

Hendrix, Jay US Army

[00:00:13.52] JOE GALLOWAY: This is Joe Galloway conducting an oral history interview with Jay Hendrix on Thursday, October 12th, 2017 at 1:00 PM. We're located at the headquarters of the Vietnam War Commemoration in Crystal City, Virginia. Sir, before we begin, could you please state and spell your first and last name for the transcriber?

[00:00:38.11] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. Hendrix, H-E-N-D-R-I-X. And my first name is legally, Floyd. F-L-O-Y-D. And I go by Jay, J-A-Y.

[00:00:48.13] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. Before we talk about your experiences in Vietnam, I'd like to get a little biographic information. JOE GALLOWAY: When and where were you born?

[00:01:01.88] JAY HENDRIX: I was born in Limon, Colorado. A small farming community.

[00:01:08.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And what date?

[00:01:10.93] JAY HENDRIX: February 15th, 1947.

[00:01:13.27] JOE GALLOWAY: '47. Another baby boomer.

[00:01:15.86] JAY HENDRIX: Yes, sir.

[00:01:17.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:01:19.87] JAY HENDRIX: Well, I'm one of 11 children.

[00:01:21.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow. That's impressive.

[00:01:26.11] JAY HENDRIX: That's a large family.

[00:01:27.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Your dad did what?

[00:01:30.53] JAY HENDRIX: My dad did farming and dairy farming.

[00:01:33.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my. That's why he had 11 kids, to work to dairy farm.

[00:01:37.44] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. Yes.

[00:01:38.65] JOE GALLOWAY: That's the hardest job in the world.

[00:01:40.94] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. 5 o'clock in the morning, 5 o'clock at night.

[00:01:44.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Every morning seven days a week, and cows don't wait.

[00:01:46.97] JAY HENDRIX: Nope.

[00:01:47.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh. My dad was one of 12.

[00:01:51.79] JAY HENDRIX: Wow.

[00:01:52.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. I got more first cousins-- I don't even know who they are.

[00:01:56.81] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. I know how that is.

[00:02:00.16] JOE GALLOWAY: And did you grow up in that little town?

[00:02:03.29] JAY HENDRIX: I grew up in a little town west of there called Simla, S-I-M-L-A, which is-- we had 100 kids in our high school, small school, and everybody knew everybody.

[00:02:15.38] JOE GALLOWAY: And that's where you graduated high school?

[00:02:17.78] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:02:20.36] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you end up in the military?

[00:02:23.42] JAY HENDRIX: Well, I graduated in '65 and I was working actually with my brother wrapping ballistic missile sites up in Nebraska, believe it or not. And we wrapped dynamite to put around the ballistic missile sites. And at that time, all I could hear was everybody's going to get drafted, everybody's going to get drafted. And so I was kind of waiting for my call, which I got six months after I graduated. And I went for my physical and they said well, you're going to go to basic training within now to six months out, because at that time, they were taking people so fast that they didn't have room to put us anywhere.

[00:03:08.52] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't have enough room at basic?

[00:03:10.33] JAY HENDRIX: No. Not even at basic. Matter of fact, when I got to Fort Bliss, Texas, we slept on the lawn for three weeks with our duffel bag.

[00:03:17.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:03:18.53] JAY HENDRIX: We had no barracks.

[00:03:20.05] JOE GALLOWAY: No tent?

[00:03:21.17] JAY HENDRIX: No tent.

[00:03:22.19] JOE GALLOWAY: No cots?

[00:03:23.02] JAY HENDRIX: No cots.

[00:03:25.38] JOE GALLOWAY: That that's pretty wild.

[00:03:27.84] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah.

[00:03:29.43] JOE GALLOWAY: And you did basic at Fort Bliss?

[00:03:32.76] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:03:34.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow, I didn't even know they did that at Bliss.

[00:03:38.61] JAY HENDRIX: Oh yeah, they had no room for people.

