

## Creech, Jay USCG

[00:00:16.55] JAY CREECH: I was born in Louisville, Kentucky, 1946. I grew up in Middlesboro, Kentucky, which is Cumberland Gap, right on Virginia/Tennessee. It's as far down as you can get in Virginia. Lee County. Two miles from there. I had one brother who's in Paris, Kentucky. My father was a veteran of the US Navy in World War II. He was a schoolteacher and had a short leg. And so they wouldn't take him in the Army or the Air Force, but he got in the Navy. And he ended up teaching in-- radar.

[00:00:56.78] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you consider your hometown?

[00:00:59.09] JAY CREECH: I would say Middlesboro, Kentucky would have to be my hometown where I grew up. It's down in the mountains, Appalachia. My family's been down there for a couple hundred years.

[00:01:10.54] JOE GALLOWAY: That'll work.

[00:01:13.78] JAY CREECH: I went to the Coast Guard Academy. I graduated in 1968. My first assignment was the Coast Guard Cutter Mendota, and we went to Vietnam on a 301 day deployment, 1969.

[00:01:31.93] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War at the time you were deployed?

[00:01:39.97] JAY CREECH: When I was deployed, we were in the middle of the '68, '69, '70-- we were starting to have the student demonstrations and the large demonstrations in the cities in the United States. And I had just got the feeling that there was some-- there was a lot of dissatisfaction across the whole country with the way things were going and what we were doing in Vietnam. It did not have the same patriotic feel I think as you had in the previous wars.

[00:02:20.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe the training you received before deploying to Vietnam.

[00:02:26.67] JAY CREECH: The Mendota was a ship built at the very end of World War II, and so we had a crew of 160. And I went on board as the combat information center officer as an ensign. We went to the Coast Guard shipyard in Baltimore to be outfitted for about three months before we deployed. The interesting thing is we took a brand new 5 inch/38 gun from an icebreaker because we were taking the guns off of icebreakers to go to the Antarctic. And so we got their gun that only had like five rounds fired through it.

[00:03:03.99] [LAUGHTER]

[00:03:05.22] I went off to various schools. I went off to Naval Gunfire Support School, I went off to ASW School, I went off to CIC Officers School, all held by the Navy. After we got out of the yard we went down to Guantanamo Bay for refresher training for five weeks. Over Thanksgiving we came back to our--

[00:03:24.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Was that like jungle school or-- ?

[00:03:26.49] JAY CREECH: No, it was for the ship. Refresher training for the Navy is a ship. The ship goes down and you get underway every day and you practice navigation and gunnery and ASW and damage control. And the Navy rides with their trainers on board. And you end up doing a final battle problem at the end and get graded, and everybody says, OK, you're ready to go.

[00:03:51.22] JOE GALLOWAY: You're ready to go. Now you sailed that ship to Vietnam.

[00:03:54.57] JAY CREECH: Yes we did.

[00:03:55.62] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. How long of a journey was it?

[00:03:58.17] JAY CREECH: It was-- we departed Wilmington, North Carolina, our home port, in the end of January, and we went through Panama Canal to Hawaii, Guam, got into the Philippines where we had a-- Subic Bay, to the base. The total time was about four weeks after our stops.

[00:04:23.37] JOE GALLOWAY: All the mechanicals worked OK?

[00:04:25.68] JAY CREECH: Everything worked OK.

[00:04:27.69] JOE GALLOWAY: For an old ship--

[00:04:28.86] JAY CREECH: For an old ship.

[00:04:29.06] JOE GALLOWAY: --that's not a bad deal.

[00:04:30.27] JAY CREECH: We only had one breakdown, and that was way into the deployment. JAY CREECH: We were part of Operation MARKET TIME with the Navy forces and Air Force, off the coast. And we stayed-- our entire deployment we were in the Gulf of Thailand, you know, and on the the Mekong Delta. And because of our draught, we stayed offshore usually, anywhere from a mile or a couple miles offshore, and used our 5 inch/38. We fired 2,500 rounds during our deployments.

