

McCaffrey, Barry Army

[00:00:16.84] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah. Well, I was born in Taunton, Massachusetts. Dad was at war, World War II, with the 92nd Infantry Division in Italy. 17 November, 1942, born. And all my uncles were in combat. They were all in the Navy, Army, Air Corps-- Army. It was that period when the country was at war 12-16 million of us in uniform. I grew up as an Army brat, all over the world. I ended up taking my senior year at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, which was a tremendous good deal for me. It completely overwhelmed me. The kids were so bright and so advanced. And then I graduated from West Point in '64.

[00:00:57.84] I came out of West Point and the Army was at peace and would always be at peace for the rest of my life. 82nd Airborne-- tremendous division, older NCOs that were Korean War vets, and I just loved it. But when I went there I said, no, we're going to be fighting in Vietnam pretty soon. Well, right after we got there we deployed to the Dominican Republic, and it was a peacekeeping operation. It was a huge eye opener for all of us. None of us knew what the heck was going on. We were down there six, eight months. It was actually a tremendously rewarding, developmental experience. At least we left Fort Bragg, where mostly what we did was put on firepower demonstrations.

[00:01:41.80] I was in charge once. One of my major responsibilities was the saw dust and whitewashed sandbags around the bleachers. It was a very heavy responsibility. So we got out of Bragg and we were actually in intermittent peacekeeping combat operations. It was a lot of fun. And then we came back. And I got back I guess it must have been '65, and the 173rd Airborne had just been committed to combat in Vietnam. So four or five of us jumped in a car and drove up to the assignments officer in Washington DC. Because we said with an airborne brigade going into Vietnam, the war would be over in six months and we had to catch up with it. And I actually felt that way.

[00:02:34.00] My battalion commander, Hugh MacDonald, in the 82nd-- a wonderful soldier, battlefield commission from first sergeant to captain in the Korean War-- said, oh, no, no to all us lieutenants. He said, no. He said-- he'd already been to Vietnam, by the way, as an adviser-- he said, oh, no. He said, that's a big country. It's going to be a long, bloody war. And a brigade is just a drop in the bucket. I remember looking at him and saying, God, I used to think he knew everything. Is he crazy? An entire airborne brigade and he thinks that war-- anyway. So I get in there and-- I used to love to tell this story.

[00:03:13.07] And the assignments officer is some old major-- old major, he's probably 32-- and he says to me, he said, McCaffrey, he said, you've already been a platoon leader in combat and you've got a CIB. Would you rather be a platoon leader again in the 173rd or would you like to be a battalion commander? I said, I'd like to be a battalion commander. And he said, good. Well, then we're sending you to the Vietnamese Airborne Brigade as a battalion adviser. It's the same thing as being a battalion commander." So I went home and told my dad, this wonderful soldier, nine years in combat in 3 wars. And he said, you stupid bastard, you should have gone to a U.S. unit.

[00:03:54.53] So I went to Vietnam after a year of language training and MATA training and all these courses as an adviser to the Vietnamese airborne. So I guess it was '66, '67. And then went back again as a company commander in the 1st Cavalry Division in '68, '69. Actually then I went back again briefly in '71 as a-- doing a study trip for the chief of staff of the Army on-- the actual purpose of the study trip was to determine what was going on at battalion level and below in the Army in Vietnam.

[00:04:31.82] There was lots of TV stories about rebellion and mutiny and fragging and all that sort of thing. So three of us went back and wrote a report, The American Soldier 1971. A lot of experience in Vietnam off and on and then half the time-- I was wounded over there three times. A good bit of that time I was in Walter Reed, wounded, or on a Navy hospital ship or whatever.

[00:05:05.38] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I grew up in a military family. And from about the age 10 on I wanted to be a doctor. And my mother wanted me to be a doctor. And I was coming home-- my dad was assigned in Paris, a wonderful Soldier, Class of 1939 out of West Point, poor boy, he couldn't have gotten a college education if it hadn't been for West Point, served throughout World War II, Korea. And he-- I was entered at Johns Hopkins at age 15. And dad looked at me and said, you're too young to be off on your own. You're going to a prep school. So I went to Phillips Andover, which was a tremendous experience for me. Well, I got there-- and I was still talking about being a doctor, and I basically felt that the Army was my family. So I tried to get into West Point on my own.

[00:06:02.98] I enlisted my mother, who got me an appointment to West Point. Dad wouldn't have a thing to do with it. He said that his division commander in World War II, his son and his son-in-law had both been killed in action, they were both West Pointers, and that he would not take part in pushing me in the direction of the Army. My mother had no such compunction. So she and my sister went and actually got me an appointment. And I passed a presidential test, and off I went to West Point. I basically loved the Army. And, of course, I'd grown up in the-- with the example of these unbelievable World War II generation.

[00:06:46.36] One of my uncles, Walt Higgins, was a battalion commander in the 2nd Infantry Division in the Battle of the Bulge. And so I listened to their example. And I'd grown up with-- Dad was a battalion commander at Fort Benning. And I knew the sergeants of the Army. So I was pretty happy to go off to West Point. And then we graduated and suddenly we're involved in Vietnam. And so life was never the same thereafter. I tell people there's a big difference between being a colonel's son and being a rifle company commander in combat.

[00:07:27.95] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went on your first tour?

[00:07:31.28] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, the first combat tour was Dominican Republic. I was probably 22 years old. And then I probably went back at 24 years old to be a battalion adviser. And then I was an old man as B Company commander, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry. '68, '69. I probably was 25 or 26. I still look at that company and the average age was probably 19. They were all draftees. The officers were draftees that agreed to serve a third year.

[00:08:04.99] So the first sergeant, Emerson Trainer, who also would get wounded-- both of us got wounded on that tour-- he was a Korean War vet of B Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry. Wonderful Soldier. By the way, that company still has reunions. Every two years we get together, more than 100 of us. Essentially it was 100% killed and wounded over time. And just an unbelievable, bloody, desperate situation, but we all took care of each other then and we still taking care of each other 40 years later.

[00:08:42.83] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your family status at that time? Were you married?

[00:08:46.07] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, the first time I deployed right after a Vietnamese language training at Monterey, California I was married and had I guess one child. Then the second time I deployed our first daughter second child was born while I was deployed. And, yeah. So I was married. That's why the company thought I was an old guy. Twenty five, and had a checkbook, and married, and children, and a car.

[00:09:15.83] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam situation before you deployed?

[00:09:23.93] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I'd started focusing on Vietnam as a cadet at West Point. Wrote several papers, academic papers, on it. I was very interested in it, and had paid a lot of attention to it. I might have had a naive view of it. But I knew a lot about the country and I could speak the language at a sub fluent level. So when I went over the first tour in '66, there was still a tremendous competition to get to elite units in Vietnam. And I was thrilled to be going. I got wounded twice on that tour.

