

Musso, Michael USMC

[00:00:14.11] MICHAEL MUSSO: I was born in France. I am a 100% war baby. I think when my dad decided to celebrate the bombing of Japan and the situation there, that's about the time that I was conceived. If you do the month, I was born in May of 1946. Go back nine months, and dad was having fun.

[00:00:38.59] I don't know much about my mother. She stayed in France after the war. She could not come home. The situation there was as my father told me, was terrible. They were in the reconstruction period, she was taking care of her grandmother. She had promised to come, but she couldn't. And I think she eventually died of cancer. My dad told me when I was about 17, yeah-- 17 or 18.

[00:01:02.89] And my dad was born and raised in New York. Graduated Brooklyn College of Pharmacy in 1928.

[00:01:10.78] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you grow up in New York?

[00:01:11.77] MICHAEL MUSSO: No. I grew up in Los Angeles. My father relocated to the West after he got out of the service.

[00:01:23.39] MICHAEL MUSSO: It was pretty good for me. I had a good time. I completed most of my critical studies in high school to the point where I could go on a 4 and 4-- 4/4 time program in high school. So I worked in the drugstore for a good man by the name of Tom Mayo.

[00:01:42.83] And I went to school in the morning. So in the afternoons, I was working in the pharmacist-- at the drugstore. Not in the pharmacy, but at the drugstore. And saved my money, bought a car. The world changed. I was pedaling to high school on a bicycle. When you get a car, the world changes when you're 17 or 18.

[00:02:07.50] MARK FRANKLIN: When did you graduate high school?

[00:02:09.05] MICHAEL MUSSO: Summer '63.

[00:02:10.40] MARK FRANKLIN: And then what did you do after high school?

[00:02:11.96] MICHAEL MUSSO: I went into JC.

[00:02:13.49] MARK FRANKLIN: JC?

[00:02:14.06] MICHAEL MUSSO: Junior college.

[00:02:14.87] MARK FRANKLIN: OK.

[00:02:15.95] MICHAEL MUSSO: My grades were not good enough to go straight to a university. So I went to JC, and then matriculated to Pepperdine University and graduated there.

[00:02:25.55] MARK FRANKLIN: What year did you graduate Pepperdine?

[00:02:28.43] MICHAEL MUSSO: 1974.

[00:02:31.31] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh. So from '60 through '74, there's that-- '74?

[00:02:35.45] MICHAEL MUSSO: '74. From '63 to '65, I went to JC. MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah. MICHAEL MUSSO: '65 to '66 I had a very good time in life. Fast-- I was-- had a fast car, and I knew women that liked fast cars and liked me as well. So life was wonderful until I got that letter in 1966.

[00:02:53.83] MARK FRANKLIN: Ah. That was-- Yes.

[00:02:54.96] MICHAEL MUSSO: I was drafted. Yeah. I went downtown Los Angeles to answer my induction.

[00:02:58.88] MARK FRANKLIN: And you were drafted into the Marines or-- ?

[00:03:00.77] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, interesting how that happened. There was a situation unfolded very, very quickly. Go into the building. They give you a bottle to pee in. And they give you a 40-question test, and they tell you to stand in a room. And you stood in a room with 300 other men. This was May of 1966.

[00:03:26.45] I look back at that time, and read the history. The war was ramping up so much so that the draft boards were drafting quite a bit. And so I stood in the room. And then this Sergeant walks in with-- dressed to the nines in his beautiful uniform with the blue and red stripe going up-- blue slacks, red stripe going up, beige shirt. I mean, this guy looked like he came out of a Macy's store window.

[00:03:59.81] He yelled, count off. And I'd never heard that term before, count off. And I just said the next subsequent number. And I was odd, I guess, or even, I don't remember. But whatever I was, I was told to go into another room. And there I stood for about 10 minutes.

[00:04:18.11] That same impeccably dressed individual walked onto the stage, got behind the podium. Raise your right hand. I raised my right hand. And I said the swearing in, which we all-- I don't remember it now, but I said it then.

[00:04:35.90] And no sooner did my right hand come down afterwards that he yelled, there's a bus leaving at five o'clock-- oh, no, he said, welcome to the United States Marine Corps. There's a bus leaving at five o'clock. Be on it. And that's how I got drafted.

[00:04:52.28] Well, I knew I was going to be drafted because I dropped out of college. I went from 2S to 1A. And 1A is "you're going now" classification. And I just waited till they sent me-- or they got-- they sent me a letter, and they did. And my dad held it for four or five days.

[00:05:13.64] And I was at my girlfriend's house. And my girlfriend said, your dad's on the phone. So I spoke to Dad. He says, Michael, you have a letter. I need you to come home and read it. I said, Dad, read it to me over the phone. He says, Son, come home.

[00:05:30.92] So I came home, and I walked in the front door. And he stood back, crossed his arms after giving me the letter, and I read it. And it said, congratulations, people of your community, blah blah,

[00:05:43.91] But what was really funny, in the bottom of the letter it had typed in after the fact, bring someone to drive your car. And I looked at Dad, I said, you've got to be kidding me, Dad. I have to be there in like-- day after tomorrow. He says, that's right, Son.

[00:06:01.01] I looked at the date of the letter, and I looked at the date of the envelope. I said, you've held this. He says, yes, I have. He didn't want me to go to Mexico or Canada. That's where everybody was going. Remember?

[00:06:13.88] Oh, you probably don't. You're too young. But in '66, I mean, the news was pretty offensive to those that were trying to stay out of the service. And they were running to Canada and Mexico.

[00:06:28.83] MARK FRANKLIN: What was your sense-- did you have a sense of what was going on in Vietnam-- the Vietnam War, or-- ?

[00:06:32.49] MICHAEL MUSSO: It all started in the 11th grade for me. I started paying attention to it because the teacher would mention it in class. And I remember it was 1962 when I first heard of it. And, you know, my father had told me the story of the Second World War, over in four years.

[00:06:49.68] And I figured, '62. I'm going to graduate '63. I'll go to college for two years. It's not going to affect me. I didn't know it would last 16 years or thereabouts. So I didn't pay much attention to it, to be frank. Like I said, I had built this car. It was fast, and I was dating young ladies that liked fast cars.

[00:07:17.79] MICHAEL MUSSO: MCRD San Diego, about a half a mile in that direction. It was a shock. I mean, I went from having a good time in life to having a middle-aged man with a - he wore this hat, the brim of which would touch my forehead. And he would yell at me, and I would feel his sputum. And I said to myself, what the hell have I done? I mean, I've not done anything to deserve this. I mean, I thought I was a pretty good guy. I mean, and he hates everything that I do.

[00:07:55.53] And then he found out I had college. And oh, God, that didn't go over well in boot camp either. I guess the typical draftee didn't have much college. And here I'm standing with two years. And I could sense that he was a good old boy from the South, and he didn't care much for me or my kind in the West Coast.

[00:08:20.76] The pressure was bad, but it wasn't that bad on me. I got to tell you, looking back on it, to me it wasn't even any harder than high school football practice. I mean, we had to do the push-ups, and we had to do the squat thrusts. And we had to do the-- we had to do everything that we were told to do. OK. So you do it. It's as simple as that.

[00:08:37.53] I wasn't fat, and I wasn't underweight. I was pretty good weight-- I mean, 175, 5 foot 10. I was doing OK. And I could do everything.

[00:08:46.06] And we had this one guy who got dropped from the platoon-- two platoons-- because he couldn't qualify at the rifle range. And I'll never forget that day. I was in the prone position ready to shoot on the 200-yard line. And it's, all ready on the right. All ready on the left. Watch your targets. Boom. Someone let a round go.

