

## **Lawrence, Albert U.S. Army**

[00:00:13.30] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I was born on the 1st of September 1946, In San Mateo, California, which is about 13 miles south of San Francisco.

[00:00:24.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. Who are your family members?

[00:00:28.57] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I had a sister. She's passed. And my mother and father-- my mother, Irish, pretty much entirely Irish. My father, English and Swedish. And that was it, a very small family because he came up to the San Francisco Bay Area during World War II, and kind of left all the other family members behind.

[00:00:52.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, what did your dad do?

[00:00:54.67] ALBERT LAWRENCE: He was a Navy officer during the war but he didn't go overseas because he had been in the Merchant Marine so he got -- was assigned a position in San Francisco, training aspiring Navy officers.

[00:01:12.85] JOE GALLOWAY: And after the war?

[00:01:16.60] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, he had graduated from UCLA and he was a Depression era child so he didn't have as many options as people of my generation. He worked kind of in the automobile agency in San Francisco and worked hard, struggled, had ups and downs.

[00:01:36.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, what do you consider your hometown? Where did you go to school?

[00:01:43.42] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, I went to high school in Mills High School, about 10 miles south of San Francisco. It's a very good high school. I must give a lot of credit to that. And then I went to-- kind of-- I ended up graduating from UC Berkeley, after the Army. I went to the University of Paris at the Sorbonne for two years. I went to graduate business school. I went to the Naval War College. I did a lot of academic things.

[00:02:18.12] My parents divorced when I was a young teenager. That changed everything because I really grew up in a middle class suburb to the south of San Francisco. I started working after school at the age of 15. I left home at 17. And I joined the Merchant Marine at 18.

[00:02:37.13] And when I was 18, I started out as an ordinary seaman. And I worked on a troop transport-- the General LeRoy Eltinge that carried the 1st Brigade of the 101st Airborne to Cam Ranh Bay in July and August of 1965.

[00:02:51.74] JOE GALLOWAY: What was that trip like?

[00:02:53.16] ALBERT LAWRENCE: That was something. Because a lot of those airborne guys were getting-- they had to eat powdered eggs at stand up tables. And they were getting sick

below decks. And I caught a ride in Cam Rahn Bay, with a 24-year-old airborne captain. And he asked me how old I was. And I said, well, I'm 18.

[00:03:14.37] And he said, well, it won't be long before you're back here with a rifle in your hands. And that was like two years and three months later, I was back there as a platoon leader with a rifle in my hands. Crazy.

[00:03:25.44] [LAUGHS]

[00:03:27.15] JOE GALLOWAY: But tell me about that voyage.

[00:03:32.82] ALBERT LAWRENCE: With the Merchant Marine was a rough crowd. They're rougher than being in the Army. And we had no air conditioning, and we were popping salt tablets like vitamin pills. The airborne guys were getting so sick below deck so they tied--

[00:03:48.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they lock them in down there?

[00:03:49.80] ALBERT LAWRENCE: No, they didn't but they didn't want them up on deck either. They didn't want a big crowd up on deck, and it was hot as hell, and humid. And I always remember, they tied their brooms. So their mops that they kept, mopping up all the awful stuff and throwing it off the fantail of the ship to clean it.

[00:04:12.33] And then we dropped them off and there they were. It made me reflect what's going to happen if I get the call. I wanted to say that after that I got a job with the Matson Navigation Company as a staff officer.

[00:04:27.30] So now, I'm in the fancy uniform but I had lost my deferment status. And I never thought about it, never made any difference to me whether I got the call or not.

[00:04:41.28] JOE GALLOWAY: And you did.

[00:04:42.42] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I did get the call. Roughly, as soon as I turned 19, I got the notice from my draft board.

[00:04:54.40] I did my basic at Fort Ord California, about 100 miles to the south of San Francisco. I did my AIT there too.

[00:05:02.11] JOE GALLOWAY: This is 1966.

[00:05:04.45] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I went in on 14 January, 1966. And I was in a basic infantry company of about 220 soldiers. We took a battery of aptitude tests at basic. And I was one of two that were selected to go in front of an interview board for a potential candidate for OCS.

[00:05:26.97] JOE GALLOWAY: OCS.

[00:05:27.94] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And the other guy didn't make it. I'm the only one out of the 220, who actually went through the OCS program. I'd had one year of junior college and that's what I almost want to make reference to. Like at OCS was generally for college graduates who had not taken ROTC. But what happened to ROTC is that enrollment--

[00:05:56.95] ROTC used to provide 70% of the Army officers. Enrollment dropped from like 16,000 to like 5,000 so the Army in desperation, were looking for-- there was a short window. Well, a six month window because OCS was always for college grads without ROTC. But for six months, the Army would take young men with high aptitude that didn't have--

[00:06:27.40] JOE GALLOWAY: And some college.

[00:06:29.13] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, hopefully. Right. With some college, I had one year. And so there I was and--

[00:06:34.72] JOE GALLOWAY: There you were. So you finished basic and then went off to--

[00:06:39.40] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I went to advanced AIT, Advanced Infantry Training also at Fort Ord. And then I went to Fort Benning School for Boys.

[00:06:50.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Benning School for Boys. How did that go?

[00:06:53.77] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, and that's another-- so I'm in the infantry program and--

[00:06:58.21] JOE GALLOWAY: You're 19 years old.

[00:07:00.29] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I'm 19 and I felt like, jeez, the physical aspects weren't a big deal and I really kind of had the smarts. So-- but about a third of the candidates got kicked out or dropped out. It was kind of grueling.

[00:07:18.80] JOE GALLOWAY: I mean, they were working on throwing you out.

[00:07:21.16] ALBERT LAWRENCE: We were there. It was 23 weeks and what I find interesting is at the end of OCS, you get the big map reading exam. If you fail twice, you're not going to be an officer. Because to be an infantry officer, map reading is just a crucial skill.

[00:07:44.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. You can't do that, how the hell are you going to be an infantry officer?

[00:07:49.35] ALBERT LAWRENCE: No, you can't. Maybe they have GPS today.

[00:07:51.96] [LAUGHS]

[00:07:52.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Now they do, but not back then.

[00:07:56.02] ALBERT LAWRENCE: No.

[00:07:57.01] JOE GALLOWAY: And you can't count on that stuff.

