

Neil, Micheal USMC

[00:00:17.29] MICHAEL NEIL: I was born in Long Beach, California in August 21st, 1940. My father, Gene Hadley Neil, whose nickname in the Marine Corps was "Cheesy," was a career Marine. My mother, Grace Pauline Neil-Sullivan. Sullivan was her maiden name. And I had an older half-sister, Pauline.

[00:00:45.34] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were a Marine brat, so you moved around the world. What do you consider your hometown?

[00:00:52.51] MICHAEL NEIL: San Diego.

[00:00:53.41] JOE GALLOWAY: San Diego.

[00:00:54.07] MICHAEL NEIL: San Diego. This is where I spent most of my growing up years.

[00:00:57.82] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:01:04.98] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, I was in my last year of law school at the University of California Berkeley in 1965. And the Vietnam War had started heating up. And there was a lot of antiwar protests, burning of the flag, et cetera, which just really upset me. I went to a Young Socialist Alliance filming one night of a movie about-- supposedly a true movie about the VC, the Viet Cong. It turned out to be a propaganda movie.

[00:01:37.14] There was a scene in there where a Marine helicopter got shot down, and the helicopter autorotated into a rice paddy. A crewman jumped up to the top of the helicopter. Machine gun shot him out, blew him off the helicopter. He fell face first in the rice paddy. And this audience cheered. I went over the next day and joined the Marine Corps.

[00:01:59.58] JOE GALLOWAY: You enlisted?

[00:02:00.54] MICHAEL NEIL: Enlisted with a proviso that it would not be effective until I finished my third year of law school, took the bar exam. And I would be an infantry officer and not a lawyer.

[00:02:12.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow. But they let you finish law school?

[00:02:15.55] MICHAEL NEIL: Yes. MICHAEL NEIL: Reported in for Officer Candidate School, OCS, at Quantico, Virginia in October of 1966. And we graduated from OCS in late December of '66. And we were commissioned as second lieutenants at that time in my class. I went to the basic school at Quantico, which is a six-month school.

[00:02:45.31] JOE GALLOWAY: It was a tough school.

[00:02:46.90] MICHAEL NEIL: It's a tough school, very challenging in many ways. And so then I went to Vietnam in June of 1967 after a 30-day leave. MICHAEL NEIL: Well, my MOS was

03, which was infantry. And so I reported into the 7th Marine Regiment, and then I was sent down to 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, Delta Company. And I picked up a platoon right there in the field. They had lost their platoon commander some time a few days before.

[00:03:33.00] JOE GALLOWAY: They had a sergeant running the platoon?

[00:03:34.96] MICHAEL NEIL: They did. And so I, in the field, took over the platoon. I didn't know a single name of one Marine in my platoon.

[00:03:44.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Hm. How long did it take you to fix that?

[00:03:46.48] MICHAEL NEIL: Not long.

[00:03:47.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Not long.

[00:03:48.10] MICHAEL NEIL: Not long

[00:03:48.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Not long.

[00:03:56.02] MICHAEL NEIL: The 7th Marine Regiment had the assignment Southwest of Da Nang of patrolling. And there were hills that we occupied, Hill 55, Hill 41, Hill 10. It was a ring and it was at the mouth of a major infiltration route. A lot of bad guys out there. And our challenge was to patrol and ambush and kill as many of them as we could, and keep them from attacking Da Nang.

[00:04:27.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And you were out from Da Nang 15, 20 miles, something like that.

[00:04:32.58] MICHAEL NEIL: Something like that. And I was a platoon commander for six months plus. And then in late December of 1967, they put out an all-division request for volunteers who wanted to fly in the back seat of an O-1 Bird Dog, which was a spotter plane that we used in those days. And I think every second lieutenant in the 1st Marine Division volunteered for that because we got flight pay. At the same time, you knew you could probably get some cold beer or two back there where they were flying out of.

[00:05:06.59] So we got interviewed. And I was one of four selected. So my next six and a half months, I flew in the back seat of O-1 Bird Dogs. They always had an infantry officer in the back. We were flying with Army pilots because we only had three Marine Bird Dogs left. The rest had been shot down. And the three we had left were over in the DMZ. So we flew out of Marble Mountain, which was China Beach area outside of Da Nang.

[00:05:34.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Basically, supporting the area where you had patrolled as an infantry officer.

[00:05:37.99] MICHAEL NEIL: Exactly. It was ideal for me and the people on the ground because I knew the ground and I knew the area.

[00:05:46.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your tour on the ground as a platoon commander.

[00:05:53.09] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, real interesting. It's a school of you learn as you go. My very first patrol, which was the next day after I took over the platoon. We're in the last leg of the - we had certain points where we'd stop and check in with the battalion and let them know-- or the company-- let them know where we were, just everything is fine. It's checkpoints. We checked the last checkpoint. The corpsman who I did not know, stepped in front of me for this last leg.

[00:06:22.07] We stepped off and we probably hadn't gone 50 meters, and he gets shot through the leg. So I'm crawling up to him. And I'm thinking to myself, what's wrong with this picture? I'm treating a corpsman's wound in his leg and he's where I was supposed to be. In other words, the sniper thought he was shooting me instead of him, because it was just-- he'd obviously been watching the positioning and we were about the same height. And he had a .45 on and I had a .45 on, too.

[00:06:50.66] So that was my first introduction to combat. And we did a lot of fighting that day. And then after that, almost every day was patrolling, every night ambushing. And I'm out with my troops most of the time, and every once in a while, I had to take a break, too. But we went from Hill 55 where the regiment was out to a hill called Hill 10. Then we went to a hill called 41, where our company was by ourselves.

[00:07:19.04] And that's where we really developed our expertise because we got to know the area which was confronting the main access route for the NVA infiltrating, coming down. We knew the area better than them. And we got a lot of good kills in that area.

[00:07:38.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Now when you started out, the shoe was on the other foot. The enemy knew the ground and you didn't.

[00:07:46.19] MICHAEL NEIL: That's right. Well, I certainly didn't.

[00:07:48.32] JOE GALLOWAY: You switched it on them.

[00:07:50.21] MICHAEL NEIL: Right. In the last few months, it did. And people have to understand that this is all pre-Tet and we pretty much damaged the VC infrastructure. And if it hadn't been for the NVA coming down and reinforcing what they were capable of doing, it wouldn't have been much of a fighting force anymore.

[00:08:11.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Tet kind of finished the VC off.

[00:08:15.29] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, I was there during Tet and that's a whole other story.

[00:08:19.17] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a whole other story. Well, we're going to get all the stories told. Now you are a recipient of the Navy Cross.

