

Martin, Jerry USMC

[00:00:17.37] JERRY MARTIN: I was born in Peoria, Illinois during the war. My mom was a Red Cross nurse, and my dad was a defense plant doctor. I have a sister who is a vice dean of education down at the University of Miami. And I have a brother who is an inhalation therapist still in Louisiana where our family was from after the war.

[00:00:39.72] JOE GALLOWAY: After the war. Well, what do you consider your hometown?

[00:00:44.04] JERRY MARTIN: I grew up in Alexandria, Louisiana. I went to school there. I went to college at LSU. So at heart, always from Louisiana.

[00:00:58.30] JERRY MARTIN: I was in college at LSU. And I guess that was a pretty difficult time for a lot of us. And my college roommate's father and fraternity brother was a Marine 2-star general. So he had told us, he said, you know, guys, he said, this is going to get worse instead of better. He says, you need to really think about what you're going to do.

[00:01:26.63] So he had talked to us about joining a program back then that was called the Reserve Platoon Leaders Class. And as long as you stayed in college, you were able to finish college, and then you were commissioned a second lieutenant in the Reserves, you spend six months on active duty and then you came back and would spend--

[00:01:47.60] JOE GALLOWAY: At Officer Basic?

[00:01:48.74] JERRY MARTIN: At Officer Basic. And then you would come back to the hometown Reserve unit there in Baton Rouge and serve out the remainder of your time. I got a little frustrated with the whole thing, so I went down and I actually joined the Reserves as a private.

[00:02:05.93] So I was sitting there and the one thing that the Marines were very good about was always keeping tabs on you, and they didn't want to lose you. So I would come down there and kind of help around the office and everything, and a lot of times, sweep the office, you know. And so the sergeants would know you were still in what they called their Poolee group, which means that they would kind of trickle you into boot camp so they always made their quota.

[00:02:32.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:02:34.04] JERRY MARTIN: One day this major came in and he says, who are you? And I told him. I said, well, I'm Jerry Martin, sir. He says, well, what do you do here? And I said, well, sir, I'm waiting to go to boot camp. And he says, oh, really? And he said, well, sit down and take this test.

[00:02:47.65] So I guess it was what they now call the ASVAB. So I took the test, and I guess I must have scored relatively high on it. And he said, have you ever thought about becoming an officer? And I said, well, I think, originally, that's what my intent was. But I said, I went and joined the Reserves. He said, well, don't worry about that. He says, you're in the Reserves here.

[00:03:10.99] I said, OK. And he said, well, you're going to stay in school, you're going to finish school. And he says, then you'll get commissioned. And I said, well, that was the original plan, because I had thought that I would probably want to go to law school. And Chip, a fellow who was my roommate, did. But he was the only guy that year that got a deferment to go to law school after we graduated, which is kind of interesting that his father was a 2-star general and he was able to get the deferment to go to law school and none of us--

[00:03:41.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Surprising, huh?

[00:03:42.37] JERRY MARTIN: Yes. None of the other people did.

[00:03:48.88] JERRY MARTIN: So I went to Quantico, the basic officer's class at Quantico, and I scored relatively high in the course. And there was a very charismatic guy that was my platoon commander, a fellow who ended up being awarded two Silver Stars for heroism, and his name was Jack Kelly.

[00:04:10.14] And he took me aside and he said, Martin, he said, have you ever thought about being a regular officer? And I said, well, sir, I said, you know, I'm really kind of programmed to be a Reserve officer, going back to Baton Rouge, spending time there in the Reserve unit and then maybe going to law school.

[00:04:29.20] And he said, well, he said, you really want to do that? He says, you know, you're going to go back there as a second lieutenant. He said, all those guys that are coming back from Vietnam are going to be first lieutenants and captains. And he said, they're going to make life kind of miserable for you because you're just going to be this new guy that's never done anything.

[00:04:45.93] I said, well, sir, I said, let me think about it. So the more I thought about it-- I went back home on leave, and I went by the Reserve unit, and I wasn't too impressed with what I saw. So I said, I'll take that regular commission, and I ended up becoming a regular Marine officer.

[00:05:04.77] And it was interesting because I had originally qualified to go into the aviation program, and they asked me, do you still want to go into the aviation program? Well, the same captain who was an infantry captain, he said, you don't want to do that. You want to be an infantry platoon commander. And I said-- he said, you can always go to flight school when you come back from Vietnam. And I said, OK, I'll be an infantry officer.

[00:05:27.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, what year is this?

[00:05:29.04] JERRY MARTIN: 1967.

[00:05:30.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Dear God.

[00:05:31.50] JERRY MARTIN: 1967. You're right. So we graduate in 1968. In January of '68, we get out of the basic school and we get to go on our 30 days leave.

[00:05:45.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Terminal leave.

[00:05:46.26] JERRY MARTIN: That's right. Well, I qualified again high enough when they gave us the language aptitude test that they said, you're going to Vietnamese language school. And I said, do I really have to do that? And they said, yeah, you really need to go there because you need to have that kind of a capability once you get into Vietnam to be able to converse with the people over there. And they said, otherwise, you're just going to be out there and not knowing what's going on. Different major this time telling me this.

[00:06:14.31] So I ended up going to language school. Well, of course, in some ways, that probably saved my life, because many of the guys that I had graduated with, 30 days later was February 1968, and they were right in the middle of the Tet Offensive when they got over there as brand new lieutenants, and several of them were killed during the Tet Offensive.

[00:06:35.27] JOE GALLOWAY: I think so, yeah. That was the worst year for casualties.

[00:06:39.72] JERRY MARTIN: It was.

[00:06:40.61] JOE GALLOWAY: I think the Marines alone took 15 or 16 thousand.

[00:06:46.32] JERRY MARTIN: My battalion that I eventually joined was part of the 1st Marine Regiment, and they were the first ones that were sent in to Hue City before the 5th Marines got there. Then the 5th Marines came in, reinforced them, and then the 5th Marines took over the rest of the battle. So many of these guys became casualties very early, but I was able to go to language school, you know, chomping at the bit.

[00:07:08.63] JOE GALLOWAY: That was what, six months?

[00:07:10.55] JERRY MARTIN: No. No. It was a short course. It was an abbreviated short course, high intensity. We could only speak English-- I mean, only speak Vietnamese. They wouldn't even let us speak English at all in the course. And I never will forget there was this fellow by the name of Bill Green. And Bill was from Massachusetts, and he had the toughest time trying to learn Vietnamese because of his Boston accent.

[00:07:34.64] And we had a major by the name of Lee. And Major Lee had been a real hero in the Korean War, had been awarded the Navy Cross for heroism in the Korean War. And he was a Chinese-American. And he was just one of those guys that, I mean, everything was by the book. And I remember he came in one morning and the major greeted us and said good morning to us in Vietnamese.

[00:08:02.51] And of course, Bill was having trouble with the language. And when the major said Chào anh, dai-uy, he looked at him and said, good morning, sir, and we were drinking coffee. And I remember Major Lee grabbed his coffee cup, threw it on the floor, and broke it. He said, you will drink no more coffee in the school until you can speak Vietnamese.

[00:08:27.17] JOE GALLOWAY: So language school was what, three months?

[00:08:30.14] JERRY MARTIN: It was about eight weeks.

[00:08:31.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Eight weeks.

