

Lord, Bill US Army

[00:00:13.75] MARC HENDERSON: When and where were you born?

[00:00:15.04] BILL LORD: Seattle, Washington, in 1947. July 7.

[00:00:19.42] MARC HENDERSON: And your family members?

[00:00:21.46] BILL LORD: Mom, dad, and I have an older sister named Cathy.

[00:00:25.15] MARC HENDERSON: And you said Seattle is where you were born. Is that what you consider to be your hometown?

[00:00:30.05] BILL LORD: Yes. We were there-- I stayed there through college, other than a little divot for the Army and a couple of other things. But yes, I went to the University of Washington. So I was there until I was 21 or 22.

[00:00:42.82] MARC HENDERSON: And now you live here in the DC area?

[00:00:45.04] BILL LORD: Yes, in Falls Church.

[00:00:47.35] MARC HENDERSON: And how old were you when you went to Vietnam?

[00:00:50.32] BILL LORD: 20. I was in-- as a draftee I was 19, but I was originally sent to Germany. And I spent six months in Germany and then came back. I went to Vietnam and I had just turned 20. And I always find it interesting that I got home from Vietnam, and I was still too young to buy a drink because I was under 21 when I got home.

[00:01:12.55] MARC HENDERSON: At 19-- 18, 19 years old, what was your sense of the war?

[00:01:17.11] BILL LORD: I think it is safe to say we were relatively ignorant of the geopolitical issues that surrounded the war. People told us we were fighting communism, people told us about the Domino Theory, and we really didn't think much about it. It really wasn't something that we kind of examined closely. It sort of made sense.

[00:01:41.45] And so when we were leaving, or when I was leaving, it wasn't like I was a big antiwar guy. I just didn't know, I accepted at face value these things we were told, although I found out something completely different when I got there.

[00:02:02.45] BILL LORD: I was a very poor student in my first year of college. So I essentially flunked out. And my draft status went to 1A from 2S. And they were getting everybody that went 1A at 19 years old.

[00:02:19.01] And in point of fact, I volunteered for the draft because I just wanted to get it over with. I knew they were going to get me. And I didn't want to enlist in anything. So I would do an

extra year. But I volunteered and went in probably a month early just because they had me, and I wanted to get it over with.

[00:02:38.33] MARC HENDERSON: So not many people know about the draft and how it worked. So how do you volunteer for the draft and not enlist?

[00:02:46.47] BILL LORD: I didn't know until I called the draft office. I called the Selective Service organization and said, what do we do here? Because you're going to-- they had already pretty much said it was going to be in October or November, and I was ready to go in September. And they just said, come down. They were taking anybody. They were very cooperative about taking me.

[00:03:09.62] MARC HENDERSON: Very happy to have you raise your hand, I'm sure. So as you began your service, do you think being drafted had any impact on that service or your time in Germany?

[00:03:24.32] BILL LORD: Not really. I think once you're there, you're there. You're a Soldier. You're just like everybody else. People don't pay a lot of attention to who's regular Army, and who's a draftee. You just kind of did your job.

[00:03:36.26] I did mine in a way that-- I did everything I could to sort of be innocuous and unknown. I wanted to be the guy whose name was not known to any officer or sergeant. I wanted to be anonymous. So I didn't make any big splashes anywhere.

[00:03:55.73] MARC HENDERSON: And what made you volunteer for Vietnam?

[00:03:59.27] BILL LORD: Well, getting off the plane in Germany, there was some guy saying you, and you, and you. And he picked like 10 guys out of all these people that were getting off the-- well, it was a troop plane. And we were taken to downtown Berlin, where there were all the American administration offices. And we were told we were now guards at these facilities, which meant we dressed up in little chrome helmets, and white belts, and white gloves and checked people's ID.

[00:04:32.48] It was a great job to have if you were a private in the Army. We had our own little dormitory, we had unlimited passes because if we weren't actually on duty, we could go anywhere we wanted. And it was a great life. We spent most of our time in a place called The Old Eden Club, where they served beer in giant glass boots. Chased all the local girls. We we're having a great time.

[00:04:57.29] There was one other two-week-period there that I wrote about, which honestly was also fascinating to me. We were prison guards at Spandau Prison, where the last remaining Nazi war criminal was held, Rudolf Hess. So I was getting all these really interesting, great experiences. But I knew guys just like me, were not getting these great experiences. They were kind of carrying the load. And there were just a number of forces at work.

[00:05:26.49] First of all, I felt a little guilty, not too terribly guilty. But I felt a little guilty, getting this off-duty while other people were doing the hard stuff. The other thing that really kind of gnawed at me is, it was obvious then that Vietnam was going to be the largest single event of my generation. It was just too big to not be the biggest thing going.

[00:05:53.18] And I didn't really want to sit there and tell my kids 30 years later, yeah, it was the biggest thing going and I sat it out at The Old Eden Club drinking beer out of a boot. So there was that. And honestly, I'm ashamed to say this, but I think there's also a little bit of a macho thing going, where you want to see what you-- you want to test yourself. You want to see how am I going to do.

[00:06:16.67] This turned out to be the dumbest thing I ever thought, but you do. When you're that age, you think you're bulletproof, you want to go see what it's like. And so all of those things in some jumble, got me to volunteer to go to Vietnam. BILL LORD: I mean, we had the standard basic training and infantry training, but there was nothing specific after that.

[00:06:42.42] MARC HENDERSON: Where did you go to basic training?

[00:06:43.77] BILL LORD: In Fort Lewis, right outside Seattle, Washington.

[00:06:47.58] MARC HENDERSON: Did you have an MOS?

[00:06:48.96] BILL LORD: Yes, 11 Bravo.

[00:06:50.46] MARC HENDERSON: 11 Bravo. And that was in Germany as well, right?

[00:06:52.56] BILL LORD: Yes.

[00:06:53.25] MARC HENDERSON: And you got that training before you went to Germany?

[00:06:55.35] BILL LORD: Yes.

[00:06:55.77] MARC HENDERSON: You were 11 Bravo, and so when you got to--

[00:06:57.21] BILL LORD: That's basically a rifleman. BILL LORD: First of all, they were very accommodating. They had me out of Berlin in almost record time. They gave me a long leave like 30 or 40 days of time off, where a bunch of friends of mine and I drove to Mexico and wandered around and had a good life. And then I had to report to Travis Air Force Base, I think in California. And that's where I left for there.

[00:07:31.28] Interestingly, the night I left Seattle to go to Travis Air Force Base, I had put my uniform back on for the first time in 30 or 40 days. And the people at the counter at the airline just looked at me and said, we know where this guy is going and they bumped me up to first class. And so I figured, this is great. And I ended up sitting in a row in the first class section, next to Donovan the singer, who had no interest in the guy in uniform whatsoever.

