-- you can come on over. And he came out of that tree line and saw that stack of 1st Cav patches on that-- just a big smile on his face.

[00:40:35.55] So the next morning we were to go through this other area and it just didn't look right. It was an ideal place for us to get slaughtered getting across the field, getting into that tree

line. But Sweet determined maybe we ought to see what's on the other side of that tree line before we get in. So I asked for some volunteers. And damn near the whole company volunteered. And this is a night operation against a pretty large force, we suspected, and all these guys want it. Yeah. Good guys. But-- excuse me, I just--

[00:41:25.70] MARK FRANKLIN: It's OK.

[00:41:29.34] ROBERT HELVEY: They were beautiful people. And so we got in there, and this one guy, I forget his name now, but he was up against-- he was moving up through this little hamlet, and got beside this one hooch. And he was laying there and this Vietnamese soldier comes out to take a piss. You know, this was about midnight.

[00:41:57.47] MARK FRANKLIN: This is Oldberg, right?

[00:41:58.94] ROBERT HELVEY: It may have been Goldburn, I can't remember. And the guy started pissing on him. Well, he blows him away. By that time, you know, we weren't surprising anybody. [LAUGHING] So we started banging. And we had a Starlight scope. And so--

[00:42:22.54] MARK FRANKLIN: Talk about that. That was kind of new technology

[00:42:25.00] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, that was very new technology. And a lot of guys didn't want to use it because it was so damn expensive. But you know, everything's green. And there was a well about 40 or 50 yards from where I was. And I was scanning. And all of a sudden, this guy stands up and stretches. The last stretch he had, I got him. But we-- on our way back, they blew up the little pagoda that I was in.

[00:43:06.02] But anyway, that was a good night, a good night.

[00:43:09.61] MARK FRANKLIN: Talk about the Starlight scope and how it worked, and what you thought of it. And was that mounted to a weapon or was that carried separate?

[00:43:19.43] ROBERT HELVEY: I don't know how it got into the company. But it's heavy, very, very heavy. And so normally, you had to almost lay down and use your elbows to hold it steady. But it worked. But everything is different shades of green.

[00:43:39.11] MARK FRANKLIN: But you can see.

[00:43:40.10] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[00:43:44.14] MARK FRANKLIN: You won't probably admit this to anybody, but you are a hero in the sense that you received three Silver Stars and the DSC, the Distinguished Service Cross. Can you talk a little bit about how you received those awards? Let's start with the first one you received.

[00:44:02.18] ROBERT HELVEY: The first Silver Star? Remember I told you about that mud fort?

[00:44:06.11] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah.

[00:44:07.10] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, I got it for fighting in that one. And my role as adviser and doing this, that, and the other. And I got called back to Saigon to receive the award, you know, from General Westmoreland. And well, a night in Saigon was pretty good. But anyway, that was the first one.

[00:44:36.14] And then the-- oh, I think the second one-- Jesus, I can't remember. It may have been-- no, I can't remember.

[00:44:58.54] MARK FRANKLIN: How about the third one?

[00:45:02.46] ROBERT HELVEY: I think that was during the Tet operation, you know, that we got surrounded. But the Distinguished Service Cross I think was when-- when was that? The 7th of January. '68. We had a new battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Blah-blah. And he had come from the Fulda Gap. His attitude was the Fulda Gap. Charge. charge, charge. 100 fucking degrees, he is wearing black leather gloves.

[00:45:44.65] And well, he just-- the forward observer, the artillery forward observer, the liaison officer hated to fly with him, because he was flying too low, circling over people, and wanting to get in the middle of it. And one time he stopped by to see me, smoking a big cigar, you know-- well, anyway, so after that we made a point that when he was flying over looking for us, he wasn't going to find us. We were good at-- they're never going to find us. And the troops liked that, the troops liked that.

[00:46:41.44] We had made contact. He was pushing us for an assault through this valley outside of Que Son. And my guys said, we got something over here. So I look and sure enough, the fucking tree line was moving. There's all kinds of people over there. And we were on the left flank of the battalion. I told him that we got to slow down so I can reinforce this side, we're going to hit something big. He said, no, move, move, move.

[00:47:17.01] He wanted to have perfect dress, like the open fields-- plains of Germany, where all your fucking tanks, you know-- well, away we go. And all hell breaks loose. I mean, all hell breaks loose. And I warned him. I said, sir, you are going to be taking fire, you're going to be taking fire. And I guess he thought he had an M60 tank or something. But he flew over. And sure enough, I saw a great big pop of smoke, helicopter crashes.

[00:47:51.93] He took his intelligence NCO. Charlie Crone was the S2, but he was on R&R. So the S2 sergeant, the new S3-- we had just got a new battalion S3 a few days before-- and two helicopter pilots and two gunners all crashed. For no reason. He told Charlie Crone, I'm going to make general out of this, or die trying. He should have been relieved right then. But he brought an awful lot of pain and agony. A lot of men died that day.

[00:48:35.04] But he kept pushing. And we weren't prepared, we weren't prepared. Ideally, the whole battalion should have formed one of the classic British Army squares, you know. But we

didn't. And they cut us apart. They penetrated our line. The three companies were now three companies rather than a battalion. And they were just taking us one by one.

[00:49:05.81] MARK FRANKLIN: So what'd you do?

[00:49:10.12] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, the first thing is, I had reinforced my point. Normally, you've got three or four guys in the front, followed by the squad, and then further back is the platoon. Well, I put the whole platoon up into a very tight formation as they went into the tree line. And I made sure they went into the right flank so they would-- and what I was hoping is that they would be able to push, and those guys would come out the other side of the tree line, and the rest of the company was waiting on them over here.

[00:49:46.51] But they had already split us up by the time we got there. But I was waiting on them to come out, and they came out. But there was hand-to-hand fighting between my guys and these North Vietnamese guys. And since the weather had been wet, you couldn't tell who was who, you couldn't tell the uniforms. And when you thought you had a good aim, then there was always this worry. So that didn't help matters.