[00:08:32.97] JERRY MARTIN: So I look at my orders, getting ready to go to Vietnam, and I look down and there's another set of orders-- recruiting duty, New Orleans, Louisiana, temporary for officer selection.

[00:08:53.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Not bad.

[00:08:55.48] JERRY MARTIN: So here I-- I said, gosh. I get out of language school, they send me down to New Orleans. I'm at the-- there at the customs house on Canal Street going around to all the colleges and trying to talk young guys into becoming Marine lieutenants. Get to Tulane, set up our A-frame. And Tulane is one of those schools a lot like the Ivy League schools, but in the South.

[00:09:23.34] And I'm standing there and I'm in my dress blue uniform trying to get people interested and had people keep coming by and looking at the display. And the next thing I see all these young girls coming up. Well, as a young Marine, you know, bachelor, I said, well, this could be a very interesting day.

[00:09:43.74] Well, they distract me. And of course, that was easy to do back then as a young guy. And the next thing I noticed is all these trash cans have been moved around the table. And the next thing I know, these trash cans are on fire.

[00:10:00.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, Lord.

[00:10:01.26] JERRY MARTIN: These girls had actually set the trash cans on fire. I said, this is not going to work.

[00:10:05.97] JOE GALLOWAY: This ain't working.

[00:10:06.96] JERRY MARTIN: So I just walked over, pulled the fire alarm. Of course, the fire trucks come up, they clear the student union. I go back and I tell my boss, who at this time was a guy named Terry Terrebonne, who had been a quarterback for Tulane University. In fact, Terrebonne Parish in Louisiana is named after some of his ancestors. And I said, Captain Terrebonne, I said, I really need to go to Vietnam. He says, well, he says, you know, he says, your time's almost up here.

[00:10:35.22] But I've been dating a girl at this time back in Virginia. Back in-- she lived in Manassas. So I called her up and told her, I said, you know, I'm getting ready to finish this. I could probably head back up to see you in Virginia. And it's her roommate I'm talking to and not her. And I said, well, where is she? Oh, she's out with this Marine captain who's an aviator. I said, what?

[00:11:02.64] So I call back and I get her on the phone later on, and I said, where have you been? I said, I thought we had something going. She said, well, no, not really. She said, you went down there recruiting. There was no promise or anything. I said, well, I'll tell you what, I said, if you're serious about this, you fly down here and I'll marry you, thinking that was the end of the story.

[00:11:33.84] A little bit later, I get a call back. I'm on flight so-and-so. I'll see you at 10 o'clock in the morning. I said, well, now what do I do? So she ends up coming down there and we end up getting married by the justice of the peace.

[00:11:50.78] JOE GALLOWAY: How many years now?

[00:11:52.92] JERRY MARTIN: Not even six months.

[00:11:54.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Not even six months on that what, huh?

[00:11:55.84] JERRY MARTIN: Not even six months. That's right, we've been going together since November. This is, I guess, May. Yeah, May.

[00:12:04.20] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:12:04.68] JERRY MARTIN: May 1969.

[00:12:05.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, is this the wife you still have?

[00:12:08.43] JERRY MARTIN: 48 years. 48 years we've been married.

[00:12:11.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Outstanding.

[00:12:13.02] JERRY MARTIN: So then I said, well, gosh, looks like I'm going to Vietnam finally. I get to California, check into Camp Pendleton. And they said, Lieutenant, you're going to be a staging company commander. I said, I'm a lieutenant, sir. He says, well, he says, we got these guys and we've got to train them. They've got to go through jungle warfare school. They've got to go through introduction to the M16 rifle. He said, it's going to be about 30 days before you get to Vietnam.

[00:12:45.79] I said, 30 days? I said, sir, I got married five days ago. This is like the 5th of November-- or May, because I got married on the 1st of May. He said, well, I'll see what I can do. I'll see if I can somehow get you over there.

[00:12:59.77] The next day, he comes back and he says, well, he says, I can get you over there in about two or three weeks. But he says, not any sooner than that. He says, you've got to go through this staging company. And he said, but there's a guy who will come in. You'll be his executive officer rather than the CO. I said, great. I said, if that's going to help me get over there to get into this war.

[00:13:20.74] You know, I'm seeing my friends over there at that point in my life. And of course, it's '68. You don't know how long the war is going to last. So every lieutenant in the Marine Corps wanted to go. I'm sure just like the guys nowadays that are infantry guys. And you didn't want the war to end. Of course, it wasn't going to end for quite some time. But we didn't know that.

[00:13:40.66] JOE GALLOWAY: It would outlast us all.

[00:13:42.31] JERRY MARTIN: It did and will. You're absolutely right. So I ended up taking over as the XO to a staging company, 200 young recruits getting ready to go to Vietnam, which was a good thing, because it gave me an introduction to small unit leadership, working with young people. And really, the first opportunity to see somebody shot.

[00:14:04.09] And we were out on the rifle range, and we were familiarizing ourselves with the M16 rifle. And this young guy, I could see the gunnery sergeant just chewing his rear end out about something. And I walked over there and I said, Gunny, I said, what's going on here? He said, well, this maggot doesn't want to go to Vietnam. He says he wants out of the Marine Corps.

[00:14:29.65] And I said, well, I said, there's probably a lot of young guys that want out of the Marine Corps now when they realize, you know, that they are going there. He said, no, he said this guy says that he wants to get out. And I said, well, I said, go ahead and just kind of-- just play it by ear, just kind of let it settle down. Let's go through this fam-firing. And I said, then we'll have him talk to the chaplain when we get back.

[00:14:53.32] Well, the next thing I know is there's this bang. And I look over there and here's this guy laying on the ground and the gunny standing over him.

[00:15:04.37] JOE GALLOWAY: He shot his foot.

[00:15:05.42] JERRY MARTIN: Shot himself in the foot. And the gunny's looking down at him, he says, now, what are you going to do, die? And I said, Gunny, I said that's not-- that's not what I want to hear. He said, well, he says, Lieutenant, he says, I guess I'll call for a jeep. I said-- and I see blood spurting out of this guy's foot and that. And I said, I don't think that's what we want to do. I said, I really think we need a medevac out here.

[00:15:29.33] So they call in a helicopter and the gunny says, I got it. You go with this guy to the hospital. So they stick him in the helicopter, I go with him to the hospital and check him in to the ER, and that's the last I see him. So I don't know whether he went to Vietnam or not.

[00:15:48.05] JOE GALLOWAY: If he did he was limping.

[00:15:49.49] JERRY MARTIN: Yes, he was limping. But that was my introduction to medvacs, and it happened--

[00:15:57.82] JOE GALLOWAY: And where was this?

[00:15:59.01] JERRY MARTIN: This is Camp Pendleton. Camp Pendleton, California. Right. So finally they tell us that we're going to go to Vietnam and it's going to be a week or so early.

[00:16:14.31] JERRY MARTIN: So we get on the airplane, I guess it's the 29th or so of May, and we get over there and then we land in Da Nang.

[00:16:22.05] JOE GALLOWAY: 29th of May '68.

[00:16:25.06] JERRY MARTIN: '68, right.

[00:16:26.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Missed Tet.

[00:16:27.30] JERRY MARTIN: Missed Tet. Totally missed Tet. So I get to the 1st Marine Division. And the 1st Marine Division is where I had been assigned, and they were down around the Da Nang area of I Corps. And I check in and they took us all, gave us a quick briefing, and then told us that we were going to be sent to different regiments. And I pulled the 1st Marine Regiment.