[00:08:02.65] But I thought it was very funny that here I am going to Vietnam, and he's the guy who sings "Mellow Yellow." So that was kind of how the transition took place. And when I landed in Vietnam, I honestly thought I was going to be dead before I got to the bottom of the ramp because it was so hot, and so muggy, and I just didn't feel like anybody could ever breathe. So there was a little bit of that. It's just you were shocked to be there just by the weather.

[00:08:35.44] MARC HENDERSON: Any smell stick out from that, or was it mostly just the heat?

[00:08:38.38] BILL LORD: It was just the heat and humidity. There were no particular smells. I mean, later on, various different things, even now remind me of Vietnam. But no, at the time it was just the overwhelming heat.

[00:08:50.23] MARC HENDERSON: What are some of those things that remind you of Vietnam?

[00:08:54.25] BILL LORD: Somebody asked me once what my strongest memory of Vietnam is. And it's every time I hear a helicopter, I get a little feeling right here in the pit of my stomach when it goes whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop. And it's just there. I don't know why it's there. But the helicopter flying by on the most innocuous mission, it could be on-- or it could be a traffic helicopter. But I would still get that.

[00:09:21.39] Diesel smells, muddy rivers, all those kinds of things are kind of the things that take you back. And you remember what they are. I think that they are little tiny unscrubbed things in your mind that kind of return you to the scene of the crime, so to speak.

[00:09:39.97] MARC HENDERSON: So when you got there, can you tell us about the process for how they decided where you were going to go? Where you were going to be assigned to?

[00:09:47.49] BILL LORD: Well, we weren't privy to the process. We ended up being processed. And at some point, I ended up in front of an Army sergeant who had my orders. And I laugh about this now because he just started shaking his head. Wait a minute, why are you shaking your head? And he said, oh, boy, you're going to the delta.

[00:10:10.84] And I was like, what-- yeah, I have a vague idea of where the delta was, but-- oh, there's a lot of bad shit going on down there. I was like, don't tell me that. I want you to tell me that I'm going to go someplace where it's safe. And I say, yeah, I know it's a terrible place. So that was my introduction to joining the 9th Division. And then they flew me down to the base camp, Dong Tam. And the rest is history, so to speak.

[00:10:42.27] MARC HENDERSON: Had you flown much on helicopters before that? Or how did they fly you down there? Fixed wing, or-- ?

[00:10:47.18] BILL LORD: No. We were on a fixed wing plane. It wasn't a Hercules, it was the size down from a Hercules. It was like that, but it was a two-engine plane. Yeah, and it was just a short flight, I mean, it was only an hour, but it was a completely different world.

[00:11:07.35] MARC HENDERSON: And what were your initial duties?

[00:11:09.84] BILL LORD: Well, initially, they just were assigning me gear and all this other stuff. And within a day or two, I was out in the field. I was assigned to a rifle company, and a rifle platoon, and a rifle squad, and off we went. There was nothing that I hadn't been familiar with. But I'd say most of the stuff had been used. I was a replacement Soldier. The way things worked, people who went home had somebody come in and take their place. People who died had people come in and take their place.

[00:11:42.03] So there was a constant churn of new guys and veterans in these units. And as a result of that, you get thrown in with-- it's this kind of mishmash of people who have been together for a long time, and absolute new guys. But the gear was all the same, when you get an M-16, you get a poncho, a canteen, and off you go.

[00:12:12.80] BILL LORD: I guess I had a couple of different jobs. When I first went over there, the first times I was out, I was just basically a rifleman. And my job was to kind of-- we went on these missions that they called search and destroy, which was a complete misnomer because basically all we did is we would walk around and wait for somebody to shoot at us. And then we would try and catch them. I mean, we were basically bait. We were targets because there was no way we were ever going to surprise the Viet Cong.

[00:12:44.54] They knew where they were, and they owned the place, and they could see us coming from miles away. So we were essentially just targets. And my job was to march along with the other guys and be a target. And when they shot at us, we shot back.

[00:13:00.38] But we also had the ability to call in artillery, and airstrikes, and all this other stuff. So it wasn't a completely unbalanced and unfair situation, but it was not conducive to good health. We worried about snipers. We worried about booby traps. We worried about all these kinds of things. And that was where we went.

[00:13:21.02] After that, I started carrying the radio. First, for the platoon leader and then ultimately for the company commander. And then my job was much more interesting because it was much more involved with kind of the tactics, and the maps, and calling in the airstrikes, and doing all those things. And it also gave me a little bit of influence on what we did, and how we could do things in a way that I considered safe.

[00:13:47.64] I mean, I was fortunate to have a couple of different company commanders who were not as gung ho, as say John Wayne was about going after the enemy. If the colonel in the helicopter told us to go and do something, I could find a good reason to have us take the safe choice, rather than the dangerous choice because anytime somebody tells you well, just go out across this rice paddy and find out what's going on over there, you're just a sitting duck in this rice paddy. And all your people are.

[00:14:21.62] And we would find excuses not to do that. And there were a number of kind of little things we could do. I was not above having the machine gunner stand next to me, when I

was on the radio. And I would say, OK, fire off a burst, and then I would talk to the colonel in the helicopter, and say we are pinned down, we can't move.

[00:14:40.61] And I know that sounds terrible. But we had nothing to win. Nobody could tell us, or articulate to us a strategy where we were winning anything. There was just nothing like that. And this is after we-- I'd been there for a while, and kind of figured it all out.

[00:14:56.45] Well, if we weren't going to win anything, all we could really do is figure out ways to survive. And that became the goal. Do things, don't violate orders, but also basically do things that keep you and your people as safe as possible. That's kind of how I went about it.

[00:15:15.81] MARC HENDERSON: I know you had a few different experiences between living in villages, living on the barges, but can you tell us-- maybe, compare the two and just tell us about your general living conditions?

[00:15:29.03] BILL LORD: Well, the living conditions were spartan, but really OK when we were in the base camp. The base camp would get shelled quite often or mortared. And we would have to go down in little bunkers. And when we were there, we filled sandbags endlessly to build all these things. But it was still relatively safe. The ships were even safer, when we were on those. And the food was much better.

[00:15:52.64] But honestly, that isn't what is in your head. What's in your head is what's it like in the field. And the field has all of these terrible things, without even thinking about somebody trying to kill you. The heat-- I mentioned the heat. The heat was terrible. It was a muggy 100 degrees. There were red ants that swarmed you. They jumped out of trees on you.

[00:16:18.38] The bite of a red ant there was not quite like a bee sting, but almost as bad. And if they got inside your shirt, you were tearing your clothes off to get rid of them. There were snakes, there were bees, there were leeches that would get under your clothes and get on your body. There were just all kinds of physically painful indignities.

