

Olds, Fred US Navy

[00:00:16.20] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

[00:00:18.99] FRED OLDS: I was 30 years old. I had a wife and three small children. And my children were 2 and 1/2 and actually one-year-old.

[00:00:33.50] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your hometown?

[00:00:35.00] FRED OLDS: Hometown was Clearwater, Florida.

[00:00:37.55] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you entered the military?

[00:00:45.14] FRED OLDS: Well, I was already in the military. So I had a pretty good sense of what wars were like. And my family had been in wars throughout history.

[00:00:54.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me a little about your family.

[00:00:56.72] FRED OLDS: Well my grandfather was a colonel in the cavalry. And in fact he was head of 26th Cavalry in the Philippines and right prior to World War II. And the person that relieved him was captured and went in the Bataan Death March. But my mother was actually born in 1908 at Fort Stotsenburg in the Philippines when he was stationed out there previously. And it later became Clark Field. And so we had quite a relationship with that. He was president of the Army Navy Club in Manila. And I got to visit that one time later on when I was a commodore, I got to go to the club and see his name up there. And it was pretty fascinating.

[00:01:35.42] My father was the first commander of B-17s in the Army Air Corps. He was a pilot in World War I. Had flown with Billy Mitchell after the war. Was an aide for Billy Mitchell as a captain at his court-martial. My grandmother sat next to Mrs. Mitchell throughout the whole trial. And that was a funny story. I don't have time to tell it here today. But that was an interesting story. It continued to pioneer bombers. I was born actually at Langley Field where he was stationed. The reason I was born there was my grandfather and why he had married my mother.

[00:02:14.90] My grandfather at the time was in charge of the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. And the Army felt that everybody who was in the Air Force, going to be in this Army Air Corps, had to still be a guy who could ride a horse and put his black boots on, his Sam Browne belt. And so they took him out there to try and get him politically correct in those days to be an Army officer and not be an aviator. And he met my mother who was of course out there as the daughter of the commander of the post. And she was a wonderful horsewoman. And he loved to ride. And so they got married. So, had a brother born there and another brother born later.

[00:02:52.19] Prior to that time he had been married-- when my brother Robin, who retired as a brigadier general in the Air Force and pretty famous fighter pilot, and there's a book out on him--

he had married Ella Raines the movie actress. They were married for a while. He was born in Hawaii. And he was 14 years my senior, basically. He and Stevan were born in Hawaii. Their mother died very young. My grandmother actually moved in with my father and moved base to base with him to help take care of the kids.

[00:03:22.74] Then he got to Langley Field and he married Marjorie Langley. Marjorie Langley being the daughter of the person Langley Field was named after. Had two teenage boys. And they just didn't get along with the two sons my father had. So that went out the window. And so two years later they were divorced. And then of course he got sent to Command and General Staff School and married my mother. So that was the third wife. In 1940 they got divorced because they had a little challenge there. And I moved down to Florida and grew up in Florida with my grandfather who had retired down there as a colonel.

[00:03:58.08] His last wife was a year before he died. And he died in 1943 of lupus, a strange disease then-- nobody knew what-- He was commander of the 2nd Air Force. He was a major-general. He had pioneered the B-17s, making cross-country flights. First one to ever fly cross-country on oxygen. First one to ever fly at night over Oahu. First one to do aerobatics over Washington, DC.

[00:04:24.48] And made a goodwill flight to Buenos Aires in 1938. That was with Curtis LeMay as a young lieutenant being his navigator. And they had gotten their actual charts up in the National Geographic Society out of Washington. And I have a letter at home from Grosvenor where he's talking to my grandmother about how, gee, I didn't realize the other night when you were at my house that was your son who made that wonderful goodwill flight to Buenos Aires. But that was-- pioneered World War II in the B-17. Started the Ferry Command.

[00:05:00.21] JOE GALLOWAY: You were a graduate of the Naval Academy.

[00:05:04.56] FRED OLDS: Yes, sir. I graduated in 1959.

[00:05:06.69] JOE GALLOWAY: 1959. And you were 30 years old when you went to Vietnam. So you had had ship duty. And you had been through all the training.

[00:05:18.69] FRED OLDS: I had been through. I started out on the Lloyd Thomas, which was a destroyer-- basically a DDE destroyer escort from World War II. And then I shifted. I was on a pre-commissioning crew of USS Luce. We had a wonderful skipper on there, named Commander David H. Bagley, who later became chief of naval personnel. And every officer on that ship made captain or admiral, which I thought was an amazing fact. But we had a wonderful crew on there. Fired 46 missiles in one year, which was almost unheard of, evaluating the missiles. But that was a great ship.

