

Lewis, Lancelot US Army

[00:00:13.58] LANCELOT LEWIS: I was born in a place called Sacaton, Arizona, at the hospital there, an Indian Health Service hospital. I was born in 1946. Sacaton is located on the Gila River Indian Reservation. And it's where I grew up. I grew up on the reservation, up until I graduated high school at Coolidge, Arizona. It wasn't too exciting.

[00:00:46.94] There wasn't much to do. Reservations generally don't have industries, or companies, or anything for jobs for people. So it's pretty sparse as far as anything there. Most people find work in towns located near the reservation or they go out of state. My father was a Korea veteran. He was a military policeman.

[00:01:19.94] MARK FRANKLIN: Did he make a career of the military?

[00:01:21.23] LANCELOT LEWIS: No, I don't remember how many years he served, but that's where he did-- that's what he did. He had a hard time keeping jobs. And so we moved around a lot. And certainly we would call that PTSD effects. And so he worked at odd jobs. He didn't have trouble getting jobs, he just couldn't keep them.

[00:01:53.70] MARK FRANKLIN: Now you graduated high school in 1964?

[00:01:57.33] LANCELOT LEWIS: '66.

[00:01:58.68] MARK FRANKLIN: '66.

[00:01:59.70] LANCELOT LEWIS: And then after that I left to go see the world, I guess.

[00:02:06.59] MARK FRANKLIN: Now why did you enlist?

[00:02:07.77] LANCELOT LEWIS: Well, I was at Arizona State University after high school. And I thought I was going to get drafted. And I didn't. So I went ahead and made my plans to attend Arizona State University. And right about the first-- end of the first semester, there was an indication that maybe I was going to get drafted. And I didn't have a deferment.

[00:02:33.67] So I just went ahead and enlisted into the Army. My thinking at that time was that if I was enlisted, I might have a better chance of obtaining additional training, or schools, and things like that while I was in the service. And I knew, because the war was going on, that I was going to have to go eventually somewhere along the way.

[00:03:01.61] MARK FRANKLIN: So what was your sense of the Vietnam War at the time?

[00:03:05.02] LANCELOT LEWIS: Nothing really. I was not really into the politics of what was going on and so forth. I guess I just knew that from a Native American standpoint that it was a way to become a warrior and to have a warrior status, which in the old days, it was things that the men would do in the tribes and so forth.

[00:03:38.93] MARK FRANKLIN: That was important?

[00:03:40.03] LANCELOT LEWIS: To me it was. Of course, there are many different reasons why people go into the Army or join the service, but that's basically what I was thinking.

[00:03:52.60] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, when you say it gave you warrior status, is that among the folks in your community?

[00:03:56.86] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, among our own people. The veterans are honored. People do ceremonies. And they treat our veterans very good.

[00:04:11.14] MARK FRANKLIN: Was there a send off ceremony for you?

[00:04:12.76] LANCELOT LEWIS: There was none. No, there was none for me. Of course, I used to work on the Navajo reservation. And there, in their tribe, they have a going away ceremony and also a ceremony when they come back, but I didn't have any of that in my reservation.

[00:04:40.29] LANCELOT LEWIS: I went to basic training in El Paso, Texas, at Fort Bliss. So no choice there. And then I went to advanced individual training, AIT, over at Fort Gordon, Georgia. And from there, I went to airborne parachute training school at Fort Benning.

[00:05:07.14] MARK FRANKLIN: So you came into the Army as an infantryman?

[00:05:10.05] LANCELOT LEWIS: I think everybody comes in as a-- basically, they start as an infantryman, a rifleman. Fort Bliss, from what I remember, of course it's here in Phoenix, in the Phoenix area. It's dry and hot. It's drier and hotter over there. There's a constant wind which has-- through time has built up sand dunes up against the hills. And that's where most of our training took place. And I remember, it's hard to walk and crawl in sand. So that's what I remember the most about that.

[00:05:51.43] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you find anything particularly challenging or difficult about basic?

[00:05:54.61] LANCELOT LEWIS: Well, no. I figured that many other people have done this, gone through this. I can do it too. And at that time, I was in pretty good shape. I played sports in school, mainly football and baseball. I was too short for basketball and too slow for track. So I excelled in the others. So I was in good shape. And I had played baseball all through the summer and so forth. So I didn't have too much problems with the things we had to do then.

[00:06:30.31] MARK FRANKLIN: How about your training at Fort Gordon? What did that entail?

[00:06:32.89] LANCELOT LEWIS: Fort Gordon was-- it was OK. I don't have any particular memories about it. I just was there.

[00:06:48.07] MARK FRANKLIN: What kind of training did you receive there for your AIT?

[00:06:50.44] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, the advanced individual training. I guess that has to do with how tactics are done, also how to use other weapons, how tanks work, the law. You have to be a volunteer to go to Airborne school at Fort Benning, Georgia.

[00:07:17.35] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, why did you do that?

[00:07:19.06] LANCELOT LEWIS: It was just my couple of buddies said, hey, let's go to jump school. OK, fine. What else could I do? So we both went. That's how I wound up there.

