

WARNER SUMPTER, USMC FORCE RECON 1967 - 68

Warner: My name is Warner Sumpter, that's W-A-R-N-E-R S-U-M-P-T-E-R. I was in the United States Marine Corps assigned to 1st Force Reconnaissance Company in Vietnam assigned to the 3rd marine division on the DMZ and then back down to the Da Nang later on in my tour for the 1st marine division and I was there from July of 1966 through June of 1967. I was born on November 11, 1944 and I left Severna Park High School in November of 1962. The reason how I got into the military was that I was working and going to school at the same time and we had the Cuban missile crisis speech. I was watching that of course being covered by the news and John f. Kennedy gave his Cuban missile crisis speech.

When he did as a young man who had been influenced by many neighbors and family members and friends who were World War 2 and Korean veterans I was afraid that my generation's war would pass me by. I made the very unwise decision of leaving high school and I enlisted in the Marine Corps. I was 18 on November 11th which was a Saturday of 1962 on a Monday morning of the 13th I was sworn into the US Customs house in downtown Baltimore to the Marine Corps.

From there I went into the Marine Corps serving first as [inaudible 00:01:52] because I turned down anything I qualified for. I wanted to be infantry [inaudible 00:01:59] John Wayne movies. I got my wish but then unfortunately someone saw through my scores that I could actually read and write and maybe that's unusual for Marines but I ended up being sent to communication school.

My parents reaction out when they found out that I was quitting high school and joining the Marine Corps they found because my recruiter happened to call the house to tell me my ship date for Parris Island. I can remember that when my father said we got the call. I think I jumped up and ran out of the house with my father on my heels. Anyway, we discussed and they asked me why the Marine Corps. I've been in [inaudible 00:02:41] patrol. They said "Why not the Air Force? Why not the Navy?" I think they were concerned with my being in the Army or the Marine Corps because of the perceived more risk.

I told them I'd always wanted to be a Marine and had been one of my desires since I was a young boy. When you're in middle school or junior high you write what you want to be. Mine was I want to be a Marine. I want to be a state trooper. We discussed it. They supported me. I think they got to be somewhat proud of me and they actually came to Parris Island to my graduation.

Naturally my father was very concerned because he was a school teacher and my mother's father and all her sisters were all in education. I'm sure he had designs for me to go to school. In fact we had spoken about it maybe even to college where he and my grandfather went in Central West Virginia but they realized that I pretty much made up my mind that I was already enlisted. I was an adult and after a lot of conversation I think they understood this is what I wanted to do and was probably the best thing for me and in the long run it was.

The Cuban missile crisis resolved itself as we know with Khrushchev blinking or backing down and assistance of Kennedy with the Monroe Doctrine but it wasn't as quiet as some people might think. The Marine Corps and when you go into the [inaudible 00:04:17] you do a 2 year rotation. What you do you join a battalion or a unit that's about 50% seasoned 50% of rotated at you're new. You train up and then you do deployments. The Marine Corps [inaudible 00:04:31] the presence of the US Military a lot with the fleet. Also they'll do cruises to the Far East. They'll do cruises to the Mediterranean and to the Caribbean.

My cycle happen to be with company 3rd battalion 8th Marines then later with HNS company 3rd battalion 8th Marines but it was training and a lot of intense training getting ready to go overseas. As I'd said earlier I was given the additional assignment of being trained as a communicator. I probably got that because of my scores and I was also assigned as the platoon leader's messenger. It was really great because he was a young lieutenant fresh out of getting his 2nd lieutenant bars and he wanted to teach and I was a sponge. He taught me a lot about leadership as well as the NCO's because I was around them as a messenger.

Eventually we did our first cruise which was to the Caribbean. You would think it would be just a typical cruise. The battalion would go into the Caribbean. We'd leave one company at Guantanamo Bay to support guarding the defense line at Guantanamo because Cuban missile crisis was very fresh. Then we would just train on the island of [Vieques 00:05:51] when we make port calls for liaison and friendly relations with the various countries. We had been on Vieques and San Juan and we were to Jamaica. When we were on our way to Colombia South America we were going to train with the military there. That's when they tried to burn the American embassy in the Canal Zone which was of course on the south side or in the Pacific.

We were deployed to the Canal Zone and we had to embark and small craft and we moved into the jungles and had jungle warfare training while showing the American presence in the Canal Zone to quell the civil unrest. That was January, February of 1964. Redeployed state side, did exactly what I'd seen the year before 50% left. I remained for the second year in the infantry. Trained again but I was moved from the platoon level and company commander. When the company commander is ready, the radio operator wasn't around then I supported a

company commander. He was a World War 2 and Korean veteran and learned a great deal from him.

Then I went to the battalion for the 2nd year and I was the battalion commander's radio operator. He also was a World War 2 veteran and the sergeant major was World War 2 and Korea so I had a lot of good mentors and people that were teaching me. That year we did a steel pike cruise to Spain the largest NATO landing since World War 2 with ports of call in France and England, came back did another Caribbean tour. That one was fairly quiet. We came back and I think that might have been year that some of the troops got called back off leave and went to [San Dominica 00:07:54] because we had these small world issues that arise and we were called for that in case there was an issue.

