

Lane, Charles US Army

[00:00:12.74] MARC HENDERSON: So when and where were you born?

[00:00:15.02] CHARLES LANE: St. Louis, 1939.

[00:00:17.30] MARC HENDERSON: And your family? Mom, dad, siblings?

[00:00:21.30] CHARLES LANE: Complicated. I was born in St. Louis. My mother-- let me-- no, it gets more complicated. I'm sorry. I was born in St. Louis. I went to Mexico when I was three because my mother had gone to Mexico three years beforehand because her mother had cut her allowance in half. And she couldn't live in a style to which she was accustomed.

[00:00:49.36] So she went to Mexico, where she met the then British naval attache who worked for Ian Fleming. They got married 10 days later. I got-- in St. Louis. I was sent-- I then went to Mexico where I spent the next three years. In 1945, when the war ended, my stepfather, a man called Peter Smithers, who had been the assistant naval attache in Washington during Pearl Harbor, was invited to stand for the House of Commons and so we go

[00:01:19.42] back-- when I'm six, seven I guess, we go back to England. So I go to England when I'm seven and begin boarding school in England, aged seven. He gets elected in the 1947 elections. He becomes MP for Winchester. So that's how I get to England and why I don't sound as though I'm from central casting. Ian Fleming borrowed my mother's typewriter to write Goldfinger. And I have the typewriter today.

[00:01:47.40] MARC HENDERSON: That's awesome. Wow. Any siblings?

[00:01:50.34] CHARLES LANE: Hmm?

[00:01:50.88] MARC HENDERSON: Siblings?

[00:01:53.79] CHARLES LANE: No, not from Charlie Lane, who turns out not to be my father anyway. But that's another story.

[00:02:03.36] MARC HENDERSON: Interesting.

[00:02:06.69] CHARLES LANE: Sir Peter-- I'm sorry-- my stepfather then gets knighted later in life. He becomes secretary general of the Council of Europe, and blah, blah, blah. He had two daughters. So I have two stepsisters, half-sisters, whatever it is.

[00:02:20.05] MARC HENDERSON: Half-sisters. CHARLES LANE: Half-sisters.

[00:02:26.14] CHARLES LANE: I would have-- I wouldn't have gone to kindergarten in St. Louis. I went to community school, then I went to some sort of school in Mexico. And then I went to-- when I age-- whatever school you go to when you're seven, I went to Eastacre in

Winchester, boarding school. And then I went to Lockers Park, which is sort of a prep school, from I guess 9 until 12.

[00:02:57.82] The only famous people to have gone to Lockers Park was Guy Burgess-- the spy- - and Viscount Montgomery, Lord Montgomery of Alamein went to-- I think-- and then Arthur Waley, the Chinese sinologist. The sinologist went to Lockers Park. I was then supposed to go to Harrow, but I failed my common entrance gloriously.

[00:03:24.22] And because I failed common entrance gloriously, I was dispatched to a dead end school in the Swiss Alps where I majored mainly in skiing, which is why I speak French. So I went off to a British school in the Swiss Alps and came back to go to Norwich in the class of '58.

[00:03:42.29] MARC HENDERSON: So how did you come to choose Norwich University?

[00:03:46.80] CHARLES LANE: A, I wanted to join the Army. B, I wanted to ski for the United States. And we went to see the British-- the American military attache in London, who noticed that I wore glasses, who said that I was ineligible to go to West Point. We didn't mention waivers.

[00:04:02.52] And so we then took a map of the snow falls and other universities. If you want to join the Army and you want to ski, you really don't have a hell of a lot of choice. So I went to Norwich. The problem with that was they hadn't told me that it also had trees.

[00:04:16.65] And so when you do 70 miles an hour in Switzerland, you were above the tree line. In Vermont, you're not above the tree line. So I decided I didn't really want to ski that badly for my country. So I ended up in bloody Norwich.

[00:04:29.75] MARC HENDERSON: Nice. Nice. So what do you consider to be your hometown? You were born in St. Louis, had an international upbringing ...

[00:04:41.57] CHARLES LANE: I think London.

[00:04:43.28] MARC HENDERSON: London would be your hometown. And now, you live in Washington DC.

[00:04:47.21] CHARLES LANE: Right. Now it's Washington. The Army brought me to Washington in 1976, and I've had a house here ever since. I think when I went-- when I was still in the Army, when they said home of record, it was London. But I think now-- if we're talking now, clearly, it's Washington.

[00:05:07.60] MARC HENDERSON: And how old were you when you started at Norwich and--

[00:05:12.52] CHARLES LANE: 19.

[00:05:13.06] MARC HENDERSON: --and when you were commissioned?

[00:05:14.99] CHARLES LANE: I was a year older because I had to go to a crammer because I spent too much time skiing. So I went to Norwich when I was 19, and I would have graduated when I was 23.

[00:05:27.71] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. So commissioned at 23?

[00:05:29.71] CHARLES LANE: Right.

[00:05:30.43] MARC HENDERSON: And what branch were you commissioned in the Army?

[00:05:35.14] CHARLES LANE: Medical Service Corps. I applied for the infantry, but they denied me a combat arms commission because of my eyes. But once I-- so they sent me to Alaska. When I did my basic training at Fort Sam Houston as a Medical Service Corps officer, then I ran the medical platoon in the 4th Battle Group, 9th Infantry, Fairbanks, Alaska and taught skiing on Birch Hill, and then applied for a branch transfer to, A, intelligence and, B, infantry. I got neither, at least not then.

[00:06:09.94] MARC HENDERSON: Were you given any reason why they wouldn't branch transfer you? And this would have been in the early '60s, right? What year was this?

[00:06:14.92] CHARLES LANE: This would have been in '60-- I was commissioned in '63. I went to Alaska in '64-- '63. '64, I was in Alaska. First officer into Valdez after the Alaskan earthquake. My medical platoon were the first people airlifted into-- they put me in a Jeep somewhere near Galena and said, Lieutenant, drive to Valdez and call us when we get there.

[00:06:39.42] And I said, why am I doing that? And they said because somebody, Lieutenant, has to check the bridges. And we'll know that they intact if you get there and you call us. Well, I think in those days, lieutenants were somewhat more expendable than lieutenants are today. Anyway.

[00:06:56.66] Oh, I applied for the Intelligence Corps. And I had an interview at Fort Wainwright. There was a warrant officer who interviewed me. And one of the questions was, if we went to war with England would it cause you any problems? And I think I said something to the effect dropping bombs on my parents would be somewhat complicated, but that's why I didn't get into the Intelligence Corps.

[00:07:19.79] And when I applied for the infantry, they sent me-- they'd forgotten how long I was-- they miscalculated how many months I'd been in Alaska. So they gave me a choice of whatever I wanted. I spent three extra months in Alaska. So I asked for Special Forces and a branch transfer.

[00:07:34.80] And when I began my Special Forces training, I was a Medical Service Corps officer as an A team XO. Somewhere during the course, I just branch transferred to the infantry. And instead of sending me to Fort Benning to go to the infantry school, the detachment sent me to the 82nd Airborne, Dominican Republic, to learn how to be an infantryman.

[00:07:54.33] MARC HENDERSON: Interesting.

[00:07:55.68] CHARLES LANE: That's how I became an infantry officer. There was the Special Forces Officers' Course and then the Special Officers' Counterinsurgency Course. There were two courses. It was about a year I spent in the 7th Group going through SF training. I think they now call it the Q course, but I don't think it was then.

[00:08:16.39] MARC HENDERSON: When you went to the Dominican Republic, what year was that? Do you remember?

[00:08:20.86] CHARLES LANE: I'd like to think-- I get my-- I think '66-- '66 I would have gone to Dom Rep. And then I would have spent about eight months in Dom Rep. We were the only company downtown Santo Domingo for four months when I got there. Then they moved us up to San Isidro to the mountain camp.

[00:08:40.32] I was a company exec, B company. I had a disagreement with my company commander and was made the battalion S2 and then got orders to Vietnam.

[00:08:57.82] MARC HENDERSON: What year was the first year you went to-- you were in Vietnam?

[00:09:01.39] CHARLES LANE: '67. Probably June '67, and I was-- sometime between leaving Travis Air Force Base and getting to Vietnam, I made captain. So I landed in Vietnam as a captain. That would have been in '67.

[00:09:19.98] MARC HENDERSON: And did you go over with a unit or did you go over as an individual--

[00:09:24.34] CHARLES LANE: I went over as an individual replacement. I left from Travis, flew in a 707 probably in those days, landed at Tan Son Nhut. Spent a night at-- there was a SF-- we spent a night at Camp Alpha. Then choppered up to Nha Trang.

[00:09:45.24] And I was assigned to the Special Forces company in the Delta as the company adjutant. I spoke French. They needed somebody who could speak French because the Vietnamese LLDB commander, Colonel Dallas' counterpart, was a French speaker. And Colonel Dallas needed a French speaker and so--

[00:10:06.96] MARC HENDERSON: What is LLDB?

[00:10:08.83] CHARLES LANE: It's the Vietnamese equivalent of Special Forces. Vietnamese Special Forces were LLDB. My Vietnamese isn't up to remembering what the LLDB actually stood for. I didn't think much of Camp Alpha. I remember that. It was the first place in the field.