[00:09:09.56] And the range master-- clear and lock all weapons. And the drill instructors were instructed to go up and down the firing line and find out who shot that round. And now the DI is grabbing each barrel as he's running. And he comes to mine. I'm saying, oh, God. I hope it wasn't me. It wasn't me. I know it wasn't me. And he grabbed it, and he went to the next guy's. Thank God.

[00:09:34.14] And the range master got on it again. He says, we are not leaving. We'll be here all day. We will have meals brought in if I don't find out who shot that round. And man, did he have power.

[00:09:48.39] And we had about 300 or 400 men there on the firing line waiting to go. Kind of-- as each line moved back, another group of 100 men would move forward. I don't know how many men-- a number of platoons. It could have been maybe 1,000 men there because we had a number of platoons. Each platoon's roughly 75 to 80 men. So you do the math. It was quite a few platoons.

[00:10:13.11] Anyway, a runner-- he says, send a runner to each platoon. So the drill instructor sent a runner to each platoon to see if the men standing in formation had shot a round in the ready position, or-- and unbeknownst to them, they had-- their fingers had squeezed off a round. And so now you got a runner checking each barrel. And time is running-- time is moving. If the barrel gets cold, we'll never find out. We'll be there for lunch and dinner.

[00:10:42.40] So he yells again, we're not moving, ladies. We are not moving. And the only thing they could do was send a runner to the head. So they sent a runner to all the vertical heads that were there. And at that time, they had only a few of them.

[00:10:59.80] But they had-- also, in the back, they had the 50-gallon barrels where you would urinate into. And the runner comes back. Said he'd blown his head off, and he's in that barrel over there.

[00:11:15.37] So that night I wrote a letter to my dad. I said, Dad, watch the Los Angeles Times. Some poor guy blew his head off at the Edson Rifle Range, Camp Pendleton. That, to me, was-- that, to me, was a shocker that someone could let something like that get to the point where he

would kill himself. I mean, nothing was that-- maybe I'm strange, but nothing was that stressful in boot camp. I mean, you simply did what you were told and kept your mouth shut. That's the way it was.

[00:11:43.26] MARK FRANKLIN: Then you-- from there you went on to advanced training, yeah?

[00:11:46.50] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. I went to-- straight to Camp Pendleton. But I had orders-- when I got back from the rifle range at that time you received your orders, whether you're going to be an O-311, which is a grunt, or you're going to be artillery or transportation, whatever. And I received my orders, and I'm going to be a grunt.

[00:12:03.33] So I wrote my dad. Said, Dad, I'm going to be a grunt. Blah, blah, blah. And he and my uncle, I guess-- I know they did because I had heard about it when I was home on leave. They didn't like that. And so what they did is they sent all my college transcripts to the commanding officer and said that we feel our son is better than a-- what did he refer to me as? Cannon fodder. My dad used that term a lot. He was a Second World War guy, so he used that term.

[00:12:34.41] Anyway, so I get notified by a lieutenant coming to the platoon before I went to Camp Pendleton. The lieutenant asked to speak to Mike Musso. And so I'm called up. I report as ordered to this lieutenant standing right next to the platoon. And the lieutenant says, follow me. And I follow him all the way down the long gridiron of San Diego MCRD.

[00:12:56.84] And I don't know if you've been on that. It's a huge gridiron. It must be about three football fields long. And so I'm walking behind this guy not knowing what's going to happen. I thought something. I didn't know what to think. Here I am pulled out of 80 guys.

[00:13:13.28] And so he takes me up the stairwell to a huge office, and he opens a door. And I see this big office. And behind it standing-- is sitting this one man. And, lo and behold, he was the commanding officer of MCRD. I'm saying, what the hell am I doing in front of the commanding officer's desk at MCRD?

[00:13:36.14] And I never forgot his name because we had to remember our chain of command-- correct-- you know what that is, right? And so his chain-- his name was Hocmouth. H-O-C-M-O-U-T-H-- Lieutenant Colonel Hocmouth. And so I remembered his name. And now I'm surprised. I said, Mike Musso, reporting as ordered, sir. He said, at ease. So I went at ease.

[00:13:59.63] I said-- he said, we got a letter from your father. And I said, oh, my God, sir. Is everything all right at home-- my father, my uncle, my cousins-- everything OK? Everything's fine at home. I understand you got two years of college. I said, yes, sir, I do. He says, what do you want to do in this man's Marine Corps. I said, sir, if you're going to ask, I want to fly.

[00:14:19.68] So he took my service-- SRB, Service Record Book-- and he goes through every single page. And I'm standing right there. He's going through my pages. Looks at me, looks at my feet, looks at me again and says, we can do that.

[00:14:34.37] And he took the documents. Sign here. [LAUGHS] So he already had the documents. What got me, he had everything prepared. So I signed. He says, you're now in the MarCad program-- Marine Aviator Cadet. We'll be sending you to Quantico upon graduation from Camp Pendleton. I said, thank you very much, sir. Dismissed. Turned around and left. So now, I'm going to MarCad. I'm proud as can be.

[00:15:01.85] So I'm scheduled for MarCad. My orders are changed. In the process of going to Quantico, I make a stopover in Memphis, Tennessee. I don't know why. But instead of a direct flight, they stopped me-- the flight terminated in Memphis.

[00:15:19.88] And so I am waiting for subsequent orders as is four other MarCad candidates. And now we found out through talking to one another, oh, are you MarCad. I'm MarCad. Are you MarCad? Yeah. OK. So we kind of hung together because we're all going to flight school. We're kind of excited about this, right?

[00:15:41.63] Three or four weeks go by. One of us decides to find out what the status on our orders is. So we go in-- we go to request permission to speak to the officer of the day. And so we speak to the officer of the day. He tells us-- one of us does, reports, we've got to come back tomorrow.

[00:15:58.25] So we go back the following day. And I'll never forget what the officer of the day said at that time. He says, he says, you want the good news or the bad news? [LAUGHS] You know how that happens in the military, right?

[00:16:10.70] I said, I'd like the good news first, sir. I'm thinking maybe I've been delayed to MarCad, that it's going to be a couple of weeks or something. And he was going to give me some kind of duty in the interim. You know, your mind's going crazy. You never know what's going to happen in the military.

[00:16:27.15] He says, the good news is you can have any school you want at Naval Air Tactical Training Center Memphis. That's where we are. I'm saying, any school I want? I don't want any schools here. I said, what's the bad news, sir?

[00:16:41.88] He says, the bad news is Congress has cut off funds for two-year college men in the United States Marine Corps for flight training. [LAUGHS] Flight training was not to be continued for two-year college men. You had to be four.

[00:16:54.59] Now, here's the rub on that, Army. Which one of you is Army? Army, here's the rub on that. When I went to Vietnam, I found that they had pilots flying those helicopters, which I'd love to have done, with two years of college. And if I were in the Army, I would have gotten it. But if I didn't-- because I was in the Marine Corps, another stick. [LAUGHS]

[00:17:18.41] MARK FRANKLIN: So what did you end up doing?

[00:17:20.50] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, I took the best school they had, and--

[00:17:22.71] MARK FRANKLIN: Which was?

[00:17:22.96] MICHAEL MUSSO: Which was Avionics. So I spent 36-- about 36 weeks as a avionics person going to avionics school.

[00:17:33.16] MARK FRANKLIN: And what does that entail? Where was it, and what did that entail?

[00:17:35.68] MICHAEL MUSSO: That was at an NATTC Memphis. I think they called it just Memphis, Tennessee. Not Memphis. It was something else. But anyway, 20-- 36-- 26 weeks of electronics, starting from an ohm, a volt, to sawtooth generators for radar. And I went through radar for the IFF box, the radio altimeter box. And I was studying also for fire control, which is the Sidewinder missile fire control system.

[00:18:14.32] So I didn't get into that class because I wasn't in the service long enough. That was a special class, from what I was told. That was in a B School. I had gone to A schools.