[00:05:51.01] Then went to postgraduate school at Monterey, oceanography/meteorology. Amphibious Group 3 staff in San Diego followed, as a staff meteorologist, oceanography. That wasn't my cup of tea. I wanted to get back in the action. I volunteered for Vietnam. I wanted to ride a PBR or do something hot. And so I was ready to go. And the day before Christmas I got orders to Vietnam.

[00:06:14.04] JOE GALLOWAY: What year?

[00:06:15.03] FRED OLDS: In 1965. I'm sorry-- it was, yeah, '65.

[00:06:23.23] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions on arriving in Vietnam?

[00:06:27.44] FRED OLDS: It was a blast furnace. I stepped out of that airplane and I thought I'd sweated it off a lot during the SERE training where they put us in little black boxes and waterboarded us and did everything that they call torture today, which we thought was good training and didn't leave any impressions on us. And it sure gets good information out, which I used to a great extent later, psychological terms, because I started interrogating people. I think the whole thing was-- it was noisy. Just a lot of high-pitched noises.

[00:07:00.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Smells?

[00:07:00.89] FRED OLDS: Smells were-- it went from pungent to clear. And it varied the gamut. The whole gamut. But it was fascinating.

[00:07:14.71] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your initial duties and your initial assignment?

[00:07:18.63] FRED OLDS: I went, reported in to NAVFORV headquarters as my orders had stated. And I was told I was going to be the amphibious intelligence officer on the staff of COMNAVFORV. And I said, well, I really didn't train to do that. You sent me to Fort Holabird, Maryland for six months of combat intelligence and I'd like to be in a combat area. And they took one look at me and they said, well we need a person down in Can Tho. Do you think you could handle all the intelligence for the Vietnamese Navy and the U.S. Navy in the Mekong Delta? And I said, absolutely, sir.

[00:07:49.62] The next day I was en route to Can Tho. And no pre--warning on any of the duties. Nothing. You just checked in. The first night in Saigon it was fascinating. I was put in the Meyerkord Hotel, which was named after one of the people who was killed over there, of course. And my roommate was a Korean. And a little unnerving, since he didn't speak any English, he sat there sharpening his Bowie knife all night long. And so I thought that was a little unnerving, because you didn't know what was going to happen. [LAUGHS]

[00:08:25.10] FRED OLDS: Well, if you took-- I don't know if there was a daily routine or not. I think we-- it varied from day to day. Because we could be flying missions in the Bird Dogs doing visual reconnaissance. We could be going on River Assault Group patrols with the Vietnamese. Or went on American patrols with the PBRs. On a normal day I would go over to the IV Corps headquarters-- because I was the briefer for the Navy-- to General Desobry, who was then a colonel, and the assembled staff that was located there for all the Navy operations in the Delta during the previous 24 hours. And then what we were planning on doing upcoming for that day.

[00:09:03.64] There were Air Force people there, Army people, not too many Navy-- just, we represented the Navy, basically. And my boss was a commander. He was in charge of putting all

the new PBR bases in. PBRs were operating off an LST off the coast initially. And they decided they had to get them away from that because they were getting beat up by the sides of the ship in the rough seas. And so they brought the first group to Can Tho. And on about the 9th of May, I believe it was, pretty-- '66. And so those were the first PBRs in country. We didn't have the helos in support. We didn't have a lot of things. They lived in a hotel downtown in Can Tho. I briefed them every day.

[00:09:45.24] But back to the IV Corps headquarters aspect, I was on Advisory Team 96, which was adviser to the Vietnamese Navy. So I briefed also at their headquarters after I briefed at the IV Corps headquarters and what we were going to do, and what we planned to do, and discussed the Vietnamese operations. Because my counterpart was an intelligence officer. And I fed him information and he fed me information.

[00:10:11.10] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living quarters like?

[00:10:14.28] FRED OLDS: Compared to most people, pretty palatial. We actually lived in a house that was chartered by the American government. A French doctor had escaped back to France. He was afraid of the coming war. And so the bottom level on his house he had at Can Tho, which was right down next to the water across from big old, the only marble building in the Delta, which was a converted bank building. And it had a dispensary on the bottom floor, and the upper two levels was where he lived.