[00:10:30.96] Can Tho, I was-- the D company was in Can Tho in the Delta. And it was really my-- it was my first time in Asia. And it was-- I couldn't use chopsticks. And I learned-- all of a sudden I decided I was going to-- and then because I spoke French, I had entrées.

[00:10:51.75] I had entrées to some of the French colons who lived in Can Tho also, so I was sort of more socially acceptable and sort of on the--

[00:11:02.34] But I don't really remember anything particularly difficult. The company adjutant-- the company S1-- the company XO was a man called Texas Sam Jeffers. I think I lived in terror of Sam Jeffers, but he was-- I worked directly for him, but-- and so I would have spent six months, seven months as a company adjutant, and then I took over an A-Team.

[00:11:30.82] MARC HENDERSON: Do you have any specific memories of run-ins with Tex, with you?

[00:11:39.08] CHARLES LANE: No.

[00:11:41.17] MARC HENDERSON: Why were you afraid of him, since I guess... ?

[00:11:44.15] CHARLES LANE: Well, I think captain-- when I was in the 9th Infantry-- sorry, when I was at the 1st of the 47th-- 1st and 47th Infantry in Fairbanks, Alaska, I was the second lieutenant. And there was the major-- the battalion XO was a major. And he was death on lieutenants. So this was sort of just a continuation of the same.

[00:12:07.98] Sam Jeffers was a good guy. I learned a lot from Sam Jeffers, but that was-- he wasn't a funny person. Memories, yeah, dealing-- we had-- dealing with people getting killed. There were a couple of people who were killed. There was a sergeant who was killed.

[00:12:32.00] You meet people, and you decide that there's no-- that this guy is going to survive, and this guy isn't going to survive. At least that's been my experience. Two people whom-- from one of the A-Teams died who I really didn't think-- I thought were going to-- weren't-- but on the other hand,

[00:12:50.76] there were a couple of-- there was a captain and a sergeant who came in later whom I felt weren't going to make it, and they didn't. And that's sort of-- I find troubling that-- what was it that made me suggest that this guy is going to make it and this guy isn't going to make it? And as the adjutant, I was responsible for doing the letters of condolence and doing the memorials, et cetera, et cetera, and writing awards and decorations.

[00:13:27.23] CHARLES LANE: Well, I would do all the assignments when a new officer or a new sergeant came in, he asked the adjutant-- I'm the S1. I'm the personnel officer, and I have-- Sergeant Hernandez was my admin sergeant. And we did all the administration for the company, for the-- what would be now be a Special Forces battalion, but then it was called a Special Forces company.

[00:13:53.39] So we had an-- Can Tho was the C-Team. And there was an A-Team, the B-Team at Moc Hoa and a B-Team at-- I can't remember where the other B-Team was, Chao Doc. And then each B-Team controlled probably five or six A-Teams.

[00:14:13.64] When I finally went to an A-Team, I went to A-414, which was co-located with B-41 in Moc Hoa, which was actually a pain in the ass because the company-- because the B-Team wasn't co-located with the A-Team. And so when the B-Team commander wanted something to do, he would always just get in his Jeep and drive across the airfield to the A-Team.

[00:14:39.07] MARC HENDERSON: How long before you joined the team?

[00:14:42.47] CHARLES LANE: I think they kept me in Can Tho for about seven months. And then Colonel Dallas-- I mean Major Jeffers decided it was time that I took an A-Team. I got my CIB, my Combat Infantry Badge in the Dominican Republic. I did not wear it in Vietnam.

[00:15:02.24] I did it-- we did it again in Vietnam and pretended that I didn't have one because-- nowadays, you see people wearing the Combat Infantry Badge with a star. And that means they've done Iraq, and they've done Afghanistan, but they get a star. I did Dominican Republic and Vietnam and Cambodia. And we just had the single award. For some reason, we don't-- there's no star on the-- I think it's nuts.

[00:15:36.76] MARC HENDERSON: And so you'd been in country for about seven months. How long was this assignment? Was it a one-year assignment?

[00:15:43.00] CHARLES LANE: It's a one-year assignment.

[00:15:43.81] MARC HENDERSON: And then you joined the A-Team.

[00:15:46.46] CHARLES LANE: I took an A-Team.

[00:15:47.57] MARC HENDERSON: And you were the camp-- team commander, team leader?

[00:15:52.19] CHARLES LANE: I was a team leader, on the Cambodian border. We were-- the main camp was at Moc Hoa. And I had an OP right up on the Cambodian border. You'd get in a 40-- in a plastic assault boat with the 40-horsepower engine, and you'd drive up there, five clicks up to the Cambodian border-- right on the border. And we kept an OP up there on the border.

[00:16:19.70] And then we would run maybe one or two operations a week. The only thing I really didn't like about operations was-- combat-- was getting inserted with a helicopter when the helicopter flares. You're sort of vulnerable, and you hope that nothing is-- I never had-- we never had-- I never went into a hot LZ.

[00:16:42.44] And I think the war in the Delta compared to where it was somewhere else was pretty civilized. I lost people, but not lots. And I didn't lose anybody on-- I didn't lose anybody on either-- on my Special Forces team. There were some Cambodians who were killed. We had ethnic Cambodians. And there were-- we had Cambodian ethnic as CIDG, Civil Irregular Defense Group, who were killed.

[00:17:14.18] None of my-- I don't think I had anybody in my team wounded either during the time I was there. When I came back on my second tour, one of my officers had seen too many

John Wayne movies and was blowing up a mine and didn't walk away quick enough and got evacuated, got wounded, got a Purple Heart. He got a shrapnel in his lung, but he did it to himself.

[00:17:40.38] So I didn't lose-- lost a lot of Thais, but I didn't lose anybody on my team. That's different. Sorry. That's two years ahead.

[00:17:50.60] MARC HENDERSON: Oh, that's OK. That's all right. So speaking about this first tour, what were the living conditions like when you were an adjutant compared with when you were a team leader?

[00:18:05.19] CHARLES LANE: The company in Can Tho, we were at the end of the-- we were at the south end of the airfield, Can Tho airfield, so it was pretty nice. I think it was-- certainly, I had my own sort of bunk and my own sort of-- with a wall around it, and it was OK.

[00:18:32.49] I think I had my-- it was better off in the A-Team. I had more room in the A-Team. And my only really restriction on the A-Team is during-- we took pucker time. After lunch, we took an hour sort of nap, siesta time that only classical music would be played during lunchtime is my only rule. We'd just--

[00:18:52.83] MARC HENDERSON: Was that your rule?

[00:18:54.29] CHARLES LANE: This was my rule, and just one. During lunch time, during that one hour, it's going to be classical music. Sorry, guys. I had one of my team sergeants who was a World War II vet wouldn't go on operations on Thursday because he didn't want to miss Combat! on TV. The armed forces TV showed Combat!, and he wouldn't-- and so on.

[00:19:19.20] I would run-- I'd require-- there were-- we were two officers, Dick Drushal, who lives in North Carolina-- I went back and visited my A-Team a couple of years ago. Drushal thought I was a lunatic for doing so, but anyway. And I would require at one point that an officer be with every-- every time we went out on a sweep, an officer. So it was either Drushal or me.

[00:19:42.51] And I think I finally decided this is dumb. I've got-- I have an E-8 here. I have an E-7. And they're-- they've done more combat time than I have. So we'll begin to spread the wealth around here a little bit. So we didn't go as frequently as we had been beforehand.

[00:19:57.63] Typically, there'd be two-day, three-day sweeps up under the Cambodian border. And you really couldn't-- there, were a couple of instances in which a helicopter would come over blip, blip, blip, blip. And the pilot would get on the radio and say, I think you should know that your three kilometers inside Cambodia. And we'd just turn around and go back out again because it was-- difficult to--

[00:20:23.47] MARC HENDERSON: What about the food?

[00:20:25.59] CHARLES LANE: Well, I think we ate pretty well. There was an officer's club-- well, in Can Tho, we had a-- there was a mess. There was a mess, and we just ate in-- everybody

ate in the mess. And the Special Forces team, we had cooks who came in. And we ate-- I think we ate very well.

[00:20:46.62] With the Thais, you had an option of going to one of the Thai restaurants or the officer's club. And I think we'd generally go to the officer's club. So Moc Hoa is 60 miles from Ho Chi Minh City. And on my birthday, a man turned up on a bicycle with a birthday cake, when my mother had organized from London somehow. How in the hell she got this birthday cake from Saigon to Moc Hoa on a bicycle, I do not know. But that was pretty impressive.

[00:21:20.40] MARC HENDERSON: On the day? And it wasn't late?

[00:21:21.78] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, right.

[00:21:24.55] MARC HENDERSON: Sounds like quite a lady.

[00:21:26.01] CHARLES LANE: [SPEAKS FRENCH], Jesus. CHARLES LANE: Some hilarious, you really feel stupid. And I had to do an extraction, and I had all my people lined up, groups of 10. In come the helicopters to pick everybody up, except for me and my radio operator because we hadn't put ourselves in a group. We had to get on the radio and have them come back and save us. You feel a little bit stupid about this sort of thing.

