

## **Vossler, William US Army**

[00:00:13.66] WILLIAM VOSSLER: I was born in-- I was born December 21, 1946. I was a gleam in my father's eye when he came home from the Second World War. And so there I was. Born and raised in Wellsville, New York. A small, rural community, Allegheny County in New York, about 60 miles southeast of Buffalo. I was born and raised there. My wife, Barbara, was born and raised there. We were high school sweethearts.

[00:00:44.86] MARK FRANKLIN: So do you call that your hometown?

[00:00:47.59] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, home is where the Army sends you. But our oldest son, actually, moved back to where his mother and I grew up because that's where his grandmothers lived. Yeah, that's our hometown. Growing up, I had-- of course, I had Mom and Dad. Dad a Navy vet from World War II, as I said. I had a brother who is still with us today. I had a sister who passed away at 12 years old due to an enlarged heart, but we were a pretty good family. We like to think so. Yeah.

[00:01:30.81] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Following high school, I enrolled in what was then named the Pennsylvania Military College, which was one of seven senior military colleges in the country. If you think of colleges today like VMI, the Citadel, Norwich University, Texas A&M, that was-- PMC was one of those seven. Unfortunately, the college died in Vietnam. If you understand the meaning. Low enrollment, high debt, 1972, the Standing Corps cadets that I spent four years with was disestablished. The school was purchased by a wealthy family of Main Line, Philadelphia. And it's now Widener University.

[00:02:19.02] So that experience as a cadet is what enabled me to join the Army, understanding that I went to that college because from my youth, I had an interest in things military. If I had, as a tenth grader, a book review due to the English teacher, the book was a military history book of some type. And so it went back that far. So I was able to satisfy my interest. I graduated in May of 1968. And technically, my source of commissioning was Army ROTC.

[00:02:59.52] MARK FRANKLIN: What was your sense of the Vietnam War at that time?

[00:03:02.10] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, strange as it may sound, not meaning to sound like a warmonger, but as a cadet, as we went through our four years, our sense of the war was that it might end before we graduated. And we would not have an opportunity-- because those of us that thought we might want to stay in the military knew that wartime experience would be important in the staying. And so it was something that we followed, actually, on a daily basis to see how the war was going.

[00:03:40.61] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, we were commissioned in May of '68, but I did not have a reporting date until November. So the day after Thanksgiving, Barbara and I packed all that we owned into the smallest U-Haul trailer that was made, hooked it to our Ford Mustang, and went to Fort Benning, Georgia for infantry officer basic course. I was commissioned in the infantry. We had an opportunity for branch assignments. We could give our preferences.

[00:04:13.95] And under the influence of the assistant professors of military science at the Pennsylvania Military College, one was armor. And one was infantry. And they always wanted to get their guys lined up in terms of preference for branch assignments. And I put both of them down on the paper along with the third choice, which was military intelligence.

[00:04:40.50] And so not knowing that if you put infantry down at that stage of the Vietnam War, you were going to get infantry. And so we went to Fort Benning, a 15-week course, equivalent to enlisted basic training, except at the platoon leader level.

[00:05:06.39] Subsequently, I took additional training, a five-week course for a mortar platoon leader, with the understanding that-- to learn as many skills as you can to make you more available to different tasks in the Army, different assignments. And then just prior to deployment to Vietnam, jungle warfare school in Panama, a three-week course to prepare us to fight in Vietnam.

[00:05:46.14] MARK FRANKLIN: You had a pretty good sense you were going to end up in Vietnam.

[00:05:48.42] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Oh, yeah, it was pretty clear. Yeah. Yeah, it was a one-way destination at that time.

[00:05:53.28] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think that training prepared you well for what you faced in Vietnam?

[00:05:56.07] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Yes, I thought very well-- through the training phase and then the movement over to Vietnam, let's say, there were no surprises. Everything they told us in training came true with one exception. And that is they continued to beat into us the notion, which is a correct notion, that the new lieutenant needs to pay attention to his platoon sergeant. The seasoned veteran platoon sergeant, perhaps at the grade of sergeant first class, E-7 will be there. And listen to your platoon sergeant. He will help you become the best platoon leader you can be.

[00:06:37.02] Well, when I got to Vietnam, I had just turned 23 years old, and assigned to my platoon. And my platoon sergeant was 21 years old, a sergeant E-5. I instantly became the oldest man in the platoon at 23. That's where we were in 1970. And so my platoon sergeant was a fine young man. And he did help me, scolded me on several occasions. He thought, oftentimes, I was too far forward as we continued to do our patrols and that kind of thing.

[00:07:22.74] MARK FRANKLIN: So when you went to Vietnam, you didn't go with a unit. You just showed-- yo deployed to Vietnam--

[00:07:28.67] WILLIAM VOSSLER: I was a replacement.

[00:07:29.72] MARK FRANKLIN: You were a replacement. When did you arrive?

[00:07:32.66] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Convolutd story. We were in jungle warfare school in Panama. And we were to deploy to Vietnam directly from there. So Barbara and I had already said our goodbyes. Barbara stayed at Fort Benning. She did not want to go home with her friends because most of them were, at least mildly opposed to the war, if not vehemently opposed to the war.

[00:07:58.79] And so her environment was-- she chose to stay with the other waiting wives for Soldiers who were in Vietnam. So she stayed in Fort Benning, stayed in Columbus, made several friends there, went to work there while I was gone. And so they announced as we were getting ready to deploy directly from Panama to Vietnam, that because Christmas was approaching, they changed our reporting date.

[00:08:26.03] You can fly back to the States for four days, which we took advantage of, four of us. We landed at an air Force base in South Carolina. Four of us rented a car for-- a taxi, actually, to get to Columbus, Georgia. That's how badly we wanted to get home. So Barbara and I were able to spend Christmas together.

[00:08:49.76] And then the day after Christmas, I flew out to California, Travis Air Force Base, boarded a contract airline, me and-- I don't know how many other guys in the same situation. And so we flew then to Vietnam. And I was promoted to first lieutenant as we crossed the international dateline. We landed at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base in Vietnam.

[00:09:17.33] MARK FRANKLIN: When was that? What date?

[00:09:19.76] WILLIAM VOSSLER: It was December 28, 1969.

[00:09:25.37] MARK FRANKLIN: 1969.

[00:09:26.90] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Landed, taxied over, found a parking-- found a parking place for the plane. As soon as they cracked that door open, and the outside air rushed in, it was the smell that never left until we got on the plane to fly back a year-- well, not quite a year later. MARK FRANKLIN: Describe that smell. WILLIAM VOSSLER: It was a sour-- to me, it didn't smell real good. And so that was the first thing happened.