[00:07:58.63] ALBERT LAWRENCE: No. And your men are watching you. They want to know-- that's one of the crucial out-- They're looking at you. Can he read a map? And they want to know if you can call in artillery and Medevacs, Yeah.

[00:08:10.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Where do they send you next?

[00:08:14.17] ALBERT LAWRENCE: They send me to Fort Gordon, Georgia to be CO-- commanding officer of a basic training company.

[00:08:23.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:08:23.59] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah.

[00:08:25.48] JOE GALLOWAY: So you just finished the training yourself and they're putting you in charge of training?

[00:08:30.50] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, I'm in charge. And what I found interesting at that point in time, all these older NCOs, all these old sergeants we're kind of doing everything. I kind of was trying to figure out, what's my role? Because--

[00:08:47.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Don't get in their way.

[00:08:48.70] ALBERT LAWRENCE: They did everything. But the funny thing was that they weren't going to follow me to Vietnam. By the time-- in those days, by the time you were in your mid-30s, physically, you weren't going to be able to hump the boonies. More of the young man's game.

[00:09:10.03] JOE GALLOWAY: I did it till I was 65.

[00:09:12.85] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, there were people-- it depends on the units I guess and where you were. But I know for example, up in the Highlands, all our squad leaders were E-5's, and the platoon sergeant was E-6.

[00:09:30.28] But when I was CO of the division mortar battery, of course, the battery sergeant was an E-7, and all the section leaders were E-6s. You know, they didn't have to hump--

[00:09:44.23] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't have to hump the boonies.

[00:09:46.22] ALBERT LAWRENCE: the boonies all day long, which not many people can do.

[00:09:54.53] JOE GALLOWAY: When do you finish up at Fort Gordon and when do you get orders for Vietnam?

[00:10:00.59] ALBERT LAWRENCE: It's about six months.

[00:10:01.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Six months.

[00:10:03.48] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And when I got my orders for Vietnam, I decided I wanted to spend my leave time in Europe. So I had to get special permission from a general. They kept saying, well, why do you want to go to Europe when you're supposed to go the other way? And don't you want to hang out with your family.

[00:10:20.09] And I was saying, well, maybe I'll never have the opportunity again. And so I was on the East Coast. And so I did the whole Europe thing for-- and then I came back. Had to race across the country, get on the airplane at Travis-- and there, I'm in the jungle. Just--

[00:10:39.76] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you get to Vietnam and where do you land?

[00:10:42.94] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, we landed at, I guess it was Bien Hoa there, Saigon. And to my knowledge, I was there for like less than a week. And nobody gave me any additional training. I was in a--

[00:10:58.16] JOE GALLOWAY: They gave you orders or telling you--

[00:11:00.74] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Oh, yeah. I got orders that I was going to the 2nd-- B Company, 2nd of the 8th. I think they broke it all the way down to company-- B Company, 2nd of the 8th, 2nd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division. Well, the 4th Infantry--

[00:11:17.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Located in the Central Highlands.

[00:11:19.40] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Central Highlands. Well, the 4th Infantry Division had three brigades-- 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. They moved the 1st and the 3rd around down by Saigon, and out to the coast. But the 2nd Brigade stayed in the Highlands the entire time. And up in the Highlands and--

[00:11:36.30] JOE GALLOWAY: And that's where you're going?

[00:11:37.96] ALBERT LAWRENCE: That's where I'm going. That's where I spent my whole time in 'Nam, up in the Highlands, which actually has more rainfall than any other place in 'Nam.

[00:11:49.04] JOE GALLOWAY: That's right.

[00:11:49.83] ALBERT LAWRENCE: But it's beautiful, pristine, heavy jungle.

[00:11:55.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Triple canopy.

[00:11:57.19] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Triple canopy. And when the sun's shining sometimes you're walking through it and you feel like you're walking through a cathedral.

[00:12:04.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Except people are shooting at you.

[00:12:06.58] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Except people are shooting at you but in one sense, you know, up in the Highlands, there was never more than a division up there. There were elements of the 173rd, the 101st, the elements of the 1st Cav and--

[00:12:21.79] JOE GALLOWAY: The enemy kept more than one division up there.

[00:12:24.06] ALBERT LAWRENCE: They did. And they did but we never had to deal with the civilian populations, and trying to discern who are the good guys and the bad guys. up in the Highlands, it was all NVA so--

[00:12:39.10] JOE GALLOWAY: And a few Montagnards.

[00:12:40.42] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And we worked closely with the Montagnards. They were fabulous people--

[00:12:43.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Good people.

[00:12:44.68] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Fabulous.

[00:12:45.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. All right, so you've got your assignment and they shipped you off to Pleiku.

[00:12:54.28] ALBERT LAWRENCE: They shipped me off to Pleiku. And I think, I'm there like a day or two. And I'm in a chopper and they fly me out to my infantry company, B Company, 2nd of the 8th. 2nd of the 8th is a famous battalion too. They were the first battalion to set foot on-- at Normandy. They're called the First at Normandy, a proud history.

[00:13:25.47] So I'm with B Company, 2nd of the 8th, it's pouring rain. I go over to report to my company commander. Everybody's under shelter house in the pouring rain. And you know, I was a young lieutenant, I had just turned 21 that very week.

[00:13:45.14] So all the other officers were 24, captain was like 26, so-- And I remember the captain gave me my orders for the next day. He was saying, well, Lawrence, I'd like you to whatever. We were going to follow this ridgeline, gave me a compass assessment, and said, search and destroy. And--

[00:14:15.91] JOE GALLOWAY: You've been 24 hours.

[00:14:17.82] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I'm just looking around and he said, maybe you should go over and introduce yourself to your men. And these guys had been in the pouring rain, it was towards the end of the monsoon so they had the jungle rot, everything. These guys looked-- so they're all checking me out. Here's the new guy.

[00:14:34.21] [LAUGHS]

[00:14:34.87] JOE GALLOWAY: What and how quickly will he get us killed?

[00:14:37.57] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Right and I think the captain just-- he knew there wasn't anything dramatic going on that day. I think he just wanted to throw me in the mix and see really of how good I was at map reading. That was it. So it was--

[00:14:54.61] JOE GALLOWAY: How did that go?

[00:14:56.11] ALBERT LAWRENCE: It went well for me. And I think my men-- you know, officers that were enlisted prior, I mean I was a private, I was a corporal, I was a E-5 by the time I became a lieutenant. And I was the same age as my men. So we were kind of-- there wasn't much separating us except our skills.