From there my 2 years were up and was time for me to decide where I would finish my last year and a half with the Marine Corps. The sergeant major for the radio operator for the battalion commander and the driver would ask us where we'd like to go and try and help if we served successfully during next assignment. I asked to go to DI school. I want to go back to Parris Island as a drill instructor and I wasn't old enough I found out. They had just changed it. You had to be 21 and I was only 19 or 20. I guess I was 20 and not close enough to 21. I had been battalion color sergeant for the color guard for battalion.

The sergeant major said "Why don't you consider 8th or 9?" That was too close to Maryland and there was a lot of reasons why I joined the Marine Corps and coming back and being too close to Maryland wasn't a good idea in my mind. I asked about force reconnaissance for the Marine Corps which is an airborne scuba special ops mission for the Marine Corps. He set up an interview and I went on for the PT test and made that successfully. Then a week or so later was called up and went back for an interview with ward of officers and senior enlisted and I didn't hear anything for a week and a half. Then one day I got a call and typical force recon style you have 2 hours to clear where you are now and sign in at our place.

From there it was a year of training for jump school and snorkel, swimming, pre scuba school, scuba school, jump school. I was a voice radio operator and now I had to become a CW Morse code operator and went 13 weeks of school for that. Did buoyant ascent for locking out submarines at sea and rubber raft work and all the things you would expect. Rappel training from helicopters and all the special ops things. It was fun and I was slated to go to ranger school and it was April or May of 1966. I remember when I was in the Caribbean in March '65 that's when the first Marines went into Da Nang. Now we're into March April of '66 and I've almost finished a year of training and I got called by the gunnery sergeant.

The gunny and the first sergeant took me in to see the CO who was a major which was W.H. Rice who also happened to be from Baltimore. I think he retired at 2 star but he was my CO for force recon, 2nd force [inaudible 00:10:52] and he asked me for my orders for ranger school which I provided him. He reached in his desk and pulled out another set of orders for deep Vietnam and said "Here go to a real ranger school." That's what happened. Then went into mandatory 30 days leave that they would require you to take. I get bored easy. I worked the construction job for 3 to 4 weeks and then I reported in to Camp Pendleton for the pre-training.

We had a master sergeant who was supposed to be in charge of the platoon or the unit or the serg unit that would train up. He made decision that he was in his 26th or 28th year this was his last tour overseas. He was retiring. He was married and he said you run the platoon so as a corporal with about 100 maybe 2 or 3 souls I ran the training for the month or 5 weeks we were there before we boarded an aircraft at El Toro Marine Air Facility and flew into Okinawa and then into Vietnam. With me was one of my friends, [Finley P. Johnson 00:12:13] African American gentleman from Philly. We were on the same flight and an officer who happen to be on the same flight with our series he realized that Finley and I were both force recon qualified.

When we got off the plane we were pulled out of line and we see him standing there. His duty was to become the commanding officer 1st Force Recon attached to 1st recon battalion in Da Nang and so he had both of us pulled out and we immediately went to Force Recon which was really located at Mable Mountain next to the airfield on the beach. We drew our weapons and Marine Corps supply isn't that great. We had to go out on local economy and black market we bought our jungle boots and long range patrol packs. The next day we boarded C123s and we showed up at Dong Ha and 24 hours later then went into another platoon. I was radio operator on the rock pile.

The Marine Corps always has supply issues. It's not that the Marine Corps doesn't want to supply the jungle boots, they probably just weren't in the system and available right then. They meet us on the DMZ. This was during operations prairie. It was very intense on the DMZ at that time. I'm sure that they just couldn't get our size and Force Recon is a very small unit. We were used to doing that because being airborne we were ... The only exception for a Force Recon Marine all marines are marines. Every marine is a rifle man.

We were allowed to wear Corcoran jump boots which we had to buy ourselves and we were allowed to wear our navy Marine Corps jump wings. We couldn't wear our scuba designator, our pathfinder. Nothing else. It was just the jump wings. We were used to buying additional equipment and replenishing your uniforms and whatever you had to do. Yes it was US equipment and it was on the

black market. How it got there? Somebody trading for booze or whatever we don't know. Those things happen and the packs we needed the Marine Corps really didn't have at that time.

We needed more than the standard knapsack, haversack with the blanket roll that the Marine Corps had at that time. This was when the army was moving into the ranger straps which the Marine Corps didn't really have yet. We were just getting that into our inventory and we didn't have the long range patrol packs what you see today with the large pockets because for us when we were in the bush we were not resupplied for 4 or 5 days so you needed a pack that could carry at least 4 canteens in pockets and then 2 on your belt and whatever else. For the Marine Corps it was basically the MBA and the [inaudible 00:15:16].

Remember in March '65 the Marines went in to secure the airbase and naval base in Da Nang. Ikor in the northern part on the DMZ that was not in the scope of the operations at that time. As they realized and they were concentrating in the middle highlands and around Saigon of course but then the US military began to push and look more the Mekong Delta but also in Northern Ikor. It was taking back a lot of terrain. There were a lot of heavy engagements during that time. What they needed was reconnaissance on the ground to try and identify the infiltration routes, to start gathering the intelligence which would lead to the infantry incursions or we would be looking for targets of opportunity to stop their resupply when units engage with ours.