[00:16:41.78] And oh, by the way, in addition to all that, there are these guys out there trying to kill you. So the living conditions in the field were very, very poor. And we were in the mud all the time. So literally, you went to sleep by rolling up in a poncho and lying down in the mud. That's how you slept, by spraying tons of insect repellent on you, so the mosquitoes didn't get you in the middle of the night. But yeah, it was very, very uncomfortable.

[00:17:11.68] The food in the field was basically C-rations. And you could get lucky and get the spaghetti and meatballs C-rations, or you could get very unlucky and get the ham and lima bean C-rations. So it was all kind of the luck of the draw. There were places, either on the ships, or even in the base camp, where you could buy little things, candy bars. I mean, I probably ate hundreds of packages of M&M peanuts when I was over there, just because they gave you energy.

[00:17:41.94] But what we really wanted in the worst way, and what we wrote home for, were just canned food, real food. It didn't make any sense for them to keep sending us cookies. I mean, cookies were good, but we were sustaining--

[00:18:01.98] we were carrying 40 or 50 pounds for several miles at a time, in mud, and 100 degree heat, we needed sustenance because the C-rations kind of left us a little shy on that. So I constantly was writing to my mother saying, go to the grocery store, buy me a bunch of like ravioli, or whatever it is, the kind of stuff you fed me when I was a kid. And it never worked out exactly the way we wanted it to.

[00:18:31.57] I think I've told the story a few times of how my mother went to the specialty department at some downtown department store, and bought all these like sardines, and canned oysters, and just terrible specialty foods that she paid a lot of money for, but were worthless to me there. As I tried to explain to her, if I'm eating these fancy foods, I'm sitting in the mud eating them. What I really want was just standard food, real stuff.

[00:19:03.60] The other interesting thing about food over there when you were in the field, and this was one of the first things that you had to learn how to do. When I first got there, everybody was carrying these little sticks of plastic explosives. And I would say, why in the world am I ever going to need plastic explosives? We used them to cook.

[00:19:24.81] Because if you put a detonator in plastic explosive, it explodes. If you hold a match to it, it burns. But it burns really hot, and really fast. And you could boil water in like a minute by holding a can of water over this flaming plastic explosive. But the first time you put a match to plastic explosives you have a second thought or two. Kind of like, are you sure this is going to be OK? It turned out it was.

[00:19:51.15] MARC HENDERSON: I think you mentioned in your book, losing your P-38, you went through lots of them. Is there anything else that you just couldn't live without?

[00:20:02.56] BILL LORD: Well, you could always find one. And most people kept them on their dog tags. I don't know how I would keep losing them. But you could always find somebody that had one. Now, I really don't think there was anything I couldn't do without because there were fundamentals that you were just never going to see. You were never going to see a female, you know I'm sorry, that was ruled out.

[00:20:25.14] And I guess that was-- if you want to say, were deprived of anything? Yeah, we were deprived of female company for a year, except for our R&R. And so I guess that's something. But I've never really cared much about creature comforts. I mean, I didn't need my blankie, or stuffed animal, or anything like that. I made do.

[00:20:46.26] MARC HENDERSON: I'd really like to hear about your life on the Navy ship compared with life in the field.

[00:20:52.50] BILL LORD: It all-- you almost are looking at yourself and watching yourself do these things because you're learning to slide down the staircases on your hands, right? Because

they're all very steep, you've been on ships and you know how that is. It seemed like every hour, but I think it was every four hours somebody got on the loudspeaker and said, sweepers, sweepers, man your brooms, give this ship a good sweep down.

[00:21:16.20] I was like, stop saying that. How many times can you use sweep a ship? So and so is arriving at the port accommodation ladder. And I was just, this is all kind of Navy jargon that we picked up. But all we wanted to do was rest.

[00:21:32.19] I mean, you've got to remember, if you were out in the boonies for three or four days, you were worn out when you got back. And you would basically, I mean, you'd essentially shower, when you got off the little boats onto a barge they would hit you with essentially a fire hose as you took your clothes off, and took all the mud off of you, and later you'd have a hot shower.

[00:21:55.26] But it was one of those things where you used the time to rest. You were crowded, it was unbelievably crowded. There were a few disagreements that people had just based on the crowding. But it wasn't terribly often. There was a sense of community there, that sort of happens when you're in close quarters.

[00:22:22.42] So I looked at it as a little sanctuary, I had about this much space above my eyes in my bunk. But my God, I was safe in that bunk on that ship in the middle of the river, where nobody was going to bomb me. So I took that as good. And as I mentioned the food was good. The Sailors were kind of in awe of us because they looked at what we were doing as something beyond all comprehension, compared to what they were doing. And it was in many ways.

[00:22:53.23] But we had a very good experience on the ship. Once we left the ships, and got back out in the field, then we were back out in the mud, and the red ants, and the snakes, and all the rest of that stuff, and the Viet Cong. But the standard week would be three days in the field, two days back on the ship. Three days in the field, two days back on the ship.

[00:23:14.77] And the two days back on the ship was really just to rest. It was to-- all kinds of things happen to you. Your feet were always wet when you were out there. And everybody suffered from something called immersion foot, which was the same thing as trench foot in World War I, except it didn't come with frostbite.

[00:23:34.24] So it was not anywhere near as serious, but it was still painful and annoying. So you had to let your feet dry out. You had-- there were just a lot of things that were in the kind of rest and recovery zone when we were there. Same as when we were in the base camps.

[00:23:53.64] BILL LORD: The 9th Division was one of the craziest things the Army ever did. They decided to create an Army division with all draftees at Fort Riley, Kansas. And they trained them all together. They put them on a ship and sent them to Vietnam all together. And then somebody woke up and said, wait a minute, in a year everybody in this division is going to rotate back to the States, and we're not going to have a division here anymore. So then they started moving some of those people out, moving some of those people in.

[00:24:21.16] But for me, I was a replacement Soldier. They had been there seven or eight months when I got there. So kind of the core group had been together for a year and a half. And then there were the new guys. And so the friendships I formed were not necessarily with these older guys who had been buddies for a year and a half.

[00:24:45.00] The friendships I formed, were with the same guys like me, who had been there for a week or two weeks. And we all kind of bonded together on that, just in terms of how new we were. But there were probably three or four guys that I think I bonded with quite a bit.

[00:25:03.28] MARC HENDERSON: How did that impact the unit overall, when that majority of folks rotated home? Did it change your on-tempo? Did you notice it at the unit level?

[00:25:15.48] BILL LORD: Well, we did. But we didn't-- they didn't allow it to be a complete thing because they started sending some of the guys home early, sending some of them to other units, and mixing and matching a lot. So it didn't turn out that on day 365, like half the unit went home.