[00:03:46.51] JOE GALLOWAY: And your next level of training?

[00:03:50.01] JAY HENDRIX: That's where I went to AIT training in Fort Huachuca, Arizona to get my correct type of school.

[00:03:56.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, Fort Huachuca was intel as I recall.

[00:04:00.49] JAY HENDRIX: Yes, intelligence. Uh huh.

[00:04:03.04] JOE GALLOWAY: And you're the first guy I ever met who did AIT there.

[00:04:06.75] JAY HENDRIX: Really?

[00:04:07.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:04:07.87] JAY HENDRIX: Wow. Well, I took clerk typist and actually, what I did was play basketball for eight weeks. To be honest with you, I went down to the basketball arena there at Fort Huachuca, and I played a little basketball. And the guy wanted to know what my MOS was going to be. And I said, clerk typist. He said, well, can you type? And I said, yeah, I can type pretty well. He said, well, if you can type 35 words a minute, we'll test you out, and you come play basketball.

[00:04:39.25] JOE GALLOWAY: And you can play basketball.

[00:04:40.47] JAY HENDRIX: So I did that.

[00:04:41.56] JOE GALLOWAY: So this was the base team or something? JAY HENDRIX: Yes. JOE GALLOWAY: Playing competition against other bases?

[00:04:47.77] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:04:48.90] JOE GALLOWAY: That's funny. That's funny.

[00:04:50.98] JAY HENDRIX: True story.

[00:04:51.49] JOE GALLOWAY: You did that for eight weeks?

[00:04:53.11] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:04:53.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And then what happened?

[00:04:54.73] JAY HENDRIX: Well, the big--

[00:04:56.17] JOE GALLOWAY: You got orders?

[00:04:56.49] JAY HENDRIX: The big order came in.

[00:04:58.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Off to Vietnam where you played a different game.

[00:05:01.99] JAY HENDRIX: Different game. Different basketball.

[00:05:03.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Oh, my. JOE GALLOWAY: How did you get to Vietnam and where did you land?

[00:05:12.63] JAY HENDRIX: I got to Vietnam on a plane and--

[00:05:15.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Charter civilian?

[00:05:18.70] JAY HENDRIX: To be honest with you, I do not remember. I remember all of us military guys were arm to arm, we landed in every little place.

[00:05:28.53] JOE GALLOWAY: That sounds more like military.

[00:05:30.39] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. I don't think it was--

[00:05:32.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you take off from?

[00:05:36.00] JAY HENDRIX: Seattle.

[00:05:36.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Seattle. Sea-Tac.

[00:05:38.05] JAY HENDRIX: Sea-Tac, yeah. And then we landed in-- JOE GLALLOWAY: Fort Lewis. JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. And then we landed in Bien Hoa.

[00:05:44.61] JOE GALLOWAY: At Bien Hoa. And you went into the repo depot chain?

[00:05:50.96] JAY HENDRIX: Yes sir.

[00:05:51.99] JOE GALLOWAY: And they assigned you where?

[00:05:54.51] JAY HENDRIX: It took them three weeks to figure out where to put me, but I was all over. I was-- I don't even remember where I went. Different locations, they were going to--

they had an opening here, they had an opening there. Well, they had openings all over, I find out later. But I ended up getting orders to go to Cam Ranh Bay.

[00:06:15.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Still without a unit.

[00:06:17.55] JAY HENDRIX: Still out without a unit. And then I got the Cam Ranh Bay and--

[00:06:20.13] JOE GALLOWAY: That's bad. They usually use those guys for KP and burning the barrels and doing all kinds of bad jobs.

[00:06:26.97] JAY HENDRIX: No.

[00:06:27.63] JOE GALLOWAY: No?

[00:06:28.32] JAY HENDRIX: No. I did have one bad job in Bien Hoa and that was burning human waste.

[00:06:34.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, the barrels.

[00:06:36.06] JAY HENDRIX: The barrels, yeah.