[00:07:36.25] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah, did you find that challenging, interesting?

[00:07:40.45] LANCELOT LEWIS: It was interesting. Of course, there's always the jokes about why you would want to jump out of a perfectly good aircraft. But it was challenging for me. And I got some of my-- over some of my fears about doing that. So the jump school is three weeks. And during that time, I took some tests, which-- I didn't know it at the time, but it was for Special Forces training.

[00:08:24.34] And so I only-- again, me and my buddy, we decided to take the test because when they announced it-- because we didn't want to go do KP and wash pots and pans. And so we got out of that. Then we took the test. It was a pretty much most of the day test, a battery of aptitude and so forth tests. And then forgot about it, until at the end-- near-- at the end of the school, I had received orders to report to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. So apparently, I was selected, my first selection for that.

[00:09:02.72] MARK FRANKLIN: So by taking that test, was that an implicit volunteering to go into Special Forces?

[00:09:07.75] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, you have to volunteer for that also. Of course, I didn't know that that's what the tests were for at the time. But that's what it was. And so that's how I wound up over there. Coming from a reservation, I didn't know very much-- who was what, and so forth, even about the military. And I just went-- as I went along, chose which way to go, and what to do, what not to do, and so forth. And it just came out that way.

[00:09:37.57] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, you go to Fort Bragg for SF, Special Forces training. Describe that training.

[00:09:42.26] LANCELOT LEWIS: Well, when I arrived there, again we took more tests for our aptitude. And there are several specialties you could do. I qualified and I chose to take the medical training. The medical training was a year or so long. It's more than what you would get as a regular combat medic in the other units of the Army.

[00:10:17.93] And when I got there, everything changed because we were in a place where it looked like a college campus. And they treated us different, treated us as men. We weren't

trainees. We weren't students of AIT or basic training, where everybody yelled at you, especially if you attract their attention.

[00:10:52.19] MARK FRANKLIN: So it was a little bit more civil?

[00:10:54.05] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, more civil. And so that's how I started my medical training. Most of the training for Special Forces was at Fort Bragg. And then some of the medical training was done there at Fort Bragg. And then part of the training also took place in Fort Sam Houston, Texas, San Antonio-- San Antonio, Texas. And so I took that.

[00:11:25.44] And then they also sent me back for what's called preventive medicine training. And during the training, you do some clinical rotations. I went to Fort Jackson I think for that. It was like a month. And we went to different departments, medical departments learning about different things. And that was it.

[00:12:00.18] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, before you started your medical training in Special Forces training, there's a qualification course. Did you do something like that?

[00:12:07.05] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah.

[00:12:07.39] MARK FRANKLIN: What did that entail?

[00:12:09.06] LANCELOT LEWIS: Basically how to survive out in the boonies, how to catch food and eat it.

[00:12:18.85] MARK FRANKLIN: Give an example of that.

[00:12:20.37] LANCELOT LEWIS: Oh, it was just catching small rodents and animals, how to build-- basic stuff like building a fire, and how to do all that under cover, and so forth. So it was interesting to me because I met people, other students, men that were training also.

[00:12:44.07] And you saw others who had already taken training or the instructors who had experience in Vietnam in actual combat and so forth who were some of-- who were doing some of the training. And those things were very interesting to me. And I figured that this training or this course was to prepare me for survival when I did finally go to the war.

[00:13:15.81] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think that training prepared you for what you--

[00:13:17.97] LANCELOT LEWIS: I think so, yes. Yes, it covered most everything.
LANCELOT LEWIS: I processed out of Fort Lewis, Washington and went to Vietnam.

[00:13:36.33] MARK FRANKLIN: From Fort Lewis?

[00:13:37.02] LANCELOT LEWIS: From Fort Lewis, Washington. And we flew by commercial airlines. And then I landed in Nha Trang, Vietnam.

[00:13:52.68] MARK FRANKLIN: What date? Do you remember?

[00:13:54.24] LANCELOT LEWIS: I don't remember exactly. It was something like January 6, somewhere around there.

[00:14:01.68] MARK FRANKLIN: What year?

[00:14:03.24] LANCELOT LEWIS: '69. I did one tour, January '69 to November of '69.

[00:14:12.00] MARK FRANKLIN: When you first got off the aircraft, what was your first impression?

[00:14:15.27] LANCELOT LEWIS: Weather was good. And there was a lot of activity going on, planes taking off.

[00:14:22.08] MARK FRANKLIN: Was it day or night?

[00:14:22.92] LANCELOT LEWIS: It was day. People everywhere, hustle and bustle of a reception center I guess they call them, where you come in. And then from there, you get your assignment on where you're going to go. I was assigned to MACV-SOG.

[00:14:45.71] We were located in Ban My Thuot. And that was near the Cambodian border.

[00:14:59.42] LANCELOT LEWIS: We were our own unit. There was a lot of classified programs and projects in that camp that I was in. And my job as a medical specialist was to support recon teams that were operating on classified missions in Cambodia, during a time when we were not supposed to be there.

[00:15:32.21] But everything was secret. So nobody really knew we were there, not through the system of the Army. We were not in the news. We were not in magazines. Well, there was a couple of magazines that people were in. But the actual things that we did were not open to the public.

