

## **Herren, John US Army**

[00:00:13.72] JOHN HERREN: I was born in September the 10th, 1934, at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, the son of a Army captain who was stationed there. I'm an Army brat. And we moved around all over the South and then spent time when I was growing up in Korea, Japan, and back to Washington. So actually, over the years, I think what's become my hometown has been Washington, DC.

[00:00:50.14] My dad was a graduate of the University of Alabama. And he went into what was then an officer's training school and actually, in the artillery. And he was deployed to Germany in World War I. But he never got to the front. He always said the Germans knew I was coming. And so they stopped. [LAUGHS]

[00:01:16.12] But then he went back. And he transferred into the cavalry, which was his real passion. He was a cavalry trooper and a terrific polo player and horseman. And so he married his wife while we were stationed at-- he was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas. And she was an El Paso girl. Her name was Lillian Corcoran.

[00:01:39.46] And they were married. And then they moved to his next assignment. And from then on, there were various assignments. He rose to the rank of lieutenant general. He served in World War II and had a task force called Task Force Herren, which was on the right flank of the Battle of the Bulge. And that army was the Seventh Army with the French next to him. And they had some hard fighting.

[00:02:14.46] This task force had three regiments-- the rest of the division, which was the-- it was back in the United States. And it didn't arrive until later on after they had been through some significant battles. And after that, he came back to the States. And then he was assigned in 1946 to Korea as the chief of staff to the commanding general.

[00:02:49.31] And we went over there as a family. And then he went to Japan as the assistant division commander and came back and went to the Special Forces. And then eventually, during Korea, the Korean War, he was assigned back to Korea. And he commanded the rear area. And from there, he went to Germany and had a command there. And then he retired--

[00:03:20.02] MARK FRANKLIN: So he's--

[00:03:20.50] JOHN HERREN: --in 1985. So he had a full career.

[00:03:22.59] MARK FRANKLIN: His Army career--

[00:03:23.41] JOHN HERREN: Over 40 years.

[00:03:28.65] MARK FRANKLIN: Did his Army career have some influence as to why you joined the military?

[00:03:33.34] JOHN HERREN: Of course, my dad had some influence on that. But he didn't-- actually, he didn't push me to go into the military. He wanted me to be a doctor. Well, I don't think my academics were up to being a doctor.

[00:03:47.25] But I got interested in West Point. My brother went to West Point. And he graduated in 1955. And I enlisted in the Army, went to the Army prep school, and then went to West Point and graduated in 1958. And so I think it was part of-- I don't know-- the DNA of the family to follow in the footsteps of my brother and my dad.

[00:04:18.69] MARK FRANKLIN: So you came in long-- you came into the military before the Vietnam War with the United States involvement was getting underway. As that progressed, what was your sense of the war going on in Vietnam?

[00:04:28.96] JOHN HERREN: Well, it wasn't going on. When I came out in 1958, there was no-- I think there was some communist movements in that era. But there was nothing in Vietnam. I don't think we started sending advisers over there until probably '61, '62.

[00:05:00.30] MARK FRANKLIN: When you were commissioned out of West Point, what was your first assignment?

[00:05:05.17] JOHN HERREN: Fort Benning, I went through the officer's basic course, airborne, Ranger, and then to Germany and my first assignment as a platoon leader. The paratrooper training really gets you ready in my review for the Ranger training because it gets you physically fit, if you weren't already. And the Ranger school is tough. And it mainly is patrolling, weapons training, a lot of forced marches with packs. It definitely, I think, contributed to my future as an infantry officer.

[00:05:48.30] When I got back from Germany, I was a platoon leader there and an XO, and then on the staff of the division. When I got back, I was an aide-de-camp to General Billingslea, who commanded the 2nd Infantry Division. And then I went into the 2nd Infantry as a company commander. I took over my company in May of '64 and commanded it and trained it during the air assault training and then took it to Vietnam.

[00:06:18.80] MARK FRANKLIN: So talk about that. That was an experimental-- air assault was kind of a new concept. Talk a little bit about that training and what you were instructed to do and how to train your Soldiers.