[00:16:58.84] Having no idea where the 1st Marine Regiment was, I just kind of went along with the flow. You know, they put you in a jeep, they took you someplace. And a lot of these guys are going to chow and they're going off in different parts. And I'm sitting there, and I said, where's the 1st Marine Regiment? And they said, well, you'll be getting on a helicopter to go up to Hue. I said, to Hue? I said, is that the place they had the big battle? And they said, yeah, because the 1st Marines are up there and they're really short of lieutenants right now.

[00:17:27.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Huh, wonder why.

[00:17:28.27] JERRY MARTIN: So I get to Hue, get off the helicopter. They take me into the regimental headquarters, and there's this very picturesque Marine colonel that meets me in his office, and his name is Colonel English. I'll never forget. I mean, just razor sharp guy.

[00:17:47.09] And he says, Lieutenant, welcome to the 1st Marines. I said, well, thank you, sir. And the sergeant major is standing there next to him. He says, you know, he says, you have the opportunity to go to any one of the regiments that we have in the 1st Marines. He said, you can go to 1-1, you can go 2-1 or you can go to 2-3.

[00:18:06.22] Well, I had just learned all the battalions that were in regiments, and that was supposed to have been 1-1, 2-1, and 3-1. So I said, 2-3, sir? He said, good choice, Lieutenant. Sergeant Major, show him out. So I was assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marines, which at that time was under the operational control of the 1st Marine Regiment because 2-3 was the special landing force that was really kind of this firefighting unit that-- where there was a real problem, they would stick that battalion in there.

[00:18:39.58] So I said, where's 2-3? And the sergeant major looked at me and says, well, he says you're going to have to take another helicopter ride, Lieutenant. I said, they're not here in

Hue? He says, no. He says, you'll be getting on a helicopter and they'll be taking you up to Khe Sanh.

[00:18:57.46] I said, Khe Sanh? Where they had the siege? He said, yes. He says, that's where the battalion is. They're up there right now outside because we're in the process of having the guys who were in Khe Sanh withdraw. And so it's their withdrawal from the combat base at Khe Sanh.

[00:19:18.91] JOE GALLOWAY: They're cover.

[00:19:19.81] JERRY MARTIN: And they're covering it. So I get on a helicopter, they dropped me off this little place called LZ Hawk. And I get off the helicopter and all I see are these burned up packs. I mean, they're just charred. There's blood spattered canteens. There's blood spattered packs. There's just rifles laying in big piles.

[00:19:44.80] And I looked at this guy and I said, what's all this? He says, well, he says, I guess you're going to Fox Company. I said, well, they didn't tell me where I was going. He says, well, no, the battalion commander says you're going to Fox Company. And I said, really? I said, OK, where is Fox Company? He said, well, they're right over there on that other hill. He said, we'll take you over there when we get a chance.

[00:20:11.59] And I said, what's going on? What's all this stuff? He said, well, that's all from the casualties of Fox Company. I said, the casualties of Fox Company? He said, oh yeah, by the way, you might want to get a couple more of those canteens out of all that medevac stuff, he says, because I noticed you've only got one canteen. You're going to need more than one to be out here in the bush.

[00:20:33.07] So I kind of go through all this stuff, and there's like blood, dried blood on it. You know, I'm brushing off dirt and I'm brushing off charred pieces of cloth and that, and I find two canteens. And I finally get it. And I said, OK, what do I do now? He says, well, you're going to be taking the mail out with you. So they give me this big, red mailbag, put me on a helicopter, and they drop me down on this ridge line.

[00:21:00.58] And I get there and I look around, and all these guys have that thousand yard stare. And the company gunnery sergeant, a guy by the name of Larsen comes out, and he said, who are you? I said, I'm the new lieutenant. And he said, oh, well, he said, we got a deal for you. He said, you can go to any one of the platoons you want. He said, but you might want to meet the company commander first. And I said, where's the company commander? He said, well, he's up there. You're going to have to walk up the hill.

[00:21:34.02] So I get up there and there's this tall, thin lieutenant up there, and he's wearing just a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, nothing else. And he said, hi, I'm Jim Jones. And it's the same Jim Jones that later on became Obama's--

[00:21:51.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Senator Jones?

[00:21:52.38] JERRY MARTIN: No, Obama's national security advisor, and he becomes a 4-star general later on, commandant of the Marine Corps, and also becomes the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe before he becomes--

[00:22:05.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Terrific Marine.

[00:22:06.90] JERRY MARTIN: Fantastic guy. And so he sticks out his hand and he said, hi, I'm Jim. And I said, I'm Jerry. And of course, you know, I've got all brand new gear on. I've got my chin strap tightened down. And I mean, the stuff is so new I'm sure it probably still smells like the States.

[00:22:24.60] So Jones looks at me and he said, well, Jerry, he said, just kind of relax. He said, you might want to get rid of that gas mask. He says, I don't think you'll be using that here. And he said, you know, he said, you take-- undo your chin strap. He said, you don't have to have it buttoned all the time. And he said, the flak jacket, he says, you can unbutton the flak jacket too. He said, right now we're kind of just rebuilding and we're recuperating.

[00:22:51.96] I said, recuperating? He said, yeah. He said, we had a pretty bad fight a couple of days ago. And later on, it was known as the Battle of Foxtrot Ridge, where an NVA regiment had attacked this company.

[00:23:07.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, Lord.

[00:23:08.88] JERRY MARTIN: And they'd killed 235 of the NVA, but they had-- we had over 60 casualties in Fox Company. And all the lieutenants, except for Jim, had been casualties. So he said, well, he said, we'll figure out where you're going to be assigned here in a couple of minutes.

[00:23:30.25] So after a while, I see this one sergeant coming up, and he said, lieutenant, he says, you're going to be with me in 2d Platoon. I said, 2d Platoon? He said, yeah, 2d Platoon. So Jim said, he said, you know, he says, I'm only here temporarily because they had me fill in when the real company commander went on R&R. So Jim had fought this whole battle as just a temporary company commander, and had done a fantastic job and was later awarded the Silver Star for that particular action.

[00:24:04.49] And so when I get down there, you know, I see all these guys, they're all looking at me saying, you know, oh hell, here's the new lieutenant.

[00:24:11.47] JOE GALLOWAY: New lieutenant.

[00:24:12.37] JERRY MARTIN: And so I found out later on that the reason it took a while for me to find out what platoon I was going to, is the sergeants had all been down there and they all flipped a coin, and the odd man got the lieutenant. So I end up being the lieutenant, the only lieutenant in the company until some of the casualties started coming back.

[00:24:35.89] But it worked out well because I listened to these guys and I listened to the sergeants, and they really kept me out of trouble. We went on operation, and I remember one

time I wanted to pick up what I thought was a war souvenir, and this one young sergeant grabbed me by the shoulder and said, lieutenant, we don't do that. And the next thing I know, the EOD guy is coming over and blowing up this thing because it was booby trapped.

[00:25:01.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:25:02.47] JERRY MARTIN: So by not being that overbearing lieutenant that had all the answers and just kind of went along with the flow and let them teach me, I'm sure that's why I survived.

[00:25:20.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Were you assigned to I Corps the whole time?

[00:25:24.29] JERRY MARTIN: I was. And I was on--

[00:25:27.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Quang Tri, Khe Sanh.