[00:05:29.23] JAY CREECH: We did a lot more than just that. We did boardings of junks and craft that were coming in off the coast to ensure that they weren't smuggling, very much like we do in the Coast Guard today. We provided logistics for Coast Guard 82-footers, for Swift Boats. We provided living space

[00:05:54.85] JOE GALLOWAY: for-- indigenous troops I guess is the best way to describe them. They were South Vietnamese, the equivalent of South Vietnamese Green Berets. There were some Chinese mercenaries that we kept for about two weeks. The boats would come alongside, they would deploy and going on an operation in--

[00:06:15.20] JOE GALLOWAY: They would be the boarders or something?

[00:06:16.76] JAY CREECH: No. They would go inside to do an operation up the rivers while we provided them with the gunfire support. We had several groups of those that we kept on board for a week or two at a time and would deploy them off for a couple of days, they would come back. We housed them on the fantail. The Chinese and the Cambodes, or whatever, would sleep outside on the deck.

[00:06:50.91] JOE GALLOWAY: The slept out on the deck.

[00:06:53.02] JAY CREECH: And we built the equivalent of an outhouse for them over the stern.

[00:06:56.43] [LAUGHTER]

[00:07:02.64] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your duties aboard ship?

[00:07:06.24] JAY CREECH: I stood officer of the deck watch. Usually I had two watches a day, four hours. And then the rest of the time I was supervising the combat information system-- or center, enlisted. I had a master chief, radarman-- I had sonarmen and radarmen that worked for me. Our job was we took care of secure voice communications with Army units, Navy units, and Air Force throughout the area.

[00:07:40.63] We were the ones who did the plotting for and the calls for fire that came in. We did all the calculations to say where it was, when it was fired. We would do all the safety checks. And the gun-- we would say, you know, here is your bearing, 035. Your range is 14,500 yards, one round, fire for effect, or whatever.

[00:08:08.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, Fairly accurate gun.

[00:08:11.19] JAY CREECH: Yes it is. It's the Navy gun that was on the destroyers in World War II, and all the way up until, well-- JAY CREECH: Most of the crew would get up-- it was like an eight hour day. Everybody gets up, you go to breakfast and lunch, and then you would determine what the day would bring. If you were in an area where there were boarders, we may be getting ready to go out to do a boarding of a junk. We refueled and rearmed coming alongside the Navy oilers about every third or fourth day. So about every third or four day--

[00:08:54.66] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't go to shore to do that.

[00:08:55.39] JAY CREECH: No. The Navy had an oiler that did regular trips around, so we would come up alongside, pick up our fuel. They would bring us mail, they would bring us-- we would swap movies with them. They would bring us food if they had food. Some of the oilers had large cargo space so we could get maybe ice cream or something. So that would take part of a day.

[00:09:25.78] Then we were always on standby for a call, and a lot of times those would come in the middle of the night, or whenever, to go in to provide gunfire support. Or if some of our 82s or other Swift Boats came alongside in the night and they needed 81 millimeter mortar rounds or .50 caliber rounds, we usually had those stacked all over the deck so we could pass them down to them.

[00:09:53.97] JOE GALLOWAY: You could keep them resupplied.

[00:09:55.72] JAY CREECH: Yes.

[00:09:59.11] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your chow like?

[00:10:01.01] JAY CREECH: Well, it wasn't bad. All I remember is that after being gone all that time I got back to San Diego and I wanted a glass of fresh milk. [LAUGHS]

[00:10:09.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. What were your living conditions, your quarters, like aboard ship?

[00:10:16.54] JAY CREECH: Mine wasn't too bad for an older ship. I shared a small stateroom as an officer with another ensign who was the gunnery officer and he also stood watches. It was a little cramped. It didn't have a door. It had a curtain. And in order to go to our shower, we had to go up a ladder and outside and down. It was the old days. But it wasn't bad, I mean, compared to the troops that were--

[00:10:47.16] JOE GALLOWAY: It wasn't a foxhole.

[00:10:48.45] JAY CREECH: It wasn't a foxhole that were humping out through the Delta. It was not too bad.

[00:10:58.21] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your impressions of the Vietnamese who came aboard and lived on your fantail?