[00:06:30.01] JOHN HERREN: Well, it was mainly using helicopters and being able to board the helicopters quickly and in order. And I know Colonel Moore, the battalion commander, used to train us also on who takes over if leaders are killed. And so if we were jumping on a helicopter, he would kill somebody, a sergeant, staff sergeant.

[00:06:55.99] Or if you were jumping off into a-- supposedly a landing zone, he would kill the lieutenant. But that was good training. We rappelled out of helicopters. And I had a really good company, a lot of seasoned NCOs--

[00:07:16.02] MARK FRANKLIN: How would--

[00:07:16.87] JOHN HERREN: --Non Commissioned Officers. JOHN HERREN: We got there in September of '65 by ship. And we left from Charleston, South Carolina, and went all the way around through the Panama Canal. And then I think the aircraft went first. They went on a big sort of like an air-- no, it wasn't an aircraft carrier, but it was a carrier that could take helicopters who were folded up.

[00:07:54.13] And so they were already there. And the trip itself, Panama Canal is interesting. But from then on, it was just really training on the ship, doing physical training on the ship, shooting, zeroing our weapons on the ship, so on.

[00:08:12.49] We arrived, I think, in the late evening. We didn't get off the ship until the next morning. But there was some firing going on and rockets you could see up in the air. And it was different terrain-- well, different images to me that I hadn't been involved in before. You could hear the Koreans on the shore, and their language and all, and so on. I was 27, I think.

[00:08:55.88] MARK FRANKLIN: What were your initial duties after landing with the division?

[00:09:00.47] JOHN HERREN: We spent a lot of time clearing the landing zone for the rest of the choppers. The initial choppers that picked us up were Chinooks. And these were troop carriers. And they took us in. But the landing zone was not very big.

[00:09:19.14] So the rest of those choppers, I think, didn't come in until we had-- until we had cleared the landing zone. And to do that, we had these Vietnamese that they had hired. And they came out. And we went out with them. And we cut the roots off of these bushes and all.

[00:09:41.30] And it was hard work. I think it took-- well, it was phases. After a week of that, we were able to get enough openings to allow x number of helicopters. And then it expanded over time. But it took a good, I'd say, three or four weeks.

[00:10:05.73] JOHN HERREN: Well, we were living basically in ponchos. And we really didn't have tents yet. We got tents after a while, after a couple of weeks. But we were just living out on the ground. And we were eating C-rations and so on. But then they did come. They erected tents. And they brought in a mess hall.

[00:10:31.43] And so they weren't bad. I mean, we were used to it. On our maneuvers at Fort Benning, we had been-- we'd been out in the boonies of North Carolina and living on the ground, sleeping in ponchos, and that kind of thing-- or sleeping bags, yeah.

[00:10:54.82] JOHN HERREN: Basically, checking on the men and making sure that they were in the proper positions. We were also in a defensive position in those first few weeks. So we manned a part of what they called the green zone around the landing zone.

[00:11:16.37] And I remember the first few days. One of my-- one of my outposts out there started firing. And I think they were firing at a tiger. And-- [LAUGHS] --tiger was roaring. And

they were shooting him up. I don't think they saw anything. They didn't kill a tiger. But it got them. They all were on edge.

[00:11:42.94] JOHN HERREN: Well, the strength of my company was the noncommissioned officers. Many of them had-- well, some of them had been to Korea. I had one who had helped blow a-- blow a bridge in the Chosin Reservoir battle and helped get the Marines out. And one of the divisions, they blew the last bridge after they had moved out those forces.

[00:12:12.19] And my platoon sergeants were really experienced. And so I told them early on, I said, you're responsible for the discipline of your people. And that was my responsibility too. But your responsibility is to them. And I want you to get your squad leaders and make sure that they're pulling their weight and so on.

[00:12:46.33] And then on the platoon leaders, when we got-- we got some brand new officers in, just before we left-- three new lieutenants right out of Ranger school. And I told the platoon leaders, platoon sergeants-- I told the lieutenants, number one, listen to your platoon sergeant. Because he'll teach you how to lead these men in combat. And so that was part of what we were doing on the air assault, and then after I got to Vietnam.