Our force recon really wasn't designed to engage although that happened later. We morphed into that. We were to be on the scene. We were to go in, gather the intelligence, send it back and then it morphed to where okay go ahead and be on target of opportunity, use naval gunfire, artillery, airstrikes whatever you had on that and then it eventually changed later on while I was there to where they wanted us to collect data by doing deliberate ambushes and collecting intelligence from the soldiers that we would ambush. The intelligence collection and our mission morphed while I was in the country.

We were trained state side to in with grease guns and then 3A1 45 caliber and teams of 4. Smallest team I ever took was 5 which got down to 4 at one time but generally were 6 to 7. A large team would be 8 or 9 which depending upon the mission I might do that because later on when I became a platoon sergeant acting platoon leader then I could design a force recon, 3rd platoon 1st force recon. I was allowed by the command to design to meet the mission.

We didn't find that often. When we got back to Da Nang then I would run into smaller groups doing recon [inaudible 00:17:48]. Up there we were engaged with regular NVA, North Vietnamese Army units. They were as equipped almost as well as we were. They were using none of the holding the magazine in with a tire

inner tube like you would find in further south in Ikor. These were men and women that were equipped with the best equipment that they were getting from either Russia or China whoever they were getting it from and that's who we would get into.

They would hunt for us. In fact there were flyers they had the same as we dropped leaflets and had rewards for turning in weapons or making known where the NVA were. They had leaflets too and they were really interested in what they called us the painted faces because we all wore the camouflage and we had the [inaudible 00:18:51] camouflage uniforms initially. Those came later in testing. Down then they would know we were there because we were inserted by helicopters. Several helicopters would land in different sites and not leave anyone as part of it so that they would know exactly which site we disembarked at.

Then once we started calling artillery they would obviously know that we had to have line of sight or airstrikes, line of sight on the target and then they would start looking for us but those were usually done squad to platoon size. My experience was they used larger numbers. This was the Rockpile sits in the middle of a valley that has many fingers that lead off streams that lead into the mountains so that's where we were running our patrols along the DMZ around Con Thien north of Rockpile, west of Rockpile. We were even out near what was later to become Khe Sanh Air Base. There was a Special Forces camp and they got so they couldn't even get out their door but the gate to the compound.

We would go out and do patrols around. We would call targets of opportunity if we saw them around the Special Forces camp. In fact later on maybe they remember they starting embedding special forces person with us. We would take them on our patrols and they would communicate. By the way the Special Forces that are [105's 00:20:32] artillery. Some of the best artillery you would ever call in your life. It was very accurate but the shooters, there were Special Forces guys there but shooters were Vietnamese.

We did so many patrols I think the citation I got said that I did over 40 long range patrols while I was there but I think they were counting some other special missions we did that there a little shorter. I guess there's a couple. There's one where we did go in and it was southwest of the Rockpile along the highway there northwest of that highway. When we went in there as we usually happen I had a new Marine with me. Great man who was later chief of police up in I want to say Scranton, Pennsylvania or something but anyway he was a good guy but when we were coming off the LZ and there was only 5 of us when we did our first stop after our initial listening he realized he didn't have our M79 grenade launcher so we had to back track to the LZ which you never want to do and we got that.

Then we went on and we spent the first night but that didn't help us having to backtrack. We spent the first night and when I put in the 8 to 9 fires harassing an introduction fire you pre-plot fires. You usually put that on likely avenues of approach to where you are. We put those out and there we also something you can preset so if you have an issue you can use those as starting points for adjusting artillery fire to support you. I put those in and maybe that you had to be careful you didn't bracket yourself but I think they knew that that was where got out of the chopper. That was a chopper that drooped someone that time.

The next morning we ended up ... It was a foggy morning initially and we starting hearing movement and we could hear it below us and we could hear it off to our right which would have been to the north of us so that terrain. They were getting in closer and we realized that it was least several squads if not a platoon with the amount of noise and they were trying to get us in an L type of an ambush. I'm sorry I have to back up. This was night 2 because the second day one of the Marines unfortunately had contracted a disease and I had to have him medevac'd out and that's what really gave away our position when I medevac'd him out. Now I'm down to 4. It was just 4 of us.

Anyway, it was the next night they had moved in during the night. They were pretty sure where we probably where and we know that 4 of us couldn't take them on nor we could [inaudible 00:23:48] to break contract. What I did is we were on the edge where could see the elephant grass. There was a single tree out there and so was a rallying point. I told him that I was going to just fire in to where they were and then I was going to walk it in to where we were. When I did that we needed to boogie out and that our rallying point would be at the tree.