[00:25:35.17] But you could tell, I mean, there was a huge difference between the time I got there and six months later that there had been a huge turnover. And you were aware of the turnover because it was officers and Soldiers. It was NCOs. It was all of this. So I'm not sure that it changed the operations, or changed the pace of the operations, but it just changed the names in the faces of the people you were with.

[00:26:01.71] MARC HENDERSON: Did you form friendships with people that you would not normally have associated with before you were in the Army, maybe from a different race or ethnicity?

[00:26:12.00] BILL LORD: Not really. I mean, I think that-- first of all, when I got there in 1967, race was not a big issue in the Army. We were all in this together. There were a lot of different races, but it wasn't until, I think it was March of 68, when Martin Luther King was killed, that started the racial divide in the Army, and started the whole kind of black power thinking among Soldiers in the Army.

[00:26:42.75] So things did kind of get clicky after that. But when I first got there, no, there were-- everybody was pretty together, and you ended up with friends, or buddies, or squad mates that were of all different races. Actually, there was at least on a basic level quite a bit of equality. The guys I ended up making friends with, most of them were white. I mean, they were the guys that came in.

[00:27:13.39] You got to remember, 85% of the Soldiers over there when I was there were white. I know that there is this kind of thinking that goes on that's saying that well, they drafted all these minorities, and they were the ones who fought the war, but no, that really wasn't the case. In an infantry unit, and certainly in my infantry unit, I would say 80% to 85% of the people were white.

[00:27:40.74] And I have read that similar numbers were among the casualties on the Wall, were probably 80% white. I don't have a citation for that, but that's what I've read. So race didn't have a lot to do with friendships over there. What did have a lot to do with it is just, you were trying to keep each other alive. I mean, there's nothing like the crucible of fear to pull people together. And as a result, there were three or four guys, like I said, that we all were kind of on the same team.

[00:28:22.86] Now, I mentioned to you earlier, of the say four best friends I had over there, one of them was killed, one of them was hit by a Claymore mine and had his shoulder mangled, and he got sent home. And two of us survived. There's just no accounting for that. It's all luck. And we kind of face those situations on a day-by-day basis. You lived in not just fear for yourself, but you lived in fear for your friends because they were the guys who were helping you through all this.

[00:28:59.99] And when that happens, I was very open to these friendships. And they meant a lot to me. But it impeded my ability to make strong friendships after I got back to the States because I had kind of closed up a lot. You know, it's-- when

[00:29:20.92] somebody who's close to you gets killed, it's like holy shit! This is real. And part of you just kind of builds a protective shell around yourself. And I can't say that lasted for my whole lifetime. I can't say that Vietnam caused this or not. But I do know that I was pretty reluctant, I mean not even reluctant, not even conscious of it, but I did not come back and all of a sudden form a lot of great friendships.

[00:29:51.82] I came back and got together with the guys I'd gone to high school with that were now in college. And i-- most of my friends were people who I had known before Vietnam, not friends that I had made after Vietnam. Interesting study. I did my best not to dwell on these things. And really kind of my statement was, introspection is the worst form of mental illness you can have.

[00:30:18.89] So I didn't look into myself a lot to try and figure out what was going on because I think that would have been-- it would have caused more problems. My whole theory on this was, put it in the past, forget about it. And that's why-- and I'm embarrassed to say this-- I never kept up with anybody after I left Vietnam, not the people who were wounded, not the people who were my friends.

[00:30:42.73] It took me 45 years or thereabouts to even contact the family of the kid I knew that was killed because it was just-- once you're gone, you lock it out, and you quit. I mean, it's gone. So the friendship thing is very, very telling and intense. But then you box it out. And these were great guys.

[00:31:12.79] You mentioned were they the people that I would be friends with in real-life, so to speak. Probably, I don't know. I mean, who am I friends with now? I mean, they're a whole scattering of different types of people. So I'm sure that they would be included. Something like that. But much more intense because of the circumstances.

[00:31:35.60] MARC HENDERSON: So what did you do for fun? So recreation, off-duty activities?

[00:31:41.02] BILL LORD: Yeah. First of all, there wasn't much in the way of recreation because they kept us busy. They kept us out in the field, or they kept us filling sandbags or whatever. We were allowed to drink a little bit, but the beer was so weak that you couldn't drink enough to get too messed up.

[00:32:00.75] We did-- we played pranks on each other. We did various different things. But it wasn't like we had a baseball league or anything like that. There just wasn't a place, or a time, or the ability to do things like that. There was no horseshoe pit. There was-- we were in a war.

[00:32:19.81] So in my case, I read a lot because it was a time killer. Because you're thinking of time, the whole time you're there, you were aware down to the hour, how long it is before you go home. It was like, how short are you? Well, 114 days and 16 hours. People knew that. They all had little clocks in their heads turning, and turning, and turning, where they knew they were going home.

[00:32:45.88] And if you could get a cheap detective book and kill three hours, you're three hours closer to home. So I can't really say that there was anything that was recreational that we did over there. I mean, we did some bad things, where we could have gotten in trouble by stealing Army trucks, and driving off into the wilderness. And oh, I don't know.

[00:33:09.40] MARC HENDERSON: Do you want to share any of those stories?

[00:33:10.81] BILL LORD: Well, I'll share the one that I like the best. Christmas of 1967 was the last real truce in Vietnam. And it was a three-day truce where everybody came in from the field. The Viet Cong, I don't know where they went, but they had agreed to it too. So all of a sudden it got very quiet, you couldn't hear small arms fire. You didn't hear any explosions. There were no bombers and it was just like, wow, this is great, or it's quiet.

[00:33:44.83] So somehow, we're in the base camp, our company gets assigned to the perimeter guarding of the base camp on Christmas Eve. Now, that to us did not seem like a fair sort of thing because first of all, we were a field unit. We were an infantry unit that spent a lot of time in the field. And there were garrison Soldiers that could easily do that job. But no, they said it was our job.

[00:34:10.81] So we immediately started smuggling liquor and whatever else we could smuggle out to these little defensive positions they had set up. And it wasn't dangerous duty at all because there was probably a quarter of a mile of just open sand, anywhere around our base camp. The river took out one of the sides of it.

[00:34:36.36] Anyway, I'll make a long story short. We got into these bunkers, and realized that there were flares. There were white flares for illumination. There were red flares for a ground attack. And there were green flares that would signify a mortar attack. Well, they also seemed very Christmasy, these colors.

[00:34:55.54] So we sort of made an agreement, and by then we were all pretty drunk, that we would shoot all these flares off at the same time at midnight. And midnight came, and usually these things fall apart, but once it got started it was everywhere. Air-raid sirens were going off, colonels were getting pulled out of their beds. They were on the radio and all these things to us, screaming and yelling saying, what's going on? And we were laughing hysterically, which was not a good way to do it.