[00:13:22.48] I knew Bob Edwards, the C Company commander very well. Tony Nadal was a classmate of mine. And Tony had called me before he came to the battalion and said he wanted to get into the battalion. And I told him who to go to. And so he went to one of the staff officers there. And I had recommended him. And we actually got to talk to Colonel Moore. And Colonel Moore put him on the staff. So there was another close friend.

[00:13:55.36] The other ones were the operations officer, Greg Dillon, great guy. And others were in the headquarters company and whatever. But I think my closest friends actually were Bob Edwards, Tony Nadal, and Dillon.

[00:14:17.64] The only problem I had on discipline is when my troopers went into the town-- they weren't supposed to go in there, An Khe-- and got in trouble. And so I had to court martial them. I had my own. It wasn't a court martial. It was a-- I didn't have the ability to court martial them. I just had ability to punish them.

[00:14:41.95] MARK FRANKLIN: Article 15?

[00:14:42.93] JOHN HERREN: Yeah, Article 15. [LAUGHS]

[00:14:46.02] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have any time to yourself? And if you did, what did you do in your off time for recreation?

[00:14:51.53] JOHN HERREN: Well, I think I wrote my folks, maybe my brother. No, I think I was just checking on troops, talking to troops. One thing we did in the base camp was we had a-- first thing we did is we had built a little NCO club. You absolutely could have beer and what have you.

[00:15:17.87] And then we built an officer's club with some red brick that we had found or whatever. Some of my lieutenants and NCOs, I guess, had some engineering background. It wasn't very much. Sort of like a shack. And that was OK for a while. But we didn't stay in An Khe very long.

[00:15:44.94] JOHN HERREN: Well, I had a really good battalion commander. He was probably the best commander I ever had. He was hard, hard but fair. And I remember when some of my troops got in trouble in Fort Benning.

[00:16:04.29] He said, John, the next time one of your guys gets caught and he ends up in the jail with the MPs-- have to go get him, and he ends up in the jail out here at Fort Benning-- I want you to go to the jail and be the one that get him released. So I then called a platoon sergeant-- the platoon sergeants and said, OK, if I have to go, you're going with me.

[00:16:27.19] [LAUGHTER]

[00:16:28.21] And that cured that.

[00:16:29.92] MARK FRANKLIN: It cured the problem.

[00:16:30.79] JOHN HERREN: We didn't have any more problems. We were certainly-- I think one of the-- I won't tell you one of the better units. But we had a very good commander. And we went-- after the first few short deployments that we had, which didn't amount to much before the LZ X-ray, it was sort of-- helped us get the down, again, how these young lieutenants would work and so on.

[00:17:14.05] But I think in the battle at the LZ X-ray, Colonel Moore was really one of the ones that helped save that battalion. Because he brought in the air. And we had artillery. And he was able to use the forces that he had in a way that we didn't get overrun.

[00:17:38.20] I mean, they didn't get-- he didn't commit them too early. He always had a reserve. And if he-- just as Sergeant Major Plumley said when he went Colonel Moore was running up and down in the LZ there. And there was a lot of fire coming in. Plumley grabbed him and said, you get killed, we're all going to get killed. It's pretty true. But he was a great leader. And I think the sergeant major was the-- and, again, my noncommissioned officers and the lieutenants-- the lieutenants did a good job,

[00:18:12.15] MARK FRANKLIN: So--

[00:18:12.88] JOHN HERREN: --some them better than others. LZ X-ray was certainly the toughest fight we were in. And I lost a lot of people. And I knew that company so well that it really hit me. But as it developed, I had a mission of securing the landing zone. It was changed when we captured a North Vietnamese and said all these North Vietnamese were up on the Chu Pong, where he was looking down on us when we landed.

[00:18:51.81] And they all want to kill us, kill Americans. And so that definitely got my attention. And so that-- also Colonel Moore's. And he wanted to get people out there to contact the North Vietnamese before they could hit the landing zone. He had to keep that landing zone open. Or we were going to be finished if a large force hit us.

[00:19:17.97] So that's what we did. My guys went out there. And the first platoon made contact. Then my second platoon, which was-- oh, it was a good-- had a hell a lot of good NCOs in it, including the guy that blew the bridge. And the lieutenant was very aggressive. I knew that.