[00:25:29.33] JERRY MARTIN: Quang Tri, Khe Sanh, Cam Lo, Rockpile, all of those. All the way over to, I guess, was it the Route One, "Street without Joy" In fact, the real first operation that I was on, that was a significant operation, was NAPOLEON/SALINE. And NAPOLEON/SALINE took us over to where the marines had fought in May at a place called Dai Do, which had been a horrendous battle.

[00:25:57.02] And this guy Bill Green, who I told you about, the guy who was with me in language school, was awarded a Silver Star for action, and his company commander had received the Medal of Honor for it. So Bill was evac'ed out. Bill was seriously wounded. And fortunately, Bill never had to worry about speaking Vietnamese, but he did have one heck of an introduction to Vietnam when he got there, and ended up fighting all through the Battle of Dai Do.

[00:26:29.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you just did the one tour.

[00:26:31.19] JERRY MARTIN: I did.

[00:26:32.00] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. Now, you were in a Marine combat company.

[00:26:38.45] JERRY MARTIN: I was. I later became the company commander.

[00:26:40.67] JOE GALLOWAY: You became company commander.

[00:26:41.60] JERRY MARTIN: As a first lieutenant.

[00:26:42.89] JOE GALLOWAY: You-- you ran that outfit then. What was a typical day like?

[00:26:49.07] JERRY MARTIN: Well, you know--

[00:26:49.91] JOE GALLOWAY: There weren't typical days.

[00:26:51.17] JERRY MARTIN: No, and you've heard over and over again that it was hours and weeks of boredom and then minutes of sheer terror. Of sheer terror. And I can remember when I was made the company commander. We had lost the company commander. He'd been promoted to major. And so they took him out of the battalion. And we didn't really have any O3 captains at that time who were not already company commanders.

[00:27:26.56] And perhaps because of my longevity and the fact that I had done, I guess, a relatively decent job, the colonel said, Martin, you're going to be the company commander, which was good because I knew all the guys in the company. I knew all the sergeants. You know, I'd worked with the sergeants and the lieutenants, some of the young lieutenants that I had. And they were brand new lieutenants, and so I felt that I kind of helped them learn what it was all about.

[00:27:54.62] So I stayed company commander for a couple of months. I was wounded in August. In fact, today's the day, this is the anniversary, 48 years ago, that I was wounded, on the 15th of August 1968.

[00:28:09.73] JOE GALLOWAY: What kind of wound? Where?

[00:28:11.14] JERRY MARTIN: Well, I was shot in the arm. In fact, I think in my citation it talks about that. We'd been ambushed, and I was still the senior platoon commander at that time. And we got ambushed and we were crossing a river and I took three bullets in my rifle as we were crossing the river. And all five of us in the lead group of guys. And of course, you may remember I said something about my battalion commander who was this guy who expected you to be able to walk point just like he had once done.

[00:28:48.79] I had decided that day to be up with my point fire team. And so I was like number six back in this patrol. But there was a reason for it. I mean, it wasn't totally reckless in that regard. We had a relatively new company commander at that time, this guy that I was telling you about that later on would end up leaving the battalion.

[00:29:12.49] And we had been given the assignment of going into this area north of Cam Lo resettlement village in I Corps, where they had heard intelligence reports that there was an NVA unit coming down out of the DMZ. So they wanted us to locate them.

[00:29:35.77] Well, the company commander had decided that the easiest way to get there was to walk through this draw, which I did not want to do. Having been there now for several months and had been in several firefights and that, the idea of walking through a draw with high ground on both sides was not something I wanted to do. And I protested. I said, Skipper, I said, I don't think this is a good idea. I don't really think we should do this.

[00:30:05.91] He said, well, he says, I don't care. He said, the battalion commander says we have to be somewhere at a certain time, and that's what we're going to do. I said, well, can I at least send flank security out and secure both sides before we take the main column through this draw? He said, we don't have time to do that.

[00:30:26.20] I said, sir, I said, I really don't think this is the way we should do this. He said, well, he says, I've already told you, it's got to get done. Just do it. So that's when I decided that I was going to be up there at the front with my guys.

[00:30:38.84] We hadn't gone too far before a sniper shot one of the guys. And I got over to him and he'd been shot right below the navel and above the groin. And I remember getting to him and I said, you're going to be OK. You're going to be OK. And he didn't seem overly stressed out. And I remember the first thing he said, he says, is everything still down there? I said, you're fine. You're going to be all right.

[00:31:06.87] So the corpsman gave him a morphine shot and I told the company commander at that time, I said, I really think we need to do something about this high ground. And he said, just go. He said, that was a sniper, it's taken care of. He says, that's just one of those kind of things that-- it's harassing. Well, we got into the river, all five of us, and crossing the Cam Lo River, and then all these automatic weapons opened up on us. And every one of us was hit right away.

[00:31:41.92] And I had had pieces of bullet go into my chest. Really, pieces of bullet and rifle because my rifle literally exploded when I took these three rounds. The guy ahead of me was hit in the knee and the ankle. And the guy behind me was hit. And so we were able to-- I guess what saved my life is when I got hit, I was thrown back and I was literally under the water, and I decided that I was going to swim under the water rather than stand up again.

[00:32:12.43] So I got to the bank and the other guys are on the bank at that time. But of course, I mean, we're just being just pounded with automatic weapons fire. And the other guys, the captain and the rest of the companies on the other side, the friendly side of the river, and here we are on the bad guy side of the river. And I remember my radio operator, a young guy by the name of Gentry, just a tremendously brave Marine, said, we've got to get Harris.

[00:32:42.58] And Harris was the kid that was shot so bad, and he had been able to crawl up on the bank. But he was right in the middle of this field where these rounds were impacting all over him. And for some reason, there was a corpsman with us, and I don't even remember the corpsman being with us. So he may have come across the river when he knew we were hit. But his name was Bean, and I'll never forget Doc Bean.

[00:33:09.22] And he got there, and Gentry, this kid, later on who received two Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts said, Doc, we've got to go get Harris. And Bean says, I'm not going. He says, look at all those rounds up there. He said, we'll get killed. And Gentry said, we're getting Harris. And Bean said, no, we're not. He says, I'm not going up there. He says, we'll wait till the fire subsists. And Gentry said, the fire is not going to subsist until they kill us all. We got to go up there.

[00:33:37.09] And Bean hesitated again, and I remember Gentry pulled out a .45, cocked it, and he said, Doc, he said, is it me or them? And so they went up there and pulled Harris back. And I could see where the fire was coming from, even though I was wounded. I said, we got to mark that position so those guys know where all that automatic fire is coming from.

[00:34:00.02] So I had a smoke grenade, and I was getting ready to go up and throw the smoke grenade. And this kid, Gentry, even though he was wounded, knocked me down. Literally knocked my feet from underneath me, grabbed the smoke grenade. He ran up there and then threw the smoke grenade into about 20 yards from where this enemy machine gun was that was firing on us.

[00:34:21.40] And of course, they could see that where it was, and I still had part of a radio left at that time. We were able to get some word to them that that's where the main fire was coming from. Well, Gentry was shot in the back.

[00:34:34.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Coming back.

[00:34:35.15] JERRY MARTIN: Coming back, yeah. So we finally get there and I said, guys, I said, we're all going to get killed here. We got to get to the other side one way or the other. So about this time, they started putting in mortars, and a tank rolls up, which I don't know where the tank came from. But we were very close to Route 9, and there was a Seabee rock crusher not too far from where this whole thing took place. And I think probably--

[00:35:05.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Security.