[00:15:29.08] Like my skill was to be a good map reader and well, small unit tactics, but to call in artillery, air support, Medevacs.

[00:15:41.09] JOE GALLOWAY: How were your NCOs in that outfit?

[00:15:44.66] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well see, another thing about being in the Highlands is, as I had mentioned, they were all young guys. They were like-- and they were all E-5s rank wise, where usually a normal organization, all the other units down along the lowlands or something, they would have all been E-6s and what have you. So the--

[00:16:04.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Are these 90 day wonder NCOs, some of them?

[00:16:09.06] ALBERT LAWRENCE: My platoon sergeant was an E-6. And a lot of units, the squad leader is an E-6. So my platoon sergeant was an E-6. He was a Silver Star recipient and an old timer. And my unit, 6 months before I arrived, was in a lot of combat and was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

[00:16:36.89] The company-- B Company, 2nd of the 8th was Presidential Unit Citation, the only--

[00:16:41.93] JOE GALLOWAY: That's rare.

[00:16:42.74] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And the only one they ever received prior was when they landed at Normandy. And that was for the whole battalion. So these guys, they didn't even need me. I remember it was, I don't want to give his name away because the sergeant-- because he was pretty tough.

[00:16:58.37] And what happened is I learned a lot from him. But jeez, within about five weeks, he came down with a real serious case of malaria, was medevac'd, and he never came back. So I had no choice but to be in charge.

[00:17:16.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Your E-6 was gone.

[00:17:19.50] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah. And if he hadn't been gone, who knows what would have happened to me. Because I've got an ambush story where like, kind of freaky, and I don't know how I would have behaved. Except I looked around, there was my RTO behind me, up on one knee, one knee waiting for me to say something, anything.

[00:17:39.99] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you learn from that E-6 before he disappeared on you?

[00:17:45.44] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, he certainly made sure everybody manned their posts. That's another thing. Usually, the sergeant takes care of setting up the night defenses for the perimeter, the listening posts and whatever, because the officers are getting together with the CO about next day's mission.

[00:18:08.69] So that responsibility, that he handled formidably, and he had the greatest respect of all the troops. However, I saw he was pretty rough with Vietnamese POWs that we had taken in.

[00:18:33.56] I've thought about that. I've written about that in my book. Like people can-- you know, how much of our humanity do we retain when we're submitted to combat?

[00:18:57.46] JOE GALLOWAY: You've got their lives in your hands and they've got your life in their hands.

[00:19:04.12] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I think because of my age and because we were almost the same age, I feel my men confided in me. I feel they respected me. Well, I mean it's all about the job you do. So I've worked with older officers who might think too much of themselves. I never had any cause to think of myself as superior.

[00:19:43.98] We were all pretty much from the same background. I'm one of those kids. I'm like, you know, they referred to officers like me as Mustangs, who were enlisted prior to becoming officers. I think that's a plus. I really think OCS officers, that we make excellent company grade officers.

[00:20:06.51] We might not be sufficiently skilled to run a battalion, or a brigade, or division but at the company level, I think we're the best. Yeah.

[00:20:20.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:26.97] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, I was a platoon leader for 3 months, then I was commanding officer of the division mortar battery for 5 months. Then I went back, and I asked to go back to my old platoon, again resume being a platoon leader for another 3 months.

[00:20:45.24] And then I spent about my last month or six weeks, I was the S-3 for the battalion, where I spent most all daylight hours up in choppers, over our four infantry companies, acting as the forward artillery observer.

[00:21:06.30] JOE GALLOWAY: This is 1967 that you're over there?

[00:21:11.97] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I arrived there in September of 67.

[00:21:15.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Things are back home starting to get a little bit of turmoil. Some antiwar demonstrations going on, race tensions going on.

[00:21:28.54] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Oh, I got a great story like-- so I arrived there and the company was pretty much segregated. I got the black platoon. More than 90% of my men were black Soldiers. And the other three platoons were almost all white. Well, they were. I got all the blacks and--

[00:21:52.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Who did this?

[00:21:53.46] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, there's a tradition in the Army at those days. You probably saw the Confederate flags flying.

[00:21:59.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:21:59.79] ALBERT LAWRENCE: A lot of the infantry officers were Southern boys. So I wasn't a Southerner and I wasn't a Yankee either, really. I was a Westerner from California. So I get the black platoon, which we were the best platoon of all, anyway. Because there were just a couple moments when our brigade worked as a single unit.

[00:22:25.51] Most often, we worked as a company sized unit or even a platoon that-- because of the jungle was so thick, which was nice up in the Central Highlands, tremendous delegation of responsibility. But on the rare occasions, when the whole battalion was moving together, my captain, oftentimes battalion would select my company CO to be the lead company. And my CO-

[00:22:54.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Duty is honor.

[00:22:56.37] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah but it's so much pride. And the CO would designate me and my platoon to be the lead--

[00:23:05.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Point.

[00:23:05.58] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Lead point, yeah. We'd be the guys. We took great pride in that.

[00:23:10.56] JOE GALLOWAY: So--

[00:23:11.06] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Oh, so living in a black world changes your life forever.

[00:23:15.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Now like I said, there was a lot of tension going on back home. Was this coming across to where you were

[00:23:23.79] ALBERT LAWRENCE: None. Not, not, not yet. Morale was-- all the time I was there, from September '67 till September 68 when I left-- Oh, I had one instance, when I was the CO of the division mortar battery where one of my section sergeants, Atkins, I think, E-6--

[00:23:50.16] We used to task-- remember I had different jobs in 'Nam, so, this is the division mortar battery. We were tasked to pull the ammo lots that came in wooden boxes. We had 4 deuce-mortars, 4 of those and 881 millimeter mortars so. We would pull the ammo to check for expired rounds.

[00:24:10.43] Sergeant Atkins comes to me. I'm still 21 so he's going-- he acts like he has a problem he can't solve. Because he had assigned a squad to pull the boxes and they were saying that was pretty racist. How come everybody in the squad-- it's a black thing. So he wanted me to go and adjudicate the issue.

[00:24:34.97] And I remember, and I had been out in the boonies in the black world, so I remember walking across and coming up to the squad and saying I wanted to hear them out, let them vent a little bit. And then I think I told Atkins, I say, hey, have Sergeant Schmidt augment the detail with another squad. So then, we had whites and blacks.

