

Gatewood, Ronald USMC

[00:00:17.94] RONALD GATEWOOD: I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on the 28th of May, 1941. My father was Charles Wilbur Gatewood, and my mother Mary Frances Gatewood, a younger brother Charles Gatewood, a sister Bonita Gatewood, and a younger sister Vicky Gatewood. Dad was a blacksmith.

[00:00:42.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:00:43.35] RONALD GATEWOOD: And he actually retired from Ford Motor Company as a machine repair and welder. So we come from a good lineage of blue collar workers.

[00:01:00.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go to school? What do you consider your hometown where you grew up?

[00:01:06.06] RONALD GATEWOOD: Carthage, Indiana, but it depends on when you ask or who asks where our home is because we spent 30 years in the Marine Corps over. All of our family was Carthage, Indiana, Rush County. It was a farm community. And that's where the predominance of my wife and our family lived.

[00:01:30.33] In our high school class, there was 18 students, and nine were girls and nine were boys. Of those young men, four of them right out of high school joined the Marine Corps. And they said, Gatewood, let's go join the Marine Corps. I said, no, no, no I'm going to go to college. So I'm not going to join the Marine Corps right away.

[00:02:00.66] To make a long story short, I went to Purdue University. And that same summer, I had learned to fly. I soloed in an aircraft. So in the freshman year, the Marine recruiter come around and he offered me an opportunity to join the Marine Corps, to learn to fly in the PLC Aviation Program, and remain in college. So that's how I got in.

[00:02:30.83] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a pretty good deal.

[00:02:32.49] RONALD GATEWOOD: It was good. Although I had a nomination to the Air Force Academy, that didn't pan out. But it was my perfect alternate.

[00:02:43.11] JOE GALLOWAY: So you finished college and were commissioned?

[00:02:46.41] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yes.

[00:02:47.37] JOE GALLOWAY: And this would have been what year?

[00:02:49.14] RONALD GATEWOOD: 1964.

[00:02:50.31] JOE GALLOWAY: '64? What was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam that year?

[00:02:56.71] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, at the year of graduation actually it was 1963 when we, if you recall, that was the Bay of Pigs. And I had taken a political science course, and our professor thought we were going to end up in a nuclear war. So Vietnam wasn't even in anybody's thought at that time.

[00:03:21.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody's radar was picking it up?

[00:03:23.38] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yes. And not Vietnam. However, in '64, '65, the draft was on. I was already in the Marine Corps.

[00:03:33.16] So that's where we began our consciousness of what was going on in the Far East. And at the time, it wasn't like as it developed to be during '67, '68 during Tet. So it was just another opportunity to fly and be a Marine.

[00:03:56.80] JOE GALLOWAY: What did the Marine Corps do with you after they commissioned you?

[00:04:01.60] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, it was difficult. They had a backlog at Pensacola. So I actually went to Cherry Point, North Carolina for six months and went into the holding pattern--

[00:04:15.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Just waiting for flight school.

[00:04:16.03] RONALD GATEWOOD: --just waiting for-- I was PLC aviation. And so I had a guaranteed seat to try, but they couldn't start. What they wanted to do was once they got there, they wanted to rush you through because they were building up for Vietnam. And being a 21, 22-year-old young man, the important thing was flying and being a Marine. And we didn't think about geopolitics at the time.

[00:04:47.16] [LAUGHS]

[00:04:54.46] RONALD GATEWOOD: It was excellent. That was my focus in life. And it was-- we had good airplanes. And there was very little downtime. You focused all your attention on becoming-- getting your wings. So it was good.

[00:05:17.05] Out of our class, there was 24. Only one person out of that 24 got jets. Everybody else went to helicopters.

[00:05:28.03] So when I reported to New River, North Carolina, we were transitioning into the H-34. And I went on a Caribbean cruise-- to the Caribbean. And it was there that I transitioned to the CH-46. So the--

[00:05:53.08] JOE GALLOWAY: While you were on this cruise?

[00:05:54.71] RONALD GATEWOOD: No.

[00:05:55.10] JOE GALLOWAY: No?

[00:05:55.34] RONALD GATEWOOD: Once we did the three-month Caribbean cruise, come back to New River, transitioned to the 46, and then went to Vietnam.