[00:06:37.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, you should get a badge for that.

[00:06:40.26] JAY HENDRIX: I know. That was as bad as anything.

[00:06:43.29] JOE GALLOWAY: It doesn't get any worse than that. OK. And so finally, they gave you an assignment to?

[00:06:49.86] JAY HENDRIX: Nha Trang.

[00:06:50.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Nha Trang.

[00:06:51.65] JAY HENDRIX: 281st Assault Helicopter.

[00:06:54.57] JOE GALLOWAY: You actually got a unit after a month or so. JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:06:56.91] JAY HENDRIX: I was assigned to be a clerk typist, which was my MOS. And the-- typing up awards for all the military people in several different entities in the same area that we were associated with.

[00:07:18.35] JOE GALLOWAY: But you were in the 281st-- JAY HENDRIX: Assault. JOE GALLOWAY: --headquarters or something?

[00:07:22.70] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. 281st Assault Helicopter Company. Yes.

[00:07:28.14] JOE GALLOWAY: And you did that, but you also did other jobs as well.

[00:07:32.93] JAY HENDRIX: I did that for about four months. And then we were short of people and I worked in the operation shack was where I worked. We weren't in an office or anything, it was just a shack where--

[00:07:48.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Literally a shack.

[00:07:49.73] JAY HENDRIX: Literally a shack. That's where all the officers got their flight plans to go out on the choppers. So I was familiar with what was going on in the operation shack and got to know quite a few of the guys and gunners and crew chiefs, got to be good friends with them, obvious reasons. And we were short some people and Major Shealy asked me if I wanted to be a door gunner one day. And I said, sure, that sounds exciting.

[00:08:24.91] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like? Obviously, better than Fort Bliss.

[00:08:30.38] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. Actually, the living quarters, when we were on home base, the 281st Assault Helicopter, we had cots.

[00:08:40.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Hooches.

[00:08:40.50] JAY HENDRIX: Hooches, yeah. Very nice. We supported the 5th Special Forces as you probably know, Green Berets.

[00:08:46.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. They could get anything.

[00:08:49.35] JAY HENDRIX: Kind what they wanted, we kind of was a little behind them picking up some of the small pieces that they--

[00:08:56.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Steak night once in a while.

[00:08:58.00] JAY HENDRIX: Steak on Sunday night when we were home, baked potato. Yeah, pretty good. Yeah.

[00:09:07.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your friendships with and your impressions of the Soldiers you lived and worked alongside.

[00:09:17.62] JAY HENDRIX: Well, I got along really with everybody. I mean, everybody had a job to do and it seemed like as I reflected back on it years later and even more today, everybody just did their job no matter what it was. Nobody complained. Built good relationships with some people and I still have some relationships today with some of the guys I was in the hooch with.

[00:09:41.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:09:41.70] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:09:42.58] JOE GALLOWAY: They come to the reunions too?

[00:09:44.76] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. Yeah.

[00:09:49.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds during your time there that you might not have had in civilian life?

[00:09:58.36] JAY HENDRIX: Absolutely, yeah. Coming from a small community where I came from, not exposed to much racial background diversity, so it definitely opened my eyes to a whole new arena of life and what people may go through or went through that I didn't go through. And sometimes you think you have it pretty rough, but there's always someone has it a little rougher.

[00:10:25.57] JOE GALLOWAY: There's always someone has it rougher.

[00:10:27.03] JAY HENDRIX: Right.

[00:10:31.65] JOE GALLOWAY: 19--

[00:10:32.61] JAY HENDRIX: '67.

[00:10:33.57] JOE GALLOWAY: '67.

[00:10:34.73] JAY HENDRIX: '68.

[00:10:35.97] JOE GALLOWAY: And '68. There were a lot of things going on at home. Riots, assassinations, antiwar demonstrations were getting cranked up. Did any of that translate itself to your unit?

[00:10:54.84] JAY HENDRIX: Not at all.