[00:18:24.94] But it was very good. You went you went to classes at 0730 to 1500 hours, I think it was, with lunch break. And then you secured, went to your living area, and got ready for the following day-- did a little bit of studying, got ready for the following day.

[00:18:46.30] It was all electronics for 26 weeks. And then I went into a radar-- the radar end of it. And that changed my MOS from 6220 to 6222. I was two above somebody. So--

[00:19:00.54] MARK FRANKLIN: And what was that?

[00:19:02.26] MICHAEL MUSSO: That was specializing in IFF-- Identification Friend or Foe boxes, and also radar altimeters.

[00:19:10.27] MARK FRANKLIN: So when did you graduate these schools?

[00:19:13.24] MICHAEL MUSSO: March-- March, April, May. Yeah. Because I had to go through escape and evasion school at Camp Pendleton. I don't mean to belittle the Marine Corps training. It's fantastic training.

[00:19:25.30] But some of it to me was either unimportant or not necessary. And escape and evasion-- some of the training that we got in escape and evasion school, I would have changed it immensely after being in Vietnam for the 13 months I was. But I don't know why they trained it-- trained the way they did.

[00:19:49.36] They taught us how to kill rabbits and eat rabbits if we were on the run. They taught us a few things about escaping and reading a compass and all this other stuff. And, you know, I got stories to tell you about guys I really knew who were caught.

[00:20:10.51] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. I took off, I believe, out of El Toro. It was a MAT's flight. But I don't know the equipment or anything. It took off out of El Toro, went to Hawaii, Hawaii to Okinawa, Okinawa a C-130 into Vietnam.

[00:20:25.12] MARK FRANKLIN: And you arrived in June of 1967. Stepping off that plane what are your first senses of-- ?

[00:20:30.55] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, they played a few games on us, as Marines are known to do. So all our sea bags and everything were laid on the bottom-- on the floor of the C-130. We were-- everything is done at the shout of an order.

[00:20:48.02] So we're sitting there. And the plane had landed. It taxied. It stopped. And we're sitting there frozen. Until he tells us to move, we're not moving. It's that simple.

[00:20:58.69] We heard-- the door comes down, bottom of the C-130. And someone yells, stand up. So we stand up. And we got our M14s. And [LAUGHS] the ramp comes down. And you got, I don't know, 200 men on the C-130.

[00:21:22.72] The ramp comes down. We see the boots. I mean, don't forget, we haven't seen anything. We just-- we see the boots. And we see this guy's face. And he starts yelling, come on. Get out. Get out. Get out. Get out. Get out.

[00:21:34.27] And all of us, we run out. And now we're standing on the apron of this Da Nang Air Base. And we don't know if we're going to be taking fire or not. I mean, they didn't bother to tell us anything.

[00:21:46.84] And we're all like this, [LAUGHS] ready to do something, but we don't know-- And then they start laughing. They say, at ease. At ease. At ease. And they put us on a bus, and they took us to our duty.

[00:21:59.75] I went from Da Nang. Took a bus to MAG-16, Marine Air Group 16. That was 4 and 1/2 miles out-- south-- about south-- let's see. Let me get my map straight here-- southeast of Da Nang. And I was-- I checked into the avionics complex, as my MOS would predict, and met Captain Whiskey Whiskey Smith. And he said, 30 days of guard duty. I said, yes, sir. So they put me right on the front-- the perimeter of the base. And now we had guard duty. And guard duty was four-hour shifts. If you got the lucky draw, you got the first one. If you got the unlucky draw, you got the middle one. [LAUGHS] It was just-- it was catch as catch can. It was 30 days. First five days I had one shift. Second five days I had another.

[00:22:59.89] MARK FRANKLIN: They rotated the shifts?

[00:23:00.94] MICHAEL MUSSO: They rotated the shifts for those 30 guys, yeah. And that was 30 days-- about 60 guys.

[00:23:05.47] MARK FRANKLIN: And how did-- how was guard duty typically performed?

[00:23:09.49] MICHAEL MUSSO: You were in a sandbag bunker with a parapet on it. And you would rest your weapon to the field of view. And if you saw something move, we had what's called hand poppers-- pop it like that. It would send a projectile about 300 feet in the air. It would pop, and it would come down with a little parachute-- parachute maybe about six feet. Because we had to disassemble one once, and I remember it being about that long-- that wide.

[00:23:47.56] And, of course, that would alert everybody on the line. As soon as a hand popper went off, everybody would come to the ready. And there would be dead silence. No silence-- no speaking until the hand popper hit the ground. And then somebody threw up another one, it would be continued. So as soon as you saw something move, you would hit a hand popper.

[00:24:08.71] MARK FRANKLIN: Was there any kind of illumination under that parachute?

[00:24:10.87] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh, quite a bit.

[00:24:11.70] MARK FRANKLIN: So it was an illumination flare?

[00:24:13.27] MICHAEL MUSSO: That's what it was. It was illumination-- an illuminated flare that goes up maybe 300 or 400 feet. Parachute opens up. It pops open a big bright flare. And you look for shadows on the ground-- moving shadows.

[00:24:26.41] MARK FRANKLIN: So earlier you mentioned if you got the middle shift that was unlucky, or that was not a good shift. How come? What was tough about the middle shift?

[00:24:37.09] MICHAEL MUSSO: I don't know. That's just the shift that I found difficult. I have no problem waking up in the morning. I have no problem going to sleep. But I don't like being awakened and then having to go back to sleep.

[00:24:49.54] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah, OK. And the middle shift hours were typically--

[00:24:51.95] MICHAEL MUSSO: Midnight to 4:00.

[00:24:52.77] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, OK. MARK FRANKLIN: After your 30 days of guard duty were up, what did you do?

[00:25:03.82] MICHAEL MUSSO: I went to my duty station. And that was something I later discovered I really did not like, and that's being confined into a van-- a small van all by yourself with the door locked, air-conditioned, temperature-controlled, and you are to do nothing but fix equipment.

[00:25:26.86] To me, that was-- I knew the equipment. That was not a problem. It was terminally boring doing the repair work standing in that small van. I mean, small van. From here to the wall maybe about-- a walk space maybe about a foot and a half and electronic equipment on each side. You know what a Conex box is?

[00:25:47.47] MARK FRANKLIN: Yes.

[00:25:47.74] MICHAEL MUSSO: Smaller than a Conex box.

[00:25:49.19] MARK FRANKLIN: Smaller than a Conex box.

[00:25:51.01] MICHAEL MUSSO: Smaller than a Conex box.

[00:25:52.87] MARK FRANKLIN: And how many people are in there?

[00:25:54.10] MICHAEL MUSSO: We'd have three guys. I was the IFF readout guy. We had a fire control guy on the other side. And I think the other guy was a UHF/VHF specialist.

[00:26:04.78] MARK FRANKLIN: And what kind of equipment were you repairing?

[00:26:07.90] MICHAEL MUSSO: IFF boxes, radio altimeter boxes, VHF and UHF communication boxes. Being bored, I went to the captain. And I said, Captain, you've got to give me something else to do. I mean, I'm going bored in there. And, lo and behold, I believe I have claustrophobia. I didn't say that to him, but I discovered it later in life. I don't like being in enclosed areas.

[00:26:29.95] So he said, report to Staff Sergeant So-and-so at the flight line. So I did. I'll never forget that short interview. I said, Captain Whiskey Whiskey Smith sent me over from avionics. Are you Staff Sergeant So-and-so? Yes I am. What do you want? I says, well, I'm kind of bored over there. What do you got for me?

[00:26:52.63] He says, OK. He says, go to supply. Get yourself a flight suit. Get yourself a helmet. Get yourself a duty belt. And get yourself those brown shoes with the steel toes and a pistol. I said, OK.

[00:27:07.46] He says, you know how to shoot an M60, don't you? I said, yes, sir. I do. Says, you know how to shoot a .50? I said, of course, I do, sir. He said, good. You're going to be our gunner.