[00:50:22.20] But anyway, they sent in Captain Barovetto, who was the Bravo Troop, 1st of the 1st Army Cav. So he fought his way in. And in the haste of combat, some of it's just chaos, he pulled up. There was a little bit of high ground and I'd put my wounded guys down below, hull defilade. And when he came over, his .50 caliber machine gun was firing, and he fired into that.

[00:50:56.46] So Barovetto immediately stopped, jumped out of that track, and got shot and killed. And so my job then was, you know, I am in command. [LAUGHING] So I had to find the next officer who's running that damn tank troop. And it was-- I was going from one personnel carrier to the next. And I found the guy. And I told him that we got to get out of here. And you get out the same way you got in. Because I didn't want to get stuck in the creek, and I didn't want to get stuck somewhere else. They knew how they got in.

[00:51:46.56] So we loaded our wounded on there and-- anyway, I forget all the details. But anyway, we started to leave, and a real gory thing. I opened up the back of one of these armored personnel carriers. And you know, diesel fuel and the smell of gun smoke, and water, and blood on the floor, squish-squashing. Oh shit, you know, this is it.

[00:52:24.96] So we got out. Those guys in the armored personnel carriers, they did super, they did super. Well, everybody did super. We had good people-- except for one.

[00:52:39.97] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, my next question was going to be to describe the leadership that you experienced while you were in Vietnam. And had that changed from when you were there in '65 to when you came back in '67?

[00:52:49.83] ROBERT HELVEY: OK. Well, my experience in '65 was-- you know, I had an Australian, an American sergeant, and me, and my RTO. And we got along fine. And I never saw my boss, the Advisory Team 3 leader. I think I saw him once or twice. But we were always

out, we were always out. And we had a barracks there in Quang Tri, but the only thing we would do, we would come in and-- for breakfast, I used to have five or six eggs and pancakes.

[00:53:36.09] I lost 45 pounds in a little over a month. So I learned when we would have dinner out in the field at night, we'd have Ramen, green vegetables, and chicken and pork, because we would have choppers come in and fly with live chickens and ducks and little baby pigs and things like that. So the battalion commander would have-- his people would sit around the table or on the ground or whatever. And I figured out real quick, I ain't being nice to anybody. I'm gonna eat.

[00:54:15.48] So we'd sit down. And normally in courtesy, you would let the battalion commander eat. Well, our team would scarf everything down. [LAUGHING] And I had a knife, a Bowie knife. There was a guy down in Orlando, Florida, who made knives. And I can't tell you his name, it's not Stanley. But anyway, it was a handmade knife, a Bowie knife. And I used that for cutting some weeds, and this, that, and the other.

[00:54:51.06] And the cooks kept looking at that knife. And one of them came out and said, dai uy, a ba-- give me the knife. And he went out. And every day after that he stopped by and picked up my knife and go slaughter the pig or the chicken or the ducks, and then clean it off and bring it back to me. And then I would sharpen it back up.

[00:55:14.86] MARK FRANKLIN: But he was making you dinner?

[00:55:16.17] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, he was making dinner. I wasn't sure he was going to do that. Now, the leadership on the second tour, Collier Ross, was outstanding. Colonel Sweet was a brilliant warrior. I mean, he was a warrior. And I admired him. He came in that company after Gregory was killed, and we'd had this terrible, terrible fight.

[00:55:47.49] And Sweet had just arrived at brigade, they were trying to figure out what the hell to do with him. And then he comes in, he flies in, and he called the company commanders in. He said, how are you doing? Fine, fine. You want to stay in the company? And I said, Yeah. And later on he said, well Bob, what would you like to do in the Army? And I looked at him and said, take your job. [LAUGHING]

[00:56:24.57] And he smiled. That's the type of guy I want. And I made points with him. But he was so good, he was so good. But that leadership goes down to the squad level. And we don't give enough credit. War, battles are won by the sergeants' capability to execute the orders. They make it happen, they set the example. And if you've got a sergeant that sets an example, they are a fucking bunch of tigers behind him. That is so true, time after time. You get a good sergeant and it's going to happen.

[00:57:09.93] And remember I mentioned Ranger Love?

[00:57:12.03] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah.

[00:57:13.28] ROBERT HELVEY: I used him till I almost killed him. He was a warrior, that's what he was there for. And when we'd take a night move, hey, Ranger Love. And he would give you this smile, yeah boss. [LAUGHING] And he could do anything. And he inspired all the other people. And-- really, really great.

[00:57:40.35] MARK FRANKLIN: That's a great lesson.

[00:57:41.43] ROBERT HELVEY: Huh?

[00:57:42.30] MARK FRANKLIN: It's a great lesson.

[00:57:43.08] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. And if you've got good sergeants, they're going to help you win. If you don't have good sergeants, you're going to be by yourself. And you can't do everything for the company. You only have to manage by exception at that level. But during this Tet thing, when we got surrounded, they were still trying to bring helicopters in to get our wounded out and bring in ammunition, and this, that, and the other.

[00:58:14.46] And one evening, a chopper comes out and this sergeant gets off. And he said, I'm Sergeant So-and-so, he is being assigned. And he said, Captain, I'm not an infantry sergeant, I'm an admin sergeant. And I said, well, what are you doing here? And he said, well, the only opportunities for promotion was in the infantry MOS.

[00:58:48.67] And I said, sergeant, why do you think there are so many openings in infantry? God dammit, sergeants die here. You're being assigned to Ranger Love. And I said, he is the meanest son of a bitch you will ever see. And Ranger Love was just a soft-- and then I said, when I'm ready to relieve you, I am gonna put you on a helicopter and you disappear. I don't care where you go, you just disappear. But I'm sure my executive officer had other plans.