[00:15:57.89] Only a few people in Washington, the president, for example, knew what we were doing because sometimes when we would be alerted for a mission, sometimes we'd get ready and then wait. That picture that I showed you before over there was one of those situations where we're just waiting for clearance from the president to say the final go. So we were ready to go.

[00:16:25.17] What we did as a medical specialist, there was several of us medics that were there. By providing medical support for the recon teams, we had what's called a medic ship, medical ship, I guess, a Huey that we flew in. And we would accompany the recon teams in another Huey that would be inserted on the ground in Cambodia.

[00:16:56.16] And then we would be waiting to see-- make sure that everything was OK. And to make sure that there were no injuries or accident that would require our services. And if so, we would be the ones to go down and pick them up again. So as a medic, we would-- after the team

was inserted, we would go back a certain distance. And we would wait at a Special Forces A site. And we would be just there waiting in case they needed help or wanted to come back out.

[00:17:48.31] MARK FRANKLIN: So you didn't go in with the team initially?

[00:17:50.65] LANCELOT LEWIS: Well, that was one of the duties we did. I was either on chase ship duties or I was with the teams that were on the ground. So I did go out here and there with different teams. And luckily, there was no real big injuries while I was on the ground with them.

[00:18:22.69] LANCELOT LEWIS: One of the missions that I wrote about in my little journal had to do with my first mission, my orientation mission, which was live fire, I guess. I accompanied a recon team that was inserted. And we snuck around looking for things. And then we came up to a trail-- not exactly. I'm sorry. Let me back up a little bit.

[00:18:59.23] We came up to a place where we heard noises. And there was-- it sounded like somebody was talking real loud. And the team consisted of at least two Americans and maybe four to six Montagnard soldiers also. And our point man told us to stop. And so we stopped. And we listened. And then that's what we heard. So we said, well, it sounds like somebody is talking to somebody. And we thought, well, maybe it's a training area for the NVA, or the North Vietnamese Army.

[00:19:43.14] And so we said, well, we don't want to go that way. Let's go this way. So we started moving to a different direction. And then we came to a trail. The trail was-- looking up and down, nothing. And so we were all just waiting to see if anything came up. And all of a sudden, there was this elderly, what appeared to be a Cambodian man walking down just like Peter Cottontail down the trail. Had a big, one of those hats that the Vietnamese wear.

[00:20:25.11] And he was close. The trail was right here. And we were in there crouched down looking at him. And then the point man, which he was over at the front, and he talked to him, and yelled at him to stop. And he had a crossbow with him.

[00:20:43.38] MARK FRANKLIN: The Cambodian?

[00:20:43.98] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah. And he stopped. And he looked. And he looked around. And then he saw us. And we were all pointing our weapons at him. And he was-- but he was close enough that I could see that his eyes got real big. And he had some teeth missing. And then all of a sudden, he jumped up. And he made a turn around. And he started running toward where we didn't want to be.

[00:21:15.21] So we said, oh-oh. We better get out of here. So we jumped the trail. And we started running. We ran for a while. Then we stopped, wait just to see if anybody was following us, or if we heard any noise, or dogs, or anything like that. Then we'd run again, and do the same thing after a while.

[00:21:33.36] At one of the stops, the point man also indicated that there's somebody coming down this wooded area. And so we all went down again. And it was a North Vietnamese regular. And so we picked him up as a prisoner of war. So we picked him up. We handcuffed him. And then we started running again because we couldn't find a landing zone nearby. So we started running again to the closest that we could find on the maps.

[00:22:11.83] And so when we got there, it was full of elephant grass, and stumps, and so forth, but we had to get out of there. Our chopper that came in didn't land. It had to hover. And so we had to climb up a rope ladder.

[00:22:31.42] MARK FRANKLIN: How did you get the POW?

[00:22:33.57] LANCELOT LEWIS: The what? Oh, he went up by himself because he just had the cuffs this way, not this way. So we got out of there OK after climbing up on the rope ladder. I didn't know what happened to him, but a couple of months later, one of the guys told me that he was a North Vietnamese soldier. He was out looking for food. He had a SKS rifle with him. When we searched him he had a BIC pen. He had some little papers.

[00:23:21.05] So we brought him back. And he said he was looking for food because he got sick when his unit were going through the jungle. They caught malaria, he and a few others. So they left him there in the jungle with the promise that they would come back and pick them up. And his unit filtered on through the jungle. And so he was looking for food when we caught him.

[00:23:50.84] When he was interrogated, he did participate in some of the actions that took place in that area at one of the eight A sites. So apparently, he had a cut on his wrist. And he was asked about that. Where did you get this cut? And he told them that that big Montagnard cut me when he took my-- cut off my cuffs.

[00:24:21.45] Which was a reference to me because I looked like a Montagnard. I'm not that tall. And the Montagnard people are short in stature. The Vietnamese people are also short. So I was closer to their height than Americans usually are. So he called me a Montagnard. But that's OK.

[00:24:50.68] MARK FRANKLIN: What was the purpose of these missions when you would go?