[00:27:17.74] So I ended up being a port door gunner on helicopters, which was very exciting. But the captain had made it obviously clear to me that I was not to let that interfere with my work as a technician. If boxes came in to be repaired, I had to have them repaired before 1600 hours-- before 1800 hours. And so I went from flying over to-- back to the avionics complex to fix the boxes.

[00:27:47.29] MARK FRANKLIN: Were you able to do both?

[00:27:48.40] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh, yeah. It was not a problem. I was a port door gunner on a 34, and a port door gunner on a 46.

[00:27:55.42] MARK FRANKLIN: And describe those.

[00:27:57.22] MICHAEL MUSSO: A 34 is a single-engine reciprocating engine helicopter-- very, very old. And shortly after my experience in the Marine Corps, they took those out of service so that you could no longer fly in them. And the 46, which is the twin rotor helicopter. Army-- you know it as a 47.

[00:28:24.40] But we had five missions. We had insertions, extractions, medevac, chase, and supply. So we put guys in, and we pulled guys out. We flew medevacs. If a big wig was coming into Da Nang, our duty was to give him security flight chase for them. And, of course, beer, bullets, and band-aids.

[00:28:54.79] MICHAEL MUSSO: We lived in a hooch. And that was a Navy-constructed building of two by fours and corrugated metal. And no heat, no air conditioning-- nothing. And when it rained, it kept you awake all night. So if it rained for five days, you didn't sleep for five days. It was hot as can be-- 110, 115. And that was in the hooch. Outside it was even hotter. And on the flight line, it got up to 118, 120.

[00:29:34.25] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think you formed friendships with folks from other socioeconomic backgrounds or races that you might not have had you not join the military?

[00:29:41.39] MICHAEL MUSSO: Sure. Sure Warren King-- hell of a nice guy. He was a good friend. He still is a good friend, but he lives in Indianapolis. I never get to see the son of a bitch.

[00:29:54.83] Warren and I met because we were both involved in weightlifting, and we were avionics men. And so we just-- we have so much in common. We knew our MOS was similar. Everybody know what an MOS is? Military occupation specialty. OK, good.

[00:30:13.09] And so he said, I'm going to work out at the gym. And I said, hey, I'd like to join you. So he taught me how to lift weights. And so I got pumped up. And he and I both got pumped up.

[00:30:24.65] And then we got orders. He went to Indianapolis, and I stayed on the West Coast. But he's a great guy. I spoke to him maybe about four or five months ago.

[00:30:33.02] And don't forget that Martin Luther King was killed while I was over there. And during that period, here I am befriending this black guy who's-- I mean, he-- Warren-- we used to have fun.

[00:30:46.49] I said, Warren, you are black. I mean, this guy was so black it was unbelievable. And he befriended me. And if there was any problem, he stood by my side. He's a good guy.

[00:31:01.19] MARK FRANKLIN: So there's a lot of social turmoil in the US. Did you witness any of that in country when you were there?

[00:31:07.22] MICHAEL MUSSO: That's interesting. Everybody thinks I should have. But the air wing-- we didn't. We didn't have that much. The commanding officer made an announcement

over the PA system he will not tolerate any of it. And when the commanding officer speaks, people listen. And we didn't have anything like that.

[00:31:27.80] I did have a situation in the mess hall, where the day that it was announced in Stars and Stripes, I'm sitting there eating with Warren. And Warren, of course, is an avionics man. And we're all avionics guys at the table. The chow hall had been segmented when that happened. A lot of whites sat on one side, a lot of blacks sat on the other.

[00:31:52.82] MARK FRANKLIN: But that was their choice. That wasn't--

[00:31:54.68] MICHAEL MUSSO: That was their choice. Yes. But I'm sitting with Warren, and two or three blacks come over. I say blacks because I didn't know their names. Two or three blacks come over, and they look at Warren. And one of them says, what are you doing eating with that gray boy? I'd never heard that term before in my life. And I realized what it was.

[00:32:17.63] So Warren, he stands up. And I'm saying, oh, shit, Warren. Don't stand. Don't stand up, Warren. He stands up. And they kind of stick their chest out. And I'm saying, oh, God. We're going to have a riot. I'm going to be in a riot. I'm going to be in a riot.

[00:32:39.35] And Warren says, I've known-- I've known-- did he say, Mike? I forget what-- oh, he said-- he may have said, I've known that gray boy for quite a while. I don't even know you. And the guy said, we'll see you outside. And I said, oh, God. And Warren says, we will.

[00:33:03.47] Now, as I sat down, and Warren sat down next to me, I said, Warren, you mean to tell me we've got to fight those son of a bitches when I get out of here? He says, don't worry, Mike. They won't be there.

[00:33:16.91] We ate our meal. And I was nervous as can be as we walked out of the mess hall cleaning our trays. I'm looking around like this. And Warren said, relax, Mike. No worries. And sure enough, there weren't. But to have a black man do that, and befriend you, and say, I got your side, man. Wow.

[00:33:41.09] MARK FRANKLIN: That's great. Did you all have much time to yourself for recrea-- did you have any recreational time? And if you did, what did you do for recreation?

[00:33:48.74] MICHAEL MUSSO: Wrote letters. Wrote letters. Armed Forces Radio would be playing. I bought myself a little stereo. And I bought a number of records from the PX at-- I think it was called Hill 327-- Freedom Hill. Freedom Hill, where the big PX in the sky was-- and bought the records and played records and wrote letters-- try and set the atmosphere.

[00:34:15.00] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you have any specific memories of the popular culture of the US at the time, so if you hear a song today, it takes you back to that time.

[00:34:21.38] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh, yeah. Oh, come on. Come on. Anything played in the '60s it's-- late '60s and early '70s-- gimme a break.

[00:34:28.85] MARK FRANKLIN: Any particular songs stand out for you?

[00:34:34.40] MICHAEL MUSSO: "Alice's Restaurant."

[00:34:36.11] MARK FRANKLIN: Were you there during any memorable holiday while you were in country?

[00:34:39.08] MICHAEL MUSSO: Of course. Christmas.

[00:34:40.68] MARK FRANKLIN: What did you experience for that?

[00:34:42.18] MICHAEL MUSSO: A little tree about 2 and 1/2 feet tall stood in our tent-- in our hooch, I should say. And we had Christmas.

[00:34:50.21] MARK FRANKLIN: So describe those living conditions a little bit.

[00:34:55.94] MICHAEL MUSSO: First checked in. It was an Army cot and an inflatable tube mattress-- inflatable mattress-- which you just-- that top sheet gets off, baby, and you sweat terribly because that thing just holds on to your sweat. And it's so uncomfortable.

[00:35:18.92] And so when the war got a little bit-- ramped up a bit, lo and behold, supply ships us cots. Now, we've got metal structured cots-- I mean, beds, racks. We call them racks, OK? And a mattress that thick. If it was 2 inches thick you were lucky. And so we had that-- and a spring. It had springs on it. And I said to myself, oh, God, this is heaven.

[00:35:47.54] And being that I was senior to when it came in and they started sending the personnel to address the ramp-up of the war-- the ramp-up of the war-- the FNG slept on top-- Fricking New Guy.

[00:36:03.80] MARK FRANKLIN: There you go. Thank you.

[00:36:06.59] MICHAEL MUSSO: And so he slept on top. I slept on the bottom-- had my own little wall locker maybe about, oh, I don't know. It was tall. I got a tall one-- maybe about 5 and 1/2 feet tall. And doors opened up, had a few shelves. And I could take the stuff out of my sea bag and actually hang it up. So when I got the locker and hangers, I went from the sea bag to the locker.

[00:36:30.20] MARK FRANKLIN: How about the food? What was food like?