[00:21:56.11] But I would wake up. You're out on patrol at night on ambushes. And I remember on one occasion, I'm sleeping on one side of the tree, and my radio operator Sergeant Torres was sleeping on the other side of the tree. And when we woke up, and the CIDG had moved about 400 meters and left us, left us sort of all by ourselves on the-- morning, we're sort of lonely, Jesus.

[00:22:26.13] There was one incident, which-- I'm trying to think-- I'm writing up somewhere. We went into a village, and I can't do it anywhere it was. And we didn't take any fire, and the B-Team commander ordered me to burn the village. I questioned whether there was any reason to burn the village because we'd taken no hostile fire. The B-Team commander basically gave me a direct order to burn the village.

[00:22:54.12] I went through my Vietnamese counterpart to see-- because it was a-- when you go out, there were the American counterpart and then the Vietnamese counterpart and then the local troops, to get him to go through his channels to get to the-- speak to the district chief because this didn't make any sense. Ultimately, we burnt the village.

[00:23:13.05] And I remember walking back out of the village, and Sergeant Torres-- I think it was Torres who was my radio operator who said, were there any communists in that village? And I'm reputed to have said, well, if there weren't when we got there, there sure as hell are now. And it was-- I think it's the only real incident that I really feel bad about. And had I been-- I think had I been older, I would have-- I think if I'd been older or more experienced or-- I think I would have-- I wouldn't have done it. But not the way to win a war.

[00:23:49.36] That was the only bad experience-- the memorable experience that I have. And I remember as a young-- going through the Special Forces course, they paired us up. And I paired up with a guy called Dave Devers was my Special Forces buddy. And we were both in our 20s.

[00:24:15.54] And Dave-- it was all who was going to get to Vietnam first, Rah, rah. Anyway, he gets to Vietnam before I get to Vietnam because I go to the Dominican Republic. By the time I get to Vietnam, he's dead. He gets chopped up in a-- he was with the 1st Cav and got chopped up in a-- I mean literally chopped up in an ambush. And that sort of comes home to roost when people you know--

[00:24:40.08] When I was at State, every now and again I would go out to the Vietnam Wall and visit. The one person I really visited was Dave Devers because we were together for a year and a half going through Special Forces school. And you just wonder why him and why not me. He'd actually been to the infantry school. I was an OJT.

[00:25:03.03] MARC HENDERSON: So what about other interactions on that first tour with members of other services, like Marines or Airmen?

[00:25:10.80] CHARLES LANE: Special Forces had our own air company. And I would get resupplied probably once or twice a week. They would fly from Nha Trang. They were flying Caribous-- C6, C7, whatever the Caribou is.

[00:25:23.70] And then somebody decided that all multi-engineer planes had to be given to the Air Force. So they gave all the bloody things to the Air Force. And we never saw another one again because the Air Force decided the airfield was too short, and they couldn't-- so that was the end of our resupply mission on a continuing basis anyway.

[00:25:41.40] And then there was a guy called Ben Cates, another captain. And I reckoned I needed to do an aerial tour of my AO. And he flew a Bird Dog, an O-1 Bird Dog. Stupidly, I suggested that he take me up for an aerial view of my-- and he instead of-- the Bird Dogs were supposed to carry two smoke rockets under the wings. He carried 14 rockets, and they were high explosives under--

[00:26:09.57] He thought he was a fighter. And we took the entire airfield to take off. And I've never been so sick in my life. I did one tour with Ben Cates, never again. It just scared the bejesus out of me.

[00:26:23.19] MARC HENDERSON: Fair enough. He was an Army Bird Dog pilot or Air Force Bird Dog pilot?

[00:26:27.24] CHARLES LANE: Army. We never saw the zoomies.

[00:26:31.17] MARC HENDERSON: What about recreation? When you were an adjutant or when you were with that first A-Team, what did you guys do for fun?

[00:26:40.50] CHARLES LANE: There was a-- God, we were naive maybe coming from the British school system. There was placed somewhere in Can Tho called the Green Door. And I used to go and play the piano in the Green Door. And I couldn't understand why there were so many cute girls in the Green Door until one of the special forces people explained to me it was more than simply a place to go and play the piano, but I didn't know this at the time.

[00:27:03.22] MARC HENDERSON: Fair enough.

[00:27:04.56] CHARLES LANE: That was my recreation. I played Mozart or something like that.

[00:27:08.19] MARC HENDERSON: What did your Soldiers do for fun?

[00:27:10.59] CHARLES LANE: Well, as an adjutant I didn't have any. And we played soccer, football soccer. And it was sort of-- I liked to get my people in play because it was useful because we bleed just the way they bleed. And some of these Cambodians-- I remember playing soccer in-- well, I could speak French, and so a lot of the Cambodians spoke French.

[00:27:34.10] And it was a very good way to sort of bring ourselves down to the same level as the Cambodians. And there was one Cambodian got barged and went headfirst into a concrete wall and didn't affect him at all. Just got up and-- geez, I-- really tough head.

[00:27:54.79] And then we had R&R. I think I went to Bangkok. I met my German girlfriend in Bangkok. And she was a stewardess.

[00:28:05.46] MARC HENDERSON: And how long was your R&R?

[00:28:07.30] CHARLES LANE: A week.

[00:28:08.26] MARC HENDERSON: One week. Did that include the travel to get there and back?

[00:28:12.76] CHARLES LANE: I think I that included the travel, yeah. I think we got one R&R. And then when I was in the second tour, I did Japan for a week. CHARLES LANE: I liked-- I liked Asia. All of a sudden, I mean-- I hadn't really been to Asia before, but it opened my eyes. I liked Asia.

[00:28:39.07] It's interesting because it isn't until much later in life that I really began-- I have my schoolmates, et cetera, et cetera, but I don't remember having close relationships with any of my Vietnamese counterparts. When I went as an adviser to a Thai infantry regiment between my two Vietnam tours, I still correspond with people in the regiment I was assigned to and Thais who were in Vietnam.

[00:29:15.04] And that's I think when I began establishing friendships, but I didn't-- on neither of my Vietnam tours did I establish a meaningful friendship, a lasting-- I'll tell you, that's not true. Because when I left my Special Forces tour, the local village chief gave me a Kalashnikov-- To

Captain Denny Lane, blah, blah, blah-- which when I was in Special Ops low intensity conflict, I gave to the assistant secretary to put on his wall because he needed something because nobody had shot at him. And I guess he still has it.

[00:29:55.16] And I'm sort of annoyed because I'd like to have it back from Captain Munn. And I remember Captain Munn saying, when you go, you'll be going home next week, just remember this is-- we're still here, and we-- this is our-- this war is now in our 10th year.

[00:30:13.82] The things the things that I learned about it I think come later-- that I have friends from Cambodia, I have friends from Thailand, and I have friends from Laos. But I didn't come-- and I didn't really establish friendship in Viet--

[00:30:37.21] And I think the reason was that there were really very few people with whom-- we lived in a Special Forces camp. We had no access to the vil-- we could go to the village, but we didn't go to the village. So there was really nobody to build this contact with. That comes later.

[00:31:03.88] MARC HENDERSON: When you left, when your year was up, now it's 1968--

[00:31:08.24] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, I got a one-month drop, one-month or two-month drop because they gave me credit for eight months in Santo Domingo beforehand. So I think I got out two months early. So I had my A-Team for probably three months.

[00:31:25.63] MARC HENDERSON: OK. So what month and year do you think you left there? Was it before Tet or after Tet?

[00:31:32.49] CHARLES LANE: I missed Tet. I was elsewhere for Tet. And I guess Moc Hoa-- well, the A-Team in Moc Hoa really wasn't affected-- impacted too much by Tet because it was right on at the end of the airfield. It was sort of built up. It was the highest-- on a little hill. It was built-- it was a French Fort. It had been a French fortification.

[00:31:52.90] When I went back three years ago, they'd torn down the French fort. You couldn't tell that the Americans were ever there. And the bridge I blew up by mistake had been repaired. I'm sorry.

[00:32:07.22] MARC HENDERSON: Tell us about that, blowing up the bridge by mistake.

[00:32:08.02] CHARLES LANE: Oh, yeah, sorry. Then there was the bridge that got blown up by mistake. So in order to get-- in order to get up-- we had these plastic assault boats with 40-horsepower engines. And that's how you got up to the OP because we could bring them in under a bridge and right into the camp on the back of the camp on the river.

[00:32:26.52] And it was getting silt under the bridge. And it was getting difficult to get the outboard-- the boats in and out. So I decided what we needed to do was to blow the-- get-- deepen the channel. And we had 40-pound shaped charges, which I put under the bridge and sent somebody to stop traffic this way and somebody to stop traffic that way. Blew the-- and I hadn't-

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[00:32:57.03] I guess I hadn't done the adequate-- there is, sort of, like force, it goes up, it goes down. And so yes, we made the channel deeper, but it blew the bridge all to Hulda. There were pieces of PSP 150 feet in the air. Fortunately, the bridge didn't go anywhere. So that wasn't-- it went into Indian country, so I didn't-- it isn't so I'd caused irreparable damage. But I noticed that when I came back three years ago, they had fixed the bridge. And now it went somewhere.

[00:33:28.85] HENDERSON: But it deepened the channel though, right?

[00:33:30.93] CHARLES LANE: You're bloody right it deepened the channels.