[00:06:10.64] RONALD GATEWOOD: '67. We left March Air Force Base and went through Kadena. But we spent the-- a short period in Okinawa, a processing, transition period. There was three or four days there before we flew from Kadena to Da Nang. Checked into the wing, and I was-- I thought I was-- and to this day think I was-- very fortunate because I was able to go right to an operational squadron, HMM-262

[00:06:50.03] JOE GALLOWAY: 262? They were at Marble Mountain?

[00:06:54.47] RONALD GATEWOOD: At Marble Mountain.

[00:06:55.76] JOE GALLOWAY: And then on their way to Quang Tri.

[00:06:58.37] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, we eventually got to Quang Tri, but we operated out of Marble Mountain for the first several months. I was the first replacement pilot to go into-- the unit deployed from New River as a unit. And so they ended up in Marble Mountain. They got all set up.

[00:07:25.43] But I was one of the first replacement pilots. And part of the story is I got to stay with the squadron the entire time, my entire tour. And my good friend Dave Althoff was the second replacement pilot. So we served together for the whole time.

[00:07:48.68] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, because it was a unit that had deployed from New River as a unit and they had worked together for months, I can't say years, but they had their own organization. So I was a new guy. Like in any squadron you start out, I was the maintenance-- I was one of the maintenance officers because they wanted to get all the flight time and fly with their people that they knew and had trained with for several months.

[00:08:21.25] JOE GALLOWAY: So you were maintenance, morale, and laundry.

[00:08:23.99] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yeah and shitty little jobs officer. So--

[00:08:25.87] [LAUGHTER]

[00:08:27.10] --which is typical with any new pilot that comes in as--

[00:08:32.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Any new pilot coming up.

[00:08:34.33] RONALD GATEWOOD: That's right.

[00:08:36.37] JOE GALLOWAY: But eventually, they're going to let you fly.

[00:08:39.46] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yes. It was a good unit in that they weren't trying to exclude anybody. They were trying to-- Bill Shadrick, the commanding officer, who was a Korean veteran-- and they knew how to-- they were good leaders. They knew how to manage people.

[00:08:59.15] And they-- by the same token, they didn't want to put you in a position that you weren't prepared for, although as an aircraft commander, helicopter aircraft commander-- a HAC as we called them-- they had a month or six weeks experience over me, maybe more. I don't recall the exact-- when they got there.

[00:09:22.97] So it was good for me to let them get the experience. And then I was eventually worked in. And so within two or three months, even though I was an aircraft commander, I flew as a second in command to get the experience and knowledge that you needed.

[00:09:42.59] There were no GPSs in those days. If you had a TACAN, a tactical aid to navigation, you were lucky. So it was mostly maps, trying to find the--

[00:09:55.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Dead reckoning.

[00:09:55.88] RONALD GATEWOOD: --dead reckoning. Exactly. And find the-- which ridgeline to put the recon team or extract them or what have you. So it was a good learning process. We were all chomping at the bits to be good Marines and fly. So there was nothing unusual about it.

[00:10:22.43] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, it was really good if you like tents, and sleeping with 10 or 12 other people in a Southeast Asia hut and I'm sure you--

[00:10:36.44] JOE GALLOWAY: In a hooch.

[00:10:37.37] RONALD GATEWOOD: In a hooch. And I'm sure you remember those. So at Marble Mountain, it wasn't bad because everything was already under construction. We even had maids that would do the laundry and that sort of thing.

[00:10:52.95] So the first four to six months was like living at home. But we would deploy to Hue/Phu Bai. Quang Tri was not on our-- there was no Quang Tri when we got there. We were one of the first units there.

[00:11:12.32] We were there when there was no runway, there was no hangars--

[00:11:18.86] JOE GALLOWAY: No bunkers.

[00:11:19.67] RONALD GATEWOOD: --no bunkers. We had to build our own bunkers. So--

[00:11:23.84] JOE GALLOWAY: That's not good. That's not good to live in.

[00:11:27.18] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, it gave you something to do when you weren't flying.

[00:11:29.90] [LAUGHTER]

[00:11:36.03] RONALD GATEWOOD: The Marines that were in the squadron that we were flying and living with, we have become lifelong friends. And in that environment, you learn everybody's strengths and their weaknesses. And you form friendships that most civilian people don't understand because you're fighting and keeping each other alive.

