

MacInnis, John US Army

[00:00:17.04] JOHN MACINNIS: I was born in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada on May the 13th, 1949.

[00:00:24.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:26.70] JOHN MACINNIS: Parents, Joseph MacInnis and Mary MacInnis. And I have my three brothers, Reed, Brian, and Andrew and two sisters.

[00:00:48.24] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, I grew up mostly in California. We moved when I was six years old from Nova Scotia to West Los Angeles. Yeah. My dad had worked for the Cape Breton Post paper in Canada. And he decided he wanted to emigrate because he had had several of his family members and friends come to the United States and work at various newspapers around the country.

[00:01:27.15] And one of his best friends, fellow by the name of Bernie Hughes, came out and was the head of the International Typographical Union for Southern California.

[00:01:39.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:01:39.93] JOHN MACINNIS: And so he got him a-- he said, come on out. I got your job at the Herald Examiner. So we moved out here and I grew up--

[00:01:48.96] JOE GALLOWAY: He was a typesetter?

[00:01:49.86] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, at that time, yeah. Back--

[00:01:51.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[00:01:52.38] JOHN MACINNIS: --yeah, way back then.

[00:01:53.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Way back then.

[00:01:55.77] JOHN MACINNIS: So I grew up in Southern California and went to grammar school, junior high, high school all in Southern California.

[00:02:05.70] JOE GALLOWAY: All in Southern California. How did you come to enter the military?

[00:02:11.49] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, it was starting in about '65, '66 when I was still in high school and friends that I had in high school were being drafted right out of high school. And the numbers were a little alarming. We were part of the Pasadena draft board area, where-- I lived in West Covina, and we were part of the Pasadena draft board.

[00:02:43.94] And from the time I was a sophomore until I was getting ready to graduate, which-- that would have been '65, '66, and '67, guys that I knew had graduated, not only had been drafted, had gone to Vietnam, but they had been killed. So it was a huge wake up to anybody that was paying attention back then that--

[00:03:11.63] JOE GALLOWAY: They knew it was coming.

[00:03:12.85] JOHN MACINNIS: --it was coming. And there were big-- and the numbers weren't slowing down. They were--

[00:03:18.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Increasing.

[00:03:18.86] JOHN MACINNIS: --increasing. The increase of the troop levels was the increase in the draft. And so I had a green card and I was-- because I was a green card holder, the requirements were exactly as if you were a US citizen. You couldn't-- you didn't have all the privileges, but you had the privilege of signing up for the draft. And you had better, because--

[00:03:43.70] JOE GALLOWAY: But now, as a Canadian citizen, you did have the option of going home--

[00:03:50.15] JOHN MACINNIS: Oh.

[00:03:50.42] JOE GALLOWAY: --if you considered that home.

[00:03:52.25] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah. Yeah, I had been in the-- personally, for myself, I had been in the States. I wanted to be in the States. And my dad had served and he had served and got a-- Canadian Rangers went ashore at Juno Beach. Made it all the way to the Ardennes.

[00:04:13.40] Considered himself the luckiest guy in the world because he had lost so many friends. And then he got hit three times there and he was out of the war. They took him home. And his thing was, he didn't tell us to join, but he said, if you're going to be part of this country, you've got to give back. And if service is required, then you should serve.

[00:04:37.21] JOE GALLOWAY: So you-- that wasn't an option, going home.

[00:04:40.48] JOHN MACINNIS: No. No. You know, I considered myself an American at that point. In fact, all of my brothers served. We all went in.

[00:04:52.18] JOE GALLOWAY: So what did you do? Did you wait to be drafted or did you enlist?

[00:04:55.84] JOHN MACINNIS: I was watching the numbers and the lottery was just-- it was starting to be the first year of the lottery, by the time I was a senior, OK? And so there was-- some people were going to take a gamble and some people weren't and everything else. And I just decided, you know, I'm going to look into it. Because there's got to be a way where you can serve and you can do something you want to do.

[00:05:17.50] If you get drafted, guess what? You're going to do what they want you to do, when they want you to do it, how they want you to do it. And you're going to do it for two years and you're going to have no choice in anything. So I went to the recruiting office and I talked to them.

[00:05:34.27] And I was an aviation nut at that time. As were my brothers. And we used to go over to the El Monte airport and we knew the pilots there. And they would take us up and they would-- in fact, we couldn't legally get a license, but I could fly just about any single engine plane that they had over there at El Monte. So when it came time to do that, we took all the tests and did all the stuff.

[00:06:06.91] And they said, well, we've got some good news and some bad news for you. You know, fortunately, the Army has the warrant officer candidate program and you can-- but it would be helicopters. It wouldn't-- there's no way in the world you would get fixed wing. None at all.

[00:06:25.51] I said, you mean-- and I was just getting ready to take my private pilot's license and I would have it before I would go in. I said, if I went in with a private pilot's license, they wouldn't let me even attempt to try? The recruiter said, I'm not going to lie to you, they want helicopter pilots. It's just impossible. He said, you're not going to get it.

[00:06:50.29] So I said, well, what else you got? He said, ah, glad you asked. He said, I've got something that's even better. And you won't have to stay in as long and you'll get better training because it's with the Air Force. That's what he told me.

[00:07:04.78] And he said, you'll get better training. And if you want to when you come out, you can step right into a high paying job. I said, what's that? He says, air traffic control. He says, why don't you-- he said, I'm going to set you up for the exams and you can do all that stuff.

[00:07:20.08] So I did. I went and I took them. And I took the-- you have to get a class A flight physical too, just the same as-- and I had already passed mine for my private license. So went and did all that and said, hey, you're in. When do you want to start?

[00:07:37.09] So I gave a month's notice at work and--

[00:07:42.60] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is what month and year?

[00:07:45.34] JOHN MACINNIS: This was in May of 1968. I was going to school part time and working part time. I had graduated in June of '67 and decided, well, I'm going to go. I'm going to do this.

[00:08:11.90] JOHN MACINNIS: Fort Ord, California.

[00:08:13.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, not too far away.

[00:08:15.38] JOHN MACINNIS: Not too far, no, no, no, no. It wasn't bad at all. But it was-- there was one little incident when we were being inducted that I'll never forget, particularly the look on the faces of those that were affected. There was about a hundred of us in this room.

[00:08:36.00] This was down-- you probably know the area well-- this was on Broadway. Broadway and Eighth or Ninth at the old-- that green building down there with the big gold clock on it. They had taken over the bottom floor as the induction center for Southern California.

