

Dodson, Donald US Army

[00:00:16.65] JOE GALLOWAY: When and where were you born?

[00:00:19.02] DONALD DODSON: Oh. March 27th, in San Diego, California, 1949.

[00:00:24.18] JOE GALLOWAY: '49. Good year.

[00:00:25.95] DONALD DODSON: [CHUCKLES]

[00:00:26.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:29.17] DONALD DODSON: My father was Roy. He was an engineer with the City of San Diego Water Department. Had come up through the ranks. 1943, he was given a transfer from the US Public Health Service to the city of San Diego during the war and was called a sanitarian, checking water purification. He retired from the city in '72 or so, went to work--

[00:00:53.25] appointed to the State Water Resources Control Board. So we lived water. He said he was in the new and used water business.

[00:01:01.71] JOE GALLOWAY: And the rest of your family?

[00:01:03.48] DONALD DODSON: My mom was a typical 1950s stay-at-home mom. She'd been a teacher before I came along. My older brother was born five years earlier in '43. So had a little house.

[00:01:19.42] I was born in Mercy Hospital in San Diego and moved in from the hospital to a little house out in Point Loma. My younger brother was born two years after I was.

[00:01:31.75] JOE GALLOWAY: After you. So clearly, San Diego is your hometown?

[00:01:36.35] DONALD DODSON: It is. And my dad was born here, and his mom was born here. So we're really peculiar folk.

[00:01:48.04] I started college in 1967, thinking I was going to be a music teacher. That was all I wanted to be from about eighth grade. I played oboe, English horn, clarinet, a little time on saxophone, a little time on flute, piano, cello. That's--

[00:02:03.70] JOE GALLOWAY: You lived and breathed it.

[00:02:05.17] DONALD DODSON: I lived and breathed music. I played not only at school, but I also, being an oboist in San Diego, I was able to get some paying gigs on the kind of the fringe of the paying level. And so I started college in 1967 as a music ed major, University of Redlands, Redlands, California.

[00:02:25.15] And halfway through the first semester, I was getting a D in theory; getting a very weak C minus in sight singing, which I hated; getting an A in physics, introduction to physics; an A in whatever my other general ed class was. And a bulletin came out saying that Redlands was offering a new degree, systems engineering. Been around an engineer all my life out on filter plant tours with him during the summer.

[00:02:52.70] And so I went to the counselor and said, well, can I take the introduction to engineering in the intersession between the fall and spring? And they said, well, yeah. But why? I said, well, I just-- it sounds fascinating.

[00:03:05.32] He said, well, it does you no good. It'll be an elective. So I said, that's fine.

[00:03:10.57] I got into this introduction to engineering, and I thought this is it. This is it. And ended up then going back to the counselor to change all my classes for the spring.

[00:03:22.36] And he said, boy, there's good news, bad news. What's the bad news? The bad news is, like a dummy, you took only geometry.

[00:03:31.66] You didn't take trig. You didn't take precalculus. Your two study halls to take piano lessons and cello lessons isn't helping you, and you've got to be ready for engineering calculus next September or you're going to time out.

[00:03:46.09] We had student deferments then, you remember? And so if I didn't catch the calculus train in my sophomore year, I was going to run out of time. So I said, well, what's the good news? The good news is they had a calculus for the noncalculus user. So I got into that class.

[00:04:04.52] This would have been February '68. And at the end of the first hour, the professor is at the lower right-hand corner with gibberish. And he says-- he turns around to the class, and he says, I presume you all can solve this equation. There are 14 heads nodding and one kid going [LOOKS ALARMED]. That was me.

[00:04:24.77] JOE GALLOWAY: It was you.

[00:04:25.13] DONALD DODSON: I went back on Wednesday. I talked to the professor. I tried to figure out what my options were. And there was a deadline to drop units to save some money. So I called the draft board, and the draft board basically was no help.

[00:04:41.03] They kind of led me to believe that as long as my deferment was good till October, I was good to go. They didn't tell me about the part if you drop below 12 units, a--

[00:04:52.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Instant.

[00:04:53.78] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. So in March, I was reclassified 1-A. I felt the warm breath of the draft board coming down.

[00:05:04.11] I had found out that if the draft board called my name, then no other branch had anything to do. They couldn't do anything. I don't think that was totally true, but that was kind of the pressure.

[00:05:15.91] JOE GALLOWAY: The word.

[00:05:16.37] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. So my clarinet teacher in seventh grade had been in World War II as a clarinet player. And he said, if you have to go, go as a bandsman. You're in the rear. World War II, different kind of war.

[00:05:29.90] You're in the rear. You're going forward with ammo, coming back with bodies, going forward with ammo. coming back with POWs. And every time you stop for more than ten minutes, you put on a show. So I said, well, that doesn't sound too bad. I didn't like sleeping on the ground as a kid.

[00:05:46.50] Being in a metal box with a big gun on it, that didn't sound too good. Artillery was math. We're back to math. So I went up to the Army recruiter in San Bernardino. Went up, had an audition, and signed a contract for three years to be an army bandsman.

[00:06:04.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[00:06:05.16] DONALD DODSON: [CHUCKLES]

[00:06:06.58] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam at the time?

[00:06:10.64] DONALD DODSON: Well, certainly, we knew it was there. You saw it in the news. By '68-- I was inducted in the Army in May of '68. By then, it was pretty clear, I think, that the political will was changing.

[00:06:29.14] Nixon was now coming in. He was sort of a new player on the stage. Johnson, you remember, had not run for reelection. The war basically ended his political career. So I was kind of aware of it.

[00:06:43.30] I was sort of misinformed, but that's what I wanted to hear basically, was if I enlist in the army as a bandsman rather than go in as a two-year draftee, as an RA-- I could be an RA, I could pick my MOS.

[00:06:58.52] And as long as I got through basic combat training, the Army and I had a written agreement that I would go to Fort Irwin, California, 35 miles north of Barstow, the middle of the Mojave Desert, as a clarinet player. And why clarinet? Well, because the band at Fort Irwin was what they called an AG Band. They had different tiers of bands.