[00:33:32.37] [LAUGHTER]

[00:33:35.52] CHARLES LANE: And then they brought the airboats into Moc Hoa then. You really wonder. So they decided the swamp buggies with airplane engines on the back and--

[00:33:45.22] MARC HENDERSON: Like in Louisiana, in the bayou?

[00:33:46.20] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, yeah, some bright soul decided we needed-- with no armor whatsoever, .30 cal in the front. Captain Anspach and Sergeant-- were killed in a-- they were dutifully killed driving a swamp buggy with no armor. They charged a .50 cal and-- a .52 cal. That was after I left. But they moved them into Moc Hoa.

[00:34:15.45] MARC HENDERSON: And it was your team that was operating the airboats? Or who operated the airboats?

[00:34:19.59] CHARLES LANE: I think they organized a supplemental team, but I think they based them in Moc Hoa. They were beginning to bring them in when I left.

[00:34:29.10] MARC HENDERSON: For the Special Forces.

[00:34:30.39] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, some bright soul decided that's what we needed to do. Really dumb. Oh, and we had-- I'm sorry, we had two Special Forces, two other A-Teams around in B41, Nick Vay and George Marecek. And they used to talk to each other in Russian because Nick Vay-- one was a Pole and one was a Czech, I think. And that really excited the SIGINT people that we-- all of a sudden you had these communications going on in the Mekong Delta in Russian, but they were basically two Americans.

[00:35:10.47] Marecek-- fairly colorful past, but we'll leave Marecek alone. And then Cincotti burnt-- he was A412-- burnt his camp down. I mean, sorry.

[00:35:25.59] MARC HENDERSON: Would you like to tell that story?

[00:35:27.09] CHARLES LANE: I don't really know what happened. All I know is that Joe Cincotti burned his camp down, and I don't really what happened.

[00:35:34.41] MARC HENDERSON: Any fallout for you for your team because of it?

[00:35:37.41] CHARLES LANE: No, I think I was still the adjutant when this happened. And I don't know what happened. Well, good.

[00:35:45.24] MARC HENDERSON: Sure.

[00:35:47.79] CHARLES LANE: And I didn't-- I didn't ambush-- somehow somebody told me that we didn't ambu-- it was about five clicks from the base camp up to the OP on the Cambodian border. There was a tacit agreement, and I don't know why, the tacit agreement that I didn't ambush the river and they didn't ambush the river.

[00:36:13.95] There was sort of an understanding between-- that we wouldn't muck with it because they needed it to get to Cambodia, and I needed it to get to my OP. And it was sort of-- I remember going up once to the OP and there was nothing. There was no cattle, no birds, no nothing. Turned around and went back in.

[00:36:34.53] MARC HENDERSON: Was there a formal conversation to decide that or just a--

[00:36:37.92] CHARLES LANE: I don't know. No.

[00:36:39.10] MARC HENDERSON: --province chief thing? Or how do you imagine--

[00:36:42.29] CHARLES LANE: And I'm trying to think of how I learned about this. And it's interesting because then when I-- in a later incarnation when I'm following the Thai insurgency, the Thai-deployed field officers have authority to have a dialogue with the Communist Party of Thailand counterparts, which we couldn't do, obviously.

[00:37:07.86] And it sort of came home to roost that the Thais could get away with doing that, that if you were an insurgent and the government guys could talk to you, and if when you were-- when you both got fed up, you can have a conversation, and it was sort of interesting. But it's a different story.

[00:37:25.35] MARC HENDERSON: Sure. So let's talk about Thailand. So your next tour, after Vietnam, you left your first tour and did you go directly to Thailand?

[00:37:34.68] CHARLES LANE: No, I went to the 5th Mech as a brigade S3 working for a colonel who became a three star called Kreiser, who spoke Kentucky, and I spoke English, and we didn't understand one another. Fortunately, Colonel McCollum, who was lieutenant colonel was the XO, spoke both English and Kentucky. And it was rather awkward being the S3 and not being able to understand a word that the command colonel said, and the colonel couldn't understand a word that I said. It was really ridiculous. And he'd play hillbilly music in his-- Jesus.

[00:38:12.00] But Colonel McCollum spoke English. Fortunately, I was only there for six months. Flew us into Washington. They flew us into Washington because of the riots in Washington, and we all arrived at-- they flew us into Baltimore-Washington and then they put us

up at Fort Meade. And we convoyed to Fort Meade, and we all had to wear civilian clothes. We all had Samsonite attaché cases and spit shined shoes and short haircuts, et cetera, et cetera.

[00:38:37.57] And we got arrested going to-- we got pulled over by the state police because we were going less than 40 miles an hour on the Baltimore-Washington Parkway. Then I guess we did a reconnaissance in Washington. Then we got back in our airplanes and flew back to the 5th Mech, Fort Carson. I don't think we were ever deployed.

[00:38:57.36] And then I came to language school, and I lived up on DuPont Circle. I was there for the assassination of Martin Luther King and for the assassination of Robert Kennedy. And the only way I could get out was to wear my 82nd Airborne uniform, pretend I was part of the peacekeeping force--

[00:39:15.96] So I did six months language course and then went to Thailand. And I took flying lessons.

[00:39:22.53] MARC HENDERSON: And which language?

[00:39:23.61] CHARLES LANE: Thai.

[00:39:24.11] MARC HENDERSON: Thai. And flying lessons, did you ever get a chance to fly?

[00:39:29.75] CHARLES LANE: Yeah. Oh, no, no. Well, I got a private pilot's license. And I didn't fly one hour since then. We used to fly out of National in a Cessna. Sort of exciting.

[00:39:41.39] MARC HENDERSON: Wow, busy.

[00:39:43.70] CHARLES LANE: Well, if you're in a Cessna, it's sort of exciting. I mean, National is very different. We're talking 1967, '68 at this point.

[00:39:55.31] MARC HENDERSON: Just one terminal then.

[00:39:56.60] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, no, there was just one terminal, yeah.

[00:40:02.30] MARC HENDERSON: And so then your time in Thailand, when did you arrive in Thailand?

[00:40:08.12] CHARLES LANE: June '68, I guess it is, at this-- yeah, '68.

[00:40:16.70] MARC HENDERSON: After language school.

[00:40:17.66] CHARLES LANE: Right, after language school. And I was assigned to the 31st Infantry Regiment, which was in Lopburi, which is about 100 miles, 100 kilometers, north of Bangkok. It was also the artillery center, and then there was a military hospital, the Anandamahidol Hospital.

[00:40:32.30] I was the adviser. I was a captain. The regimental commander was a senior colonel, which is a brigadier. He had never had a captain as an adviser, and I was also the adviser to a military hospital. What an infantry captain is supposed to tell the doctor who's running a hospital I have absolutely no idea. But I was the adviser to the Anandamahidol Hospital and the 31st regiment. One of the best assignments I ever had, a great assignment.

[00:41:00.86] We had to do-- the intel people wanted to know who was in our regiment, and who our people were. And I would talk to my-- my counterpart was a man called Sitichai Isarayun Ayutthaya who didn't like Americans. And he wasn't quite sure what to do with-- we got on like a house on fire, but he would correct my spelling.

[00:41:24.95] He was dating one of the doctors at the hospital. He dated, I guess they dated-- they were holding hands for 15 years before they got married. Then he died in the parking lot of Don Mueang Airport. I happened to be in Bangkok for the funeral, just a coincidence.

[00:41:44.33] Colonel Utisan had never had a captain as an adviser before, and I sort of apologized for being a captain at the time, so it's not my fault what I'm at. And he said-- he was really very good about this. He made me his IG. I had basically the run of the regiment, and I would report things I saw that I thought could be done better directly to Utisan.

[00:42:11.51] And then Utisan gets orders to Vietnam to command a regiment in Vietnam, one of the Thai regiments in Vietnam, and says, I'm taking you with me as my adviser. And I said, no, no, no. I've already been to Vietnam. I'm not-- this was hairy enough the first time. I don't think I want to do it the second time. He said, no, no, no. You come as my adviser. And I pointed out to him that I'm in the American Army. He's in the Thai Army.

[00:42:34.52] It turns out that he calls JUSMAG and I get assigned. They take my-- I thought I was going to Project 404 Laos because I spoke French. Anyway, I end up in Vietnam again six months before he gets there as the adviser to the 2nd Regiment of the Thai infantry. And then he comes in as my regimental commander again.

[00:42:57.05] We were manufacturing-- we used to go up to the Takhli Air Force Base where they had a salvage yard. And the regiment-- we were making Viet Cong flags and things of this nature. And then we were flogging them to the Air Force who thought those relics from the Vietnam War, and trading them for bookcases and things out of the salvage yard.

[00:43:18.08] And we organized football matches between-- oh, yes, and then we had JUSMAG challenged-- no, the Thai military challenged JUSMAG to soccer in front of the king, which they gave a sort of translucent-- the Americans translucent white shorts, pink socks, that sort of thing. And we beat them, mainly because I'd been to the-- I was playing soccer for the British Army.

[00:43:44.21] The British Army had a signal company there, and we borrowed four corporals from the British Army, put them in American uniforms. And we-- nobody practiced-- the guy who was supposed to get the medal from the king didn't practice because he knew we were going to lose, and we won, and I still have my plaque from the king. We cleaned their clock. Three, zip.