[00:09:59.78] So then we go down, we unload the plane, go down the ramp. And the first thing-- well, a couple of things caught my eye immediately. It was off to the right. There was another aircraft being loaded with rectangular boxes. And I thought-- I wonder what that-- and then it was so clear I should have recognized it immediately what it was. And it was they were loading coffins on the plane.

[00:10:40.27] Over to the left was another plane. And there was a line of guys. They didn't have the-- like we have at the modern terminals, where you could pull up, this thing that swings out, and you unload, and walk under the cover. No, you walk up these ramps. So over to the other side was a long line of guys getting ready to go up this ramp into another plane. Those guys were going home alive. The other guys were going home dead, in boxes.

[00:11:16.87] So that was-- I mean, I can remember that. So yeah, that was important. The next thing that hit me was, from a visual standpoint was, so after unloading the plane, we were going to get on-- we were put on buses to be taken over to the reception center, where your records were gone through. And then you were-- someone's going to, at random as a replacement, assign you to a unit-- at random. And that's basically what happened.

[00:11:48.65] But as we get on the buses, I noticed that all the windows on the buses, on the outside had grilles, a mesh, a grille system over the windows. And I thought, what's that all about? It was like you were climbing into a prison bus, keeping the prisoners in the bus. Well, we didn't-- I didn't feel like a prisoner, but soon realized that those mesh grilles over the windows covered the windows to keep foreign objects like hand grenades from coming through the window as you drive through the streets. And so at that point, it's hitting my mind, they're really serious about this stuff.

[00:12:33.58] I ended up being assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, which was part of the 3rd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division. The division had actually deployed back home and was reactivated the year before, except for the 3rd Brigade, the Go Devil Brigade. And the Go Devil Brigade was still in Vietnam. So 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry was where I was assigned. I can remember-- and the battalion had a base camp at a village called Binh Phuoc, which was in Long An Province, south of Saigon.

[00:13:14.12] And I remember at the brigade, 3rd Brigade reception area, the 3rd Brigade base camp at Tan An. I remember, New Year's Eve, I hadn't reported to the battalion yet. They put you through a short in-country training course. And so I was still involved in that training, but it's New Year's Eve 1969. And we were at the Tan An base camp. And they had a small officer's club about half the size of this room, where you could get a beer, and that kind of thing, and a sandwich.

[00:13:54.89] And so we were having-- myself and four or five other guys, several of whom were permanent party for the brigade at the brigade base camp. And we could hear in the distance-- then all of a sudden in the distance is all these explosions. Oh, it sounded pretty close. So we go out and look and look to the south. And yeah, you could see-- you could see these big explosions. You can see the gunships flying. You can see the line of tracers going down to the ground. I mean, there was a big hot action going on down there to the south of Tan An.

[00:14:35.73] And I said, well, that's a pretty good shoot up down there. One of the permanent party there at the brigade says, yeah. He says, where are you assigned? I said, 2/47 Infantry at Binh Phuoc. And he said, that's Binh Phuoc buddy. You're going to be down there tomorrow. And so that was interesting.

[00:15:02.03] Yeah, Long An Province, we spent-- our method of operation at that time was-- for the battalion-- we were a mechanized outfit first of all. So we had the M113, armored personnel carrier for added mobility, except during the very wet seasons of the year, where movement of track vehicles was-- even track vehicles was very difficult.

[00:15:28.05] So we did a combination of mobile operations, most of the operations on foot, but some air mobile operations. What we did was we interdicted the trails that came off the Ho Chi Minh Trail into the Delta area of south Vietnam. So we interdicted the movement of troops and supplies into that area by means of primarily night ambush.

[00:15:56.93] We would go out establish night ambush positions along the known and suspected trails, waiting for the movement of the enemy who only moved at night, because in daylight they could be seen and attacked. So they would move at night. And then when the sun came up, they would go to ground and stay hidden throughout the daylight until night again. Then they'd move again.

[00:16:24.53] And so our method was to lay in position-- on selected positions overnight. If they moved through our direction, then we would open fire. My platoon, when I joined, when I took command of that platoon, I was the oldest man of the platoon, yeah.

[00:16:45.03] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Again, the battalion had a base camp. On that base camp we had battalion headquarters. We had the four companies of the battalion, plus a support element, plus a field artillery battery. So it was a fairly substantial operation built by the US Army Corps of Engineers. We had big timber reinforced with sandbag, almost a bunker, above the ground, not below the ground, with tin roofs, a pretty good shelter.

[00:17:30.60] And each company had a section. The Soldiers had their barracks in typical barracks fashion. For the commissioned officers, we had a big room divided into small sleeping areas, big enough to put a bed into, like the room we had the last two nights here in Washington. It had a bed. And you could walk around the edges of the bed, but anyway.

[00:17:59.74] So a small room, but we weren't in the base camp all the time. We were in the field. So we might be in the field on these patrols-- night ambush, patrol, night ambush, patrol say for 10 days, two weeks. And then we would rotate in. There would always be one company, one rifle company in the base camp, two rifle companies out doing these patrols.

[00:18:22.78] But they would rotate us in, primarily so that working and living soldiering in the Delta that we could get our feet dried out. We would spend two or three days in the base camp doing that, and cleaning up our equipment, cleaning up our Soldiers, and cleaning up our weapons.

[00:18:44.32] MARK FRANKLIN: Preparing for the next mission.

[00:18:45.91] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Just preparing for the next mission. So it was a continual cycle. For the company that was in the base camp, the onerous-- one of the more onerous duties was to clear Thunder Road. Thunder Road was the name for the semi-improved road that connected the Binh Phuoc base camp with the brigade base camp north of us at Tan An.

[00:19:08.35] And so the enemy would often mine that road with pressure mines or command detonated mines. So every morning, that road had to be cleared because it was from the base

camp at Tan An that we got our supplies. And so before the supply column could come down the road, we had to clear the road from the base camp to Tan An.

[00:19:33.67] MARK FRANKLIN: How would you clear it? What were your procedures for clearing it?

[00:19:36.70] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Procedures for clearing it were we would line up along the road.

[00:19:40.48] MARK FRANKLIN: On foot?

[00:19:41.14] WILLIAM VOSSLER: On foot. And walk and look for any fresh diggings. I mean, it was not totally unlike what went on in Afghanistan and in Iraq, and look for any signs of disturbed soil, like that. And we had-- the 113s would be crawling along behind us because they had the .50-caliber machine gun on it and-- give us additional firepower. And so it was always a long walk up Thunder Road.