[00:25:03.68] The issue was resolved. So simple. But nothing intense, nothing heavy. And I left before Nixon took office. Not that I agreed or disagreed with any of his policies. But morale dramatically changed. Vets I meet after, who were there in '60-- behind them afterwards, they dealt with the racial issues, the drug problems. We had none of that.

[00:25:36.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you share with us some examples of when your men confided in you? What were their concerns?

[00:25:44.49] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well at the end of my tour, towards the very end of my tour, remember how they rotated lieutenants around. The lieutenants-- platoon leaders don't-- they're not a platoon leader for 12 months.

[00:26:03.06] JOE GALLOWAY: No. You got six.

[00:26:04.57] ALBERT LAWRENCE: These enlisted guys, they did probably 11 and 1/2 months, short breaks in the rear. And they were in and out of combat, and my men would confide in me because they would even mention to me that they might be considering what, self-inflicted wound.

[00:26:35.13] They might be considering that. This was after they've been there about 11 months.

[00:26:42.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Why would you want to do that when you got 2 weeks left in country?

[00:26:46.76] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I know. They just had these premonitions-- bad juju. Maybe it wasn't the last 2 weeks but maybe the last six weeks. They didn't have good feelings so they were kind of burnt out.

[00:27:04.24] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you tell them?

[00:27:05.35] ALBERT LAWRENCE: You know, what I told them? Well, it's not a good thing to do because they're going to know what you did. But I didn't-- I still felt it was their choice. It was their choice.

[00:27:29.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Most of them chose correctly.

[00:27:31.56] ALBERT LAWRENCE: None of them put a bullet-- none of them self-inflicted.

[00:27:35.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:27:37.41] ALBERT LAWRENCE: But they'd talk about it. That's another thing. I still remember showing up the first couple-- no maybe, remember I had been in Europe. I'd been drinking beer in Amsterdam and I'm with my men. And there's a girl sitting around, telling nothing but war stories, nothing but war stories. And they're not happy stories, they're morbid stories.

[00:28:05.96] And I remember one of my sergeants was looking at me and he was kind of saying-- so he says, oh, but you think that's all we do. Sit around, tell war stories. And I said, that's what it sounds like to me. He laughed and he said, yeah. He said, and after you've been here about three months, that's all you're going to be talking about. Yeah.

[00:28:33.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Was he right?

[00:28:34.04] ALBERT LAWRENCE: He was. Well and that's it. You're telling all those war-- You're living in another world. I was one of those guys. I didn't write letters home to mom and dad. What are you going to say?

[00:28:48.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about the worst combat patrol that you led.

[00:28:55.79] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, it was just the first one. After our platoon sergeant had medevac'd with malaria. We were up in the Highlands through thick, thick jungle, and we were the trail platoon. So it was a hell-a hot day and we came down to these banks of rice paddies.

[00:29:32.61] Maybe six of them, half a dozen, up to your armpits, and the jungle was so thick on each side that you had to wade. We waded across, single file, and try to keep your weapon dry. And somebody fired a round before we had crossed.

[00:30:06.92] Somebody did something stupid that-- which everybody knows. Don't need to test fire your weapon until-- not in that situation but--

[00:30:18.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Not in that place.

[00:30:19.16] ALBERT LAWRENCE: However, it was. So we're down in the bog and we're coming up on the other side. The other platoon was actually-- because the officers, most of them had gone over a little ridge. And the other platoon was taking a break, water break. And we were coming out. And kind of all hell broke loose from the other side that we had just left. And this is my first major contact.

[00:30:51.60] JOE GALLOWAY: But it's behind you.

[00:30:53.93] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, but it's coming at me. And we're all hitting the ground. And so we're there all on our stomachs and this is my first intense-- where there's rat-tat-tat. And I'm pretty scared. And I'm as scared as everybody else.

[00:31:22.82] But at least I had the fortitude to look around and there was-- let's call him, Crenshaw, my RTO. He's right behind me, up on one knee, with the radio and the antenna sticking up. Holding the thing and he's looking at me like-- waiting. You know, waiting for me to do something.

[00:31:44.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Time to call in some artillery there, Lieutenant.

[00:31:47.54] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, so I had to like get up. At least get up on one knee like he did. I mean, come on, it's just bullets are hitting, and there's the antenna. We're the command and control group right there. Just clear as can be.

[00:32:01.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Target.

[00:32:02.44] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And I remember I even shifted a little bit to protect my groin. So you know. I did. And then like, yeah, what can I do? I'm on the phone, I'm calling in artillery and so-- he was a hero, this RTO.

[00:32:25.80] JOE GALLOWAY: He reminded you of your duty.

[00:32:28.20] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah. He reminded me of my duty because another thing is, when you're in those situations, as you probably know, your heart's beating pretty fast. And the Soldiers are down on the ground. They're not returning fire because they can't see the enemy. And you know, why stick your head up.

[00:32:48.93] And so one of the duties of the officer as well is to go up and down the line and get your men to shoot. So like-- and once you kind of-- what do you-- submit to fate. And actually your heart beat slows because that's your duty. That's your job.

[00:33:12.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Fear goes away.

[00:33:14.08] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah. So when we talk about those stories, yeah, that's the unforgettable one.

[00:33:19.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of the leadership in your unit as far up as you could see it?

ALBERT LAWRENCE: You know what, we never, ever got the big picture. We would-- not even from the Stars and Stripes, which had good sports section, and comics. But sometimes we would get the picture from-- maybe somebody would get a copy of Time Magazine and then we'd read about it. And so we didn't know anything about the big picture and--

[00:33:57.69] [SIGHS]

[00:33:58.17] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm not sure Westmoreland or Creighton Abrams knew the big picture.

[00:34:03.45] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well there was that time-- the ambush. I was just talking to you about like-- So we're there. We're returning fire, and our battalion CO is flying above us but yeah, but above him was the brigade CO flying above the battalion.

[00:34:26.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. And sometimes, you could have the division CO above them.

[00:34:32.49] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I get them confused who I really want to lean on. Was it the battalion-- I don't think was a battalion. The battalions are part of the-- but the brigade, they're not. Kind of, well, that's how you feel.

[00:34:43.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah

[00:34:44.25] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And he's up there in the bird. And he wants us to assault back across the rice paddy, in line. We're all shoulder to shoulder.