[00:10:03.26] And between those two tours I went home-- when I went home I thought I was going to be an instructor at the Mountain Ranger School, which I was very excited about. And I get off the plane, it turns out my miserable West Point Spanish was on my record. So I ended up as the general's aide in Panama. I was aide de camp to the U.S. Army South for about a year. When I got to Panama, which was a wonderful year, wonderful old general. Bataan Death March survivor, treated me like a son. But during that year, the country started to change because Tet '68 happened.

[00:10:40.23] And so I was watching. And I was supposed to go to Harvard, two years of graduate school, go back and teach political science at West Point. And I started watching all this unbelievable bloody fighting, involving-- including the Vietnamese airborne, which was fighting up at Hue City, one of their brigades. And so I called the assignments officer, said, get me back to Vietnam. When I headed back to Vietnam by then, the country had turned. '68--

[00:11:11.90] JOE GALLOWAY: By that, you mean the United States?

[00:11:13.64] BARRY MCCAFFREY: The United States, yeah. And so, when I took command of this company, it had all these nice 19-year-old boys, they were in great physical health. There were massive disaffection. And basically, a lot of kids were joining the National Guard, finding a medical reason to get out, going to Canada. So the kids in my company, were this wonderful group of young men. And they basically, I think, when you start talking to them, most of them

had an uncle who had fought in World War II. And they said, shut up and do what the country asks you to do.

[00:11:50.63] So they were almost volunteers themselves. But remember, at the height of the Vietnam War, 14% of the armed forces were draftees, rest of them were volunteers. But I think basically, it was draft-induced volunteers--

[00:12:07.76] JOE GALLOWAY: That's it.

[00:12:08.69] BARRY MCCAFFREY: --to avoid service in the Army or the Marine Corps, in the infantry and in Vietnam. And if you lost all those bets, you ended up in my company. So the country had become alienated. I loved the Vietnamese. I thought we were doing the right thing. But by my second combat tour in Vietnam, I used to tell these Soldiers, look, we're fighting for each other. We're here to take care of each other. We're going to carry out the mission. And-- but there's no attempt to say, as they would have in World War II, the American people are behind you, you're fighting for your brothers and sisters. I think that was gone by my second tour.

[00:12:50.90] JOE GALLOWAY: You-- I'm remembering one of your shake and bake sergeants, Dan Garcia.

[00:12:59.18] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, wonderful man.

[00:13:00.62] JOE GALLOWAY: And I ran into him in L.A. 15 years ago, something like that. And he was telling me about this wonderful company commander he had who was killed in action. And being a reporter, I said, well, what was his name? And he said, Barry McCaffrey.

[00:13:22.04] And I said, Dan, I've got his phone number here. Would you like to talk to him? And you two had a reunion. Tell me about Dan.

[00:13:32.27] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, it's interesting. I'm still forever grateful to you for linking me up with Dan. When you looked at the group of 19-year-old Soldiers that were in my company-- and by the way, occasionally it would be an RA lieutenant, Lieutenant Bruce Brandeis. The first sergeant and I were essentially the only two in the company who were over 25 years old and who were regular Army. And then you looked at the platoon leaders most of them were a three-year obligation draftees who agreed to go to OCS. Then there were the instant NCOs.

[00:14:10.04] And the older guys, the World War II guys, used to badmouth the instant NCOs. We loved them, company commanders, because what happened was they had all these tremendous kids that were drafted, young athletes, good kids, good families, and they got into Fort Benning or one of these basic training outfits. If they're super sharp, they said, you're going to the NCO course. It was a merit-based selection. It wasn't because they had three years of college. It was because they looked sharp in basic training.

[00:14:47.60] The honor graduate and the number two guy graduated as staff sergeant in the Army. So they'd get off the helicopter at 10 o'clock at night. And the first sergeant and I would

start talking to these guys. And suddenly, he's a squad leader or a platoon sergeant of an infantry unit in combat. And he's been in the Army for 150 days. Dan Garcia was one of those kids.

[00:15:11.43] So as I look back on it-- by the way, a lot of them would be platoon leaders, the lieutenant would get killed or wounded, they'd be the platoon leader, had 35 Soldiers in high-intensity combat. So Garcia who went on to become a lawyer and the president of a major health care organization and just a tremendously successful guy, early in life I'd look at him and say, what talent, what courage, what commitment.

[00:15:39.32] By the way, it wasn't complicated combat, in the sense that it was dismounted infantry. It was air mobile assaults, it was digging, and hand grenades, and machine guns, and mortars. And I had to know how to employ firepower, but the rifle company it took dedication, attention to detail, self-discipline. And these instant NCOs were terrific. Thank God for what they did.

[00:16:12.24] BARRY MCCAFFREY: I got there, and I had this sort of sub-- I actually spoke Vietnamese probably better than I did Spanish, and I took three years of Spanish. I had a sub-fluent command of the language. I knew a lot about the customs and the culture, joined this parachute infantry battalion. The battalion commander, Major Luong, was a-- had been in the French parachute units. All the senior officers, it was a brigade, just as I got there it turned into a division, maybe probably 12,000 troops. And they had a culture that was really incredible.

[00:16:50.19] They wouldn't leave a soldier or a weapon behind. And the rule was every one of us will get killed before we'd lose a soldier or a weapon. They were incredibly good. Their discipline was draconian. Their idea of an Article 15 was to beat somebody with axe handles.

[00:17:13.98] There was still an element of corruption to that society. It was unbelievable. The battalion commander Major Luong had a big air-conditioned house, which he-- he ended up as a division commander, two star general in later years. I saw him just before the country went under. And so he lived inside the 2nd Airborne Battalion's area in a big air-conditioned house. And the soldiers lived in what looked like tin roof cowsheds with dividers, with their families, made out of poncho liners.

[00:17:46.44] They seemed pretty happy about it, too. It was just astonishing. But their loyalty was to the Vietnamese airborne, not to a government or to a cause. It was to the division. They were very effective. I learned a lot out of them. They took care of us.

[00:18:02.95] One of my-- their-- of course, we'd all fought to get to this advisory detachment. We were on airborne status. We wore red berets. We thought we were so cool we couldn't stand it. We couldn't pass a mirror without admiring ourselves in it. And the advisory detachment was 100% casualties, too. Everybody got killed or wounded sooner or later.

[00:18:24.51] The Vietnamese airborne was held as a national strategic reaction force. Occasionally we'd get farmed out and be a Corps strategic reaction force. So most of the time that I-- right after I joined them, we moved up to II Corps and lived in some little rice village.