[00:36:32.81] MICHAEL MUSSO: I can't complain about the food. We were lucky at MAG-16. We had a guy who was drafted who was a cook at his own restaurant we found out later on. And so he prepared some good Thanksgiving dinners.

[00:36:46.50] I mean, I walked in once and I saw it like 15 feet of food-- a couple of turkeys, vegetables, salads. Two rows to walk with your tray. And I said, my God, this is beautiful.

[00:37:01.31] Well, that all ended quick afterwards, you know, because the holiday season was over. We got-- we went back to regular food, which God knows what it was every day. But we ate it.

[00:37:20.34] MARK FRANKLIN: So when you flew, what operations-- what area of operations did you fly--

[00:37:24.48] MICHAEL MUSSO: All in I Corps. You know where I Corps is? I Corps is the most northern section of the Vietnam conflict. There's four corps. I Corps is predominantly Marines and Army. Not much Navy. Oh, well, the Navy had-- excuse me. The Navy had riverboats because we saw the riverboats all the time we were flying over.

[00:37:46.80] MARK FRANKLIN: How about describe the leadership you had.

[00:37:49.02] MICHAEL MUSSO: Good. Good leadership. All the officers I knew were good people. I befriended an officer-- I don't know if you could call it befriending. When I came home, I picked up E-5 sergeant. And they gave me about 25 or 30 men. And my task was to take helicopters that had to come back from Vietnam and prepare them for O&R.

[00:38:22.74] So what that meant was we had to flush the hydraulic system, flush the fuel system, bring up the floorboards, and clean everything that was under the floorboards. Mark and notate anything that needed to be repaired in the metal shop, such as bullet holes, broken struts. Check the blades. I mean, we had to do all that stuff.

[00:38:44.94] So every week we'd get a bevy of helicopters, which would be a 46, a 53. You know what a 53 is, right?

[00:38:54.11] MARK FRANKLIN: Yeah.

[00:38:54.40] MICHAEL MUSSO: OK. 46 or 53. And we didn't work that much on 34s. However, they were on the base. But I don't think that they came back from Vietnam. They may have scuttled them in Vietnam. Because when I got home in '68, I didn't see many 34s running around, to be frank with you-- 46s and 53s.

[00:39:13.53] A 53 is a single-bladed, five-blade-- a single-rotor five-blade helicopter at the time. Now, I think they have more blades. They may have six blades. And a tail rotor in the back.

[00:39:29.20] And at that time in 1968, it was the world's largest helicopter before the Russians came out with the larger one. And it had a 6,300 horsepower engine. And it was pretty big. You could drive a Jeep into it. That's how big it was. At that time that was pretty big. Now, of course, you could drive tanks into some of these helicopters.

[00:39:53.05] And I got to become familiar with it, in that Major Franklin, who signed my-- I think it's he that signed my DD-214, my termination of duty-- noticed me, and noticed I was taking flying lessons on my own. I am a pilot now, but I was-- I didn't go through military training. I decided I was going to blow my GI. I wanted to fly, and so I did.

[00:40:21.31] And found out that I had received my commercial license, and said to me, he says, how about you and I go down to NAS North Island? I'm taking the 53 down there. I said, sir, that's all you got to say. And I grabbed my ditty bag, and off we went. And he and I flew down to NAS North Island. And we came back in a Marine car of some sort-- some car was waiting for him.

[00:40:45.78] MARK FRANKLIN: Are there any operations that you are willing to share? Or would you prefer-- I mean--

[00:40:50.22] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. Operation would be President Johnson's MEDCAP program. He announced a MEDCAP program. And it came down that we were to now provide medical services to the local vill. And you're nodding your head. Have you heard of the MEDCAP program?

[00:41:09.75] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, yeah.

[00:41:10.02] MICHAEL MUSSO: OK, good. So that meant us getting in a Jeep or two with a corpsman, a dentist, an MD, if you could find one, or a couple of corpsman, and four or five Marines. And you go with a young officer and a radioman. I'm the radioman. So, of course, I hung with the officer.

[00:41:31.71] And what we did, we just went to the village. They set up their areas. And I just sat with the officer waiting for further orders. And we did that for-- I don't know how many trips I made to the vill. But it was good. It was a good thing to do. And I got to see firsthand some of the destruction of the villagers from the VC.

[00:42:01.83] MARK FRANKLIN: What was their typical response, the villagers, when you would do these MEDCAPs?

[00:42:05.36] MICHAEL MUSSO: Ah, a little scary. We were there-- to them, we were the aggressor. I mean-- you know, I went to Vietnam thinking they would welcome us in open arms, and that wasn't the case.

[00:42:24.03] MICHAEL MUSSO: OK. I meet my first Korean. We'd landed at a top of a mountain-- an artillery battalion. And they're all elevated on top of mountains, so did a lot of mountain landings for resupply. And being that I was the FNG, the two pilots and the crew chief went their way to speak to the command bunker people, whoever was there.

[00:42:46.70] And I'm talking about a mountain top no more than about an acre or two-- a howitzer or two, a bunker or two, and a command post, and the men living in ditches. And I'm serious. They were living in ditches-- living in cutouts in the ground-- foxholes when I saw--

[00:43:09.07] MARK FRANKLIN: And these are the Koreans.

[00:43:09.73] MICHAEL MUSSO: No. These are American GIs. They didn't have any hooches on top of the mountain I would see. Not all of them were like that. But a lot of them were-- these

guys-- I mean, my heart went out to them. They didn't shower for 10 or 15 days. I mean, they were eating C-rats. That's another story. I'll tell you about C-rats.

[00:43:27.31] So I'm walking around the helicopter securing it, as I should, or watching it for security. And you check to see that no one's coming up the hill attacking you or anything. And you're just doing your duty.

[00:43:42.31] And as I walk around the other side, that side facing the valley, I look down, and there's this Korean. And he's sitting there, and he's eating lunch. So he waves me over. And I-- friendly. Of course, I'll come by and sit next to him.

[00:44:00.43] And he doesn't speak any English, but he says, GI. GI. Yeah, I'm a GI. And he says something I don't quite understand. And all of a sudden, he gives me his canteen and says-- I didn't want to insult him or anything.

[00:44:20.75] So I took a finger full of what he was eating, and I put it in my mouth. Kimchi. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. That was so hot. I jumped up. And when I jumped up, he started laughing.

[00:44:37.15] Now, he's laughing so hard that some of the guys on the other side of the helicopter hearing it, and they say, hey, hey, the boot met the Korean. [LAUGHS] And that was-- I took-- ran in the helicopter, grabbed my canteen, poured water in my mouth trying to get rid of that. And that was the worst thing that ever happened to me when it comes to food. So yeah, I had my experience with-- but then I met them later, and they were OK.

[00:45:07.03] MARK FRANKLIN: So what were your impressions of our allies beyond the food experience?

[00:45:10.21] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, I met some Australians-- great guys. They loved us. I mean, really. They were very friendly. Didn't meet any Brits. I met Australians and Koreans-- very friendly towards us. But in a battle, I'd take a bullet for them, just like they'd take a bullet for me.

[00:45:28.75] MARK FRANKLIN: How about the Vietnamese military? Any interaction with them? South Vietnamese Army.

[00:45:35.50] MICHAEL MUSSO: No. Actually, I didn't. I stayed with the air wing. And we had some aboard the helicopter at times. And I didn't interact with them. No.

[00:45:49.27] The crew chief was pretty concerned that I stayed in my position and provided security for the helicopter in case it needed it. And I was the gunner. So I wasn't to mill around with anything or anybody.

[00:46:13.43] MICHAEL MUSSO: They liked us to a degree. I mean, the youngsters didn't know any better. Of course, they loved you. They loved to walk by you when you-- or walk next to you when you're walking on the street and steal your wristwatch and your wallet.