[00:08:27.26] MICHAEL NEIL: I am.

[00:08:28.58] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a pretty high gong.

[00:08:31.01] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, it was an honor to receive it. But it's really due to some magnificent Marines who were with me that night. Like I said, we've been making a lot of contact with the enemy in this area in mid-December. As a seasoned platoon commander, I was given a lot of latitude on planning my ambush sites and patrol routes. And our battalion commander had enough faith in us out there in the field, where we infiltrated areas with five, six man patrols.

[00:09:08.21] Later, when the Army took over, I understand the Army wouldn't send less than a platoon or a company size out there. And so this particular night, we received some intel that there might be some enemy activity in this area. And I knew this one village was kind of a mainstay stopping point for the VC and the NVA because you'd go into these villages and you'd see pregnant women. You don't see any young men.

[00:09:35.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah

[00:09:38.67] MICHAEL NEIL: And everybody looked pretty healthy. So you knew it was a VC stopping point. But anyway, then I set up my headquarters in there, cordoned off the area, captured one guy that we didn't like the looks of, and got some information out of him. I had a-- forget the name. There was a name for former VC who comes out-- Chieu Hoi. Yeah, the Chieu Hoi. And I got some information out of him. I didn't necessarily want to watch them get the information out of him, but--

[00:10:14.25] that was all right with me. I don't care. My men's lives were at stake. But in any event, I pre-positioned my three squads out in three points where I felt that might see some action that night. It was key to know the area because we knew routes. I set up a beautiful ambush one night and the bad guys came behind me and you could see them. And so we had to turn around and take them under fire. And it just didn't work out too well, if they'd just done what they were supposed to and gone where I had planned them.

[00:10:44.85] But anyway, we knew the area pretty good. So sometime, I think it was after midnight, I get a call from Larry Smedley, Corporal Larry Smedley, who I'd made corporal. Sent him to a school in Okinawa because I saw that he was a fledgling leader and he was good. He was good, my best squad leader probably at the time. And basically, we're talking in code. So I'll just tell you what the gist of it was. He's telling me that he's counted over a hundred bad guys go by him.

[00:11:18.97] Boom! Big time. So all right, I said, hold on. Boom. I let the company know. I said, send the reaction platoon right away. We're taking fire. I'd already pre-arranged artillery fire and everything else. So everything is all set to go in case we did hit the big time. This is the big time.

[00:11:36.73] JOE GALLOWAY: This is the big time.

[00:11:37.37] MICHAEL NEIL: So I go back to Larry. I said, shoot them. Basically, I think I just said it in the clear. I said, shoot them. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. So the night lights up. He only had seven men with him. That's how small my squads were. When I take my platoon to the field, I'd be lucky to take 20-25 men.

[00:11:55.96] JOE GALLOWAY: You should have 35 or 40.

[00:11:58.06] MICHAEL NEIL: Absolutely. Absolutely. But just due to attrition. Our casualty rate was pretty big in our battalion. It was nothing to have 50 percent casualties in one month.

[00:12:07.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:12:07.87] MICHAEL NEIL: And that's KIA and WIA. But in any event, so Larry lights them up. Meanwhile, I had coordinated with my other two squads so we could link up. Linking up at night in the middle of the darkness in the jungle is pretty tough. So I linked up with them. And meanwhile, the sky you've got to understand it's like the biggest fireworks display you've ever seen on the Fourth of July. I mean, the sky is all light. Everybody's shooting. So we link up and I link up with Larry Smedley's squad. And now, we know the enemy is all around us.

[00:12:45.93] So we start moving in the direction where I thought we could made contact with these guys. They hit us big time. I have a distinct image of seeing Larry moving forward with his squad. He was killed that night attacking this enemy position, a machine gun. Larry Smedley received the Medal of Honor that night. He's the real hero of the night. And meanwhile, I formed a defensive perimeter. We discovered there was a cache of-- looked like weapons. It looked like recoilless rifles within our perimeter.

[00:13:29.53] So I'm around them. And meanwhile, we're surrounded anyway. So we can't go anywhere and I got some wounded and I got two KIAs. I didn't know I had the KIAs at the time. I knew I had some wounded. So we're in a firefight for several hours and the reaction platoon can't get out to me. So we're just fighting to survive. Grenades coming in, grenades going out. A lot of hand-to-hand stuff. I killed a couple of bad guys inside the perimeter. But this is all going on.

[00:14:03.89] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't have time to dig any holes.

[00:14:06.65] MICHAEL NEIL: Oh, no, no, no, no. We're just laying flat. Matter of fact, we start taking fire from this ridge line up above. So I yell at this other squad leader, get up there and kill those bastards. And he just charged up like-- it was like out of the movies. They're all screaming and yelling. They get out there. We got him, sir. We got him. All right. Get your ass back on down here. So then at one point in time, Corporal Dohanish, my radio operator, says, sir, every time you yell, they shoot at us, which would happen.

[00:14:37.34] Boom, boom, boom, boom. They're kicking up-- Like Rudyard Kipling says, kicking up dust spots on the green. It's true. It's a true statement. When you see that dust flying up around you, you know they're getting close. But in any event, we had a lot of stuff going on. Every one of my Marines behaved heroically that night. It was just incredible because it was-- I

mean, you could reach it. I had a bad guy reach out and grab me. That's how close they were, OK?

[00:15:04.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:15:04.76] MICHAEL NEIL: So they--

[00:15:07.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take care of him?

[00:15:08.30] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. Yeah. I got to admit, when he first grabbed a hold of me, it scared the hell out of me. I'm just enjoying-- so anyway, you just react. You react. If you want me to just tell the stories that flash in my mind--

[00:15:26.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah

[00:15:28.91] MICHAEL NEIL: We put in a call for a helicopter medevac because I got five or six wounded, two KIAs. I had all my Marines put their flak jackets over our wounded because we're getting so many grenades and so on. And so we got our flak jackets all over. And I feel that they're fairly well-protected. But one of my corpsman told me that one or two of them might die if we don't get them out of there. So we got a helicopter coming in medevac and he's taking all kinds of fire.

[00:15:57.80] And I waved him off. I said, I can't bring you in. Can't bring you in. And my corpsman told me again that they may die. And so I relayed that to the helicopter. The pilot said, well, I'm coming in. We all had call signs and whatever mine was-- Delta One Alpha or something like that. And so he came in and it was one of the bravest things I've ever seen. He brings his helicopter and we raced down. And we're getting fire all over. And we're trying to put suppressing fire out for him. It doesn't make any difference.