[00:12:05.79] And really, I think the most rewarding thing about being a helicopter pilot is the people that you save. That's one of the things that we pride ourselves on. And it got-- as the war developed and the fighting got intense, specifically the battle for Khe Sanh and the Tet Offensive and the way the attitude of the nation was that the military was bad, we ended up-- our sole purpose was to support the grunt on the ground. And we had that attitude. And that's what we prided ourselves on was taking care of those guys.

[00:13:02.08] We would put them in harm's way. If they got shot up, we went and got them. And so, that's the pilots and the enlisted, we certainly did take-- look out for each other.

[00:13:21.10] You'll hear many stories of how crew chiefs and gunners pulled pilots out of burning airplanes. And of course, we all did our very best to save the infantry in whatever engagement they got in. So you find out what you're made of when that time comes. And you can count that as one of the things why young men go into battle to see what their mettle is.

[00:13:53.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds in the Corps that you might never have in civilian life?

[00:14:04.85] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, I'll have to say that the Marine Corps absolutely changed my attitude about the various racial groups. And to make a long story short, and the answer was yes. And it was a very positive way.

[00:14:23.80] But we weren't in the situation like a lot of the infantry outfits were where the predominance of people were Marines of other ethnic groups. We had our fair share of the various ethnic groups. And they were good Marines, brave soldiers. And to this day, they are personal friends.

[00:14:54.01] We're all green. It's not black. It's not white. It's not yellow. We're all green. And that's where the--

[00:15:04.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Now back home, there's racial riots. There's antiwar protests. There's all kinds of social stuff going on. But does any of that really come over to where you are?

[00:15:18.37] RONALD GATEWOOD: Not directly in the squadrons. But I do know that existed. And that's-- that in some of the other units it may have happened. But it was not pervasive whatsoever in the aviation unit that I was in.

[00:15:36.55] But I know I've seen the movies, the Platoon and those sorts of movies. And people in combat their focus is on staying alive and accomplishing the mission. It's the idle hands that are the devil's workshop.

[00:15:56.38] JOE GALLOWAY: It certainly is. I don't suppose this really applies, but what did you guys do for recreation or off-duty time?

[00:16:08.06] [LAUGHTER]

[00:16:10.81] RONALD GATEWOOD: There was nothing to do. On occasion-- we cherished our R&R, so rest and recreation. My wife came to Thailand. And so being a married person with four children, we just saved those precious times.

[00:16:35.69] And we met in Hawaii. But we played volleyball, and we drank a beer or two. And actually in Da Nang when we were at Marble Mountain, once a month you got to go to the O club at China Beach, so--

[00:16:55.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Once a month?

[00:16:56.72] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yeah.

[00:16:58.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Knock yourself out.

[00:16:59.90] RONALD GATEWOOD: That's right. And we were on the beach. And so you could find things to do, but there was no Disneyland there.

[00:17:11.19] [LAUGHTER]

[00:17:19.10] RONALD GATEWOOD: As a young captain, I didn't get really outside of the unit level. But I have to say the unit that we were in for the most part was superlative. Like I mentioned Bill Shadrick, Greg Corliss, was our XO who later was taken over by Dave Althoff, and as CO Mel Steinberg.

[00:17:45.08] They were all-- had combat experience in Korea. And they were nothing but exemplary leaders. And actually, they were our role models and good. So I had nothing but a good experience. Occasionally, you would get the careerist who was out after making a name for themselves that would not work out well. But that was the exception rather than the rule.

[00:18:17.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe for us significant actions that you participated in?

[00:18:24.24] RONALD GATEWOOD: In a medium helicopter squadron, which is what we were, the assault support revolved around troop inserts. We did many battalion-size operations. We did resupply of large operations.

[00:18:42.87] We did recon inserts inside of South Vietnam and outside of Vietnam, never North, but in Laos and Camb-- mostly Laos where we were. So that's what consumed our whole time. The whole war changed, of course, during Tet. And then it went from a low intensity skirmish-type activity, routine resupply, to medium intensity combat.