[00:44:08.93] The team was called the Milwaukee Cougars. I have no idea why it was called the Milwaukee-- and I got recruited because I had the right accent.

[00:44:18.54] MARC HENDERSON: Because you knew how to play soccer.

[00:44:19.79] CHARLES LANE: And I knew how to play soccer. And it was some colonel who I was trying to substitute him. And he said, no, captain. I'm staying. I said, yes, sir.

[00:44:30.41] MARC HENDERSON: So you-- you ended up back in Vietnam directly from this tour.

[00:44:35.72] CHARLES LANE: Directly from-- I flew directly-- I don't even remember if I got any home leave or not. I think I went straight from Bangkok straight into Vietnam.

[00:44:50.30] MARC HENDERSON: And was this still 1968 or now 1969?

[00:44:54.65] CHARLES LANE: '69, '69 because I'm with the Thai '69, '70.

[00:44:59.90] MARC HENDERSON: And where did you report to in '69 when you got there?

[00:45:06.23] CHARLES LANE: Well, I knew I was going to the Thais, but I think I got to spend the gorgeous night at Camp Alpha again. And then I got-- oh, it turned out that the senior adviser to the Thai division-- there was a two regimental Thai division-- was a guy called Middlestat, and I'd known him vaguely in Bangkok. He was a Thai speaker. And that's why-- a drive, it's 30 kilometers from Saigon down to Bearcat. So the next day I just drove down there.

[00:45:39.89] I was the adviser to Special Colonel Arun Tawatta Singh, who subsequently got himself shot in a coup in Bangkok a year or so later, and he was one of the favorites of the king, of the queen. Couldn't read a map. Nice guy. But had a chief of staff who was superb, who was killed the day after I-- when we did ambushes and things like that, it would be me and the chief of staff, the regimental chief of staff, a lieutenant colonel. I arrived as a captain. I got promoted to major when I was in the field there.

[00:46:18.89] I didn't know-- he was-- we did ambush-- when he went out on ambush, and I'd go with him on the ambushes. And he was-- the day after I left to go rotate to Fort Benning, he went on an ambush and was killed. I've always wondered, there but for the grace of God go I, sort of exercise. And he was the highest ranking Thai officer killed in the Vietnam conflict. Super guy.

[00:46:44.41] MARC HENDERSON: And what unit was that?

[00:46:46.85] CHARLES LANE: It was called the Black Panther-- Black-- well, it was initially called the Black P-- I have a flag from the Black Panthers, which the Thais then renamed the Black Tigers because it really wasn't appropriate to be called the Black Panthers.

[00:46:59.24] MARC HENDERSON: In the late '60s.

[00:47:00.08] CHARLES LANE: In the late '60s. And I still have a flag on my wall which was Black Panther, which I showed to my African-American friends here.

[00:47:14.21] MARC HENDERSON: What did you think of the Thai servicemen?

[00:47:17.54] CHARLES LANE: I thought they were really good. They were disciplined. They did-- well, I think the XO, both regimental XOs-- Tiep came before the one who was killed. Tiep ran the best PSYOP operations I've ever seen in any Army. And then he ends up as a three star in the Thai-- four star in the Thai Army running one of the-- Third Army district Tiep Cheranaloon. I thought he was superb. I learned a lot from the Thais of how to operate in a counterinsurgency. They were very, very good.

[00:48:08.54] At one point, somebody decided that they wanted to-- they brought the 5th Mech down to show us how it was done. And these guys were stoned. They kept falling off their tracks, et cetera, et cetera. They weren't going to show the Thais how to do anything.

[00:48:25.92] I had an advisory team, and I was a captain-- major and they were-- I gave the photograph to your people. I had a team of-- I had three battalions, and I had three advisers who worked for me. All three were sergeants. I think the Thais thought they were commissioned officers, and we didn't let anybody know that they weren't commissioned officers.

[00:48:48.53] One was Griffith, Tommy Yokum, and Sergeant McKinney. Sergeant McKinney had been the middle heavyweight boxing champion for 82nd Airborne. He used to call Yokum white trash, and I won't say what Yokum used to call him. But they got on like a house on fire. It was a real eye opener. They were really-- it was a great, great team of fine people.

[00:49:15.80] I think nobody knew what to do with them. They ended up sort of sent sent to Bearcat. I inherited-- oh, and then there was a guy called Dyson who was a Norwich graduate. I had Dyson. So there was me as a major, Dyson as a captain, and three sergeants.

[00:49:33.71] And then Dyson got reassigned somewhere else, I think went home, et cetera, et cetera, and then was replaced by another captain who-- the one who was trying to fix a booby trap and put a hand grenade next to it and casually walked away and got a piece of shrapnel in his lung. I can't remember his name. My only-- but he sort of did it to himself. Wasn't my fault.

[00:49:59.99] In May of '69, I get a telephone call from II Field Force, and they say, do you have a Major Denny Lane, Captain Charles Lane assigned to you who speaks French? And they say, yes. They said, have him outside in 25 minutes, no name tags, no rank, no-- neutral uniform. And I got a call that said take off my name tag, rank, and so on. So I go up there.

[00:50:39.92] Helicopter comes in. They throw out a chaplain to put me in. You know this is serious. There's a G2 from II Field Force with some maps of Cambodia. And I say, where am I going? And he says, you're going to a place called Go Dau Ha. We're contemplating an incursion into Cambodia. And there is concern, we don't know what the Cambodians and the Vietnamese are saying to each other.

[00:51:08.28] And so your job, Captain-- Major, sorry-- your job, Major but with no rank, is to go to Go Dau Ha and we take this PRC-77 radio and these earphones and this five-ton truck with a bloody great white star on it. So why did I have to take off my name tag and my rank, et cetera? You're going to give me this five-ton truck.

[00:51:27.02] And my mission was to monitor clear text French from Cambodia and from Phnom Penh to Saigon. And I sat there for two weeks with the earphones on and a notebook transcribing clear text French. And I gave-- he's making-- these the copies of notes, which you're doing.

[00:51:44.73] Sort of interesting under what conditions will you Vietnamese people intervene in our war of national liberation against-- [MUTTERING]. And then people began showing up on the border, and they all want copies of everything that I'm-- but I'm working for II Field Force, so I said, I'm sorry, but I take them to the RATT rig, and the RATT rig sends them to somebody. God only knows who.

[00:52:05.12] Oh, and then-- and this becomes-- later becomes interesting. Sean Flynn and Dana Stone, Sean Flynn was Errol Flynn's son and Dana Stone was a journalist. They found their bodies in Cambodia. Anyway, I'm not supposed to break cover. I'm sitting in one of the rooms of this place.

[00:52:36.11] The Vietnamese captain comes and says, there are a couple of motorcyclists out here. Would you come and tell them to go away? So I come down, and I swear that it's Dana Stone and Sean Flynn. And they want to go through the Go Dau Ha station and go to Phnom Penh.

[00:52:55.85] And I say, I don't think it's a very good idea because we don't really know where the Khmer Rouge are. And so, if you really wanted to do this, I would go back to Saigon and fly to Phnom Penh and go the other way, which is what they did. And they haven't been seen since.

[00:53:11.51] Now, the problem with all this is that there's been this-- people are trying to figure out when they left Vietnam, when they left Cambodia. And they are not in my notebooks. And I swore, because when I was doing the yellow rain collection, later in Thailand, '80s, the doctor who was involved in collecting yellow rain samples, chemical warfare samples, knew Dana Stone. And I told him I had these two notebooks which documented that.

[00:53:44.63] And when I got back home and I looked at my notebooks, there's a blank-- I swear it happened. I don't think I put them in it because my notebooks-- I was sort of on their side, and I didn't-- I felt that, if I had it in the notebook, then I'd have to report it, but I felt that this way I didn't have to report it.

[00:54:02.21] But the timing doesn't work. But I am absolutely convinced I saw them. And it remains un-- anyway, they pulled-- so I do this, and they-- so one night they pulled me off-- they pulled my team out. There were basically three of us, a Jeep driver, the RATT rig operator, and myself. They pulled us off because I guess they had SIGINT that the PAVN or somebody was going to hit the border station that night.

[00:54:37.73] So they pulled us off and we went back to Go Dau Ha for the night, drove back the next morning. And in the process of driving back the next morning, my driver is wounded because they had, in fact, tried to overrun the border station. And they blew the hell out of the room in which we had been working.

[00:54:58.76] And then, again, there are things that I think I remember. The guy I was assigned to was a lieutenant colonel at II Field Force, said they wanted to put me in for a decoration. And I said, that's very nice, but you should know that I wasn't there. You pulled me off the border. So that was my only opportunity to get a Silver Star, but I noted that it was difficult to get a Silver Star if you're not there. And so that's why I don't have a Silver Star. Six Bronze-- I said, can I trade a Bronze Star for that? No.

[00:55:34.19] But that was sort of interesting. And then I go back to the Thais for about three weeks. And then I get called up again and to go to-- I'm assigned to II Field Force because a Cambodian delegation has arrived. And we do the incursion of Cambodia.

[00:55:50.83] A Cambodian lieutenant colonel shows up called Tumyung and about five Cambodians. And he's a Cambodian liaison to the 1st Cav during the incursion into Cambodia. And I'm the liaison to the Cambodians, et cetera, et cetera. And I get sent back up there again.