[00:59:35.44] But just like the helicopter pilots-- Jesus, you know, they're God's people. They-- just like the medics, if you got a wounded guy, they're there. And they lost I think 10 helicopters during that time we were surrounded, trying to get our wounded out and bringing more ammunition in.

[01:00:01.81] And then it got to the point where we just-- these helicopters come in-- the LZ was not much bigger than this. And they come in and slam that thing around, and dirt and weeds and everything flying in the air, and rations and ammunition off. And they drop down at the last minute, we would throw the dead and wounded in and they would be gone. And I don't see how you could fly like that. But that was normal, that was normal.

[01:00:31.34] The 1st Cav Division is an airmobile division. And these are the guys that make it happen, it doesn't matter what it is. And I was just so proud to be with a unit that had that much cohesion.

[01:00:45.07] MARK FRANKLIN: Well after you broke out, you still had to accomplish the mission. Talk about how you went on to accomplish the mission.

[01:00:51.99] ROBERT HELVEY: Well what happened was, after we got out of that, the executive officer, Bill Scutter, went to Sweet and said, got to get him out. Sweet pulled me out.

[01:01:09.06] MARK FRANKLIN: Pulled you out?

[01:01:10.18] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, and made me the intelligence officer. Scutter thought that I wasn't going to live through that. I fooled him.

[01:01:23.23] MARK FRANKLIN: So how did you feel about that? Because Charlie Crone was the S2.

[01:01:30.10] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah, Charlie Crone was the S2. I felt really bad about leaving my men, really bad about it. But anyway, it didn't take much reflection to see, well-- this, this, this. How many lives can a man have? So I took it.

[01:01:58.52] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, you were wounded how many times?

[01:02:00.46] ROBERT HELVEY: 3.

[01:02:01.15] MARK FRANKLIN: Can you talk about that?

[01:02:04.39] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, I was probably the luckiest guy in the world, no bullet wounds. Shrapnel. The first time was when I was an adviser, we were moving across this field of secondary brush. And it was a narrow path going through it. And we were going through that and I was standing there talking to somebody. And a Soldier passed me, and went up, and set off a booby trap. Killed the Vietnamese that was standing next to me. He had several pieces of shrapnel right in his chest.

[01:02:49.37] And I had-- in my arm-- I don't know why I had my arm up, but I had some shrapnel in my arm. And so they wanted to give me-- the Vietnamese wanted to give me a tetna-- tetna di. And I said no.

[01:03:09.17] MARK FRANKLIN: What is that?

[01:03:09.71] ROBERT HELVEY: Tetanus shot.

[01:03:10.87] MARK FRANKLIN: Ah, OK.

[01:03:11.91] ROBERT HELVEY: And I wasn't sure about how sterile their syringes were. So that was that one. And the second one-- the second time was-- I was telling you about the day that Gregory died. Well, when I was moving over to get into position to try to hook up, I was going to try to hook up with Charlie Company, and we'd already been in contact.

[01:03:42.15] So I had to run back across this field to make sure our guys were linked up. And as I was running across the field, I found myself doing a flip in the air. Something hit. And your

adrenaline is up so much, I didn't feel anything. And about an hour later after everything started settling down, I sat down. And just like a deer, once he stops, he will never get back up again.

[01:04:14.99] The muscles in my leg-- I had had a can of ham and lima beans in my pocket. And when that piece of shrapnel hit me, it hit that can of lima beans. And there were two or three little pieces, but the big one was in that can of lima beans. And so that's the second.

[01:04:40.71] MARK FRANKLIN: That actually probably protected you.

[01:04:43.04] ROBERT HELVEY: It saved me, yeah, because there wasn't anybody coming out to get you in the middle of a firefight. You know, the helicopter evacs were not going to happen. But-- yeah.

[01:05:00.03] All air assaults are good. But on a couple of occasions, we started into an air assault landing zone, and there were the green tracers, North Vietnamese tracers coming up. And then our door gunners firing theirs with tracers going down. And I-- God, that's beautiful. But we couldn't get into the LZ, so he landed us in a rice paddy off to the side.

[01:05:31.23] And of course, you're wearing 70 pounds of gear. And we had to jump about five or six feet, which was not unusual, but not into a rice paddy. I was stuck. I had my RTO to come over and help me get out of there. But that was a memorable experience, just how nice it was, but getting stuck in a rice paddy.

[01:06:03.53] You know, I hate to say this, but I didn't have any bad days. I really didn't.

[01:06:13.94] Well, I think probably during the Tet Offensive, being with Sweet, heading towards Hue. And I had another experience there. We got a guy in, a lieutenant-- second lieutenant. And his father was a Navy captain. And so when he came in, I liked to talk to all of them when they came in. I said, I've got a question. If your daddy was a Navy captain, what the hell are you doing over here? And he said, I'm over here to kill gooks. And I said, gooks? I'm not familiar with that. He said, fucking North Vietnamese.

[01:07:06.47] I said, well, I'll tell you something. You're going to have an opportunity to kill some North Vietnamese, but I haven't found any gooks yet. And so about three or four days later-- You get used to everything. And as a company commander, your mind is a goddamn computer, always whizzing, doing all these checks. And at night, I'm not sure I ever slept soundly, ever. But when they would do the night checks, you know, Charlie 2-2, Charlie 2-2, radio check, over. And then at 2 o'clock in the morning, it's usually when they push the button down twice, usually--

[01:07:56.08] MARK FRANKLIN: Squelch band.

[01:08:00.11] ROBERT HELVEY: Well this time, what really jumped up at me, 2-2, 2-2, radio check, dit-dit. Something is wrong. I got up, went over to the perimeter where 2-2 was supposed to be having OP out. I went to the perimeter and I-- what time did the OP come in? Sir, he came

in about two hours ago. I said, thank you. I went back to my CP and I said, Lieutenant Jones, get your fucking ass over here. And I said it loud enough that everybody heard it.