[00:10:55.86] JOE GALLOWAY: The people you work with?

[00:10:57.26] JAY HENDRIX: Not at all. I had no idea what was going on at home.

[00:11:04.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Really? Do you have specific memories of the popular culture of that time? And by that I mean obviously, rock and roll songs that if you hear it today takes you right back to it?

[00:11:17.28] JAY HENDRIX: Oh, yes. Yeah.

[00:11:18.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Name me two of them.

[00:11:20.37] JAY HENDRIX: All the Beatles songs.

[00:11:21.71] JOE GALLOWAY: All the Beatles songs, yeah. Probably too early for Creedence.

[00:11:28.50] JAY HENDRIX: Probably a little early for Creedence Clearwater, yeah. But Bob Dylan, some of his music was pretty crazy. Donovan. And then of course the Motown was quite popular. I have a little story to tell you. We had a black guy in our company. He was from Philadelphia and he was playing-- we had a record player believe it or not in the hooch.

[00:11:57.24] JOE GALLOWAY: A genuine record player?

[00:11:58.83] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. Little record player. And we'd sit around and listen to albums when we could. And he put on the Righteous Brothers. And I told Clark Wardley, I said, Clark, that's a pretty good black group. I said, do you know much about them? He's just busted up laughing because that's how much I didn't know.

[00:12:26.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you did your entire tour right there with that unit. You were doing some flying?

[00:12:32.86] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:12:34.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about the most memorable flight you took.

[00:12:40.96] JAY HENDRIX: Well, there was one to Kontum where we were flying in and crashed.

[00:12:48.88] JOE GALLOWAY: That's memorable.

[00:12:49.93] JAY HENDRIX: And still have scars from that.

[00:12:55.67] JOE GALLOWAY: You were hurt?

[00:12:56.89] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. Not bad, but--

[00:12:59.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You got banged-- they got banged up?

[00:13:01.75] JAY HENDRIX: Got banged up a little bit. That was probably the most memorable one that-- and it was really--

[00:13:06.67] JOE GALLOWAY: So it was a pilot error?

[00:13:08.29] JAY HENDRIX: Pilot error, yeah. No shooting in that one. Then I was also in a landing zone when we got shot at and went down.

[00:13:19.62] JOE GALLOWAY: You got shot down?

[00:13:21.01] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. But that one I didn't get hurt in, believe it or not.

[00:13:24.85] JOE GALLOWAY: I bet you got scared, though.

[00:13:27.46] JAY HENDRIX: Well, we were in enemy territory. So yeah, you could hear things coming up. Yeah.

[00:13:34.85] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were pulled out by another helicopter that came and got you?

[00:13:40.96] JAY HENDRIX: They were right behind us. Yeah.

[00:13:43.39] JOE GALLOWAY: So you weren't on the ground very long?

[00:13:45.65] JAY HENDRIX: No. Thank goodness.

[00:13:49.39] JOE GALLOWAY: How much, if any contact did you have with our allies? By that, the Koreans, the Australians, New Zealanders, Thais, Filipinos.

[00:13:59.72] JAY HENDRIX: None. None, really. Not to speak of. Yeah.

[00:14:09.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for me the best day you had during your tour.

[00:14:19.04] JAY HENDRIX: Probably when I got drunk and forgot to catch the flight I was supposed to go out on.

[00:14:25.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Going out--

[00:14:26.36] JAY HENDRIX: To the field.

[00:14:27.22] JOE GALLOWAY: To the field.

[00:14:27.96] JAY HENDRIX: To the jungle.

[00:14:28.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my.

[00:14:31.97] JAY HENDRIX: We went to the boys club a little early that day but then I got in trouble. Not bad, but Major Shealy gave us a stern warning to--

[00:14:43.17] JOE GALLOWAY: You got chewed a little.

[00:14:44.15] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. So that's probably the best day.

[00:14:47.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Best day you had. You got away with it.