[00:56:11.24] We start flying the commanding general's helicopter-- not a great pilot. He finally flew into a wall, into a mountain. But that's another story.

[00:56:22.01] MARC HENDERSON: The Cambodian commanding general?

[00:56:23.50] CHARLES LANE: No, no, this was the American commanding general, the 1st Cav, 1st Cav. And I was, again, the French language officer. And then at one point-- so we go in and we were sort of thrashing around Cambodia and I'm attached to II Field Force with this gaggle of Cambodians. I don't really remember them.

[00:56:39.68] Then an American helicopter crashes in one of the villages, Bavet One, Bavet Two. And it turns out I know the pilot. I can't remember his name, but I used-- in fact, I used to wear his-- because I'd met him when they sent that gaggle down to work with the Thais.

[00:56:59.63] So we put a coordinate search right into that village, bingo. And again, because I'm the French speaker, I say to the village chief, so where the American helicopter? And they say, oh, it's in Bavet One. And I say, but this is Bavet One. They said, no, no, no. You must have the American map because Bavet one is five kilometers away.

[00:57:17.69] And when they printed the-- when DMA copied the French maps, I guess they inverted the two. And so we put a coordinate search into the wrong village, and he's still missing.

[00:57:33.23] CHARLES LANE: So I leave Vietnam, and they finally send me to the infantry school. So I finally get to go to infan-- to Fort Benning.

[00:57:40.43] MARC HENDERSON: What was it like going home in 1970?

[00:57:44.66] CHARLES LANE: Oh, well, first I go to-- [CHUCKLES] first, I go to visit my parents who, of course, are living in palatial splendor on Lago Lugano, Switzerland where they're building a rather extensive house for several million dollars in Euro. And it never dawned on me that the rest of the United States Army wasn't spending the summer at Lago Lugano slurping it up.

[00:58:06.54] So I come out of Cambodia and back to palatial living, et cetera. Then I go to Fort Benning. I'm still a bachelor. I'm not married. I have a Thai girlfriend, but I'm not married yet. And I arrive at Fort Benning, and I look around. There are of 13 majors, and I am clearly not the oldest major because what you don't want to be is the class leader. Guess what? I had date of rank, so I became the class leader. So I spent a year going to the infantry school.

[00:58:39.59] MARC HENDERSON: After you already had a CIB.

[00:58:42.65] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, yeah, well, but a career Army officer, I mean, we were majors and captains going to the career course.

[00:58:48.98] MARC HENDERSON: OK, got it.

[00:58:49.67] CHARLES LANE: So it was a standard course, but I was the class leader. Sort of uneventful year. I lost a kidney playing soccer for the United States, but that's not the story. Anyway, so then I had to go to grad school. And I wanted to do Chinese. I wanted to go back to the Far East.

[00:59:16.07] So I flew up to St. Louis, Missouri, Washington University, and went to see the Chinese department, who it turned out my grandmother knew the head of the Chinese department. I said, I'd like to do an MA in Chinese, but I'm terrified of taking the Graduate Record Exam. And he said, we'll waive that for you because we need people who've been on the field, on the ground. And so don't worry about the GRE. Thank god.

[00:59:43.19] So I did a year-- I did 18 months at St. Louis doing intensive Chinese. And when I finished my Chinese, I was supposed to go to Monterey as the 2IC of the language school. But turns out, we needed French speakers to go to Cambodia. And so they called me up and said, Major Lane, instead of sending you to Taiwan or the language school, how about going to Cambodia? But you have to volunteer. So I volunteered.

[01:00:16.07] And I was the adjutant again. So I go to my--

[01:00:21.11] MARC HENDERSON: For which unit?

[01:00:22.77] CHARLES LANE: It was a military equipment delivery team Phnom Penh. I worked for Major General-- well, then Brigadier General John R.D. Cleland. And I arrive and I'm wearing John Lennon glasses, round hippie glasses. And Cleland says, you, back on the airplane. Go get proper military spectacles. And I say, but this is what General Stilwell wore. And he said, don't give me that shit, Dennis. Go back to Bangkok and get a proper pair of spectacles. So I-- back to Bang--

[01:00:55.16] By this time I was married. So then I snuck my wife in, and somebody rat-finked on me because she was Thai. And you can't tell the Thai from a Cambodian from, at least-- but somebody told General Cleland. And where is your wife? Even as we speak, sir? He said, yes, yes. Well, she's actually here. He said, good, Dennis. Bring her to lunch and then you can put her on the 4 o'clock airplane back to Bangkok. So I took her to lunch and sent her back to Bangkok on the 4 o'clock airplane.

[01:01:29.57] We had a guy come in to Cambodia, a seaman, turned up in the embassy who was dying of everything. I mean, he was on his last legs. But he was an ex-servicemen and I reckoned he deserved to die in an Army hospital, in an Air Force hospital. So I had I put him on an evacuation airplane to Sattahip. And he died in the hospital in Sattahip.

[01:01:57.23] So this guy arrives in Sattahip, and the commanding general of the hospital said, who is this civilian who's dying of everything? And then calls the general to complain. And the general calls me in, and says, Dennis, what-- I said, sir, he was a veteran. He deserves to die in a military hospital. And he said, but you didn't ask me. I said, true. Could you have given me permission? And he said, no, but don't do it again.

[01:02:27.38] Cleland was a good guy. I disagreed with his politics. He kept Cambodia alive for an extra year. But if John Cleland called me up and said, Dennis, come and work for me. I'd-- he died last year. Great guy. I hated him, but that was what leadership was all about.

[01:02:48.56] MARC HENDERSON: Are there any other leaders that you learned from, for good or bad?

[01:02:57.01] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, there are lots of-- I go back to Thailand as an Army attaché, so there are lots of Thais. Couple-- I mean, to really be-- there was a couple from Norwich, a guy called Don Bradberry, two sergeants, et cetera, et cetera. Nobody really from Vietnam.

[01:03:21.65] It was a different-- it was-- I mean, there were-- it was a different relationship, I guess because there was a war on.

[01:03:32.51] MARC HENDERSON: Can you think of any specific instances where you, looking back, you learned a leadership lesson?

[01:03:41.78] CHARLES LANE: Oh, the Thais knew how to do what do you call it? Not peacekeeping, civil affairs. Really impressive. Their civil affairs officers were superb.

[01:03:58.29] MARC HENDERSON: What did they do differently?

[01:04:00.06] CHARLES LANE: Well, I never did it with-- they had the ear of the people. The Thais, when they deployed, they deployed battalions around. Really, really did work on a local level. But I guess it's Asian to Asian, and they weren't as alien as we were.

[01:04:27.50] CHARLES LANE: Whatever was happening in America, I don't think we-- the protests, et cetera. I don't think we really focused on. We were too busy running operations and trying to stay alive, and et cetera, et cetera. I don't think that was an issue. I mean, I would write my parents twice a month, et cetera, or write my grandmother some-- then we'd receive letters through the-- mail was pretty good.

[01:04:58.04] I didn't really get-- but part of the problem is I didn't really have a connection with America anyway because my parents were living in Europe, and I didn't really know anybody in America. So I'm sort of off in my own world.

[01:05:15.50] MARC HENDERSON: Now, you mentioned having a TV. Was that common to have a TV?

[01:05:21.80] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, I think-- yeah, and it was military-- there was a movie on, you see late night, a guy who--

[01:05:36.09] MARC HENDERSON: Good Morning, Vietnam.

[01:05:36.98] CHARLES LANE: Good Morning, Vietnam. That really, really existed. And I don't remember him specifically, but it was part of the armed forces network. And I think that the C-Team had flicks, movies once a week. I think we had movies too. 35 millimeter-- big, big-- and we had a projector and we'd show them. And I can't remember. I don't remember what, but we showed them to the Cambodians. We'd all sit out and watch the flicks.

[01:06:16.82] MARC HENDERSON: When you were speaking of your time in Cambodia, what time frame was that? That was still before 1975, right?

[01:06:25.07] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, I would have got to Phnom Penh in '73, in '73, and I had left in-- I did a 15-month tour. So it would still be-- I would have left in the summer of '74 before the evac. We were surrounded by the Khmer Rouge. But the evacuation was in '75. I missed the evacuation. Go to work at 6:00 in the morning and come home at 11 o'clock at night. It was fairly arduous duty.

[01:07:09.05] Spent New Year's Eve '74 going through the morgue looking for a Brit working for Fennell, who had been sitting in a bar, and some Cambodian came in, emptied his .45 and shot one ear out the other ear. Guy had been a Battle of Britain pilot, was taken to a morgue. Which morgue? We don't know. I am the French speaker, so I get to go to the morgues and going in and shifting bodies until I find the right guy. And we--

[01:07:41.99] We have a-- a warrant officer is driving his Jeep home, gets hit by a five-ton truck. Because I'm the adjutant, I get sent out to find the Jeep. And upside down, I can't find the warrant officer. Some Cambodian kid comes, takes me by the hand, leads me into this building up to the third floor. There's a Frenchman in sort of shorts in an operating room putting my warrant officer back together again.

[01:08:07.82] He turns out to be a man called Paul Grauvin, and Grauvin was a French military surgeon who was in Hanoi. And the surgeon at Dien Bien Phu had a hot date and called Grauvin, who was a homosexual, and said, Paul would you spell me for the night because I have this hot date in Hanoi.