[00:10:44.43] But of course, when we got there, there were rats in the water cistern and we had no refrigerators or freezers. We ate off the economy. We didn't have a base. We'd go down and take-- pull a squid off, the hanging dry squid, and have them cook it up. Or we'd take our tile and heat up the oil and cook our water buffalo in the oil. And had wonderful seafood. Food was great. You just had to know what you could eat and you couldn't eat. But the quarters we were in? They were absolutely lovely. And we had tile decks. And we decorated up. And it was extremely comfortable. And we had to put about eight locks on the door and put screens over-- grenade screens-- to protect our windows, and that sort of thing. But it was very convenient. It was within 300 yards of the River Assault Group base where I normally worked out of.

[00:11:38.43] FRED OLDS: I think I came to respect the Vietnamese people. I think they had a lot of challenges that we wouldn't have faced in this country. I mean, they just-- some of the basic, sanitary things that we take for granted. You know, when you first looked at the hole in the floor in the bathroom, and that's where you did your thing, and you said, I'm squatting down here. How do I squat down? We don't squat very well as Americans. We really don't. And most of their heads, you squatted down you place one foot here and one foot there and a little hole in the floor. [LAUGHS]

[00:12:12.24] But the Vietnamese, they all squatted. And it was an interesting thing. And all their kids, I think it was getting used to the fact that none of them wore any underwear or any things. They would just squat on the curb and do their thing. And the women didn't have any sanitary devices. They just didn't have the money for those things. So when they were having their monthly period it was difficult. But I mean, they just-- it just happened.

[00:12:36.96] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation, off-duty activities? Or did you have any?

[00:12:42.81] FRED OLDS: Absolutely. When I first got there, I wasn't tasked quite as heavily as I was in about three months. So I actually volunteered to help teach English in one of the local USAID/USOM buildings. And so I had a class of 30 Vietnamese who were trying to learn English, basically to work for the Americans I think. But I learned a very, very, very important lesson out of that. And that was, I failed a couple of people. And that was a big mistake. Because they lost face. And the Vietnamese can't lose face. It's just like the Asians. You can't lose face. And they didn't come to the graduation party or any of that.

[00:13:22.80] But they presented me a junk which was about this long. I have a picture of it. And it had a brass plaque on it, presented to Professor F.A. Olds, and with all their names in Vietnamese on it. It now resides in the Maritime Museum at Hampton Roads. But it was very rewarding to do that. However, the week after I stopped, they fragged two of those places and killed a couple of instructors. And I decided better things to do than be in an unprotected classroom. So I stopped doing that. But I found the people very, very-- when they got on your side, they really were on your side. And I found them brave. My counterpart was one of the bravest young men I've ever seen in my life. And he was about like that. But he was brave.

[00:14:12.67] JOE GALLOWAY: What area of operations did you serve? All in the Mekong Delta?

[00:14:17.20] FRED OLDS: Basically it was all in the Mekong Delta. I got called to go up to Nha Trang a couple of times to brief the Marine generals on potential operations of U Minh Forest. Deckhouse Five and Six they wouldn't listen to me on, and they expended a lot of effort and lost people and equipment for nothing. They didn't believe a lieutenant in the Mekong Delta knew anything. And it was interesting. They sent-- the coordination was a real factor when we first started. The Army didn't want to talk to the Navy. Navy didn't want to talk the Air Force. And it was-- you had your own little bailiwick. And especially, for God's sake, don't give out the communications data so it can be compromised.

[00:14:58.40] So the first PBR patrol we sent down the river went aground. We didn't know where they were. And finally when their patrol went out to check on them and the two boats had run aground on a sandbar near Cu Lao Gieng island, which was pretty heavy VC area, the crews got out, spread out on the sandbar, and left one guy on the boat so they wouldn't get all wiped out if they took around from the adjacent VC area. Couldn't get them off till the tide came in because those waterjets don't back up very well. And they couldn't even push them off. So we found them. We then changed our radios so we had the Prick 25 radios is what they called them in those days, and we put an antenna on the roof of our hooch and we could then get 35 miles downriver using that. But that was a godsend to do that.

[00:15:44.24] But I then went out and I coordinated with the Air Force. And I flew in a Spooky AC-30-- AC-37, 47, whatever they called them-- gunships. And I actually got to fly it around the perimeter of the ammo depot outside Can Tho. It was all lit up. I learned how to do it, and bank it. It's 4 degrees, and so you kick left rudder and you put their line of fire right down a canal. And

then we got called to the Cambodian border and went up. And we emptied the airplane that night. And that was in, I think that was actually in May of-- it may have been a little after that. But we emptied the aircraft out. But it was a fascinating flight.