[00:07:20.06] It was a little marching unit, about 25-piece band. They didn't--

[00:07:24.35] JOE GALLOWAY: And they needed a clarinet?

[00:07:25.37] DONALD DODSON: Yeah, they didn't have a slot for oboe because they weren't ever supposed to be playing concert band music. So the bandmaster was thrilled because on a clarinet MOS, I am there as a pretty darn good oboe player, oboe and English horn. And then I played bass drum while we were on the march.

[00:07:43.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[00:07:49.57] DONALD DODSON: Fort Ord.

[00:07:50.95] JOE GALLOWAY: You got through it OK.

[00:07:53.14] DONALD DODSON: I got through it. It was not-- in looking back, that we had one drill sergeant, one of the lead drill sergeants who was as sadistic as you could be in 1968 without getting your stripes pulled. He was a terrifying guy.

[00:08:12.19] Now, I'm a upper middle-class white kid from suburban San Diego. Violence was not part of my scheme of things. And this whole Army combat training was different, way different than I thought. So I got through.

[00:08:32.32] And in fact, had I not gone AWOL part way through to have some time off, I would have come out E-2. I had a lot of points. Did really well with an M14.

[00:08:44.41] JOE GALLOWAY: What further training did the Army give you?

[00:08:46.96] DONALD DODSON: Nothing. Because I was what was called OJT. I had auditioned around the school of music in Virginia, which suited me fine. So I went from Fort Ord, short leave, and then out to Fort Irwin. And I arrived there.

[00:09:02.66] They were thrilled. I played bass drum out on the march. And then the bandmaster who had come from Sixth Army Headquarters Band, which was almost the top echelon of bands, Sixth Army Headquarters Band, was a full concert band. He liked playing university-level wind symphony music.

[00:09:22.76] So he's out now at this little Podunk band in Barstow because he's retiring and going to take a job with the Fontana School District. So the Army moves him in his family to Fontana, and he came out and camped out at Fort Irwin, which was quite a commute. But he stayed there during the week.

[00:09:41.36] And Mr. Ferraro was thrilled that he had somebody that played the oboe parts instead of a flute player or a clarinet player playing the cue notes. So it was a--

[00:09:55.37] I guess I didn't finish the story. I had been led to believe if you went to Fort Irwin in the band you stayed there. And a lot of guys did. They did their whole tours after basic at Fort Irwin.

[00:10:07.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Right there at Fort Irwin.

[00:10:08.54] DONALD DODSON: So I had this blissful misconception that I had done--

[00:10:14.96] JOE GALLOWAY: You were going to spend two-and-a-half more years--

[00:10:16.46] DONALD DODSON: Absolutely.

[00:10:16.88] JOE GALLOWAY: --in Fort Irwin.

[00:10:17.63] DONALD DODSON: And I had taken an opportunity to avoid Vietnam.

[00:10:27.84] DONALD DODSON: In April of '69, I got orders to go to Vietnam. And I said, whoa, whoa, whoa, I have a one-year stabilized tour of duty here, the 433d Army Band. You can't do this to me. And the clerk said, well, you're right. So--

[00:10:47.71] JOE GALLOWAY: But it ain't doing you no--

[00:10:48.99] DONALD DODSON: Well, it actually postponed it. Somebody up at garrison headquarters at Fort Irwin got DA, Department of the Army, to cancel those orders. Within a couple of weeks, they reissued the orders. I signed in on July 27, 1968. I signed out on July 27, 1969. They did their one-year stabilized tour, and I was on my way to--

[00:11:14.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Bang. You were on your way.

[00:11:15.48] DONALD DODSON: --Oakland Army Base and off to Vietnam.

[00:11:19.44] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you get to Vietnam, and where did you land?

[00:11:23.67] DONALD DODSON: It was aircraft. Let's see. I flew--

[00:11:26.58] JOE GALLOWAY: A civilian airliner type thing?

[00:11:28.14] DONALD DODSON: Yeah, contract World Airways. I flew civilian to-- and that was maybe one of the hardest memories of my life, looking out the window, leaving Lindbergh Field. I hadn't flown a lot, but I had flown a little bit and looking out. And we went over my house and my high school and then went into the fog. And it dawned on me then.

[00:11:54.63] JOE GALLOWAY: You're gone.

[00:11:55.58] DONALD DODSON: This could be the last time I ever see this stuff. So I got to Oakland Army Base on the Friday before Labor Day weekend. Now why does the Army have you show up on a Friday?

[00:12:09.51] So I check in and grab a rack and get into the routine. And they had these big formations. And every formation, they would call out a couple hundred names.

[00:12:22.74] In August, September '69, there were too many people at Oakland. There were people sleeping on mattresses in the hallways. It was like a huge buildup. And looked like pandemonium. We were supposed to be there three days and then go.

[00:12:42.60] About four days into this deal, they would always call a few names at the end of the formation. And they told those people to come up to the reviewing stand instead of going into this Building 26 or whatever it was called, which was the point of no return. Just symbolically, the Army had this big warehouse, and you'd go in on the east side. I think it was the east side.

[00:13:05.70] And you never came out again because you'd get on a bus on the west side. And you would have been outfitted. They would have confirmed all your orders. And you stayed in there for like about 24 hours, and you couldn't get out because they didn't want people going over the fence.

[00:13:21.04] So they put me in this holding platoon. And I said, what's this? And the next formation I fall out behind the reviewing stand. And I ask the guy next to me, what is this? And he goes, it's the holding platoon.

[00:13:33.91] What is that? He goes, well, somebody screwed up. He says what-- I said, really? He goes, yeah, what's your MOS?

[00:13:40.42] I said, well, I'm a clarinet player. Oh. See, there's no bands in Vietnam. Somebody screwed up.

[00:13:47.20] And I said, well, I know there are bands. There's nine bands in Vietnam right now, Army bands. And what are you? Nike missile operator.

[00:13:55.12] I said, whoa, they got Nikes in Vietnam? He goes, no. Of course not. Somebody screwed up. It's all back in the manual processing, way before computers.