[00:46:25.23] I mean, literally. One would grab your attention. The other would have your arm taking your wristwatch. One would try and grab your weapon and take your pistol, if you had a pistol.

[00:46:34.58] I mean, they're kids. I mean, they don't know any better. The older ones, however, I can't say one way or another what-- I have no opinion. I didn't interface.

[00:46:55.52] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. Losing Michael Alberici was my worst day.

[00:47:01.10] MARK FRANKLIN: Were you with him?

[00:47:02.24] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. And I rotated home. And a guy in the tent wrote me and told me Michael got blown away.

[00:47:13.49] MARK FRANKLIN: Was he on the helicopter, or was he--

[00:47:14.78] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. And he berated me. We were-- he was a good guy. We knew a lot about each other. His family wrote him maybe two letters at the time I knew him for about six or seven months. And here, my future wife was writing me-- every two or three days I'd get a letter. And Michael knew it, and I'd let him read the letter. Here, Mike, you know.

[00:47:47.39] So we had plans when he got stateside, being that we had the same MOS. He'd come, and he'd check in at El Toro and we'd get together. And he was going to rotate maybe about four months after me. And I got the letter from a gentleman by the name of Fessler in the tent.

[00:48:14.85] MICHAEL MUSSO: Best day? Probably receiving a compliment from Major Franklin saying, Mike, if you sign here, you'll have E-6 out that door. MARK FRANKLIN: Wow. MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. He did my exit interview and found out that-- what had happened in MarCad. And he wasn't apologetic, but he understood. And I had a clean record. I had not even-- there was not one entry on my page 12-- nothing. And he said, we need men like you. I'll see what I can do for you. But I'll get you E-6 out that door.

[00:49:04.60] My chest swelled. I mean, that made me feel great. But I had a woman in my life that had stayed with me for over four years. And I wanted to get married and have children and enjoy life. And that's-- I got to tell you, that's exactly what I did. I got out, returned to college, married this wonderful person-- had three children with her.

[00:49:35.88] MICHAEL MUSSO: I got a letter about every three days.

[00:49:37.86] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you write back?

[00:49:38.94] MICHAEL MUSSO: Absolutely.

[00:49:40.11] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you tell her much about what you were doing or what was going on?

[00:49:42.45] MICHAEL MUSSO: Not allowed.

[00:49:43.29] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, OK.

[00:49:44.43] MICHAEL MUSSO: We weren't allowed to tell where we were, what we did. I mean, it came-- it was just silly stuff we wrote about. Like, chow hall had this. I had a pretty good day at work. I couldn't fix one box, blah, blah, blah.

[00:50:02.91] And it was-- and it wasn't what you wrote, it was that you wrote-- didn't have to have much content. Just the fact that you got the letter. I could care less what she said, other than the fact that she still loved me and she didn't go with some other guy.

[00:50:18.09] So the fact that you got a letter, and the fact that I sent her letters when-- later on she'd say, just as long as I got something, I could care less what you said. She sent care pack-- nice Italian girl. Boy, she sent-- she sent-- [LAUGHS] she sent rolls of provolone cheese. [LAUGHS]

[00:50:37.98] MARK FRANKLIN: Did it keep?

[00:50:38.94] MICHAEL MUSSO: By the time he got to Vietnam it was soft. It smelled.

[00:50:43.53] [LAUGHTER]

[00:50:46.56] And she sent salami. [LAUGHS]

[00:50:48.60] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, no.

[00:50:49.68] MICHAEL MUSSO: Don't send salami. Oh, it just-- bend it-- It was-- [LAUGHS]. Ah, she tried her best, but--

[00:50:57.81] MARK FRANKLIN: That's great. We've heard that a couple of times. Not very often, but that's great.

[00:51:01.23] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh, yeah. You never know what you're getting. No chocolate, of course. It would melt terribly.

[00:51:06.39] MARK FRANKLIN: How much news did you hear about what was going on back in the country-- the anti-war protests, the civil strife?

[00:51:12.54] MICHAEL MUSSO: It wasn't in Stars and Stripes, we didn't hear it. And I got to tell you, I didn't hear much about the protests. And I had guys give me dirty looks when I got home. I didn't let it bother me. I gave them a dirty look back. I was proud.

[00:51:28.77] You know, unlike a lot of what you probably hear, I was patriotic. I was motivated. I was positive. And I shunned those that weren't.

[00:51:46.22] MICHAEL MUSSO: July-- I think it was July 17. It's on the DD-214. It would be 1968. My journey home was preceded with prayers. Did not want come back on a Navy ship. You know why, don't you? Come on, Navy. You have to cross the equator. You have to cross the equator. He knows that.

[00:52:08.54] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, you didn't want to do the ceremony.

[00:52:11.27] MICHAEL MUSSO: I didn't want to-- ceremony, you call it?

[00:52:13.19] MARK FRANKLIN: Yes.

[00:52:13.51] MICHAEL MUSSO: [LAUGHS] And I heard the stories. And I said, oh, please, God, let me go on a jet. And I did. I flew home on a Pan Am jet.

[00:52:20.99] MARK FRANKLIN: So commercial.

[00:52:22.02] MICHAEL MUSSO: Commercial. Yeah.

[00:52:22.85] MARK FRANKLIN: Where did you fly in to?

[00:52:27.83] MICHAEL MUSSO: Hawaii. And then Hawaii to El Toro.

[00:52:31.04] MARK FRANKLIN: El Toro. What was that-- was your fiance waiting for you? What was that reception like when you got there?

[00:52:35.96] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, she couldn't wait for me because she was employed by Western Airlines. And she was busy. She was a ticket agent with Western, and she couldn't leave. She knew when I was coming. But you really don't know the exact time-- on or around such and such a date.

[00:52:56.54] So she couldn't take off on or around. She had to be there specifically. I couldn't deliver that. So she was working. And I took a cab from El Toro with two other guys and went to the Western Airlines corporate office, walked up the stairs and opened the door, and there she was. And the whole office went nuts.

[00:53:14.00] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh. So that was a good reception.

[00:53:15.71] MICHAEL MUSSO: I had a good reception. And she planned, about three weeks after I got home, a VFW party for me. And so I had a good reception. I had a family that supported me. God bless them.

[00:53:35.15] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you stay in the Marine Corps?

[00:53:38.27] MICHAEL MUSSO: Four years. Then I was out.

[00:53:40.01] MARK FRANKLIN: What did you do afterwards?

[00:53:43.46] MICHAEL MUSSO: Continued my flight training. I taught flying at Long Beach Airport for a while. And--

[00:53:48.59] MARK FRANKLIN: You taught flying?

[00:53:49.76] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. I'm a flight instructor.

[00:53:51.12] MARK FRANKLIN: So you had already gotten your flight instructor--

[00:53:53.09] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh. Major Franklin had seen me. In my exit interview, I showed him all my licenses. This is-- I said, sir, I've got a commercial pilot's license. I've got a CFI. I'm multiengine rated and instrument rated, sir. I've got everything that's needed.

[00:54:09.56] MARK FRANKLIN: So you did all that before you went in the Marine Corps?

[00:54:11.72] MICHAEL MUSSO: No. While I was in the Marine Corps.

[00:54:14.24] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh.

[00:54:14.84] MICHAEL MUSSO: When I came home in '68, I started flying for the private pilot's license. And luckily enough, one of the guys that was in the avionics complex was also a pilot. And he didn't tell me about his MarCad opportunity. But I suspect-- we never had that conversation. But I suspect he was a MarCad candidate as well.

[00:54:39.59] And he probably had his license before he went in-- as a matter of fact, he did. Because he told me a story. He tried to check out an airplane in Tennessee, and an officer had moved his name down. And he got very upset because-- just because I'm an enlisted man you moved my name down. That happened quite a few times while I was in the service.

[00:54:58.52] MARK FRANKLIN: So you became a flight instructor. Did you stay with that job?