What we did is I started calling fire which of course got them to take shelter for a few minutes but then they knew that that was our only opportunity what we were going to do. They started moving and we took out. As we took out from there running then I readjusted to fire I went to our position and we ran as best we could, as fast as we could and we did. They walked to fire up to where we were and we were successful in stopping their momentum but when we stopped to rallying point I'll never forget it. We got under the tree and the tree was in the middle of the elephant grass on top of this ridge and it was obviously where a tiger would get in to look for prey I guess because it was nothing but claw marks on the tree.

With that, we knew we had to be extracted so fog started to lift I walked to fire into where we were. We moved 2 more times and then eventually got the choppers. We were taking some small arms fire by that time. First chopper came was the CH34. It's a rotary. It's not a turbine or a jet engine, has a real bad hover out of ground effect. We all 4 jumped on and it couldn't lift off with the humidity

and the altitude. They pointed for one to get off and I said 2 and took my radio operator and then a second chopper came in. We got out.

There were a couple of times. There was time we jumped out of a copper out there. The chopper would never land because there would booby traps and we just missed a pit that was dug for almost for a chopper hoping it was a very large pit that was either meant for a group of men or for an aircraft and maybe get 1 wheeled in and phone one of the large stakes. We had several times that we made contact but I guess one of the other things was one time I had guess when it became low it was right after they were almost overrun one time and we moved a lot of bodies and then we went on out and we were able to determine how they have gotten into the vicinity as a recon team that time.

There was one time there was a CH34 on a medevac and they were on their way out not back so it had a pilot, copilot, crew chief, gunner if there's any one door on the CH34, gunner for the other side and a corpsman. They got out of their lane in combat. You have lanes were aircraft can fly and altitudes. There's lanes where you don't go because if they're firing artillery that's where the artillery is going. This helicopter unfortunately got out and was hit with a 105 friendly fire. We were sent in next day to try and see if there were any souls because the infantry couldn't get in there. It was too far out. We would know then.

Basically the engine is magnesium and it burns so hot that the only thing we found were one of the little tags for one of the pilots and then we found the torso without any arms, legs and partial head of the gunner, the crew chief because he must have been blown out on impact. Then were other times. If you did 3 or 4 patrols you would run some type of engagement just about every 3rd time if not getting enemy fire on the way in to be inserted which would mean you'd have to go to your alternate LZ for insertion or you'd have to give up the mission or quite frequently because there were always be looking for us.

They would set up on the ridges because they knew we would be eventually be extracted and for them as well as when you capture a forced recon marine the other thing was definitely to take out an aircraft. If a North Vietnamese soldier could verify that he shot down an aircraft that was quite an accomplishment for them. They would set out and when we were trying to be extracted they would take the aircraft under fire quite frequently. They even had instruction on where they should aim on the various aircraft knowing where there could be a definite hit because it doesn't take a hit to the engine. It could be hydraulic launch, fuel lines.

Even one time we were trying to be inserted this was down near Da Nang with a 46 and they had a higher caliber machine gun which hit the blade and when the blade is bounced it's pretty hairy. In fact we had to go back and be reinserted.

That was down to Da Nang. We couldn't get inserted on that one. We had to go back, get another chopper and that's when an established OP, observation post, in the A Shau Valley or Da Nang Hoi if it was southwest of Da Nang.

There were times that we would have patrols where it'd be pretty bad. In fact in my last patrol in Vietnam I had ... Actually they would take the team leaders out for decompression and being the communicator I was put into the [inaudible 00:30:09] platoon to help there for the last couple of weeks in country. That was June of '67.

A young man I had trained, [inaudible 00:30:19] I was an old man I was 22 by this time and [Navotny 00:30:25] from new England really great marine and I got in so he could be the platoon sergeant and hopefully they would get him an officer because he didn't have as many years in the Marine Corps as I did. When I rotated back home I had 4 ½ years by that time. He was going out on the Laotian west of Da Nang.

A lot of infiltration in that area was below Elephant Valley and near Antenna Valley and [A Shau 00:30:56] Valley in that area. He was in fact put on orienteering and was pretty good at it. I was put to do CW and what he did he said "Is there any way you can go?" What I did is ... I found out how far they were out and I knew that voice route wouldn't work that well. I used a guy so that he wouldn't lose credibility with the team. I got myself put on to go with him because I did CW and we would have to use CW at that distance.

Speaker 1: [Inaudible 00:31:34]

Warner: Morse code. We were so far out that voice was degraded and there was no relay station that could communicate for us. That's when I went down to Marble Mountain and got a radio from the army. I believe it was an AN PRC74 I think that was the nomenclature. Anyway, we went out and someone else carried it. We went out and there was lieutenant in the [inaudible 00:32:04] section that hadn't been in the field and he decided he wanted to go. That made him the team leader and I told the other sergeant I would be his assistant team leader. He was the team leader I was rotating.

When that happened he said you got to be the assistant team leader. When we did this patrol and we were so far out that when we were being inserted the first LZ was hot. There were 2 NVA at that location but they were obviously supply folks. One was armed, the other wasn't. They were carrying so engaged them and that meant we had to go our alternate LZ which we did. I'm [inaudible 00:32:56] God bless the lieutenant. He's going for an airstrike because we had made contact below to make sure that if there was anyone else in that area and

when he called for it I could tell he was calling our coordinates of the alternate LZ so I got that corrected.