[00:20:11.20] And a couple-- more than once-- we didn't do it, but more than once, they cleared Thunder Road just by driving it. And that proved to be unsatisfactory. In fact, lost a couple of bridges. Lots of bridges, as you can imagine in the Delta area, that had to be crossed. And if not bridges, at least culverts and that kind of thing.

[00:20:36.49] MARK FRANKLIN: Describe how you would set up an ambush from beginning to end. How would you set that up?

[00:20:40.90] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, we would have-- first of all, we'd have intelligence that would come down. At the platoon level, we weren't involved in the locating. We went where we were told, but what we would do is go out. And each of the-- for the company, each of the three rifle platoons would be assigned a different sector. We always knew where each other was because the last thing we wanted to do was open fire in the direction of where the other guys were.

[00:21:09.05] And so we very carefully went out. And we would line up along the paddy dikes, use the paddy dikes for cover, which meant you had to get down in the paddy. Now if the paddys had been freshly manured, then you're laying there all night, sometimes we would go to the extent of blowing up a poncho, or a raft, a rubber raft, and lay on it. But you're laying along the bank of the paddy dike and waiting for a target of opportunity.

[00:21:45.91] We would place out Claymore mines. A Claymore mine was an anti-personnel mine command detonated by wire. It had, think of a plastic dish, concave in shape. On the back side of it is C-4 explosive. On the front side of it are several hundred ball bearings, basically. And then you had a detonator that screwed into it, connected to the wire. And you had a little clicker. And the wire would go back around 50 feet, 50 to 100 feet.

[00:22:25.85] And it was electrical power. You just press that clicker and it would explode the mine. And it was a directional mine. So you would fix those along the paddy dike. And if the bad

guys were coming down that dike, the first thing that would happen would be to command detonate that Claymore mine because it would cover a large area and--

[00:22:53.42] MARK FRANKLIN: Pretty destructive.

[00:22:54.41] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Pretty good chance that you're going to hit some. So we would set that up. We wait. We would stay awake all night, watch, and listen for our targets. And if they did not come along, and then in the morning we would have to then conduct a patrol to go into the areas where they might have gone to ground. Given the coming daylight, they might have gone to the ground.

[00:23:22.92] So we had to go through there, patrol through there, find them. And of course, that's where the vegetation is. The vegetation is there because there's a lot of water there. There's a lot of canals. The worst part about it, if you can't find a way across a canal via a small footbridge, you might have a log that's about-- it's about 4, 5 inches in diameter that you're going to have to carry the guy-- the machine gunners are the guys that I always felt sorry for.

[00:23:54.48] You're carrying the machine gun plus ammunition. And they got to balance their way across this doggone canal. So you had to be pretty nimble to make that crossing. Now, you watch the local people, the Vietnamese, a woman carrying-- with a long stick with two heavy bags of rice can come up and walk across that like she's walking down the street, all right? But that's not the same with us.

[00:24:18.79] And so it was always interesting. Or the other option, if you don't have a crossing like that, then you have to wade through the canal. Still water runs deep. In that still water are the leeches. So you do the crossing and come out. And first thing you have to do is, all right, let's check each other out. And it's a matter of checking each other out in private areas of the body to make sure that there are no leeches attached to us because that can become the source of an infection.

[00:24:49.40] So a Zippo lighter-- with a little flame from a Zippo lighter or a package of salt out of your C-rations, sprinkle down on those little critters will cause them to release and drop off. And all you got is just a little sore spot on your leg. Back down in that part of the country, it was very common.

[00:25:14.18] WILLIAM VOSSLER: When you're the new guy you're the new guy. And so you talk with those that have been there and get maybe some teaching points about everything, about the terrain, about the Soldiers, about the company commander. What's he really like? In that way, you establish a friendship.

[00:25:38.51] But what you're also doing is you're aligning your minds together because there will be an opportunity, not necessarily in this type of operation that we were doing with these night ambush operations and that kind of thing, but there may be an opportunity later where we're going to be fighting more closely aligned as a company, one platoon directly beside the other, in support of the other.

[00:26:03.15] So we want to make sure that our minds are aligned, that we're thinking somewhat alike, not necessarily independently, that we are team players. And so you establish your relationships with fellow platoon leaders, fellow leaders like that in that context.

[00:26:28.83] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you think you made friendships with folks from other racial or social backgrounds that you might not have had you not joined the military?

[00:26:36.74] WILLIAM VOSSLER: From a racial standpoint, I can't say that that's the case. In terms of friendships, if you're the platoon leader, your friendships are with your peer group. You can't get overly friendly with the Soldiers because you're going to have to order them, possibly, to do something that is going to be extremely dangerous to their health. And so they need to respect you, but they don't need to be-- you can't be their best buddy.

[00:27:26.80] From the racial aspect of it, as a military historian specializing in the American Civil War, I specialize in myth busting. Oftentimes, we hear of the Vietnam War, that the common Soldier was primarily from different racial groups. Well, right up front, I'll tell you that in my platoon, I had three black Soldiers. At the same time, I probably had nine Latinos, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, they outnumbered them-- Gomez, Aguilar. I mean, they outnumbered the black Soldiers, but I just wanted to make that correction for the record.

[00:28:24.59] MARK FRANKLIN: While you were there during-- when you went over, the civil rights movement was pretty strong, moving back in the States. And there was some civil strife, some racial tensions. Did you witness any of that in Vietnam?

[00:28:36.11] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Not in Vietnam. We were placed in a situation there as a combat platoon that we had to rely on one another specifically. We're looking out for each other. Race didn't come into whether you were going to support the guy on your left and right. That wasn't an issue. You were going to support them. It didn't matter what the race was. And that's down at the platoon and company level.

[00:29:13.86] Beyond that I didn't have any experience with it. If there was racial problems, there might have been, I guess there were. Apparently there were, but where we were, we were bonded together for self preservation while accomplishing our mission. And so there were no major issues from a racial context. And I can say that continued on for the remainder of my tour.

[00:29:47.35] The same thing with the drug-- the notion of the drug business. The Soldiers policed the drug business themselves. They cleaned that up. They don't want somebody-- if you're laying out there in a night ambush position, and you've got a machine gun over here, and a machine gun over here, and an L-shaped ambush, you don't want some drugged up guy manning that doggone machine gun.