[00:14:02.98] So I spend about ten days down at Alameda Naval Air Station in this little segregation group. Finally, they pulled my orders. Finally, I go. They bused us out to Travis Air Force Base in the middle of the night.

[00:14:19.45] Apparently, they'd had some troubles. They told us that we were to hunker down if stuff started hitting the windows. All the protesters were asleep, so--

[00:14:28.34] Got to Travis. Got on World Airways. Flew to Hawaii. Got to the crew change, fuel thing. Stepped out onto the old-fashioned ladder.

[00:14:38.56] I thought I was going to die. It was like being in a steam room with a towel over your face. And I thought, I don't know how this is going to work.

[00:14:48.38] Got back on the plane. I went to Guam. We were stuck on Guam. They couldn't get a flight crew. So experienced sunrise on Guam. And it's like as soon as the sun gets a little crest, you're sweating.

[00:15:06.51] I thought I'm--

[00:15:07.60] JOE GALLOWAY: You're not made for the tropics.

[00:15:09.22] DONALD DODSON: I was not made. No. My genes, they are Welsh.
[CHUCKLES] So we got into Vietnam finally, and it was--

[00:15:20.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Tan Son Nhut?

[00:15:20.77] DONALD DODSON: Tan Son Nhut.

[00:15:21.25] JOE GALLOWAY: The gun--

[00:15:21.73] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. They bused us out to Long Binh to the Repo Depot. And I knew that every human being that looked like they knew what they were doing, cadre, I was to say I'm here to audition for the 299th Army Band or 290th, whatever it was.

[00:15:39.07] So 80 percent of the people who heard that, like slapping food on your plate or something, they couldn't care less. But somebody said, oh, OK. So I went over and had an audition. And, of course, my thought at that point was, oh, if I can stay in Saigon and be an oboe player, maybe that's going to be cool.

[00:16:00.61] So I go through kind of an audition, and I hear them talking outside the plywood wall. And they said, hey, why don't we-- since this guy is an oboe player, why don't we send him up to Fourth Division and get that crazy guy off our back. He was screaming for an oboe because as an infantry division band, he had a slot for an oboe.

[00:16:23.29] And so they shipped me under an MOS of clarinet, and he got an oboe player. So that's where I went, Fourth Infantry Division and--

[00:16:31.39] JOE GALLOWAY: To be the oboe player.

[00:16:32.86] DONALD DODSON: I was the first and second and third chair oboe player, the Fourth Infantry Division Band, and I played a little bit of clarinet, a little bit of bass drum.

[00:16:40.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Now here you are. You're in Pleiku? Or An Khe?

[00:16:44.41] DONALD DODSON: Outside. We're outside of Pleiku, Camp Enari.

[00:16:47.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Enari.

[00:16:47.95] DONALD DODSON: Yep. Yep.

[00:16:51.01] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your first impressions on landing in Vietnam?

[00:16:56.11] DONALD DODSON: First impressions-- the only difference-- and I'm sorry to the Hawaiian Travel Bureau. The only difference for me between Hawaii and Vietnam, the steamy air smelled like flowers in Hawaii and smelled like decay and jet fuel and--

[00:17:15.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Feces and--

[00:17:16.26] DONALD DODSON: Well, mildew, mold. Yeah, it was just kind of a smell. And then this just sense of oppressive heat and humidity. I'll tell you--

[00:17:26.31] I have a funny story. Looking out of the window. We all hunched over coming over. And they make a fairly sharp turn coming into Tan Son Nhut. And as we get down close, I see all these little fires.

[00:17:43.23] And I think, this is really weird. I mean, they're not having-- it's too smoky for barbecue. I mean, what is this? And then I thought, oh, man. Those are mortar rounds.

[00:17:54.34] These guys have just got done getting hit because every couple hundred feet there was this little smoldering fire. Well, of course, I learned very quickly that was where the feces was--

[00:18:06.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Being taken care of.

[00:18:07.44] DONALD DODSON: Dehydrated.

[00:18:08.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. [CHUCKLES] The burners.

[00:18:12.39] DONALD DODSON: Yes. I became one of those, by the way.

[00:18:20.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you fit in with the band? Do you think your bandmaster was happy to see you?

[00:18:25.56] DONALD DODSON: Mr. Morris was. Mr. Morris had a grand dream that this band was going to be like a Pacific Rim showpiece. We even had permission to wear goofy uniforms. We had blue helmet liners with the Fourth Entry Division ivy leaf on the front in a white stripe.

[00:18:48.39] We had to wear white web belts. We had to spit shine jungle boots. And that was not fun.

[00:18:57.75] Now I don't-- I'm not here to malign or diminish the great sacrifice of the infantry, artillery, hospitals, helicopters. Just this weird little footnote, almost, that on the table of equipment in personnel an infantry division got a 40-piece band. And so Mr. Morris was thrilled because he'd had a flute player trying to play oboe cues and all that whole stuff.

[00:19:29.74] The bass drum guy was thrilled because I told him I wasn't going to play oboe on the march. I mean, that's just really stupid. And I came as an E-5. I'd made rank at Fort Irwin-- at the 433rd Army Band. Made rank really fast.

[00:19:45.56] And so I arrived as a five, so that meant I had duties to do, supervision. And yeah, I'd say we fit in pretty quickly.

[00:20:00.38] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like?

[00:20:03.47] DONALD DODSON: It was a palace by comparison to the grunts. We had hooches that had been purpose built to be barracks. In fact, as an E-5, I was in a room with another E-5. And he had a little refrigerator.

[00:20:20.24] We had a little TV. The signal from Pleiku Air Force Base was still strong enough, so we got to watch reruns of I Love Lucy and stuff.

[00:20:29.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Combat.

[00:20:31.28] DONALD DODSON: Well, the Armed Forces Radio Television Network edited what we got. So there was like a talking head once an hour or so, I guess. But right away, we're doing gigs. Army bands, the primary mission was official ceremonies, morale raising, entertainment stuff. And then the secondary mission was security. In those days, we were all trained as riflemen, and that was the primary mission that an Army bandsman had.