[00:24:53.36] LANCELOT LEWIS: It was just to gather intelligence, or to verify information, and then report back on anything you might find-- troop movements. Kind of a quick stuff. The camp that we had, there were like I said, there were a lot of classified-- there were several classified projects that were there. As a medic, when we were not doing chase duty and when we were not on the ground with the recon teams, we would rotate at the front gate to make sure-- or inspect people that are coming through there because of the projects.

[00:25:36.58] We also did guard duty here and there. And when we weren't doing that, we were just taking it easy. Or sometimes we would go to catch what's called the Blackbird, which was a C-130 painted black. And they were used-- we used them for transportation. We would fly to

Nha Trang, or we would go to Saigon, or anywhere really, anywhere else that maybe you want to go. But those are the only places that I went on those.

[00:26:20.95] It was hot. It was dusty. And I don't know if you remember the commercial about Georgia red clay? That's what was there, Georgia red clay. And you can see that on the picture that I have in the back. It got into everything. It got into your clothes and stained everything. I lived in barracks that were-- I don't know how long they were there, but we lived mostly with our team members and our Montagnard team members also.

[00:27:04.14] LANCELOT LEWIS: The French who were there before we were called them "Montagnards." It means "mountain people."

[00:27:15.66] And they lived in the jungles. They and the Vietnamese did not get along. I compared them to Native Americans here in America.

[00:27:27.96] MARK FRANKLIN: Really?

[00:27:28.92] LANCELOT LEWIS: Because we were also put on reservations, and all the wars that we had with the Army, and the settlers, and so forth, not specifically here in the Southwest, but in the northern states with the Sioux and so forth, what they call the Indian Wars. So that was what I thought about them. They were like Indians here in America. But they were friendly. They were our friends. We paid them as mercenaries. We trained them. And they were loyal to us. And so I liked them.

[00:28:19.39] MARK FRANKLIN: Did they make good soldiers?

[00:28:21.13] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, they did. They knew the jungles. They knew all-- pretty much everything out there, and how to survive, and where to go, and not to go, and so forth. And there are different tribes of them. And I think the Rade were one of the tribes that we were working with.

[00:28:41.39] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you notice any differences between the tribes?

[00:28:44.15] LANCELOT LEWIS: Not really. Again, I didn't really get to some of the other areas. It was only those that we worked with. LANCELOT LEWIS: We were all professionals, pretty serious people I guess you could say. We knew our jobs. We did our jobs well. We got along well. I did not hear of any strife or anything like that between the recon team members, or the leaders, and so forth. So I thought we did-- we all got along.

[00:29:29.01] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you make friends with folks from other racial or socioeconomic backgrounds that you would not have had you not joined the military?

[00:29:36.54] LANCELOT LEWIS: Not really, for some reason maybe. I didn't really socialize that much. I just wanted to survive. So I didn't really-- there was only a few people that I kind of got close to. And some of them got killed. And some of them made it back, but there wasn't that many.

[00:30:08.19] LANCELOT LEWIS: There was an action where-- one of the last operations that I went on before I came home. It was in Laos. We did run an operation in the north up there. We were inserted into Laos. And we happened to run into-- made contact with the enemy. And we got caught on a hillside. And we-- it was during nightfall. And everything was dark. And we got surrounded.

[00:30:55.71] I didn't think we were going to make it, but over-- through the night, we were-- there was incoming mortars and firing here and there. And it was really dark. We called for air support. And they came. What's called Smokey gunships came in. And they sprayed the area around us. They couldn't really see us.

[00:31:30.58] And trying to describe where exactly-- where we were, we finally came up with the idea of using one of those tubes that's used for a rocket tube, and stuck a strobe light in there, and then pointed it at the airship that was there. And that way they could tell where we were. And then as they spray around us with their miniguns--

[00:31:58.00] MARK FRANKLIN: So they could see you.

[00:31:58.79] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah. So they knew where we were. And somewhere along the way, one of the Montagnards was hit by shrapnel. And that's where the citation that I brought reads. I went ahead and treated the man.

[00:32:22.40] MARK FRANKLIN: What kind of injury did he have?

[00:32:23.83] LANCELOT LEWIS: He had shrapnel wounds on his neck. And he swelled up a little bit. I didn't have to put in an airway or anything like that because he was able to breathe and so forth. But just-- again, you have to protect your patient. And so through the night, we were there doing that. And then the next morning, the enemy seemed to just filter away.

[00:32:56.81] And a chopper came in. And our medevac came in. And we took the injured soldier to a hospital that was the closest we could find there on the American side. And so that's how that action took place.

[00:33:16.23] MARK FRANKLIN: You mentioned earlier before we got started that you had some close calls.

[00:33:20.76] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, one of the main ones was I was awarded a Commendation Medal for-- we were on an operation where we spent overnight at a camp for another unit. And while we were there, the camp there was attacked.

[00:33:50.94] We weren't part of the defense there. We were just visitors. So we just stayed in one place in the middle of the camp. And then we were watching, listening to the things that were going on, red tracers flying all over, and green tracers here and there. And finally, at one point, they said, we've got to call saying we need reinforcement of one of the walls.