[00:30:11.06] So the Soldiers, primarily, took care of anything like that themselves. And a lot of people don't understand that concept. Again, it was self preservation. If you've got a guy that's got-- that could get some drugs from the local girl at the village outside the base camp, then he's not going to take those drugs to the field or maybe he's not even going to go to the field, because

what they did with one young man who was a problem is they-- before we went back out in the next mission, they locked him in a Conex container.

[00:30:55.09] A Conex container is a steel storage container. It's about 6 feet high by 6 feet wide by 6 feet deep. And it's got a big iron door on it. And we had a guy that was a problem. And we went to deploy. And we got out to the field. And I said to the platoon sergeant, we got everybody? He said, no. We don't have so-and-so. I said, where is he? And he said, well, he was high. And the guys locked him in a Conex container.

[00:31:31.40] I said, a Conex container? Somebody's got to get him out of there. Is he locked in? Oh yeah, he's locked. He's locked. And I said, well, we got to get him out of here. I mean, the sun's going to turn that into an oven. And he said, well-- he said, sir. He said, they don't remember what Conex container it was they put him in.

[00:31:52.14] And so it was radio traffic back and forth. And of course, the company was in the field. So the only guys that could take care of the problem was our rear detachment, the company rear detachment back at the base camp. So they needed help. They had to go to battalion. And so there were some unpleasant-- some pleasantness over that. But that just illustrates that the Soldiers policed the system.

[00:32:18.23] Off-duty time was only when we rotated back in to dry out and to clean up, but I can't say that you're off-- you're not off duty. You're always doing something. If you brought the Soldiers in for them to get cleaned up, and to get the weapons and equipment cleaned up, then you give them that opportunity. But then you're inspecting what-- the troops do best what the commander inspects. And so as the leader, then you're saying, all right, you've had 24 hours to get squared away. Let's see how squared away you are. And so there wasn't a lot of time to recreate.

[00:33:06.49] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you have any specific memories of popular culture? By that I mean books, films, music, if you hear a song today that takes you back to your time in Vietnam?

[00:33:16.12] WILLIAM VOSSLER: What little time I had being interested in military history specifically, I would do reading when I had a few hours to do that. So that was one thing. So popular culture, to this day, when I do tours of the Gettysburg battlefield for groups-- if it's a military reunion group, specifically the Vietnam era, I'll get on that bus. And the first thing I'll say is, good morning, Vietnam because Adrian Cronauer was the guy who made that very popular.

[00:34:02.42] And so that was part of our popular culture, our popular music. We could get from Saigon broadcasts of the Armed Forces Radio Network. And so that's what we listened to. That's where we got our information. We got our information from the Stars and Stripes newspaper. Our brigade, the Go Devil Brigade published a newspaper, the Go Devil newspaper.

[00:34:28.64] So we got accounts of what the other battalions of the brigade were doing and how we were doing, because down at that level we didn't always know what else was going on in the battalion, that word didn't filter down to us. And so that was our source of information.

[00:34:51.74] MARK FRANKLIN: Any memorable holidays that stand out during your service in Vietnam? And what would have made them memorable if they were?

[00:35:02.75] WILLIAM VOSSLER: The one holiday that I remember the most was Easter of 1970. And I remember it because we'd been given a warning order that we were about ready to pack up and relocate to a different area of-- a totally different area of operation. As it turned out, we didn't know at the time, we're going to move up for the attack into Cambodia on the 1st of May, 1970 where President Nixon allowed the Cambodian incursion for us to go in and clean out the Communist sanctuaries on the other side of the border, from Vietnam in Cambodia.

[00:35:47.13] We didn't know where we were going, but we knew-- we'd been told we were going to have to pack up soon and move. So it was Easter. And the chaplain, the battalion chaplain convened a worship service in the artillery battery parapet at the base camp. And so we were sitting there on ammunition boxes that have been filled with sand to protect the artillery pieces. And it's dark, sun hadn't come up yet.

[00:36:18.37] And he arranged it so that we were all facing to the east. And then here comes the sun. You could just see a sliver, just a brilliant, orange coming up. And he began the service. And that was-- when I saw that question, that's the first thing that came to mind.

[00:36:51.21] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Leadership-- we lead in four directions. We try to lead our boss to make the right decisions. We lead our peer group. We lead our subordinates. We lead ourselves. So let's go up top first. The battalion commanders, I had two during my time there. They seemed to be good men. Both will go on to-- one will retire as a full colonel. And the other as a general officer.

[00:37:27.73] But they were good men, I thought. But there again as a platoon leader and later company executive officer. You didn't have a lot of contact with-- at that level. I had two company commanders. Both of them were veterans. And both of them very, very good men.

[00:37:49.44] One was a former Special Forces and had extended his tour in Vietnam to get company command of a line company. The other was an aviator, who was presently not flying but had spent some time. Both men were very good. In fact the one company commander, after we got back from Vietnam, Barbara and I got invited to his wedding up in Boston. And so we-- both of those were very good men.

[00:38:26.25] Peer group-- fellow platoon leaders were without fault very, very, very good. I felt very comfortable working with them and they with me. So I thought that was good. The Soldiers, the Soldiers, young men, young men. Oftentimes, we use the vernacular of boys. Well, at this stage of the game, they're not boys anymore. They're young men.

[00:39:01.04] As I said, the platoon sergeant, when I got there, buck sergeant E-5. He was able to be the platoon sergeant because the men in the platoon respected him. And so they were going to do what he says. And he was my platoon sergeant until we got a replacement, a staff sergeant E-6, one level higher than the buck sergeant.

[00:39:30.99] And he had just come from-- he was an undergraduate from a program that the infantry school ran, a noncommissioned officer candidate school, where promising Soldiers were picked out. It's like OCS, except for noncommissioned officers. And they were put through a leadership program at Fort Benning. And so I got a staff sergeant E-6 as my platoon sergeant.

[00:39:56.13] He had had a previous tour in Vietnam as a young Soldier. So he was, in that sense, he was a veteran of Vietnam, but not necessarily was he a veteran NCO in combat, but he was good. And then we got a whole influx. Suddenly, the doors opened. And we got a whole influx of NCOC E-5s who became our squad leaders.

[00:40:27.33] And I got three of them. So I got three brand new squad leaders. Of course, the difficulty then was integrate them with the guys that had been there. So they proved to be very proficient. And those three will carry the load for that platoon as we go into-- as we went into Cambodia. And it was about the time we went into Cambodia where I bumped up to be executive officer of the company. And a new platoon leader took over 1st Platoon. And John did a good job with that platoon.

[00:41:02.31] MARK FRANKLIN: Describe any significant operations that you participated in. And you talked about Cambodia. So let's talk about that.