[00:11:08.17] JAY CREECH: Those particular groups that came aboard I would call them hardcore. Many of them had tattoos on them that said, Sat Cong, which was, Kill Cong. They were I would say the type of people that would collect the ears and type things. They were not a very friendly group. They were a very hard group.

[00:11:37.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Hard core, in other words.

[00:11:38.62] JAY CREECH: Yes, very much so. JAY CREECH: I also made a second tour over to Vietnam. The first tour was with the Coast Guard and we were MARKET TIME with the Navy. The second tour I went in 1972 to 1973. And I was assigned to the US Army, Republic of Vietnam as an adviser to the South Vietnamese army.

[00:12:08.85] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. Now how did that happen?

[00:12:13.89] JAY CREECH: The Coast Guard was involved ashore, partly with Navy and even with the Army, we had port security duties and units in Vietnam. So the job that I went back to in '72 was as an adviser to a South Vietnamese army ordnance company.

[00:12:38.97] And they were offloading ammunition from US ships and placed them onto barges. And the barges would either go back up the Mekong River all the way to Cambodia or they would go to the ammo depots that were nearby. And so we were provided as a liaison to the US ship and then to the South Vietnamese to make sure that they safely offloaded the ammunition that was coming over.

[00:13:09.43] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a vastly different tour than your first one.

[00:13:13.41] JAY CREECH: It was. In that tour, when you asked me living conditions is what triggered it is, I lived in Cat Lai, Republic of Vietnam, and I lived on the US Navy SEAL base with the SEALs. I mean, I wasn't a SEAL, but I lived with them. And it was an old French seaplane base that we lived in. In that one I lived in a little tin building by myself that was about the size of this.

[00:13:48.66] JOE GALLOWAY: A chicken coop.

[00:13:49.28] JAY CREECH: Chicken coop. I lived there by myself and then the Navy lived in the building next to me, which was the old French building. We had a mess hall, they served two meals a day. And there were some UDT and some other assorted Navy support people there. There were some Army people there that the Army Transport Corps were there for-- they had the barges and the tugs. And I had a Jeep, and sometimes I had somebody else to help me. I had enlisted Coast Guard, either an E-6 or a chief, part of the time.

[00:14:33.99] As the war wound down, those explosive loading details were in Cam Ranh Bay and down in Vung Tau, Da Nang. And so there was five of them. And as the war was winding down, those places closed and the Coast Guard people that were there left. And so they left me to be the roaming guy to go. And so then I roamed to these other places to assist the Vietnamese who were in those ports.

[00:15:09.06] And so I would pack up and get a backpack and my weapon and I'd go bum a flight to Da Nang or to Vung Tau or someplace. And then go in and visit with those guys. Or we would drive down. Sometimes we drove down in a Jeep to drive to different locations.

[00:15:32.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Yeah, interesting times.

[00:15:37.23] JAY CREECH: Yes. And I pulled back into Saigon in December. They signed the ceasefire which always had one-- you always have a story. It was signed-- the ceasefire-- and I had to walk out of where my billet was over to the Coast Guard spot that particular morning, the Coast Guard office. And the ceasefire was supposed to start at 8 o'clock in the morning. At 08:15, I was huddled up against a tree in the middle of a 123 rocket barrage. It was coming down. And I'm going, this is a nice cease fire. It started.

[00:16:23.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Nice ceasefire there. Yeah.

[00:16:24.75] JAY CREECH: Right.

[00:16:25.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, you sound like you were almost the last Coastie left in Vietnam.

[00:16:29.40] JAY CREECH: I was.

[00:16:30.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:16:31.37] JAY CREECH: I left with Lieutenant Commander Bill Leahy, who later made Admiral, and Master Chief Peterson. The three of us were left. Colonel Viet was the colonel in charge of the ordnance companies. And so the night before, we went over to Colonel Viet's office and we took him all of our weapons that we had with the exception of three, and any other things of value that we thought he might like. And we took them in a trailer, and took them over and dropped them off at his office.

[00:17:16.17] We were flying to Bangkok on a commercial flight with all the Coast Guard historical documents and things that we could take with us. So we were flying on a-- I think, I can't remember. It was a Thai airline or something out of Tan-- not out of Tan Son Nhut, but out of downtown.