[00:16:30.77] It's a tracer war. There's tracers going all over the place. And once again, it looks like the Fourth of July. So we get the wounded on there and he takes off. And he got the Silver Star. I wrote him up for a Silver Star for that. And I've just never seen anything quite as brave as that. And of course, even when he comes in with his lights off, there's still some--

[00:16:50.42] JOE GALLOWAY: So was he flying a Huey or an old H-34?

[00:16:53.36] MICHAEL NEIL: You know what? I think he was flying an old H-34. It wasn't a Huey. I know it wasn't a Huey. It was a 34, yeah. He was a great, great-- I got to meet him later on when I was flying as an O-1 Bird Dog AO. So what else? I mean, it's kind of hard to remember. As the sun's coming up, Rich Gannon, who had the relief platoon, they make it out to where we are. And it's a welcome sight to see these guys because man, my men are beat. And we're--

[00:17:31.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Your platoon by now must only be 10-12 guys, I think.

[00:17:35.66] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, I had with me then probably-- well, I don't know. I would have to go back and count. But it was certainly down from what it was, even though I'd been reinforced with two machine gun teams.

[00:17:53.93] JOE GALLOWAY: How did they infiltrate? They come in on the chopper?

[00:17:56.79] MICHAEL NEIL: No, they came with me. They were out there with me. But interestingly, I had put the two machine guns, the two M60s, with the other two squads, not with Smedley's, because I thought Smedley was the least likely to get contact. And so he did not have a gun with him. And it was a shame because if he'd had a machine gun, if he'd had an M60 with him, he'd have killed a lot more of them at the time than they got, because as I said, they just--

[00:18:24.99] JOE GALLOWAY: What a set of cajones. He's got seven guys and he ambushes a hundred?

[00:18:29.10] MICHAEL NEIL: Over a hundred.

[00:18:29.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Over a hundred.

[00:18:31.92] MICHAEL NEIL: It would turned out to be an entire battalion of NVA/VC coming in to rocket Da Nang. What turned out to be what I thought were recoilless rifles were the first two 120-millimeter rocket launchers and the tubes that we'd ever captured. And that probably accounts for why they were fighting so hard to overrun us and get in there because-- it was so dark. I could see it was a long tube. But I wasn't going to turn on a flashlight and take a look at it.

[00:19:07.63] So that's what it turned out to be in a big core slab they were flown down to Saigon that day. And all the bigwigs were very excited about seeing this because then they could get some statistics off it, what it can be capable of and how we could combat it again in the future. But there was also a couple of machine guns in there that we got. And the machine gunner was a real pain in the butt. He kept popping his head up. And we got up and finally got him. But that was pretty much the night. And about five days later, I went to Marble Mountain to become an AO.

[00:19:57.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your corporal, the one who had the Medal of Honor.

[00:20:01.17] MICHAEL NEIL: Larry. Larry Smedley. He was from--

[00:20:04.37] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a famous Marine name, Smedley.

[00:20:07.17] MICHAEL NEIL: It is. Smedley Butler.

[00:20:08.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Smedley Butler.

[00:20:09.72] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, Larry Smedley is from down South. And like a lot of the Southern boys, excellent appointment, good in the field because they're used to hunting. And they're used to being outdoors. And they had a step up on a lot of the city boys. Generally, my point men were always Southern boys. And one of them--

[00:20:28.84] JOE GALLOWAY: They have a nose for trouble.

[00:20:30.21] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. One of them saved my life one time, McKinley. That's another story I can come back and tell that one another time. But Larry Smedley, I recognized when he was a fire team leader that this kid had a lot of potential. We had an opening for three weeks school in Okinawa to train squad leaders. So I figured he'd be-- you're losing squad leaders all the time for one reason or another. And so I sent him to the squad leader school.

[00:21:05.83] He came back. And boy, he's just reinforced with Marine ethos and everything else. And just a great young kid. I got some pictures of him. He was tough as nails, but good with his men and everything else. I went to-- down South, to Tampa Bay or somewhere in Florida, I think he was from Tampa Bay, and gave a talk one time. And as I'm sitting on the dais, there's people around because they just dedicated a memorial to him.

[00:21:38.51] I realized for the first time that he was only 18 years old that night. And that's the kind of Marines, young people, we had, 18 years old. The interesting thing is if he'd gone home, he couldn't even have had a beer legally. MICHAEL NEIL: My first company commander should never have been a company commander. He was unfit to command. It was miserable serving under him. And fortunately, he was gone soon thereafter. And he rotated back.

[00:22:21.41] And we got a great-- had two company commanders after him, both outstanding. I think when the war first started, we were just not ready for the magnitude of the war that presented itself. I had a platoon sergeant that wasn't qualified to be a platoon sergeant. He could have done some other things and probably been pretty good. But I soon got another platoon sergeant that was outstanding. But in any event, it was a miserable experience.

[00:22:50.51] And the other platoon commander that came in at the same time as me, Rich Gannon, would back me up on this. This guy was just terrible. But in any event, we got a battalion commander that came in, Colonel Davis, who was a Silver Star recipient, Chosin Reservoir. He was just great. He was just great.

[00:23:12.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Ray Davis?

[00:23:14.46] MICHAEL NEIL: Not Ray Davis. But this was Bill Davis. But they weren't related. But Ray Davis was a famous Marine general. Yeah. But I think the quality definitely improved. What the best thing was for us from the basic school was all of our instructors that we had instruct us were recent returnees from Vietnam. So we had these officers and enlisted men that could really tell us what to do. And I think we were as prepared as we could have been to go and do what we did because of the experience that was passed on to us by these returnees.

[00:23:57.74] It was still a learning process, though. I remember in the basic school they told us the school solution if you had to go across the long rice paddies, pick one Marine and he goes across and tells you whether or not-- that way, if you're going to get ambushed, you only lose one Marine. So the very first time I had a chance to do something, that's probably about my third patrol. Had this black squad leader, Evans. Great, great squad leader. And the blacks call themselves splibs. There was nicknames. And we were whiteys.

[00:24:32.52] I got to tell you, that's another story about race relations over there. They were great in my area in my time. But in any event, I did that. And later on, he says, sir, with due respect, may I speak frankly? And I said, sure, Evans, what's going on? And I'm sitting in ambushes and everything else these with these guys right now. I'm just a glorified corporal in some of their minds, probably. But very respectful, Marine training came out.

[00:24:59.70] And he said, sir, I want to send two Marines across. They'll reinforce each other. They'll feel a lot better. One Marine starts questioning himself. So send two and just let them move across and cover each other. And that's just the way we'd prefer it. I always did it after that.

[00:25:18.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:25:19.08] MICHAEL NEIL: It wasn't a school solution.