[00:41:09.84] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, again, the overall thing-- the Army had been trying to deal with the Cambodia problem for years. And of course, you've got the Ho Chi Minh Trail that comes down from the north through Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam-- well, in Cambodia to the west of Vietnam, and so on, Cambodia allegedly neutral. And so technically, by law, we were stopped from going in there. And it was decisions made at the highest level of national policy.

[00:41:54.22] But we would have battles and the bad guys would fight. Then they would withdraw back into Cambodia. And we couldn't touch them. We couldn't go in there. We couldn't shoot in there, tactically, couldn't shoot in there. But it was a big problem. And they established base camps with supplies coming down the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

[00:42:14.74] And then supplies coming in to Cambodia by sea into Sihanoukville, which was a port in southern Cambodia, and then trucked up into these sanctuaries immediately adjacent to Vietnam. Let me say immediately, 2 to 3 kilometers on the other side of the border. So this went on and on for years.

[00:42:39.96] And finally, President Nixon made a decision in 1970. We need to go in there and clean up that stuff. And so we were a part of that force. We started moving north the 14th of April. We moved, evacuated our base camp in the south to Saigon in Long An Province and went over to base camp, a place called Bearcat, and up to Tay Ninh. And then we kept moving

north right up, getting closer to the Cambodian border. We did it in stages so as not to alert the enemy to our pending attack.

[00:43:14.34] And so we made the attack on the 1st of May. And what we found there was very well organized training areas. The training areas of the nature that we would find at any military installation. Training areas much like those that we had left a few months ago at Fort Benning, where you had cleared areas. You had bleachers. You had chalkboards.

[00:43:42.15] All this under the canopy of trees and camouflage nets. Very well organized, but there was nobody there. They had cleared out. And so we-- naturally, we destroyed those. Then we started finding the caches of food, of rice primarily. We had some gunfights. And for us and our tactical method, our method had changed. It was no more night ambush operations. Were more of a conventional operation.

[00:44:13.93] In fact, we had been told going in-- again, we were a mechanized infantry outfit. We went in to the left of the 11th Armored Cav Regiment. And so we'd all been told that we were going to face enemy tanks from the North Vietnamese Army. Well, we never did face enemy tanks from the North Vietnamese Army. But we thought we were going to. So it was that intensive in terms of moving from a counter guerrilla operation in the south to conventional operations in the north.

[00:44:49.27] So it was decidedly different method for us. And we were there-- we had a limit of advance. We could go only so far. And we had only a certain amount of time, then we had to back everything out. And oh by the way, take everything with you. Any damaged vehicles, you can't leave anything behind, bring it all back out. So we were evacuating disabled vehicles, vehicles that have been blown up in combat. We had to evacuate them out, clear the area.

[00:45:21.04] MARK FRANKLIN: Were you allowed to destroy any of the cache supplies that you saw?

[00:45:23.95] WILLIAM VOSSLER: What we did was-- we did two things with the caches that we found in terms of the food. The ammunition we blew up. The rice caches, the first thing we tried to do was redistribute it to the people. We have this phenomenon now on our border in the south with these migrants coming in and all that. Well, in Cambodia, in fact in any war, what you have is you have a displaced population of people.

[00:45:56.93] The North Vietnamese came in. In Cambodia, they took all the food from the people to feed the army, to feed the soldiers. So these poor people have been deprived of food. We had men and women pushing their children down the road toward us, the children with armloads of pineapple, to trade pineapple for our C-rations, because these kids, these families are hungry. Their food's been taken from them by the North Vietnamese, by the communists to feed their soldiers.

[00:46:36.81] And so one of the first things we did is-- of course, we needed labor to load these large sacks of rice. Well here, load these two and take this one with you to feed your family. And so it was that kind of operation. So they brought in big semi-trailer trucks to load the stuff, and

evacuate it, and take it out or we let the people, the local people take it. I got pictures. I got pictures of these people surrounding us and just begging for food. But yet, we don't hear about those kinds of situations.

[00:47:17.38] Nobody trained us. Nobody equipped us to deal with that problem. We had to figure that one out for ourselves. And we did a good job of that. But anyway, we cleaned out-- we cleaned out the sanctuaries. And we took enough supplies. And we killed enough of them, that basically for the next year, that area was not a problem for the American forces or the South Vietnamese. We had cleaned that up. It only lasted a year. And then they came back. And they reclaimed it. And as we went into '71 and '72, then things are going bad. But at least for that-- that was the highlight.

[00:48:11.18] WILLIAM VOSSLER: My most vivid memory. You try to keep the memories positive. And I've wanted to put down in writing all this. And I intend to. And I think I will do that, not for any publication but for my kids, and grandkids, and great grandkids now so that they can maybe understand me a little better. There was some bad stuff. One of the questions is, what was your worst day? Am I right?

[00:48:48.92] MARK FRANKLIN: Yes.

[00:48:49.00] WILLIAM VOSSLER: You want to go there?

[00:48:49.99] MARK FRANKLIN: Sure.

[00:48:50.77] WILLIAM VOSSLER: All right. So it's Cambodia, week, 10 days. We found all these training areas. We found all these tunnels that led to hospitals under the ground and all that stuff. So we found enough tunnels. Well, we needed to blow-- we needed to collapse these tunnels. We needed to get rid of all this stuff.

[00:49:19.93] So our 3rd Platoon had been sent over to a tank company of an adjacent battalion. So a call went in for an engineer team to come in with demolitions and blow these tunnels up. So 3rd Platoon, we got four M113 personnel carriers. We got a platoon of tanks sitting in this big clearing.

[00:49:56.35] And so here comes a helicopter and lands. The engineer team jumps out. And they unload all this TNT. And the commander of the tank unit directed that all the TNT be-- of course, there wasn't a place on the tanks to carry it. And so they loaded it in the back of one of the 113s. And they loaded all of it in the back of one specific personnel carrier. Helicopter takes off.

[00:50:30.49] I wasn't there. I wasn't on the scene at that time. But I was close enough that I heard the explosion. I felt the explosion. I felt the ground shake. It looked like the big plume of smoke when they show you the atomic bomb going off, that big funnel that goes up. There was a big funnel. It wasn't an atomic bomb, but it was all the explosives, all the TNT. I can't tell you how many pounds they put in there.

[00:51:03.46] But what happened is one of the enemy had hidden himself in a spider hole adjacent to that landing area, observed this whole process, and put one RPG round through the side of that personnel carrier, which caused the explosion. Those who are familiar with the M113 will recognize that in the ramp that goes down in the back, there is a door cut into that ramp. It's hinged on one side, swings open so you can get into the vehicle or out of the vehicle without dropping the ramp.