[00:34:21.87] And so we got our equipment together. And we went over to where the wall was. And it wasn't really much of a wall. It was just mostly some bunkers, and dirt that was piled up there, and the fence, concertina wire, and so forth. And they were coming through there, starting to come through there. And that's why we went there to plug that hole.

[00:34:48.93] That was where I first heard those bullets flying next to my ear. And I thought, oh, man. So we took cover. And this lasted most of the night. At one point, we started getting low on ammunition. So me and another guy, we went over and we found some extra ammunition and loaded some into the-- what do you call those?

[00:35:21.47] MARK FRANKLIN: The magazines?

[00:35:21.92] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, the magazines. And we brought them back to where the guys were shooting at the enemy. And so we were able to do that. And then that was one of the times when I thought to myself, wow, this is just like in the movies. There were explosions everywhere, tracers flying, people yelling, planes coming in, strafing, dropping bombs, just like the movies.

[00:35:59.69] MARK FRANKLIN: So you were able to repel that attack?

[00:36:01.49] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yes, yes.

[00:36:03.77] MARK FRANKLIN: Was there another one like that that you want to talk about?

[00:36:06.14] LANCELOT LEWIS: Well, there was another one where-- there was a-- we were-- at one time we were at another camp. And a bunch of us were-- in the evening, we were sitting around, had a fire going. And we were just talking and BS-ing. And all of a sudden, a rocket came in and hit a tree near where we were. Shrapnel and tree all scattered everywhere, flew all over the place.

[00:36:44.43] Of course, we were in a row. And both guys next to me got hit. On me, not a scratch.

[00:36:54.29] MARK FRANKLIN: How bad were they hit?

[00:36:55.31]

[00:36:56.36] LANCELOT LEWIS: Shrapnel wounds, not too bad. It's still shrapnel, still Purple Heart.

[00:37:03.66] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you get hit?

[00:37:04.97] LANCELOT LEWIS: I didn't get hit. I did not get-- I lucked out. Throughout my tour, I did not have any major injuries, or being wounded, or anything like that.

[00:37:17.93] MARK FRANKLIN: What kind of equipment, medical equipment did you carry as the medic?

[00:37:20.78] LANCELOT LEWIS: There was a bag called an M5 kit. I had some basic stuff like tape, bandages, some ointment, an IV set, some IV fluids, maybe an airway, tourniquets. So those are basically what I carried.

[00:37:49.67] MARK FRANKLIN: How about weapons, what kind of weapons did you carry?

[00:37:51.80] LANCELOT LEWIS: I carried a sidearm, a 9-millimeter Browning pistol. I also had my M16. Sometimes I would be carrying the shorter version, the CAR-15. I also had to have smoke grenades, maybe regular grenades, a couple of those. We also had our survival panels. It's a fluorescent panel that was used for rescue-type operations.

[00:38:34.17] MARK FRANKLIN: What did you use those panels for?

[00:38:35.88] LANCELOT LEWIS: We would mark where we were. We would spread it out on the jungle floor and a chopper would come in, and see where you were, and then pick you up there.

[00:38:48.15] MARK FRANKLIN: So it was for the helicopters?

[00:38:48.63] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yes. Yeah, to mark where we were. There was a strobe light, and some flares, and other various types of equipment that we carried.

[00:39:01.62] MARK FRANKLIN: Describe the quality of the leadership.

[00:39:04.32] LANCELOT LEWIS: We were specialists. And they all knew what to do and what not to do. And the recon team--

[00:39:17.31] MARK FRANKLIN: Was there an officer in your recon team?

[00:39:19.57] LANCELOT LEWIS: No, we were all mostly all enlisted. The recon team leader took care of his men. And they did a good job. They did an excellent job.

[00:39:35.69] LANCELOT LEWIS: I think when I finally got promoted. I came out as sergeant E-5, but when I first-- medical specialists were called specialists. And we were given that because from what I understand, the medical training was more intense, more-- a higher level than a regular infantryman.

[00:40:16.25] And so we were a specialist. And so we kept that title and that grade most of the time until finally, I was promoted to a regular E-5. But that was almost before I came back home. I was only a sergeant for a couple of months before I came home.

[00:40:43.12] LANCELOT LEWIS: The worst day, I think it was what I just said before about being surrounded. There were some other times where we had to land in a hot landing zone to

pick up a team. And also there were-- bullets were flying all over the place. But again, I didn't get wounded or anything like that.

[00:41:11.68] MARK FRANKLIN: When you're landing in a place like that, a hot LZ, what's going through your mind?

[00:41:15.28] LANCELOT LEWIS: You just have to kind of keep your mind on what you do if- - what you do in a worst case scenario, what you're going to do if they bring a wounded person, a wounded man, a wounded Soldier to the chopper. Going through your mind about making sure he's got airways, and checking-- making sure they're not bleeding, and so forth. That they're breathing OK.

[00:41:48.13] And you're also thinking about keeping your mind on hoping that you don't get hit. But you just have to do what you have to do. And so I really didn't worry about the specific situation that much. It was just doing the job that I had to do.