[01:08:47.92] And I asked him, I said, what time did your OP come in? And he looked at me. And I said, your OP came in at midnight. Now tell me why you called them in. And he said they were tired. I said, they were tired? They're not dead, but it's not because of anything you did. Our whole company could have been wiped out. And I was yelling and screaming at him. And I said, don't ever do that again.

[01:09:21.71] So when we went on that operation to recover Gregory and the helicopter pilots, we were supposed to secure this part, this flank, and somebody else was going to secure that flank. And we were going to cross this open field. And this was the last time that I had to deal with him.

[01:09:49.98] And he jumped into a hole right outside the tree line, jumped into a hole. And his platoon was going without him. And I jumped in the hole, grabbed him by the harness, pulled his ass out of there and I kicked him all the way across the field. And everybody knew Lieutenant Jones was finished. And I told him to get on a helicopter. At the first chance, you get on a helicopter and you get out of here. I don't care where you go, I never want to see you again. And I think that did a hell of a lot for the morale because I wasn't going to tolerate that shit.

[01:10:41.89] And the first time-- and I thought-- I just wrote it off to inexperience. You don't walk out of a tree line across a rice paddy. Anytime you get-- you're going somewhere, you go full speed ahead. And he said, it was dawn and we'd been walking all night. And I said, OK Jones, your platoon is going to take the lead on this move across here. And I'm going to fire an artillery prep. And then when I tell you to go, you tell your men, follow me, and you run your ass across that field.

[01:11:23.89] So everything went fine and the artillery stopped. And I said, Jones, go. And he said, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do. And I said, I'll show you what you're supposed to do, look over there. And I kicked him in the ass, got him out of there. But just didn't have time to train the guy to be-- you know, what are you supposed to do? He had no business being in a rifle platoon. I'm sorry, what were we talking about?

[01:11:57.62] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, I was going to ask you your best day.

[01:11:58.78] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh, my best day. That wasn't one of my best days.

[01:12:02.02] MARK FRANKLIN: No, that wouldn't have been.

[01:12:06.76] ROBERT HELVEY: You know, I can't tell you. Like I said, they were all good. They were all good.

[01:12:12.84] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have much contact with our allies? The Koreans, the Aussies, the Kiwis, the Filipinos, Thais?

[01:12:18.55] ROBERT HELVEY: Butch Swanton was one Australian that I worked with.

[01:12:23.89] MARK FRANKLIN: Your first tour.

[01:12:24.58] ROBERT HELVEY: First tour. And I didn't have anything to do with them on the second tour. But they were really-- the guys that I know-- there was another Australian on our advisory detachment. They were tough. Butch Swanton, he had false teeth. And we had been out about three weeks in the jungle and we were-- we got down into the valley. And I said, Butch, listen, you're going to have to take a bath. Goddamn, you stink.

[01:13:09.28] And he said, well sir, that smell is the soap. And I said, soap doesn't smell nearly as strong as your body does. And he said, well, I'm not going to use soap. And I said, I don't care, just get in the river and wash your clothes and rub your skin. So instead of getting into the fast part of the stream, he goes into this little-- this little, slow dead space. He got in there and got out and the goddamn leeches were all over him in every orifice in his body.

[01:13:50.19] MARK FRANKLIN: How long did that take?

[01:13:52.65] ROBERT HELVEY: It took about 30 minutes to get them off. But I wasn't a medic, so there were certain things I wasn't going to stick my finger in. But that was so funny. Sir, you smell that soap. Now I know why. It was not the soap. He just didn't want to get into the water.

[01:14:20.11] Great. They were good people. And you know, the Buddhist culture is gentle. Really, it's a gentle culture. And these villagers, they were so appreciative. Not of us so much as they were afraid of us. But they saw when I let my medics pull a medical team thing and they could go do their thing, and giving candy to the kids, and sitting around, have a cup of tea with them. And they realized maybe we weren't quite as bad as the enemy was telling them that we were.

[01:15:01.80] But it was just nice. A couple of times, you would think, why couldn't I retire and come over here and live? You know, this is nice. Just beautiful, gentle people. And of course I guess once you get citified, you start losing some of that. But-- oh yeah, when we were out in-- what the hell was it? Que Son Valley. We were way back at the head of the valley. And we were in this village and we were talking. And this old man comes up and he spoke French. Well, I didn't speak French. I know how to say cut the grass, mow the lawn, and that was about it.

[01:15:53.11] And so I got my interpreter there. And this guy wanted to know how come they weren't wearing French uniforms. And I said, well, we're not French. And I said, you never had American units out here? No, no. Now, here's where the Marines come in. The Marines had occupied that valley for two years. The villagers had never seen them.

[01:16:29.90] MARK FRANKLIN: They never got out.

[01:16:32.48] ROBERT HELVEY: They came out I think once a year. They had a thing called MASHER or something, an operation. But apparently once a year, they would go out and clear out the valley. But there were miles and miles of old tunnels in there since the French days.

[01:16:48.80] MARK FRANKLIN: Now you-- 2/12 captured a good number of POWs during your operations.

[01:16:53.93] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[01:16:54.71] MARK FRANKLIN: How did you process them?

[01:16:59.25] ROBERT HELVEY: That's a good story. We captured a North Vietnamese one day. This is an example of how it's supposed to work perfectly. We captured this guy and brought him into the S2 section where-- I was S2 at the time. And I had a professional interrogator, MIS interrogator. And he said he worked with such and such transportation company and we carried supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

[01:17:38.85] And I was looking at his hands. Fucking things didn't have a scratch one on his hands. There's something wrong. So I had this deal with the interrogator that we were going to scare him because Earl Spry, the division G2, will be waiting on him.

[01:18:06.50] So we yelled and screamed at him and threatened to kill him and blah blah, blah. And I could be mean looking. I'm not a mean guy. But we put him on a helicopter. When he got down to division headquarters, Spry ran out to the helicopter and helped the guy off and shook his hand. "Very glad to meet you, come on in." And he had a table set up in the tent with hot tea and cookies and a couple of flowers.