[00:51:52.97] That door, blown off its hinges, was the largest piece of that personnel carrier we found, apart from the engine block and transmission, which is pretty good size. Everything else was in smaller pieces. The seven guys on that vehicle, with one exception, we're in smaller pieces. It's spread out over quite a distance.

[00:52:30.60] Company commander sent me over there to find out what happened. And that's what I found. So now, it's a system of taking ponchos, laying them out on the ground, and collecting pieces, torsos. I've got a right arm over here. OK, that's that guy. He needs to put it over here with this guy. And so it was-- that's the one that-- that's one of those-- there's others, but that was one-- MARK FRANKLIN: Stays with you.

[00:53:29.30] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Best day in Vietnam was Camp Alpha, getting on an airplane to fly to Hawaii to meet my wife for R&R. We had six days-- five nights, six days. When people say, oh, you were in Vietnam. It's like saying, oh, have you been to Chicago lately? And I remind them that, all right, people in Vietnam, everybody that went, OK. They did their thing, but not everyone.

[00:54:03.88] I don't know the exact statistics, but of all the people that were there, how many were actually in ground combat against the enemy. I'm not talking about within hearing distance of a stray mortar shot. I'm talking about-- you know what I mean. So here we are, all these guys, we have not seen a Caucasian woman in weeks and months. And now we walk into this hall-- a Caucasian or a black woman-- they've all been Oriental women.

[00:54:44.79] And so we walk into this hall. And here's all these women. And it's like, oh my god. And so the one thing we did, and it was universal, is walk straight ahead. In all these faces, which one is yours? Which one's your wife, or girlfriend, or whatever? Which one? And Barbara was standing right there along that line. And I walked right past her.

[00:55:14.72] And she comes up from behind me and grabs me on the shoulder and says, hey, hey, I'm here. And so that was a funny-- she let her hair grow out. Her hair was longer. That's how I explained it, but yeah. So that was the best day. But another bad day was at the end of the six days going back. Going back after R&R was worse than going in the first place because I knew what was still ahead of me. And I knew for sure what was ahead of me, which I didn't have a complete understanding of before. And so going back was hard.

[00:56:00.10] WILLIAM VOSSLER: In that transitional period between when we left our base camp in Long An Province and going into Cambodia, in that transition period, we worked just east of Saigon out of a base called Bearcat. And that's where we met the Korean troops. And so

we did some combined operations, joint operations with them in the area, in terms of patrolling. Basically, a continuation of what we did down south, except during daylight hours primarily.

[00:56:32.35] And they were good. They were good soldiers. What impressed me, more than anything about them, was how their leadership treated the soldiers. Very harsh. And I saw, personally witnessed, it was an inspection of some kind. And we were-- I don't know why we were there, but we were there observing. And there was an inspection of some kind. The Korean troops were lined up. And the commanding officer was going down the line inspecting the troops.

[00:57:14.21] And this one soldier was ill-prepared for some reason. I don't know. I don't know even why, what it was all about. But this officer, senior officer just clubbed this guy, wham, side of the head, just bam. And the guy goes down. And I thought, wow, that's a different kind of leadership. But my observation of them were that they were very, very tough soldiers.

[00:57:48.74] And they were the Tiger Division. So the Tiger Division isn't made up of a bunch of wimps. The Tiger Division is the Tiger Division. And so they were very, very tough, very proficient guys. We did some work, particularly before we went to Cambodia with, of course, with the Vietnamese Army, not only the ARVN, but the RF/PF, the Regional Force and Popular Force militias because they were responsible for defending their home ground. They were the home guard.

[00:58:26.00] And so oftentimes, our patrols, our ambush sites would be coordinated with them, because the last thing we wanted to do was to get them involved as a mistaken objective or target. And so they were a mixed deal for us. It depended solely on the leadership of that particular group.

[00:58:53.23] MARK FRANKLIN: Some good, some not so good.

[00:58:54.28] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Some good and some not so good. WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, Vietnamese people-- and I think maybe I would mention those people in my letter home, the few that I wrote. I felt sorry for them because they were indeed oppressed. One of my missions as platoon leader was I was assigned to conduct a raid out to seize three tax collectors, North Vietnamese, three communist tax collectors with NVA guards because these guys were going through the area and collecting money from the population, which the population didn't have money to give away, but what money they had or take their son in the army, in the local Viet Cong battalion.

[01:00:04.85] And so I felt that they were an oppressed people and not necessarily was their government doing the best by them, not necessarily was their government doing all they could be doing to help them. And so that fell then-- that fell then to us. And I carried-- I carried that with me.

[01:00:34.58] In my platoon, I had five Tiger scouts. Now, a Tiger scout is a repatriated NVA or Viet Cong soldier, who has been captured, sent to reeducation camp, and saw the new light. And so I had five of these guys with me. And they were Vietnamese. And they did very well in

helping me guide the platoon. One of them, a fellow named Quan, allegedly, according to him had been a North Vietnamese first lieutenant.

[01:01:17.28] Quan was one walking piece of scar tissue. He had a deathly fear of helicopters, particularly Cobra gunships. That was the source of his appearance. But he was a very loyal, very faithful soldier to me. He took on the persona, the role of my personal bodyguard. And then of course, there were the four others that responded to him for within the platoon for their leadership from him.

[01:01:51.37] MARK FRANKLIN: Did he ever explain to you why he switched sides?

[01:01:54.65] WILLIAM VOSSLER: No. We never really got into that discussion. He was from the north. I think the four other guys were from the south. But he was from the north, but I think he got turned off by-- either turned off by the Communist doctrine or turned on by what we were trying to teach him. And so we just had this thing in Afghanistan with these people that we left behind. I don't know what happened to those guys. Well, I don't know what happened to a lot of the guys, a lot of the American guys in my platoon. And we've lost contact.

[01:02:55.04] WILLIAM VOSSLER: The AN/PVS-2 Starlight scope, that was it, which allowed us to see night vision at night with an odd, green, kind of fuzzy, wavy-- but it did help us. But that's the only thing that-- I thought about that question a lot. I don't know. WILLIAM VOSSLER: Most of my contact with family was a letter to my wife, most of those written when we had rotated into the base camp. So they were certainly less than daily.

[01:03:36.76] MARK FRANKLIN: Did you talk much about what you were doing or did you keep most of that to yourself?