[00:42:09.91] MARK FRANKLIN: What was the most difficult injury that you had to treat?

[00:42:12.55] LANCELOT LEWIS: Nothing really. There's a few scrapes here, shrapnel wounds, except for the guy that got hit with the shrapnel in his neck. Again, I lucked out. Some of the other guys had to treat people with sucking chest wounds, amputations, more shrapnel, gunshot wounds, and so forth.

[00:42:42.41] One of the other things that we did when we were not doing our medic duties were to-- we had a small, little dispensary there with about ten beds, where we rotated. We took care of the Montagnards, our men, our recon team members. Some of them who were wounded, who got injuries, or they were sick with malaria. And we would treat them there.

[00:43:15.73] Also, the Montagnard people, in the war, wherever they went, they took their families with them. The families had a little village outside of the camp. So we would also treat-- we were also trained to treat their animals. Every once in a while, from the camp, there would be mortar fire here and there just for harassment.

[00:43:56.09] And apparently, one time, one of them hit or wounded their elephant. And so we were told to go out. We called a veterinarian, a Special Forces veterinarian was called out to make an assessment. And he determined that we should treat the elephant with antibiotics.

[00:44:27.29] MARK FRANKLIN: With human antibiotics?

[00:44:28.13] LANCELOT LEWIS: Human antibiotics, yeah.

[00:44:29.63] MARK FRANKLIN: What caused the wound of the elephant? What happened?

[00:44:31.61] LANCELOT LEWIS: It was some shrapnel that hit-- there was some wounds on the side. But the villagers were mad because of that. And so I happened to be the ones who had

to go out there and help with that. Two or three of us went out. And the elephant was actually a baby elephant. Of course, a baby elephant is still about that big.

[00:44:56.56] And it was tied to a tree on one of his legs. And he saw us coming. And we were going toward him. And no problem. We came up to the animal, the elephant. And we looked at the wounds and decided, well-- they gave us a big old syringe about this long with medicine in it that we had to use. So OK, well, all right. Who wants to do it?

[00:45:27.38] And so we had to take precautions and try to hold the animal still. And make sure you don't get stepped on and so forth. And finally, one of the guys took it upon himself, OK, here we go and stuck the syringe in there. And the animal went crazy, back and forth, knocking us backwards, and so forth. We got it done.

[00:45:57.04] So an elephant never forgets. The next day we came back out. And he saw us coming and started making noises. He knew what we were going to do. And we had to do it again. So we did that a couple of times.

[00:46:15.94] MARK FRANKLIN: How many total?

[00:46:17.65] LANCELOT LEWIS: About three times, yeah. But the animal, the elephant got better. And everybody was happy. So that was just--

[00:46:27.31] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have to remove any of the shrapnel or?

[00:46:29.20] LANCELOT LEWIS: No, no. Shrapnel sometimes, you just leave there. You just makes sure it doesn't get infected. Just like a person would have some type of metal in their skin, sometimes we just leave it there and consider it as shrapnel.

[00:46:48.75] LANCELOT LEWIS: My impression was that they were pompous. They didn't like the Montagnards. So I didn't like them. We didn't really deal with them that much anyway. There was a few there at the camp, but never really interacted that much with them. It was only my impressions when I went to the cities like Saigon and so forth, where I saw, and saw how they were, how they acted, and so forth, how they treated us. And so that was my impression.

[00:47:42.57] LANCELOT LEWIS: Not very much. I came from a big family, ten kids. They were all younger than I was. I was the oldest. I wrote to my mother here and there. I regret that I didn't really write to her more often. She has since passed away a couple of years ago.

[00:48:13.84] I would write letting her know where I was, and if I was changing stations, or if I was going somewhere else. I did not give any gory details of anything. It was just that I was doing OK. And I'm still there. And then that's about all I did. But again, I didn't write as often as I should have.

[00:48:38.63] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you get much news about what was going on back home?

[00:48:42.29] LANCELOT LEWIS: Not really. I didn't really care. I knew about the protest that was going on. I knew about all the problems that were going on, on the campuses, in the big cities, and so forth. LANCELOT LEWIS: I came back to Seattle, Fort Lewis, Washington. Processed out there.

[00:49:08.68] MARK FRANKLIN: Was this December of '69?

[00:49:11.51] LANCELOT LEWIS: November of '69.

[00:49:12.50] MARK FRANKLIN: November of '69.

[00:49:13.91] LANCELOT LEWIS: I didn't really re-up. They didn't really pressure me to do that. I just felt that I did my part. And I just wanted to go home. And so I traveled to Phoenix. I came to Phoenix. And nobody knew I was coming. I wrote to my mother. I told her I was going to be home around such and such a time, but I didn't give her any specific time. I wasn't sure what was going to happen anyway. So that's all-- I just-- approximate time.

[00:49:53.57] So I got to Phoenix at the airport. And nobody was there. I got my luggage. I had my uniform on, but nobody bothered me. And I don't know, maybe it was because of nobody wanted to bother the Green Beret, maybe they didn't care. Again, at that time, we were required to travel in uniform.