[00:35:27.66] Anyway, they probably could have done terrible things to us for pulling a little prank like that. But what the heck, it was fun. And in the end, we were forgiven. But it was probably the highlight of the recreational kinds of things, you might mention, when I was over there.

[00:35:49.20] MARC HENDERSON: How about popular culture? Is there anything that really stands out or brings you back if-- like maybe a song, or a picture, a movie, or-- ?

[00:36:01.29] BILL LORD: Well, yes, is the short answer to that. There were some great songs. I mean, first of all, "Fortunate Son," which was a Creedence Clearwater song, guy named John Fogerty wrote it. And it was just kind of the song that every anti-authoritarian Soldier would sing. I mean, he divided the world into two people, the people who will send you to war, and the people who'll actually end up having to fight the war. And they're never the same ones.

[00:36:33.03] And I've sort of made a study of this through my life. There were the Dick Cheney's of the world, who would carry a big stick, and swagger, and talk tough, and send people to war. And then there were dopes like me, who would get caught up in it, and would go to war.

[00:36:51.57] But anyway, that was kind of an anthem for me and for a lot of guys, throughout our entire lives, of just, yeah, it's us against them. It's this one class of people that want there to be wars so they can talk tough. And another group of guys who end up having to fight wars and realize what it's all about, and don't talk tough about it. So there was that.

[00:37:15.96] There is another song, and it's funny, I was talking to some kid at UCLA doing a history project, just last week, and he was asking the same question. I said, there's a song called "I Was Only 19," and it's an Australian song. And you can look it up on YouTube.

[00:37:34.77] It captures in about three minutes what it was like to be in Vietnam because they start off all marching down to get on the ships, and they're all kind of happy, and look at the kind of fun we're having. And then by the end of it, it's just a series of laments about rashes, and fears, and all the different things. Anyway, that's a great song.

[00:38:00.78] The movie Platoon, which won the Academy Award for Best Picture, I use it as an example of how wrong people are about Vietnam, even though it was directed by a great Vietnam veteran, because all the Soldiers in that movie, other than one, were in their 30s. I mean, literally they really looked like Soldiers. I mean, they had beards. And they were tough and they had deep voices. And all this kind of stuff.

[00:38:29.68] We were children. I didn't shave every day until long after I got back from the war. I weighed about 30 pounds less than I do now. I was a skinny little kid. I looked probably 16. And I was not out of line with the rest of them. People don't ever get the sense from popular culture, particularly the movies, just how young we were.

[00:38:57.24] And that to me was-- I use this as a kind of an example all the time. But we were completely ill-prepared at that age to do what we did. I'm not sure there's any good age to do it. But the example I use is when-- if you know a 19-year-old, do you refer to that person as a 19-year-old man? Or do you say, eh, he's a 19-year-old kid? That's how I described my kids when they turned 19. They're kids. And that's what we were.

[00:39:27.00] And I just hope that that one "I Was Only 19" song, and my critiques of movies like Platoon, will kind of get to that. You just can't imagine how young and terrified kids could be.

[00:39:50.99] BILL LORD: It was-- the delta is a big place because there are four giant rivers that go out to sea, all called the Mekong, but all-- probably 50 or 60 miles south of Saigon, probably 50 or 60 miles wide. We would move in through-- on helicopters, or on boats, and go through these areas. And we went through a lot of these areas several times.

[00:40:16.38] There were some areas that we knew. We could almost predict when we were going to get shot at because we knew that there were Viet Cong there. And I guess some planner, operations planner knew that too, and figured we'd go out and get them. But it was all in that kind of general area. And it was all flat, and it was all muddy, and it was mostly rice paddies with little tree lines. And our job was to try and stay safe.

[00:40:43.92] MARC HENDERSON: So you mentioned the area, do you remember any specific operations, the names of any operations?

[00:40:53.12] BILL LORD: No, if there were operation names, they are are kind of lost and forgotten. There were some places. There was a place called Snoopy's Nose, where a little tributary came down and went at around like this. And on the map it looked just like Snoopy the Dog. So Snoopy's Nose. And that was one of the places where we always got in trouble. So that became a thing.

[00:41:14.84] And then there were towns that we would go to, where we knew, like My Tho was close to our base camp. And it was pretty tame, except during the Tet Offensive. And this was kind of where things went awry. In the Tet Offensive, we had to go through that town almost like a World War II, take a block at a time, kind of thing. We'd never fought like that before.

[00:41:42.71] And later-- and this is kind of an aside-- there's a town called Ben Tre, south of where we were in the delta. And we were not in Ben Tre, but we were near there, this is five or six days into the Tet Offensive, when the most famous quote of Vietnam was uttered. It was some Army colonel who said, we have liberated Ben Tre. We had to destroy the town to liberate it. But we liberated it.

[00:42:11.75] And it's true he-- the Viet Cong had taken over the town. And they just sat outside, and with artillery, and air power, pretty much blew up the whole town. But we liberated it. Now, there must have been an assumption that the loyalists or the good Vietnamese had left that town before they did it.

[00:42:33.32] But I don't think so. I think that they were all there. But that's the only way you could make any territorial progress is to do things like that, which is exactly what we didn't want to do from the perspective of the enlisted man. We don't want to destroy a town. What have these people done to us? Really nothing. This is kind of another aside.

[00:42:59.57] We went over there thinking we were fighting communists. And the Viet Cong may nominally have been communists because they were loyal to Ho Chi Minh, who ran a communist government. But in their minds they were patriots. They were fighting to unify their country. They were fighting a patriotic war to pull together the Vietnam they had always known.

[00:43:26.95] And this government that existed in Saigon, that was propped up by the United States, really was an impediment to them to try and do that. And I guess, the best example I can give you of that is, there was a South Vietnamese Army.

[00:43:43.03] The South Vietnamese Army was run by this Saigon government. They had every bit as good a gear as we did. They had great weapons, they had tanks, they had everything we had, except one thing. A will to fight. They would not fight the Viet Cong.

[00:44:01.94] Now, of the two groups of Vietnamese, one was a highly motivated guerrilla force that was willing to take all kinds of risks and to accept unbelievable hardships because they thought they were fighting a patriotic war. And then there's the South Vietnamese Army, who said, the Americans will do this for us. And we strongly resented the South Vietnamese Army because of that.

[00:44:27.61] In the time I was there, they finally decided that they would use the South Vietnamese Army as kind of a national police force because they just weren't capable of combat operations in the field. Well, if they're not motivated enough to fight for their own country, what am I doing there? It just all of these things over time sort of got into your head.

[00:44:51.64] MARC HENDERSON: Can you talk a little bit about, or describe a typical day for a radio operator? And I imagine there might have been status associated with being squad, or platoon, or company commander's radio operator.