[00:08:56.12] And we were all lined up in there, kind of milling around. And finally said, OK, line up here. And they're hollering all this.

[00:09:04.04] JOE GALLOWAY: They're going to swear you in.

[00:09:04.91] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, they're hollering all this dress, right dress. And we're all saying, wait, what the-- wait, what are you talking about? OK, so we get into some kind of semblance of a line and then they had everybody count off. And then there's a little bit of a silence, everybody's waiting. And then out behind this curtain comes two Marine Corps officers and a drill sergeant type of fellow.

[00:09:26.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, no. They're going to take 1 out of every 10.

[00:09:30.50] [LAUGHTER]

[00:09:34.16] JOHN MACINNIS: And they did the count off. And they said, will numbers, and he'd say what it was, step forward.

[00:09:40.72] JOE GALLOWAY: You're in the Marine Corps.

[00:09:42.16] JOHN MACINNIS: Welcome to the United States Marine Corps, gentleman. Exit left.

[00:09:46.87] JOE GALLOWAY: You weren't-- not one of them.

[00:09:48.31] JOHN MACINNIS: No, but it happened-- it landed right next to me.

[00:09:51.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Right next to you.

[00:09:51.97] JOHN MACINNIS: Right next to me. Right next to me. Now, I would have-- because I was an enlistee, I wouldn't--

[00:09:59.28] JOE GALLOWAY: You wouldn't have had to do it.

[00:10:00.61] JOHN MACINNIS: No, no. No, but it's almost like they knew which ones were which because I didn't see anybody come back out of that curtain. The rest of us went right. And I could just-- and the looks on their faces were like, oh, my gosh.

[00:10:15.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:10:16.66] JOHN MACINNIS: And when I tell that story to people now, they say, oh, they don't draft people into the Marine Corps.

[00:10:22.75] JOE GALLOWAY: The hell they didn't. Yeah.

[00:10:24.70] JOHN MACINNIS: Even in Vietnam.

[00:10:25.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Sure did.

[00:10:26.83] JOHN MACINNIS: It was a heck of a deal. While I was there, I had passed everything for the air traffic control school. In fact, they had a date for me to go to the school, which was at a place called Keesler Air Force Base, Biloxi, Mississippi.

[00:10:43.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Biloxi, Mississippi.

[00:10:44.89] JOHN MACINNIS: The Army needed air traffic controllers bad and they needed them quick. And they didn't even have a school for it. So they split it--

[00:10:54.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Farm it out to the Air Force.

[00:10:56.35] JOHN MACINNIS: Two thirds of it was done with the Air Force in Keesler, a third of it was done with the Navy at Bainbridge, Georgia. And so they-- I got the Keesler side of it. And while I was waiting, I finished basic training. Did fine, even got a stripe out of it, got a rank out of it. And I'm waiting.

[00:11:21.68] I said, when do I get to go-- again, what's going on here? They kept me in this barracks. And it was, for want of a better-- I swear to god, this is what they called it, until your paperwork catches up with you, you're going to have to spend-- they said a few days, ended up being two weeks-- a few days in the alien barracks.

[00:11:43.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Alien barracks?

[00:11:44.62] [LAUGHTER]

[00:11:47.05] JOHN MACINNIS: In the alien barracks. OK. Now, for the first three days-- this is one of those two story wooden World War II barracks, OK?

[00:11:56.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:11:57.13] JOHN MACINNIS: I was the only one in there. And I'd go to eat, and I'd come and go to chow hall and come back and everything. And you know, I kept waiting and I keep waiting. Finally, they come and they talk to me and they say, we have a little problem here. The Air Force makes the rules for their schools. And this should have been handled before by your recruiter when you came in.

[00:12:23.67] He said, you have to have a security clearance to be an air traffic controller. And yours is just getting started. We just discovered that when we sent your paperwork down to Keesler, that you didn't have one. And they said, he's not coming here because we're not going to spend time-- what if you can't get him a security clearance, so he can't be a controller?

[00:12:46.41] So they said, we have some other options. We could send you to some other school that you're qualified for. He said, your test scores are so high, you could do almost anything you want to do. I said, well, no, I want to be a controller. He said, well, how about if-- do you want to go to the WOCS?

[00:13:09.64] They didn't know what I had gone through before when I had told the recruiter, no, I didn't want to fly helicopters. They said, do you want to-- we could send you down to Fort Wolters tomorrow, and you could start in the WOC program. I said, no, I don't want to do that. So I'm waiting, I'm waiting.

[00:13:26.77] By at the end of the first week, I said, find out if they're going to get this thing done. I said, there's no reason in the world-- I'm a Canadian, for god's sake. I said, we're allies, there's no reason in the world I should not be able to get a security clearance. And of course, that's the lowest level of all those clearances.

[00:13:45.85] But you have to have one. It's part of the-- if you're going to be a licensed air traffic controller in the military, you've got to have one. So here they go. They finally, in the middle of the night, I hear all the lights go on. It's 3:00 and I thought, hey, somebody, they actually got the paperwork done.

[00:14:03.43] I'm going to be getting out of here. No, in comes this giant influx of grumpy civilians. This was an artillery unit from Ohio that had been-- they were being called up. They were not--

[00:14:21.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Unhappy campers.

[00:14:22.27] JOHN MACINNIS: Unhappy campers. They were being called up to go to Korea to replace a group that had been pulled out of there to go to Vietnam. Oh, boy, I'll tell you. And so one more week I had to wait there and they finally-- then they sent me down to-- put me on a plane, sent me down to-- sent me to heaven.

[00:14:39.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Sent you to?

[00:14:40.54] JOHN MACINNIS: Heaven.

[00:14:40.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Heaven.

[00:14:41.29] JOHN MACINNIS: To the Air Force. Oh, good god. Now I know why those people would sign up to go in the Air Force and think nothing of it. It was like going to college.

[00:14:52.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:14:53.65] JOHN MACINNIS: It was a highly competitive, great facility. It ran--

[00:14:59.59] JOE GALLOWAY: How long did it go? The course.

[00:15:02.98] JOHN MACINNIS: 18 weeks.

[00:15:03.94] JOE GALLOWAY: 18 weeks.

[00:15:05.30] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah. And--

[00:15:05.92] JOE GALLOWAY: So you're living large in Biloxi, Mississippi.

[00:15:08.30] JOHN MACINNIS: I'm living large in Biloxi. I had my choice. I could live off base, if I wanted to. I could bring my car. I could-- they don't call it a mess. What do they call their-- the--

[00:15:22.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Dining facility.