[00:17:36.30] And so we just took our Jeep over and pulled it up into the parking lot and spray painted everything that we could off of it, and left it, left our guns. There was hardly any Americans, not very many left. And we unlocked and put our weapons under the seat. And we just went into the airport and off we went to Bangkok.

[00:18:01.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody used that Jeep.

[00:18:03.00] JAY CREECH: Somebody used the Jeep. Yes. But it goes against--

[00:18:07.20] JOE GALLOWAY: As long as you weren't signed off on it.

[00:18:09.25] JAY CREECH: I know, and against all your things that you're taught in the military is that you never lose your weapon, and never lose a piece of government materiel. But, well--

[00:18:18.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, you didn't lose it. You knew where it was.

[00:18:19.99] JAY CREECH: We knew where it was.

[00:18:26.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions that you participated in aboard ship?

[00:18:33.76] JAY CREECH: Yes. The one that probably was the biggest was we were bringing-- as we brought Swift Boats and 82-footers alongside, they would stay with us and eat and things. And so I had a roommate, because we had a room that had an extra bunk, Lieutenant Droz. And he was the officer in charge of Swift Boat.

[00:19:01.10] And so we were conducting a major-- not we, but along with the Coast Guard and the Navy operators in that particular area. And the particular Coast Guard person was Commander Yost, who later became the commandant of the Coast Guard. And he was in charge of the coast on the Gulf of Thailand side. So we had I think five or so-- I should know the number, five or so Swift Boats.

[00:19:36.62] And there were five or-- two companies of South Vietnamese army. They were probably Ranger-type army, along with some Green Berets I think that were leading them. And they were going to go into the Bo De River and up the Bo De River and offload the Vietnamese for an operation.

[00:20:04.83] The sad thing is that my roommate, Lieutenant Droz, was-- on that operation was hit with a B40 rocket and was killed. Of interest is that he was the Swift Boat directly astern of the one that was being piloted by our current Secretary of State, John Kerry.

[00:20:29.77] JOE GALLOWAY: John Kerry?

[00:20:30.56] JAY CREECH: Yes. So that was the operation that had a lot of publicity a few years back.

[00:20:36.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:38.18] JAY CREECH: So Droz was my roommate, was killed. And he was not my permanent roommate, but he was staying with us. And that was--

[00:20:50.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you operate with John Kerry in any other operations?

[00:20:55.37] JAY CREECH: I can't answer the question, but I'm sure we did because we operated with the same group of Swift Boats. And I have pictures of Swift Boats alongside, and I can't tell. I mean, I wouldn't know who he was then anyway. But we did I'm sure because it was the same operation. Operation SEA LORDS is what it was called.

[00:21:25.83] We must have put in about 250 rounds probably on that particular day and the next day. JAY CREECH: There's no doubt the best I had was on the second tour when I'd gone back into Saigon, I got to go see Bob Hope on Christmas Eve.

[00:21:47.27] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. This is what year? '73?

[00:21:51.66] JAY CREECH: It was '72.

[00:21:53.98] JOE GALLOWAY: '72.

[00:21:55.01] JAY CREECH: Yes, '72. So that was--

[00:21:57.94] JOE GALLOWAY: That was all right.

[00:21:59.06] JAY CREECH: Yeah, it was. Kind of neat. JAY CREECH: The worst day-- I don't know that I'd say there really was a worst day, but it was probably-- not the scariest day, but-- So I came back the second time. I went into the Navy in Cat Lai and reported in. And I'd already been on the ship tour and I had been ashore at quite a few places along-- even when we went ashore there. So I was familiar with the possibility that any time, anywhere you could get harmed.

[00:22:39.87] So when I reported that night, there was a little-- a JG in the Navy was showing me around. And I said, OK. I said, I'm staying here. I said, where's my fighting position in case we get hit tonight because I've got my weapon. Where am I supposed to go for my fighting position?

[00:23:00.75] He says, oh, don't worry about it. He says, we don't get hit here. He says, we're the SEALs here, and they don't want to come and fool with us. OK. I said, OK, but still, let me know. And he says, well, it's up here in front and there's a sandbag spot. He says, you can go in there. I said, fine.