[00:45:04.96] BILL LORD: Yeah, there was a little of the status. And I very quickly got to be the company commander's radio operator. And I don't know why I laugh and say it probably is because I had decent diction. But I guess I also was calm under pressure. And that's another thing that I think they look for when they're trying to get somebody.

[00:45:24.92] But yeah, it meant that I wasn't necessarily on the front lines. It meant that we were-- when things were happening, when we got involved in ambushes and things, I was talking on the radio, rather than shooting. I actually, got rid of my M16 because I didn't really have

much faith in the M16 in the areas we were in because they were so wet, and muddy, and they jammed all the time.

[00:45:49.75] I borrowed from somebody in the Navy a shotgun. And had double-aught buckshot loaded into it because I figured if anybody gets to me they're going to be close because my job is not to go shoot people anymore. My job is to make sure people are in the right place, and that we're communicating, and literally coordinating air strikes, and artillery fire, and things like that.

[00:46:16.70] So yes, it came with status. It also came, and I started to say this earlier, with a little bit of an ability to control events, which I really cared about. My last company commander would go to his pre-operation meetings, where they would give all the checkpoints and tell them where they were on the map and stuff. He'd dump all that stuff on me.

[00:46:40.24] I loved it. I loved maps. I loved the tactical aspects of it. I would plot everything on the map. I could tell you within probably 10 feet of where we were, every single moment we were out in the field. So that if somebody had to call in artillery strikes, I would know exactly where we were, and where the strike would be because that becomes a reason to help keep yourselves alive.

[00:47:07.36] It is very funny because once I got back from Vietnam, I was not what you would call an A-type. As a matter of fact, my wife would refer to me as a Z-type because I'm really-- I laugh and say, I'm kind of an idea guy. There is somebody else out there to do the detail work.

[00:47:25.67] But when I was there, I was a total A-type. I wanted to know every single fact. I wanted to know exactly where we were. I wanted to know where things plotted on the map. I wanted to do everything that we possibly could to stay alive. So when in Rome, you become an A-type.

[00:47:52.89] BILL LORD: Almost none. I mean, I say that when-- we met some of these guys when went on R&R because we would-- I went to Australia and I met a bunch of the Australians there in the plane going back. But everybody had a profile. The Koreans, the ROK-- I can't remember what ROK stood for, but Republic of Korea probably. They were known as the tough guys. I mean, they were the meanest guys in Vietnam. We never saw them, we never heard them, but they had a formidable reputation.

[00:48:26.97] The Australians were always the guys who-- they had these beautiful slouch hats. They would trade it for just like a baseball cap or something. And you felt guilty. It was like, I would buy this hat for \$100. But you want to trade it for a baseball cap. I actually turned a guy down once because you can't give me that hat for a baseball hat.

[00:48:50.73] But they were the friendliest and the most fun. And R&R there was just an unbelievable experience. But now, we don't really have that much-- when you're out in the field you just don't have that much interaction with anybody except your own guys.

[00:49:07.05] MARC HENDERSON: So do you want to tell us anything about your R&R?

[00:49:11.13] BILL LORD: It was like landing in a place for a week where an entire country did everything they could to make you happy. They bought us dinner. They took us to shows. They-- people would stop their cars, when they would see us with our terrible haircuts. And they-- oh, you're Yanks, you know, and shake our hands and all this kind of stuff. So it was a really great experience.

[00:49:37.20] While we were there, I actually did run into a guy that I had served with in Berlin. And so we kind of buddied up. And we're in this hotel, and we're trying to figure out how are we going to meet girls. And I can't say whether it was him or me, but somehow, we put up a big sign in our window looking out on all of these office buildings that said, two Americans, room 907.

[00:50:04.83] Our phone never stopped ringing. There was even a little blurb on the front page of the paper, a day or two later, about these enterprising young Soldiers, who had figured out a way to meet girls. So we were very proud of that. I have that paper in my basement framed. And it was just a great time.

[00:50:27.96] We were very sad to have to leave to go home. But that was part of the deal. But now, it was a wonderful time. And oh, I guess, it's been seven or eight years ago now, I took my family back there, went to all the old haunts, went to the same hotel. I don't know, and had just as good a time. So we're a pro-Australia family.

[00:50:57.96] BILL LORD: I would say it was the first 24 hours of the Tet Offensive. And I say that not so much that we were in the line of fire, as much as we were in a little town outside our base camp, where every month or so, we would have overnight duty. It was considered what was called a cakewalk. It was an easy, easy assignment. It was a very pacified little village.

[00:51:25.40] There were little kids who would sell marijuana to us, or they would trade it for C-rations. I mean, it was just a nice little break. And all of a sudden, somebody came by and said, we're getting reports that there's a North Vietnamese battalion right across this little stream from you. Well, there hadn't been a North Vietnamese battalion within 500 miles of us, the whole time we were there. They were all the way up north.

[00:51:52.79] And then they said, well, and they're gathering gasoline because they're thinking about burning this town down tonight. And this was a little scary to us because this was the Tet truce. There was nothing about any of this in our world because remember we'd had the nice Christmas troops, where everybody behaved, and we played pranks, and this was just two months after that. So we were kind of taken back.

[00:52:21.86] And we created completely different defensive positions. We set out mines, we did all this kind of stuff. And as it turned out, they didn't attack that little town. They went around and attacked a different town, My Tho, which was the provincial capital.

[00:52:40.28] But we were up at 6:00 in the morning, and loaded on helicopters because there was panic in Saigon. And we were flown up to the Cholon Racetrack, which is in the suburbs of Saigon to do I don't know what. Probably, to make sure that Vietnamese or Viet Cong, who were escaping were interdicted I guess is the military word.

[00:53:08.12] But the fact of the matter is, if our little delta unit is being called up to Saigon, it means there is nothing but panic at the headquarters, the MACV headquarters in Vietnam because everybody was taken by surprise. They were fighting at the embassy, Hue was falling-- had fallen. They were just in a state of complete and utter panic.

[00:53:31.07] Now, that didn't last very long because things turned quickly because we had all the firepower. And later, we stayed there maybe two days. And we were sent back down into the delta where we, as I told you before, started doing towns, taking them back, My Tho and Ben Tre and some of these others.

[00:53:49.86] But that 24-hour period was very, very scary. Not so much because we were under fire, but because of what didn't happen. It was just the fear of something happening. The thought of a North Vietnamese battalion. What the heck are they doing here? And burning the town, and the truce being violated, and then being sent in a panic. That's scary, scary stuff.

[00:54:17.09] And I guess, you were more at risk getting ambushed by somebody on a regular old day. But yeah, that was probably the worst 24 hours. It was just getting into that whole thing and then hearing the news reports of what had happened around the country. BILL LORD: The best day was probably the day I left for R&R.