[01:18:44.24] And they sat down and Earl said, you know, we just talked about the families and this, that, and the other. And he started getting comfortable. And then the spigot turned on. He was a North Vietnamese lieutenant colonel or something, part of the-- whatever that division was that we were fighting. And he was an intelligence-trained officer.

[01:19:20.67] They had an agent in the 1st ARVN Division headquarters, a very senior officer in the division headquarters. And so Spry and him just kept talking and talking. And then they turned him over to be interrogated by the Vietnamese intelligence people. And then Spry called into the 1st ARVN Division headquarters and said, I'd like to bring a helicopter down and take the division commander on a trip.

[01:20:00.21] So up in the helicopter, he briefed about who he had in his division. So no witnesses, it's just him and Spry and the crew. And never heard another thing. He's gone. Rumor was that he fell out of a helicopter, but I don't know that.

[01:20:25.95] But that's how it's supposed to operate. You know, you tell your people, you don't kill prisoners. If you kill a prisoner, he's nothing but dead meat. If he's alive, that's something our intelligence officers want to talk to him about. I said, if you kill him, you're liable to get killed and all your people are going to get killed one of these days because he survived.

[01:20:52.30] So we would do that every now and then, but that was just a classic example. Probably didn't happen very many times. I knew Earl Spry, I knew Earl Spry. And so anyway, that was-- But I just think the-- Oh, the Koreans, the South Korean army, they're mean. They are mean and smart. When I was a second lieutenant in Korea, my platoon had-- something was stolen. And so we had to call in-- since I had some KATUSAs, we had South Korean military police do the interrogating. God almighty.

[01:21:52.29] The soldier that had been interrogated came back and he came into the office. And I said, well, sit down, we'll talk. And he said, I can't sit down. He'd been beaten with a-- you know those poles on the bunks? You know, he had been beaten with one of those things. And he hadn't done anything wrong, they were just trying to see if he knew anything. And I just thought, Jesus, leave me alone. [LAUGHING]

[01:22:22.56] But they were good. In fact, they were so good that-- I don't know this firsthand, but I've been told that they could walk into a village and look at the rice pot and know exactly how many people that rice pot was feeding. And they would do a quick count. Where's the rest of them? And I bet you if they were anything like the guys that I worked with the year before, they'd find it out. But they were good. It was the White Horse Division.

[01:22:57.35] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you have any memories of the popular culture back home while you were in Vietnam? Any song that you hear today takes you back to when you were serving in Vietnam?

[01:23:06.17] ROBERT HELVEY: My Boots Are Made for Walkin'.

[01:23:07.81] MARK FRANKLIN: No kidding.

[01:23:08.90] ROBERT HELVEY: Nancy Sinatra.

[01:23:09.79] MARK FRANKLIN: That one brings back memories, huh?

[01:23:11.55] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah. In fact, they put a movie up. I don't know where in the hell it was, but we were on a big open field. And they had a movie showing. And it was Nancy Sinatra singing that song. And there I was, my boots were walking up that hill. But that's a highlight. The good-- the good--0

[01:23:36.53] Oh yeah, and the Baltimore Colts quarterback--

[01:23:42.32] MARK FRANKLIN: Johnny Unitas?

[01:23:43.42] ROBERT HELVEY: Johnny Unitas. He came by when I was-- I was back in the compound on my first tour. And they said, Johnny Unitas is coming, Johnny Unitas is coming. I knew Johnny Unitas, he's my team, Baltimore Colts. And here comes-- a little short guy gets off the helicopter, that's Johnny Unitas. How in the hell could he be that powerful and that good a quarterback and that short? You know, how do you--

[01:24:17.54] He was so kind, so gentle, and really, really seemed interested. But the other woman-- Now that reminded me. She was a comedienne.

[01:24:35.69] MARK FRANKLIN: Martha Raye?

[01:24:36.71] ROBERT HELVEY: Martha Raye. I was out with my advisory-- my battalion, and we were coming in. And Martha Raye had just given a little show for about 30 or 40 people in the compound. And I said, well, we're not going to be able to get back to see it. We won't be there before dark. You know, she stayed. And there were five of us. She put on a show for five of us. The raunchiest show I've ever seen in my life, she was so funny. But, you know, she'd do that for us.

[01:25:21.88] And that's a highlight. She didn't have to come over there and she sure as hell didn't have to come over there twice. And everybody else, the people in Da Nang or Saigon or something, they'd get these big damn shows, Bob Hope and all that. And Ann-Margret just said, well, I'm going to visit these people.

[01:25:42.47] And she was loved by the generals, because they really appreciated what she did. But that was a high point, I think, that-- You're talking about the animosity, the anti-military stuff, I wasn't aware of that until I got back.

[01:25:59.47] MARK FRANKLIN: But that's what I was going to ask you next. How much contact did you have back home and how much did you hear about that?

[01:26:04.23] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, I didn't hear anything about it when I was over there. But when I got here, got back, it was obvious, very obvious. And I was invited to a party, this guy who used to be a CIA contractor, a helicopter pilot flying Laotian people around. He got crashed, and he had a big metal plate in his head and all that shit.

[01:26:31.19] So we were at a party over in Foggy Bottom. We went to this cocktail party. And this fat lady comes up and says, you got a short haircut. You in the Army? And I said, yeah. You ever been to Vietnam? And I said, yes ma'am. Did you ever kill any women and babies? And I said, not to my knowledge have I killed any women and babies. But I would welcome the opportunity to rip your fucking throat out with my bare hands.