And the battalion commander didn't think he worked for anybody but the airborne commander in Saigon. Shortwave radio, da da da da da, every night taking instructions.

[00:18:51.90] And when missions would come up he'd say, no, I won't do it. Because the only thing he wanted to do was get involved in major battles where he could get kill a bunch of VC or NVA and get a bunch of weapons. And if he did, the division commander or the vice president would fly up to where we were and hand him a huge bag of money and another bag of medals. And then they'd divvy up the money and the medals, and he'd get half of it. And the company commanders would take half of what remained. And the soldiers ended up getting like \$30 and a big chicken dinner. That's the way that unit worked. It was fascinating.

[00:19:35.37] But one of my friends, Tommy Kearns, didn't stay long, five years in the Army, giant Army football player, probably weighed 250 pounds. Just to give you an insight into how these Vietnamese soldiers were. He was in a huge fight up in I Corps They were defending against an NVA attack. They were fighting out of slit trenches that they dug. There was an awful lot of rockets, mortars, and artillery going on in the fights we were in. And he got shot, fell down in the slit trench, and-- badly wounded. And the unit was ordered to withdraw.

[00:20:16.17] They couldn't-- these little soldiers couldn't get Tommy's giant frame out of the slit trench. And so the battalion commander said, we're all staying here to die. And the fight turned into a battle over Tommy's wounded buns. We loved them. Were-- I'm still in the Vietnamese Airborne Association. We have reunions where the Vietnamese flag and the national anthem and these old guys appear in their uniforms. It was a remarkable experience. They were great people.

[00:20:54.04] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like as an airborne adviser?

[00:20:58.24] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, as an airborne adviser it was amazing. We lived in Saigon, and Brinks-- Buis BOQ. By the way, early on, I had two of my-- I was a lieutenant, assistant battalion adviser. There'd be four companies. I'd normally go to the battalion XO. Wonderful man. Major Truong, graduate of the French École de Guerre But we'd go out in the field with these guys for months on end. We didn't have U.S. resupply. We had Vietnamese helicopter or airborne drop supply on operations. So out in the field it was a pretty primitive existence.

[00:21:40.72] JOE GALLOWAY: And Vietnamese rations.

[00:21:42.98] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, my-- before we'd go out, all the officers would do this, I'd give my-- I had an RTO and a bodyguard. And I'd give my RTO 1,000 piastres, and he'd go buy two ducks. And he'd tape their bright yellow beaks shut. And they'd be in his pack look-- with their heads looking around as we moved through the jungle. And then, you know, we were part of the battalion commander's mess.

[00:22:14.41] And so, at night, we'd eat with the Vietnamese. And I actually loved the food. By the way, I never got sick in the field. Ever. The only time I got sick was when I went back to Saigon and get milkshakes or something at a U.S. PX. So we lived pretty brutally. And the fights we were in were all-- tended to be huge battles with heavy casualties.

[00:22:38.53] But when we were back in Saigon, we were living in air-conditioned BOQs, sleeping on nice beds. We had a private mess. We had a bar. We acted like immature jerks out at the Brinks BOQ. We were always raising hell and throwing furniture off the second floor balcony. They finally moved a lieutenant colonel, an older guy, Colonel Lombardi, back into the BOQ so we'd have a den mother to get us under control.

[00:23:05.81] I hate to say it, that was a turning point for me. The Dominican Republic was exciting and fun. And the start of the deployment in-- my deployment to Vietnam with the Vietnamese airborne with these big fights. I suddenly realized war was no fun. The abject misery of seeing people with their legs blown off, and their lower jaw shot off. And so--

[00:23:37.93] JOE GALLOWAY: If I'm remembering right you had a brother-in-law who was killed?

[00:23:41.95] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, my brother-in-law, Dave Ragin, a Citadel grad-- God, like class of '61 maybe, and killed in action very early on, August 1964. One of the first two Distinguished Service Crosses of the Vietnam War. Four advisers with a Vietnamese Ranger battalion all killed in action on a given day. And I remember at that time, August '64, it made front page news all over the country.

[00:24:10.57] And basically, by the way, Dave, another idealistic young Soldier-- the battalion gets ambushed on it's way back into garrison after an operation and were all on a road. Most of them took off, including the battalion commander. And a small number of Vietnamese Rangers, and all four advisers stayed and fought. And they were all killed. So yeah, that was before the U.S. entry. And then I came in after the U.S. entry to the Vietnamese airborne. By then, it was a big war, and there were lots of troops in country.

[00:24:52.45] BARRY MCCAFFREY: I have lots of memories. And by the way, some of them may be distorted. When we have these reunions of my company, we start talking. And some of the Soldiers have gotten histories out, and maps, and they know-- and they'll correct me and my impressions. I had a lot of memories. Memories of the Vietnamese people are good. I love the way they dressed, and I love the sound of their language, and their food, and their kindness. And I remember when I was a Vietnamese airborne adviser we'd sneak away if we were on palace guard and go back in the mass in the cathedral in Saigon, the beautiful young girls in their ao dais. And we'd go have lunch before we'd go back to the battalion.

[00:25:35.28] So I really loved the Vietnamese. And we've been back a couple of times since then. They're still remarkable people. So that's one set of memories.

[00:25:46.63] And then the-- but when it came to the U.S. combat forces as a company commander, and I think I lasted eight months, by the end-- in my memory, I joined the 2nd of the 7th Cav up in I Corps and we moved south to III Corps for the big pending Tet '69 offensive. And we got started fighting up on the Cambodian border.

[00:26:14.54] So for-- the first LZ we went into, I believe at the end of two weeks I was the senior company commander in the battalion. Everyone else had been killed or wounded. One guy

had been relieved. By the way, three of those company commanders, we just lost Bill Lacey, Al Christensen-- we had lunch together every year since Vietnam, once a year.

[00:26:38.74] And-- but it was pretty intense combat. And my probably strongest memory was when I was in trouble, in a firefight, my division commander, who was a-- had come ashore at Normandy as a lieutenant, and the entire division was there trying to keep me alive. It was an astonishing system, the artillery, the attack helicopters, the air-power, F-4 Phantoms with napalm. My division commander would fly in and land in my company and walk over and say, Barry, what can I do to help? And we'd load his helicopter up with wounded and he'd fly out.

[00:27:22.87] So I came out of that company command tour, thinking the Army was tremendously competent and powerful, and that those helicopter pilots would do anything we asked them to do, even when they were certain to be engaged, they'd come in.

[00:27:41.65] JOE GALLOWAY: So you left that combat tour as a company commander-- captain-- with good impressions, even though you were personally horribly wounded?