[00:54:40.47] MARC HENDERSON: Heard that.

[00:54:42.44] BILL LORD: Or let me rephrase that. The best day, was the day I left the country for good. But there were some days where we had fun. And there were days where we would not-- I mean, there were long periods of time. And there were weeks that could go by, where you would be out in the field, you'd be walking around, you'd be making all the noise. But you wouldn't get ambushed.

[00:55:11.25] And sometimes, it was just absolutely boring. But you were always aware and tense because at any moment, something could blow up. So I guess, if that could be considered a good day-- where nothing happened-- those were good days.

[00:55:32.90] MARC HENDERSON: In one of your letters to your mother you wrote about ground surveillance radar picking up water buffalo. And I was wondering if you could share that whole story and maybe talk about the technology?

[00:55:46.43] BILL LORD: Well, none of these tools like that helped us very much. I mean, basically, I still couldn't make sense of something called a Starlight scope. This was supposed to be this big invention that allowed us to see in the dark through something that looked like a telescope. But I could never see anything. And I think it was just, it was just more weight that we had to carry.

[00:56:09.29] They had people sniffers, they could fly over in a helicopter, and they could read infrared signatures of people because they would give off heat. Invariably, that would lead to friendly fire problems, more than it did anything else because they would tell the Air Force yeah,

we got we got eight people out in here. And they all of a sudden send an F-16 or something. And I don't know, if it was a Phantom, I'm sorry, an F-4 Phantom that they would bomb us with.

[00:56:39.38] But it was all just-- it was interesting stuff but had no real bearing on what we did because we were still kind of guys out there with rifles, shooting at other guys with rifles. They had surprise on their side and we had firepower on our side. And that was really the gist of it.

[00:57:09.96] BILL LORD: First of all, you've got a little bit of news from the Stars and Stripes. But it was filtered. So you really didn't know what it was. But everybody's parents sent them the local papers. Not necessarily the whole paper, but they would send clips. And we would see how it was playing back home. And what they were writing about in the papers. And there were just clear distinctions between what was being said in the papers, and what the Stars and Stripes was saying, and what we were seeing.

[00:57:46.97] And I think that you have to stop and remind yourself in 1968, the first part of 1968, the Tet Offensive was really a huge upheaval, not just in Vietnam, but back here. Everybody is a-- turned against the war during the Tet Offensive. Walter Cronkite came out against the war right after the Tet Offensive.

[00:58:09.68] President Johnson gave up the presidency because he was so frustrated at trying to figure out what to do with Vietnam. Martin Luther King was assassinated. We all thought Bobby Kennedy was going to be the next big thing, and then he was assassinated. The cities were on fire because of all the riots. And then the Democratic Convention. There was a police riot where all of the demonstrators were clubbed and beaten.

[00:58:36.50] This was just an extraordinary time here. Much less, to be reading about it in Vietnam, where you're thinking that you're fighting for a country that has gone crazy. And there was one other thing, and I don't know if it was in this exact time frame or not, but I think it was somewhere in there.

[00:58:57.71] John Kerry came back and formed Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and testified in Congress about a study he had gotten in Chicago about atrocities committed by Americans. Well, I'm sure the study was accurate. And I'm sure that the incidents that he talked about were true. But they were five or six incidents covering a million guys.

[00:59:25.82] Now, most of the people over there were hardworking, honorable, scared Soldiers. They weren't out shooting people unnecessarily, they weren't committing murders, they weren't burning villages. But his testimony, and this is because of the news media that I was a part of for 50 years, but that became the headline, American Atrocities.

[00:59:47.63] Well, what that did was now the antiwar people started out being against the war and then against the politicians. By the time I got home, they were against the Soldiers because they were calling us baby killers. Well, we didn't kill any babies. We didn't even try really hard to kill the Viet Cong. We just wanted them to keep them from killing us.

[01:00:08.06] So all of those things just weighed on us. As only you can imagine, when you're there, and all this stuff is happening stateside. You left-- I've described it before as you leave an Ozzie and Harriet world, and you come back to A Clockwork Orange. It's just a huge distinction.

[01:00:31.10] And in and amongst all this, all of a sudden nobody can tell you what you're fighting for, nobody can tell you what you have to win, and now they hate you for essentially doing something you didn't want to do in the first place. So it was-- the news from home was very, very disconcerting is the simple answer to your question. But it was disconcerting not just for us there, but for everybody here as well.

[01:00:58.07] MARC HENDERSON: How did you communicate with folks back home?

[01:01:00.71] BILL LORD: Letters mostly, I mean, that was the only thing you could do. There were-- I laugh-- in Iraq, people are having like face-to-face cell phone calls, and face-timing, and stuff. No, I mean, you sent letters, and you hoped that they got there.

[01:01:15.32] And you wrote a lot of letters because-- you would write to everybody because there was just nothing like mail call and not getting a letter. That could be much more depressing. So you always-- you had to write to get people to write back. And we did that. But many of them would include clips or just their views of things. And it was kind of interesting what they all thought.

[01:01:43.83] BILL LORD: June of '68. There is no better feeling than when they fly a commercial jet, it was a 707, but when they fly those out of Vietnam, they take a very sharp, steep angle to avoid any kind of snipers and stuff. And there's no better feeling than having your back pressed up against the seat knowing that you are leaving this place forever. So there is that.

[01:02:11.88] I didn't have any great adjustment problems. I have to say, I got home I think on a Friday. I think I started school the next week. I got back into college. I literally didn't broadcast the fact that I'd been in Vietnam. I still looked like a college kid. I was almost 21. But I still looked 18 or 19. So I could fake being a freshman in college pretty easily.

[01:02:35.94] But I did really just make a decision that I was going to put all this stuff behind me. And I lived this the rest of my life. I have always said, I'm going to look forward, I'm going to look forward optimistically. I'm going to try to do the best things I can in the future. But I'm never going to look back. I'm never going to dwell on this.

[01:02:59.26] And I think that allowed me to avoid some of the demons that other people were overtaken by. I can't say that for sure, but it worked for me by not dwelling on Vietnam, by not contacting people, I haven't even read many of the stories about it anymore. I was done with that.

[01:03:23.19] I went to antiwar demonstrations when I was in college. But mostly that was because that's where all the girls were. It wasn't this huge thing that I wanted to be a part of. I got into journalism because I wanted to be involved in the things that were going on, but I didn't want to be on the extremes of what was going on.

[01:03:46.93] I didn't want to be a right wing nut trying to circumscribe people's freedoms and rights. I didn't want to be a left wing nut going out and setting fire to the ROTC building. I wanted to be involved, I wanted to know what was going on, but I loved the idea of being impartial and being in the middle of it all.