[00:25:20.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Not a school solution.

[00:25:22.14] MICHAEL NEIL: But it was the Marine solution in the field.

[00:25:28.27] JOE GALLOWAY: That was my next question. At this time back in America, there's social tension, racial tension, and war protests. All that's going on. Does that translate to where you're working?

[00:25:44.50] MICHAEL NEIL: We'd hear about it.

[00:25:45.31] JOE GALLOWAY: You hear about it?

[00:25:46.06] MICHAEL NEIL: People come back from R&R and tell you about it. JOE GALLOWAY: Among your people? MICHAEL NEIL: Nope. I never had a problem or an issue. I don't remember our company-- the units that were actively engaged in the field, the infantry units, we didn't have time for that crap.

[00:26:04.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't have time for it.

[00:26:04.87] MICHAEL NEIL: No, we're all trying to save each other's lives. They're working together. I'll never forget an image that I will always have in my mind of seeing this white Marine from down South. He was from Arkansas or Mississippi. And this black Marine, he was from-- they were both from deep in the heart of the South. They're exchanging letters with each other and reading each other's letters from home. It was our only form of real entertainment, just about, was letters from home.

[00:26:32.75] And the first time I attended a black man's wound under fire, he was a big guy. And his blood-- I mean, I remember his blood was the same as anybody else's. We all bleed red. I couldn't tell. And I had his blood all over me. I could care less. He was my Marine.

[00:26:52.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Tell me about your back seater job in the spotter planes.

[00:26:58.10] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, the first month was quite an eye opener because I had to learn how to handle the three radios back there. Learned how to fly the plane too because the AO we had control of the rudders. And we had a stick we could put in. So I could actually fly the plane and I could look over the pilot's shoulders. And I could see the dashboard and read the altimeter and everything else.

[00:27:26.70] JOE GALLOWAY: So if he got hit, you had to take over the plane?

[00:27:28.92] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, that's what happened just before we got there. A couple of months before we got there, that's what the AO did. The pilot got shot and the AO brought it in. It wasn't a perfect landing. And I could have landed that plane any time, especially later on when I got more proficient. It wouldn't have been a great landing, but I would have got us down. Yeah. We worked a lot with the recon units and the ground maneuver elements, calling fixed wing.

[00:27:57.81] There was a moratorium on bombing in the North. And in April/May time frame, there'd be nothing for us to take-- for me and the Army pilot, we were taking off. And by the way, only Marines could control Marine air. We were under strict orders. The Army was never to control Marine artillery unless I was incapacitated. That's just the way we were. We just wanted to make sure we had Marines doing it. It'd be nothing to take off and have a flight of four or five. That's two aircraft stacked up, waiting to go.

[00:28:34.28] And so if you contact them, you immediately let them know who you are as you're flying the zone. You've got to find a target for them, say who's the lowest on fuel. You're talking all in those days. Now you can talk in the clear, but we had to talk in code in those days. So every day, there was a new key into the code that you had to use. So who's lowest on fuel, so OK-- flight 2, come on down and we'd go down.

[00:29:06.05] And there were two pods on each wing we could mark with smoke. The pilot could fire the smoke and try to hit it close to the target from there. I would adjust the pilot to come in on a certain heading. And from that, go 50 meters to your left. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Port or starboard. And then you want to make sure that they're on target coming down. And you clear them hot because generally, you'd have troops in the area and always working with the ground troops.

[00:29:40.45] Get down. Get down. God damn it, get down. Make sure they get down. I don't want to have a wounded Marine. And that would happen as well. These guys are grunts. They're just young kids. They'd have a camera. They want to take a picture of the strike. Yeah. And they

get wounded. Yeah. So we had a lot of napalm. I probably called in somewhere in the neighborhood of probably close to 300 airstrikes, which is a lot of airstrikes.

[00:30:07.78] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a lot.

[00:30:08.35] MICHAEL NEIL: And I'm just estimating. Called in a lot of artillery and worked a lot with the ground units on spotting the areas ahead of them where they're moving. You see bad guys up there, look like there's a tree line with foxholes dug in. And you've got to warn them with that. And some of the recon units-- we worked with a recon unit one time, saved their lives and got them out. They were all shot up. And the Army pilot was a new guy. It wasn't his fault.

[00:30:41.62] Most of the Army pilots were good guys, but they had never been grunts on the ground. And so he couldn't believe why they were moving so slow. And I said, well, they're carrying wounded. They're carrying a dead Marine. And they're fighting, too. I mean, I'm talking to them on the radio. And they're shooting. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And they're out of breath. I'm trying to get them to an LZ where I can get a helicopter in to get them out. So finally, we got it down. And I said, hey, you got to shoot over here.

[00:31:11.68] And then when I'm-- boom, boom. I'm going. In my mind, I can still hear the shooting going on. And it's loud and clear over the radio. And sometimes, it's very hard to hear because of the shooting that's going on. When the man you're talking to is shooting his weapon too, it's very hard. So got the helicopter in there and got them out. And so we landed in Phu Bai to refuel because we were bingo fuel by then, too. And they had to land there.

[00:31:36.05] So I jumped out of the aircraft and ran over there just to see these young Marines. And you've never seen more exhausted, tired, grateful Marines in your entire life. And I just said-- I mean, it was heroic what they did that day. But we never want to leave a wounded behind.

[00:31:55.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Never. When were you wounded?

[00:31:59.35] MICHAEL NEIL: Ah, that was about in September of '67. We had an operation in a village. And it was the same village that two nights before, I had literally crawled down this path. Crawled on my side because I wanted to set up a little ambush site. We almost got these two guys the next morning, too. Damn it. We didn't get them. So we were on the same path. Now it's broad daylight. It's about noon time. But I got my whole platoon out there and we're searching this village because I'm sure that we're going to find some stuff.

[00:32:39.21] And they had planted a bouncing-- not a Bouncing Betty, but a tomato can landmine. So one of my Marines stepped on it. And I got some shrapnel in my hand. And my radio operator got-- I mean, I'm knocked unconscious briefly. I looked up and I'm bleeding through my hand. I've been talking on the radio like that. My radio operator-- first thing he says to me, he says, sir, I'm going home. It's my third Purp. And he's bleeding like hell from his knee. And the only thing he thinks about is going home.

[00:33:10.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:33:11.29] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah, he was a good man. Yeah.

[00:33:13.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Did he go home?

[00:33:14.11] MICHAEL NEIL: He did.

[00:33:14.80] JOE GALLOWAY: He got his third Purp and he--

[00:33:16.78] MICHAEL NEIL: The enlisted Marines always were sent home.