[00:19:23.56] JOE GALLOWAY: You were suddenly flying into the middle of 35,000 guys who were trying to shoot you down.

[00:19:30.30] RONALD GATEWOOD: Exactly, yes. And so one of our main missions was supporting the 26th Marines at Khe Sanh. And we did that until we ran out of airplanes. I made an anecdotal calculation from January the 20th of 1968

[00:19:52.59] until I left in I believe it was May of '68, we had lost 26 CH-46s.

[00:20:00.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Out of the 30 you started with?

[00:20:02.35] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, we only had 20, but they would keep bringing more.

[00:20:06.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Kept bringing more.

[00:20:08.43] RONALD GATEWOOD: There was no set TO. It would depend on what they had. And they tried to keep you resupplied, but a lot of those--

[00:20:16.89] JOE GALLOWAY: It sounds like 100% casualties to me.

[00:20:20.42] RONALD GATEWOOD: You could describe it that way. And a lot of them weren't shoot downs. We lost most of them at Khe Sanh because they had all the revetments zeroed in with their mortars and artillery. So you would get shot up on the hills, land there, and the next-- before you get that airplane fixed and out of there, why, it was burning.

[00:20:43.23] And we lost on the tarmac or on the Marston matting at Quang Tri. During the intense portions of Tet, we would plan on getting rocketed every night, if not-- so we would lose helicopters just sitting on the ramp there.

[00:21:05.61] There were shoot downs. I rode home twice. But it was-- I'd get shot up, land someplace, and the wingman would take us home. So it was a little bit of everything. But like I mentioned, the intensity during Tet and the battle for Khe Sanh was--

[00:21:26.19] JOE GALLOWAY: That ramped it up big time.

[00:21:29.16] RONALD GATEWOOD: Big time, yeah.

[00:21:35.62] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, the best day I had during my tour was probably the same flight that I had my worst day. I've got two worst days, but I'll describe the best day because it was when I extracted the Dallas Girl Recon team. What happened to Dallas Girl, they were on a reconnaissance mission to go to an observation post which overlooked Route 9 from Dong Ha past Camp Carroll to where Dong Ha-- Route 9 turned north.

[00:22:17.53] You could see the whole valley from that OP. So they went up there, they got in a firefight, and five out of the seven were wounded. I'd spent the day at Khe Sanh and was on my way home. And when I got a call from the Direct Air Support Center-- the DASC-- and they said, we've got a Recon team that's in trouble.

[00:22:51.19] They probably won't last the night. Can you do anything? And I said, well, we'll give it a try. I said, do you have any gunships, meaning do you have the Huey gunships?

[00:23:04.00] And they said, no. They were there, but they had returned to base for low fuel. So the conversation went back and forth. And they said, well, they won't last the night because they've got all these wounded, and they'll be overrun.

[00:23:28.30] So I took my helicopter and I landed at Cam Lo, which is between-- just past Camp Carroll and got all the ammo off of my wingman's plane. Since we didn't have gunships, we'd provide our own gun support.

[00:23:49.34] That was-- initially, when we first got there, the 46 didn't even have guns on them, now they have .50 calibers on each side. So we went to altitude. We figured out they had consolidated in a bomb crater, the Recon team. And so we got orientation where they were.

[00:24:12.11] And then I came up the valley, and we had enough ammo that we could sustain fire for about 30 minutes. So my crew chief talked me into the zone. I saw him.

[00:24:32.39] He talked me into the zone, and I hovered over him. And so we were starting the hoisting operation, which was the only way. There was no landing zone there. So they said--

[00:24:42.74] JOE GALLOWAY: You're hoisting them out of a bomb crater?

[00:24:45.53] RONALD GATEWOOD: Hoisting them out of a bomb crater. But as we settled in he said, the hoist, which is-- the cable is only 60 feet long. And it was about 10 feet short.

[00:25:00.65] So he said the cable is too short. So I sat down in the trees and chopped the top out of the trees so that we could get them out. And so we had a hoisting operation. And the gunners--

[00:25:18.44] JOE GALLOWAY: That's painfully slow.

[00:25:19.97] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, it was. And I'd picked out a place-- we were taking fire. We were returning fire. But the gunners there, with all the ammo they had, had sufficient ammunition to keep their heads down for the most part.