[00:27:53.17] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Oh, yeah. I mean, it was just astonishing. I used to say-- I had some big battles, but I thought it was impossible for my company to be overrun as long as I was inside the range fan of U.S. artillery. And because I knew air power would come in, F-4s screaming in 200 feet up, napalm, end over end a giant balls of fire, 500 pound high-drag bombs, 175 artillery. I've had a Navy cruiser, eight-inch guns fire in support of me. What I actually thought--

[00:28:35.59] and by the way, these Soldiers of mine, 19-year-old Soldiers, none of them were volunteers. None of them had been in the Army more than three or four months when they got to the company. But they were incredibly team conscious. They knew what they were doing. They were smart as hell. They were a lot of fun to be around. They had tremendous personal courage.

[00:28:56.59] In fact, I used to tell people my biggest concern about the American Soldier was-- and every new guy that'd come in, I'd tell them this. I said, if you're wounded, we will never leave you. Even if every one of us is killed. But we're also not going to rush to get 15 people shot trying to get you out right away. So when their buddies were at risk, they'd take care of them. I came out of combat second tour feeling pretty good about our Soldiers and about the Army. Not our generals, by the way. We had-- and I used to tell-- I tell people to this day, my wife ended the Vietnam War hating U.S. reporters, politicians, and generals. And she hadn't changed her mind about any of them since then. [LAUGHS]

[00:29:46.36] JOE GALLOWAY: No, I changed her mind about reporters.

[00:29:49.42] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, she may let you and I in under the--

[00:29:52.57] JOE GALLOWAY: We got our nose under the tent.

[00:29:54.04] [LAUGHTER]

[00:29:59.95] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I started to write an article once and gave up. This is a little bit odd, but I think it's illustrative. Maybe five days before I got shot we had a huge operation planned. They moved my brigade back onto a giant military base right outside of Long Binh. In fact, I think it was Long Binh. So they prepared us a-- I think it was the 5th VC Division, which was mostly North Vietnamese. 1969. They'd located them with all their transmitters. It was a couple of thousand of them and the security forces in the division headquarters.

[00:30:45.49] And by the way, this sort of argues against how much I admired the generals, on-- tactical guys. So they put, I believe, two battalions in to go after this VC headquarters. And so we had time to get a lot of beer in us. We got fresh uniforms. Everybody ate steaks. We had a ball on Long Binh. We must have been there for seven, eight, nine, ten days. Everybody just loved it. We stole a Jeep from the 101st Airborne.

[00:31:14.47] And then we got put in a posture, and we all took off, a couple of battalions at the same time. It was maybe 10 o'clock in the morning, bright sunshine. There's 40,000 some odd REMFs at Long Binh. And it was the largest military post on the face of the Earth at the time. As we lifted off, all of us sitting in the doors of the Huey helicopters headed into battle.

[00:31:40.90] As we lifted off, I remember looking down a couple of thousand feet at this giant base thinking every one of these people down there is eating their heart out that they're not in this helicopter with me. And that was probably the best day of my life. Shortly thereafter, I ended up getting shot which is another story.

[00:32:06.68] BARRY MCCAFFREY: I don't know. There's a bit of me that says-- I was with the Vietnamese airborne and we-- when in-- it must have been '66, for political reasons they selected a Vietnamese unit, and they put my brigade into the DMZ between North and South Vietnam. We went up there, and we staged out of Dong Ha. Then we flew into Gio Linh if I remember on our-- and the whole battalion at the same time in H-34 helicopters, Vietnamese, the old helicopter, shaky. A bunch of them got shot, hit on our way in. And then we attacked into the DMZ. And boy, I'll tell you from the day--

[00:32:54.71] we were getting-- the Army L-1 pilots, who I dearly loved, were telling us that we've got multi-thousand man columns crossing the Ben Hai River headed in your direction. So we were in a fight, from the time we clear the barbed wire at Gio Linh and moved north. And it got worse and worse. And then we dug in real deep. We knew we were in trouble. Two battalions and the brigade commander, and maybe 20 advisers-- and I remember that we had a bunch of other additional-- because they knew we were going to be in a battle.

[00:33:33.50] So the Marines put a bunch of people with us to get their fire support. We had a Navy ANGLICO team, some great young kid comes in, and a Navy lieutenant wearing a bush hat, some of them had, entrenching tools. And of course, we said, boy, this is a mistake. Start digging now. And so the sun went down. And it turned into a battle lasted for, I don't know, a dozen hours. And the sergeant-- God--

[00:34:06.11] my team sergeant got hit badly early on in the fight. My captain got killed. I got hit twice. I remember I went over and got the captain's revolver. He had a giant .44 magnum revolver. I couldn't have got my M16 to work. My left hand wasn't working-- got his revolver and crawled over and found the team sergeant.

[00:34:29.39] He said, get them to load my M16, put it on my chest. I'm going to-- I want to be able to die fighting with the rest of you. And so they started pounding us with artillery and mortars and probing the perimeter. And it was raining. There was heavy mud on the LZ. Finally, we had several hundred killed and wounded out in the LZ. And they started trying to bring in medevac. And the medevac all came in under fire.

[00:34:59.00] I remember that Navy ANGLICO lieutenant was sitting there lying in the mud, people stepping on him trying to get in a Chinook to get out of there. And one eyeball was hanging out in his face. He was pleading for somebody to help him. And so the-- two B-57s came in on close air support, and both got shot down. Because by then they had 40 millimeter and antiaircraft guns.

[00:35:29.72] And God, I tell you-- My radio operator and I are both wounded. We've been digging all night. By the time the sun came up we were down to like-- you could barely see over the edge of the foxhole. My radio antenna got shot off right where it stuck above the dirt. The acting battalion commander comes over, and he sits on his helmet next to my foxhole. He's talking to me. I'm in the foxhole, bringing in-- the Navy cruiser is shooting for us by then. The Marines were-- started a tank unit up from Dong Ha to get us out, and they got stopped, and were in a fight.

[00:36:06.92] And so he says to me-- he said, well, he said, I'm going to reorganize what we've got left. We're going to counterattack. He said, basically, the honor of the Vietnamese airborne is at stake. It's time for us to die now.

[00:36:23.46] And I thought, boy, that's a great line in a movie, but hard for me to hear personally. And that's what they did. They started blowing bugles. And by the way, just in the nick of time this-- the cloud cover was low. It was raining. And an AC-47 got under the clouds and caught a NVA battalion-- and killed probably most of them in a couple of passes-- that were about to assault us. So to this day, I look back on that as thinking none of us are going to make it out of here. But we were determined to fight.

[00:37:09.17] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I had some contact with the Australians. We went down to-- we operated in the III Corps estuary, which was a nightmare, I might add. It was a-- looked like a World War II movie of the invasion of Tarawa. We were a multi-battalion operation, landing craft--

[00:37:36.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Mangrove swamps.