Then we were in for I guess about 3 hours and I took position as the rear security. As system patrol leader I think this patrol had 7. There were 7 of us. We had gotten in about 4 hours and we were being followed where we took a break. I made sure we took a break in the hardest roughest terrain so if someone is coming you'll hear it. Sure enough and that one surprised me was several NVA. Again way out in Laotian border. This is the buildup before the [inaudible 00:33:52] offensive. This is June of '67 and nobody would believe we're seeing what we're seeing.

We kept trying to tell them we're seeing a lot of buildup. Anyway, we were on that hill side and here comes several NVA with a Caucasian. He was as tall as I was. He was wearing khaki uniform with blouse boots. Now whether he was East German, Russian, Cuban because we heard they working with the Cubans we don't know. We engaged and broke that contact. Later on that day we moved into an area and realized we ended up in an area where was a fig tree with ladders on it where they were actually taking the figs down and gathering food from there. Once again we could hear the movement.

This time we didn't see them and we got some small arms fire but the first air strike we used was past movers. They were probably air force F4's but the second time we got gunships to come in. Because we kept making contact, up to this point we were still using voice because they kept the chopper close by that we could talk to. Then after that we broke contact. What we did is we went into our harvest site for the night and we were using the CW. I was doing all the CW communications. Next day we moved and darn it we didn't walk right into one of their camps under the triple canopy and there were bomb proofs under the under the hooches.

Then there was cave there an outcropping of rock with a cave that they could get in. We knew we had too quick we had just stumbled on this. We were parallel in trails everywhere. There were trails everywhere. We knew that we were definitely a very heavy infiltration route. With that, we started moving and it was getting dusk and we went down and got into our position that night. You would also go if there's a finger on the mountain you would ... wherever you were traveling you never traveled trails. You never traveled on top. You never traveled stream beds. You traveled where nothing travelled and you tried to cover your trail.

What happened is at our last rest stop the point I stayed in touch with this young man Magnum he had gotten sick. I thought he had drank too much water but he contacted me about 4 or 5 years ago that to let me know no he didn't because I

rotated [inaudible 00:36:41]. he was getting sick with malaria. He hadn't taken his pills like he was supposed to. I took point. What you do is you go down up the ridges here. You go down and then come back up so that if someone is following you they're going to make noise above and below and beside you before they get to you. So when we get in there I had been points so I'm inside. I've got the headset. I'm sending our position for the night and CW.

About that time someone starts tapping me. They knew we were there and they are on line and this time it is absolutely a platoon if not larger. They are coming down the ridge. About the time I got the headset off and they're telling me to be quiet that's when they started firing, grenades start both ways and it was 7 of us and we could not hold that position. We were taking too many wounded. The lieutenant was wounded and they say that 5 of the 7 were wounded but we found out after the debrief that one young kid that was new he had [Tricong 00:37:52] grenade on his path, was our M26 and he had shrapnel on his chest.

We later had to send him for some treatment minor. It was nothing the hospital hasn't but they had the metal pulled out of his chest. He was [for the 00:38:07] way. Anyway we broke contact. Lost some weapons, lost some packs but we were able to extract ourselves, move further down, reestablish another defensive position and then right when they tapped me that something was wrong I sent the code that we were in contact and when that happened they must have put aircraft in the air fast movers because they were there pretty quick. Trying to leave, we have to leave the CW. We had 2 PRC 25s for voice.

One of the guys got excited and let the handset drag and ripped off the radio so we had 2 radios but 1 handset. We moved down until the M79 got left and we went down to a defensive position or I sent them down and told them to do it. Magnum had been hit pretty bad and so I was able to move back up closer to him, get him to me and then we moved on out. He calls it his million dollar wound because he eventually had some things happen to his life and that helped him out later on getting the help he needed psychology.

Anyway, we went on down and they eventually were able to get us but the trouble was they were using his starter weapon shooting us and our M79 but we were able to get up break it down enough just at the last little bit of light we were able to get a 46 in to pull us out. It was 6 of the 7 and I was the only one not hit and I only had 4 days 4 hours to rotate. With all the sad stories there was a good story and I was able to work with the guys. Maybe getting back to your question yeah there were times when there weren't good outcomes and we would lose some folks.

The great thing about being young is your invisible and yeah you did. You would think about it but you couldn't dwell on it. You never dwell on it. Especially if

you're in leadership position. I count it a blessing that I was a leaser because I can make decisions I could guide my own destiny. You feel like you have some control. Sometimes I felt real sorry for the young privates so I would always try and get their input even if it didn't matter. I wanted them to have ownership in what we were doing. They were good guys. Marine Corps trains good warriors. The Marine Corps makes good warriors. The thing is you take care of each other and that's the bond.

Speaker 1: A couple of things you mentioned ...

Warner: That's part of your training. You've got to know. First you have to have confidence in the people that are providing the close air support or the artillery. The Marine gunners out of I guess they were at a Ca Lau which was between Dong Ha and the Rockpile and I believe they were using the 105's were good but if they were using the 155 they were usually self-propelled and some of those they had to get out. The motors didn't work with winches. They didn't mechanically move. They had to crank them to get the gun oriented to give you support because equipment will wear out but I had the confidence.