[00:19:42.21] And I always had-- and I always had told the platoon sergeant he had, who was a good one, don't let this guy go. You have to counsel him and stop him from doing rash things, things like that. Well, it wasn't working.

[00:20:04.60] And so what happened was he saw some North Vietnamese or about four or five them in the woods. This was at the same time that the first platoon was getting some sniper fire. And so he calls me and said four or five guys north. And he's out here. And I'm going to go get him. And I said, OK.

[00:20:22.36] But I didn't realize he was going to take the whole platoon and run after them. And, of course, that was a bad mistake. And before long, they were in a fierce fight and taking casualties. And they were cut off. And I was going-- listening, and all this, and trying to get artillery-- or we had mortars.

[00:20:52.36] They fired the mortars. But the mortars didn't know exactly where they were. They had been moving out. And so they'd gone to some point. And then they pulled back. And I told Herrick when it got bad, grab a piece of terrain and defend it. And we'll get to you. And he did.

[00:21:14.24] But the mortars were shooting over him and weren't anywhere close. And he had a mortarman on with him in the platoon. And so that wasn't helping. And then they finally-- my forward observer finally began to bring in fire and help them. But it was a bad situation.

[00:21:39.09] We had another big one in Bong Son, which was north of Qui Nhon. It was about a-- well, it actually ended up about a month. But the first week, the first couple of weeks, we were heavily involved in that one. And I was in the operations officer. I had been moved up to take over for Dillon.

[00:22:05.70] And I remember one time, we came down out of the mountain after we had different short clashes with them. And we came down out of the mountain and ran into a bunch of them, just towards-- it was getting late in the afternoon. And a bunch of North Vietnamese were in a village not too far away.

[00:22:37.01] And so we had started getting fire from them. And we were firing back. And then my battalion commander said, well, OK, we're going to stay here. And then first thing in the morning, we're going to go for that village. But we wanted to get artillery in there and so on. We tried to get some of it in there.

[00:22:56.60] So we stayed there that night. And there were some of these North Vietnamese. There was one guy who was crawling through the mud. And he crawled all the way up almost to our line. And some of the guys grabbed him and came and brought him in to the place where I was with the battalion commander and the radio operators and so on. And they had him tied up and all in there.

[00:23:28.54] And so we were half asleep. And this guy woke up and tried to go after-- [LAUGHS] --the battalion commander, grabbed him. And then the next morning, we attacked. But by then, they had gotten through-- the North Vietnamese were very good at moving around. And that night, they had left. They realized that we probably had a bigger force than they did. And we had the firepower.

[00:23:59.82] MARK FRANKLIN: The North Vietnamese that you captured in the mud that your guys captured, what happened to him?

[00:24:05.49] JOHN HERREN: I don't know. We gave him to the South Vietnamese. We were working with a South Vietnamese unit. And the one big thing in LZ X-ray was our artillery really helped save that platoon.

[00:24:17.10] And Ernie Savage, who was the sergeant that took over when the platoon leader was killed and the platoon sergeant were killed and the one who blew the bridge was killed, machine gun operator-- but the artillery helped save that platoon too. And-- so anyway. But that was the only other big operation that I was in. Then I came back in September of '66.

[00:24:53.40] JOHN HERREN: Well, certainly, what happened to the second platoon and that fight was-- I still remember almost everything that happened. I haven't forgotten that, November the 14th. It was the worst day.

[00:25:15.62] JOHN HERREN: Well, it depends. One of my best days was when I took R&R. And on my second tour, I went to see my wife in Hawaii on R&R. [LAUGHS] I guess another best day was when I got on the plane to fly out of Vietnam, the first tour.

[00:25:43.82] JOHN HERREN: Second tour was at MACV headquarters. And I was in the surface operations staff. It was General Abrams' staff. And I covered the I Corps, the furthest Corps to the north, and Special Forces. So what I would do is I would get on-- I'd hook my-- hook a ride on a helicopter and go up to that area and go to the different commands-- the 101st and others-- and find out what their plans were, what they planned to do in the future.