[01:03:40.78] WILLIAM VOSSLER: I just might reference what we were doing, enough to satisfy that I'm OK. This is what-- this is a beautiful country. I mean, it was beautiful country. It is beautiful country. And what's going on and what I was feeling at the time. And then, of course, some more sentimental stuff, not worth-- she's squirming back there. Unfortunately, looking back as a historian, I regret one thing. When I came back, we had a big fire on the charcoal grill.

[01:04:24.93] BARBARA VOSSLER: We burned the letters

[01:04:26.46] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Burned all the letters. I've regretted that ever since. But at the time, we thought it was a good idea. I had some issues going on. I think maybe part of the idea was, well--

[01:04:42.57] MARK FRANKLIN: Get rid of it. How much news did you hear about what was going on back home politics, social unrest, anything like that?

[01:04:49.54] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Only what we could read in Stars and Stripes, what we could hear on the Armed Forces Network Radio. That's how the information came in. Again, my letters home were general, Barbara's letters home. We were reassuring each other that we were

both OK. That our situations were both all right. I think the letters were more involved with that than what was going on.

[01:05:23.91] But I do want to recount one specific incident. And if we go back to the timeline-- and again, it goes back to the Cambodia incursion. All right, so what happens, associated with the Cambodian incursion is the massacre at Kent State. Just to clarify, Kent State student protests, while we're in Cambodia, back home, of course, there was a lot of unrest over the notion of expansion of the war as we went from Vietnam into Cambodia.

[01:06:06.85] And so there's a lot of student protests, particularly-- a lot of protests in general, but student protests in particular. And then we have, at Kent State, we have a student protest there. The National Guard is called out. And through several errors, the National Guard opened up on the student protesters. And a bunch of them were killed.

[01:06:27.78] So-- as front line news. Back in the day, quite often what Soldiers would do-- I didn't do this, but quite often what Soldiers would do is their families would-- or they would purchase a subscription to their hometown newspaper that they could receive by mail. And so that's how they kept abreast of what's going on back home. That's how the Soldiers kept abreast of what's going on back home, what's going on in the world.

[01:06:58.08] And so, we're in Cambodia several days. We finally get mail. Recognize that from our moving around for a month, well, three weeks anyway, we were like a band of gypsies moving from place to place. So it was difficult for the mail to keep up with us. And we finally got some mail.

[01:07:21.89] And so one day after mail call, this young Soldier comes up to me. And he's got a copy of his hometown newspaper. And he holds it up in front of me, opens it up, and banner headline is-- I can't remember exactly how it was worded, but Kent State Massacre, Students Killed. And he's crying. And he says to me, he said, Lieutenant, he says, are you sure we're doing the right thing here?

[01:07:54.96] And so, all right. So you're leadership, think. where is your empathy? Get your empathy button going here, buddy. And talk to this young man and help him deal with it. And so that was a challenge, to do that. But it's not an exception. That happened-- it happened quite a bit.

[01:08:24.44] MARK FRANKLIN: How did that news from home affect you?

[01:08:27.73] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Actually, I was offended by it. I was offended by the protest to start with and then what little account we had of why it happened that they would open fire. And it wasn't worth-- it wasn't worth killing people over. And I don't know that they set out-- they certainly didn't set out to do it, but that's what they did. And it's just an unfortunate circumstance of the war.

[01:09:04.42] WILLIAM VOSSLER: I came home late October of '70. I got a few weeks cut off my tour because the 3rd Brigade, 9th Division rotated home for inactivation. And what they did

is they went through the personnel files. And they picked out, for each of the battalions, the commissioned officer who'd been in-country the longest. Believe it or not, in the 2nd Battalion, 47th Infantry, that was me.

[01:09:33.41] And so I and the 16 Soldiers from the battalion were put in charge of the battalion colors, the battalion flag. And then we had two more infantry battalions, plus an artillery battalion, and a support battalion, and the same thing. So that was all the brigade. So we were coming home. And so we were taken to a base camp. We rallied up at a place called Di An.

[01:10:00.01] And the 9th Infantry Division Association issued us brand new uniforms, embroidered name tags, embroidered rank insignia, two new pair of boots, a special helmet cover with the Go Devil symbol on the side, the 9th Division symbol on the other side. And so we spent a few days rehearsing the inactivation ceremony.

[01:10:23.62] And they took us down. And we loaded on C-141, Air Force transport four-jet, big four-jet transport plane. I could never figure out why all the seats going horizontally across the body of the aircraft faced backwards, faced the rear of the plane instead of forward to the plane. And they were horizontal, not parallel seating but horizontal and facing the rear of the plane. So we flew back to Fort Lewis, Washington.

[01:11:05.28] And we had inactivation ceremony there. And then once that was over, and we cased the colors, and turned them in. And it was a commercial flight to Chicago. I brought back a trophy weapon, a Chicom rifle. In those days, they wouldn't let you put that kind of thing in cargo. You had to carry it on the plane to keep it with you.

[01:11:30.94] MARK FRANKLIN: A little different today.

[01:11:31.78] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Think about it. So people knew who I was and they were not-- they were not aggressive toward me, but they were less than polite. I just put it that way. So then Chicago to Atlanta. And then that's where Barbara picked me up, because again, she stayed there in Columbus, Georgia. And so we went home to our apartment in Columbus. Not our apartment, our house. We had rented a house.

[01:12:07.19] When I left, we had-- she had a rented house that we-- for her to stay in. I bought her-- rented her the house and brought her a guard dog. And so that was-- she was there. And so we went home to Columbus. I had 30 days leave, end-of-tour leave. And so I was assigned as an instructor in the weapons department at the infantry school. And so I had 30 days to relax, and spend some time, and get to know my wife again.

[01:12:38.88] And we spent two weeks before we even went to the rest of the family. We spent two weeks for me to-- what do I say? Wind down, chill out, and get to know each other again. And then we drove up to western New York for the rest of the family.

[01:13:03.32] MARK FRANKLIN: So you made a career out of the Army. WILLIAM VOSSLER: I did. MARK FRANKLIN: Did you have any trouble readjusting or did the Army provide you that support?

[01:13:08.95] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, that's the beauty of it for me. And that's unfortunate for so many others. I had two things going for me. I had a wife who-- a very patient, very understanding, in some cases, very forgiving-- I had some issues. Man, I still do from time to time. But staying in the Army-- again, instructor there at the infantry school. And we were cranking out more guys to send to Vietnam. And it was part of-- just a continuation of the mission, doing it in a different way. We were still sending out OCS classes. We were still sending out NCOC classes. We were still graduating the infantry officer basic course and shipped these guys over.