I had used these gunners before. They were good. If you've got several squads or a platoon and there's only 4 of you and they're all incoming that was a decision probably put on patrol in harm's way but I didn't see any other way for us to get out of the situation we were in without really disrupting their movements and taking away their will to pursue us to boost their morale. At times you just don't have it. The guys knew what I was doing. They knew what I was doing and I told them I said here's what I'm setting up and everything is a whisper. You're close. You're spread out so one grenade won't get you all but you don't want to get separated and be captured. You're always within eye contact and maybe a little closer than you should be to give that supporting fire and all.

Never was questioned. It was that or maybe we would have all maybe not made it or been POW's because we did have a few Marines get captured and that you don't want. This one was one of the lower hills. This one wasn't a huge one, a high one. It was where probably if they were moving infantry in to do a sweeping movement or something that they might use. It was designed that if a chopper ... It was camouflaged. It had weak stakes with stakes on top. It was camouflaged well that if a CH34 or a Huey tried to get in there and lost its hover out of ground effect or if they had tried to land it would've given way and possibly put them in.

Very ingenious. We had the warrior, the NVA were good. They see sometimes but that was their mission hit and miss, disruption, bust our morale but never underestimate your enemy. You give him his credit otherwise you'll get sloppy and he'll be the winner.

Not really because early on I think [inaudible 00:44:27] was still alive at that time and I think it was the Vietnam war and not the ... but I remember being [inaudible 00:44:33] We have a life sized photograph of him and he would talk about what a Marine should be able to do before he went into combat, jog 25 miles full pack, enter to the fray and succeed. I think it was attributed to him that until you go to the sound of their guns meaning cross the DMZ how can you win and that was so evident to us because when I was on the DMZ or when I was this last patrol right out on the Laotian border and believe me went into DMZ when I was there.

In Ikor when I first got there we had to gather intelligence, what was happening. We never went into North Vietnam as far as I knew of our coordinates but we want to see and they were treating it as if it was their base camp. They had trails. They had caves in there. They were so sophisticated. They had ropes with lanterns that I guess was on a pulley system and they had caves where they could pull it. The lanterns would move at night. I think they were looking for us and our mission to report that as troop movements we'd put B52's doing the art like stripes waste all that ammunition while they're in a cave or a bunker and they're dropping bombs on it, waste of time. They had no troops in that area of the DMZ but that was a way to try and get us to expend ammunition.

I think that were movements were when they moving someone else. A lot of little things they would do like that. Even in the Mekong Delta we went down there once. I got pulled out put with 19 went back to Philippines and went in. They want to see if the Marine Corps could do any better than the army in the Mekong Delta. Even there they wouldn't really try and do different and they used to try and get you to think that there were more or less or they weren't there. They worked hard at it and we worked hard to find them. We did find them quite frequently.

Sometimes we knew they were there. Sometimes there was a meeting engagement but we looked. It was interesting. One time back at Da Nang I guess it was January, February sometimes around there or March of '67 rockets hit Marble Mountain in Da Nang airfield and actually there was a human cry from the higher ups how did they get in so close with rockets to hit the airstrips in Da Nang. Naturally force recon we were given the missions to go out. What we did is we went out and we were looking and saw in the jungles some branches that have really moved pretty substantially and then we started seeing footprints. They were elephants.

What we did as reconnaissance is also almost being the early CSI. We took samples of the dung from the elephants and we turned it in and what we found out is that's probably how they brought those rockets into the edges of the jungle just west of Da Nang. What they did because the feces indicated and

knowing the digestive time of elephants whatever the lab did, they were able to determine that those elephants had probably been on a [plain of jars 00:48:34] because of the vegetation matter of certain amount of time that corresponded. That's how the rockets could've gotten there.

Then a few days later or a week later another sergeant and myself because we were on patrols they would use us to ... If they thought something floated down the river that looked like an explosive that was against one of the bridges around Da Nang or Dong Ha we would take our snorkel and scuba gear and we dive it or we've dived the rivers because they would know caves. In Vietnam the banks usually the rivers have a lot of bamboo and the roots intermingle so that it makes almost like a rebar. If the banks on the river come down like this and the water level is here that means that those banks don't wash away but below it with the monsoons and all the water running so that the bank comes down underneath.

It goes back like this and up on those banks they would dig down and they would dig a tunnel to the river because then they would go up where they started digging and then they would take wood and make a box and it would only have a very small opening and then they would put branches over it so that air could get in and they put leaves and that was their air hole and they usually would go into the middle of a bamboo thicket to do it. Back out you couldn't tell anyone was there and then they'd start going on in and out of that cave underneath that lip from the river.

What we would do is we would go and just snorkel and we have a boat we'd get from the village and pull our scuba tanks and we'd have Marine [inaudible 00:50:22] we just have [inaudible 00:50:24] and see if we can find an opening. Actually what we found and we checked the bomb in the river at the same time worked in unison going up and what we found we found some rockets in the river wrapped in plastic so that we knew that they were storing and that they were going in these caves. After being out ambushing at night they go into caves and hide in there.