[00:34:56.28] JOE GALLOWAY: That's bullshit.

[00:34:57.12] ALBERT LAWRENCE: With our machine guns firing over our heads against an entrenched enemy. Yeah. We did it. You always follow orders.

[00:35:06.51] JOE GALLOWAY: That's why God made artillery.

[00:35:08.55] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, that's it. Of course, you'd think, but not always.

[00:35:14.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have to do the assault?

[00:35:16.68] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Huh? Yeah, we did the assault.

[00:35:18.95] JOE GALLOWAY: How many did you lose?

[00:35:20.12] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Didn't get any. We just lost just a handful.

[00:35:24.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, KIAs, WIAs.

[00:35:29.21] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, but not from my platoon. From the platoon in advance of us that was taking the break.

[00:35:44.73] I saw the big fan in the MASH unit in Pleiku. I had malaria pretty seriously and--

[00:35:52.46] JOE GALLOWAY: What was this thing?

[00:35:53.69] ALBERT LAWRENCE: So they had to rush me to the MASH unit, and the nurses stripped me naked, and they would get the ice and the alcohol. And then just keep working it over your body and brought the big fan out. And I've still got a photo of the MASH unit in Pleiku with this huge fan. That was like our air conditioning. And that always amuses me.

[00:36:17.45] So if you say, cutting edge technology--

[00:36:19.67] [LAUGHS]

[00:36:20.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Ice, alcohol and the big fan.

[00:36:23.40] ALBERT LAWRENCE: --and the big fan. Works miracles.

[00:36:27.18] JOE GALLOWAY: God love those nurses.

[00:36:29.10] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, Yeah.

[00:36:31.98] JOE GALLOWAY: So you came down with the raging, pain-some malaria.

[00:36:35.31] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, there's some heartbreaking stories too. Because I had a guy in my platoon-- private. We were doing the wading through the rice paddy thing. He stepped on the punji stake. So like-- back on his heel. Because our jungle boots had the steel plate in the instep. Cut him in the heel and we pulled him out of the rice paddy.

[00:36:57.12] And we were all kind of making jokes, even gave him a cigarette, and everybody's kind of smiling, laughing even he was. Even though he was bleeding but they sent him back to the rear and-- well they medevac'd him obviously, but--

[00:37:13.43] And I owed him \$5 from a poker game. I know you could say, wow, officers playing cards with your men but out in the jungle, we didn't wear any insignia. We were all the same. We were all in the foxholes. And that's the thing about the infantry. The Marines know that too.

[00:37:35.64] But our debts are pretty important. So I remember putting \$5 in an envelope and giving it to a door gunner on a helo, saying deliver this to Jim, back in the hospital. And a couple of days later, some of our men came back--

[00:37:55.43] we had so many cases of malaria-- and asked about Jim, and they said, he's got malaria. The guy came down with a fever. And just a couple of days later, somebody came out and said, he died. He died from that punji stake.

[00:38:10.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:38:10.76] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah.

[00:38:11.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Blood poisoning.

[00:38:16.02] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Mm-hm. Yeah.

[00:38:19.43] JOE GALLOWAY: How long were you down with your case of malaria?

[00:38:24.75] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, after 'Nam, I had it. I went back on the Merchant Marine. I was on the cruise ships to Tahiti and Australia. I used to have relapses and a real pretty nurse on board the ship, kind of took care of me.

[00:38:42.42] She didn't have any quinine. I mean, so there was no real medicine to take care of me. So I had relapses.

[00:38:50.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Keep the cold pad over your forehead.

[00:38:51.21] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, she would do that. She would, she really would keep my body warm. A bit chilled and so I would say I had relapses for not very long. Maybe a year or two.

[00:39:06.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Me too. I couldn't take the orange pills. I went blind.

[00:39:12.23] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, I took them all. And I'm in the hospital bed and some doctor comes by with the clipboard. And he's asking me, he's going, OK, so which pill aren't you taking? Because he wanted to write me up for malingering. And I--

[00:39:28.40] JOE GALLOWAY: was so religious about--

[00:39:29.63] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I religiously took both pills. I was not trying to get out of doing my duty.

[00:39:35.87] JOE GALLOWAY: I took the big orange pill and went blind for 12 hours.

[00:39:39.68] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Did you really?

[00:39:40.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And I said, I'd rather have malaria and did.

[00:39:45.17] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, I have French friends who live in tropical Africa and they'd rather get the malaria than take those pills, day by day, over years. They just don't do

it. They'll just deal with the malaria. If-- it's probably not good for your liver, and a lot of other vital organs.

[00:40:04.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. But you were down for a couple of weeks?

[00:40:10.25] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I was pretty bad because I was like pissing brown urine. And it looks like Coca-Cola. I was like, that's the worst kind.

[00:40:18.37] JOE GALLOWAY: That is bad. That's bad stuff.

[00:40:20.53] ALBERT LAWRENCE: You're losing red blood cells. It's really dangerous. So the nurses at the MASH unit-- they realized, they'd rather turn me blue with the ice and the alcohol than let my brain boil.

[00:40:33.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:40:38.30] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I had two best days, both when I was CO of the division mortar battery. One, I befriended a Vietnamese army captain, who provided security for two of our mortar detachments on the other side of Pleiku. And he invited me and three of my section sergeants to take lunch with him at the Vietnamese officer's club in Pleiku. A high honor.

[00:41:12.13] I got some photos in my book about their showing up. And this wonderful man, and a special day, and drinking beer, and eating food at the Vietnamese officer's club in Pleiku. It was something very special, really special. And who knows what happened to him when-- in '75 when the NVA came through. He was one of the first to be-- deal with them.

[00:41:45.19] And the other moment I had was when I was leaving the division mortar battery. I volunteered to go back out into the boonies. I didn't like being in the base camp. It's kind of, I mean I had mortar batteries, mortar detachments out in the field, Yeah. All over the place but--

[00:42:09.77] JOE GALLOWAY: But your job was back in the base camp.

[00:42:12.04] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Kind of. Sleeping on a cot. It's like-- so I remember my platoon. All of these sergeants in the battery came to collect me one night and to take me to the NCO club. And they even brought a shirt for me to wear. An E-6 shirt.