[00:21:04.13] JOE GALLOWAY: I don't know how it was in Vietnam, but in the Gulf War, the 24th Division Band secured headquarters in the field.

[00:21:12.84] DONALD DODSON: Right. We had what was called the tactical operations center there at Camp Enari. In the field when we got there, Major General Donn with two Ns, R. Pepke was my hero. He loved the band. I don't know.

[00:21:29.43] He was a young officer in World War II, as many of our senior people were. He had his favorite march. He just loved the band. And so we didn't do a lot of the things that other Army bands did.

[00:21:43.26] 25th Division, 101st, they did sweeps. They put the horns down and put the M16s up. And so we-- the first several months I was there was just amazing. It was like a bad stateside job.

[00:21:57.48] JOE GALLOWAY: [CHUCKLES]

[00:22:04.19] DONALD DODSON: A lot of us had college. Some were graduates. A lot of them had got their degrees in music and were drafted out of being teachers or drafted out of performance somewhere. So it was a pretty intelligent group.

[00:22:21.44] There was actually kind of two bands there. There were two kinds of people. There was the MOS bandsman who had probably been in a stateside band. A lot of them had been to the school of music. Most of us, I, think were OJT-type guys.

[00:22:35.90] Then there were people from the combat arms who did well. I don't know if they formally counted points like they did in World War II, but they would get a commendation from their CO, their infantry or artillery, whatever. Or they'd get injured. Not bad enough to get the ticket home. So--

[00:22:57.67] JOE GALLOWAY: But bad enough to bring them in from the field.

[00:22:59.48] DONALD DODSON: Bad enough that they could come in. And if they played in high school or-- some of these folks, it was really kind of sad. We had Audition Day. And they would come in--

[00:23:10.68] while they were on stand-down, they'd come in in their real war garb covered with that red slimo mud. And they'd come in, and it was almost like-- and we'd be doing our other work, other details, other stuff. And we'd always--

[00:23:26.37] JOE GALLOWAY: And they're auditioning--

[00:23:27.06] DONALD DODSON: And they're auditioning--

[00:23:27.75] JOE GALLOWAY: --for a chance for life.

[00:23:28.38] DONALD DODSON: Exactly. Exactly right. And that quite literally, I think, was the motive. And it was just--

[00:23:36.96] Here they were. You could just see the pressure. Now these were guys that were cooked in pressure, but they were auditioning to come out of the field. So about a third of the band was actually not bandsmen. They were doing OJT in our band.

[00:23:52.32] But Mr. Morris wanted a 60-piece band. So our authorized strength was 40. But--

[00:23:59.10] JOE GALLOWAY: He's heading home.

[00:24:00.00] DONALD DODSON: Yeah, yeah. I came across getting ready to come up here an article in the division newspaper. Anybody who can spell music, come on down. When you're in, tell your cadre that you're a musician.

[00:24:15.45] So there was this kind of always a flux of people rotating home and new guys coming in. And I always really appreciated them. We had a guy that had flunked out of medic school and was in infantry. So he came out of an infantry unit because he played music. And so we weren't entitled to have a medic in our little group, but we called him Doc.

[00:24:43.05] It was the honorary title. He had a bag. And I'd had first aid training back in the world, so I--

[00:24:49.53] he and I had talked a little bit. And so I inherited the honorary title of Doc when Doc rotated home.

[00:24:58.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds that you would never have run across in your civilian life?

[00:25:09.51] DONALD DODSON: San Diego was pretty segregated still in the '60s, but Point Loma High School was on an area that there was an overlap of San Diego High and Point Loma. And so we had some African Americans at Point Loma. There was a huge Portuguese community for the fishing fleets there that were at Point Loma.

[00:25:36.44] So it was mostly white, but where we went to church, I remember real clearly my dad making it very clear to all of us that there was no difference, that this was all just skin-deep. I didn't see racism until I got in the Army. I'd never seen racism, just that ignorant kind of hatred for what a person looked like or where they came from.

[00:26:04.44] So my first time as charge of quarters-- the night watchman in our area was called charge of quarters. There were only two people armed. This, to some people, sounds like lunacy. All of our weapons and ammunition were locked up in metal boxes. A, they didn't trust us; B, they thought we'd hurt each other; and C, control.

[00:26:27.45] There were two people armed. There was a charge of quarters, which was a noncommissioned officer, and an enlisted guy that was the assistant. So my first time rotating through was within a couple of weeks. Well, nobody taught me--

[00:26:41.46] my clarinet lessons, oboe lessons, playing in the University of Redlands marching band didn't prepare me to be charge of quarters. So Jay Carter, African American guy, was the EM for me to be the NCO, the night watchman. And he and I, I think, formed a friendship. It was really something.

[00:27:04.44] Later, sadly, there was a lot of racial strife going on. And, of course, civil rights was still churning stateside. The Army tried to pretend it didn't exist, but it did. And the Black Panthers came through and pretty much told all the black guys, look, you got to stop talking to whitey.

[00:27:27.23] And I remember feeling like, wow, what did I-- what did I do? And he and I were very superficial from about January of '69 on until he went home. I always get a little forgetful.

[00:27:44.33] Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. I was still a civilian. Robert Kennedy was killed. I was in the Army.

[00:27:50.18] They put everybody on basically a stand-down. And they made it real clear that there wasn't going to be no acting out. We didn't have civil rights. We were flemwads, basic training. But they were very worried.

[00:28:08.07] The antiwar thing was going on. And I looked at my-- my predicament is of my own causing. Had I been smarter or had I been a little bit more on the ball, I wouldn't have got myself stuck in this green machine. So yeah, we were aware of it.

[00:28:29.67] I don't think any of us-- that I worked with in the rear echelon-- I don't think any of us were like gung ho. It was just-- I likened it to a bottling plant. I'd been to a bottling plant when I was a little kid. And there's empty bottles rattling along, and they come on to this big belt.

[00:28:46.26] And there's a machine that puts the stuff in and puts the cap on. And then they go out and get shipped. It was just my turn.