[01:27:07.67] Her husband said, it's time for us to leave. But in most cases, you know, I could understand some of the animosity. Because the military is an easy symbol and an easy scapegoat for people who don't like the policy. And all we do is do what the president and the Congress tells us to do. So if you don't like the war, get a new president, which I think they did, and they--

[01:27:45.96] In July, '68. I do remember going to Cam Ranh Bay. And sometimes you had to stay two or three days before they got you booked out. And I went in there and signed in and the sergeant said, you're 2nd of the 12th. I said, yeah. He said, well, I was in Charlie Company, I remember you. About 20 minutes later, my name gets called. He said, your plane is out there.

[01:28:15.53] MARK FRANKLIN: He took care of you.

[01:28:16.77] ROBERT HELVEY: He took care of me. And I've heard that that happened many, many times. when they get this guy from our battalion down there, they took care of us.

[01:28:27.53] MARK FRANKLIN: Where did you fly into back here in the States?

[01:28:30.63] ROBERT HELVEY: Seattle, Washington. SeaTac.

[01:28:34.41] MARK FRANKLIN: You didn't come in McChord? You came in commercial?

[01:28:37.14] ROBERT HELVEY: No. I came in--

[01:28:39.03] MARK FRANKLIN: Commercial.

[01:28:40.21] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, I guess.

[01:28:41.22] MARK FRANKLIN: SeaTac is the airport. What was that like coming in there and getting off that airplane?

[01:28:47.97] ROBERT HELVEY: I didn't have any-- I was looking forward to getting home and this, that, and the other.

[01:28:53.55] MARK FRANKLIN: The reason we ask that question, a lot of veterans were told, take your uniform off, change into civilian clothes.

[01:28:58.36] ROBERT HELVEY: OK. Nobody told me to take my uniform off. But when I got assigned to the Pentagon, there was still a lot of hard feelings. And we were warned not to go downtown in our uniforms.

[01:29:16.26] MARK FRANKLIN: DC? Washington DC?

[01:29:18.50] ROBERT HELVEY: DC.

[01:29:19.34] MARK FRANKLIN: What year was that? Did you go to the Pentagon--

[01:29:26.04] ROBERT HELVEY: '68, '69, I can't remember.

[01:29:31.76] MARK FRANKLIN: So your family was with you there?

[01:29:33.57] ROBERT HELVEY: I didn't have a family when I went down there. But you know that cocktail party I was telling you about, the woman I married was over there. That's how I met her.

[01:29:43.02] MARK FRANKLIN: Is that right?

[01:29:43.65] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[01:29:44.63] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you stay in contact with any of your 1st Cav veterans?

[01:29:49.05] ROBERT HELVEY: Yes, Rick Brick. Rick Brick is a little short guy. And he became one of my point men. I have a philosophy about point men. First, if I were running the world, I would get all of my point men out of the Appalachian Mountains. They're comfortable. They're not afraid to be in the woods at night, they're not afraid of snakes, or this, that, and the other. And they know how to hunt. They can carry heavy loads, and they're nice people, they're really nice people.

[01:30:34.29] Some of them look terrible. And we had this one guy, Mousy. He was a point guy. And this reporter, Jurate Kazickas, she was over there. The battalion commander sent her to my company to spend the day. And she was beautiful. And I said, Jesus, I got these 100 guys that are-- oh God.

[01:31:05.52] And I told the guy to take her over to let her talk to some of our point men and then come back and talk. And Mousy was Rick Brick's buddy point man. Mousy was the meanest looking son of a bitch you'd ever see in your life. And Jurate told me that, if I would have seen Mousy on the streets in the United States, I would run across the street to get away from him. She said, Captain, he's mean. And I said, Yes he is.

[01:31:42.66] She said, but over here, I would want to be close to him.

[01:31:48.42] MARK FRANKLIN: She knew.

[01:31:49.50] ROBERT HELVEY: Because Mousy had this hand and eye coordination and Rick had it too. That if he looked at you, you're dead. That quickly, you're dead. And I was watching Mousy operate one day, we were moving around. And Mousy was over here and I think Rick was way back here on this side. And I saw this guy jump up out of this paddy, the berm.

[01:32:19.73] The guy stood up. And Mousy was looking this way. And he turned around and blew that fucking guy's head off. That quick. Just looked at him and he was dead.

[01:32:30.06] MARK FRANKLIN: How did he know he was there? He just knew he was there?

[01:32:33.01] ROBERT HELVEY: Corner of his eye. You know, he caught that movement and Mousy--

[01:32:37.71] MARK FRANKLIN: He was gone.

[01:32:38.43] ROBERT HELVEY: And these people, these people. I think he was from Tennessee. But Rick was from northern New York, where the Appalachian Mountains start to go into civilization. And Rick hunted, fished, played accordion, plays the piano, plays the guitar. You know, he just does everything. And of course I didn't know that then. The only thing I knew, he liked point.

[01:33:15.97] And I think the point guys-- I don't think it's a mental problem, but they look forward to the challenge. That I'm smarter, better and I'm going to prove it. And I put my life on the line doing it. Those guys exist. And I was blessed with having several of them over that tour.

[01:33:39.09] MARK FRANKLIN: Any of these veterans, as far as you know, did they have trouble adjusting to life after Vietnam?

[01:33:44.76] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh, Rick Brick. You got to talk to Rick Brick.

[01:33:49.05] MARK FRANKLIN: Is he still upstate New York?

[01:33:53.12] ROBERT HELVEY: I got a call several years ago on the telephone. And the guy says, I'm Rick Brick. Rick Brick? This has been 20 or 30 years, you know, Rick Brick. He said, I was in 2nd of the 12th. I was your point man in the 2nd. Yeah, then it started ringing a bell. And he said, can I stop by and see you one of these days? Yeah. So he said, I'll be there tomorrow.

[01:34:19.14] So Rick comes and I go to the door. He said, I'm Rick Brick. I would have never recognized him. Well, when this guy came up to the porch, I was thinking this little skinny guy. Well, he's still short, but he had put on about 50 or 60 pounds. I said, Rick, I didn't recognize you. And he pulled out a photograph. Yeah, I recognize that Rick Brick. He said, I'm him.