[00:15:24.31] JOHN MACINNIS: Dining facility. It's open 24 hours.

[00:15:27.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:15:28.39] JOHN MACINNIS: And you can pick your classes. You have-- everything's in blocks and you have to complete everything. And when you do, you move on to the next one.

[00:15:36.56] So you can go to school in the day. You can go to school at night. You can go to the grave swing, whatever you want to do. As long as you can-- as long as you can--

[00:15:43.39] JOE GALLOWAY: The Air Force believed in choices?

[00:15:46.78] JOHN MACINNIS: In choices, yes.

[00:15:47.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Amazing, huh?

[00:15:48.13] JOHN MACINNIS: And it was a shock to Army people. In fact, I'll never forget the first morning I go in to have breakfast and this starched white coat chef behind the counter says, sir--

[00:16:02.96] JOE GALLOWAY: How would you like your eggs?

[00:16:03.80] JOHN MACINNIS: --your eggs. I almost fell over. How would you-- yeah. I would say, preferably cooked. How would you like your eggs? God, some of the things you remember. I tell you, that was just like a-- boom.

[00:16:19.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Thunderbolt.

[00:16:20.22] JOHN MACINNIS: How the other half lives, yeah. And so that was terrific. That was really terrific to go through that. And came out of there and went to Fort Rucker to take all that stuff I had learned and sent me out to, oh, good god, right-- somewhere in the panhandle of Florida, OK?

[00:16:43.68] Had to get up every morning and drive 80 miles to the deepest jungle of North Florida to-- they had these-- whatever you call it-- tactical bases. So it was trying to emulate like what a fire support base or a LZ--

[00:17:05.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Is this jungle training?

[00:17:06.81] JOHN MACINNIS: No, this is setting up the airfield, radar, tower, all that sort of stuff. And then--

[00:17:14.55] JOE GALLOWAY: In the middle of nowhere.

[00:17:15.39] JOHN MACINNIS: In the middle of nowhere. And then these trainee WOC pilots are coming down from Fort Rucker, 100 miles away. And they're navigating and they're flying and then they're trying to land on these pinnacles. And they're trying to--

[00:17:29.43] JOE GALLOWAY: This is chopper pilots.

[00:17:30.75] JOHN MACINNIS: Chopper pilots, right.

[00:17:31.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:17:32.16] JOHN MACINNIS: And then--

[00:17:33.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Which you didn't want to be.

[00:17:34.41] JOHN MACINNIS: Which I didn't want to be. But I had, as I was telling Mark, I said, I have an undying admiration for the courage and the quality of flying ability of the Army helicopter pilot. There's nothing like it. But they would-- what we did, besides watch them land on these pinnacles and do that, there was an airstrip there too.

[00:18:00.96] And we would set up the radar. In the morning, these newbies would come down and try not to kill each other and land these things and get back alive. In the afternoon, the more advanced students would come down and they would have the hoods on, and we would be giving them radar approaches. And so they would learn how to come down without seeing the ground.

[00:18:19.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Instrument flying.

[00:18:20.35] JOHN MACINNIS: Instrument flying. And we would give them what we called a precision approach. And so we were--

[00:18:29.45] JOE GALLOWAY: And hopefully it was precise.

[00:18:31.31] JOHN MACINNIS: Exactly, because it had to be. So we were learning how to do that while they were learning how to fly it down. And so it was great training because that's exactly what we did once we got over there.

[00:18:42.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, how long are you doing this sort of stuff before you get orders to Vietnam?

[00:18:49.34] JOHN MACINNIS: We had to do-- I forget what the number was, but it was something like-- we were being observed with a NCO on the headset, listening while we're talking and grading us and all that. And we had to do, I think it was 100 before we were considered qualified. And at that point, I figured I'm on-- this is like-- I'd gotten there in January, this was probably May.

[00:19:27.50] And I figured, I'm going, you know? I'm ready, let's get this done. And kept waiting, I kept waiting. All my buddies were leaving. They were all getting their orders.

[00:19:38.84] And so I did a little inquiry and I said-- and that's when I found out that because my brother in the Air Force was already over there--

[00:19:50.37] JOE GALLOWAY: They couldn't send you.

[00:19:51.42] JOHN MACINNIS: They couldn't send me, right. Or they wouldn't send me. I don't know if they couldn't. I think if they wanted to, they could have. But anyway, so he ends up-- he had been for, I think, a couple of months at Bien Hoa, and then he ended up getting a transfer over to Thailand, over to Korat.

[00:20:06.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah, now you're clear.

[00:20:08.25] JOHN MACINNIS: Now I'm cleared. So another couple months goes by and I get my orders, told to go on leave. And went home and went up to--

[00:20:18.57] JOE GALLOWAY: This point, what's your rank?

[00:20:21.22] JOHN MACINNIS: I was a specialist 4.

[00:20:23.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Specialist 4.

[00:20:24.36] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, one thing you could do in the aviation branches of the Army back then is-- and particularly if you were in air traffic control, you could make rank--

[00:20:40.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Quick.

[00:20:41.74] JOHN MACINNIS: --quick. JOHN MACINNIS: Reported to Oakland Army Terminal. Shipped up to Travis Air Force Base. Flew on--

[00:20:56.34] JOE GALLOWAY: World Airways?

[00:20:57.78] JOHN MACINNIS: No. No, no, no. That's another little story here. ONA, Overseas National.

[00:21:03.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Huh, I never heard of that one.

[00:21:04.98] JOHN MACINNIS: Oh, yeah. Yeah, ONA. Overseas National. It was on a DC-8. And we went Fairbanks to Japan to the base there. Air Force base that's up on the northern island, up on Hokkaido.

[00:21:24.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, up on Hokkaido?

[00:21:25.77] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, way up north.

[00:21:26.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Good god.

[00:21:27.27] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, there's a big--

[00:21:28.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Kadena?

[00:21:29.10] JOHN MACINNIS: Kadena, that's it. Boy, what a memory. Whoa, yeah. Then Kadena and then from Kadena down to-- landed at Tan Son Nhut and got bused over to the 90th Replacement.

[00:21:41.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, did you have an assignment or were you up to the mercy of the gods?

[00:21:47.40] JOHN MACINNIS: Up to the mercy. I had people looking out for me because they had preceded me. And they had given me a lot of information. Once you get to the 90th, let us know and--

[00:22:02.49] JOE GALLOWAY: We'll rescue you.