[00:28:54.69] My dad didn't serve in the military. His eyes were 2200. Parenthetically, they wouldn't take him in World War II even with a degree in chemical engineering. Me, good to go.

[00:29:08.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Good to go.

[00:29:09.57] DONALD DODSON: Cannon fodder. You can be nearsighted.

[00:29:14.28] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation, off-duty activities?

[00:29:23.57] DONALD DODSON: The primary activity was drinking. We had an EM club that half of it was enlisted, half was NCOs. And E-5s in the Army went with the EMs for booze. So all my pals were over there. I had no friends that were E-6s and 7s.

[00:29:43.24] And the E-8, I had met--

[00:29:45.16] JOE GALLOWAY: So all your friends were over on the E side.

[00:29:46.02] DONALD DODSON: We were on the E-4 or below. So yeah.

[00:29:49.39] JOE GALLOWAY: You drank with them?

[00:29:50.20] DONALD DODSON: I drank with them. Absolutely. Yeah. And part of that was because I spent more time with them. As the lowest ranking E-5, I was garbage NCO.

[00:30:00.61] So every Saturday, I had to get a detail together, and there was a duty roster. So you didn't-- the same guys didn't pull garbage duty every week. They would get a check in the box, and you'd run down that list. I got to do it every Saturday. That was my Saturday.

[00:30:15.95] When I was off, I found out that the special-- what were they called? The people who put on shows and recreation stuff.

[00:30:26.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, they called them special something.

[00:30:28.13] DONALD DODSON: Special something. They now call it MWR, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation. So they had--

[00:30:34.61] at Camp Enari, they had a terrific photo lab. And a guy from the band taught me how to do photographs. So one of the pictures of me going to guard duty and me with the dog and my oboe. I made those pictures. I took them.

[00:30:51.23] I had somebody hold my camera and take the pictures. I went down there. I made the negatives. They come to life.

[00:30:59.12] Put there in this dark room. You make a print. So that was my recreation there.

[00:31:06.23] We traveled a lot. So when we went down to Nha Trang-- because in II Corps (Vietnam was in four Corps), we were the band from Nha Trang, Quy Nhon, all the way to Cambodia. And one time, we did a gig in Da Nang because the local Army band was somewhere else.

[00:31:27.86] We went to Saigon, did a show, so-- Dalat.

[00:31:31.52] JOE GALLOWAY: You traveled around.

[00:31:32.42] DONALD DODSON: We did. And so we got to go visit other places. Nha Trang was safe enough in those days that we--

[00:31:40.16] they'd let us out. We didn't have any firearms. We would go out the gate and get a little taxi, those funny little Vespa taxis. I saw the Big Buddha. And I have like 700 slides that are in a box waiting to be digitized and just haven't ever got the gumption to do it.

[00:31:57.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have specific memories of the popular culture at that time, particular songs, movies?

[00:32:05.12] DONALD DODSON: "Does Anybody Know What Time It Is?" Chicago Transit Authority became Chicago. Chicago Transit Authority had an album come out in the spring of '69. I was unaware of that.

[00:32:20.93] One of the musical geniuses in our band-- we had some really terrific musicians. His wife sent him a cassette. That was a common way of communicating, was a cassette. And I don't think the guys in the field probably got to do that, but the REMFs got to do that.

[00:32:40.37] We got to record, and they'd send it for free. And so I had like this little travelogue show. I would take slides, and then I would narrate the slides and send them home. And my folks would send them to my friends at Redlands and vice versa.

[00:32:56.16] And so Chicago Transit had a sound that was amazing. This guy took the cassette. And he and I were on guard duty that night. He's on the floor of the bunker with a flashlight, which was like, ah.

[00:33:15.14] So he's down there, and he's listening to "Does Anybody Know What Time It Is?" And he's transcribing. He's taking what we call dictation in music. And he's orchestrating that song for our rock band, which was a subset of the full division band. So I think we were the first live performance of Chicago in Vietnam.

[00:33:41.18] JOE GALLOWAY: In Vietnam.

[00:33:42.11] DONALD DODSON: 1969.

[00:33:43.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you play music outside of your official duties in Vietnam?

[00:33:48.56] DONALD DODSON: Not so much the first several months. But after I'd been there a while and I'd been garbage NCO, then I was loading NCO, then I became a squad leader. Got to wear hard stripes. And acting NCO.

[00:34:02.60] And my name came up on the seniority list to be-- I might also use the proper term, shit burner. Fecal matter dehydration technologist, if you want to get fancy. Because we had no flush toilets. We didn't have running water.

[00:34:17.08] And so that's what these little fires were is barrels of fecal matter. And the formula was like nine parts diesel, one part mogas. And every once in a while, somebody would reverse and--

[00:34:33.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Reverse it and blow it up.

[00:34:33.68] DONALD DODSON: And yes, you'd hear this [BOOM]. And you'd think, oh, incoming. And everybody's queuing up at the Conex box. Get your weapons. Get your ammunition. Go to the defensive points.

[00:34:46.36] JOE GALLOWAY: And what you really needed was a shower.

[00:34:48.94] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. It was now cooking off. So later-- it was about like maybe August-ish or so I resigned my hard stripes and became a shit burner. And so that was really kind of the end of a unpleasant year was-- But to answer to the question, I got more time to play oboe because we were exempt from other duties. So painting rocks, painting ammo cans. Every company area had thousands, millions of these metal canisters that the ammo come-- that the powder comes in. And so some brilliant person came up--

[00:35:30.68] JOE GALLOWAY: They decided to paint them.

[00:35:31.85] DONALD DODSON: Put them up like little picket fence posts. And then you'd paint them white and then put a red stripe around them. And so we were exempt from that. I was exempt from exterior guard. I'd had a really bad experience on guard duty.

[00:35:45.59] So being a shit burner was inside and didn't do anything about rockets and mortars, but it did something about the perimeter. So I got to play oboe a lot. I played in the chapel. I was actually-- we were in the same company as the chaplain's assistants.