[00:26:21.71] Then I'd come back and brief the major general who was the J3, joint staff operations commander. And then he would brief General Abrams. And then I also, because they liked-- I think they liked my voice, that they had me be the briefer for surface ops every Saturday for General Abrams and all his commanders. [LAUGHS] And that was quite an experience. But-

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[00:26:48.20] MARK FRANKLIN: That's a lot of pressure.

[00:26:49.01] JOHN HERREN: But there were slides. And I would just follow the slides. And then General Abrams would-- when he wanted me to change the slide, he'd just go-- make a very small movement. I'd have to watch him very closely. [LAUGHS] But I got to hear all the different generals. And General Abrams used to chew them out.

[00:27:11.51] Because they didn't know-- I would report on something that happened in their area, that they hadn't heard about. And so he'd jump all over them. He'd say, well, how come you don't know that, general whatever?

[00:27:25.67] MARK FRANKLIN: You were very popular.

[00:27:27.32] JOHN HERREN: Yeah.

[00:27:28.94] MARK FRANKLIN: You're wearing a ribbon on your lapel. Describe that ribbon.

[00:27:32.03] JOHN HERREN: That's the Silver Star. Actually, the Silver Star was not awarded me by Colonel Moore. It was-- well, it was awarded to me because my men told Colonel Moore that I should get the Silver Star. And I know Tony Nadal and Bob Edwards were probably more heavily involved in the action the first couple of days. Because I got waylaid a bit.

[00:28:04.13] I happened to run into a North Vietnamese in the creek bed when I was talking to Herrick. And everything was going to hell. And I was in this creek bed with my radio operators. And I came up. And I saw a North Vietnamese about 15 feet away with an AK-47. And he looked to me like the scout, the first guy with others behind him.

[00:28:27.14] So I unloaded on him. And my rifle, my M16 fell apart, the pin holding the barrel to the rest of it broke or fell off. I'm not sure what happened to it. So anyway, then I threw a grenade. And the grenade hit a tree above this guy-- I didn't know if I'd killed him-- above this guy and bounced back between the two of us.

[00:28:54.90] And then my basic problem was, I needed to tell somebody about the people who were behind this guy. Because I'm sure-- I was sure there were more behind him. So I happened to go up into the land-- I ended up-- I was close to the outer edge of the landing zone.

[00:29:12.78] So I went up there. And Delta Company had just landed. And there was a machine gunner right there. And so I told the machine gunner, watch out for the creek bed over there because there more be-- there were NVAs in there. I think there are more NVAs in there. About that time machine gun fire started sweeping across the LZ.

[00:29:34.47] And I dropped down. And I ended up with my radio operator being killed. And the one who I dropped down by, the Delta Company commander, he got hit in the arm. And I became a medic. So I couldn't get back to my company for probably half an hour or more.

[00:29:54.24] Meanwhile, I was talking to Herrick. And I finally got back to them to see Joe Marm make his Medal of Honor attack of the anthill. And then we tried to go get the platoon. And we got them the next day. They were cut off for 24 hours. There were eight killed. Let's see.

Eight killed, 13 wounded. I had a total-- in that company, I had total of 44 killed and wounded. And a lot of them came out of that second platoon.

[00:30:37.40] MARK FRANKLIN: So it was your actions in the creek bed that earned you the Silver Star?

[00:30:42.22] JOHN HERREN: Well, I think it was the actions taking Le Febvre back under fire and then later on trying to get to the platoon that was cut off.

[00:30:56.82] MARK FRANKLIN: Le Febvre was the Delta Company commander?

[00:30:58.90] JOHN HERREN: Yeah, yeah. JOHN HERREN: No, we didn't. No. Let me see. We-- well, in the second tour, we were working with an ARVN regiment in that area. But on the LZ X-ray, no. Well, the first tour, I knew there was also a Korean unit that was down the highway.

[00:31:23.65] And the impressive thing about that was their compound and their defenses were by the book, right out of the manual. But they didn't-- they did their own patrolling. We didn't get involved with them. The second time was with the Vietnamese. And we were-- there was also a Special Forces camp there. And so we had some-- I think Colonel Moore had more contact with their commanders and their units than we did at my level.

[00:32:07.84] JOHN HERREN: I think they were-- particularly in the rural areas that we operated in, in Bong Son in particular-- they thought we were the French. And one of those-- we made one sweep to try and find a Soldier who was missing from another unit.