[00:35:06.13] JERRY MARTIN: Security for the Seabees. And so they ended up there and they ended up coming down, and we were able to withdraw. But I didn't realize that Gentry was shot in the back, because he just did not give you that indication. And so I waited until I had literally fired all my ammunition covering the guys that could get back, got back to the other side.

[00:35:34.63] And as I got across, I saw Gentry kind of stumbling in the river. The river was only about waist high, and I couldn't tell what was going on with him. And I hollered and I said, Gentry, are you hit? And he said, I'm hit. Well, he got hit a second time in the river. So here he's been wounded three times. And interestingly enough, they never took all of the bullets out of him.

[00:35:58.99] In fact, there was a thing in the Anchorage, Alaska newspaper, I guess maybe 15 years ago. He'd gone into the VA hospital complaining about back pain. And they did an X-ray and there was one bullet still lodged right by his spine that they had never-- they had never taken out.

[00:36:16.53] JOE GALLOWAY: And didn't take out then?

[00:36:17.28] JERRY MARTIN: His whole life-- no, they didn't. Because they said it had been encapsulated to the point where they couldn't do that for fear that they might damage the spine. Yeah. So I mean, those are the real heroes of that particular day, even though they gave me a decoration for it. Those were the kids that should have been the heroes of that day.

[00:36:43.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for me the quality of leadership in your outfit once it was reconstituted, up to battalion.

[00:36:51.88] JERRY MARTIN: I think my battalion had excellent leadership. Actually, Jim Jones was an example. And I think he was well respected, and I think people back then recognized that this is a guy who's got his stuff together and he's going to probably be the kind of guy that's going to progress up in the Marine Corps. And I stayed in touch with Jim. And later on, Jim's uncle retired as a 3-star general. But his uncle later became the division commander of the 3d Marine Division, and Jim was picked to be his aide afterwards.

[00:37:29.11] But I can understand why, because, I mean, he would have been an excellent choice no matter whether it was his uncle or not.

[00:37:36.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:37:36.91] JERRY MARTIN: But my battalion commander, Jack Davis, Lieutenant Colonel Jack Davis, had, as I said, been a squad leader. He was a Mustang and had been a squad leader in Korea, and his platoon sergeant was a Medal of Honor recipient, Archibald Van Winkle. So these are guys that knew what they were doing. There were some guys that were a little shaky.

[00:38:00.73] And later on, as '68 drug on, some of the guys that we were getting, especially the second tour captains, weren't always the best, which kind of surprised me. You would have thought they would have been.

[00:38:18.89] But when I think back about it, some of these guys who were second tour in '68 and '69 had been there in '65 when the personality and the composition of the war was so totally different. They had not been involved with fighting hardcore NVA regulars. And a lot of them were aware of what it was going to be like the second tour. So they were a little bit more cautious.

[00:38:41.77] Although Jack Kelly, the guy who I told you talked me into being an O3 and a regular officer, came back. And he was just hell on wheels his second tour just like he'd been on his first tour.

[00:38:58.94] JERRY MARTIN: Well, I had left the infantry by that time and was an air observer flying in those little Bird Dog airplanes. And if you recall, I had gotten married before I had gone overseas.

[00:39:12.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:39:13.61] JERRY MARTIN: And I guess it must have been about three or four weeks once I was over there, my wife wrote me a letter and she says, I think I'm pregnant. So I guess this is January of '69. In fact, it is January 20, 1969. I get a call from the chaplain. I'm getting ready to fly a mission in this little Bird Dog.

[00:39:39.08] And he said, Lieutenant, he said, your wife had a baby. I said, really? My wife had a baby? I said, well, I knew that we were expecting a child. I see that commercial on TV a lot with that guy who his wife they're Skyping and that. Of course, we didn't have that capability back then.

[00:39:58.91] So anyway, he said, yeah, your wife had a baby. The Red Cross just called and said your wife had a baby. And I said, really? What is it, boy or girl? Because that was before they did all of the telling you if your pregnancy was a boy or a girl. And he says, I'll tell you when you come back. I said, I'm getting ready to launch on a mission. What if I don't come back? He said, well, then it won't make any difference, will it?

[00:40:27.89] So I ended up flying that mission that day for two-and-a-half hours and never knew that I had a son until I'd finished flying that mission in January of '69. And that's the thing, you talk about Vietnam veterans, and there is no stereotype for a Vietnam veteran. And I found that same thing about chaplains. There's no stereotype for chaplains either. And this guy was just weird.

[00:40:54.92] I remember we had a memorial service and his sermon that day, he read the words to the song "What's it all About, Alfie." And I remember us all shaking our head, and here is the memorial service for these three guys who had just gotten killed, their Huey helicopter had been shot down and they were all killed. And I remember we all just kind of turned around and walked away and said, what is that? But that's the way this guy was.

[00:41:28.65] JERRY MARTIN: I had quite a bit of contact with the Vietnamese for a while.

[00:41:32.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:41:34.36] JERRY MARTIN: Even though there was a program down in the southern part of I Corps that the 1st Marine Division ran. It was called the Civic Action Program. They never really were successful with that idea in northern I Corps where we were because of the fact that there were so many of those villages that were hard core VC because of the NVA presence.

[00:41:59.88] So they attempted to do that with my company when I was a company commander, and they basically fragmented my company with a Regional Forces company.

[00:42:12.21] JOE GALLOWAY: And put in at northern I Corps villages.

[00:42:14.84] JERRY MARTIN: Yes. Place called My Loc Didn't go well at all. The only good thing about it was it was where FOB 3 for the 5th Special Forces were, the forward operating base where these guys would fly into Laos and North Vietnam on special missions.

[00:42:31.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:42:32.88] JERRY MARTIN: So they were there and they gave my company to provide security for them, as well as attempting to take this village that was right outside the camp and attempt this pacification program. It didn't work.

[00:42:48.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't work.

[00:42:49.31] JERRY MARTIN: Didn't work at all. But I got to spend a lot of time with the Special Forces, and in fact, became one of their liaisons. In fact, I remember the colonel, another

colonel, a new colonel came in and chewed my butt out because the Special Forces and these guys they call the CIDG, the Luc Luong Dac Biet, wore these tiger stripe uniforms. I decided that I should look like they did if I'm going to be wandering around the village rather than stand out like the Marine company commander.

[00:43:18.89] JOE GALLOWAY: So you put on tiger stripes.

[00:43:20.13] JERRY MARTIN: So I put on tiger stripes, and I wore them the whole time I was there. My guys, they started turning into cowboys and everything else. They'd wear the little Vietnamese bush hats and that. And I remember the colonel came down and he says, what the hell are you cowboys supposed to be? And he said, you better get back into Marine Corps uniform the next time I come down here. He says, and I'm coming down tomorrow morning.

[00:43:43.68] So we had to switch uniforms again, and I still kept the tiger stripes. I still have them after all these years. So, you know, I worked with them for about a month. But it was a project that never really was successful.

[00:43:59.88] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your general impression of the ARVN?

[00:44:05.13] JERRY MARTIN: The ones that I was with, not very good. However, I knew guys who had worked with the Vietnamese marines and the Vietnamese rangers, and they said they were probably good as anybody you'd expect to fight with, other than your own people who you had had similar training situations with and could understand what was going on.