[00:37:37.10] BARRY MCCAFFREY: --mangrove swamps. I remember the ramps went down. And it was 10 feet to the edge of the mangrove swamp. And it was hours before we got through

the mud. And then we drowned people. And-- oh my God. Every creek-- I remember the rule was, a water obstacle is as deep as it is wide.

[00:37:59.34] So you'd look at some little piddling in the mangrove swamps, 20 foot wide. And it was 20 feet deep. And they'd fire on us from the other side of the creek. But the Aussies were on that one. They were pretty responsive. Impressive guys.

[00:38:15.95] In one operation we were near the Koreans up in II Corps. Korean marines were on one of our operations, and I was very impressed by them. But you know, at the end of the day, I hate to say this, it was U.S. Marines and the Army divisions that did 98% of the fighting. The others-- the Aussies had one regiment if I remember that-- pretty effective.

[00:38:42.17] But the heavy muscle-- and then the Koreans, they had two divisions there if I remember. So they would hold the road open, the main road that we occasionally used when we were operating in II Corps. But I think most-- the majority-- overwhelming majority of the fighting was done by U.S. Marines and Army infantrymen.

[00:39:03.53] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, the last 10 years I've been in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan normally with the-- wearing the hat of a professor of national security studies at West Point. I was in a civilian position. So every six months a year, I'd hit both war zones. And I spent a lot of time at battalion level wearing civilian clothes. They knew me from being on NBC News. So I was like somebody's grandfather.

[00:39:31.28] And it was-- the reason I say that is I had a tremendous insight into the unbelievable caliber of U.S. combat forces in both those struggles. 15,000 killed and wounded, an actual war. And I could see how they lived. And it was very interesting to me, because on the one hand, if you were fighting at Falluja as one of-- as the part of the Army brigade of the two Marine regiments, the fighting was as intense and not all that different than the Battle of the Ruhr pocket or just-- it was a couple thousand killed and wounded in the space of five days. So bitter, bitter combat.

[00:40:12.94] Having said that, in Iraq and Afghanistan as a general statement, if you weren't an infantry unit or special ops unit, you were in air conditioned or heated quarters, you were eating two hot meals a day, and you had Skype connection with your son doing his homework back in the 173rd out of Italy. You had email contact, you had cell phone contact.

[00:40:40.54] JOE GALLOWAY: IM.

[00:40:41.81] BARRY MCCAFFREY: IM. It's just astonishing. By the way, it's not all good. It's mostly good, but not all good--

[00:40:47.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Not all.

[00:40:47.65] BARRY MCCAFFREY: --because those troops never sever their emotional connection. Wives are bitching about, I'm back here with the kids and you're goofing off. And I'm overstating it. But Vietnam, my God, I wrote a letter home, my wife, Jill, now of 50 years

standing, almost every day I was deployed. And I'd hand it to some helicopter pilot, sealed up, with Free Mail on it. And those letters all went back to her.

[00:41:18.66] I don't know, three weeks or a month later, I might get a letter back from her from a helicopter pilot that would say-- respond to what I had said. And unlike most Soldiers, I was older. I was 25. So I wasn't pulling any punches. I was telling her, and letters to my dad, what was actually going on. And-- which was tough to read, I know, for-- on her part.

[00:41:44.72] But the contact was remote. Every fourth day, you'd get that wonderful Stars and Stripes newspaper. And we might get two copies and everybody in the company would read it for the next two weeks. Whole things happened while I was deployed that I-- there are deep holes in my understanding. I remember the Thresher, a Navy sub, sank with total loss of life. I found it out 10 years later. So we were completely isolated compared to these modern combat units.

[00:42:18.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you-- so letters were your only way, real way of communicating?

[00:42:23.39] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, and the letters--

[00:42:24.50] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't get to the MARS?

[00:42:24.62] BARRY MCCAFFREY: --took so long to go back and forth. A couple of times I called home. I called home-- I was wounded on the USS Repose, which was this unbelievably positive experience. And then I could get on a ship's long wave radio and talk to my wife. And sometimes the Air Force FACs with their air ground control Jeep late at night would let you get on long wave radio, and you'd patch into someplace in the U.S. and get to talk to your family. But a very isolating life. Basically, it was your unit. And that's the--

[00:43:01.51] I semi-exaggerate. I always knew exactly where I was on a one to 25,000 maps. But above that level it wasn't clear to me what was going on.

[00:43:12.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you remember I asked you a question-- this was a long time ago-- what was the best outfit you ever served in?

[00:43:21.41] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, well--

[00:43:22.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you remember your answer?

[00:43:23.60] BARRY MCCAFFREY: I do. I do. The last time I got wounded and I got-- my arm, left arm, got blown off by a machine gun. And so I ended up going through-- the Air Force got me out. I love Air Force medevac. Air Force hospitals stabilized me in Japan. I ended up at Walter Reed Ward One. I was there off and on for a couple of years. And what a remarkable--

[00:43:51.08] military medicine, Army medicine, is astonishing. They don't care how much money you've got or what your grade is. It's group collective medicine. There's no impetus to do

something or not do something based on money. They make group decisions. They'll have a big conference of all the orthopedic guys and go through every patient and what their care plan is.

[00:44:17.43] Anyway, I was-- I lived on that ward off and on for a couple of years. Our ward nurse, Major Baker, I've still got her picture up in my office. She couldn't make lieutenant colonel because she didn't have a college degree. She'd been an Army nurse in World War Two, an Army nurse in Korea, and an Army nurse in Vietnam. She was our ward nurse. And we absolutely worshipped her.

[00:44:42.51] And so mostly the ward-- occasionally we'd have a traffic accident victim or an old-- old guy, a lieutenant colonel with an alcohol problem in a traffic accident. But mostly, it was all lieutenants and captains badly wounded in Vietnam. And it was an incredibly positive experience. People took care of each other. The VA took care of us. The hospital was terrific to us. We just loved each other. Everybody stayed in contact over the years. We've had reunions.

[00:45:14.10] We stayed in contact with Major Baker. I got deputized to go see her in her Florida retirement home. She's in her mid-80s. I got there, and she was up on the roof cleaning her gutters. And on a-- gone up a ladder. And she was there.

[00:45:32.36] We once asked her, said, Major Baker, how come you never got married? She said, well, I was engaged to a young Marine who was killed in World War II.

[00:45:43.71] JOE GALLOWAY: There it was. How much news did you receive from home about the war? You said you got Stars and Stripes every few days? And that was it, pretty much?

[00:45:59.82] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Yeah, I think so. And again, contrast with-- I was a division commander in Desert Storm. And used to abuse the heck out of me, because it was this eight months run-up to the war. And I'd get off a helicopter to talk to a battalion. First of all, the Soldier's would rush over and want to get their picture taken with the division commander to send home to their mom or to sign their letters. What a different group.