[00:42:38.76] I was only 21. I didn't grow a mustache so I thought like, I didn't feel like I looked like in E-6. Felt like, can't I be an E-5? And they said, no, no, no, because E-5s were restricted to just one part of the NCO club. And the E-6s had free run, so--

[00:42:57.60] And they had the best club, the strippers, they had everything. So I thought I was going to-- the bouncers are going to whatever, stopped me at the door. But no, I got in. We partied like a wild man. That was another great moment.

[00:43:17.15] Do you know the worst day I had was coming home and reporting to my new CO at Fort Polk, Louisiana, who was a major. When I showed up, I remember walking into his office and I stood at attention. I reported to this major, kind of overweight. He hadn't been to 'Nam.

[00:43:49.46] And I have reported to him, you know, Lieutenant Lawrence, reporting for duty. And then I went into parade rest. And he looked at me and he goes, I didn't say, parade rest. So I just snap back into attention, and then he looked at me and he was going, let's get one thing straight.

[00:44:14.75] He said, I don't like Vietnam vets. He said, you know why? I said, no, sir. It's because he said, they have shitty attitudes. And so that was my welcome back to the States. I gave him a look that like this, nothing unlawful about a look that ended the welcome ceremony.

[00:44:41.62] That has always stuck in my head. That yes, he wasn't going to 'Nam so he resented those who did.

[00:44:49.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Before we get you out of Vietnam, what were the differences between leading an infantry platoon and commanding division mortar battery? What was different? What was similar?

[00:45:12.35] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, you have to know your shit on both of them. It's not like I had trained on mortars. And our infantry company was broken down to 3 rifle platoons and a mortar platoon. Those mortar guys were something. 81-millimeter mortar, that's a 48-pound-- that's broken into 3 pieces, 48-pound base plate, and the rest. However, much that weighs.

[00:45:46.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Humping that shit in the jungle ain't fun.

[00:45:48.09] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Hard to imagine. So these guys, the mortar guys-- and being a rifle platoon leader is much more glamorous. And so when I was the CO of the division mortar battery, I'm not saying I had to play some catch up. I did it real quickly. I wanted to be there, especially the Four-deuces.

[00:46:16.55] These Four-deuces, we had 4 of those. They weigh 675 pounds. You can't hump those to the boonies.

[00:46:25.32] JOE GALLOWAY: You ain't humping those.

[00:46:26.84] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And the shell weighs I think about 27 pounds or whatever. It goes out. I try and think how many 3 and 1/2 miles whatever, Yeah. I think so.

[00:46:35.03] JOE GALLOWAY: It really blows up with great authority.

[00:46:37.79] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, and plus the Four-deuce mortar round, I don't know if you've ever seen them. The primer-- you put the whatever they call the accelerants on--

[00:46:54.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, the accelerant.

[00:46:55.53] ALBERT LAWRENCE: But you can break them into quarters, slip them in. And I wanted to familiarize myself very, very clearly with everything, the site mechanism and all that. It's so much geometry and math and it's kind of fascinating.

[00:47:16.08] So back to challenges, I forgot to mention one thing about when you say leading-- because in the field-- I've read some people's books, some Vietnam veteran books. Never really lead from the front. In Vietnam, I was always positioned about a third of the way back from the front.

[00:47:41.36] You know, we had the guys with the machetes, and whether we moved in column or file. But my position was not at the front. My position was about a third of the way back so I could control the head and the tail. If you're in the front, you can't--

[00:48:02.21] JOE GALLOWAY: You're cut off from the back half of your unit.

[00:48:05.03] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And plus I would talk to my men. I mean I had to know where everybody was before I could call in artillery. I even called them. I'd say, hey, you can't be straggling back there. What's the matter with you? You're endangering everybody's lives here. I got to know where everybody is before I can call in artillery. And so they got it. They got the lesson.

[00:48:28.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Drop a little Willie Peter back there, that'll catch them up.

[00:48:31.54] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah that would.

[00:48:32.64] [LAUGHS]

[00:48:34.56] ALBERT LAWRENCE: So stuff like, well, you know. That's another thing. You get to Vietnam and you got guys from everywhere but from LA, Detroit, and everybody's armed to the teeth. And one thing about being in Vietnam is you're no longer afraid. You've lost your fear of authority.

[00:48:57.00] And that even happens when you come home. You come home and like, back to the major there at Fort Polk, I mean like, what's he going to do? Send me back to Vietnam? I mean you're no longer afraid, you're really kind of fearless. And that's had a big influence.

[00:49:13.65] JOE GALLOWAY: And that's what the major hated more than anything else.

[00:49:16.35] ALBERT LAWRENCE: He probably did. And that fearlessness has been actually a plus throughout my entire life. Less fear. Afraid of what? What's the worst that could happen?

[00:49:37.81] JOE GALLOWAY: How much, if any, contact did you have with our allies? The Koreans, the Aussies, the New Zealanders.

[00:49:45.33] ALBERT LAWRENCE: None, but I worked closely with the Montagnards. Yeah, and they were always wonderful to work with.

[00:49:50.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about those people and what you loved about them.

[00:49:54.82] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, here's the thing about the Montagnards. The Montagnards in the Central Highlands-- there's about six different tribes, the Rade, the Stieng. They're different than the Montagnards further north that have Chinese origins like the Hmong or whatever.

[00:50:12.39] But in the Central Highlands they all came from Malaysia. There are two groups, Malaysia or Indonesia. They were treated horribly by the Vietnamese so they didn't have a problem killing any Vietnamese, North or South.

[00:50:34.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, they were quite happy to. And vice versa.

[00:50:35.98] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And they wouldn't let you get close to their women either. They were very noble people. They were-- my men were in a village once when a-- Montagnard village, just my platoon-- when a child had died from malaria. And so there was a funeral celebration. Everybody's drinking, banging on drums.

[00:51:05.08] And I was the chief of my tribe so I squatted down with the village chief. I've got a photo on my book about that. They insisted I drink two kind of 8-ounce glasses. But you know, it was a mild high and then they had a water buffalo that they wanted to slaughter. That's right.

[00:51:27.04] And one of my sergeants-- we have the only axe. And he hit the water buffalo with the blunt end, didn't take him down. Took a second whack to bring him to his knees, and the elders went over to slit the throat, collected the blood in a bowl and handed it to me.

[00:51:52.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, you got to have a drink.

[00:51:53.39] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, I'm the guest of honor. So you know, you have these experiences that like, wow, they take you farther away than where you've been. Oh, so the Montagnards-- and what else can I say about them because we did them bad. Terrible.

