

An ‘Xtreme’ Entrepreneur

Billionaire and Vietnam War veteran Bob Parsons started his first business in 1984 and has since gone on to be involved with more than a dozen companies, crediting his success to his Marine Corps training

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Bob Parsons says he owes everything he has to the Marine Corps.

Parsons, who served as a rifleman with Delta Co., 1st Bn., 26th Marines, attached to 1st Marine Div., in Quang Nam Province in 1969, said as a high school senior, he was failing most subjects. Then a couple friends invited him along when they spoke to a Marine Corps recruiter.

“The guy was really intriguing, and he had us at, ‘Hello,’” said Parsons, CEO and founder of Parsons Xtreme Golf, a global golf equipment company.

Before joining the Corps, Parsons said, he was not a good student. He failed fifth grade and said that “due to a fluke,” he didn’t have to repeat it.

“I was able to go into the sixth grade with fourth-grade skills... and then every year, I barely got by,” Parsons said.

He would go on to graduate from college with honors and make a name for himself in the world of entrepreneurship. But to get there, he first had to go to Vietnam.

VIETNAM MEMORIES

Parsons’ service in Vietnam earned him the Combat Action Ribbon, the Purple Heart and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry, which was awarded to his entire unit. Parsons, a VFW member at-large with the Department of Arizona, earned the Purple Heart after walking through a trip wire and receiving “multiple shrapnel wounds” in both legs and his left elbow.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

But his most vivid memory from Vietnam was “how beautiful it was.” Stationed at Hill 190, he said his unit was “on ambush” most nights.

“In the day, when I [could] just kind of sit there and look out over the valley, the colors were just gorgeous,” Parsons said.

Parsons returned to Vietnam in November 2017 as the keynote speaker at the Asia Pacific Golf Summit 2017 in Da Nang. He said he agreed to the trip as long as he was not around anything related to the war.

“The people who knew who I was and the people who didn’t know who I was, they were wonderful,” Parsons said. “And it just felt so good to be there. For me, it was a wonderful thing.”

‘THE DREAM THAT CARRIED ME THROUGH’

After leaving the Marine Corps, Parsons worked in a steel mill before attending the University of Baltimore. He graduated magna cum laude in 1975 with a bachelor’s degree in accounting.

“The reason for that was the Marine Corps,” Parsons said. “They taught me responsibility. They taught me discipline.”

The entrepreneur created his first company, Parsons Technology, in 1984 with the goal of taking care of his customers better than any other company in the field.

“That was the dream that carried me through,” Parsons said. “That’s why, in spite of things being pretty tough, I kept working on software... I improved it as much as I could. I worked hard. I used to work literally two-and-a-half days straight at a time.”

He would stop working when he “started hallucinating.” At that point, he would “go home, crash, sleep for about six to eight hours. Then I’d get up, go for a run, come back, shower and do it again.”

“I’d have never done that without the Marine Corps,” Parsons said.

Parsons taught himself computer coding and programming while working for a commercial credit leasing corporation in the mid-1970s. He recalls being in Redwood City, Calif., at the time awaiting a flight and venturing to the nearby Stanford University campus. There, he bought a basic computer programming language book in the university bookstore and then wrote his first computer program on the flight home.

“When the first Apple came out, I bought one,” Parsons said. “When the first IBM came out in 1980, I sold the Apple and bought one of those. Then I created Money County and in 1984 tried selling it.”

Parsons eventually sold the company to Intuit for \$64 million. In 1997, he founded GoDaddy.com, an internet domain company known for its provocative television commercials featuring former professional racing driver Danica Patrick.

The commercials, according to Parsons, were important to GoDaddy's success "in every way." When the first ad ran, GoDaddy had a 16 percent market share worldwide. After, it increased to 25 percent. Parsons sold GoDaddy for \$2.25 billion in 2011.

His business ventures also include — among others — YAM Property Management, the Bob and Renee Parsons Foundation and Harley Davidson of Scottsdale (Ariz.).

'PXG FOR HEROES'

Parsons' affinity for the military also bleeds into his work at PXG. Founded in 2014, the company offers a "full range" of golf clubs named for Marine Corps military occupational codes.

For example, the irons are 0311 (rifleman), hybrids are 0317 (scout sniper), fairway woods are 0341 (mortars) and drivers are 0811 (artillery).

PXG also established a program offering discounted clubs for veterans called "PXG for Heroes." Parsons started the program in May after being asked "a number of times" what the company does for the military.

All active-duty, reserve, retired military personnel and veterans who served in the Marines, Army, Air Force, Coast Guard or Navy are eligible to receive 55 percent off of retail prices of select items.

Beyond his current endeavor — and the other companies he is involved with — Parsons contends that his Marine Corps service played a key role in his life.

"Knowing what it's like, you got a commitment to the guy on your left and your right as he does you," Parsons said. "It's just not something a Marine takes lightly. And so when I came out of the Marine Corps, I was a different guy. And for the better. I'm where I am because of the military, the Marine Corps specifically."

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