[01:04:07.89] MARC HENDERSON: You failed out of school before you went to Vietnam and then you came back. And what was it that changed from your first college experience to your second, other than the war?

[01:04:18.75] BILL LORD: Yeah, well, I mean, just chronological maturity probably had as much to do with it as the war. It's amazing how much better you do in college when you actually attend the classes. So there was that. I was much more focused. I did get good grades. I did find a profession. So that gave me even an added impetus to study hard and do well.

[01:04:42.12] The first time I was young. I just didn't care about much. Young care-free days. But you get a second chance, and you take the second chance, and you're older and wiser. And it worked out much better.

[01:05:01.26] MARC HENDERSON: And back to your homecoming, did your friends and family give you a big reception?

[01:05:05.67] BILL LORD: No, not really a big reception. I mean, my mom met me at the airport. And when I got home, I borrowed her car and went around and saw all my friends. But no I mean, it wasn't like we had a big party or anything. And I wouldn't have wanted that. I mean, I was just again thrilled to be back. I was thrilled to have checked the box that said I survived.

[01:05:27.69] And it's funny, I have asked for nothing. I mean, I've never wanted any benefits for Vietnam, or any special treatment for having been in Vietnam. It is only recently that sometimes at the Harris Teeter, I see they have these signs that say, veterans parking. And if the lot is filled I will occasionally use one of those slots.

[01:05:54.10] But no, I didn't want any kind of special treatment at all. I got the best treatment I could. I got out. You know, if you survive something, take your winnings and leave.

[01:06:13.68] MARC HENDERSON: How do you think people remember the war today?

[01:06:16.21] BILL LORD: Oh, I don't think anybody thinks about it much. I really don't think people want to think about it very much. I think that it was a bad time in American history. It was a bad time for people who now feel guilty about the way we were treated as returning veterans. It was a bad time to be a returning veteran.

[01:06:41.11] And there was just no support there. I mean, it's funny. Even World War II veterans weren't all that excited about us coming home. I mean, we had nobody. Now, and I think we all applaud this, you go to a baseball game and in the third inning they say, OK, all you

veterans stand up and get a round of applause. And we do that. And we're happy to do that. But it's not for Vietnam guys.

[01:07:10.18] I still think about the Vietnam guys when that happens. But honestly, it's almost like we treat veterans so well now that it's almost, there's a little bit of guilt about Vietnam tingeing that good treatment that the veterans get now. And I'm happy to have that done.

[01:07:29.17] But there's no looking back on it and saying that somehow we were treated right. I ask people just to imagine it's 1960s, '68, you're at a Yankees game, and the announcer says, OK, all you Vietnam veterans stand up, we're going to give you a round of applause. People would have booed. People would have thrown stuff at us. I mean, it was just a completely different world in those days.

[01:07:57.72] MARC HENDERSON: Lessons that you learned from Vietnam, like to pass on to today's generation?

[01:08:03.27] BILL LORD: Well, there is and it is a complete accident. For the last 35 years I ran news organizations. I was the boss. And I had a very distinctive style of doing that. And it worked because people kept hiring me to do bigger and bigger jobs. So I must have been doing something right.

[01:08:24.09] But literally, eight or 10 years ago some lady, who was in a different department came up to me one day and said, well how do you do it? How do you manage all these people? How do you make these decisions? I mean there's so much pressure in the news business, you react to whatever is happening very quickly.

[01:08:40.83] And something just popped out of my mouth that shocked me. I said, I learned everything I needed to know about leadership in Vietnam as an infantry sergeant. And I was like, what was that?

[01:08:53.88] Well, you stop and think about it, and-- you've got to be decisive. You can't worry about it. I mean, you can't worry about being wrong. If something happens, you're the one that they look to for a decision, you make that decision. If it's the wrong decision, you go back and change it later. You've got to be honest with people. You've got to tell them straight up, what you're doing, why you're doing it, how it affects them, and what their part in all this is.

[01:09:22.30] And the other thing that is completely military, but you don't think of it in those terms until somebody slaps you, you've got to look after your people. That was the main thing I did as a leader, is I was never the guy that sucked up to the boss, I was the guy that kind of protected the flock. And that worked for me.

[01:09:45.03] So I learned how to manage people, and I learned how to do all this-- quite unconsciously, mind you-- by being in the Army, and being a part of all that. Nothing is 100%, but you've got to realize that when you make decisions like this, when there are life and death consequences, it prepares you to make those kinds of decisions and to behave this way, when there are no consequences.

[01:10:10.66] And I do think it gave me an edge over the years, because honestly there were people who were my peers, who would just work themselves into a state of hysteria sometimes, trying to make sure that they had the right answer, and they did everything just right, and they were going to not blunder somehow.

[01:10:28.65] It's like, honestly, nobody's going to die. That's the beauty of all this. You can do whatever you want to do, and you're not marching kids off to their death. So that makes it a lot easier if you look at it in those terms. And that kind of-- I quite unintentionally created a career around that.

[01:10:58.47] BILL LORD: I'm an idiot. The first time I saw it, I was here in DC. I lived somewhere else. I think I lived in Utah. And then we were back here to receive an award, and we had a few hours to kill. So this was in the '80s and the Wall was pretty new. And well, let's go down there and take a look, we were tourists. I was very-- I love the whole story about the architect and the whole way it worked. I'm fine.

[01:11:27.00] It was just, I'm a tourist. And I walk in there. It was just overwhelmed. And I should have known. But oh, there it was. And later, once I was prepared for it, and once we moved back here, and then I would take my kids, I've taken my kids they're a bunch of times. They've done the little etchings of people I knew.

[01:12:03.81] But the first time we just-- I don't know what I was thinking that I would just walk through it like a tourist and not be affected. But you can't do that. At least, I couldn't.

[01:12:19.48] MARC HENDERSON: And what are your thoughts on our organization?

[01:12:21.70] BILL LORD: Well, I wrote this book. And as a result I've gone around and I've given little talks at VFW groups and Vietnam groups. And I've actually joined the Vietnam Veterans of America, Northern Virginia chapter. And they're sending me all kinds of stuff about this. And I don't know what the event is going to be, but we're going to do that. I'll see how it goes.

[01:12:51.58] MARC HENDERSON: And have you received your Vietnam veteran lapel pin?

[01:12:56.00] BILL LORD: I have one. And I think I got it from the organization. But I guess, I don't wear lapels anymore. I'm out of that business. I put a tie on once every month or two, just to remind myself I have some.

[01:13:13.63] MARC HENDERSON: Well, sir, it was an honor. And I want to thank you sincerely for your service, sir.

[01:13:18.04] BILL LORD: All right, well, thank you. I appreciate it.