[00:22:03.60] JOHN MACINNIS: --we will figure out a way to get you to a preferred, as they called it, a preferred assignment.

[00:22:09.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah? Did it work?

[00:22:11.01] JOHN MACINNIS: Oh, yeah, it did. In fact, I had two guys fighting, saying-- one says, come down. Vung Tau is a resort amongst this war, OK? I mean, it was the in-country R&R location.

[00:22:27.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, if you were stationed with the 9th Infantry maybe.

[00:22:30.98] [LAUGHTER]

[00:22:31.71] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, the guys that worked the control tower, they lived off base and lived large.

[00:22:42.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Lived large.

[00:22:43.02] JOHN MACINNIS: For a war going on, they lived large.

[00:22:45.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Is that where you went?

[00:22:47.25] JOHN MACINNIS: No, no, no. The other side was fighting for me. They said, no, you want to work traffic. You want to come to the busiest Army airfield and the biggest Army airfield in Vietnam.

[00:23:00.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Which was?

[00:23:01.17] JOHN MACINNIS: Which was a place called Long Thanh North. I had never heard of it. Never heard of it.

[00:23:06.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Where the hell is it?

[00:23:07.92] JOHN MACINNIS: It's about 28 miles south, southeast of Tan Son Nhut.

[00:23:15.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Huh.

[00:23:15.72] JOHN MACINNIS: And it's just west of Bearcat and Xuan Loc and it's right on the river about 40 miles north of Vung Tau.

[00:23:26.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Who was it serving out there? What Army divisions?

[00:23:30.84] JOHN MACINNIS: It didn't really support anybody. I'll tell you why. It had been-- after Bearcat got built, which-- Bearcat initially started out as an old Special Forces camp and then it got built up as a heavy lift helicopter, OK?

[00:23:50.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Base.

[00:23:51.36] JOHN MACINNIS: Base, Chinooks, and Sky Cranes and all that sort of stuff. And then they decided, hey, this is-- there's lots of room out here to build another base. So they got Lear Siegler involved and they just leveled everything, 10 miles by--

[00:24:08.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Paved it.

[00:24:09.66] JOHN MACINNIS: Paved it, built the structures and all that. And they called it Long Thanh, because there was a village there called Long Thanh. But the Army put its most expensive fixed wing assets in there. They put in a whole bunch of-- like I said, they had this airline that they used for field grade officers and ambassadors and government officials and all that kind of stuff.

[00:24:37.73] JOE GALLOWAY: VIPs.

[00:24:38.61] JOHN MACINNIS: VIPs. All the VIPs. They had the helicopter equivalent of it up near Bien Hoa. It was called Red Carpet. This was to be the fixed wing equivalent. And--

[00:24:51.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, what kind of aircraft are we talking? Caribous?

[00:24:54.33] JOHN MACINNIS: No. These are--

[00:24:55.26] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:24:55.43] JOHN MACINNIS: No, no, no. These are--

[00:24:56.79] JOE GALLOWAY: These are all nice Beechcraft.

[00:24:58.86] JOHN MACINNIS: Beechcraft King Airs, turbopowered. In fact, two of them were even air conditioned and kept on standby. Those weren't used. They had 30 aircraft.

[00:25:09.30] The two that were air conditioned on standby were for Creighton Abrams and his staff and his people and everything. Come pick me up and take me here and there and all that kind of stuff. And so--

[00:25:20.10] JOE GALLOWAY: How nice.

[00:25:20.91] JOHN MACINNIS: How nice is right. But at the same time, it gave a flavor to this field that just expanded from there. And what they did was they moved all of the Army Security Agency planes-- you may recall seeing some of these back then. They looked like porcupines. They had all the--

[00:25:44.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Lots of antennas.

[00:25:45.14] JOHN MACINNIS: Antennas coming out of them and everything else. And they were the radio relay aircraft. And they went everywhere in Vietnam. But they were all based-- they were based there. And--

[00:25:57.36] JOE GALLOWAY: These the ones that would fly along the Cambodian border picking up signals on the other side?

[00:26:03.59] JOHN MACINNIS: Those are the guys.

[00:26:05.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Them's them.

[00:26:06.26] JOHN MACINNIS: Them's them. And then they brought in even more. They brought in the Mohawks, the 73rd Surveillance. And those are those-- they're built by Grumman. They're big, powerful twin engine-- probably, I think, they were biggest plane in the Army.

[00:26:23.48] The only one the Air Force didn't take away from them. They took the Caribou away from them and they took--

[00:26:28.40] JOE GALLOWAY: The Beaver and all of that.

[00:26:30.11] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, yeah. And they had all-- and they just kept bringing all these things in. And then finally, when we got about halfway through that first year, Lear Siegler had departed. When I got there, even the air traffic control-- this base was so un-Army back then, when they were building it and when the first assets were coming in, that the controllers were civilian contractors.

[00:26:55.73] So when we came in, we replaced them. And they gradually-- we--

[00:27:00.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Went away.

[00:27:01.25] JOHN MACINNIS: They went away, we took over the base. JOHN MACINNIS: We had hooches. I mean, but they were nice. I mean, they were--

[00:27:14.16] And we had-- and as time went on, we had some of the best scroungers in the industry, OK? That's all I want to say. And they were big traders. And they were-- every day, we had-- there was what we call-- we called it the milk run. It was an Australian Air Force Caribou, call sign Wallaby Zero 3. Every morning, every morning between 6:00 and 6:10, he called in for landing.

[00:27:45.73] And he would come in and he would be dropping stuff. Dropping off our Fosters and dropping off other stuff and picking stuff up.

[00:27:54.11] JOE GALLOWAY: And he was your scrounger airline?

[00:27:56.59] JOHN MACINNIS: He was our scrounger airline. And then when we needed something, he would make--

[00:28:01.15] JOE GALLOWAY: He would take orders?

[00:28:02.35] JOHN MACINNIS: Of course, or we would send somebody with him. We would send one of our guys with a list and say, this is what we--

[00:28:08.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Go get these things.

[00:28:09.28] JOHN MACINNIS: Go get these things. And this is what we have to trade. And they would go-- and their flight pattern would be-- they would go from Long Thanh to Tan Son Nhut to Bien Hoa over to the coast. Then they would go up, Cam Ranh, and they would end up at Nha Trang.

[00:28:27.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Nha Trang.