[00:14:50.78] JAY HENDRIX: I got away with it.

[00:14:55.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe the worst day you had during your tour.

[00:14:59.51] JAY HENDRIX: Well, when you get shot down, that's probably the worst. Although, there were some times when we got mortared on base. When I had guard duty one night that we got hit pretty hard around Tet. And that was pretty close.

[00:15:14.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you were in country during Tet '68?

[00:15:17.99] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:15:19.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that.

[00:15:21.71] JAY HENDRIX: Well, we got hit on base in Nha Trang.

[00:15:24.71] JOE GALLOWAY: They came for you.

[00:15:25.70] JAY HENDRIX: Right there. And I had--

[00:15:28.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get on to the flight line? You go up to your choppers.

[00:15:31.15] JAY HENDRIX: Several choppers got hit. Our--

[00:15:34.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Sappers came through the wire.

[00:15:36.05] JAY HENDRIX: No. No snipers it was all incoming.

[00:15:38.71] JOE GALLOWAY: No, sappers.

[00:15:39.65] JAY HENDRIX: Oh, sappers.

[00:15:40.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Carrying satchel charges to blow up your stuff.

[00:15:44.03] JAY HENDRIX: No, they were all incoming. Where they were coming from, I'm not sure, but they were lighting up the flight line.

[00:15:56.62] JOE GALLOWAY: And did that happen subsequent nights, or just the one?

[00:16:01.02] JAY HENDRIX: Just the one night.

[00:16:01.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Just the one night.

[00:16:02.47] JAY HENDRIX: Mm-hmm, just the one night.

[00:16:04.15] JOE GALLOWAY: That's scary enough.

[00:16:06.08] JAY HENDRIX: We had people running to their bunkers, and trying to figure out where to go, and what to do, because that was pretty unusual for us to get incoming on our base.

[00:16:16.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. You had what? An ARVN Ranger battalion bunked next to you.

[00:16:21.64] JAY HENDRIX: Yes, we did.

[00:16:22.39] JOE GALLOWAY: They were pretty good troops.

[00:16:23.74] JAY HENDRIX: They were very good troops, yes. You could count on them.

[00:16:26.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And then you had a Special Forces headquarters there. They were pretty good too.

[00:16:33.50] JAY HENDRIX: They were awful good.

[00:16:34.40] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't have the REMFs.

[00:16:35.36] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:16:38.09] JOE GALLOWAY: The next question is, what were your impressions of the Vietnamese people, military or civilian, that you had any contact with?

[00:16:48.06] JAY HENDRIX: Well, the military was, I thought, the best of the best--

[00:16:54.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, you were seeing their Rangers.

[00:16:55.75] JAY HENDRIX: --were right there.

[00:16:57.23] JOE GALLOWAY: And they didn't get better than that.

[00:16:58.72] JAY HENDRIX: They really didn't, and that's what I have to base that on, that question. As far as the civilians, I thought they treated us better than I would have ever expected, when we were in town-- once we could go into town-- a few times. There was always a few bad ones, like there are anywhere. But I thought they looked up to us, that's what I felt, as Americans.

[00:17:33.37] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:17:40.30] JAY HENDRIX: I finally got my dad to write me a letter.

[00:17:43.23] JOE GALLOWAY: One?

[00:17:44.83] JAY HENDRIX: One or two letters.

[00:17:46.28] JOE GALLOWAY: I think I had one from my dad during four tours.

[00:17:51.03] JAY HENDRIX: My mom was not living, so I missed that. But very little contact. My sister-- my older sister would write me quite often, but not that much contact.

[00:18:05.49] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't try the MARS phone system?

[00:18:08.73] JAY HENDRIX: No.

[00:18:09.26] JOE GALLOWAY: No?

[00:18:09.81] JAY HENDRIX: No. Never heard of that. JAY HENDRIX: Oh, that was a great day. Actually, that was my best day. Actually-- to back up a little bit. Yeah, that was a great day. We flew out of Cam Ranh Bay to Seattle.