[00:36:03.70] So one of the keyboard guys that I knew, he and I played duets. He'd play the piano part, and I'd play the oboe part. So he said, let's go do this for chapel. But there was-- I was not in a rock band. I didn't do any gigs.

[00:36:24.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe for me the quality of the leadership in your outfit?

[00:36:28.74] DONALD DODSON: Well, I'm thinking that Mr. Morris, Carleton R. Morris, chief warrant officer, is perhaps still alive. I tried to-- I made contact with him a few years ago. And the pictures and that CD that I tried to copy were his brainchild. He was an amazing conductor. He'd been a junior high teacher.

[00:36:49.83] I think he'd volunteered for the Army. He volunteered for Vietnam. And like I said, he had this vision of being something other than a division band.

[00:36:59.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever get to build it to a 60-instrument orchestra?

[00:37:03.12] DONALD DODSON: I think we had times when it was 50-60. Yeah. Yeah, there were times.

[00:37:09.21] It was harder when General Pepke went home because General Walker came in. Major General Walker, he thought we were somewhere around dog poop. I think he was embarrassed that he had a band, whereas General Pepke, it was--

[00:37:24.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Pride.

[00:37:25.09] DONALD DODSON: Oh. And he'd fly us out. So instead of spending two days on a convoy for him to fly in out to a landing zone somewhere, he'd fly us out the day before, and he'd fly us back. We were there at our little starchy uniforms and our shiny shoes. So he was excellent.

[00:37:49.84] The senior NCOs were focused primarily, I think, on sexual relations with hooch maids and alcohol. So when they needed work-- because we were like a little fill in light construction group. When we moved the division headquarters, that was a big deal. We had to refurbish stuff.

[00:38:10.36] And part of our band went down and actually took old barracks that had been vacated and rehabbed them. So building a ramp down to the showers to replace the crumbling

stairs, that was one of my projects. Somewhere in the An Khe river valley there's a set of stairs that go up to a slab that was our rehearsal hall. But the senior NCOs did not impress me a lot.

[00:38:39.28] The E-6s were OK. So the E-5s got all the work done. We had a great XO. The band master reported to a captain of headquarters, headquarters company.

[00:38:51.43] And Captain Prowant, I'm sorry. I made his life a living hell by just not being a conforming kind of guy. But the XO, Lieutenant Allen, was an ROTC guy from Cornell. Had a job waiting for him at Marriott. And he and I came in the same week. He was the guy I had to talk to get a truck driver's license.

[00:39:18.77] So we had a relationship. And I thought he was just a fantastic guy. He understood that the cachet of rank had diminished. And the guys who ran the war, I think, didn't really quite understand that, that you needed--

[00:39:42.23] we'd call them in management now informal leaders. You needed people who were going to get the work done, not because I have this thing on my-- it used to be stripes. But over there, we had little metal emblems. And I always appreciated the fact that he understood the human dynamic of getting work done through other people.

[00:40:08.44] DONALD DODSON: Well, it's got to be getting on the plane to come home. I think that was the best day. It was bittersweet, though.

[00:40:17.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that.

[00:40:19.21] DONALD DODSON: The getting there-- I have a short-timer's calendar I found, where you put a little mark every week. And it was the word out, O-U-T, with an exclamation point. So every-- whatever.

[00:40:31.62] It was probably an Orange Pill Day. Monday was Orange Pill Malaria Day. And so every Monday, I put a mark. So the word out was just outlined. So O filled in, then U filled in, T. I got to the bottom of T probably in late August, early September, then I went to every day.

[00:40:50.70] We had lots of expressions. I wish I had written them all down. It would have been a great book. I'm too short to shit. I got to stand on my tippy toes to see out of a tank trap.

[00:40:59.58] We had all this short-timer stuff. So you got this anticipation. The dog had adopted me. We had a mascot, War Dog. And he would decide under whose bunk he would sleep.

[00:41:11.50] And he decided. He was an official mascot. He had a real dog tag. I had to take him to the vet once he adopted me. So that was my first dog.

[00:41:24.13] So it was sad that I was leaving War Dog behind because that was the way it was. But Dick Bitner, and Vic Saint Clair and a couple of guys, when the Fourth Division went home, they didn't. They went to 101st Airborne Band, and they took the dog with them. They broke all the rules.

[00:41:45.65] And so Bitner and I see each other every couple of years. You ask about friendships. There was a long dark period where I had no contact with anybody. I just buried it. I never thought of myself as a Vietnam veteran.

[00:42:00.91] Kept in touch with a few guys, and the mail would come back. But then the internet began to kind of reconnect us. And so Bitner and I have met. Several guys send emails. We got to a place.

[00:42:18.44] And I think they had changed where we went home from. I didn't go out through the south because it was closer to-- oh, that was R&R, out through Nha Trang-- Da Nang. I went out through Da Nang. Been to Da Nang once, part of Da Nang. It was a big sprawly kind of place.

[00:42:34.42] And we surrendered our weapons at An Khe at Camp Radcliff. So that, I think, was the most uncomfortable part of it. We're now traveling naked.

[00:42:47.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. No weapons?

[00:42:49.51] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. And so we get into this outplacement place. Food was better. They had flush toilets. I just said, oh, the things you cherish.

[00:43:02.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Nothing to burn.

[00:43:02.98] DONALD DODSON: There was nothing to burn. The brainwashing, what you could/couldn't say. You're going to be mobbed by people, and this is the party line.

[00:43:13.44] And then you just stand around. And--

[00:43:17.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Wait for your number.

[00:43:18.87] DONALD DODSON: --here comes-- yeah. Here comes this plane. And they do whatever they do and refuel it. And the crew gets on, and you get on this plane. And there's this hush.

[00:43:30.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Is it military now?

[00:43:31.98] DONALD DODSON: No, no, this is World Airways.

[00:43:34.11] JOE GALLOWAY: World Airways. Coming and going.

[00:43:36.30] DONALD DODSON: I would love to know what our ticket price was. I imagine if retail to fly from-- where did I go? I came in to Washington State. If that was, let's say, \$1,000 in 1970 money, it was probably 5,000.