[00:28:28.81] JOHN MACINNIS: Turn around and come back, OK? And--

[00:28:31.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Picking things up at each stop.

[00:28:33.70] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, for them, it was they were delivering personnel and parts and stuff and everything and all that. And we just happened to become very good friends with them. And when we needed help-- so anyway, we got hot water heaters, plumbing, indoor facilities. So we got that kind of stuff out of it.

[00:28:56.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Sounds like pretty good.

[00:28:58.51] JOHN MACINNIS: It was good duty. It was-- if you're going to--

[00:29:01.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you spend the whole tour there?

[00:29:03.43] JOHN MACINNIS: I spent the whole tour there. Now--

[00:29:06.73] JOE GALLOWAY: And extended?

[00:29:07.93] JOHN MACINNIS: And I extended, but they didn't let me stay because I had--

[00:29:16.60] JOE GALLOWAY: You were enjoying it too much.

[00:29:18.70] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, I don't know if it was that so much, but it was probably, at that point, late '70, things were starting to wind down.

[00:29:31.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:29:32.29] JOHN MACINNIS: And they were looking-- if you could qualify for a six month drop and you wanted to go to school, if you showed your intention of going back to school, they would kind of work with you. They wouldn't tell you they could do it, but they would start doing it. And for me, it was easiest-- it was probably easier for me to just follow along with what they were going to do.

[00:30:00.63] I was hoping to get some more experience because I had seriously, in the back of my mind I thought, I'm probably going to-- I've picked up enough knowledge here and I'm good enough, I think I could go to work for the FAA. And so while all that was going on, they plucked me out of there and gave me two days notice and said, you're going to Hawaii. We're going to make you a citizen. Because I was still Canadian at this point.

[00:30:23.22] And I said, hey, that's a good deal. So they snapped my picture and filled out the paper stuff and sent it in. I went to Hawaii for five days, hand in court, drank a bunch of funny umbrella drinks at Fort DeRussy and--

[00:30:41.92] JOE GALLOWAY: And poof, you're an American.

[00:30:44.32] JOHN MACINNIS: I'm American. So enjoyed that. Came back and that was-- I became a citizen on December 21st. I was supposed to stay-- 1970.

[00:30:59.82] And I had agreed to stay until the 8th of June '71. And then I'd be processing-- get out and I'd come back to the States and my three-year enlistment would have been up on the 21st of June of that year. Instead, when I come back, it's like they're asking-- there's a big dust up going on about a big operation. The biggest aviation operation of the war is coming up.

[00:31:31.08] And they're going to reopen two bases that have been closed for years. And they're going to set them up and there's going to be-- they need controllers that can work.

[00:31:43.94] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is in I Corps.

[00:31:45.64] JOHN MACINNIS: I Corps, yes sir.

[00:31:46.84] JOE GALLOWAY: This is Operation LAM SON 719.

[00:31:49.47] JOHN MACINNIS: 719, that's correct. You were there. You know how big it. It was huge. It was huge. And so they--

[00:31:56.98] JOE GALLOWAY: And a total disaster.

[00:31:58.51] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, it was in the planning-- it was-- I have a friend of mine who has written a book about it, LAM SON 719. And Robert's whole thing was--

[00:32:16.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Could have called it FUBAR.

[00:32:18.39] JOHN MACINNIS: Could have, but it was-- with what they did at Khe Sanh, they took what was left. It had been closed for--

[00:32:31.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Which wasn't much.

[00:32:32.29] JOHN MACINNIS: No. And they said they could do it in two weeks. Well, it took them six weeks.

[00:32:39.80] And for the middle part of that-- in March of 1971, Khe Sanh was the busiest airport in the world. It had the highest traffic count of any airfield in the world. 47,000 operations.

[00:32:55.79] JOE GALLOWAY: But it closed down at night.

[00:32:58.04] JOHN MACINNIS: Well--

[00:32:58.58] JOE GALLOWAY: And everybody left.

[00:33:01.31] JOHN MACINNIS: It would-- not the radar operators. They didn't close down.

[00:33:09.49] JOE GALLOWAY: What was the other base beside Khe Sanh?

[00:33:12.40] JOHN MACINNIS: Dong Ha.

[00:33:13.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Dong Ha.

[00:33:14.44] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah. That was the old Marine base. And it was an-- it reopened as an airfield too. All of it under Army command with Army aviation units.

[00:33:28.30] JOE GALLOWAY: So you're getting shipped up there?

[00:33:30.67] JOHN MACINNIS: I knew I was going to be part of-- they asked for volunteers. Nobody volunteered. And all of a sudden, we were having our second meeting, but they hadn't told us yet it was Khe Sanh and Dong Ha. We didn't know that yet. But they just said it was going to be in I Corps and that we were going to have to-- we had our weapons that we had that we--

[00:33:53.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Hadn't fired in a year.

[00:33:55.60] JOHN MACINNIS: We qualified with them and put them away. But I mean, it's not to say that we didn't-- you know, we got-- we got mortared twice a week whether we needed it or not. I mean, there was a chance, enough of a chance they were blowing-- and every time we would get one of these mortar attacks, it would be coming out of the Michelin Rubber Plantation to the south of us.

[00:34:18.79] And a couple of days would go by and they would give us an Arc Light alert and I'd serve roll the antenna all the way up. And here would come a formation of B-52s and they'd blow up the rubber plantation. And there would be no mortars for a couple of days.

[00:34:32.98] JOE GALLOWAY: \$300 per tree destroyed.

[00:34:36.40] JOHN MACINNIS: They would do it. But I was getting ready. I said, if I've got to do it, you know, I got to go where I got to go. And I was going with a pretty good bunch of guys because I knew most of them. And if I had to go to a place like that and--

[00:34:53.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did they send you? Khe Sanh or Dong Ha?

[00:34:59.46] JOHN MACINNIS: I was on the orders to go to Khe Sanh, OK? But what happened was the two days before, we were packing, we're getting our stuff we were-- guys were going over to--

[00:35:13.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Updating their wills.

[00:35:14.79] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, they were going over to the Bearcat and buy some real weapons. They're getting a BAR and everything else they could get their hands on. OK? So didn't want to go unarmed.

[00:35:28.20] And so I wake up one morning, I get called-- this is the day before-- I get called in. This is the 25th of December. The jump off point was-- we had-- they had to go to-- all the controllers had to go to-- and their equipment would be put on a C-130 and flown up the Quang Tri. Quang Tri, they would form up with the elements, the aviation elements that were also coming in from all over the--

[00:35:57.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:35:58.17] JOHN MACINNIS: --all over the country. So they said, we've got a notice here. Your drop has been approved. You're going home.