[00:25:35.24] But I had picked out a place that if we did have to crash land, we had a place that looked somewhat survivable. So we got them, we got-- hoisted them up and got them all on board we thought. And that was the best day because we had saved six people as it turns out.

[00:26:05.79] But then the crew chief said, we got everybody. Let's go. So we're going back down the valley that we just came up, and he came back up. And he said, the assistant team leader said we left one behind, the one guy that got killed. And he was killed in action, but well, that became the worst day. So--

[00:26:33.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you turn around and go back?

[00:26:35.28] RONALD GATEWOOD: No. And that's where the worst day was. I was low on fuel. We had a battle-damaged aircraft. And I said, I'm going to keep what I have and save what I've got, and we'll go from there.

[00:26:51.01] And so we left. And so that was really a-- it troubles you that you did that. But I felt we did the best thing under the circumstances.

[00:27:08.64] JOE GALLOWAY: If you'd gone back in that bird with no fuel--

[00:27:12.12] RONALD GATEWOOD: We'd have run out of fuel and we'd--

[00:27:13.86] JOE GALLOWAY: --you'd have killed everybody.

[00:27:15.51] RONALD GATEWOOD: We'd have all probably perished.

[00:27:18.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they ever go back and get that guy?

[00:27:21.18] RONALD GATEWOOD: That's a good question because they did the next day. And the reason I know this is because in 2004, we took the team-- I didn't take it. But the family, the sisters of the team leader Lieutenant Donald Matocha, they were activists in the POW/MIA accountability movement. And they said, we want to know what happened to our brother, because part of the scenario was in 2004, they found the remains as-- they found the remains as a result of the joint POW/MIA accountability--

[00:28:09.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Of the guy missing?

[00:28:10.60] RONALD GATEWOOD: Of the guy missing.

[00:28:11.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:28:12.25] RONALD GATEWOOD: And what's even more unique was the North Vietnamese soldier that buried him showed them where he buried him because there was a-- we knew where the zone was. So they had an idea, and they went back-- they went in, JPAC went in and did a forensic dig. But they couldn't find any remains.

[00:28:38.65] So as a part of the US policy, no other nation does this, but they try to recover the remains of those Soldiers and Marines lost on the battlefield. So they put out this notice, if you know of any North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, or US military remains, we will give you a reward. He said, I know where I buried that guy. And so they did, they found him, and they positively identified him.

[00:29:11.83] JOE GALLOWAY: And sent him home.

[00:29:12.61] RONALD GATEWOOD: And sent him home. And your friend and my friend Patrick Fries documented that whole scenario on a DVD called *An Ocean Away*. The next day, however, the 3rd Recon Battalion, they had a company that they put in to try to go up. And out of that the best I can tell from the anecdotal stories, there were four people lost that next day trying to go up there and find the remains.

[00:29:48.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Four KIAs?

[00:29:49.91] RONALD GATEWOOD: Four KIAs. And the team leader that-- the assistant team leader Nickie Smith who was in the original Recon team was there. He said, I'll show you where it is-- where the site was. He was one of the ones that was not wounded.

[00:30:13.82] But in that second day he went in, he lost a leg. There was a staff sergeant in front of him that took a direct hit from a mortar. And then there were several others in that engagement that were lost.

[00:30:33.59] And then a month later, that's when the squadron headed by Dave Althoff went in there, and they tried it again. And they sent in-- four guys walked in, they got into trouble. And so one of the original team leaders, Gary Myers, when he stepped off the airplane shortly thereafter, he was killed.

[00:31:01.71] And so that's when they began trying to recover that group. And the same time, they sent in another reaction force that got shot up. And they tried to recover them. Like I say, there's about six, eight people that we lost.

[00:31:25.52] You can't win a war of attrition doing it that way. You got to be smart. And I thought it was an interesting thing. The mother of Lieutenant Matocha said, I don't want any more people killed because my son-- excuse me. But anyway, that's the worst one.

[00:31:52.03] And I think the other worst one was when we were on the SLF. The 46s were grounded because the tail was coming off. And so we were conducting operations along the Coast. And so the morgue got full, and I had to take 39 body bags down to Da Nang. And they all had head wounds from a sniper. So that was the second worst day.