[00:23:18.49] Lo and behold, at 5 o'clock in the morning, that morning, you can hear mortars dropping down the line, coming down on our sleeping quarters. And then the siren goes off and I ran out. First night there. And I grabbed this weapon, and I didn't have anything else, and I ran out and jumped in this sandbag job. And who was there but it's the JG.

[00:23:49.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Nothing ever happens.

[00:23:51.17] JAY CREECH: I looked at him and I said, nothing ever happens around here. And we're hearing whump, whump, whump. I don't call that a worst day.

[00:23:59.15] JOE GALLOWAY: That's not a worst day, but it's funny.

[00:24:00.87] JAY CREECH: Yeah, it is. But the worst day was probably when we lost Lieutenant Droz.

[00:24:15.56] JOE GALLOWAY: How much if any contact did you have with our allies? The Koreans, the Thais, the Filipinos, the Aussies.

[00:24:26.84] JAY CREECH: On my first tour on the Mendota we had a lot of interaction with the Thais. We actually did joint-- there was joint patrols with the Thai Navy up on the border in the Gulf of Thailand with Cambodia. So they would come aboard and we talked to them. Years later in my career I ran into the Thai Navy attaché. He had been on our ship with us, had been a liaison, yes.

[00:25:01.33] JOE GALLOWAY: And your general impression of them?

[00:25:04.90] JAY CREECH: I thought the Thai Navy was-- they were a very professional group. They did a very, very good job-- the ones we saw. I did not have any contact with the South Koreans. I did, of course, have daily contact with the Vietnamese on my second tour doing the explosive loading safety job.

[00:25:29.70] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your impressions of their efficiency?

[00:25:32.97] JAY CREECH: Their efficiency was very low. They had a very high survival drive. They didn't want to do anything that would possibly put them into any kind of harm's way.

[00:25:53.46] JOE GALLOWAY: It had been a long war.

[00:25:56.08] JAY CREECH: Yeah, they were not particularly-- not the same work ethic that we had. Days, nights, they would show up early or-- not show up early but show up late, leave early.

[00:26:13.56] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:26:20.04] JAY CREECH: I had mail and I was able to get to a telephone. We were on the MARS. We didn't use that a lot on the ship. But on the first tour our ship would go to the Philippines, or we would go pull into Bangkok or someplace, and we always could get to a phone. My second tour, I was relatively close to Saigon and I would get to Saigon about every three weeks because that's where our office was and I would be able to call home at-- the Red Cross probably had phones, I think. I can't remember but I was able to call home.

[00:27:04.95] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war from home or from other places? Stars and Stripes.

[00:27:14.70] JAY CREECH: Stars and Stripes is my only one, I didn't receive a whole lot more. My mother of course would every once in a while cut out articles and stuff she thought that I was somewhere near something that happened, she would send me an article. But Stars and Stripes was about the only--

[00:27:35.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Only thing you saw.

[00:27:36.15] JAY CREECH: --we saw, yes. Which-- I did read that in the Stars and Stripes-- before we left to go on to Bangkok, we read in the Stars and Stripes that the last Coast Guard people had left. I always considered that an inaccuracy in reporting. [LAUGHTER]

[00:27:55.50] JOE GALLOWAY: You were left.

[00:27:56.22] JAY CREECH: I was there reading it. JAY CREECH: The first tour, a hundred and some people on the ship, we didn't feel isolated. We did talk back and forth. And from Wilmington, North Carolina when we returned, the town turned out for us. The congressman met us, the band was on the pier, and all of downtown was decked out.

[00:28:32.21] JOE GALLOWAY: It was like a World War II troop ship coming home.

[00:28:33.98] JAY CREECH: It was. And so that was good.

[00:28:36.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Not too many people had that experience.

[00:28:38.37] JAY CREECH: No, they did not. And then I was able to have the reverse of that on the way home. On the second tour, I flew out of Bangkok, and I flew commercial. Only way I could get out was to fly the opposite way back in through London.

[00:28:58.22] Actually, that was another story. I got escorted by gunpoint back into the plane in Beirut because we stopped. But I flew back the other way. And so on the plane somebody asked me, he says, well, you know-- I was wearing civilian clothes-- he says, you have a really nice tan. Have you been on vacation? And I said, no, I haven't been on vacation.