[00:16:22.37] And then-- so that was one area. I was called a month after I got in country and they said, we're not getting the intelligence we think from both the Army or Air Force in the Delta. And we want you to set up and run a civilian agent net which I didn't have a clue how to do. And we'll give you all the money you need. So I could go up in Saigon and I'd go up once a month and pick up 200, 300 piastres, set up safe houses throughout the Delta with my counterpart, Vietnamese counterpart. And we'd go out meet with VC in these safe houses sometimes. Scared the hell out of me every time I did it. My knees would be knocking when I'd get out of there.

[00:17:00.80] But they were-- we got quite a net set up. We added to that by having on each of the craft that was going out to PBRs or a RAG boat, if a farmer or fisherman came out and they volunteered information to them, we'd give the equivalent of \$0.10. Now that may not sound like anything. But when your annual income is \$100 a year, getting \$0.10 is a lot of money. And so we'd give them \$0.10 and tell them, next time if you give us information, we'll give you \$0.15. And they would. And we built quite an agent net.

[00:17:36.02] And these people would come rolling out. They'd look like they're being stopped. And they weren't being stopped. They were actually feeding us information. And I got a lot of data back that way. And by paying them virtually nothing. Then all of a sudden the Army came out and offered \$500 for a recoilless rifle and \$200 for something else. And it wiped out the whole damn thing. And I thought, how ridiculous can you get? So that was one of the areas I worked. So I had set up and ran a civilian agent net.

[00:18:02.39] Then I got called about the four month point and they said, we're going to bring an American RAG in this coming year, the Mobile Riverine Group. We'd like you to do an oceanographic study of the Mekong Delta. I said, well that fell right back into my background, which was great. That was all my training at postgraduate school. So I really enjoyed doing that. But I had Air Force planes configure cameras in the front of the F-4s and other planes that flew each of the canals in the Delta. And then they'd bring the rolls of film back to me and we'd go through each one of them.

[00:18:35.93] We'd change the angles of the cameras in the plane so we got completely detailed shots of every one of the canals. And then we took the place where we saw a blockage, any place we saw a blockage, gave it to EOD, had them estimate what it'd take to blow that out of there, whether it was a little footbridge or whatever, in case we want to take Mike Boats down the river or LSTs.

[00:18:58.19] And so in about two or three months after coordinating all the knowledge that worked for me, and getting their inputs, and they kept feeding them back, and we would talk about various blockages and what was going on, we annotated 1:25,000 scale combat charts, put overlays on them, and issued them. And so that was actually a product I got to see before I left

country, which I was very proud of. But I didn't ever save a copy of it, and I'm really teed off about that. So that was another one.

[00:19:25.52] Then I was the Navy's defoliation coordinator. And I had to go out and brief-- I had to talk with the province chiefs first to get permission to fly the missions. Well, that was always shaky, because of you briefed them, they knew you were going to fly them down there, and the ranch hands were going to catch hell. But we didn't let them know the time frame. So it was pretty good. I'd go get with the province chief, get permission to do it, we'd drop pamphlets saying it's going to happen. Please move out. We'll give you other land coming up to this, north of the area where you are. But it's VC area, free-fire area.

[00:19:58.52] And then I'd go in and I'd brief the pilots before they took off, and boy, those planes smelled terrible. It was like walking in the old Checkerboard Feed Store, if you ever walked in the back of one of those places, you used to choke half to death. Young fellows wouldn't know that today. But we knew about Checkerboard Feed Stores back in those days. And it was very, very strong. But then they had to fly the mission. Those ranch hands were brave as hell. They took a lot of rounds in the aircraft. Then I'd go in the helos after a month or two, and I'd fly low-level over all the areas and double check whether we'd gotten through all three levels of canopy. So that was a mission.

[00:20:33.03] Another one was coordinating with the Air Force. We were on a patrol one day and almost-- I couldn't hear for about three hours after it happened. They put an Arc Light in the province alongside the canal we were on. And it almost-- I thought the boats were going to blow right out of the water. And we just literally could not hear each other for about three hours.

[00:20:54.21] JOE GALLOWAY: That was the B-52 raid.

[00:20:56.25] FRED OLDS: B-52 raid, which was from 50,000 feet. And they called them-- in the Delta, they called it the Silent Death, because they never knew they were coming. So I immediately went to IV Corps headquarters and I said, hey, you almost had a big blue on blue situation here. And we need to do something about this. The Air Force officer did not want to talk to me about any Arc Light missions coming in. And I finally had to go the general. I said, General, look, I have got to know they're coming. I can put the information out to the commander of the PBRs, work this area here, if we know they're coming in there. And we'll keep them out of there so we don't have a blue on blue. And he had to be ordered to finally give me the information. But I was the only Navy guy who knew when they were coming in. And so we could then plan the operations around it.