[00:32:29.18] And we went through these villages. And they didn't like us. Other places in some of our operations, I don't think they overly disliked us, but they were-- we were sort of in the way of their farming and all. But in general, in the cities and all, they were pretty friendly, you know?

[00:33:05.09] JOHN HERREN: Well, I got a call when my daughter was born. And then I don't know if I talked to-- I don't think we had the ability to call back at that time. But I had letters. I exchanged letters and so on.

[00:33:24.33] We had R&R, Rest and Recuperation. And we were-- I went to Hawaii. And I also went to Saigon. The first tour, I went to Saigon and Thailand, to Bangkok. And then the second tour was Hawaii.

[00:33:42.59] MARK FRANKLIN: When you wrote your letters back home, did you tell them much about what you were experiencing? Or did you--

[00:33:48.26] JOHN HERREN: Yeah, I mean, my dad was in the military and my brother. And so-- you know.

[00:33:55.61] MARK FRANKLIN: So there's some turmoil going on back home. How much news did you hear about what was going back in the States?

[00:34:03.57] JOHN HERREN: Well, I didn't like it. I didn't like the fact that they were protesting the war. I mean, we-- particularly when they were protesting against the military. And we were just carrying out our duty. So I didn't like that.

[00:34:25.43] JOHN HERREN: I came back in-- let's see. I went over-- and I went to the Armed Forces Staff College after Georgetown. After I came back the first time, I went to Georgetown University and taught ROTC and worked on a master's degree and then-- in international affairs.

[00:34:44.72] And then I went to the Armed Forces Staff College and then went over to Vietnam in February of '69 and came back in, I think, late January or February of '70. And then I came back and finished up my master's degree and then went to the Pentagon.

[00:35:13.29] The first tour, I didn't get any real feeling that a lot of people were against the war. I don't think they are against us, the troops. But I'm sure it was out there. The second time, oh, I think I read more about what was happening than what was happening to me. I didn't really experience people disrespecting me and so on.

[00:35:57.17] MARK FRANKLIN: You made a career of the Army when you came back. When you came back during that-- did you have any trouble adjusting to life back in a peacetime Army after the war?

[00:36:10.76] JOHN HERREN: Well, yeah. I mean, it's-- there is some adjustment when you come out of combat. For me, the first time going back to a university that was teaching ROTC was definitely an adjustment. The second time--

[00:36:26.56] MARK FRANKLIN: Was that after your first tour?

[00:36:27.72] JOHN HERREN: Yeah.

[00:36:28.29] MARK FRANKLIN: What was that like?

[00:36:30.37] JOHN HERREN: Well, that was at Georgetown. Well, that was good. I enjoyed that tour. And we had good students. Not very many went to Vietnam. A lot went into the Judge Advocate Corps.

[00:36:49.56] MARK FRANKLIN: How about after the second tour coming home and adjusting?

[00:36:52.95] JOHN HERREN: Well, basically, I was coming back to work in the Pentagon. That was an adjustment. [LAUGHS] Because I'm coming from the field going into the bureaucracy of the Pentagon and into the Army staff. But I had some good jobs on the staff.

[00:37:11.78] MARK FRANKLIN: Have you had much contact with your fellow veterans and stayed in contact with them?

[00:37:16.23] JOHN HERREN: Well, we had-- we have a-- up until this COVID thing, we had a annual reunion of the-- versus the Ia Drang battle. And they were doing it every year, different places. And that's when we saw a lot of the men that we served with and the leaders, so on. And Colonel Moore used to come to that-- Joe Galloway, Plumley, Sergeant Major Plumley. So that went on for quite a while. And then, of course, Colonel Moore dropped out because he'd gotten a little too old and so on.

[00:37:59.74] JOHN HERREN: I think it gave me an appreciation for soldiers and what they sacrifice when they're in the military. I remember the platoon sergeant of that second platoon that was-- that was in that fierce fight. He re-enlisted a couple of days before that battle. And he could have gone home. You had that second lieutenant. It was tough to deal with.