[00:29:25.97] I said, I was in Vietnam. And it was a man and his wife. And then he looked at me and says, well, too bad for you. And then they didn't talk to me the rest of the trip. I got the true welcome back that many, many others did also on the way back the second time.

[00:29:52.04] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your reception like from family and friends when you got home the second time?

[00:30:00.92] JAY CREECH: The second time to be quite honest I slept for like 20 hours because I'd been flying the wrong way. And my mother who would never let an event go by that she didn't call for a social interaction had a party for me that next night with most of her friends. So they came. And It was a very warm welcome at home.

[00:30:29.51] JOE GALLOWAY: You were still single then?

[00:30:31.07] JAY CREECH: Yes, I was.

[00:30:31.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after the war?

[00:30:43.94] JAY CREECH: The only thing that bothered me was about the first year back. When I lived in Cat Lai, you'd have the B-52 strikes that used to come through and you could tell them by the threes. My tour after that-- because I went onto a ship again to-- and in the middle of the night sometimes, noises would start in the middle of the night, and I would jump up because it reminded me of the ARC LIGHT drops coming through. So it took me a while to adjust to sleep to some of those noises.

[00:31:23.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years, Coasties or otherwise?

[00:31:40.94] JAY CREECH: With the Coast Guard people I have not had a lot of-- I had some I had some interaction with Marines and-- mainly Marines. I went to the War College and got to meet quite a few Marines that had had tours, one of them who had won the Medal of Honor. We chatted more than once and became a good friend.

[00:32:17.80] Most of my Coast Guard friends, Admiral Bill Leahy, I ended up working for him a couple of times and that was all started from our tour we had over there when he was my boss. I just had a phone call last night with a Coast Guard friend that was the commanding officer of the LORAN station in Tan My. I went up to Tan My when I was there the second time. It was part of my little tour around.

[00:32:50.98] At that time, it was the northernmost US base. It was a LORAN station and there was an Army Fox 4 helicopter squadron nearby. JOE GALLOWAY: Was this up in Quang Tri area? JAY CREECH: It was up north of Hue. And they saw that you could see the tanks. And so in '72 when the North Vietnamese started their offensive, they actually assigned a US destroyer to the Coast Guard LORAN station for-- just like we used to do, to provide kind of gunfire support.

[00:33:23.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Managed to keep them off?

[00:33:25.54] JAY CREECH: Yes. And the Coast Guard-- because at the LORAN station, the force protection was provided for by the US Air Force. There was a platoon of US Air Force there that provided security for the Coast Guard.

[00:33:39.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Good luck.

[00:33:39.85] JAY CREECH: Yes.

[00:33:47.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your Vietnam experience affect your life and career afterward?

[00:33:58.93] JAY CREECH: It has affected my life. I mean, I don't think any time that you go through some of those experiences and you can't help but be-- in some cases I'm more vigilant about-- when I do things. That came from the training, or it came from trips I made and things.

[00:34:23.37] If I'm walking down the street and-- I stayed a lot of times on ships and we would go to-- after Vietnam I'd be in foreign ports and things and I always thought of it as sort of the same-- I'm here or someplace new, and you don't ever forget that training and thinking about that. I think about--

[00:34:44.46] JOE GALLOWAY: So a long time after you could spot ambush places.

[00:34:47.46] JAY CREECH: Yes, this is true. The other thing that affected me is that I came out of high school in the '60s. And just this last year, I went back down to a Vietnam Memorial and I have two high school classmates that are on the same panel.

[00:35:09.47] And one of them was a good friend, Randy Gayles. Randy was-- in Middlesboro we started playing baseball together when we were on a Little League baseball team when we were eight years old. And Randy-- when we played Little League, Babe Ruth, and Randy-- growing up in Kentucky, we integrated our school our senior year.

[00:35:53.24] So Randy came over to play football with us on the Middlesboro team because the Lincoln School was closed. And we played together, we played baseball together again. Randy was a corporal in the Marines, point man, got killed.

[00:36:11.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you ever seen the Vietnam-- Kentucky Vietnam Memorial?