[00:33:18.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they evac you?

[00:33:20.26] MICHAEL NEIL: They did. I didn't want to go. But my XO came out to reinforce us when-- he was just real close by us anyway. So I couldn't have shot. I couldn't have done anything. I couldn't use my hand for about a week. But it was probably good because we were all so dirty in the field. And the only thing they wanted-- they take you back and clean you up and try and get as much of that shrapnel out as they can. So it was probably a good idea, but I didn't want to go. I refused at first and he gave me a direct order.

[00:33:53.65] Yeah. Yeah, all the wounded. And so we went to Da Nang. I got to spend two nights in Da Nang and got in an argument.

[00:34:03.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Clean sheets?

[00:34:04.18] MICHAEL NEIL: Oh, yeah. They cleaned you out. And the doc says, look, I'm not going to take all this stuff out because I'm probably going to do more damage than anything. And so finally, they shoot me up with morphine and I wake up the next morning. There's a like-- it's a white, like-- I couldn't describe it. I'm looking up like this. It's a white mosquito netting they had over me. And we never had those in the field or anything. And my first thought was I had died.

[00:34:36.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You're dead and gone to heaven.

[00:34:38.93] MICHAEL NEIL: And then this friend of mine rips the mosquito net back. And I knew I'd either gone to hell or I was still alive. I said, I know I'm not dead seeing you here. But anyways, that was funny.

[00:34:53.21] JOE GALLOWAY: So you were back in the field in a week?

[00:34:55.59] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, I went back in two days. MICHAEL NEIL: Bob Hope Show. My platoon-- I'd like to think that I always had the best platoon in the company. But I may have had the best platoon in the battalion. But anyway, my platoon got selected out of the battalion to go back into Da Nang and to an amphitheater area they'd set up to see the Bob Hope Show. But we'd been on a two-day bush patrol. We were out all night before. We had no vehicles to take us in.

[00:35:37.55] We walked everywhere. So I walked my platoon back into the company fire base on Hill 41. We got some chow, then we walked down the hill to the Route 1, the old--

[00:35:49.07] JOE GALLOWAY: And hitchhiked?

[00:35:50.33] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, we attempted to hitchhike at first. That wasn't working too well. So if you hold up your weapon, vehicles will stop.

[00:36:00.48] JOE GALLOWAY: They will stop.

[00:36:01.10] MICHAEL NEIL: And so I told each one of my squad leaders that you tell your fire team leaders, I'll have their ass if they're not back by sundown. You're on your own going into Da Nang and have a good time. So I don't know what a lot of them did. A lot of them probably just went to the whore houses or got cold beer or whatever. Whatever Marines do, I didn't want to know. As long as they were back, I didn't care.

[00:36:24.87] So I took this Vietnamese boy that was like a mascot and this other brand new second lieutenant. We had to force our way up to the front of the Bob Hope Show because all the guys in the rear were packed in. So guys like us-- I mean, I still have grenades on. I had my black face on.

[00:36:43.98] JOE GALLOWAY: And you just pushed on through.

[00:36:45.84] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. Believe me, I was pushing through to get out of my way. So all these pukes in the rear who thought they really had it made-- when I got to the front and I suddenly see the Marine officer who enlisted me in San Francisco. He was a captain, Larsen. But he was the escort officer for the Bob Hope Show. So I said, hey, Bob. Raquel Welch was with Bob. I knew her as Raquel Tejada because I went to San Diego State with her.

[00:37:20.15] She was in a sorority and I was in a fraternity. I even danced with her one night. But we had never dated or anything. And so he comes over and he doesn't recognize me at first. I said, it's Lieutenant Neil from Berkeley. I mean, my head's shaved. I probably lost 20 pounds and I had this black stuff all over my face. Hey, Lieutenant Neil. I said, Kevin, I know Raquel Welch. I went to school with her. And there was a bunch of reporters around. They said, oh, get him up there on the stage. Get him up there. So they get me up on the stage.

[00:37:49.04] And I got pictures of it. And she came towards me. She got within about maybe as far as you and I are, two to three feet. And she just jerked back. First, she was coming rushing towards me like this because they sad to her--

[00:38:02.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Then she saw you.

[00:38:04.38] MICHAEL NEIL: No, she smelled me.

[00:38:05.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Smelled you.

[00:38:07.26] MICHAEL NEIL: I'm sure that was it. You didn't know how bad you smelled until you came back from R&R and you smelled the other Marines in the hooch with it. And I hadn't had a shower or bath.

[00:38:18.00] JOE GALLOWAY: So she bounced off?

[00:38:19.05] MICHAEL NEIL: She did at first and she apologized. And like a little peck on the cheek. But hey, she looked great. And that was the best day of my life in Vietnam. MICHAEL NEIL: It was on the bridge below-- it's easy to do because I've told this before-- below Hill 55 was a bridge connecting-- it was part of Route 1, but it ran south to the Arizona area which was another bad area. And it was a vital bridge for us. So from time to time, platoons had to be on that bridge. We rotated the platoons out of the battalion to guard the bridge.

[00:39:04.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Guard both ends of the bridge.

[00:39:05.85] MICHAEL NEIL: And we'd been on an operation back in Happy Valley. And this was in August of 1967. My platoon was placed on there. And the position was in terrible shape. The bunkers were crashing in. The grass had grown into the wire. Always should be at least hand grenade range away from your wire.

[00:39:28.23] So I asked this company commander, who I've already told you was the worst example of a Marine officer I've ever seen, for assistance because my men-- not only are they charged with manning that position, we have to run patrols and ambushes at night, too. And they had to sleep once in a while. That's a big problem for Marines in combat or Soldiers in combat is getting sleep. They'd fall asleep at a moment's notice. So in any event, he denied me any reinforcement.

[00:40:01.21] Wouldn't send me a flame tank. I asked for a flame tank to burn off the grass, the brush. And he said, no, I like that brush. It's hiding your wire. Well, it hid the wire. It hid the bad guys crawling up. So the first couple of nights, we would hear sounds out there. It was kind of unusual. We'd throw grenades and stuff like that. Well the third night, I think, we were on the bridge, I got hit by sappers. They'd been planning this for weeks. They came through the wire with Bangalore torpedoes.

[00:40:30.85] I had bad guys running all around inside my perimeter. My Marines were shooting and killing them right and the left. I lost three KIAs, all from-- what was that? Bazooka-type of weapon they had. RPG. Yeah. Yeah. RPG. Direct hits on the bunker. And they had planned this. And one of the bunkers was sunk so down, my Marine was having to sit on top of the bunker to see out. And he takes it and gets hit, right? Takes it full bore, full bore of the RPG.