[00:38:40.91] I probably should have been a little-- I should have jumped in there. I must admit in retrospect, I should have jumped in early on on that lieutenant. I always let my lieutenants operate because I trusted the platoon sergeants. But he was too aggressive. And I kept telling him to-- he wanted to win the Medal of Honor, he told me one time. Well, anyway.

[00:39:12.05] MARK FRANKLIN: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you feel about veterans coming home off the battlefields today?

[00:39:19.38] JOHN HERREN: Well, I think-- again, we were-- the Army, we were sent to do certain missions. And sometimes they don't-- just like in Vietnam-- I think we won every battle in Vietnam. But eventually, we just-- we lost our-- the Congress just lost patience. The American people lost patience just like they did recently with Afghanistan.

[00:39:52.10] And so that's why I say I think Soldiers that are sent out there to do those missions are doing the best they can. And if the mission isn't completed due to other circumstances or they either don't they have the-- they don't have the support they need or they are put in positions sometimes when they're untenable-- I think some of that happened in Afghanistan. There were put in these valleys up the rivers and made it very hard to get into them if they got in trouble. But anyway, I can't be a judge of what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan.

[00:40:41.92] I ended up in a Wounded Warrior Mentor Program at the end of my career. I mean, after I got out. Another classmate of mine from West Point-- well, actually four of us in the beginning. We were over at Walter Reed. And we didn't see anybody. They had a lot of support over there, the wounded, and these are amputees and all.

[00:41:06.82] But we didn't see anybody constantly with them. In other words, a mentor. Because what were they going to do when they get out with two legs missing or an arm and so on? So we organized a program. And it started slowly. And then it built up where we were able to get mentors from all over this area and also down at Fort Belvoir.

[00:41:36.04] And what we would do is interview them, then pick out a mentor, and find out what they wanted to do when they got out. And then if they wanted to improve their education, there are things they can do while they're actually recovering after they get out of the hospital.

And then there's also jobs, what jobs would be out there that they might want. And internships, they have a possibility for internships while they're there.

[00:42:14.46] So what we do, we would match them up with a mentor, usually a retired officer or some active officer or NCO, senior NCO who had been in the area of the field that they were interested in. And that mentor would then follow them throughout their stay in the-- we call them the transition brigades. Now, it's called the recovery brigade. Stay with them on that and help them do some of those things. So it was a really good program. And it's still going on. We've got about 120 mentors that are active.

[00:42:56.15] MARK FRANKLIN: Are you still part of it?

[00:42:57.48] JOHN HERREN: Yeah. No, I just can't do the interviews anymore. My hearing is not good. And so I just retired, so to speak, this year, recently from Walter Reed. I was basically at Walter Reed doing the interviews. I was the interviewer. But it was a good program.

[00:43:19.38] MARK FRANKLIN: What's the name of the program?

[00:43:21.30] JOHN HERREN: Wounded Warrior Mentor Program.

[00:43:22.98] MARK FRANKLIN: Mentor Program.

[00:43:24.84] JOHN HERREN: All volunteer.

[00:43:26.89] MARK FRANKLIN: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[00:43:30.79] JOHN HERREN: Well, I think it-- that's a tough question. [LAUGHS]

[00:43:38.99] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, would you--

[00:43:40.19] JOHN HERREN: I remember it as certainly a time when the Army with the helicopters, it was a new concept. The concept worked. I think, as I said before, I think we won almost every battle. Maybe we didn't win some of the times when there were ambushes and that kind of thing. But we didn't have to deal with IEDs and explosives that they have in Afghanistan and that kind of stuff.

[00:44:10.24] And it was a time when all kinds of support was brought in to help you in Vietnam. And there was-- we had artillery. We had gunships. We had air, all those things. And I think all those things have continued in the Army. The infantry can't fight alone.

[00:44:33.81] Now, in Afghanistan, I think they were fighting a guerrilla, sort of a guerrilla force. And I think the problems there were the-- when you get out into the rural areas where the people out there, they were going to go with whoever. The Taliban were there. And if the Taliban were going to protect them or help feed them and all or whatever, they'd go with the Taliban.

[00:45:01.98] If we were there, I think we got different village chiefs to be helpful to us. But on the other hand, they probably-- a lot of them turned. But I think the whole concept of how you fight a war using helicopters, the air mobile concept was really the result of-- came out of Vietnam and has continued today.