[01:08:35.60] So Grauvin flies in. The other guy gets on the airplane. In comes Grauvin. Out goes the other guy. That's the last airplane out of-- and so Grauvin becomes the hero of Dien Bien Phu. He's the guy who puts everybody-- who is a prisoner of war. And he dies in Bangkok a couple of years later. Anyway, he's the guy who put my warrant officer back together again.

[01:08:59.72] They ran a hospital-- he ran a hospital with another Frenchman. There were two beds in every room because to free up the nurses, you brought-- when you were hospitalized, you brought your lover, whatever sex it was, into the hospital. And they took care of you because the nurses had other things to do. Sort of interesting, the-- very French.

[01:09:25.07] MARC HENDERSON: So your time in Cambodia, were you supporting operations in Vietnam?

[01:09:29.62] CHARLES LANE: We were supporting operations in Cambodia. We were trying to professionalize the Cambodian military without a great deal of success for those-- there were Phantoms, and there was a guy called-- there was an Army major called Alan Armstrong who wrote a blistering report on which-- I can send you a copy.

[01:09:53.92] Cleland was extraordinary. He kept Cambodia going probably a year longer than it should have. I was there for Neak Leung. Have you seen The Killing Fields? They dropped the bomb right down the middle. I was there for Neak Leung. I was in Phnom Penh with the assistant air attaché Mark Berent, who went on to write books about pilots and things like that.

[01:10:21.82] And some pilot decides to bomb the presidential palace, which is right across the street from the American Embassy. And we're standing in the middle of the street watching the airplane come down. Then these two things fall off the airplane-- clink. And we run like hell because at 4,000 feet you can't tell which side of the road it's going to run in. And anyway, he missed, but it was the attempted bombing. I tore the knees out of my corduroys.

[01:10:47.22] But Cambodia for me was more difficult than Vietnam. I think the Cambodians actually believed in us. And I don't think the Vietnamese did. I find Cambodia much more emotionally, far more difficult than Vietnam. Jonathan Swain has got a wonderful book called, I think, The River Of No Return. Great book.

[01:11:13.51] And he would have been there through that period. He's in The Killing Fields. He's the photographer in The Killing Fields and still lives in London. And we still correspond, and we have lunch whenever I go to London. A lot of friends from Cambodia.

[01:11:28.78] MARC HENDERSON: Do you keep in touch with them?

[01:11:30.13] CHARLES LANE: Yeah, yeah, I have all sorts of Cambodian contacts.

[01:11:34.63] MARC HENDERSON: And what about other veterans that you served with? Have you stayed in touch with them?

[01:11:38.50] CHARLES LANE: Oh, oh, yeah, then Tum Yuong, the lieutenant colonel when we invaded Cambodia, by the time I get to Phnom Penh, he's a brigadier. His highest rank obtained in the French Army was corporal, which was probably the rank he should have had. But he was a really nice guy.

[01:11:55.39] I sent him a note from Wash U. What can I bring you when I come to Cambodia? He says, you can bring me a Plymouth. He doesn't get a Plymouth. He gets an umbrella from Brigg's of London with a sword stick in it.

[01:12:11.02] And then he's killed driving down from Lovek by himself one night. So there's some Viet Cong, some Khmer Rouge has got his very expensive Brigg's Adderleys umbrella with a sword stick in it. Lost his family. Cambodia's bad. Lots of ghosts in Cambodia.

[01:12:36.00] MARC HENDERSON: And then what about your return home-- or return to the United States after that?

[01:12:41.31] CHARLES LANE: I'm sent to Fort Lewis, Washington. I'm sent to a Reserve Special Forces unit at Fort Lewis, Washington. Horrid job, nothing to do. And I write my mother and said, I'm fed up. I'm quitting. I'm leaving the Army. She tells-- there's a colonel in my life called Stepanovitch.

[01:13:05.64] And Stepanovitch had been wounded when he was 12 fighting for Mihalovich in the Balkans. And he's evacuated to Paris, goes to the French Military Academy, gets commissioned in the French Army, goes to Vietnam. He is a member of the 1st Parachute Regiment when they decide they should be running France instead of de Gaulle.

[01:13:31.11] Gets a direct commission as a captain in the US Army. How, I will never know. I arrive at Fort Bragg. One of my additional assignments is I'm the interpreter to a US Army captain who doesn't speak English. This is Stepanovitch.

[01:13:46.20] And so when I have this thing that I'm quitting the Army, Stepanovitch is known to every general in the United-- he writes General Yerks, who is a director of personnel. 24 hours later, I'm transferred to the 9th Infantry Division as a deputy G2. Saves my career.

[01:14:03.15] So I do 9th Infantry for-- and then I'm at Fort Lewis. And my assignment officer-- when I was in Cambodia, if I took leave, somebody else obviously had to come in and take my place. And the guy who came in and took my place spoke fairly good French. But he didn't like working for General Cleland. And he became my assignment officer.

[01:14:29.61] So he calls me up and says, I'm sending you to Washington. We're making you an MI officer, and we're sending you to Washington. It was a Southeast Asia, China-- Southeast Asia desk officer. And I say, I don't want to go to Washington. He says, you have two choices. You resign, or you go to Washington.

[01:14:45.75] So I went to Washington. And I've applied for military intelligence three times, and I've been turned down three times. I'm not doing this again. He says, you are now an intelligence officer. So I became an intelligence officer over the telephone. I never went to Fort Huachuca.

[01:15:01.23] So when I went to Washington, I was an MI officer. And I did three years on the Army staff. I had the Southeast Asia account. And so the wrap-up of Vietnam. And when the Israelis wanted to trade the North Vietnamese captured American equipment because they had all the captured Russian equipment from the Egyptians-- and was it going to be-- I don't know how that worked, but it was sort of interesting watching all this sort of unrolled.

[01:15:32.16] And then we had to do-- then a guy-- I can't remember. One of my first jobs was to write for General Aaron something that came out in-- Harper's Magazine had done a piece about did we falsify figures and troop strength in Vietnam? And I had to do a sort of a think piece. And the answer was, yes, I think we did.

[01:15:59.67] But anyway, that was-- then the guy was supposed to do China-- then, oh, then I guess-- then we began seeing reports of chemicals being used against the Lao. And so we got involved in getting-- a medical team went out to Thailand to do the yellow rain investigations. And then I get sent to Bangkok to continue the yellow rain investigation. But I do four years in Washington then back to Asia.

[01:16:25.44] MARC HENDERSON: When you left Cambodia, that was 1970 or '71? It was '71?

[01:16:30.36] CHARLES LANE: No, I leave Cambodia in '74.

[01:16:33.21] MARC HENDERSON: Oh, so you were there for-- you had been there for a while then.

[01:16:35.73] CHARLES LANE: I was there for about 15 months, from '73 to '74.

[01:16:41.49] MARC HENDERSON: So I'm interested to learn the difference, each time you came back to the United States, what was the general-- what was it like, the feel--

[01:16:51.19] CHARLES LANE: Well, the only one I can really sort of relate to was when I was at Wash-- when I went to Wash U doing Chinese. There were two Army officers, and people-- and I sat next to, in Chinese language course, the woman who sort of ran the Vietnam Veterans thing against the war.

[01:17:12.51] And we got on like a house on fire, and about six months later somebody told her I was a serving Army officer. But I was the-- I think part of the problem was I was the first Army officer she'd ever met. It was this perception of what an Army officer is, et cetera.

[01:17:29.10] I never experienced any unpleasantness as a-- but we didn't wear uniforms. We were pretty careful about that. Or if we wore our fatigues, all the demonstrators were wearing fatigues too, so they couldn't tell the difference, that we were the real thing.

[01:17:51.87] I remember when I was assigned at the Pentagon, somewhere near the Smithsonian, I was walking back by one of the Smithsonians. I don't quite know why I was walking. And there was a demonstration coming down, and one of the demonstrators recognized me, and I was in uniform, and sort of wrestled me to the ground, et cetera. But it wasn't nothing to do with the demonstration. It was just sort of an old friend.

[01:18:27.00] And this had happened once in Thailand. I came down from somewhere. I was walking out of the embassy, and this sort of disheveled long-haired person wrestled me to the ground. And he was the deputy S-- when I was the S3 of the regiment, of the brigade, he was my XO. Had two Distinguished Service Crosses, and had been-- decided when he left Vietnam, he just quit. And they said, you can't quit. And he said, I'm quitting. I'm not going to do it--

[01:18:56.49] When they began throwing the Americans out of Vietnam, he was too committed to Vietnam. And he said, I'm going home. And they said, you can't. You'll be AWOL. And he said, so you're going to court martial me? Two Distinguished Service Crosses. Forget it. You're not--

[01:19:09.46] Anyway, that's Stan Blunt, who then turns up in Bangkok and is looking for American prisoners of war being held against their will. And it's sort of interesting. I'm sorry, I digress.

[01:19:21.29] MARC HENDERSON: Oh, please, would you like to speak about that, your work looking for service members being held?

[01:19:27.79] CHARLES LANE: Well, his name is Stanley A. Blunt. He was a deputy S3 when I was the S3. And he'd lost part of his head, when in Vietnam. And he had a short term memory loss, which was a hell of a thing. When you get a radio call and you would then say, well, who was that, Stan? And Stan doesn't have the slightest-- he doesn't remember. So thanks, you know.