[00:36:06.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[00:36:08.13] JOHN MACINNIS: I was absolutely shocked. I had forgot I'd even put in for it.

[00:36:12.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:36:12.75] JOHN MACINNIS: And then I thought, well, OK. In fact, this was the 24th of December. They said, you are going home tomorrow.

[00:36:22.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Christmas Day.

[00:36:23.73] JOHN MACINNIS: Christmas Day. You're going home on--

[00:36:25.38] JOE GALLOWAY: And you said you got a drop. What's that mean?

[00:36:30.39] JOHN MACINNIS: I had six months off of my three year.

[00:36:33.43] JOE GALLOWAY: And they were going to cut that off of your--

[00:36:34.62] JOHN MACINNIS: Cut it off.

[00:36:34.92] JOE GALLOWAY: --and let you go.

[00:36:35.95] JOHN MACINNIS: And let me go. And not have me worry about paying back the--

[00:36:42.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Whatever.

[00:36:42.69] JOHN MACINNIS: Oh, when I extended, I took a 30-day leave and got paid for it. So I take the drop, say goodbye to everybody, hurry up and get my ass--

[00:36:53.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Get on that plane.

[00:36:54.84] JOHN MACINNIS: Get on-- that one, I took a chopper. I'm going down to-- took it to Sanford there at Bien Hoa. The Army tower that was on there. And then went over to the base there and checked in. And said you're on the roster here for Christmas morning.

[00:37:15.41] And the plane didn't show up. But it did show up late in the day. So we went to a Bob Hope show.

[00:37:24.89] So that was cool.

[00:37:25.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Get some Christmas dinner?

[00:37:26.85] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, got some Christmas dinner. Finally got on the plane at 6:00 and this one was a TWA. I remember that, TWA 707. Out of there, we went to-- and this was-- we had some headwinds because we went-- I forget where we went. Oh, we went to--

[00:37:49.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Guam? Wake?

[00:37:50.30] JOHN MACINNIS: No, Okinawa first because we had to drop off some Marines that were trying to go to-- so about seven or eight people got off. Okinawa. We went to Wake.

[00:38:01.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Wake.

[00:38:02.67] JOHN MACINNIS: Wow.

[00:38:03.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Been there.

[00:38:04.38] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, Wake is middle of-- I mean, it ain't much.

[00:38:06.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Ain't much.

[00:38:07.92] JOHN MACINNIS: But they got fuel. Wake to Honolulu. Interesting thing was I spent two Christmas days because of the dateline.

[00:38:15.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:38:16.37] JOHN MACINNIS: We left it we left at 6:00 in the evening. When we get to Honolulu, it was about 6:00 in the morning--

[00:38:25.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Christmas Day.

[00:38:25.78] JOHN MACINNIS: Christmas Day, starting all over again. I'd already spent it in country. And we get to Travis and it's-- we're back to about 7:00 in the morning Christmas Day. And of course, there was no processing on Christmas Day. Even the government takes--

[00:38:43.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Takes Christmas off.

[00:38:44.74] JOHN MACINNIS: --takes Christmas off. So the next morning, they processed us out. And this is another thing, when people talk about how you're supposed to report when they ask you did you get hurt while you were over there? Do you have any things that need any medical attention that you need? Blah, blah, blah.

[00:39:06.43] I remember this young lieutenant said-- there was only about 70 of us. Everybody else they had actually rushed them all out to get them out to get them home for Christmas. And they said, if you have any medical needs that need attention, our doctors will be back end of this week. Or you can just sign this waiver and you will be home tonight. What are you going to do?

[00:39:39.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Everybody left.

[00:39:40.60] JOHN MACINNIS: Everybody left. Everybody left. They just made sure they had a paymaster there. And I was shocked because I got money I didn't even know I had coming to me. Because the way certain--

[00:39:55.78] JOE GALLOWAY: What's your rank at this point?

[00:39:57.52] JOHN MACINNIS: I was a sergeant.

[00:39:58.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:39:59.58] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah.

[00:39:59.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Three stripe buck?

[00:40:00.91] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, buck. Because when I had-- you had to be-- whatever they call that rank-- an NCO rank to-- couldn't be a specialist anymore, if you were going to be a supervisor. And I was what they call the GCA chief. Everybody in radar worked for me. So I--

[00:40:20.80] JOE GALLOWAY: You had to have some rank.

[00:40:22.48] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, yeah. And then they asked me if I would re-enlist. They said, we will give you E-6 here in country. Now mind you, I haven't even-- I have been in the Army, at that point, a total of-- when they offered that to me, I had not even been in two years yet.

[00:40:44.62] And I can remember when I was in school down in Mississippi, these Air Force guys were great guys, these instructors. And they had-- some were from World War II, some were from Korea. And they had flown bombers and fighter planes and everything else. And now they had been rifted and they were E-6s.

[00:41:06.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:41:07.45] JOHN MACINNIS: Some of them were E-7s, most of them were E-6s. And I thought, my god, you've got 25 years in and you're an E-6. You know, there's an imbalance. Maybe all that good food you guys have and everything else.

[00:41:24.84] JOHN MACINNIS: Great group of guys. This is another thing about the air traffic control aspect of the Army. In order to get into the program, in fact, you have to have a-- you have to score a higher score than even for the WOC program. You've got to score 10 points higher.

[00:41:49.67] So the academic level or the intelligence level of so many of the controllers-- because the Army wasn't going to send people to these schools in the other services and have them fail.

[00:42:04.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, embarrassing.

[00:42:05.15] JOHN MACINNIS: Embarrassing. And also, they needed them. So the backgrounds of the people that I was serving with-- we had a couple of guys in my unit there that were airline pilots before they-- they were second officers and they had been drafted. A couple of them were college teachers-- college professors. Another one of them was a-- what do you call it, physical therapist. .

[00:42:36.56] Another guy-- I mean, they were all older than me. I turned 21 just before I came home. But I was quite young, but I was surrounded by people who were four or five years older than me, many of whom had been drafted and had taken advantage of that. And they kind of looked out for me.

[00:43:06.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of the leadership in the units you served in in Vietnam?

[00:43:15.57] JOHN MACINNIS: At the officer level, it was outstanding because it had to be. Here's what the Army did. When they went through the first couple of years of the war, '65, '66, '67, and they were ramping up the aviation assets, they just brought controllers over and sent them to the various units. Americal, 9th, Big Red One.