[00:46:26.64] And then I'd assemble the battalion. I'd talk to the battalion and say, here's what's going on, here's what's coming up. What are your questions? It used to astonish me that they were listening to BBC, they were reading the Economist and Time magazine. It would get sent home from home. It was astonishing how wired they were.

[00:46:48.78] The only thing I knew about really what was going on at home either was coming to me in personal letters or between tours. So I clearly understood the tenor of what was going on in the U.S. about the war. But not while I was there. I think that war really necked down, it narrowed down. It was survival, command, movement, camouflage, night discipline on lights. We were just trying to stay alive and carry out the mission.

[00:47:19.87] JOE GALLOWAY: So the news such as it was, and such as you heard, didn't really affect you that much?

[00:47:25.41] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Didn't affect me. Although I think the Soldiers, the teenagers got off the helicopter at night to join this frightening new world. And they knew the country, but '68 didn't support the war. They saw the demonstrations and the political push-back. But they still came. And I think a lot of it was just their families said, no, this is what you're supposed to do. Go ahead and carry out your draft instructions.

[00:47:57.92] JOE GALLOWAY: What was it like when you went home between tours, or going back because you were wounded? What was your reception like?

[00:48:08.39] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, my wife, Jill, ended up on all three combat tours being parked near her mother and father in Southern California, Newport Beach. Very pleasant environment. She loved her parents. They loved my kids.

[00:48:29.42] So she was never in trouble while I was gone. But clearly, Southern California was, like many places in the country, totally in rebellion against the war, at least young people and the political class. And so she was embittered. She, I think, had a lot of trouble dealing with people who would essentially say, why is your husband foolish enough to be in combat?

[00:48:59.63] But as an Army brat, and as a West Pointer, and a regular Army officer, and as someone who-- I was proud of what we were doing. I didn't think we were fighting for the Great Patriotic War, but I knew what I was doing as a company commander. So I didn't have any problems. And when I went home, I was going home to military units or Walter Reed.

[00:49:22.55] But I think for my young Soldiers who were going home wounded and being discharged, they felt isolated. To this day they'll say, we went home, we grew our hair long, we never talked about Vietnam. Ever. For any reason. Except with our families. And I had my aide from Desert Storm, this wonderful young captain-- Steph Twitty is his name-- who commanded a battalion during the Thunder Run in Baghdad. And I had him talk to my company. And he gave a wonderful talk, courage, it takes skill with that battalion.

[00:50:07.94] At the end of it one of my Soldier's sisters got up and said, Colonel Twitty, I hope we never do to you and your Soldiers what happened to the Vietnam vets.

[00:50:24.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after the war?

[00:50:30.59] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I've always been a little bit skeptical about so-called PTSD. And the only reason I say that, I think PTSD is real, combat fatigue is real. I've seen it. Pretty rarely. I had a couple of Soldiers, one a lieutenant, completely unravel on me as a company commander. Mostly, I think when people couldn't stand the pressures of combat, they just wouldn't-- they wouldn't come out. And there didn't seem to be anything that really happened to you.

[00:50:59.51] So I used to tell people-- I told my company at one point that if you're out here, we need your help. You need to stay with us. If you refuse to do it, I'll send you back, and nothing will happen to you. But before you leave, you'll have to explain to your squad leader, your platoon leader, and me why you're leaving us.

[00:51:18.32] And I never had anybody leave the field under those circumstances. And by the end of my tour as a company commander, I had a giant twitch in my face. And I was having nightmares at night. And I remember that my RTO would bang me. Hey, sir, quiet. You're talking. So there's no question that extreme combat pressure has an impact on you. And eventually, you won't be able to handle it. If you're in a Ranger battalion, you'll be able to handle 100 units of stress. And if you're an 18-year-old with inadequate training and a bad squad leader, maybe you'll crack at two units.

[00:51:58.34] But this PTSD is real. And I did notice it, particularly when I came home the second tour at Walter Reed there was a lot of crazy behavior, immature behavior, combined with, you know, you get in a hot shower with two beers in you, and know that you didn't-- you were going to sleep inside that night, and there wouldn't be any mortar fire. There was also a sense of joy just in safety, and being home. But I think there's an adjustment period when people come out of combat, and they're getting a lot better at dealing with it.

[00:52:38.31] So, don't beat up your 20-year-old wife while you're drunk. Don't buy a 2000cc motorcycle and drive it into a bridge abutment the second night you're home. Suicide-- I think kids come home, and they drink too much, and their wife leaves them, and they have access to weapons--

[00:53:02.11] you've got to take that into account on adjustment. But I do think as a general sense people are strengthened by exposure to combat as the general sense than weakened by it. But there's an adjustment to-- back to civilian life that's painful for those around you if you're not careful.

[00:53:26.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any memory or experience from your time in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting influence on your life? Or changed you in some way?

[00:53:41.34] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, that's a-- first of all, those impressions of Vietnam are so intense, even if they're distorted, that they're real to this day. And of course our reunions maybe add to that because we talk about things, and laugh about them, or cry about them periodically. But I can remember a lot of it in intense detail.

[00:54:08.46] And probably-- I ended up staying in the military 32 years. So I came out of my last Vietnam combat tour, and-- actually on a study trip, but as a company commander. And so every time I got promoted for the next 25 years, I'd always explain to people that I'm very proud to be temporarily serving at the grade of lieutenant general, but I'm actually an infantry company commander and that's my mindset. Because I did-- I think it was driven into me. And I certainly remember this as battalion, brigade, division commander-- division commander in combat in Iraq-- that the only reality in life is what happens at maneuver company level. The rest of us are supporting cast, vitally important, possibly in danger, but we're all supporting a group of actors in this scene. And at ground level, you get a bunch of young people, their lives are immediately at stake.

[00:55:13.38] I used to tell a story. I had one wonderful battalion commander I admired, brilliant man, actually had very little tactical experience, spent a lot of time in his bunker drinking martinis and radioing out sort of insane instructions late at night. But then he'd come to-- we'd pay no attention. And we'd talk to each other at company level on our internal nets and say, what the hell is going on with this guy?

[00:55:41.34] And I remember one time I had-- he had a plan, and I'm sure it was part of a brigade plan. We were all moving on line after an Arc Light, to exploit an Arc Light. So they wanted us to get in there rapidly and catch the survivors and exploit intel material. So the sun comes up, and we're all stuck sticking C-rations in our face and shaving just predawn. And a bunch of NVA-- trying to get out of the area, I'm sure-- blunder into us.