[01:19:53.77] And then my dog bit him, but beside the point. Stan turns up, comes into the embassy, wants to talk to me. He's been approached by the Chinese. No, he's just come back. His story is that he was approached by the Chinese and the Chinese flew him from Hong Kong to Kunming and then Kunming into northern Laos with a squad of Chinese, a Frenchman, and a Brit.

[01:20:34.92] And he thinks they were looking for Americans being held against their will, and they wanted Blunt because he was a legitimate Soldier. So he spoke Soldier. He spoke Army, et cetera, et cetera. And then he talked me through it, when I walked him through with maps, et cetera, et cetera.

[01:20:52.27] So I write this up as an IR, sent it to Washington. Silence. So I do it again and send it back to Washington. Stan comes back in. He says, I'm prepared to be put on the box. You can box me, do it together.

[01:21:07.98] MARC HENDERSON: What does that mean, be on the box?

[01:21:09.45] CHARLES LANE: They put him on the lie detector. They hook him up, wire him up, et cetera. Nobody ever did. And it's, for me, one of the great riddles. Why not? And I don't know. Is there something that I don't know about, et cetera. And then Bo Gritz shows up. Bo Gritz, an SF guy, is looking for Lao.

[01:21:34.15] But is this legitimate, or isn't this legitimate? But he's driven to the airport by the NSC guy. So if somebody is driven to the airport by somebody who works for the NSC, you sort of assume that this is official. Then that gets all screwed up, and one of their guys writes a book.

[01:21:55.41] MARC HENDERSON: What year was that again?

[01:21:56.88] CHARLES LANE: This would have been in '82. And we really had some MIAs at that point. It was sort of-- the POW/MIA people had a post in Bangkok, two really good guys, Paul Mather and a sergeant. And Paul Mather's here. The sergeant is now a captain living in Bangkok, does Japanese poetry and things like that. Sort of interesting.

[01:22:26.04] But they weren't allowed to go-- they could only react to information that was provided to them. They couldn't go out and look for information, which I found-- and when I got there, there was with a foreign service officer called McWilliams.

[01:22:46.86] McWilliams and I did the yellow rain and POW/MIA interviewing on the Thai-Cambodian border from '80 to '83. And they brought a team of five people to replace it for yellow rain and five more people for MIA. And they sort of threw cold water on the yellow rain investigations and didn't get very far on the MIAs.

[01:23:12.06] I don't know. I think all sorts of nonsense--

[01:23:14.82] MARC HENDERSON: The three years that you were doing that, there was no MIAs found?

[01:23:20.31] CHARLES LANE: Lots of reports. We'd get reporting from the Lao refugees, which we'd send to Washington and let Washington take it from there. We didn't find anybody.

[01:23:33.39] MARC HENDERSON: Do you know who you sent it to in Washington? Or just--

[01:23:35.58] CHARLES LANE: POW/MIA shop, Chuck Trowbridge, Bob Destatte. They've all retired.

[01:23:42.09] MARC HENDERSON: I was just wondering, the agency that you sent the reports to.

[01:23:43.95] CHARLES LANE: Oh, no, there was a POW/MIA shop run by DIA.

[01:23:47.46] MARC HENDERSON: OK.

[01:23:48.81] CHARLES LANE: And then the director of DIA was a man called Perroots, I think. The day after he retires says, I think there are Americans being held against their will in Indochina. So why does he wait till the day after he retires? I don't know. It's a real bag of worms, that whole thing.

[01:24:16.38] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think your experience in the Vietnam War and Southeast Asia affects the way you feel about troops returning today, returning home today?

[01:24:36.80] CHARLES LANE: I guess, it's a different era, and it's a different war. I guess what I sort of object to is what I think we don't seem to have learned. A couple of things we have-- I end up in a later incarnation spending four years in Kosovo, three years in the same municipality as a mayor.

[01:25:02.60] I spent three years in the same place. There are 129,000 of them, and there's one of me. At the end of three years, I knew what was going on. But it took me two to three years to do it. At the end of three years, I was exhausted. And part one, because I think when we do these things you have to build relationships in the field. And we're not there long enough. You go six months here. Then they move you six months somewhere else. You can't do. You can't.

[01:25:26.47] The other problem, which as far as I'm concerned, as soon as you put US conventional forces on the ground, a US infantry battalion, it becomes my war and not their war. And I think this is absurd, and we continue to do this. And they never have the time-- they're not there long enough to really get good and to establish a relationship.

[01:25:49.55] I think it's all about relationships, and we don't do that. We don't do relationships. We're not there long enough to do it. And on the other hand, would I really want to spend four years in Vietnam? I'm not really sure. But I think that's what you had Special Forces for. This force multiplier is that you work with the locals, and it's their war, not ours.

[01:26:13.47] MARC HENDERSON: What do you think the war meant to your generation?

[01:26:25.37] CHARLES LANE: I went back to Vietnam three years ago with my wife to visit my Special Forces team camp. And in the process, somehow, when I was online, I found a sergeant who had been attached to the same team who had photographs. And I've been in contact with him. And he's written a book.

[01:26:47.72] And it's sort of interesting because this is not a potboiler. This is not a bestseller, but it's a very different book. This book, which you just had downstairs, I'm fascinated in reading because I think an officer writes a very different book than a sergeant. And I think you'll find this draft, right, I haven't sent you the first chapter, which deals with Norwich, which maybe I should send you that, which I called something. I don't call it Norwich. I call it something else, something on the Dog River.

[01:27:25.73] I think it's-- what he sees and what I see are very different. And I think that's-- the problem is that his-- you need-- there's a guy called Paul Fussell, who writes War and Modern Memory and Thank God For the Atom Bomb, et cetera, et cetera, who points out that part of the problem of the conflict is that Soldiers usually are not endowed writers.

[01:27:55.79] But reading the book by the sergeant is really interesting. But it's a completely different book than what the book that I would write. Mine, I think, would sell. His, I don't think, would. But he's closer to what the problem is than I think I am. I think I also suffer from a problem of being a product of the British school system. And I think it's a different attitude to relationships, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

[01:28:33.63] CHARLES LANE: I gave you a short story. I go visit Dave Devers. Pentagon used to maintain that, of course, the apex points at the State Department. It's all their fault, which is sort of absurd because it actually, I think, is all our faults for being a really stupid undertaking.

[01:28:54.03] I went through the infantry school when McNamara-- we were all did operations research strategic analysis. And then we were told to forget Vietnam. We are all going back to the Fulda Gap. And where did we go when we finished it? We all went back to Vietnam again.

[01:29:07.62] I mean, I mean, this is really, really bright. I think it's an extraordinary monument. The World War II monument looks like it was built by the Germans. I'm having lunch with somebody from the Korean War one, which is sort of separate. I think Maya Lin's Vietnam War, really, I think is really impressive.

[01:29:39.37] I've have a-- there was a guy I was on the Army staff with who is on the Vietnam Wall Commission. I think it's brilliant. She took a lot of flak for that. It's far more emotional than-- the others are sort of heroic. And there was nothing heroic about Vietnam, and there wasn't really anything terribly heroic about Korea either.

[01:30:06.59] MARC HENDERSON: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[01:30:10.88] CHARLES LANE: No.

[01:30:12.29] MARC HENDERSON: Well, you're participating as-- you're participating in it now.

[01:30:16.40] CHARLES LANE: When I was at JCS, I was one of the people who had to read names at the 11th of November-- on the 11th--

[01:30:26.00] MARC HENDERSON: On Veteran's Day.

[01:30:26.66] CHARLES LANE: On Veterans Day because I had the POW/MIA account at JCS. Take it pretty seriously. I mean, it's poppy day. I did the same thing in Hong Kong. I was a senior US officer.

[01:30:41.84] In Hong Kong-- OK, so in Hong Kong, we're laying the wreath on the cenotaph, and this elderly woman comes up to me and says afterwards-- she's Belgian-- and she says, Colonel, why do you wear eagles? And I said, I haven't the foggiest flaming idea why I wear eagles. And she said, I asked General Eisenhower the same question, and he didn't know either.

[01:31:03.86] So he turned to Sergeant Schmedlap and said, Schmedlap, find out why we wear eagles. And the story goes that Schmedlap, who was very bright-- obviously his name wasn't Schmedlap. So if you-- gold is-- the reason that--

[01:31:19.22] OK, the ores. You begin with the ores in the bottom of the ground. And the reason that a second lieutenant wears gold and a first lieutenant wears silver is that gold is mined deeper than silver. So you go gold, silver, and then you go to the great oak trees, and then you go to the birds in the sky, and then you go to the stars. And that's why-- I have no idea if this is true, but this is quoted me by a Belgian woman. But I think it's a great story.

[01:31:47.93] MARC HENDERSON: It's one I'll have to tell.

[01:31:50.21] CHARLES LANE: Check it.

[01:31:50.72] [LAUGHTER]

[01:31:52.14] MARC HENDERSON: So with that, I will say thank you, sir, so much.

[01:31:55.11] CHARLES LANE: Thank you.

[01:31:55.52] MARC HENDERSON: It's truly an honor to hear your stories.