[00:50:23.21] MARK FRANKLIN: But you didn't have any issues coming home?

[00:50:24.59] LANCELOT LEWIS: No, no issues. No. I made my way to the Greyhound bus station and caught a bus from there to Coolidge. Coolidge is where-- the high school I went to. And Blackwater is where the family lived. And that's part of the reservation. It's just maybe about three, four miles out of Coolidge.

[00:50:49.49] In the old days, you could pull a little wire on top there to let the driver know to stop. And so I did that. And he let me off at a road, where I could walk down, straight down to-- about a mile down the road to where my parents lived. And so I did that. I got off there. And I walked down.

[00:51:12.48] Nobody was home when I got back. But I was able to get in because the door was not locked. And in the old days, we could do that. You can't do that anymore. But they didn't come back till later in the afternoon when I got home. And then we had our reunion then, so--

[00:51:37.86] MARK FRANKLIN: How was that?

[00:51:39.15] LANCELOT LEWIS: It was nice. It was nice to be back. Of course all my brothers and sisters were there. One of my sisters had gone into-- my brother served in the Air Force. He was stationed right out here at Luke, not Luke but the base out here near Mesa.

[00:52:09.78] And then one of my sisters also joined the Air Force and served stateside. One of my other sisters joined the Army and served in Korea. And then, of course, I'm the fourth one in the family that went into service. And so that's what happened.

[00:52:36.66] After the military, I goofed around for a couple of months and used up all the money I had. And finally decided, well, maybe I should find a job. And so there was a little company on the reservation that was making these containers that you could load on a back of a truck, semi, or you could stack them on a ship, those big box containers. They were making those.

[00:53:10.01] And I was an inspector checking all the little rivets and everything in between there. But that was only for a couple of months. And some friends of mine told me that the Indian Health Service was starting a physician assistant training program. And so they knew I was a medic. And so they told me about it. And I eventually was in the first class of the physician assistant training for the Indian Health Service.

[00:53:39.06] MARK FRANKLIN: Who ran that?

[00:53:40.80] LANCELOT LEWIS: Indian Health Service.

[00:53:41.88] MARK FRANKLIN: And what is that? A state--

[00:53:44.02] LANCELOT LEWIS: Federal government.

[00:53:44.57] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, it's federal?

[00:53:45.09] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yes. Indian Health Service provides medical care to the Native American reservations all over the country.

[00:53:54.18] MARK FRANKLIN: So how long was that training?

[00:53:55.53] LANCELOT LEWIS: That was for two years. The emphasis was mainly on things that we would see stateside, because the medical training in the service was more tropical diseases, things like malaria, and so forth, and medications that go with that, and trauma, and so forth. But here, it was more mostly things that you see here in the States, on reservations.

[00:54:20.55] And so when I finished that, I was stationed in-- one of my rotations took me to Schurz, Nevada. The physician assistant training was based in Phoenix, at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center. And so I went to Schurz, Nevada for a year for my clinical rotations. And the Paiute Indians lived there. And then I came back. I finished the training. I was assigned to Keams Canyon with the Hopis and the Navajo people.

[00:54:55.86] MARK FRANKLIN: Where?

[00:54:56.80] LANCELOT LEWIS: Up in Keams Canyon, Arizona, up north. Then after that I transferred to a place called Dulce, New Mexico. And it was located on the northern edge of New

Mexico, next to Colorado, up in the mountains. The Jicarilla Apaches lived there. And so they had a clinic. And that's where I was working for a while.

[00:55:23.81] Somewhere along the way, I became a physician assistant. I'm sorry, a hospital administrator. So I did that for a while. And I eventually came back to my home town on the Gila River and became the administrative officer for the hospital there. And we built a new facility. And the new facility, which is there now, I worked there for a few years as the administrative officer.

[00:55:57.69] And then finally decided, I think I like being a physician assistant better than being an administrator. And so I decided to go back into practice again. I attended the University of Washington in Seattle, the medical school there, to get recertified as a physician assistant, because my certification had lapsed from before.

[00:56:28.89] So I did that. And I went back into practice, approximately 1995. I went back into practice again. Then I wound up in-- one of the other places I worked in my-- after I finished my PA training was in the bottom of the Grand Canyon with the Havasupai, Supai. I worked there for a while too, short-term, temporary duty assignment.

[00:57:00.50] LANCELOT LEWIS: I was getting ready to go on our last mission. We were waiting for clearance, or from the president, or what we were told to go on the mission. As you can see Bambi Tuit, dusty or dry.

[00:57:17.06] MARK FRANKLIN: That's the red clay you were talking about.

[00:57:18.26] LANCELOT LEWIS: The red clay, Georgia red clay.

[00:57:20.18] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah.

[00:57:21.95] LANCELOT LEWIS: I have a snap link on. I have several dressings, field dressings on me, not just one. Most people carry one. And I carry about three or four of them. I have a grenade here. I have a 9-millimeter on the side there. There's a machine gun here, but I wasn't carrying that. It was just there.

[00:57:51.19] This one here, it was just somewhere along the way. We were just taking pictures. I told the guy, hey, take my picture where the clinic was. After I came home, working at the hospital. I became the commander of the Ira Hayes Post 84, American Legion.