[01:34:54.62] And he had gotten out of the Army and went to live in a national forest in Wisconsin for three years, alone. He had a tent and he was alone for three years. He said the park service guy knew he was there. And he said in the winter time, he'd check in on him every now and then. But he said, I just couldn't stand to be around people.

[01:35:25.37] And another time, he had been in treatment for PTSD and he was all right. So he was fishing with a buddy of his, Lloyd something or another. And he could see that Rick was coming apart. So he took him to the VA hospital in Indianapolis, I think. And of course, they processed him. And Lloyd went up to the floor with him and helped him get settled in.

[01:36:06.05] And what he didn't realize, the doors on those wards lock when they're closed. So Lloyd was there, he said, Rick I got to leave. So he went to the door and the door wouldn't open. And Rick was back there looking and Lloyd asked the guy, can he get out? And Rick said, don't let him out, he's one of us. [LAUGHING] Lloyd said it took him an hour to get out of there. They called all these other people up. But Rick was sharp. God almighty.

[01:36:51.14] I go fishing with him. I quit going fishing with him because he got one of his spells, you know. Oh wow. But he could-- when we would approach the stream, he would stop, and he would just stare at it. And then the first thing you know, he'd grab a bug. And then he'd get the fly to match it and put it on.

[01:37:16.76] And then we used to go salmon fishing up in Michigan. And he'd see a fish and he could throw that line out so that fly would be right in front of that fish's nose. I've seen him do it dozens and dozens of times. How precise he was, you know. And I was just learning fly fishing.

And I just didn't think I'd ever learn because I thought I was using a baseball bat. But he just stayed with me. And now I got to the point where I could--

[01:37:53.63] But Rick loved being in that company, he really loved being in that company. And he still calls about two or three times a week.

[01:38:08.60] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh good I might ask you to put me in contact with him. We may like to do this with him if you think he'd be willing. We don't have to do it now, I will get to you later.

[01:38:19.70] ROBERT HELVEY: I think you would-- if you have a long conversation with him, you'll see that he's just as great as he can be. He used to have this old Dodge van. And he put a false bottom in the back. He had over 1,000 rounds of ammunition in his van. He said, well, if you go somewhere, you might need it. And for the life of me, I couldn't imagine why we would need 1,000 rounds of ammunition.

[01:39:01.98] Oh God. Yes, it affected me. I think the world of our Soldiers. And I think one of the biggest mistakes we made for our country, eliminating the draft. Because I want everybody to know what these people are like that later on, you're going to send to war. Who are these people? And only-- hell, the draft didn't even get Trump. And I think he needed to be over there. I'd love to have that son of a bitch in my company.

[01:39:39.32] But I just think that I could not have had a company as strong and powerful and determined in an all-volunteer Army. I had guys that were smarter than me who could tell me something that I may have missed, or who could talk to me and-- you know, when I got back to be battalion commander down at Fort Hood, I had a radio operator that couldn't listen and then tell me what the message was. Just couldn't-- Now I know--

[01:40:24.13] Remember in the old-- well, you're not that old. But in the old Army, you always had message books, where the officer would write the message. And you didn't have to read or anything, you just took the message to the next guy. Well, my RTO then, slash Jeep driver, would have fit right in then, because you had to do it. But over there, I could pick an RTO out and hey, he might be a college graduate, certainly might be a high school graduate, easygoing, knows how to get things done, and doesn't wait, doesn't wait to have to be told to do something. And they were quick, they were quick thinkers.

[01:41:07.06] And I just think for an officer's ease of command, I'd like to have a draftee. Because they're good.

[01:41:19.65] MARK FRANKLIN: It's a broader selection.

[01:41:20.51] ROBERT HELVEY: I get that broader selection. That's nothing against the all-volunteer Army. But when we expand in a hurry, that all-volunteer Army, you know, the first six months of the war, they're all going to be going anyway. But I just think your civic duty requires you to do that.

[01:41:38.13] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, that's a good segue to my next question, which is, how do you think your experiences in Vietnam affected the way you think about Soldiers coming off battlefields today?

[01:41:46.90] ROBERT HELVEY: I have a lot of respect for them. Every war is different. The technology changes, the battlefield, each generation. And it's hard for us, our age, to really appreciate what guys in the Big Red One did at Kasserine Pass. You know, the first time we were committed to war, they beat our ass. And how quickly they learned those lessons, these young college kids getting drafted. And they help you retrain your other people. And it is just amazing what we did with a draft Army. I don't know, what was the question? I forgot.

[01:42:33.58] MARK FRANKLIN: Just how you feel about the troops coming home today and how your Vietnam experience may have affected that.

[01:42:38.06] ROBERT HELVEY: I respect them, I respect them. And one of these days, I hope we find out why we're still over there. Now the dumbest fucking thing that I've ever heard was a DoD guy was answering a reporter's question about the increases that we were sending in, I think Afghanistan. And he said, we're sending people, reinforcements over there, to help the people that are already there.

[01:43:11.45] What? We're sending Soldiers over there to defend the Soldiers that are over there? And it seems like we're still doing it.

[01:43:21.87] MARK FRANKLIN: Open ended, yup.

[01:43:23.86] ROBERT HELVEY: And that goes back as I say, unconditional surrender. And that means we've got to know what it means. Why are we there? And what's winning look like? So before we start the war, we need to know what it's going to look like when it's finished, and how much it's going to cost. And we apparently haven't done that.

[01:43:47.62] MARK FRANKLIN: We don't learn the lessons well. How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[01:43:56.77] ROBERT HELVEY: By veterans? Very much. The civilian community? It is like 50 years ago. I don't think it's registered. There's just nothing there.

[01:44:14.25] MARK FRANKLIN: Which is why this commemoration is trying to help the public understand that. But we'll get to that one in a minute. You talked a little bit about what you think the country needs to learn. Are there any other lessons that you learned in Vietnam that you'd like to pass on to future generations?