[00:43:47.98] And most of their base camps had an airfield. And these guys were supposed to work the tower. Well, the command structure at those places would take a lot of these guys and say, well, he looks like a mortar man to me. I'm going to send him over there. And there was a lot of problems early on, tragic problems, too, where airfields were not-- where controllers weren't available.

[00:44:14.02] There was nobody answering the radio. They were basically-- like you talked about earlier, the airfields shut down. Not because of-- only because there was nobody to man the--

[00:44:22.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody there to man them.

[00:44:24.19] JOHN MACINNIS: Nobody there. And after a couple of losses of aircraft and losses of crews, the Army said, we got to fix this. So they came up with this-- they took what was 1st Aviation Brigade and turned it into the largest brigade in the history of the Army. 1st Aviation Brigade, when they got through with it after that two-year buildup it-- brigade, mind you. You know a brigade is like 1,100 people, OK?

[00:44:54.64] No, the 1st Aviation Brigade, 28,000 personnel, 8,000 aircraft all in one brigade. But they don't have-- there's no line command to any of the people that they support. Their officers run it. Their officers command their people.

[00:45:12.85] What they did was they went and they took-- this was the first time I ever ran into a West Point officer. I had seen mostly either ROTC or they came up through the ranks or what have you. What they did was they took their best officers that had aviation experience, that were pilots, and that were at least a major or a lieutenant colonel. And they took-- they called them ASDs, Airfield Support Detachments, and they put one at every Army airfield in Vietnam.

[00:45:53.19] And that consisted of about-- it was a very small unit-- consisted of about only about 18 to 20 people. You had, usually, six tower controllers, six radar controllers, two NCOs to manage them, a radar repairman, an avionics repairman, a generator repairman, a clerk, a first sergeant, and a CO. And the CO-- and this is why they were able to attract high quality officers to run these places-- the CO would be known as the airfield commander.

[00:46:29.31] And it didn't matter who else was there, didn't matter what units came in on TDY, it didn't matter. He was the airfield commander and he ran the joint. And you're welcome to come in and--

[00:46:43.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Use the facilities.

[00:46:45.54] JOHN MACINNIS: --but I run this airfield. And once they got that straightened out, which was about 1968, Army aviation ran rather smoothly because it had very good people in charge and it had-- they became very mission oriented. And they were able to support all the various units.

[00:47:15.33] JOHN MACINNIS: The Kiwis and the Aussies, because Long Thanh was-- the area between us and the coast, and Vung Tau, that 40 mile area where the river--

[00:47:28.04] JOE GALLOWAY: That was Aussies.

[00:47:28.39] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, where the river takes those two bends, Nha Be and Nui Dat, they were based there. And they had their own airfield. The Aussies had their own airfield, it was called Luscombe Field. And like I said, they used to stop every day with their milk run going up the coast. But they also-- they talked the Air Force into giving them a couple of OV-10 Broncos.

[00:47:53.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, I bet they did.

[00:47:54.81] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah. And they said, well--

[00:47:59.37] JOE GALLOWAY: At least they could cool off the Fosters.

[00:48:01.59] JOHN MACINNIS: Oh, yeah. Well, they could-- and they could-- they wanted to do their own close air support. I mean, well, not the actual dropping of the ordnance, but they wanted to-- the forward air controllers for their own troops. JOE GALLOWAY: Their FACs.

[00:48:13.78] Yeah, but they wanted a real plane to do it. They didn't want one of these Bird Dogs. They wanted the-- you know the Bronco is one of the-- Cal Fire still flies them today for all their fire--

[00:48:29.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:48:30.00] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, it's a beautiful aircraft.

[00:48:31.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Beautiful airplane.

[00:48:32.40] JOHN MACINNIS: But they used to come in and they were always short. Always short personnel. And we worked out a deal that-- I shot a lot of super eight film flying with them. They would come in and let the tower know, hey, is anybody want to go on a couple of easy missions, as they would call it, easy missions.

[00:48:57.69] And our CO, one of our COs put a stop to it because he said we didn't have ejection seat training. But then our first shirt said, I don't think he would have any objection if we sent you guys up for ejection seat training. So because he's just trying to cover his butt because if anything happened, which can happen at any time in a war, mind you. If you had to bail out and you got killed or something, and--

[00:49:28.24] JOHN MACINNIS: Then it's his ass.

[00:49:29.23] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, exactly. You know? So they sent us up to Bien Hoa and we got--

[00:49:35.08] JOE GALLOWAY: For ejection training.

[00:49:36.13] JOHN MACINNIS: --ejection training. We were the only enlisted guys in there. And I'm telling you, Joe, they were-- we take the class, and they-- we had to give them our air traffic control license, because you have to have an endorsement that you carry with you on everything that you're qualified for.

[00:49:58.33] And so after we passed the class and everything we had to do-- we were there all day-- and so he signs it off and stamps it with the thing and everything else. And--

[00:50:11.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Now you can eject.

[00:50:13.31] JOHN MACINNIS: --and we got to keep flying with them, when we had the time. It was a lot of fun.

[00:50:18.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:50:25.00] JOHN MACINNIS: I was ready to. I had agreed to stay for the extra six months, but I was ready to get out of there. But it ended up-- it was a bit of a shock to go from Vietnam to sitting in a classroom at Cal Poly in, I don't know, maybe 72 hours.

[00:50:45.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. You went straight back to college?

[00:50:48.67] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah. Yeah, my girlfriend had--

[00:50:53.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Signed you in.

[00:50:54.85] JOHN MACINNIS: --got my paperwork and my classes and I got back--

[00:50:58.12] JOE GALLOWAY: What were you studying?

[00:50:59.17] JOHN MACINNIS: Business.

[00:50:59.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Business?

[00:51:00.58] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah.

[00:51:01.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your dream of working for the FAA ever come to pass?

[00:51:07.24] JOHN MACINNIS: I had several opportunities, I really did. And I-- here in Los Angeles, at LA Center. One of my best-- the kid who was the tower chief at the same time I was the GCA chief at Long Thanh North, a remarkable kid. Jerry Van Steenburgh, he came back and he wasn't-- I think he was even younger than me. He was-- I was 22 then, he was 21.

[00:51:36.10] And the Navy was trying to unload Los Alamitos onto the Department of Defense because they didn't want to support it anymore. And so it was going to become a DOD managed-- and they needed a whole new set of controllers to-- and he happened to walk in there one day and talked to the right people and everything else. And by the end of that week, he was the new tower chief, working for the Department of Defense.