[00:58:16.00] My wife and I decided that we needed to work on something that would inspire the veterans in the group to keep them moving and to be able to do things. We did all the stuff that posts do, the funeral details, the flag raisings, and so forth. But they seemed to need some kind of encouragement as a group.

[00:58:44.27] And so we decided, let's build a monument to Ira Hayes. Ira Hayes, of course, raised the flag on Iwo Jima in World War II. You can see on the bottom, there were native stone. These stones were gathered from all parts of the reservation. We asked the people to bring stones

from your area and dump it here. We're going to use it to build this monument. And some of them did. And some of them we had-- on other places, we had to go and get them ourselves from different parts of the reservation, native stone.

[00:59:17.71] And then we decided that we were costing us a little bit more. So we decided to make the top and cover it with tile, Black tile, almost like the tile at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. And that's how we got it finished.

[00:59:42.01] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, where is the monument located?

[00:59:43.56] LANCELOT LEWIS: It's located in Sacaton.

[00:59:45.05] MARK FRANKLIN: In Sacaton?

[00:59:45.89] LANCELOT LEWIS: Yeah, right in the-- it's the only little main intersection that's there.

[00:59:49.76] MARK FRANKLIN: Now, Ira Hayes was from the same tribe?

[00:59:52.58] LANCELOT LEWIS: He was a Pima from Gila River also.

[00:59:54.92] MARK FRANKLIN: Just like you?

[00:59:55.50] LANCELOT LEWIS: Just like me, yes. We wanted to have significant items on the monument. And so we decided to request stones from Iwo Jima itself. At that time, Iwo Jima had been turned over to the Japanese as a shrine. And nothing came off of that island. We had to go through Senator DeConcini to make the request.

[01:00:40.83] And they did allow six stones. And they arrived to the monument here. We placed the stones on top. We figured that came from a mountain, they should be higher, on top. So they're in there now in the finished monument. On the front was to be a bronze relief of the flag raising.

[01:01:19.15] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have any trouble adjusting to life after Vietnam?

[01:01:22.66] LANCELOT LEWIS: I think I had some trouble initially. I think as all veterans did, we abused some alcohol. I never got into any drugs or anything like that. But eventually, as I began working and going to school, that gradually faded away. And I decided it wasn't doing me any good. So that was 20, 25 years ago. And so I don't smoke. I never did. I started drinking coffee. I didn't do that until I started working for the government.

[01:02:07.73] MARK FRANKLIN: How do you think your experience from Vietnam affected your life afterwards or did it?

[01:02:12.37] LANCELOT LEWIS: I went in at-- I was older than most of the guys that I served with. They were 18, 19. I was 20.

[01:02:22.24] MARK FRANKLIN: You were an old guy.

[01:02:22.92] LANCELOT LEWIS: And I came-- yeah, sometimes they referred to me as the old man. And I came out at 23. And so I think I was more settled. I knew what I wanted to do. I stopped worrying about a lot of things that I couldn't do anything about. I accepted people as they were, tried to treat people as I would want to be treated. And I still do that today.

[01:02:55.82] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think your experience in Vietnam has influenced your view about troops coming off the battlefields today?

[01:03:02.34] LANCELOT LEWIS: No, I still think that we are Soldiers. And we have a common bond. And I treat the veterans that I come across with respect and kindness. Of course, they come in all kinds of different conditions. Again, I try to wear my cap most of the time. Some veterans will come up to me and thank me for my service. And then I say, what about you? And they say, oh, yeah. I was at such and such a place. I did some of that too. So they were in the service also, but they don't wear anything to signify that.

[01:03:56.43] Nowadays, we were the-- Vietnam veterans were the ones who didn't get a very big welcome home. But nowadays, a lot more people are beginning to say, thank you for your service, and shake my hand, and maybe a free lunch every now and then.

[01:04:23.16] MARK FRANKLIN: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today?

[01:04:26.41] LANCELOT LEWIS: I think a lot of people still think of it as a war that we lost, but I don't think we lost it. I think we won. It was the politicians who lost it. And we won most of the battles. We took care of most of the enemy. I sometimes think about how many people from different countries and our country who lost their lives. What does God do with all these people? What was the purpose of that? And so I do a lot of questioning sometimes of myself.

[01:05:12.94] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you bring back any lessons from Vietnam that you would want to pass on to future generations?

[01:05:18.55] LANCELOT LEWIS: No, except for what I said. Treat others as you would be want to be treated, be kind to everybody, help everybody that you can. That's about it.

LANCELOT LEWIS: I did go some several years ago. I wasn't really moved that much because the unit that I was in was small compared to the whole Army.

[01:05:59.50] And that was a few names that were on there that I wanted to see. There are a few other veterans who were also on the Wall, from my reservation that were on the Wall, a couple of them that I knew also. Those were the main ones that I really wanted to see. But as far as the whole thing, it is a nice tribute I guess, but I didn't really try to think too much about it.

[01:06:30.55] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, sir, that was a great interview. Thank you very much for sharing. It was awesome.