[00:41:15.09] But in any event, we kept them from blowing the bridge. I personally tore one of the satchel charges off the bridge. And my Marines, I kept yelling at them. They're over there. Boom, boom. So we got the satchel charges, threw them in the water. But my company commander was screaming and yelling at me, how could you let these people come in? How could you do this? And he's over the phone. And I said, well-- he says, you're relieved.

[00:41:39.99] And I said, well, if I'm relieved, then get somebody down here to take my place because I'm too busy fighting these guys. We're talking on a landline then. This guy was awful. But in any event, we repelled them. They got them back out. They dragged all their wounded out and their dead out. They left a lot of gear behind. At one point in time, I'm standing no further than ten feet away from two of them. And they don't know who I am and I don't know who they are. I would have shot them or they would have shot me. That's how dark it was.

[00:42:08.86] The problem is when you're fighting at night, a lot of people don't understand why certain things don't happen. It's because you can't tell a good guy from a bad guy. So that was the worst night of my life. Everybody congratulated me the next day for saving the bridge.

[00:42:28.54] JOE GALLOWAY: I thought the commander was yelling he was relieving you.

[00:42:31.45] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah.

[00:42:32.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Did he?

[00:42:32.80] MICHAEL NEIL: No.

[00:42:33.16] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:42:33.73] MICHAEL NEIL: Of course not.

[00:42:34.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course not.

[00:42:40.56] MICHAEL NEIL: Very little. There was an Australian-- very small unit, just a handful of Aussies in there. And every once in a while, I'd see them and we'd wave at them or something like that. They were good guys. But really, we always had a Vietnamese Marine with our battalion and he was generally pretty good.

[00:43:10.38] JOE GALLOWAY: How much if any contact did you have with Vietnamese civilians, the villagers?

[00:43:15.18] MICHAEL NEIL: A lot. The people that are on our side-- there are many villages obviously that were closer into our positions that were very anticommunist and-- or Catholic. There was one Catholic village I remember very well. I became very close with a Vietnamese boy by the name of--

[00:43:38.10] his nickname was GTO because he knew all the words to the song GTO. And then there was another bridge closer to Da Nang that we had to guard once in a while. And we were always going through there. And he became like my platoon's mascot. And I've actually--

[00:43:53.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about this boy. How old was he?

[00:43:54.84] MICHAEL NEIL: Well at the time, I think he was around 11. He was just a little guy. But he was the leader of the Vietnamese boys in that village. So if we wanted something

done, he could get them. He'd yell and scream at them. We got him little Marine outfits where we had them cut down-- we got him dressed like a Marine and he loved it.

[00:44:15.01] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a wonder he didn't get killed at night by the VC.

[00:44:18.58] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, their village-- we had a unit that protected that village. It was what they call a CAP unit. And they got overrun one night. I went out there the next day to help them out and about half of them were killed. But yeah, they wanted to. Any of these villages that were pro-government and anticommunist-- yeah, the VC would want to attack them, too. The San Diego Union newspaper ran an article on my trip back to Vietnam. And it describes my relationship with GTO. The thing was--

[00:44:56.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about the trip back and your reunion with this kid.

[00:45:01.51] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, I went back in 2009 about five, six years ago. Six years ago. Five years or six years ago. And I did not know his real name. I mean, here's a kid that was so-- I brought him his first pair of shoes back from R&R. And I brought him up to our Hill 41 for Christmas before I left the platoon which was strict. I had him inside of our wire one night for Christmas. And I don't realize we got beer and it's a truce.

[00:45:42.34] So we couldn't go out on patrol or do ambushes and the VC weren't supposed to do anything. And generally, the VC obeyed that. So I couldn't keep the kid from smoking cigarettes. So he would smoke. And we were all smoking on those days. And I had him on my position on the bridge one night right next to his village. And he said, dai uy, dai uy, can I talk on the radio? No, no. No, you can't talk on the radio. You know you can't do that. I want to call the tank battalion down the road. I know them.

[00:46:17.03] So I think, well OK. Now it's about one o'clock in the morning. I said, OK, but you know radio procedure, right? Oh, dai uy, I know. So he gets on there. He goes whatever the tank battalion's call sign was. Tank battalion, tank battalion, this is GTO, over. Unknown station, send your traffic. GTO says, oh, you horse's ass, you bullshit. And he called, what's your other name? And I mean, there it was. He was just firing at them. I had to grabbed that handset from him. I said, GTO, what are you doing? He said, I don't like those guys.

[00:46:54.90] So anyway, I go back to Vietnam. And my wife got me some pictures of him and myself as a boy. So I got our translator that was leading our group to take me to the village where he was from. And in the village, everything has changed. I know you've been back. I'm sure. And places where we used to fight are developed or grown up or whatever, they've changed. They don't plant this. They plant something else now or whatever. So in any event, finally an older woman says, I know him. She says, and I have his mobile phone number.

[00:47:33.78] Now this is all being said in Vietnamese. And the translator is telling me what she's saying. So she brings the phone number back and he calls the number. Now up to this point, I had told nobody what his nickname was. I hadn't told the translator. Nobody. So he says, he's on the phone. He's on the phone. I said, ask him what his nickname was.

[00:47:56.56] So then he goes back in Vietnamese, asked him that. He says, the Marines all called him GTO. I'm getting like this. And I said, ask him what his father did. He goes back. His father was a village barber. Those two things, only he would have known that. And so then we got together the next day.

[00:48:19.48] JOE GALLOWAY: What was he doing?

[00:48:21.85] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, he had to become a communist to survive in that environment. And he did pretty well as a businessman over there. He's done real well. And I think that his family is very involved with the government and everything else. So when he visited here, we never even used his true name.

[00:48:51.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did he come here?

[00:48:53.32] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. He's been here once to visit. Yeah. So yeah, it was great. But these two newspaper articles-- one of the reporters in the San Diego Union did a couple of good articles. So if you ever wanted to see something, that would be great. MICHAEL NEIL: Letters. That was it. And my mom saved my letters and my sister saved them. So I had a lot of letters.

[00:49:28.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get news from home on what was going on back there and what was going on in the war you were fighting?

[00:49:36.80] MICHAEL NEIL: Not much.

[00:49:37.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you see Stars and Stripes?

[00:49:39.80] MICHAEL NEIL: Every once in a while, we'd see a paper like that or my mom would send me a newspaper or something. The best thing my mom would send me is Irish whiskey in a plastic baby bottle. And then she'd put popcorn all around it and everything else to seal it. But no. As a matter of fact, I learned of the death of one of my neighbors, Johnny Callahan, a kid I grew up with-- he was with the 82nd Airborne --because my grammar school that I'd gone to started sending me letters.