[00:43:53.52] Anyway, so we got on this long tube. There was no-- they loaded by rank. So I'm literally kind of in the middle of the bus. And once we're off the ground, of course, there's screaming and yelling and cheering.

[00:44:07.80] I hadn't slept real well. And you're sitting squashed in. And I remember we got to Yokota for fuel and a stretch and got off. Saw my first C-5.

[00:44:20.62] We'd heard about this thing, the C-5 aircraft. And I saw my first 747. I'd never seen a 747. I have pictures. They're like way across the tarmac.

[00:44:34.54] Left Yokota. Came across to-- McChord I think is where we landed.

[00:44:43.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Seattle-Tacoma.

[00:44:44.59] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. And then they took us in to Fort Lewis, Washington. And I just remembered waiting to go through customs. I actually left Vietnam at 10:00 p.m. on September 10th. And I was standing in customs in Fort Lewis at 10:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

[00:45:08.73] I could never figure the time zones out. The most memorable thing there-- getting fit, having real milk, real cow's milk with fat particles in it and ice cream and a steak. Oh, man. And I think I have met an angel. I do think there are people on Earth who are meant to make our lives easier.

[00:45:37.35] I was so bone-tired. They dropped us off at Seattle-Tacoma civilian airport at like four in the morning. And the airport didn't open till six. And so I had a voucher to fly. And there was a sign.

[00:45:52.06] I knew that that was going to be the plane to San Francisco, where I transferred to go to San Diego. And I was dead dog-tired. Just worn-out. I'm in my new Class As. I have a necktie on for the first time in 14 months.

[00:46:09.35] And I'm just terrified I'm going to sleep through the gate call because I got to sleep through anything. No, I couldn't sleep through 155 millimeter when they went out. I could sleep through 105s.

[00:46:22.21] And a guy came pushing a little cart along, a janitor. And it's pretty obvious what my story is. And he goes, you just get back, Soldier? And yes, sir.

[00:46:34.43] And he goes, you need to get that flight? Yes, sir. He goes, I feel this story. He said, you get some sleep.

[00:46:44.14] He'd been there. He was older guy but maybe Korea, maybe World War II. He said, I will make sure you're on that plane. I was so tired. I just-- djoosh.

[00:46:55.81] And I woke up as the commotion started. And sure enough, here comes this guy.

[00:47:00.83] JOE GALLOWAY: He was going to wake you up.

[00:47:01.99] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. I said, I'm going home, man. I'm going home.

[00:47:11.68] JOE GALLOWAY: No antiwar demonstrators?

[00:47:14.29] DONALD DODSON: Well, no. I kind of dreaded that going through San Francisco. But it was probably a weekday, middle of the day. By the time I got down there, it was midmorning, probably.

[00:47:30.55] A lot of uniformed people coming and going out of the terminal that I was coming and going out of. And so there wasn't any contact really. Got to San Diego. And my family was at the end of the walkway. And it was--

[00:47:50.71] like the first-- I don't know how many days I slept. When you sleep real well, you get little dried crusty stuff in your eye. I hadn't had crusty stuff in my eye for a year. I woke up, went to the bathroom, went back, ate, poop, went to sleep. I think I slept probably 72 hours.

[00:48:12.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have any difficulty readjusting to life after the war, after the Army?

[00:48:18.08] DONALD DODSON: Yeah. Part of the readjustment issue was as a bandsman, I knew I had not been in the same Vietnam that the warriors had been in, so I really didn't have a sense of that. And I had seven months on the books to do. So I didn't get to go home and stay home.

[00:48:42.26] I had to go to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, 36th Army Band. I tried to explain. I have a three-month drop for school. Seven minus three is four. Four is less than five. Five you could go home.

[00:48:54.95] If you had five or less, you went home. So I ended up going out there to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. There was only three of us that were Vietnam veterans. And it was just buried.

[00:49:10.94] I think what I did, I stuffed it. I went to college. I got out of the Army like on a Tuesday in February '71. And I was sitting at San Diego City College at noon the next day. And I had this almost like vertigo.

[00:49:25.88] I thought, I'm going to wake up and be in my rack. And the faster you can let your hair grow out, the better. I didn't know I had adjustment problems. For 26 years, I just tried to keep it buried.

[00:49:40.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Now had America changed in that year that you spent in Vietnam? Was the America you left the same it came back?

[00:49:50.45] DONALD DODSON: Well, I was different, so my lenses were all different. America probably wasn't much different from '69 to '70. I think I had become an antiwar guy by about February, March of '70, going from gullible kid, following orders on the bottle-making machine to pretty cynical about things.

[00:50:20.04] And so I didn't really have time to do much of that. I know that it was not healthy for me to tell anyone. My friends knew. My family knew.

[00:50:32.24] But met a guy from high school at City College. And he was a safety engineer. I became a safety engineer later in life. And he asked me one time,

[00:50:42.90] 20 years later, he said, you know what you were like in the spring of 1971? I said, no, man. I was going to school. I did the best semester I ever had. Dean's list the whole nine yards.

[00:50:55.91] And he goes, you were like a zombie. And you can tell I'm a talkative kind of guy. He goes, you were like just-- he knew me in high school, and he saw me. And then he saw me later as a safety engineer. And he said, I'm glad didn't get stuck in that.

[00:51:12.62] So yeah, I've had issues. Until CPAP, I have to tell you, I had nightmares. In 9/11, I had dreams about being in my Vietnam uniform. We called it the pickle suit.

[00:51:28.91] And the new guys, of course, have new guy stuff, new guy helmets. And I'm climbing on a Huey with an M16 with a bunch of new guys, a bunch of young guys. And they're going, what the F are you doing here, old man? I said, I don't know. I don't know.

[00:51:46.43] He goes, well, you did your tour. I know. I know. And I remember having dreams like that.

[00:51:52.49] I was on a bunker on San Diego Bay, showing up. And there was these Hells Angel guys that were guarding San Diego Bay after 9/11. It's a dream, a nightmare. And I show up.