[00:32:26.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Man, all off the same sniper?

[00:32:30.03] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, who knows? They were all from the same platoon on the same operation. You can draw whatever conclusions you want.

[00:32:39.92] JOE GALLOWAY: They got in the wrong place.

[00:32:42.03] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, it was Operation BADGER TOOTH.

[00:32:45.18] JOE GALLOWAY: If they had 30, that's almost an entire platoon itself.

[00:32:49.08] RONALD GATEWOOD: There's a unique number there-- 13 and 13, that's three squads. So, yeah.

[00:32:57.18] JOE GALLOWAY: And you had to fly them into the morgue?

[00:32:59.37] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yeah, down to Da Nang because we were on the ship. We were on the Valley Forge, and they couldn't handle any more.

[00:33:13.76] RONALD GATEWOOD: We really only knew those by reputation. I guess you can call the South Vietnamese our ally. So we did a lot of work with them. But the other allies, for the--

[00:33:29.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Not so much.

[00:33:29.69] RONALD GATEWOOD: Not so much. Yeah.

[00:33:37.06] RONALD GATEWOOD: My impression was it wasn't their war. And we were young and didn't give it too much thought. We were there to do a job and fly and help the Marines. So we just did what we were told.

[00:34:01.62] But as a person, I resented the fact that I had to be there doing this job. I perceived we were supposed to be helping them out. And when I would see the young South Vietnamese men ride up and down the streets with their wives and girlfriends on the back, I thought there's something wrong with this picture.

[00:34:24.54] And another point that kind of illustrates that attitude was in that Dallas Girl Team, there was a Kit Carson Scout. And a Kit Carson Scout is a South Vietnamese that knows the terrain and knows everything and is supposed to help the Marines out. Well, when that battle occurred, he left and he was never seen again. Now, maybe he was killed by his own people, the North Vietnamese, but he didn't stay to help fight or get extracted.

[00:35:06.93] RONALD GATEWOOD: We saved every R&R we could to meet. And then-- it's not like today where they've got internet and social media. And we were doing good to have a telephone call across the field.

[00:35:22.08] And I do know some of the CH-53 pilots who had HF radios. They'd go to altitude and try to do a foam patch with Hawaii. But the contact was only by written letter. So those as you know are very important to you.

[00:35:41.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Exactly. How much news did you get from home about the war you're fighting? Is Stars and Stripes, Armed Forces Radio about it?

[00:35:53.28] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yeah, for the most part. Our family being the Midwest, they didn't like what was going on. They didn't understand the war. They didn't understand why I was there.

[00:36:14.01] They weren't politically active or didn't express their feelings that much. But when it was all over, they were pretty much totally supportive because of the hometown boy. But I came from a family, a socioeconomic group that was just not politically active like the Matocha sisters might have been.

[00:36:46.47] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, that was the longest 13 months I'd ever-- So it was-- that's your most prized thing is your family, your wife and family. So it was-- by that time, the war was not popular. And so it really wasn't popular with the family.

[00:37:13.05] Now, my mother on one hand was a young wife in World War II. And my dad was in the Navy. And I can remember when he came home from work and I was a toddler, but I hid under the kitchen table.

[00:37:31.08] But my mom, she was a World War II wife. And she knew how important it was to the family to get the husband home and that sort of thing. So it was not a happy, joyous-- it was a period of re-transitioning and relearning. But it wasn't catastrophic. And I avoided those-- and I know that they happened, but I avoided the public that didn't like the military.

[00:38:11.73] JOE GALLOWAY: So you didn't--

[00:38:13.02] RONALD GATEWOOD: I didn't--

[00:38:13.81] JOE GALLOWAY: --run into the antiwar types.

[00:38:16.65] RONALD GATEWOOD: I did not. No. Because I went into the Midwest, and they were largely pro whatever was going on with the war. My attitude at that time was that my first four years I'm serving my country, and I will do the best. And if it turns out that I can stay and it's better for the family, and as it turned out, I did that.

[00:38:42.34] And I had a wonderful career that most Marines don't get because I had an accompanied tour in Africa, and I had an unaccompanied tour in Latin America. And I've traveled around-- and three tours in Asia. So I've truly seen the world.