[00:18:31.86] JOE GALLOWAY: On a civilian charter?

[00:18:34.08] JAY HENDRIX: Oh, a big commercial. That was nice. Seeing American women for the first time in a long time.

[00:18:41.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you landed at SeaTac in Seattle. They had some demonstrators there, some protesters, from time to time. Did you see any of those?

[00:18:52.91] JAY HENDRIX: I did not.

[00:18:54.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody messed with you?

[00:18:56.03] JAY HENDRIX: I wasn't looking for it. I didn't know it was probably even going--

[00:19:00.80] JOE GALLOWAY: They could have been there--

[00:19:01.20] JAY HENDRIX: They could have been there.

[00:19:01.92] JOE GALLOWAY: --and you didn't notice them.

[00:19:02.71] JAY HENDRIX: Could have been.

[00:19:06.00] JOE GALLOWAY: And were you finishing up your enlistment?

[00:19:09.33] JAY HENDRIX: No, I had six months left.

[00:19:11.13] JOE GALLOWAY: You had six months left, but they're going to let you go home for 30 days or something.

[00:19:16.20] JAY HENDRIX: No.

[00:19:16.70] JOE GALLOWAY: No?

[00:19:17.19] JAY HENDRIX: I got a re-issuance of military clothing in Seattle. I remember that. And then, I was home for about a week. And then, I got my orders for-- I ended up at the Army Air Defense Command in Colorado Springs.

[00:19:34.42] JOE GALLOWAY: In Colorado Springs. Well, it was not so far from home.

[00:19:37.79] JAY HENDRIX: No, it was nice. I wanted to go to Fort Carson, and I got even better.

[00:19:41.76] [LAUGHTER]

[00:19:43.50] Because that was awesome duty.

[00:19:47.71] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do after you separated from the service?

[00:19:52.01] JAY HENDRIX: Well, I floundered quite a bit. I had-- went to barber school, because I was going to work my way through college cutting hair. So I actually got a job cutting hair again and going to school part-time, trying to figure out what I wanted to do. I did that probably a year or so.

[00:20:17.20] And I had purchased a little car, and I had it financed with a finance company. I was going in and making payments every week, so I could pay it off. And the guy finally harassed me so much in coming to work for him, that I filled out an application. And he hired me the next day to get into the finance business. So I got into the finance business

[00:20:37.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Still cutting hair?

[00:20:38.83] JAY HENDRIX: Still cutting hair.

[00:20:40.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you got a second job.

[00:20:41.78] JAY HENDRIX: I'm making a lot of money; \$450 a month, probably. And then, I ended up giving up cutting hair, and full-time in the banking finance business. And I had a career in finance banking and mortgage lending the rest of my life.

[00:21:01.99] JOE GALLOWAY: The whole rest of your career.

[00:21:03.35] JAY HENDRIX: Yes, and retired last year.

[00:21:11.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Did anything about your Vietnam service cause you any difficulties readjusting to life?

[00:21:20.31] JAY HENDRIX: As I look back, yes. I was pretty ashamed of telling people where I was at, or I was ever in the military, for probably 20 years.

[00:21:36.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:21:37.48] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. If they asked me if I was in the military, I actually lied and told them that I--

[00:21:42.44] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:21:42.88] JAY HENDRIX: No, never served. About 20 years later, I had my awards, my ribbons and stuff, and I was going to actually throw them away, and my next door neighbor caught me. And my daughter--

[00:21:58.90] JOE GALLOWAY: You were literally going to the garbage can.

[00:22:00.65] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. And he said, what are you doing? And I said, well, I don't need these anymore. So he got ahold of my daughter, and then they ended up doing-- the bottom line is, they ended up doing a shadow box for me. It was kind of a turning point for me in not being so shameful about serving in Vietnam.