[00:52:05.44] And he called me and he said, come on. He said, hey, man, Southern California, Seal Beach. He goes, what's not to like? Yeah. He said, this is easy duty. And I went down there and I looked at it. And I ended up-- I liked the area so well, I ended up moving there. But I--

[00:52:24.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't take the job?

[00:52:25.63] JOHN MACINNIS: No, no. I had a couple of other guys that I was involved with who were going into business and-- the food processing business up the coast in Ventura. And it

was-- boy, it was a good opportunity. And they were financing us. So it was-- put the money together, and the deal together, and the opportunity, and--

[00:52:49.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Work?

[00:52:51.02] JOHN MACINNIS: And all my friends told me, oh, you're too good a controller. You really love this work. You're a natural. You should be doing it. You'll regret it. All that sort of stuff. And I did miss it. I missed it terribly. It's frantic, but it is-- it's adrenaline. OK? And--

[00:53:13.51] JOE GALLOWAY: That's the question is, did you have any difficulty readjusting to civilian life?

[00:53:19.57] JOHN MACINNIS: It was too slow. It was too slow. It was-- all of it was too slow. And so I continued on with what I was doing, but every one of them had a bigger regret-- those friends of mine that went into that. Many of them did.

[00:53:33.91] And Reagan fired them all in '81. They barely had-- they were barely 10 years into their careers and they were all out. And so I missed that, fortunately.

[00:53:47.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:53:48.95] JOHN MACINNIS: I missed it.

[00:53:55.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your Vietnam experience change you and affect your life afterward, for better or for worse?

[00:54:02.28] JOHN MACINNIS: Oh, it sure did. It was-- you're not the same person. You're not. I was lucky being in the place and the job that I was doing. I was very, very lucky. At the same time, I had many friends who were over there that didn't have it as good. And their circumstances-- and hey, even-- we lost, from my class that graduated out of Keesler, we lost four in one day over there.

[00:54:45.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:54:45.36] JOHN MACINNIS: Four in one day at LZ Oasis on Mother's Day, 1969. And that was an eye opener. Controllers aren't supposed to-- and they were amazing guys. They stopped, saved the 9th Infantry's butts because they stood the line.

[00:55:12.66] And when it was all over, there was 60 dead NVA in the wire that-- in front of their bunker. And their bunker was a smoldering heap.

[00:55:24.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:55:36.04] JOHN MACINNIS: I think, unfortunately, it's not remembered enough. It's remembered-- if you talk to people, if you talk to the veterans who were there, we're all proud

that we served. We're all proud that we took care of each other. It's been said so many times, and it's true, when you're over there, you're looking out for each other. That's what you do.

[00:56:05.24] You make sure that your buddy is safe. You make sure your buddy makes it. And that kind of sticks with you. But the war itself, with all the-- even following the great program that Ken Burns produced and put on, which god bless him, he covered all the politics and all the infighting back here and everything that was over there, too. Very all encompassing viewpoint.

[00:56:39.32] But what I don't like is that it's viewed upon as that the Soldiers lost the war. That we lost the war. And that's just not true. You know, you talk to-- I talk to my grandkids and it's like, how did you guys lose? I'm serious, I got asked that by my own grandkids. How did you guys lose?

[00:57:17.66] JOHN MACINNIS: It's very hard. It's really hard, OK? I've been there several times. My wife and I, very early on, answered the solicitations for funds. And we're still-- my wife still, several times a year, writes a check.

[00:57:42.41] But we were involved even before then. My wife is from New Mexico and her mother was born just a few miles from where Dr. Westphall has his property there. And I know you've been there.

[00:57:57.56] JOE GALLOWAY: I have been there.

[00:57:58.29] JOHN MACINNIS: In fact, I was there when-- five years ago when you were the speaker. Yeah.

[00:58:03.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:58:04.11] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah. Because we--

[00:58:04.76] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a beautiful place.

[00:58:06.02] JOHN MACINNIS: One of the most beautiful-- the Sandia Cristo Mountains is sacred Indian country to begin with, OK? And then you put this beautiful chapel, simple but elegant. And you put-- and I don't know if you know it or not, but they're 2/3 of the way construction for the cemetery there now.

[00:58:29.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[00:58:29.59] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, and it's--

[00:58:30.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Going to be a National Cemetery?

[00:58:31.91] JOHN MACINNIS: No, it's the State of New Mexico, but any veteran can be buried there. And it's just below the first slope where the road comes up. And it's a beautiful spot.

[00:58:42.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Beautiful spot.

[00:58:42.89] JOHN MACINNIS: And the governor there-- in fact, when they had the bricklaying ceremony on Labor Day weekend, Governor Martinez, she's no longer the governor, but she-- one good thing that she did is she got the legislation through for the state to put up the four million bucks to build that cemetery. So yeah.

[00:59:11.92] JOHN MACINNIS: It's great. It has to be done. It has to be. People need to be recognized. We didn't get a chance to talk about this, but there was-- I don't know anybody that came home around the time that I did that was treated well.

[00:59:33.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:59:34.06] JOHN MACINNIS: That was treated well. And I mean, just from friends, neighbors, classmates, whatever you want to call it. Even the-- I had a couple of problems and I remember I went to the VA in Long Beach. And they said, son, we've got nothing for you here.

[00:59:53.74] Wait, I'm a veteran. No, we have nothing. No, no, this-- your-- [SHOOING SOUND] --and the American Legion didn't want us, the VFW didn't want us.

[01:00:05.02] JOHN MACINNIS: Have you received your Vietnam veteran lapel pin?

[01:00:08.42] JOHN MACINNIS: I sure have. In fact, when you spoke out at Fort Irwin, they handed them out to all of us.

[01:00:13.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Handed them out out there.

[01:00:14.50] JOHN MACINNIS: Yeah, in fact, they gave us a box of stuff. All kinds of neat stuff.

[01:00:18.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, thank you for--

[01:00:19.06] JOHN MACINNIS: It's on my vest. Although I didn't wear my vest today. I would have.

[01:00:22.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you for coming in--

[01:00:24.01] JOHN MACINNIS: Thank you, Joe.

[01:00:24.37] JOE GALLOWAY: --sharing your story. You're my first Canadian.

[01:00:27.79] JOHN MACINNIS: Well, there was 10,000 of us, Joe. [LAUGHS]

[01:00:31.18]