[00:21:43.23] FRED OLDS: I was flying in a Bird Dog, an L-19 FAC aircraft, Forward Air Control aircraft. And the pilot was a fellow named Charlie Banks. And we had run out of rockets. And all of a sudden we were hearing the snap, snap of a Zippo lighter going by. And that sound, when it got around close to the aircraft, it went snap, snap, just like the old Zippo did every time you close it. And I look down, and there's a guy in a sampan shooting at us. And Charlie said, get that son of a bitch. So I took the short M16 we had. And we always carried about 60 clips, and had a tracer every fourth round. So I could walk it anywhere I wanted to out of the back seat. We flew with the windows open, snapped up over our heads, sat on our flak

jackets so we wouldn't dig a round in our rear. And I stuck it out. And I got him. And I saw him fall out of the sampan. And blood, you know, spread through the water.

[00:22:40.69] And it became very vivid because I had nightmares for about a month. I'd wake up with an exploding head and just see that water with blood. You don't often see somebody you kill in war. It's a strange thing. And it affects you that way. I saw one other person. And when that happened it didn't bother me at all. It just was a thing. But that lasted about a month. That was a--

[00:23:11.74] FRED OLDS: Well, most people wouldn't think this would be the best day I had, but it was getting to spend a little over 24 hours with John Wayne. He's one of the few entertainers who would come to the Mekong Delta. Bob Hope never would even think about it. He'd stay in the safe bases. But he came down to Can Tho. And he shows up and comes strolling up and, how the hell are you your, partner, type thing. And he stood with the PBR sailors for over two hours, putting his arms around their shoulders and hugging them and just being there with them and talking to them.

[00:23:46.64] And then he came back to this old French doctor's house we had, and we spent another four to five hours with him in there playing poker and talking. He told about his minesweeper. And then we took him on a little patrol in a safe area. Quote unquote. It was just a little waterway behind Can Tho. You come back out a short distance. God, that day they decided they're going to shoot it up. And he got up and he shot and he did damn well. [LAUGHS] I'm sure he had that to talk about. He was doing research for the movie The Green Berets at that time. And he was terrific guy. Just terrific. Very personable.

[00:24:26.44] FRED OLDS: Oh, you know, I thought about a couple of these. When you have people killed alongside you, and wounded alongside you, it really tears you apart. And that happened with the Vietnamese when I was on Vietnamese river patrols. Because you're laying on the deck of a command unit, and a person gets hit or gets killed. And you just-- to them, life is cheap over there, and the life goes on. And I think to the average American, we're not used to life being cheap. We prize life. And we did there, too. And so when somebody ever got wounded or killed, that's the worst. That's the worst.

[00:25:03.98] But I guess if you want to put it down to relating back to the home front, as I mentioned, I had three young children. And one day the Viet Cong set up a bomb in the marketplace at Tra On, which was a few clicks down the river, we called it. A kilometer was a click. And I think it was 30 clicks down the river. And the PBRs and River Assault Group brought all the wounded people back to Can Tho. The French had a quote hospital, they call it that, unquote, in Can Tho, run basically by a double-boarded heart surgeon in the Air Force named Frank Camp. He was a major. He lived across from us in the old bank building with some nurses and the doctors he was supervising under USOM and USAID. And they actually went over and tried to help do things at the hospital.

[00:25:52.15] The Can Tho hospital, the only way you got blood were they had cyclo drivers sitting outside. And if they needed a pint of blood, they'd just go, hey Joe, come in. And they'd take a pint of blood and put in the person who needed the blood. I don't think there was ever any

matching. The entrance to the place had three slabs. And they were at an angle about like this. And they were made like a meat board, where you have a thing along the side to take all the gravy or the juices down. You drop it down. And they had a trash can, I'd use a different term for it, but they had a trash can down there to catch the blood and whatever. And it's concrete. Not like you see in our hospitals.

[00:26:30.24] And out of one of the boats, I had my Jeep. And I took this young girl, she was about the age of my oldest daughter. And I held her in my arms. She was bandaged up like this. And we got over to the hospital. And she was scared death. And I was a round-eye and she was a slant-eye, and that's what they called them over there. And they called us. And I laid her down on that slab and she smiled at me. And just gave me the prettiest smile you've ever seen. Not a whimper out of her.

[00:26:57.06] They cut the bandage off. Her right arm was held on by that much flesh. They cut it with a pair of scissors and threw it in the trash can. And I went outside and threw up. So that was probably one of my worst. And I saw her two weeks later. We gave her a doll and she was moving the right arm. And we didn't think about taking the arm off the doll. And that hurt again. But so anyway, she was all chipper. Ready to go. But that was a pretty bad day.