[00:22:19.03] JOE GALLOWAY: You had nothing to be ashamed of.

[00:22:22.66] JAY HENDRIX: No, I really didn't. I realize that now. But I don't know why I was--

[00:22:29.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, the society was very divided over the whole thing.

[00:22:35.32] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah. It was-- people put us down. I mean, a lot about not knowing what really we did, what we went through, the sacrifices that we may have made to have a better America. And I didn't realize that for a long time. I didn't even care about it for a long time. It's taken a long time, and I still have some feelings about that. So, it's a process.

[00:23:09.89] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have over the years with the people you served with in the 281st?

[00:23:20.13] JAY HENDRIX: I had contacts with my bunk buddy and then another person in our hooch. About four or five of us guys I kind of had--

[00:23:30.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Through the years you kept in touch.

[00:23:32.11] JAY HENDRIX: Through the years-- by the phone. I'd seen Neal several times, and then we lost contact. But it was all just kind of superficial-- hi, how are you doing? what's going on? what are you doing in your life? and what not. I did stop and see my bunk buddy in Iowa, and we went through--

[00:23:54.88] He worked in the orderly room, so he had a lot of information that we found quite interesting to rehash, and relook over, and some of the guys we lost. It was just an eye-opener to think, gosh, you know, we really did do that. We really were there.

[00:24:12.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, we really were.

[00:24:13.77] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah.

[00:24:16.95] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you start coming to the reunions?

[00:24:19.67] JAY HENDRIX: Last year was my first one.

[00:24:21.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Just last year, your first time.

[00:24:21.97] JAY HENDRIX: Yes. I was scared to come to be honest.

[00:24:27.00] JOE GALLOWAY: And after you did, what did you think?

[00:24:30.91] JAY HENDRIX: Well, last year was a special year, with our book coming out and our dedication to the Special Forces, Green Beret plaque. It was a special time, and I felt proud. I felt really pretty proud and realized that we did have something to offer.

[00:25:00.02] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that the Vietnam War meant to you and your generation?

[00:25:11.30] JAY HENDRIX: That's a tough question. I really don't know how to answer that, Joe. I think it meant we're proud. We're proud people. We're proud of what we did. I think we helped America in some ways-- I think. That's what it was all about. I know we're all proud of each other as we see each other at reunions, at what we gave and what we gave up to do it. And try to pass that on down the road.

[00:25:50.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Either you were there or you weren't.

[00:25:52.81] JAY HENDRIX: Yeah.

[00:25:54.98] JOE GALLOWAY: And if you weren't, you've got no hope of understanding.

[00:25:59.68] JAY HENDRIX: Right.

[00:26:01.87] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:26:08.03] JAY HENDRIX: Well, I think, finally, there's some recognition. And I don't know if it's because we're getting older, and we as a group of people are more proud of being able to share that information. I think the Wall helped a lot to commensurate how big the war was, how many deaths really happened to make the sacrifices. And I think, finally, we're-- people like myself have come to the forefront a little more and are not so ashamed to share, like we are doing today. I think that's a huge effort in the right direction.

[00:26:59.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial here in DC?

[00:27:04.45] JAY HENDRIX: Tomorrow

[00:27:05.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Tomorrow-- not yet.

[00:27:07.36] JAY HENDRIX: Not yet.

[00:27:14.04] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration project, obviously. You're here, part of it.

[00:27:23.22] JAY HENDRIX: Yes.

[00:27:23.61] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about that?

[00:27:25.14] JAY HENDRIX: I think it's enormous. I'm glad somebody has taken it-- you're a big part of that right now. And it's huge to get the word out.

[00:27:40.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you for coming in and sitting for this.

[00:27:43.98] JAY HENDRIX: You're welcome. Thank you.

[00:27:45.23] JOE GALLOWAY: I appreciate it, Jay.

[00:27:45.50] JAY HENDRIX: My pleasure. Nice to have met you.

[00:27:47.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Good to meet you.