In fact one that I found big as I am I couldn't get in there so we went out and found the air hole and started digging and we found that one NVA soldier. What's ironic that night we went back and we stayed. I guess it was a nicer home. It wasn't thatch it had some type of concrete or stack almost like adobe but the roof was going and it had hard dirt floor. The infantry platoon was providing the security. They did a perimeter and we slipped on dirt floor of that house with our scuba tanks and our weapons to go start diving again the next day. As we got ready to leave I guess this is mid April in fact this one I got wounded. This is mid April of 67 and I didn't have an photographs of me in jump or scuba and all that.

Thought I'd better get some photos and on a backdrop. Scuba tanks were there and a mask and my [inaudible 00:51:57] fins and I was making a little move. I actually want to get ready to take a photo and my heel slings in the dirt. The other diver that was with me "[Woodcock 00:52:09] I said got a problem. Come over. My heel just sunk down and the floor is always hard as concrete almost. He came over and you take your advice. He just took his K-Bar or maybe he had a Randall knife too and felt around my heel and said nothing metal I was afraid it might have found [inaudible 00:52:30] or something.

We started digging back. We find under that salt dirt piece of pottery like a lid and that's exactly what it was. What we found out is when we dug it out there was a large vat under the ground and then we found several others with this lid and then they put the dirt back over but hadn't compacted it and it was wise that they were hiding for the NVA and for the VC. With that we were ordered that the rice had to be kept for the other villager and so they start taking rice out and we were getting stones to break these vats because Woodcock we were enjoying, we were both sergeants but we had no responsibility. All we have to do is dive. We got a lieutenant with this platoon taking care of us so we're having fun.

As we went out Woodcock reaches down to take a rock away from the base of the house and when he does there's a hole. He peaks in and here's a set of eyes. There was an NVA officer with another soldier in a bunker underneath us. They would do these houses they would built on the edge of them and have concrete over where you would ... It was almost like a maze you would walk in here with a wall on both sides and then there'd be an opening and you'd come back this way. Then that would make like a little bunker they could hide in if there were airstrikes or something for the civilians. They built in for themselves.

What it was and this one if you went up on top there was another false wall and you went down and that took you underneath where they had built a bunker under the house. We didn't know that. What we did is we started pulling it away. We got a [inaudible 00:54:22] which was a Vietnamese interpreter to come over and ask guy to come out and order him to come out with outcomes. They tried a grenade first and we all took off running and that's when I went to jump back inside the door but Woodcock was blocking it. He was bigger than I was so I went to jump over a log and as I was going I got some shrapnel.

Then we came back. Woodcock engaged him and I engaged him too but Woodcock had a shotgun with flechette rounds and I had my stoner. I engaged one in the cave today before him and then we found out that we also had gotten the other soldier that what with him, a female soldier. She was armed once we dug out and got them. We got some good intel on that one because he was trying to eat papers when we got him. He still had the papers in his mouth so we were able to get some fairly good intelligence off and here we are on a diving

mission which was when we were back and we were supposed to be rehydrating before we take our teams again.

Not all the force recon Marines by this time. We were getting replacements that hadn't been to jump school or scuba school or things like that. They were just assigned to us to do the basic mission. Happen all the time to things. They were good. Long answer I'd never underestimated them and used to be a full country with very bright people. We would train different groups now and then and one gentleman that came up. Story was his wife was a beautiful Vietnamese French lady that someone hired and government tried to get too friendly with her and he got sent to Da Nang that was his punishment from the government.

I still have the Vietnamese to English and English to Vietnamese dictionary. You make some friends with some folks. It was tough in that even a couple of older veterans who just didn't know better at the time would make comments about you're the first generation to lose a war that thing. It was difficult. When I was at I told you I was at Pendleton some of the people had in that unit I was training or responsible for while we were doing the training and they had gone through San Diego and they had met some girls. One of them I met through them and when I came back I was being discharged out of Frisco because I was getting out of the Marine Corps so I didn't get to come back with regular troops.

Actually Okinawa going back on the department of defense dependent flight with children and wives and not having been around kids for a year that was wild. Anyway and so I went to Travis Air force base then to Treasure Island for discharge and I called this girl and where she take me to go out for the evening and I'm in still in uniform to Ashbury district in San Francisco. Needless to say I was back to Treasure Island real quick and convinced them I needed to be out there sooner. They told me 2 weeks I think they processed me in 4 days. I'd be home before the first of July of '67.

Anyway it was just different the way that you were treated. It was difficult because don't know later in the war but for all my friends we grew up on all the World War 2 propaganda movies. They were designed to keep the American spirits up so we grew up on those movies and the Korean War movies. Up to this point I don't think American military had ever been blamed for anything where the kids in college and all the others should have been mad at the government they focused on the military and that was unfair.