[00:50:11.79] And one of the boys said, I was sorry to hear about Johnny Callahan. I didn't even know him, but you see, my mom hid that stuff for me. So the day I was wounded, my mom woke up and woke my dad up. And she says, Mike's hurt. She just felt it. And I never wrote her a note or told her anything about it. But she found out from-- they get the telegram. But they didn't get the telegram until three days later. Even though you tell them not to send a telegram, they'd do it.

[00:50:53.30] MICHAEL NEIL: July of '68. It was a commercial airliner, but it wasn't one of the big ones like American or United. It was a smaller commercial airliner that flew us.

[00:51:02.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Emerald Airways.

[00:51:03.36] MICHAEL NEIL: Yes, one of those. Yeah. Flew us to Okinawa, where we'd stashed some gear. So I bought some stereo equipment and stuff to take home like a typical Marine because they would ship that. The Marine Corps would ship it home for you. To tell you the truth, I missed my first flight home from Okinawa because now I'm with another AO buddy of mine, Bill Coleman.

[00:51:30.38] JOE GALLOWAY: When you say AO, that's--

[00:51:32.72] MICHAEL NEIL: Air observer.

[00:51:33.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Air observer.

[00:51:34.76] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. And there were 13 of us in the unit. And three of them were killed. Matter of fact, I almost extended. There were five of us that were going to extend. Six of us were going to extend. No, five. And at the last moment, that would be six months. I'd get to go to Australia on R&R. And I was going to extend.

[00:51:59.19] And I just finally said no. I told Bill. I said, I'm not going to do it. I tore the paper up. I said, I've been shot at almost every day for the last 13 months. I'm not stretching this out anymore. So he didn't do it. And one other Marine didn't do it, the AO. Two that did were both dead within two months. And a third--

[00:52:21.75] JOE GALLOWAY: So you run into your buddy in Okinawa.

[00:52:23.82] MICHAEL NEIL: OK. So--

[00:52:24.84] JOE GALLOWAY: You guys are drinking some whiskey or something?

[00:52:26.22] MICHAEL NEIL: Well yeah. We were out late the night before so I missed my flight. So I'm walking back across the parade deck over to where he's sitting in a chair, drinking a cold beer. And he sees me coming. He falls out of the chair because he knows I missed my flight. And I'm so sad. I can't believe it. So in any event, the next day, we got on our flight. Fly into the Air Force base just outside of LA. So we land there.

[00:52:53.49] And then I grabbed about three enlisted Marines. I said, look, let's not take this bus. It'll take us forever to get to LAX. Let's jump. Let's rent a cab. So we did. They had cabs there, commercial cabs. So the four of us guys paid for the cab. And now picture this. I'm walking through LAX with my sea bag over my shoulder and a SKS-44, which was the predecessor of the AK-47, over my shoulder because I had taken that off the body of a VC that I had shot.

[00:53:26.94] And I wanted to bring it home with me, which I did. But I walked through LAX. Nobody says anything. I get on this PSA plane. The stewardess take the rifle and put it up above in the cover. How things have changed. Between LAX and San Diego, the stewardesses got me six drinks.

[00:53:51.50] And as I'm getting off the plane, the lead stewardess-- my wife is listening to me right now, but she's heard the story before-- gives me her name and phone number. And I said, I know I'm home. It was great. That was my flight home. It was just-- the flight attendants--

[00:54:04.94] JOE GALLOWAY: You remembered to get the SKS out.

[00:54:06.62] MICHAEL NEIL: Oh, yeah.

[00:54:07.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:54:07.85] MICHAEL NEIL: But now I walk through-- JOE GALLOWAY: Do you still have it? MICHAEL NEIL: I do. Actually, I've loaned it-- given it to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot Museum. And so they have it right now, along with a defused Chicom, Chinese communist grenade that we got.

[00:54:29.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Now some folks coming home ran into problems. You did not?

[00:54:35.39] MICHAEL NEIL: I didn't. Fortunate to come back to San Diego. San Diego is pretty much of a military town, conservative town. Now not to say that once in a while out in the community, I got in a little altercation with two guys one night. And if they hadn't pulled me off, I probably would have killed both of them. No, San Diego was a great, great town. And it was not like San Francisco or some other places, or Wisconsin, where they were having all the antiwar stuff. I don't remember any really--

[00:55:08.79] I mean, some of my Marines got spit on, got called baby killers. And I know, I've heard all those stories. And I've had them personally told to me by people that I know and trust and believe in. It was awful for many of them coming home, especially the young guys, 18, 19. I'm an older Marine. I'm 27 when I came back.

[00:55:30.17] JOE GALLOWAY: The other thing is you're staying in the Marines and they're not. Most of them.

[00:55:35.52] MICHAEL NEIL: A lot of them are getting out.

[00:55:36.58] JOE GALLOWAY: You're inside the perimeter?

[00:55:37.92] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. Yes. In a way, that was right. But mainly, it was just San Diego was a good town to come home to.

[00:55:46.80] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do after that tour in Vietnam? You stayed in the Corps.

[00:55:51.33] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. I was stationed at MCRD, Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. And this is a little bit of a story. I wrote my dad a letter. And I said, Pop, they're sending all the second lieutenants to Camp Lejeune. And they're going down to Gitmo,

Guantanamo Bay, on Navy ships. That's where they were sending all the second lieutenants. I would love to get stationed at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. I'd never asked my dad for a favor. I did not know that he knew the commandant of the Marine Corps.

[00:56:25.15] So apparently, there was a phone call made. And I get orders from Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego. I was sent to the drill field down there to work with the DIs and training Marines. And I didn't want to do that at that time because the Marine Corps was cracking down on their DIs and because you're not supposed to touch them and stuff like that-- touch the recruits. And I didn't want to be a spy on DIs. So I went up to the legal office and I told this major, I said that I was a lawyer.

[00:56:59.89] And he couldn't believe it. So they got my orders changed because they needed a lawyer. So for the first time, I was a lawyer. So they--

[00:57:07.84] JOE GALLOWAY: They let you be a lawyer for once.

[00:57:09.94] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. So I worked up there until my enlistment was up. And when I got out of the Marine Corps, I had no idea of staying in. I started practicing law in San Diego with another Marine who was also an infantry guy like me. He was actually a company commander. Bill McAdam was his name. And he went on to become a judge. And we're still good friends. But in any event, about two years out of the Corps, I got a letter from headquarters Marine Corps.