[00:52:17.03] JOE GALLOWAY: But they had been betrayed by the French and by everybody else. So I guess they were used to it.

[00:52:25.85] ALBERT LAWRENCE: They took great pride in speaking French. And I knew a Montagnard-- I remember a Montagnard boy, he was like 13. He was already a platoon sergeant based on merit completely, the number of people he killed.

[00:52:39.56] And speaking about merit, I wanted to say, one other thing about OCS is that, in our great meritocracy, whether you go to West Point, or whether you're ROTC, or whether you're OCS, you all start out on the same rung of the ladder. You all start out as second lieutenants,

leading about 40 soldiers into combat. That's to me just remarkable, a wonderful, wonderful quality.

[00:53:16.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you speak French?

[00:53:20.81] ALBERT LAWRENCE: When I went two years to the University of Paris, the Sorbonne. You know what? I spoke Spanish. And so my CO felt that was good enough to interpret with the French, so I was still the translator.

[00:53:36.49] [LAUGHS]

[00:53:37.19] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, doing the best I could.

[00:53:39.73] JOE GALLOWAY: But you had some French, and a lot of Spanish. You made it work.

[00:53:45.23] ALBERT LAWRENCE: No, I had a fair amount of Spanish and no French. But over the years I--

[00:53:53.71] JOE GALLOWAY: How'd you go to the Sorbonne for 2 years without French?

[00:53:57.49] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I took three semesters at Berkeley. And then I went to France. And I went to the south of France for six months, to the-- bought a bicycle, and attended the Alliance Francaise for six months to strengthen my French, so I could attend the University of Paris, Sorbonne.

[00:54:15.11] Then I went out to Paris, and did marginal work, and did two years at studying in Paris. Now, and the weird thing is some years later, Uncle Sam hired me because they were looking for a French speaker. So--

[00:54:35.05] [LAUGHS]

[00:54:36.08] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And when I was in France, people just said, well, you're going to grow up and be a shoe salesman. You're just going to be a bum.

[00:54:42.93] [LAUGHS]

[00:54:44.04] ALBERT LAWRENCE: So you never know.

[00:54:50.68] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I'm glad I really spent my time in the Central Highlands, out in thick jungle with the Montagnards predominantly, because in a certain sense with the Vietnamese, I could see-- well, like most people, more materialistic, and in a weird way, you can always tell from the onset, they didn't really want us there.

[00:55:18.20] You know what I mean? It's always the same. You're trying to do something good but they probably look at you as kind of just being something of an occupier.

[00:55:30.64] JOE GALLOWAY: You're a threat.

[00:55:32.25] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah.

[00:55:33.84] JOE GALLOWAY: They're pacifistic, the village people who were on a farm without being messed with.

[00:55:42.59] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, and plus they just had a corrupt government in the South. A government the people could never believe in.

[00:55:54.09] No, almost none at all. But well, because I was so young. I didn't have a wife, didn't have really a girlfriend. I wrote my mother a letter once. I read it a couple of years after my return and I couldn't even recognize the author as myself. So when I was mentioning to you about what are you going to write about, I mean, what are you going to write about?

[00:56:18.87] But my mother and father, they got divorced. They lived 400 miles apart. I've been very independent.

[00:56:25.32] JOE GALLOWAY: For a long time.

[00:56:26.34] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah.

[00:56:30.55] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you get about the war that you were fighting?

[00:56:36.28] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, as I mentioned, hardly any. When we get the Time Magazine or-- good luck trying to figure out what's going on in Tet. For us, Tet-- and by the way, Pleiku, I was the CO of the division mortar battery during Tet.

[00:56:50.13] JOE GALLOWAY: During Tet.

[00:56:51.49] ALBERT LAWRENCE: And Pleiku was one of the very first cities to be attacked. So we were in the action. It was different being the CO of a mortar battery because well, there's no thrill like being at the point of the sword.

[00:57:13.45] Here, you're doing indirect fire. You're not seeing what you're doing except through second hand comments.

[00:57:24.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Get a lot of joy out of those Four-point-deuce?

[00:57:28.89] ALBERT LAWRENCE: They're-- it's amazing that that's an infantry weapon. For the infantry, it's basically just like a 105. It's just like a 105 and we preferred 105s over 155s because the blast radius of a 155 is about 55 yards. And the blast radius of 105 is like 35 yards, and it's the same with the Four-deuce, so--

[00:58:07.53] They do a fair amount of damage. They're-- and when somebody is in need, I remember when I was out there calling for artillery myself, and when it shows up, and it's on target and that's why this whole thing about the wafers and how I wanted to make sure I wasn't going to just be nonchalant. No, No, people's lives.

[00:58:36.84] JOE GALLOWAY: How long did it take in Tet for the Americans to restore control in Pleiku where you were fighting?

[00:58:47.88] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, you see, not many people read about the fighting in Pleiku, do they? Because most all the fighting was done by the Vietnamese.

[00:58:55.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Was it?

[00:58:56.24] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, and then some of the 4th Infantry Soldiers showed up toward the end. All the fighting was done by the Vietnamese. I think we had one-- what do you call it? We had an armored unit there. Yeah. We had a one US armored unit. All the rest was Vietnamese.

[00:59:26.28] Because I remember after the fighting stopped, I was going across the other side of Pleiku to check out my mortar detachments. And the Vietnamese kind of apprised me that they had all the enemy bodies in the soccer field, if I wanted to go and inspect them.

[00:59:50.50] This was like a-- this was a VC battalion and a sapper. I don't think they were NVA. But I was too busy checking out the damage because they were firing rockets at the airfield on the other side of Pleiku. I didn't have the time to go check out all the bodies.

[01:00:18.25] JOE GALLOWAY: They killed a lot of them.

[01:00:20.86] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, around 300. So, not like thousands.

[01:00:30.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Still respectable for a country town.

[01:00:32.51] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yes, it was. Being fought just by basically-- so nobody hardly read about it because it was handled by the Vietnamese.

[01:00:46.83] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I had shaking hands. People comment on that. Years later, I never even thought about it. People would say, wow, Bert, your hands are always shaking. I was going-- and you know, I started smoking cigarettes in Vietnam. I ended up smoking 4 packs of Camels a day.