[00:55:01.13] MICHAEL MUSSO: No. There's two things that I found I could not do as a flight instructor in 1970. One of them is eat. There was no eating. The second one is dating. There's no dating. There's no eating, and there's no dating. [LAUGHS] There's no money-- \$6 an hour for a private pilot license, and \$11.50 an hour for a wet airplane. That means with fuel.

[00:55:30.68] And luckily, I had befriended a real estate fellow who had a plane. And his main drive was to keep that plane flying. And so he could, I guess, write it off for taxes or whatever. I didn't know enough about tax at that time.

[00:55:44.39] But it was-- you have to keep them flying for a number of reasons. Maintenance-- And it was in a commercial category. So he was operating on a different level of FARs-- probably part 131, if I'm not mistaken, or 135. I've been out of it for so long I don't remember.

[00:56:02.84] MARK FRANKLIN: So what did you end up doing then, after that?

[00:56:06.11] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, the way life unfolds is really amazing. I had to eat. And in so doing, I took a job as a liquor clerk in a supermarket. And in the process of closing the stores every night I would prepare for my next day's students' flights.

[00:56:27.32] So I'd had my sectional laid out on the counter. And the next day, I think I was scheduled for a short cross-country with a student, and I was trying to figure out where I was going to take him out of Long Beach. Short cross-country could be Van Nuys, could be-- actually, Orange County, I believe, is-- 25 miles is the minimum for a cross country. So I could have taken him to Van Nuys or Orange County.

[00:56:53.35] I was figuring that out, and this guy walks up and says, what are you doing with a sectional? I said, I have a student tomorrow morning-- complete stranger. And I said, you're with Kraft, huh? And I knew he was with Kraft Foods because he's wearing the Kraft lapel.

[00:57:11.68] He says, yeah, I am. And I'm a pilot, too. I says, you're kidding me. So he says, what are you doing behind the liquor counter? I said, hey, man, we got to eat. You know that, right? And he says, yeah. Aviation is having a hard time right about now. I said, yeah, 1970 is kind of tough. Nobody's got money to fly.

[00:57:28.30] So he said, here's my card. He said, call me. I'll set you up with an appointment with our area manager. We could use someone like you. You've got food experience? And luckily, I had worked in the supermarket when I was a young kid. And I said, sure. I've worked a couple of years in a supermarket. He says, ah, you're just the type of guy we want.

[00:57:47.48] So I had an interview with this fellow, Mr. Shop. And he-- I filled out the application. He liked everything he saw. He said, good. He says, we'll start you off at-- what did he say it was? We'll start you off at \$700 a month, you get a company car, and you're responsible for about 20 stores. I says, thank you. I can handle that.

[00:58:17.72] So I worked there for a year-and-a-half, and I found out that wasn't my cup of tea. It was too simple. Again, I was bored. So I went to my wife and I said, you know, I got to get out of this.

[00:58:30.76] It's-- I could do this forever. We'll have a car, all the food we can eat. I mean, it's wonderful, but it's not what I like. And so we decided I was going to get back in college. So I went back to college-- Pepperdine University-- and I graduated Pepperdine.

[00:58:51.52] MARK FRANKLIN: And what did you do after that?

[00:58:53.41] MICHAEL MUSSO: My wife worked the gates at Western Airlines. And she knew a police officer-- name was Fast Eddie. So Fast Eddie finds out that I was a Marine. And so he said, I'd like to meet him. So Carol says, Fast Eddie wants to meet you. We had talked about that. I said, sure, I'll meet him.

[00:59:14.95] So I meet Fast Eddie at the gate a day or two later. Just shake his hand. He says, where were you? I says, I was in MAG-16, I Corps. He says, I'm familiar with MAG-16. I say, you are? He says, yeah.

[00:59:31.45] He says, what are you doing now? Well, I said, I'm working for-- I just graduated college, and I was working for Kraft Foods. And he says, you know anything about electronics? I says, well, yeah, you're talking my language. He said, good.

[00:59:49.96] He says, you good in sales? I said, I could be good in sales. He says, OK. He said, I want you to write down this number. I want you to speak to Mr. Bob Lyons at Motorola. So I said, oh, OK.

[01:00:03.73] So I call Bob Lyons, and we have a short conversation over the phone. He says, come on in for an interview, and I did. And he has the first interview, which lasted about 30 minutes or thereabouts.

[01:00:19.45] And he says, it's a long process working for Motorola. It's not an easy job to get. I said, I know, Mr. Lyons. But I'll continue to interview as long as you'll have me. He says, sure. He says, so-- he says, we'll have one more interview. I want you to meet someone here in the office. I said, OK.

[01:00:40.23] So I've realized you have to get approval by everybody you meet, even the secretary. [LAUGHS] Yeah. In 1974, you had to go down the line. So he says, good.

[01:00:52.77] Mike, he says, next visit we're going to schedule you for a test. I said, oh, what kind of test Mr. Lyons? He says, it's a general knowledge test. Everybody that comes to work for Motorola has to pass it. I said, wow. Later on I found out it was a Stanine IQ test. They call it a personality profile test. BS. It's an IQ test.

[01:01:15.07] So I took the test. He sends it up to Dr. So-and-so up in San Francisco, and he puts his signature on it and shows the manager the result. And they make a decision. Well, the decision was, let's call them in for the next interview.

[01:01:27.69] And the next interview included your wife. Because it was made very clear that they were not going to be hiring anyone who was single. You had to have an interview with your wife.

[01:01:40.77] Now, Bob didn't say that. But you had to have an interview with the wife. And so we had the interview with the wife. And Carol, of course, she passed with flying-- beautiful woman-- passed with flying colors, and I had the job. Had a job of Motorola for about six years.

[01:02:00.15] MARK FRANKLIN: All right. Did you have any trouble adjusting to life after Vietnam?

[01:02:06.00] MICHAEL MUSSO: None that is preventing me from doing and continuing functioning. It just-- I never had-- I had dreams, but I can't say I suffer STD. I have suffered from

Agent Orange. I have-- I am CIDP, which is a neurological deficiency. So I just pray it doesn't extend to my left arm. I won't be able to lift or do anything.

[01:02:43.23] About a year or two after I got home, I noticed that I could lift my right arm, but I couldn't hold it. I had to lift it, but I couldn't hold it. So I went to the doctor and they said, yeah, it's a nerve condition.

[01:02:59.02] And after seeing about 10 doctors, all of which could not provide any cure, even surgical cure. They said, look, if we open your neck up everything in the MRI is normal, Mike. We don't know why you can't lift your arm. And to have a doctor say that to you-- I mean, you better go back to the books. There's something there, Doc.

[01:03:26.79] So the head neurological doctor at Kaiser, who was a VA instructor, a VA doctor of neurology, had a final discussion with me and said, Mike, I got to tell you. The only thing it can be is Agent Orange. So he traced it back. I had to answer and fill out a bunch of paperwork with the VA. And VA granted me disability.

[01:03:53.69] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you stay in touch with your fellow veterans over the years?

[01:03:56.73] MICHAEL MUSSO: I just came back from Alaska. My friend, John, who I knew in Memphis, who-- we both agreed-- from John saying to me when we got out of the Marine Corps, roughly the same-- couple of months difference. He said, I will never ever work for a government agency again, Mike.

[01:04:17.82] He graduated college-- mechanical engineer. And he is now-- he took a job with C. Everett Koop, surgeon general. That's a paramilitary organization.

[01:04:30.31] When he told me I said, John, you've got to be kidding me, man. That's a military organization. He says, I know, but it's different. They made me an offer I couldn't refuse, Mike. So he retired in '05 about two years ago.

[01:04:43.89] MARK FRANKLIN: How about the Marine that you served with in Vietnam that you-- the African-American. Was it Warren?