[00:27:32.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Pretty bad day. JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with our allies beyond the Vietnamese? The Thais, the Koreans.

[00:27:46.50] FRED OLDS: Very, very little. Very little. I occasionally saw the Australians surrounding the Australian hospital. That was a terrific group. And that was at Long Xuyen I believe. I can't remember exactly. But they were terrific over there. But very little with the other-

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[00:28:05.49] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:28:09.63] FRED OLDS: Well, we sent tapes back and forth. That was the way we did it. We didn't have any other means to do it. And getting a phone call was like a miracle. But I will say one thing. When the detailer wanted to get hold of you, the damn crank phone worked. And you're talking to the detailer in Washington, but try and talk to your family, you can forget it. It wasn't there.

[00:28:28.30] So we sent tapes back and forth. They were about that big around. And then letters. Of course, the letters.

[00:28:34.68] JOE GALLOWAY: The little open-reel--

[00:28:35.67] FRED OLDS: The old open-reel tapes, right. And so that's how we did it.

[00:28:40.53] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war from home?

[00:28:44.82] FRED OLDS: Well I think my wife tried to keep the news from home from me because she didn't want me to be upset further.

[00:28:50.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you see Stars and Stripes?

[00:28:52.59] FRED OLDS: Oh, yeah. We'd read Stars and Stripes daily. In fact, I'd read about my brother doing this stuff you know. [LAUGHS] Because I was over there at the same time he was, except he was 44 and flying out of Ubon with the F-4s and doing his thing with Operation BOLO, and I was a young 30-year-old lieutenant in the middle of the Mekong Delta. But we saw-- yeah, Stars and Stripes. Listened to the radio. We'd listen to Hanoi Hannah talk on that thing. Yeah.

[00:29:18.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Did that news from home affect you in any way at all?

[00:29:24.95] FRED OLDS: It would. My brother would write. One of my brothers-- it was my closest brother. Dusty would write and he would say, what in the hell are you doing over there? Get on home. And, it's not worth it. And we felt that it was very worth it, that the Vietnamese people really did want us there. And we felt we were winning that war in the Delta. And to this day I think we won the war in the Delta. And I think it was six years after the war was finally over that they were able to placate the Delta. Because it was controlled by the U.S. by the time we got out of there with their flop and all the others.

[00:30:03.91] FRED OLDS: I returned home in May of 1967.

[00:30:07.30] JOE GALLOWAY: What was that like?

[00:30:09.44] FRED OLDS: Well it was a different world. [LAUGHS] It was a different world. I mean, as soon as-- actually, as soon as the plane took off out of Tan Son Nhut, that was another great moment. When you got above any possibility of AA fire, and everybody cheered just like the POWs did when they were released, to just be heading home. I didn't have any great desire to go back at all. People would ask you about it. But they would-- you see all these protests. And I just really detested it. It really bothered me. And we were never welcomed home. There's no question. We were never welcomed home. And I don't remember ever physically getting spit on. But I certainly got a lot of derogatory comments made.

[00:30:51.09] I will say one thing. Your body reacts like you did in Vietnam. I was at the commissary over at MacDill Air Force base with my wife. And they broke the sound barrier somewhere and I hit the deck in the parking lot. My wife said, what in the hell are you doing down there on the ground? [LAUGHS] And it was like, that's a rote reaction, dear. Don't worry about it. [LAUGHS]

[00:31:14.02] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years?

[00:31:19.03] FRED OLDS: Very extensive. The experience we gained on the rivers and things, we continue today. And we actually talk with the current Riverines. We were guest speakers at their change of commands. We present a beret to the person voted on by their squadron mates as the person they think should have got an award. And he gets to wear a black beret to all their official functions. And so we are continuing to do it today. And it's a great group.

[00:31:47.75] We have a group locally of-- one of the persons asked me, why do you call yourselves game wardens? And if you think about, what's a game warden do? A game warden controls game. Hunting and that sort of thing. So we controlled the rivers. And that's how it got the name game warden. In fact, I was down North Carolina giving a speech at a Riverine class down there recently, and I walked in this bar to have a beer after the speech and these fellows were sitting there. And they give me a really funny look. And I realize they're looking at the back of my thing, it says game wardens. And they think, they're trying to figure out how they're going to get out of there fish they'd illegally caught or something. [LAUGHS]

[00:32:32.22] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your Vietnam experience affect your life afterward? Or did it?