[01:01:04.76] And they'd bring us the cigarettes free. And because I was the leader, I got to pick last so, and the only thing that was left was the Camels so. I was smoking the cigarette--

[01:01:20.18] JOE GALLOWAY: You're talking C-ration cigarettes?

[01:01:22.38] ALBERT LAWRENCE: No, they kind of-- actually just beautiful cartons.

[01:01:25.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, nice cartons.

[01:01:25.97] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Oh yeah. Nice, big boxes. Not the 4 or 5 in the pack, no. And they'd come out. We needed cigs. So I had the shaking hands and one thing I realized right away is that-- well, there's a couple of things I want to talk to you about. Is that I didn't fit anymore among my high school buddies.

[01:01:50.51] I was too morose for them. You know, they were in college, talking about fraternity parties, and I had five more months to do in the Army at Fort Polk. And I went back to my job at the Merchant Marine anyway, so-- which is a good thing because I'm down in Tahiti and Honolulu. So that wasn't bad.

[01:02:17.57] But anyway, I'm-- yeah. They're too lighthearted. I'm more morose, serious. There's something I wanted to talk about-- oh, the anger thing. Because I've written in my book about it. I talked to so many vets that are angry. And they say they're angry about the peaceniks or the politicians.

[01:02:42.92] But I've discovered for myself that they're really-- you're really just angry about yourself. What you've become, desensitized, and yeah. Yeah, so being desensitized, and that can stick with you for years and years.

[01:03:10.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, tell me about your return home. Anything remarkable about it at all? You run into any demonstrators or-- ?

[01:03:23.13] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I didn't spend any time at home. I got right on the ships and I went right off to Tahiti and Australia.

[01:03:29.75] JOE GALLOWAY: This is after you get out of--

[01:03:31.43] ALBERT LAWRENCE: After I got out. I did my 5 months at Fort Polk, Louisiana I come back--

[01:03:37.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Lovely place, Fort Polk.

[01:03:38.42] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah. Isn't it? I come back to California and I go back to my old job.

[01:03:41.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Right back out on the ship.

[01:03:43.43] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I'm right there. I'm an officer in the Merchant Marine and I'm the only guy in the Matson Navigation Company, the only officer without a college degree. And all the other officers were like, more than twice my age. And they all knew me from before.

[01:04:00.08] Well, San Francisco was an incredible place before, when it was a vibrant waterfront. That all ended around-- by 1972 it was all gone. All the ships went over to Oakland

for containerization but in the old days, with that whole Embarcadero, the waterfront was filled with ships.

[01:04:20.87] I was a young guy, but I could go in a bar, and like I knew all the seamen and stuff, and just fabulous, so-- Yeah, I went right back to sea. There's no kind of--

[01:04:31.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to that life after combat?

[01:04:37.00] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, drinking rum cocktails in Tahiti was therapeutic. Helped me get over it.

[01:04:45.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Helped you get over it. Did you maintain any contact with guys you had served with?

[01:04:53.66] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Do you know that I'm glad you asked that question because I don't go to reunions. I never talked about the war for about seven years. In fact, I didn't talk about the war until my daughter was born. Then, I had good friends in France, friends out at Stinson Beach where I went back to college,

[01:05:20.96] close friends, that never knew I was a Vietnam vet. But when my daughter was born, I kind of whatever, checked into the VFW people but there were a lot of crazy guys there. So if you want to spend your time hanging out with the vets-- but I don't go to the reunion.

[01:05:38.54] And it's funny because I have another friend of mine who went through ROTC. They'll talk about me as being different, meaning they have reunions all the time, every year. But--

[01:05:54.96] JOE GALLOWAY: And the West Pointers do too.

[01:05:56.88] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yeah, they do too but OCS guys--

[01:06:02.15] JOE GALLOWAY: They do too.

[01:06:02.95] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I know some do.

[01:06:04.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Some classes do. I've been invited to them.

[01:06:07.00] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Yes, they do. But you know, that's what I'm saying. There was a 6 month window and basically, even the OCS guys are all college grads. So, you know, I was not a guy with a lot of schooling.

[01:06:27.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think your Vietnam experience changed you? Affected your life after work, for good or ill?

[01:06:35.24] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Oh, definitely. Oh, yeah. And first--

[01:06:39.56] JOE GALLOWAY: More good than ill?

[01:06:40.16] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Oh, yes, for sure. I think I came back-- remember, I didn't have a lot of schooling. After 'Nam, I graduated from Berkeley. I've got about 3 graduate degrees. I mean, it's like I had so much confidence.

[01:06:51.89] JOE GALLOWAY: And Uncle Sam paid for it. Or some of it.

[01:06:54.39] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, not much. What happened for me is I made so much money in the Merchant Marine. I mean, I worked pretty hard and saved all my money. Worked almost two years and then came ashore and went to school. Like for example, I didn't have enough money to go to Cal Berkeley for two years. I doubled the load.

[01:07:18.24] I had to get special permission from the dean. I majored in philosophy. So I graduated from-- I did my last 2 years of university in 14 months. And then I went out. So basically, I didn't have to work for 3 years. on my merchant marine money.

[01:07:36.41] And I ran out of money when I was in France, going up to Paris. So then, but I was going to the University of Paris, I started out getting a job as a dishwasher. I didn't care what I did, whether-- you know, that's an interesting thing. How you-- status you feel. Because then I could have been in the military, I could have stayed in the Army maybe.

[01:08:00.25] Who knows, without a degree, how far are you going to go? Merchant marine officer? My mother thought that was the greatest. Why would you leave that to go back to junior college? Why? Because I wanted schooling. I believed in it. and I got it.

[01:08:20.14] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think the war meant to you and your generation?

[01:08:27.52] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Well, you could look at it two ways. The experience of your generation. I mean, I had that experience and even when I go like to-- I don't hang out at the VFW but I might show up about every 6 weeks to just see who's sitting around.

[01:08:47.47] And if you've been in the infantry or in the Marines, you're in. Nobody can-- you're in. And so there's something to be said about if you're going to do it, just do it. Go all the way.

[01:09:13.68] JOE GALLOWAY: You visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial when in DC?

[01:09:16.62] ALBERT LAWRENCE: Many times. I worked in Washington DC for 2 years. I can't ever go there without having tears running down cheeks.

[01:09:33.89] ALBERT LAWRENCE: I feel just so humbled and privileged that you contacted me.

[01:09:47.83] JOE GALLOWAY: We appreciate you coming in and telling some of your story.