[00:39:00.24] JOE GALLOWAY: And brought your family along with you?

[00:39:02.32] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yeah, that's exactly it.

[00:39:04.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

[00:39:09.09] RONALD GATEWOOD: I'd have to say no. Because what we did is we made a conscious effort to forget about it for 35 years. And you get immersed in new things. I didn't really say, well, I'm going to go to jets so I can go back to Vietnam, but I did want to fly jets. And if they send me back to Vietnam-- that was just not part of the plan, but it happened.

[00:39:40.56] So we were always kept busy with new and challenging things. So I really had no- - the ability to compartmentalize and forget and do new and interesting things. I didn't have any trouble.

[00:39:58.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you maintained contact with guys you flew with back then?

[00:40:03.82] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yes.

[00:40:04.45] JOE GALLOWAY: And you guys get together for reunions?

[00:40:06.94] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yes. Yes. And all the way from the people-- it's getting different now because the people that deployed with the squadron in '67 and those that left Vietnam in '72-- because I spanned that whole period, I have friends in all of them.

[00:40:27.95] And we still talk and meet on occasion. We had a huge reunion at Quantico about a month ago where the former commandant was there participating with us. So yes, we're still meeting as a result of our shared experience on the battlefield.

[00:40:55.28] RONALD GATEWOOD: I think that if I had to categorize it, it would be it absolutely affected my life. And I think it made me a better, wiser person for not so much-- well, for the Vietnam War, yes-- but the whole experience gave me a perspective of life and the war and all the training and education that I received.

[00:41:27.62] So the whole experience, including Vietnam because conflict is a part of human society. And we saw it firsthand, participated in it, and grew from there. I became a senior Marine planner. And I worked in the nucleus of decision making for the Marine Corps for my period, for my time. And so yes, it did influence me, the whole experience.

[00:42:03.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your time in Vietnam affect the way you think about the troops coming back from our wars today?

[00:42:11.38] RONALD GATEWOOD: Yes. You could not get the current warriors to do what we're asking them to do to go back into war every-- as many as eight or ten times if you treated them the way that the Vietnam veterans were treated. But it's not something that was legislated.

[00:42:35.95] The American people saw the errors of their ways. And it's this program like this, and you can see it, the way the behavior of the American people are. They now look up and respect to the veterans of current wars. And I think that what we did in Vietnam, the heroism, and the job that we did affected the warriors that you see in Iraq and Afghanistan today. So another way of saying it, the next generation stepped up to the plate and are doing their job.

[00:43:14.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Mm-hmm. How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:43:25.46] RONALD GATEWOOD: It is remembered as a war that was wrongly prosecuted. They saw that the fallacies of the way wars are executed, but they still see the necessity of having to have a good defense, a good military capability because the various politicians which are supported largely by the population are funding the military the way they should.

[00:44:13.85] RONALD GATEWOOD: The first time it was very emotional because it seemed like such a waste of 58,000 people, had no good conclusion. And then I went back in 2004 and even today where Vietnam is essentially a trading partner and maybe an ally to a certain degree. And I have to say that South Vietnam or Vietnam-- it's not North or South-- is the most entrepreneurial free enterprise system-- communist-socialist system I've ever seen. So we went to Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonald's in Ho Chi Minh City.

[00:45:04.55] [LAUGHTER]

[00:45:10.86] RONALD GATEWOOD: Well, I didn't realize it until this, but I bought into it because a friend of mine, a Marine who works for OSD, got me introduced. He gave me a pin, gave me a citation. And then when he saw the reaction that I had he said, here. Why don't you take some of these lapel pins and distribute them to-- give them out. And I did that.

[00:45:48.61] And at one of our squadron reunions, I gave everybody a pin. And on one occasion, I read the citation, the presidential citation. And whenever I had the opportunity, I would read the citation.

[00:46:05.40] And even guys around our town, if they're wearing a Navy cap or something expressing I was a Vietnam veteran, if they didn't have a pin, I usually carried some around in my pocket. And I would give them one. So I've participated in that. And I think it's a wonderful program.

[00:46:30.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, thank you, Colonel Gatewood, for coming in and telling your story.

[00:46:36.55] RONALD GATEWOOD: That was a pleasure.