[01:13:57.15] But I'm doing it in the company of guys that have been there just like me. And so having been there, having experienced it, if we were going through a bad time, we didn't have to explain ourselves to each other. We understood each other. And we understood this too shall pass. And so for me, it was an easy transition.

[01:14:23.80] What it does is it also highlights for me the situation that the Soldiers, the veterans who were there that did not have that kind of environment, did not have that organizational culture to fall back on. And the troubles that they had. And they're certainly well known. And I just say, I don't know how to explain it. It's very sad.

[01:15:02.29] MARK FRANKLIN: Do you stay in touch with any of your fellow veterans?

[01:15:05.77] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, from Vietnam? No, not really. It's strange how things work out. The 2nd Battalion, 47th Regiment is still active at Fort Benning in the training base. And our regimental association which has been pretty active, every two years had a reunion at Fort Benning.

[01:15:29.56] But it was always the same weekend that back on the farm at Gettysburg, where Barbara and I live. On our farm, we raised registered purebred beef cattle. And we would host, every spring, an annual sale with other cattle breeders. It was always the same weekend as the reunion at Fort Benning. And so I would never-- I never got to go. But I still-- giving tours now, 23 years on the Gettysburg Battlefield, we get a lot of reunion groups of Army, well all military branches. And so I try to do as many of those as I can.

[01:16:11.09] And when I'm out on the battlefield there at Gettysburg, any time I see an older man, or in a few cases, women, an older man with the hat that says, in some way, shape, or form, in many different ways Vietnam veteran, I always make the point of going over, leaving the group I'm with, which they think sometimes-- most of them think it's all right. And they wonder why, but I always go over. And the words are, welcome home. When were you there? I was there with you. I am a member of the American Legion, but we don't participate in a lot of the events.

[01:17:05.14] WILLIAM VOSSLER: I don't know that the Vietnam experience changed me. I think it defined me. I thought, in college, military college, four years as a cadet, I thought maybe the military was something I wanted to do as a profession. But then again, I didn't know. You know, Mom wanted me to come back home, teach history in the high school. But ah, no. Fun travel and adventure--

[01:17:46.95] I think that it confirmed-- well, I don't think. I know that my Vietnam experience confirmed in my mind what it was I wanted to do. Therefore, I can say it defined me. It gave me a purpose. And the purpose was to stay in, and stay in the Army, and be a trainer and leader of Soldiers. And that's what my MOS was. I was 11 Alpha, 3 Lima, infantry combat leader, and my alternate specialty was operations and training. And that's basically what I did for 30 years. So that Vietnam experience defined my adult life.

[01:18:44.46] MARK FRANKLIN: How do you think your experience in Vietnam affected the way you look at troops coming home off the battlefields today?

[01:18:50.52] WILLIAM VOSSLER: High empathy with what they went through, what they're about to go through is an understanding of that, wishing they didn't have to go through what they're about to go through. Yeah.

[01:19:14.77] MARK FRANKLIN: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation, Vietnam?

[01:19:18.69] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, I think what's important about that war or any war, as we remember the history of this nation and the men and women who have served to protect the freedoms that we have, is I think for all of us as citizens, we need to have a frame of reference back to those conflicts. A lot of the younger generation have no frame of reference of those of us of the Vietnam era. Or if they do, it's a frame of reference established by the awful, terrible movies like Platoon, Full Metal Jacket, that kind of thing, which paints us in a certain way that is totally, totally Hollywood fictional crap.

[01:20:22.99] And so they think of us in those terms, because they don't know any better, because they don't have any other frame of reference to compare us with. Because in school, they have been-- they've not been taught. They've not been taught the truth, the whole story, not just the truth but the rest of the story. We've dumbed it down to certain factors. And that's what they think they know. And it's important that we continue for this war, for any war-- we've got, coming up, you'll be sitting here with Iraq veterans, Afghanistan veterans with the same thing. We have to keep the terms of reference going.

[01:21:13.91] MARK FRANKLIN: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you'd like to pass on?

[01:21:17.36] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Well, I just-- that was one that-- I think the other thing when we speak of leadership is we need to put-- we need to keep leadership in perspective. And that it's-- leadership is people leading people. And we have to understand the people concept of it. I spoke earlier of leading with empathy. That doesn't mean you have to deal with lesser standards.

[01:21:59.92] The leader has to establish a standard. This is who we are. This is what we do. This is how we do it. This is what we stand for. This is what we don't stand for. That's what the leader has to do and establish that with those that he's or she are leading. So leading those young

men-- I think, again, it was part of that defining moment, that defining period where-- I mentioned four directions of leadership-- senior, subordinate, peer group.

[01:22:41.72] The fourth one I didn't talk about was leading yourself. And so that's self examination of, how am I doing today? Look into the mirror and say, man, I really screwed that up, didn't I? Well, I won't do that again. And so, I guess, that's what I brought back, what I brought back in my kitbag with me, that's stayed with me for all this time.

[01:23:11.94] WILLIAM VOSSLER: Sad. Got to explain it, while that was being built, I was assigned at the Pentagon as a staff officer. This was before my battalion command in Germany. And so I worked on the Army staff. And I was in the third subbasement, kind of like here. I was in the third subbasement. I never saw the light of day, unless sometime during the day, take a break, go over to the Pentagon Officers Athletic Club, the POAC, and put on running shoes, and my shorts, and my t-shirt, and go out and take a run.

[01:23:54.94] And I would run from the Pentagon, up across the bridge, across the Potomac, and run up the mall, around Capitol Hill. That's where I could always say, I ran rings around Capitol Hill. And down, and over here to the side was this memorial being built. And they had the Vietnam veterans were there. And they had all the stuff. And it was, at that point, it was sad. I didn't want to be reminded of it. And so I didn't pay-- well, it was there. It was there. I knew it was there. But it was quite a few years before I was able to go visit the Wall.

[01:24:47.90] MARK FRANKLIN: And then how did you feel about it?

[01:24:54.39] WILLIAM VOSSLER: The sadness, the sadness was still there. Regret. So sad, regret, what could have been, what should have been, what might have been for all those fellows and women. It's just not going to be. And then come up with more wars.

[01:25:20.36] So here's a guy that studies military history, can look at the bookshelf. And there goes all these wars we're going to continue on, but it's the sacrifice that they made so that we can continue on with what we have. And for that, sad, regret, but then there's grateful, admiration. And so those are the factors that, for me, look at the Wall, that's what kicks in.