[00:44:30.74] JERRY MARTIN: Mail, and that was it. I made-- I was able to make one MARS call, which was that you remember the relay radio calls after I had gotten out of the hospital after I had been wounded.

[00:44:44.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did they send you when you were wounded?

[00:44:45.97] JERRY MARTIN: They sent me to an Army base-- not an Army base. It was like a MASH unit down at Phu Bai. They didn't send me to a Marine unit. So I stayed down there for about, I guess, it was about two weeks because the wound got infected more than anything else.

[00:45:02.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:45:03.10] JERRY MARTIN: Cellulitis and everything, and so that was the worst part of it. I mean, I still have little pieces-- or my wife tells me that little pieces are still coming out whenever she sees me scratching something. I'll say, could you scratch that for me? She said, well, there's something underneath there.

[00:45:20.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Well, when you were writing home, what did you tell them about your experiences?

[00:45:27.02] JERRY MARTIN: Well--

[00:45:27.64] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot or a little?

[00:45:29.21] JERRY MARTIN: A little.

[00:45:29.67] JOE GALLOWAY: A little.

[00:45:30.14] JERRY MARTIN: Yeah, a little. In fact, if you remember from your time there, the problem with letters is you would get them in batches. You never got regular mail. I mean, when you were someplace where they could get mail to you. And the battalion that I was in at that time, we were constantly on the move. You would get maybe a week's--

[00:45:51.16] JOE GALLOWAY: You had them numbered.

[00:45:52.27] JERRY MARTIN: That's right. You'd get maybe a week's worth of mail. But then if it rained, they turned into papier mache. So a lot of times you couldn't write or you couldn't read what was there because it was just this glob of soaked-- you know, soaked paper.

[00:46:10.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Made it hard to communicate.

[00:46:11.53] JERRY MARTIN: Absolutely, yeah. In fact, I remember I got a letter from my father-in-law one time asking me why I didn't write more. And I remember writing him back and I said, I'm writing, I just don't know where the letters are going. Because, there again, you depended upon those things to get out of the bush. And whether they did or not, you never knew.

[00:46:31.09] JOE GALLOWAY: You never knew. How much news did you receive about the war you were fighting from home?

[00:46:41.54] JERRY MARTIN: You would get that Sea Tiger newspaper that we had. And every now and then--

[00:46:45.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Stars and Stripes?

[00:46:45.89] JERRY MARTIN: Stars and Stripes the Pacific edition, you'd see some of that. But then, there again, like I was saying with letters, so often, if you were lucky enough to get that and somebody else hadn't used it for something else, and you know what I'm talking about there, then you got just bits and pieces of news.

[00:47:07.28] I remember I was really thrilled about being able to vote in the presidential election. And I had asked for an absentee ballot. Yeah. Nixon.

[00:47:20.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Nixon.

[00:47:21.32] JERRY MARTIN: Yeah. Nixon, when he ran for president.

[00:47:23.75] JOE GALLOWAY: You vote for him?

[00:47:25.55] JERRY MARTIN: I voted for him only after he'd been elected. Because by the time I got the absentee ballot, the election was already over.

[00:47:34.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Already over with.

[00:47:35.40] JERRY MARTIN: So I said, to hell with it, I'm still going to vote, and I voted, and I sent it in. Of course, it didn't count, but I could say that I voted because I was only 22 years old when I was there as a company commander.

[00:47:46.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have a reasonably good idea of what was going on back home with the demonstrations and the antiwar stuff?

[00:47:54.96] JERRY MARTIN: But I'm sure that I'd heard guys talk about that, especially-- you've got to remember, a lot of the guys would go to Hawaii on R&R.

[00:48:03.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:48:04.58] JERRY MARTIN: And I did too later. But they would come back and say, well, things back in the States, or the world as we referred to it, things in the world aren't what we remember. And I remember I had this young black Marine. Good kid.

[00:48:24.83] And when Bobby Kennedy was shot, I remember him sitting down and we were eating chow, and he said, Lieutenant, he says, what the hell's going on back in the world? I said, what are you talking about? He says, people are killing us back there in the world. Why aren't they over here killing these people?

[00:48:43.37] And you thought about that, and it's probably the same thing that people are saying now. Who is the real enemy? Are we or they?

[00:48:55.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Mm-hmm.

[00:48:56.00] JERRY MARTIN: So yeah, you were aware of it, but not to the point where you dwelt on it.

[00:49:06.74] JERRY MARTIN: Well, I have to admit, it was mixed emotions for me. I didn't want to leave. But after I left the infantry, I became an air observer for the G2 section of the 3rd Marine Division and had flown quite a bit. In fact, flew during Operation DEWEY CANYON. And I was supposed to have extended. And through some administrative error, the extension never went in.

[00:49:41.69] So about the time that I came home, I remember the adjutant coming down and saying, Martin, he says, you've got to finalize this extension. He says, you agreed to extend, but you never did. And I said, well, what happens if I don't now?

[00:50:05.17] JOE GALLOWAY: You got to go home.

[00:50:06.34] JERRY MARTIN: He says-- well, that's what he said. He says, well, he says you're going to have to go home. Well, when I was in the air wing flying with these guys, your mail was a lot more reliable. So I was getting pictures of my baby son. I was starting to get regular dialogue with my wife and that. And of course, that's all she talks about is when I'm coming home to see the baby and everything, and I'm all for that.

[00:50:31.79] And so I looked at this guy and I said, you know, I don't really think I'm going to do it. He said, what do you mean you're not going to do it? I said, I don't have to, and you said nothing's going to happen to me. I have to go home. So I said, you know, I think I'll go home. And if they send me back, then I'll come back. So that's kind of how that played out.

[00:50:51.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about going home.

[00:50:55.86] JERRY MARTIN: You know, I think back about it, and I remember getting to Los Angeles, to LAX, and having to spend the night there. And I remember I just kind of curled up, slept on the floor.

[00:51:09.93] JOE GALLOWAY: In uniform?

[00:51:10.56] JERRY MARTIN: In uniform, yeah. Because there was no place else to go. And we got there probably eight, nine o'clock at night. I couldn't get a flight out till the next morning back to DC. And so I just went to sleep on the floor. And we'd slept on things like that and worse than that. So I said, it was no big deal. But I don't remember many people saying anything at all. They just kind of left you alone.

[00:51:37.77] So, you know-- and when I got home to Manassas, I felt very comfortable because my wife's family had all been in the Second World War. And so they welcomed me. There was no animosity. They had all been overseas, or one uncle had been wounded in Germany. And his big thing was you're going to join the VFW now. I mean, I remember that was the first conversation I had with him.

[00:52:09.78] And I said, well, you know, Uncle Bob, I said, we can back off on that, right? I don't have to jump into this right away. Oh no, you do. If you don't do that, you're going to miss out on benefits and all this stuff. I said, OK, all right, all right, if that's going to make you happy, I'll join the VFW. So I mean, it was a very positive veteran environment.

[00:52:28.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Now, did you still have time on your commission?

[00:52:34.23] JERRY MARTIN: I was a regular officer. I stayed in. I stayed in.

[00:52:37.26] JOE GALLOWAY: How long did you stay?

[00:52:38.55] JERRY MARTIN: 20 years.

[00:52:39.27] JOE GALLOWAY: 20 years.