[01:04:48.66] MICHAEL MUSSO: Warren. Last name King, interesting. Yeah.

[01:04:51.59] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you stay in touch with him?

[01:04:53.15] MICHAEL MUSSO: He and I spoke, I'd say, about a year ago.

[01:04:56.10] MARK FRANKLIN: Oh, great. Good

[01:04:57.66] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. He won't share with me a few things, but I think he's having a hard time. I just do. I know Warren. And when he hesitates to talk, you know something's wrong there. Good guy. Great guy.

[01:05:15.78] MICHAEL MUSSO: You know what it did do? It reconfirmed my patriotism. Because I met guys who were the other side of the coin. For example, we had a guy in our platoon named Tom Godon in boot camp. Tom Godon-- hell of a nice guy. Didn't know him much, but good Marine, graduated boot camp. Went to Vietnam right out of boot camp. Went straight from ITR and went to Vietnam.

[01:05:46.27] A sniper got a straight shot at him in the hip. He lost-- no. In the first round, hit his leg. Second round, hit his foot. So he was cobbled. And he's telling me this in 19-- let me think. I got to think of the year now. 19-- now, see, the wall-- the wall didn't come down yet. The wall didn't come down from Berlin yet. So it was before. When did the Berlin Wall come down? '91?

[01:06:18.39] MARK FRANKLIN: Yes.

[01:06:18.90] MICHAEL MUSSO: OK. So it was probably 1989 he's having this discussion with me. Because he found me. And he called me up, and he says, is this Mike Musso from Platoon 1009? And I said, who the hell is this? It was Tom Godon. So we met and had lunch.

[01:06:37.80] He got-- he was cobbled. Spent 26 weeks in Japan. Came from Japan to Balboa. Spent another three or for three or four months in Balboa. And finally, was able to walk with therapy.

[01:06:56.58] He walked in the restaurant. He looked just great as can be-- not a pound overweight, tall-- the guy that I remember, in boot camp, I mean. And so we sat down and talked.

[01:07:10.51] And I asked him that same question. How have you been since you got out of Vietnam. He says-- wounded like that. He says, oh, shit. I feel great, Mike. I said, what did you do when you got out?

[01:07:19.65] He says, well, I befriended my therapist, he says. And the therapist got wind that I did pretty good in biology in high school. And he says, you know what? Why don't we schedule you for a basic biology exam? And he did. Got accepted into medical school. He's an emergency room surgeon at West Covina Hospital-- Dr. Thomas Godon. G-O-D-O-N.

[01:07:46.77] And here I'm-- and this is a guy that was drafted-- not drafted. I was drafted-- but was in the service at the same time. And so we were both patriots in a way. And we didn't let it bother us. A lot of people, I guess, let it bother them.

[01:08:06.30] It was common for me. My dad served in the Second World War. I spoke about it with my father and my uncle. It was simply your turn. And that's what he said to me. He said, Mike, it's simply your turn. You got to do it. That's the way-- that's the mentality. It's simple, I guess-- too simple. But that's the way it is.

[01:08:29.41] MARK FRANKLIN: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about troops coming off the battlefields and training-- or deployments today?

[01:08:37.59] MICHAEL MUSSO: Well, I have a theory. If you're going to go into battle, you've got an entrance strategy. Don't go in without an exit strategy. We had no exit strategy. Go in, kick ass, and leave? And what do you have in return? That's what happened Vietnam-- went in, kicked ass, never lost a battle, got nothing in return.

[01:09:07.17] MARK FRANKLIN: What do you think the war meant to you and your generation?

[01:09:11.67] MICHAEL MUSSO: It opened our eyes that we're not always going to win. And you have to accept the fact that you're going to lose. No, I didn't accept that when I got home. 1968, I still had thoughts that we were going to win.

[01:09:28.17] As a matter of fact, I would get together with a few guys who knew me, knew I was a Marine. And I'd say, fuck it. We were winning when I left, buddy. [LAUGHS] It's you guys that blew it. [LAUGHS]

[01:09:46.68] MARK FRANKLIN: How do you think the war is remembered today?

[01:09:49.89] MICHAEL MUSSO: I think the world looks-- or I should say, America looks at Vietnam as a loss, a terrible loss. But I hope they don't think that those of us who fought it are losers. Because, I mean, we were winners up till then. And it was hard to accept that. Even Korea-- come on. We got South Korea, and look at it now? We can't say that about Vietnam.

[01:10:34.25] MARK FRANKLIN: You mentioned earlier about entrance/exit strategies. Are there any other lessons you took from Vietnam you'd like to pass on?

[01:10:44.93] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah. And, you know, I get asked that by kids a lot. Yeah. Youngsters ask me that. And I tell them, if you're going to go into the service it's like living in civilian life only it's more scrutinized.

[01:11:05.68] So take every school you can. If they offer you a school, take it. I tell that to the kids. Take it-- every school you can if you're in. If you want to go in, then get in and give it your all. Take every school you can. Take advantage of the benefits. Do good, and don't be stupid.

[01:11:25.96] I mean, I've seen guys do such stupid things it's not even funny. And it's all stupid. I mean, they're trying to prove something, I guess. I don't know.

[01:11:41.57] MARK FRANKLIN: Have you been to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC?

[01:11:44.68] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh, yeah.

[01:11:44.96] MARK FRANKLIN: What are your impressions?

[01:11:45.34] MICHAEL MUSSO: I walked it in 1984.

[01:11:47.32] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you?

[01:11:47.87] MICHAEL MUSSO: That's when it was opened, right, if I remember it correctly?

[01:11:49.57] MARK FRANKLIN: Well, '82 is when it--

[01:11:50.53] MICHAEL MUSSO: '82. '82. I walked it in '82, yeah, when it was opened. Yes.

[01:11:55.84] MARK FRANKLIN: What are your impressions of that?

[01:11:56.77] MICHAEL MUSSO: My father passed away in '84. I get the dates mixed up. Sorry about that. I liked it.

[01:12:02.26] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you?

[01:12:02.80] MICHAEL MUSSO: Oh, yeah. I went back the next morning when there wasn't so many guys there, and I stood in the center of that. Whoa. That's effective-- your entire field view.

[01:12:21.04] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you find the name of your buddy?

[01:12:22.84] MICHAEL MUSSO: Three of them. MICHAEL MUSSO: I think it's wonderful.

[01:12:31.44] MARK FRANKLIN: That's great.

[01:12:32.28] MICHAEL MUSSO: We never had anything like that. And I got to tell you, again, my family was very supportive. So I didn't have any of that discoloration, you might say.

[01:12:43.62] MARK FRANKLIN: Have you received your Vietnam Veteran lapel pin?

[01:12:47.39] MICHAEL MUSSO: I probably have. Yeah.

[01:12:48.63] MARK FRANKLIN: It looks like this.

[01:12:53.55] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah, I have that.

[01:12:54.36] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you?

[01:12:54.92] MICHAEL MUSSO: Yeah.

[01:12:55.26] MARK FRANKLIN: What are your thoughts on-- that's what we present to Vietnam Veterans as part of this commemoration.

[01:12:58.95] MICHAEL MUSSO: I think it's wonderful. You know, anything you guys can do. I mean, that's why I'm a member of the VFW. And we're now a dying breed. We had a speaker come to our VFW meeting was 92 years of age. And he-- World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. I mean, he had all the metals on his cover. And I'm saying--

[01:13:17.07] MARK FRANKLIN: Three-war vet.

[01:13:18.06] MICHAEL MUSSO: Three-war vet. And he is loquacious. He is in health. He is height/weight appropriate, and losing his hair like the rest of us.

[01:13:31.74] MARK FRANKLIN: But he's still going.

[01:13:33.12] MICHAEL MUSSO: And talks a mile a minute.

[01:13:34.83] MARK FRANKLIN: Wow.