[00:32:37.32] FRED OLDS: Well, I don't think there's any question. I think I've relied a lot on what I learned over there. I think if you don't learn something from whatever you do then you're not worth your salt to begin with. But to impart it and save other lives in the future, I think many of us have done that. We feel we've done that, whether we have or not. I guess we haven't got any concrete proof. But all those lessons learned I've used in war games. I war gamed out of Washington for almost seven years as an analyst for a company.

[00:33:04.35] And it was-- that experience was all put to good use there. I also wrote manuals for them on the drug wars in Central and South America. All of it, the waterway stuff is current today as it was then. What do you do for instance with a prisoner, when you catch a prisoner? Do you chain him to that forward M60 machine gun? Or today's M60 that you got on the boat? Well, you can't do that. That's a violation of the Geneva Convention. But not everybody knows that. How are you going to feed them? Where are you going to take them for medical care? All those are current questions.

[00:33:37.38] When they were in Iraq and they're running over there, we said, how do you get a wounded person out? Off your craft? Oh, we'll call for something. I said, it may not be fast enough. You had the Seawolves in Vietnam after a while. We didn't have them when we started. But you had the Seawolves. And they could respond, take a person, get them right to medical care. Where are you going to take them? A lot of questions like that still need to be answered today. And they couldn't answer them in Iraq when they were patrolling the lakes.

[00:34:03.54] But I talked at length. And fact, I spoke brokered change of command of the group that patrolled the lakes in Iraq, protecting the dam and stopping infiltration from Iran. And so it continues. And that experience has been great to be able to impart that knowledge to other people and hopefully save lives. And it's a lot of camaraderie in it also.

[00:34:20.01] I sort of detest the current-- I hate to say it, the current political correctness, where we take a group of men down, a group of men and women, and because they got fatigues on they can't even have a beer in the VFW. Or when we put on a party for them, that they can't have a beer and enjoy the hot dogs and the clambake or whatever it happens to be. I think it's just gone too far, you know. They're responsible individuals. Why is a corporation president, who can go out and he can sit at any place he wants? And anybody who's a stockbroker, anybody, you see them in the bars all the time today. Our people deserve a chance to sit there and act like normal

citizens. And they're not being given that opportunity now. It's just too damn politically correct. I'm sorry. But that's--

[00:35:06.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years, and had a lasting influence on your life or changed you in any way?

[00:35:20.61] FRED OLDS: I think I've always been a fairly compassionate individual. But I think I tend to give more of myself after Vietnam than I did before. People in this world need help. And if we're not willing to do it, who is? And I see this country getting very, very weak today. And it bothers me because we did lead the world in assisting the world and feeding the world. Why do we have corn go into our gas, which could be feeding the world? And it damages our engines, you know? Let's get back to letting the farmers grow corn to export to the world.

[00:36:02.12] So that kind of aspect of it. I think caring for people. And understanding the world. It's a different world over there when you come out of a situation where just an intuition and-- I don't know, that's not the correct word. But if you said hello to a young girl, you say, chao co If you said hello to a grandmother, you say chao ba. You said hello to a mother, you say chao ba. So just by inflecting your voice differently you can insult the heck out of somebody, you know? [LAUGHS] But you don't think about those things. You don't think about losing face. And so you tend to be a little careful in some of the ways you rephrase things after learning that particular culture and living with it for a year.

[00:36:43.40] I think one of the strangest things happened on-- I was on a RAG patrol. And all of a sudden, I feel this fella going up and down my leg. You know, feeling up and down my leg. And I'm going, ho boy. [LAUGHS] And the Vietnamese males always cuddled up together. And they cuddled. They weren't gay or anything. They just-- that's the way they slept. That was their lifestyle. They couldn't understand what that hair was on my leg. And they wanted to feel the hair on my leg. And then my arms. They don't have any hair, you know. It's strange. But those are the kind of crazy things you learn about it. But there are also funny things that come out of it.

[00:37:18.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans who are coming home from combat today?

[00:37:25.52] FRED OLDS: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, you hear it over and over again, the greatest generation. Well, those of us who fought, we all fought for this country. And we've been spit on. And we've been trashed. And I personally like to say, I haven't been spit on. But certainly a lot of derogatory stuff out there. And you wonder, well, when the hell are they going to finally do something? And looks like they're doing that. And so I think that's-- I'm very pleased to be able to be part of that if that's going to help. Because I think everybody comes back deserves to get the thanks of this country because they've given a part of their life. And I don't care if it's for 15 minutes. They've given a part of their life.