[00:36:16.31] JAY CREECH: No, I have not.

[00:36:17.69] JOE GALLOWAY: I recommend highly that you go there. It's the most incredible one I've seen in America. It's designed as a sundial--

[00:36:27.89] JAY CREECH: Yes.

[00:36:29.00] JOE GALLOWAY: And each day of the year, the shadow points to the name of the dead who died on that day, the Kentuckians. It's quite moving.

[00:36:48.83] JAY CREECH: Yeah, my brother-in-law's been there so he told me the same thing. My brother-in-law was a Marine that did five jumps.

[00:37:02.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:37:05.83] JAY CREECH: And I'll do that. I'll thank you for your recommendation.

[00:37:07.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:37:13.99] JAY CREECH: Yes, I do. I'm very pleased that we recognize the veterans today for their service in the expansive ways that we do it. I was at the airport when some were coming back from Vietnam-- or Afghanistan, or Iraq. The people were lined up and just cheering and clapping. With the exception of my trip to Wilmington, North Carolina, that's what I missed.

[00:37:43.01] JOE GALLOWAY: That was your welcome home. The real one.

[00:37:45.44] JAY CREECH: The real one.

[00:37:48.23] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today or is it?

[00:37:58.22] JAY CREECH: I don't think it is remembered very much, I think people wanted to forget it and they've done a good job at doing that. Very unfortunate, but yes.

[00:38:19.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:38:32.05] JAY CREECH: Yes. I learned-- on the first ship on the first tour over there I learned a lot about working with people. I learned about-- that when it's 2:30 in the morning and there is an Army captain that is saying, I'm being overrun, I need support, that you get up and give your best. And I also learned to be vigilant. Again, a story.

[00:39:04.74] They called me up and said, we've got a fire support mission. It was like 3 o'clock in the morning. And it was again down the coast. And said, it's such and such. And we knew that there was-- well, there was an Army outpost there with a Green Beret supporting the South Vietnamese army or indigenous forces. And so he called in and says, we need fire support. And so we were there, we started doing all of our work to find out what we needed to do for range and shooting.

[00:39:42.45] Looked over at-- I think he was an E-5-- and I said, asked him to please authenticate. And in authentication when you're on a radio, you ask for-- you have your little chart for the day and say, authenticate Juliet, Mike, Poppa, George, whatever. And then they're supposed to look at their sheet and give it back to you what the authentication was.

[00:40:10.13] So we ask him to authenticate, nothing came back. We said, please authenticate, gave the numbers back again. Nothing. So it was a ploy by the Viet Cong to have us to fire into our base. We were able to get a hold of the captain that was at that outpost the next morning. He had never called for fire support.

[00:40:38.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah. Sneaky buggers.

[00:40:39.39] JAY CREECH: So I've used that particular life lesson. I used it all through the rest of my career to tell people that you can never be too vigilant when you're-- whatever it is you're getting ready to do. You have to be alert. Never let that little slip because it could be somebody's life.

[00:41:01.77] JOE GALLOWAY: It's life and death.

[00:41:03.22] JAY CREECH: That's correct.

[00:41:05.19] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:41:12.51] JAY CREECH: I would say that the lesson is that you as an American citizen and as American military, you have a job to do and it's your job to do it to the best of your ability when and where assigned.

[00:41:37.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial here in Washington?

[00:41:41.62] JAY CREECH: Yes, I have.

[00:41:43.08] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your impressions when you go there?

[00:41:54.10] JAY CREECH: When I walk down to the Wall, it's like there's a temperature drop almost, like I feel a temperature drop. I just feel very emotional. Well, a lot of young men and women.

[00:42:18.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[00:42:23.54] JAY CREECH: Yes.

[00:42:24.74] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about that? Good idea?

[00:42:27.71] JAY CREECH: I actually participated. I went over with the congressional-- with the speaker of the house, Boehner. The Coast Guard asked me to be a representative for him. So I got to go.

[00:42:44.63] JOE GALLOWAY: And you're here today.

[00:42:45.92] JAY CREECH: Yes.

[00:42:46.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you very much.

[00:42:48.05] JAY CREECH: You're welcome, you're welcome.