[00:56:17.28] So in the untimely hour of, let's say, 6 o'clock in the morning, we're suddenly shooting it out with these people at a range of 20 feet. And I remember I was sitting there looking at this wonderful canteen cup of steaming hot coffee, which my RTO had made. My wife would send me sugar and cream. I'd carry that from my headquarters-- CP group. I look at this hot coffee, and a dozen machine gun rounds went under, over, and around my head with that terrible cracking noise.

[00:56:53.07] In slow motion, I remember the coffee disappearing. Now we're involved in a gunfight, a pretty good one. And we're throwing volleys of grenades. And we're pushing these guys back.

[00:57:06.54] And my battalion commander got on the radio, because he wanted me part of this sweep, headed-- and he said, specifically, what contact are you encountering? I said, I don't know. There's a bunch of people with AK-47s, there's a couple of machine guns. And his words to this effect were, you're being held up by light opposition. I want you to get moving.

[00:57:33.25] And at company level, it didn't look light opposition. It looked as if you ignored them and tried to get moving you'd get killed right then and there. So it stuck with me for years thereafter. When I give instructions. I have to envision what it looks like in the rifle company. And that was the big change to me for the rest of my Army career.

[00:57:59.49] JOE GALLOWAY: That syndrome where the battalion commander's at 1500 feet in a Huey, cool and collected, and he's criticizing you as a company commander because you're not moving fast enough through the quicksand and the mangrove swamps.

[00:58:18.87] BARRY MCCAFFREY: And yet the division commander, this wonderful human being who had started life as a lieutenant at Normandy beach, he'd land his helicopter and say Barry, what can you-- what can I do to help you? Chain smoking as he talked to me.

[00:58:38.85] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your experience in Vietnam--

[00:58:41.45] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Anyway, his name, Joe-- I forgot-- was Lieutenant General George Forsythe. He ended up retiring as a three star. He was a volunteer Army guy. We just dearly loved him. Humble, unassuming, smart, combat savvy. Wonderful man.

[00:59:01.35] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:59:08.58] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I think it had a big impact. At our company reunions these troops will say-- they're all very keen on supporting this new generation of veterans. We'll frequently go to a veterans hospital, a group of us, as part of our reunion. And-- wait a second, tail end of a cold. I think they've all got-- a lot of them have got, you know, young people in their families or whatever, that are in the military.

[00:59:42.20] Their experience as draftees and coming from high-intensity combat back into the United States was not good. Their families stayed with them. Their friends did. By the way, a lot of these guys were tremendously successful. One them is a multi-millionaire developer in New York City, who actually volunteered for the draft while married and in college because he wanted to see what combat was like. Sort of an anomaly.

[01:00:11.96] Most all of them did pretty well. But they had some bitter experiences coming back to this country and not being valued for their tremendous courage and sacrifice. And that-- boy, that war still goes on to this day. There's this miserable book out there. Nick Purse or Turse or something, sort of the continuing war on the reputation of these Soldiers, where he essentially argues that there was a strategy of mass murder body-count and that the troops in general targeted civilians.

[01:00:51.11] JOE GALLOWAY: There all war criminals?

[01:00:53.00] BARRY MCCAFFREY: It's incredible when you think about it. They were just a bunch of nice boys out of good families. Of course, they weren't doing things like that. If they had bad leadership-- it they had bad leadership like My Lai, and they were under stress from mind warfare, indiscipline can happen in a flash in a combat unit. But as a general rule, these were a bunch of nice kids.

[01:01:17.69] And they were-- they loved puppies and children. And they were respectful to women. And Lieutenant Bill Montgomery, I-- frequently I'd be moving someplace, and I'd drop behind a squad, which we'd leave them with Claymores, and then we'd keep moving. And we'd see who'd come out and if anyone was following us. And we did that one day, and a bunch of water carriers came out to go-- we were crossing a stream bed, and they'd been-- a dry stream bed. They'd been digging wells in there. I said, ha, somebody's in the area.

[01:01:50.09] The squad down there nails a bunch of them, turns into a giant fight. The company gets committed. We start attacking the bunker complex. And we were fragging every bunker we came to, or throwing C4 satchel charges in them. And this young lieutenant calls me and he said, I can't-- he said, I've got to hold up. I think I can hear children crying in a bunker. And he stops. There was a gunfight going on. And he crawls in there alone with a pistol to find out if there's kids in there. And there were. There were some-- it must have been local VC and their families were in the bunker.

[01:02:35.45] So my impression was that these were some wonderful young men. They ought to be proud of what they did in combat. Well, when they come home they were-- most of the country was mute. Most of the country didn't spit on them and throw rocks, and-- but I think they were mute. And what I would hear in later days, Desert Storm. I got-- every division in Saudi Arabia got hundreds of thousands of letters. And a lot of would start with, I was silent during Vietnam. No more.

[01:03:10.64] So I think it was tough on these kids that fought with us, and they weren't welcomed home the right away.

[01:03:19.34] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in society today?

[01:03:25.37] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, Jan Scruggs and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial has done a lot. And Mick Kicklighter and this whole project on remembering the war to try and educate future generations on what happened. God knows it was a bitter experience. I tell people, what came out of that war to me was the requirement for wisdom among political leaders, to think carefully about what they're doing, and the cost, the real cost, of war. That Vietnam Memorial with the names is a powerful reminder that it wasn't a geopolitical event. It was an event that left 58,000 families harmed for the rest of their life, in some cases, their children. Never mind the million-plus Vietnamese that were killed.

[01:04:16.07] I took a delegation back to Vietnam a few years ago from the Vietnam Memorial. And by the way, we got a tremendous reception. The-- we met with a Vietnamese veterans organization in Hanoi. And there were a lot of tears and hugging and respect, and-- but they said we'd killed two million of them. It was one awful event.

[01:04:40.36] So-- the reason we ended up leaving Vietnam under-- and losing the country to a communist dictatorship that ended up putting hundreds of thousands of them in concentration camps and murdering them by the thousands, and hundreds of thousands fled at risk of their life to get away from them-- the reason that happened was the country didn't get appalled, this is my own judgment, by the bloodshed and the loss of our young men and some women in combat. They finally decided the national leadership didn't know what they were doing, and were grinding up our boys in endless warfare. They just didn't know how to end it. I think they were right.

[01:05:27.42] JOE GALLOWAY: No end in sight.

[01:05:28.68] BARRY MCCAFFREY: No end in sight. And the ability to-- if you can explain a war to the American people saying, here's what we've got to do, I stand behind this-- then I think they'll support sacrifice of their blood and treasure. If you can't explain it, you can't fight anything but 30-day operations. The country won't stand for it.

[01:05:51.27] JOE GALLOWAY: You got to show them an end game.