[00:38:04.46] When I got through I got a Merchant Master's Unlimited Tonnage License. My first job was chief mate on Chauvenet doing bottom surveys around Dolma Island for Desert Shield. And I had an experience there that I'll never forget. The civilian crew was scared to death

we were going to get gassed. I had a 50-person Navy det on there that was doing oceanographic work and doing the charts. But I set up to run combat CBR drills to defend against possible gas attack. Because they had it. We knew they had it. They'd gassed the Kurds and done things like that. So I started running the drills.

[00:38:40.64] The first drill I ran was a decontamination drill. Big guy comes up and he shoves the dang guard out of that way, and bursts in, and tears the thing off. And I said, you just blew the whole dang ship. During a critique later I said, you blew the whole ship. You killed everybody on here. You brought everything inside. Yeah, but it was in that freaking outfit. [LAUGHS] And I said, yeah, it's a lot hotter right now if you're dead. So the next day I had a .38-- or, that guard had a .38 out there-- and he says, go ahead guy. Go ahead. But that's the kind of thing you went through. So we did that. I mean, that was part pf one of these. But so I did that. And then I was a master of a ship for Desert Storm. So I sort of progressed into that.

[00:39:23.67] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today in this society?

[00:39:29.46] FRED OLDS: Well personally, when I left Vietnam-- and I'm very serious about this-- we were winning the Delta. We were winning that war. And when we pulled out we were winning that war. The American public doesn't understand it. I really don't think they understand it, that when the American government pulled the money back-- if you don't have the money to fuel your airplanes, you don't have the ammunition there-- they had the will to fight. And I was alongside those people. And I fought with those people. I know they had the will to fight. They did not run. They didn't turn their back like a lot of people say in stories. They fought and they fought hard. When they cut the funding off, we felt we won the war. The government lost the war.

[00:40:16.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:40:24.02] FRED OLDS: I don't think there's any question. I don't think there's any question. But anybody who served over there did. I think we had-- the term PTSD, I don't know, you know. I was at a meeting recently at Chrysler Hall, they were going to do a display on pictures of people who had PTSD. It was before they shut down the Chrysler Hall to do these things. And they were life-size portraits. And we had a focus group to discuss what you think people will say when they come here and look at these pictures. And they were from Soldiers from Wars, is what they called it. And it had World War II, Vietnam, and these other people.

[00:41:01.80] And so they were wrapped in blankets. And it was interesting. Fantastic photography. And we said, well, how do you define-- I asked this chief nurse from Portsmouth who was also in the focus group-- I said, how do you define PTSD? Is it-- well, everybody has it. I said, no, I mean, you want to define somebody over here at Portsmouth there. How do you define PTSD? Well, I guess we can't. I said, OK. And I told the story about the little girl. I said, have I got PTSD? Well, I don't know. I said, well. So I'm just asking. How do you define PTSD in today's-- she couldn't define it. If she's a chief nurse and she couldn't define it, how can we define it?

[00:41:50.39] It's an amazing thing to sit back and everybody says, oh, they got PTSD now and they're all getting 100% disability. Well that's not true. But that's what the effect is. So when I'm speaking with these Riverine groups, I stand in front of them, I look at them and I say, hey, all you fellas have PTSD out here? You don't look disabled to me. [LAUGHS] I say, everybody put your hand up, thinks he has PTSD. Well, no hands go up, you know. [LAUGHS] Good. I just thought I'd make sure, because the newspapers say everybody's got PTSD coming back from the wars. I said, you're like the Sailors I knew, you know. You don't have PTSD. You're out there doing your job. [LAUGHS] It's different when you're out there.

[00:42:30.60] JOE GALLOWAY: In the end, what did that war mean to you and your generation?

[00:42:37.36] FRED OLDS: I think we felt we fought for our country, we gave everything we could. And we certainly left 50,000 plus people over there. And The Wall is a very moving experience. And I've been up there two or three times to see my buddies and people that are on there.

[00:42:55.10] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:43:02.00] FRED OLDS: Serve your country. Serve your country. Serve your country. Put yourself in uniform. If you don't, you are doing a disservice to your country. Then serve in Congress. But don't before.

[00:43:22.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[00:43:27.14] FRED OLDS: Just heard about it a couple weeks ago. And I think it's wonderful.

[00:43:30.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Excellent. All right. Thank you, Captain.

[00:43:34.34] FRED OLDS: Very welcome, sir.

[00:43:35.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Appreciate it.

[00:43:35.75] FRED OLDS: It's been a pleasure to be here with you, sir.

[00:43:37.61]