I was lucky. I told you before my grandfather was a school teacher and he was a very slight man. He was my mother's father but he was a really good guy and very religious West Virginia Methodist. Before I went to Vietnam he was raised by an uncle and his mother had died when he was young. That man and his wife [Jack Radcliffe 00:59:25] did not have children and so he raised my grandfather

and another young man. The other young man which was my grandfather to him it was his brother. He had other siblings but this was truly his brother but I think they were only cousins who has been in World War 1.

My grandfather was really good about telling me about the morality of war in that even though we were raised as Christians there'll be times you have to do things. Then when I came home and I went the same, he did the same thing so I basically got debriefed. The best decompression for me was a family member. A lot of men coming back did not have that support and that strength and I was older. That resonates with a lot of my friends.

There's Reuben Upton Darby the 4th he lives in hedges though now but he was from Hagerstown and went to Shepherd College. He lost a leg over there and he still writes about it and talks. He has written several books and articles. In fact when he lost his leg he got a first person award in Reader's Digest because he wrote it humorously that when the chaplain come to see him after he lost his leg. He asked him how he was doing and he said well this is a hell of a thing for a Quaker isn't it? The other one was [Dave Sebley 01:00:57] from Cumberland. He still lives outside Cumberland an old town. He was injured up near the DMZ.

Reuben was in 1st force with me. In fact I took him on a scuba mission to the Mekong Delta and that's when he decided he didn't want to stay in the scuba locker and ended up being wounded. Dave and I had been in 2nd force together. He had come over in the country with 3rd force recon which relieved us on the DMZ and why I went back to Da Nang. He got shot with a AK47 and I think it was 2 or 3 CH46. A C9 got shot down trying to extract him. He was engaged he was in fact there is book written on it but the tendons will shrink over time. He laid on the battlefield for at least a day in the hip but I think it was more like 2 1/2 days.

When they tried to reconnect the tendons it proved very painful to him. He's the one that wanted to be a trooper like I did and never got to. What he has to do now he has a brace that goes down. He wears a shoe that looks like a welder shoe which keeps his toes from turning under because he will go cripple from that tendon. He didn't lose a limb. For both of them it's been harder but we've stayed friends. They been there every success I had either with the state police or when I went back in the military. They shared it with me and we stay in touch. I think it touched them and a lot of my other friends a great deal. It's nice that people are saying welcome home now but it's a little late.

Speaker 1: Uncle Warner thank you for sharing you stories with us. Thanks [inaudible 01:03:15].

Warner: You're welcome.

Speaker 1: Because I had other guys sitting in that chair. There's still fighting this war I think over there.

Warner: They are and it's sad and it really is. They're good people. When I said they grew up on those movies all young men there are people that are patriots. You have idols. For me a lot of those veterans. You wanted to do as well as they did, emulate them. There's a couple I [inaudible 01:04:03] there's one jumped in on D day that's a friend of mine and he's blind in one eye and you would never know it. He was in sales. When you talk to him he's always doing this and the reason was he never wanted you to know he was blind in one eye. He didn't lose the eye but he lost the sight and he jumped in 101st. You just have those folks that are really good friends and good examples.

For me it worked out well. As I told you I turned down the commission in the Marine Corps. They had offered me to take a commission but I wanted to go to college. I promised my father and grandfather I'd go to college so I turned it down. The one that took it to staff sergeant he retired a full bar colonel with the Marine Corps and was in charge of officer personnel. The other one Livingstone there's 2 Larry Livingstone's or Large Livingstone. We're in Vietnam one was a medal of honor winner. That's a different one. Mine Larry Livingstone I knew was from Ohio. He took the commission and he retired I guess probably in late 90's but he was a Marine 2 star major general 2nd marine division commander.

Larry, I know he had the Navy Cross. He had 2 or 3 silver stars. He had probably 4 bronze stars. I called him the medal magnet because he ended up I think between 5 and 7 purple hearts. For me, it worked. I started college, got bored, went to state police, finished college. Made it to major, was one of the governor's detail for 7 years. Pardon?

Speaker 1: What governor was that?

Warner: It was Mandel, Lee and Hughes. Then I left and Harry Hughes's last year and went to headquarters as a system bureau chief but then it was the ... Remember the helicopter crash on Lincoln Park I took command after that. In fact that's part of the reason why I retired a year or so ago because I was public safety director at UMES, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and they invited me out for dedicating the first new helicopter.

I realized wait a minute in 1986 87 88 I was buying those new helicopters and upgraded the pilot training, medic training. I said wait a minute if they're retiring the aircraft you bought it's about time you hang it up. Then I left there and that's when I took the commission. Well already had the commission and went back to active duty and then retired from [inaudible 01:07:24].

The other job when I was down there I was actually the assistant secretary for law enforcement and security operations for the state. All the state ID's that's me. If you don't like the prox cards I'm the one that designed all that. Actually when I was at Fort Huachuca I'd get up in the morning I felt so guilty. I work on the RP for that and email then I'd go to work because it's 3 hours difference from here then out at Fort Huachuca. Did my thing there and then I did that until 2008 and then I went down because I love history and I have an old home down there so that's when I decided to go down and work at the college. Did that for 5 years. It's been a good run. It's great for me.

Speaker 1: Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for what you did over there.

Warner: Like I said thank you for what you're doing.