[01:44:33.37] ROBERT HELVEY: Well, the future generations, I think it boils down to leadership. Know your job, you have to be competent. You have to be able to read a map. You have to understand what happens or what could happen with all this technology that you're carrying around with you.

[01:44:58.10] For example, we had an exercise down at Fort Hood, firepower demonstration and all that shit. And it had all these artillery units that's going to be firing support on this objective. And it didn't happen. And there was a pause, the people in the stands, pause. And this guy goes up and says, Sergeant So-and-so, Sergeant So-and-so, come to the fire direction center. The computer had broken down. They needed somebody who knew how to work the plotting board.

[01:45:36.75] MARK FRANKLIN: That's old school.

[01:45:38.53] ROBERT HELVEY: Old school, yeah. And that was just a glaring example of wait, this is dangerous, this is really fucking dangerous. And then we have-- If we're going into a nuclear war, the electromagnetic pulses, that's going to shut everything down. And the Russians are very good at getting into that stuff. And it's frightening that we have become so dependent. Everything's on computers. Shit, you don't even see a hard copy of anything anymore. Well, what happens when all those hard boards burn out and melt? Where are the copies? They're not there.

[01:46:21.31] So I don't know. We had a good Army and I think we had mediocre leadership at the top, I really do. I think Westmoreland had bit off more than he could chew, the whole-- He went over as a MACV guy and the next thing you know, he's got 500,000 troops that he's got to worry about. And we were really fuzzy about what the hell we were doing over there.

[01:46:56.05] That brings up my philosophy. The worst thing a country could do was send our Soldiers to fight to restore the status quo. Why in the hell would we send our people to fight to restore the conditions that caused the fucking war to start with? Now we know that that's right, because in the Second World War, there was only unconditional surrender. And 70-some years later, we ain't had a war over there. Why? Because we destroyed every organization and institution that could possibly fight us. And then with time, we introduced democracy and sense of responsibilities.

[01:47:50.39] We're proud of our allies now. Except our allies are no longer proud of us. And Trump has managed to do it. So be competent, and know what to do when the lights go out. And know that these Soldiers, their lives depend on the leaders. Don't let them down.

[01:48:23.79] Oh listen. When they were talking about building that thing, I fucking couldn't believe that they were going to put a goddamn black rock right in the middle of the Mall. What the hell is that? I went over there, Goddamn, I cried.

[01:48:45.51] MARK FRANKLIN: It's emotional, isn't it?

[01:48:47.10] ROBERT HELVEY: It's so powerful. Yeah. And Rick Brick wants me to take him to the Wall. I told him about how moving it was and yeah, I'd love to take him up there.

[01:49:06.66] MARK FRANKLIN: There is a national program out of DoD, the office that I belong to, which is called the United States of America Vietnam War Commemoration. And it is our mission to first thank, recognize, honor, our Vietnam War veterans and their families for their service and sacrifice. We do that through a commemorative partner program. We have

partners throughout the country, over 11,000 organizations that are helping us do this, reaching out to their local communities to thank and honor Vietnam veterans in a variety of events.

[01:49:41.21] We are part of the history and legacy branch. This is one project that we're working on. Up until today, had you heard about this commemoration at all?

[01:49:50.64] ROBERT HELVEY: No. I wish you would have told me this, week before last. Because they have-- What, Veterans Day or something?

[01:49:59.55] MARK FRANKLIN: It might have been Armed Forces Day?

[01:50:01.64] ROBERT HELVEY: Armed Forces Day or something. South Charleston has the longest continuous Armed Forces Day parade in the United States.

[01:50:10.18] MARK FRANKLIN: Is that right?

[01:50:11.06] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[01:50:11.59] MARK FRANKLIN: I did not know that. Do you ever get together with your fellow veterans?

[01:50:15.69] ROBERT HELVEY: Last year, the 1st Cav Division had a reunion here in Charleston, West Virginia. That was the first one I-- division one that I went to. And my battalion had one down in Louisiana, I was down there for that one.

[01:50:29.96] MARK FRANKLIN: Have you-- one of the ways that we recognize our veterans is with a Vietnam veteran lapel pin. Have you received that?

[01:50:37.36] ROBERT HELVEY: I don't think I have.

[01:50:38.53] MARK FRANKLIN: Well--

[01:50:39.26] ROBERT HELVEY: Wait a minute. Is this it?

[01:50:42.37] MARK FRANKLIN: That's it right there.

[01:50:44.68] ROBERT HELVEY: OK. They gave it to us at this Cav reunion.

[01:50:48.28] MARK FRANKLIN: So then they must be a commemorative partner, because they couldn't have got that without being a partner. Well that's great, I'm glad you got that. Did you see what was on the back? Did they tell you what was on the back?

[01:50:57.26] ROBERT HELVEY: No.

[01:50:57.95] MARK FRANKLIN: Did they explain it to you?

[01:50:59.24] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh really?

[01:51:00.41] MARK FRANKLIN: Let me explain it to you. So you've got the American Eagle on the front face. And you've got that-- In the blue ribbon around, it says Vietnam War veteran. But you also see the six stars. See those little stars there?

[01:51:13.61] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[01:51:14.33] MARK FRANKLIN: That represents the United States and the five allies that fought with us. So the Koreans, the Aussies, New Zealand, Philippine and Thai. That's what those stars represent. And on the back is the most important message. You'd have to take it off to look, it's really tiny. It's hard to read, but trust me it says, A grateful nation thanks and honors you.

[01:51:37.59] ROBERT HELVEY: Yeah.

[01:51:38.65] MARK FRANKLIN: That's what that says. And that is made in the United States. I can guarantee, it's made in this country.

[01:51:44.98] ROBERT HELVEY: Oh good.

[01:51:46.20] MARK FRANKLIN: So sir, thank you very, very much. Why don't you put that back on. That was an awesome interview.