[00:52:04.49] And they're-- they've got chains on their belts and all that stuff. And once I said I'd been in Vietnam, they were, oh, man. Hey, hey, he's been in Vietnam. So I never got the real rank hatred.

[00:52:17.42] There was some innuendo occasionally, but I guarded carefully. I didn't put myself out where people were going to be calling me bad names and stuff.

[00:52:29.52] JOE GALLOWAY: When Soldiers came home from World War II, they gave them a little lapel pin--

[00:52:36.21] DONALD DODSON: What was it called?

[00:52:36.93] JOE GALLOWAY: And eagle with a circle. They called it the ruptured duck.

[00:52:39.12] DONALD DODSON: Ruptured duck.

[00:52:40.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:52:40.86] DONALD DODSON: Yes.

[00:52:42.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, we decided the Vietnam veterans need a ruptured duck, and we produced one.

[00:52:48.79] DONALD DODSON: Aha.

[00:52:49.62] JOE GALLOWAY: And I'm about to present one to you.

[00:52:53.31] DONALD DODSON: Wow.

[00:52:54.51] JOE GALLOWAY: I think you deserve it.

[00:52:56.40] DONALD DODSON: Well, thank you.

[00:52:59.11] JOE GALLOWAY: It's got the eagle. Like that, I'm going to read you the inscription which is quite small on the reverse but means a lot, I think.

[00:53:12.91] DONALD DODSON: Well.

[00:53:13.96] JOE GALLOWAY: It says-- hard to read-- a grateful nation thanks and honors you. Bet you never expected that.

[00:53:25.29] DONALD DODSON: Well, I'd heard it a lot. We used to take meals down to Navy Hospital to wounded Marines in 2004 through 2010. And they were thanking us, which we were there to thank them. Well, thank you.

[00:53:42.48] After I came out of hiding in about '96, I started the journey. Some therapist thought, it's good for you to write stuff, write-- journal. And it's good for you to kind of own your experience. So I splurged, and I had some of these things.

[00:54:03.54] I was in the Sixth Army as a bandsman at Fort Irwin. I was in the Fourth Infantry Division. This subdued patch I wore in Vietnam, that actually has been in Vietnam.

[00:54:19.23] When I came back to do my final five-month sentence, the next one here is the Military Assistance Command Vietnam. Because at Fort Huachuca when they made up my new uniform, the tradition was your active unit was on your left shoulder and your war unit was on your right.

[00:54:42.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Unit combat badge.

[00:54:44.20] DONALD DODSON: They didn't have any of the stateside, I believe. So I got to wear this stupid thing, which was just-- that was Saigon to me. MACV was that. But on the--

[00:54:56.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you eventually get it moved to the ivy leaves?

[00:54:59.38] DONALD DODSON: No. Because my time at Fort Huachuca was-- there was nothing more the Army could do to me. They could strip my rank.

[00:55:10.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh. Never believe that.

[00:55:12.82] DONALD DODSON: Well--

[00:55:13.45] JOE GALLOWAY: They could have sent you to Thule, Greenland or something.

[00:55:16.45] DONALD DODSON: I would have relished the snow. I became a very dissident kind of guy. This is the Strategic Communications Command patch that was on my left shoulder. This is the enlisted brass that we wore, US, and the Adjutant General Corps. Bands were under the AG.

[00:55:36.34] This is an actual rank emblem worn in Vietnam. And that little piece of fabric I cut off of a pair of jungle fatigues just to preserve. You guys, those were what you wore? Yeah, that's what we wore.

[00:55:51.73] The unit-- these are unit citations. I figured they would just look good there. I think one of them is for the Fourth Division got a gallantry cross for doing what it was supposed to do, like whatever, 10,000 of us. And then that--

[00:56:05.62] I think our unit got that for humanitarian junk. We'd play concerts in little towns. When I was an acting sergeant, that's the stripe I got to wear. And then, of course, that leads me to my story about putting them on the first sergeant's desk.

[00:56:24.85] These are the ribbons, and these are the medals. So this is Army Commendation Medal with oak leaf cluster. And I did nothing heroic. I just did my job.

[00:56:34.69] I was a good loading NCO, a good garbage NCO. I was a good oboe player. I was a guy that the XO could count on. This is the National Defense Service ribbon. We call it the Firewatch Ribbon because if you got out of basic training, you got that.

[00:56:50.26] So everybody in the army had that. And I think they're still giving those out. Vietnam Service Medal, I think that's called, with two stars. There were two big campaigns while I was there. So I get two stars.

[00:57:03.39] This is a not really-- this ribbon didn't have a medal, but the civilian industry said, hey, guys want to have medals. So this is the campaign ribbon and then a civilian medal thereof. And you notice the date on there starts 1960.

[00:57:21.48] And now we know, of course, that we had advisers and we had TDY Air Force guys in civilian clothes in the '50s. This is a commemorative of the Vietnam War and its companion, the-- somebody came up-- Congress came up with a brilliant idea to have a Vietnam-- no, a Cold War commemorative.

[00:57:42.39] So this was the hot war that-- I don't think-- I didn't think hastened the end of the Cold War, but it was all part of it. This is my umbrella over my little eagle. The umbrella means that the crap coming from above would flow down to those underneath me.

[00:58:04.03] And that's my real honest-to-gosh expert, qualified expert. And then I hung a little machine-gun thing on there because I had a pretty horrible experience with a machine gun in Vietnam that malfunctioned. So I didn't really qualify expert with a machine gun, but I figured honorarily it was given to me.

[00:58:24.33] And that's a real dog tag, One was in the boot, and one was around the neck. And thank God, they both came home. So that's--

[00:58:36.01] I thought maybe my kids-- and I thought at the time I'd have grandkids and maybe somebody would look at that and say-- and I began to write a narrative kind of like I just gave you the cliff notes, so-- that's it. The life of a REMF.

[00:58:50.23] JOE GALLOWAY: There you go. Thank you.

[00:58:52.31] DONALD DODSON: Hey, thank you. It's good to meet you.