[00:57:41.11] They wanted me to come back and become a Reserve and come back on active duty for a couple of weeks. And I did it. And man, my head immediately was right. And I knew I wanted to stay in the Reserve. So I stayed in the Reserves and did a lot of active duty time and commands and things.

[00:58:00.40] JOE GALLOWAY: They called you back when they needed you?

[00:58:02.11] MICHAEL NEIL: Yes.

[00:58:02.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:58:03.43] MICHAEL NEIL: Not as much as they're doing today, but certainly yeah. When I was needed, I was called back.

[00:58:09.52] JOE GALLOWAY: And in between, you're practicing law in San Diego?

[00:58:12.46] MICHAEL NEIL: Yes.

[00:58:13.09] JOE GALLOWAY: And somewhere in there, I read that you owned a bar.

[00:58:16.90] MICHAEL NEIL: I did, along with three others.

[00:58:19.42] JOE GALLOWAY: I can't believe that a retired Marine would own a bar.

[00:58:26.38] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, the old Irish side of me comes out. A lot of Marines are of Irish heritage. And yes, it was called Reidy O'Neil's. But Mike Reidy, who was Navy officer during Vietnam, insisted my name be involved with it. And he was the main money man, but he was a very gracious guy taking me in on that.

[00:58:50.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And you had that bar for a lot of years.

[00:58:54.62] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, we had it for about five or six years. I'll tell you what. Owning a bar is not always fun. Your liver takes a beating.

[00:59:03.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Yeah. And your wallet, too.

[00:59:06.13] MICHAEL NEIL: Well, a little bit. Yeah.

[00:59:07.39] JOE GALLOWAY: A little bit. Yeah.

[00:59:13.06] MICHAEL NEIL: I don't think anybody who served as an infantry officer or enlisted or just saw combat could not say their life has been forever changed. I could wake up every day and realize this is a great day. Another day this side of the sod. When that sun comes up in the morning when we're out on those ambush sites or whatever, you knew it was going to be a better day because the sun comes up. The bugs go away. You can see the enemy better. Of course, they can see you, too.

[00:59:52.33] I think your judgment ability of other men, it's definitely-- no, not women. I think most of us are set-- but in any event, men. Not only that, but appreciation of just little things in life and realizing that all the great things we have and the respect for our country and respect for other people's abilities just-- it makes you tougher, too.

[01:00:25.91] JOE GALLOWAY: How did the Vietnam War affect the United States Marine Corps? Make it better or make it worse? Somewhere in between?

[01:00:35.01] MICHAEL NEIL: Made it better. And here's what happened. There was a core of us that-- even though I went off of active duty there. When I did, there was a core of Marine officers that stayed in. And I knew many of them very well. And we all said, we should never fight a war like we fought the Vietnam War. We fought it totally wrong. McNamara's plan was just defective from beginning to end. And I could talk to you about Project 100,000. That's a whole other story.

[01:01:09.45] But the war should always be taken to the enemy. We never did take it to North Vietnam. If we invaded North Vietnam, they could never have infiltrated the South. And South Vietnam never would have fallen, number one. Number two, don't train with your units. It should be unit replacement, not individual replacement like we did in Vietnam. And what I did was not good. Nowadays, we make sure that we have units. You train with your platoon for months before you ever go into combat.

[01:01:41.41] JOE GALLOWAY: You go as a unit and come home as a unit.

[01:01:44.60] MICHAEL NEIL: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's probably one of the-- that was the number one lesson that we were able to convince everybody that should always be the case. Unit replacement, unit integrity. You really don't get good for about three or four months.

[01:02:05.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[01:02:05.56] MICHAEL NEIL: And then you start really learning your stuff and--

[01:02:08.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Then you start thinking about moving on.

[01:02:11.77] MICHAEL NEIL: Yeah. So I'm OK. The 13 months, it's not eternity. Sometimes, it seems like it at night.

[01:02:23.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Has Marine doctrine and strategy changed with the technology and the training?

[01:02:29.98] MICHAEL NEIL: I think it has. I can't really comment on what's going on in the last ten years too much because I'm too removed from it. But I do get-- the Marine Corps is good enough to give us updates and--

[01:02:45.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you go out to Pendleton once in a while?

[01:02:47.68] MICHAEL NEIL: Yes.

[01:02:49.63] JOE GALLOWAY: What do they look like?

[01:02:50.98] MICHAEL NEIL: The Marines today are the best ever, in my opinion. I gave a talk to a Marine battalion that was going overseas a few years ago. And I'll never forget what this young lance corporal said to me. And it was out-- they had been out in the field all day long. So they were coming back in. They were frying steaks. And we were in a big huge tent, torches all around. It looked like a Viking dinner or something like that. And I'm up there and I can yell and scream and do whatever I want.

[01:03:24.01] No women. Just these male Marines. And I got them all going like, we're going to attack the world. And later on in the evening, I asked this one young man. I said, how do you feel about going back to Afghanistan? And he said, I'm looking forward to it, sir. And I said, why is that? And he says, because I didn't kill enough of the bastards the last time. And that's the kind of spirit we have. And they're well-trained and a lot brighter, probably on average, than our Marines used to be.

[01:03:55.33] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[01:04:00.88] MICHAEL NEIL: I don't think it's remembered by that many people, although I'm always struck. First of all, the history books. I've been asked to speak at colleges and high

schools. And there's like a little chapter maybe in the history books that's just minuscule compared to-- basically, it's like a Reader's Digest account of what went on.

[01:04:28.15] And I understand that. People are going to have to go further. But I'm always taken back when I go to the Wall in D.C. I'll be back there next week for I have two different reunions going on, my rifle company reunion and my officer's class reunion, exactly the same time.

MICHAEL NEIL: Every time I go to the Wall, which I couldn't go-- the first two times, I walked and got close to it, about a hundred yards from it. And I couldn't bring myself to go up to it.

[01:05:08.93] The third time, I was with several members of my platoon. I was back there for a battalion reunion. And one of my platoon sergeant-- my platoon sergeant was with me, Joe Lambert, who recently died. And I was able to walk right up to it with other Marines. But I'm taken back by all the young people that go up there because it affected so many lives and people touch. They're always looking for that name they know. So I think it's a bit of a bad memory in a way.

[01:05:47.17] Nowadays, people say thank you for your service. But I never heard that until about three or four years ago. I really believe that the Marines, Soldiers, Sailors-- World War II maybe had the greatest generation, but the finest generation fought in Vietnam. Because they fought in a time when it was all that antiwar fervor going on. But they stood up and they realized their obligation to our country. And they went and they served. And those that served under those circumstances, an unpopular war, to me were the finest.