[00:52:40.03] JERRY MARTIN: Yeah, I stayed in for 20 years.

[00:52:42.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Infantry the whole way?

[00:52:43.95] JERRY MARTIN: Yeah. Yeah. In fact, I retired from the 2nd Marine Division right before Desert Storm, yeah.

[00:52:50.43] JOE GALLOWAY: So you went right back to the Marine Corps after a little time at home.

[00:52:56.85] JERRY MARTIN: Well, interesting. I had orders to Marine Barracks Las Vegas, Nevada out of Vietnam. And that was another reason why I wasn't too excited about extending because that's what prompted this whole extension thing is when the adjutant came down and said, Martin, you've got orders to Las Vegas, Nevada. He said, you're supposed to extend. You never finished that extension. You need to sign it.

[00:53:21.60] You know, I started thinking, Las Vegas, wife, kids. Do I really want-- do I really want to stay over here for another six months and do this? And so-- but as I'm going home. And I end up back in Manassas. Which is where I went back to. I get this naval speed letter that says, do not execute orders. Stop. Do not execute orders to Marine Barracks Las Vegas. Proceed to Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington DC.

[00:53:55.26] So I go to Headquarters Marine Corps as a lieutenant. I was there for 11 months, wavered my overseas control date to go back overseas, ended up on board the cruiser Springfield, which was one of the last of the old World War II gunfiring cruisers. Ended up in the Mediterranean, and we ended up doing circles off the coast of Beirut in 1970 and '71 right before everything blew up over there.

[00:54:21.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:54:22.80] JERRY MARTIN: So yes, I went right back to the Marine Corps. But 11 months.

[00:54:26.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Good old Marine Corps. Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

[00:54:34.11] JERRY MARTIN: I think everybody who's been in combat has had some difficulty readjusting. And I think the people who say they haven't aren't really being honest with themselves.

[00:54:44.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:54:45.42] JERRY MARTIN: Yes. Yeah. You look at the world totally different. You look at people totally different. You look at the things that seem to bother people and you say, it's not that big a deal.

[00:54:59.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Not that big a deal.

[00:55:01.41] JERRY MARTIN: And the other thing about it was you're with guys who had similar experience. So that's our therapy, I think. You did talk at the bar. You did laugh about stuff, you know. And guys who-- I had this one friend who'd spent an extension over there, and was awarded the Silver Star and the Navy Cross. And, you know, he was one of those-- in fact, it's interesting because his brother was a professional golfer. In fact, a very well-known professional golfer, but he was a Marine.

[00:55:32.34] And he would go around and guys who hadn't had a combat experience, he was constantly ragging on them. And so we'd laugh about stuff like that. And I remember there was this one guy when I was at Headquarters Marine Corps, this young captain. And Marines have this Marine Corps birthday that-- it's a tradition that has been around, the tenth of November.

[00:55:56.62] And so I remember going to this first birthday ball at Headquarters Marine Corps. And this guy and I were in the same office at Headquarters Marine Corps. And he came to the ball and he was wearing three national defense medals. Well, he had been awarded two Bronze Stars and two Purple Hearts. And I said, what the hell are you doing, man? I said, this is-- the commandant's going to be here. And he said, don't talk to me. I'm disguised as a lawyer.

[00:56:30.01] So, I mean, he would do stuff like that. And this other guy, who you probably know, who is also an author, and I were good friends. And in fact, we were air observers together, a guy named Karl Marlantes.

[00:56:42.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:56:43.65] JERRY MARTIN: Well, Karl and I were lieutenants together in Vietnam and Headquarters Marine Corps before he got out. And, you know, Karl was awarded the Navy Cross and Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts, air medals--

[00:56:55.87] JOE GALLOWAY: He's written a couple of good books.

[00:56:57.39] JERRY MARTIN: Oh, yeah, very good books. And he and I have stayed in touch over the years. And I remember Karl and I were at Headquarters Marine Corps. In Headquarters Marine Corps, lieutenants were expected to wear their uniform on a regular basis. And in the Marine Corps, about that time, you were also expected to wear your ribbons and badges on your uniform. And Karl was one of those guys that always fought the system. And I guess maybe that's because he was a Rhodes Scholar too.

[00:57:26.58] And so we were there one day, and I remember this colonel came in. And the colonel was not very well decorated at all. In fact, I'm not even sure he was an infantry officer. And I had my decorations on, and the colonel looked at Karl and said, lieutenant, where are your campaign ribbons? Are you not a Vietnam veteran? He says, sir, I'm a Vietnam veteran. He says, well then, you're supposed to-- and he said it casually-- you're supposed to wear your ribbons and badges, or at least your personal decorations if you have any.

[00:57:58.23] Well, next day he comes by, Karl still didn't do anything. So about the third day, the colonel came in. And I'm sitting next to Karl at this time, and the colonel reads him the riot

act. And he said, where are your ribbons, Lieutenant Marlantes? And he says, I'm giving you a direct order to wear your ribbons.

[00:58:20.14] And so Karl comes in the next day and he's wearing his single Navy Cross on his uniform. And the colonel got upset. He says, is this supposed to be a joke, Lieutenant? He said, are you telling me you have earned and rate our nation's second highest decoration for heroism?

[00:58:43.81] He says, yes, sir, and I have the Bronze Star and Purple Heart and air medal and Navy Commendation Medal with V for valor. And he says, are you ashamed of them? He says, no, sir. He says, I'm getting out of the Marine Corps. And he says, I intend to sell these uniforms, and when I punch holes in them, they cut down on the resale value.

[00:59:02.27] So that's the kind of guy-- you know, you ask about people. Those are the kind of things that you think about and you laugh because, I mean, guys never really took themselves too seriously, at least I hope we didn't.

[00:59:20.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:59:26.98] JERRY MARTIN: I couldn't be one. Yeah, there's no question. I know that I could not serve three or four combat tours.

[00:59:35.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Or five or six or eight.

[00:59:37.48] JERRY MARTIN: Exactly. These guys-- these guys are my heroes. I mean, what they have to do mentally when they try to come back and then somehow integrate themselves back into their family, and then again have to turn that off to go back into that mode that we were when we were in combat, that idea of self survival.

[01:00:03.37] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think the war meant to you and your generation?

[01:00:09.20] JERRY MARTIN: I think it was our civil war in a lot of ways. I watched that Ken Burns series, like I'm sure most people did. And having come from the South, you grew up with the stories of heroism from the losing side.

[01:00:30.44] In a lot of ways, it started to make much more sense to me that the heroism that you witnessed, even though we supposedly lost that war, which I think there are people who would argue that we never lost a battle, that we lost maybe the political aspects of the after effect of the battle and the war itself, I could see that.

[01:00:57.24] I could see what great grandfathers had probably experienced and went through. And that idea of we're not losers. We are heroes. We did what was expected and we have no apology for that. And that's kind of the way, I guess, I've always looked at it.

[01:01:19.79] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think Vietnam is remembered today in our society, or is it?

[01:01:26.15] JERRY MARTIN: Well, you know, it's funny you ask that, because being a high school teacher, I never really talked about my Vietnam experience. But now there are these invitations to go and speak as a, quote, Vietnam veteran. But there again, we'll go back to that civil war analogy, and that is, we're starting to look like those guys at the wall at Gettysburg.