[00:45:28.08] MARK FRANKLIN: Are there any lessons from your experience in Vietnam that you'd like to pass on to future generations?

[00:45:32.97] JOHN HERREN: Well, I think on a political side, I'm probably out of my bounds on this one. But it just seems to me that we were a little hasty getting into Vietnam. I think Ho Chi Minh wanted to work with the Americans. And I think we blew him off with the French. They didn't want to work with him. And so maybe that war could have been prevented.

[00:46:08.93] That, one thing. As far as leadership goes, I think the main thing that I found out was you really have to have good noncommissioned officers. And then they'll lead the way. But they always said I was a good commander.

[00:46:32.74] But I was a good commander because of my NCOs, my noncommissioned officers and the men. The men are going to do what they're told to do if they've got good leadership. It's a really important-- and we had it. We had it in that battalion.

[00:46:55.77] JOHN HERREN: I went back with a group that-- ABC and with Colonel Moore and Sergeant Savage and Colonel Nadal and George Forrest from our company. But we went back in '92.

[00:47:13.99] MARK FRANKLIN: Talk about that, going back to Vietnam.

[00:47:16.47] JOHN HERREN: Well, we went back. Colonel Moore had arranged this, and Joe Galloway. And they had gotten permission from the North Vietnamese to come to Hanoi initially and meet Ho Chi Minh, not Ho Chi Minh, General Giap-- General Giap. And, of course, we went along.

[00:47:36.37] And that was very interesting. Giap took us to a sand table that laid out the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. And he was talking about that. And he said, I was getting ready to attack South Vietnam and-- I'm sorry. I was getting ready to attack Dien Bien Phu for the French war.

[00:48:05.84] And my staff told me, you shouldn't do that. You don't have the firepower to take that fort. That's a pretty fort-- that's a pretty strong fort they built there. And so he backed off. And he then spent the next-- oh, I think the next month he had artillery dragged up, I think, manually.

[00:48:36.68] And maybe they used mules or something or whatever up into the mountains over Dien Bien Phu. And they dug in. They're very good at that kind of stuff. They dug in. And so then they launched their attack. And they had all this artillery. And, of course, they pretty much wiped out Dien Bien Phu.

[00:48:54.05] Now, that was opposed to the next phase when we were withdrawing from Vietnam. And at that time, General Giap said, I think we should attack. Let's go down. Let's attack through towards Pleiku and in the I Corps towards that area. I guess they were going to hit I Corps first, yeah, and then Pleiku maybe later.

[00:49:22.10] And his staff said, well, maybe you better wait a little while. And he said, no, I'm not waiting this time. I think we should go. And they did. And they were successful.

[00:49:37.91] But that was one thing. And then, of course, we went down to the LZ X-ray with the Vietnamese we fought against. And there was one particular company commander-- who had been a company commander. He was now a colonel. And the name was Tuc I think.

[00:50:00.67] And anyway, he was one of the companies that opposed us. And he just said, you guys just didn't want to die. Because they really tried to take us. And he also said that-- he fought in-- he had been wounded eight times not in the Ia Drang, but later on. Because he had fought against the French, fought against us, fought against the Chinese, and then against the Khmer Rouge, all those battles. And he was quite a soldier.

[00:50:39.90] But anyway. So we were down there with them going through the battle. And during the-- ABC was there filming it all. And that became a program. I forgot the name of it. But it was-- that was quite an experience.

[00:50:59.59] MARK FRANKLIN: When you went, did you have any animosity, any kind of anger?

[00:51:03.07] JOHN HERREN: Yeah, I did, sort of. Yeah. Particularly the fact that the North Vietnamese were-- particularly in Albany, which I read about. I wasn't experiencing it when they came through and were killing a lot of our wounded. But Colonel Moore stopped that. When they started talking about that, Colonel Moore cut it off.

[00:51:27.41] He said, no, we're not going to-- we're not going to film this. We're not going to film this conversation. Stop this. Because they were killing some people. But we were also killing some of their wounded. So it went both ways, although I think it was more of them killing our guys. Because they had had a hasty ambush and had pretty much decimated that battalion.