[01:05:53.88] BARRY MCCAFFREY: You got to show them a purpose. You've got to be able to stand in front of a TV camera and give a report and say, I still think we're doing the right thing and that hasn't happened with Iraq and Afghanistan, just as an example. So in Afghanistan, we've still got over 35,000 troops there as this interview is going. And I tell people, I have never seen in the entire 12 years of warfare, a politician go on TV and say, the country is in trouble. We've got to fight to protect our values. We want your son or daughter to come in the Army or the Marine Corps, carry an M4 carbine, and fight to keep us safe. Not once.

[01:06:41.70] They've disassociated themselves from that-- those wars. That was the lesson of Vietnam. You can't do that. You've got to tell the American people, here's what we want to do. And we want your boys and girls to step forward and fight for us.

[01:06:55.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[01:07:07.64] BARRY MCCAFFREY: I think so. First of all, you are what you are at that age. And I'm glad. And you're protected by youth. If you're 25 years old and under, you can put up with a lot. And, in retrospect, life in the field in a rifle company '68, '69 was really hard. We lived like wild animals. We dug holes in the ground to get into and try and stay alive. We were wary 24 hours a day. We got no sleep. We had frequent--

[01:07:41.74] I went-- once went almost a month with no contact. But mostly it was frequent contact and sometimes severe. It was pretty hard life. And people had their crotch rot, and they were malnourished. And they were sick. They had a stick in the eye. And they didn't leave the field. Basically, one of my Soldiers on a given day could have found a dozen reasons to go on sick call if they were back in the States. And they stayed out there with us. It was a pretty hard life. But they were young, and they had positive attitudes, and they took care of each other.

[01:08:20.92] I think the other thing that we learned out of it was trust and teamwork. And we also thought we were doing the right thing then. In a larger sense, I still think we did. I'm not one to say it was a mistake. I think our political leadership was miserable. They didn't think through in a large-- to a large extent what they were doing. But having said that, one of my buck sergeants, Jack Jader, instant NCO from Texas, said, he said, he said, I pass-- this several years ago-- he said, I pass Vietnam vets begging on the street all the time with a little cardboard sign. He said, I'll look at the guy and he'll be too young, or it could be some sort of obvious reason why he couldn't be a Vietnam vet. But he said, we're back in.

[01:09:15.94] Suddenly the country wants to-- I'm grateful for it too-- want to acknowledge the service of the 3 and 1/2 million of us who fought in Vietnam. But Jack said, he said, every time I see one of these fake vets, I say, hey, buddy, what was your service number? You remember. If you were a Soldier in the '60s, you knew your service number, and your rifle number. That was two things for sure you knew.

[01:09:41.86] When he said that-- we stopped using service numbers, I think in the early '70s. When he said that, bang, I could remember my military service number. And so it sort of amuses

me because I think the country has largely said, these troops served with courage and dedication. They did what we asked them to. And they ought to be proud of what they did.

[01:10:07.87] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam you would like to pass on to new generations of Americans?

[01:10:17.34] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Well, I think one of them-- I sent your book, you and General Moore's book, *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young*. I've been giving that out to political leaders for 15 years now. And I put an inscription in it, I tell them the last two chapters, if I remember, on the aftermath of war, delivering telegrams to families around Columbus, Georgia, those that-- the huge loss of life at the Battle of the Ia Drang.

[01:10:50.04] And so I give that book to political leadership. And I tell them, I want you to read this book. First of all, I think it's one of the best five books ever written in English about small-unit combat, but more importantly, there's a lot of lessons in there. And one of them is don't go to war lightly. If-- I'm almost of the mind-- I want to see powerful military forces so we don't have to fight.

[01:11:14.41] I'm distressed by the ongoing reduction-- planned reductions in the armed forces to take the Army back to 1939 levels. You want a powerful armed forces so you can intimidate and back up diplomatic and economic power. But I think as a general rule, when in doubt, don't conduct combat operations. You never know how it will turn out.

[01:11:39.61] And by the way, don't despise your opponent because it's a poor country or a primitive country. We saw-- we see that time and again in history. Somalia, Mogadishu. No armor, no artillery, no air power, tiny forces. We don't have to worry. These are savages who fight with AKs. And they handed us a tremendous bloody eye in the Black Hawk Down era. So I think one of the things that came out of Vietnam was the senior political leadership has to think carefully through what they're about to do. And then I think the senior military leadership has to play a similar role. I think they do, by the way.

[01:12:22.83] I think that Vietnam War positively affected the senior military for years. Just before-- this is a little bit inappropriate language. One of my personal heroes is retired Lieutenant General Terry Scott, four or five years in combat in Vietnam unbelievable combat record. He was one of my assistant division commanders in Desert Storm. And so here we are, the day before the ground attack into Iraq starts. And by the way, there were-- the Vietnam veterans by then were only at brigade commander and on up. The rest of the Army hadn't fought.

[01:13:04.98] So we're standing in my TOC. We're about to disperse. And Terry Scott is going to go up to the division, TAC CP and the chief John Van Alstyne's going to stay at the division main CP, and the command sergeant major, Jim Randolph, is going to go off on his own to watch Soldiers in combat. And we're all looking around the room. And I said, in a normal infantry light-hearted way, because we thought this was going to be a huge battle involving chemical operations, but I say to the group, I said, well, it's nice we can all have a final cup of coffee together. I guess this is the last time all of us will meet will be alive together.

[01:13:48.54] Pretty funny line. And Terry Scott looks at me, and he said-- and it's his west Texas twang-- he said, well, I'll tell you one thing, I'd much rather get killed than fuck this thing up like we did Vietnam.

[01:14:01.08] [LAUGHTER]

[01:14:04.17] And I think that was the mindset. That was a healthy implication of Vietnam. We thank God for Colin Powell and Norm Schwarzkopf because Powell and these guys had been involved in combat operations in battalion level. And they didn't want to do that to the Army again, either.

[01:14:23.37] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't want to make cannon fodder.

[01:14:25.53] BARRY MCCAFFREY: If you're going to conduct military operations use military force. You've got to have a clear end game in mind. You've got to use the tools to get you there. And I think that's a gift of the Vietnam War.

[01:14:42.68] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Lieutenant General Kicklighter is running it, somebody I've admired for years. And I saw him when the World War II Memorial was going on, which he ran. And so he's been-- it's a great gift he has to try and energize, mobilize these various ways to educate the American people, and make them remember. And to say, look, you people are the wealthiest society on the face of the earth, all 307 million of you. But there's a good argument that none of this would have occurred if it wasn't for these men and women who stepped forward to defend you. So I'm delighted that General Kicklighter is running this whole operation and that we're doing it deliberately to educate the American people.

[01:15:26.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, sir.

[01:15:27.89] BARRY MCCAFFREY: Good talking to you, Joe.

[01:15:29.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Good talking to you.

[01:15:30.05]