[01:01:53.55] So what we are becoming, in some ways, is that next vanishing generation. You know, I say that because so many of the Korean War veterans were World War II veterans, and they were called back. So those guys are that vanishing national treasure, the guys who were the greatest generation, and most of them are gone.

[01:02:17.28] JOE GALLOWAY: And we're going to.

[01:02:18.66] JERRY MARTIN: And we are too. So in some ways, I think it's not only politeness for our generation and them having us come in, but there's also that curiosity about what kind of people were we.

[01:02:34.76] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on?

[01:02:43.60] JERRY MARTIN: I think the one thing that over the years was the idea that-- Dr. Martin Luther King said it very well. And there would have been a time that I probably wouldn't have understood that quote that it's not the color of a person, but it's their character.

[01:03:04.84] And I remember having grown up in the South and being thrust into a multicultural, multiracial environment for the first time and sitting next to an African-American. And even when I was in college, where I went to school, they integrated LSU while I was actually a student there. And there weren't many African-Americans at LSU even when I graduated.

[01:03:35.17] So to sit and fight and eat, cry at times when somebody was lost that was close to you, with guys who we wouldn't have had that opportunity, was an amazing experience. I remember-- I remember one of the first times I was in Vietnam, there was a young black corporal. And whether he was testing me or not, I don't know. It's obvious probably back then where my Southern accent was a lot stronger.

[01:04:08.29] He was eating chow. And I can't remember, it was a can of something. I think it was peaches, as a matter of fact, a can of peaches. And you remember the white plastic spoons and everything. And he says, he thrust the spoon at me and the can. He says, here you go, Lieutenant. You want something to eat?

[01:04:30.57] And I remember taking that can and that spoon and digging out one of those peaches and eating it and then handing it back to him. And I don't think he really thought that I was going to do it. But at that point, there was no color. There was no color.

[01:04:52.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Everybody bleeds red.

[01:04:53.73] JERRY MARTIN: And it dries brown on your uniform. And I remember the kid Harris, who I helped bring home, was an African-American. And I remember a kid by the name of Jones on Mutter's Ridge. And people used to ask me, why did you become a teacher? Why didn't you become a defense contractor like so many guys who had tours at the Pentagon and at the Office of Secretary of Defense? You certainly had the contacts, but why did you become a teacher?

[01:05:25.78] And I remember there was this kid from Detroit, his name was Jones, PFC. And we were on Mutter's Ridge, and he had one of those old transistor radios like a lot of those guys had, those little ones. And how-- I guess because of the elevation, he was able to pick up Armed Forces Radio. And he was dancing up on the LZ and a sniper shot him.

[01:05:47.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, God.

[01:05:49.17] JERRY MARTIN: And I was the first one to get to him. And so I laid on top of him. I said, Jones, stay down. Stay down until this is-- plays out. And I'm laying there, and of course he's bleeding pretty badly. And he said, Lieutenant, where are we? And I said, Jones, we're on Mutter's Ridge. He said, no, no. He said, where are we? I said, Jones, we're on Mutter's-- I thought he was going into shock. He said, where are we? Where's Mutter's Ridge? And I said, Jones, we're in Vietnam. And he says, where's Vietnam?

[01:06:34.55] And it suddenly dawned on me that here's a kid who could possibly have died that day not knowing where he was in the world, and probably had no reason why. And I said to myself, I said, if I ever can change the world, nobody's ever going to have to go into combat and not know where they are and why they're doing it. And I think that was probably the motivation for me becoming a teacher.

[01:07:11.28] JERRY MARTIN: I've got 11 names on that Wall who I-- they're the forever young in our lives. They've never grown old. And we remember them. In fact, I remember Jan Scruggs asked me to write a story one time. And I wrote it about a kid by the name of Muriel Grooms. And we knew him as Max. And that was the name I think he picked for himself. Because going through life as a Marine with a name like Muriel, you can imagine how difficult that was.

[01:07:51.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Not so good.

[01:07:52.15] JERRY MARTIN: So we called him Max. And Max had been my radio operator for a while. And he was from Maryland, Hampstead, Maryland. And we joined the company about the same time. So we had that in common and the fact that he was from Maryland, I was from Virginia, or at that time, considered myself from Virginia since that's where my family was.

[01:08:17.02] We became pretty good friends, even though I was a lieutenant. Even though you were the lieutenant and you were the old man and sir and all that, you still had some guys that you were closer with, and Max was one of those kind of guys that never asked for anything, never complained about anything. And when he'd get his packages from home, he would give just about everything away before he ever ate anything.

[01:08:42.31] And I remember one day we were on a road sweep down Route 9, down there close to that Cam Lo resettlement area. And he had dysentery, active dysentery, to where here he's having these dysentery attacks, and we're walking down the road. And we've got about a five mile sweep that day. And this guy was complaining about carrying the machine gun. And Max looked over at him and he said, I'll take it.

[01:09:19.04] So here's this guy who's barely able to walk and says he'll carry the machine gun, and he did. And the day he was killed-- he was killed. And his name is on the Wall, November 2, 1968 is when he was killed. I didn't want to carry the radio that day. Max said, I'll carry it. And he was blown in half by a command detonated Claymore. So those are the people you remember.

[01:09:49.85] There was another guy by name of Dale Luster. Dale was an air guy. And the second half of my tour, I flew with guys who had been fast mover pilots, jet pilots, attack pilots. And I asked them why they were flying. And they said, well, we had a choice. We could have gone to the infantry as the air officer or we could fly these little Bird Dog airplanes, these reconnaissance airplanes. So they said, to us, it wasn't a choice. We would fly the Bird Dog so we could sleep on a bed that had a mattress. We could eat hot chow and didn't have to live like a grunt.

[01:10:40.01] Well, Dale was our grunt air officer. And Dale was one of these kind of guys-- had three kids, and he always showed you pictures of his kids. And he went back after he left us as a grunt, back to flying A-4s, and was killed making dummy passes after he'd run out of ordnance and they shot him down trying to save a Special Forces camp.

[01:11:10.12] So those are the guys that I remember, Joe. And those are the guys who are on the Wall. But when I see their faces, I think about them.

[01:11:25.58] JERRY MARTIN: Well, I think it's a good thing. I think one of the things that's going to come out of perhaps interviews like mine is that people are going to see that the Vietnam veterans who are speaking are like the guys that we grew up with as kids. They were the fellow who lived next door. They were somebody's dad. They were somebody's uncle. They may be some widow's husband that never remarried.

[01:11:54.38] And I can remember guys in my hometown that were heroes, and you never read about them until you saw that obituary in the paper that said, was awarded the Silver Star, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross in the European--

[01:12:14.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Battle of the Bulge.

[01:12:15.17] JERRY MARTIN: --in the European theater of operations. But the were the silent heroes. And I think many of us-- and I think one of the things that I sometimes resent is the fact that people think that if you don't wear a jungle jacket and you don't have a hat that says Vietnam veteran on it, that you weren't there.

[01:12:37.91] I have no problem with those guys that wear the jungle jackets and the Vietnam veteran, but I don't think that the majority of us advertise that every day, that we came home

maybe like our dads and uncles did, got on with our lives, and then tried to make the community a better place because of our presence.

[01:13:00.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Colonel Martin, thank you very much.

[01:13:03.63] JERRY MARTIN: I appreciate it. Thank you, Joe.

[01:13:05.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Great interview.

[01:13:06.05] JERRY MARTIN: Well, I enjoyed it very much, and it was great seeing you.