

## **Phillips, Rufus US Army**

[00:00:18.32] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I was born in Middletown, Ohio, but I grew up in Southside Virginia in Charlotte County, which is about 25 miles from Appomattox.

[00:00:28.13] JOE GALLOWAY: And your birth date?

[00:00:29.93] RUFUS PHILLIPS: 10 August 1929.

[00:00:32.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Who was in your family?

[00:00:33.95] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I had relatives who fought on the Confederate side of the Civil War on my mother's side and relatives on my father's side who fought on the Union side of the war. I have a sister who's still living, and she lives up in Pittsburgh.

[00:00:50.27] JOE GALLOWAY: And your dad, what did he do?

[00:00:52.79] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, he flew for the RAF in World War I. And then he joined the Air Force or the Army Air Corps in World War II, but they wouldn't let him fly. So he became a squadron commander on Miami Beach training Air Force or Army Air Corps cadets. And then he started a business planning and designing airports, in the engineering business.

[00:01:19.56] JOE GALLOWAY: And your hometown would be--

[00:01:22.62] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, it would be Charlotte County out in the rural area.

[00:01:25.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Out in the middle of the woods.

[00:01:27.75] RUFUS PHILLIPS: [LAUGHS] Middle of the woods, Virginia.

[00:01:35.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you were first in the military.

[00:01:39.66] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That's right.

[00:01:41.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Commissioned?

[00:01:42.36] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yes.

[00:01:43.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Out of ROTC.

[00:01:45.21] RUFUS PHILLIPS: No, OCS.

[00:01:46.14] JOE GALLOWAY: OCS.

[00:01:47.34] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I volunteered, went to Indiantown Gap for basic training. This was while the Korean War was still on. And then went down to Fort Benning to go through infantry OCS. And then I went through jump school down there.

[00:02:04.05] JOE GALLOWAY: But didn't get sent to Korea?

[00:02:06.39] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, by that time, the war was over. JOE GALLOWAY: Lucky man. RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I had been with-- I'd been trained by the CIA before. And then they had an assignment for me in Germany. And that assignment blew up. And so I didn't have anything to do. So I got out and volunteered for the Army.

[00:02:31.47] JOE GALLOWAY: For the Army. JOE GALLOWAY: How did you get recruited by the company?

[00:02:41.70] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I was at college in New England. And a fellow came around. I played football. And a fellow came around and was contacting folks to see if they wanted to serve. And he wouldn't say how, except he asked, well, would you be willing to jump out of an airplane behind enemy lines? And I rather foolishly said yes.

[00:03:08.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, we can say cavalierly.

[00:03:10.83] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Cavalierly, yeah.

[00:03:13.89] JOE GALLOWAY: And what university?

[00:03:16.77] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yale.

[00:03:17.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Yale. Ah, that's back when they were doing that.

[00:03:20.73] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That's right.

[00:03:22.32] JOE GALLOWAY: And they taught you how to jump out of airplanes?

[00:03:25.47] RUFUS PHILLIPS: They did.

[00:03:26.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Before you got to the Army?

[00:03:28.23] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yes, before. And then I learned again in the Army.

[00:03:30.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Then they taught you again how to jump out of airplanes.

[00:03:32.22] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That's right, yeah.

[00:03:33.96] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. So you were commissioned in the Army. What year?

[00:03:40.29] RUFUS PHILLIPS: 1953.

[00:03:44.28] JOE GALLOWAY: '53.

[00:03:45.42] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. In November. So the war had just ended.

[00:03:51.75] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your first assignment?

[00:03:55.53] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Actually, I was detailed back to the Agency. And then they sent me over to Korea, joined an air-sea rescue unit over there. And that's where I was when I got orders to go to Vietnam.

[00:04:10.53] JOE GALLOWAY: And why did they pick you out of Korea to go to Vietnam?

[00:04:14.40] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, because I'd had some agency background, a Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, a fairly famous fellow, had been sent out by President Eisenhower to do what you can to save South Vietnam. And he formed something called the Saigon Military Mission, which was attached to MAAG. And I was detailed to that.

[00:04:42.93] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I got picked up by military aircraft. I was on military orders and got picked up by military aircraft, flown down to Clark Field, and then flown from there over to Vietnam. And we arrived two days before the Geneva Accords went into effect. And there was a major came out to pick me up.

[00:05:04.56] And he took me-- they didn't have any room for a place for me to stay in barracks there, so they put me up in the Majestic Hotel. And while he was taking me there, he said, be careful. The Viet Minh just raided two French posts the night before. This was two days before the truce.

[00:05:26.19] And so I was there, and not knowing what to do, told not to tell anybody that I was there. And eventually, Colonel Lansdale showed up for a meeting because there were a bunch of us, a handful of us, really. And he said, I'll be telling you what to do. And in the meantime, this is my job.

[00:05:48.33] I've been asked to come out here and do what I can to save South Vietnam. So I was kind of left wondering what's going to be my role in that. And so I went out to see him later. And I wanted to know what did he want me to do.

[00:06:06.63] And he said, well, the psywar unit out at the Vietnamese Army headquarters. And he said, I want you to go out there and talk to them and find out what their problems are and get to know them. And I said, well, I don't know anything about psywar.

[00:06:21.12] So he reached up on his bookshelf. He had some books with him, and he gave me a copy of Paul Linebarger's book and said, *Psychological Warfare*. He said, here, read this. And that was the beginning of--

[00:06:35.76] JOE GALLOWAY: You became the psywar expert.

[00:06:38.07] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, then I became the actual adviser to civic action for the Vietnamese army because they were facing the problem of big zones of territory in the south that had been controlled by the Communist Viet Minh for nine years. And they were evacuating north. And the government had to put government into these places.

[00:07:01.57] And the only instrument they had was the army. And Lansdale understood that we had to retrain that army, reorient it, because it had just been in combat. And it had generally served under the French, and they didn't give a damn about civilians. And the whole thing was to win over the civilian population.

[00:07:23.12] So the first thing he had me do was take a group of them over to the Philippines to find out how President Magsaysay had defeated the Huks. And then we came back, and we drew up a program for the army, for reorienting and re-educating the army, which was quite successful.

[00:07:42.22] And then kind of by happenstance, because I was involved in that, I became the only MAAG adviser to two re-occupation operations by the Vietnamese army. The last one was two divisions. And I was still a second lieutenant.

[00:08:01.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, 1954 in Saigon was, as I recall, rather exciting. The Binh Xuyen wars were underway and all--

[00:08:10.89] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, they hadn't yet started. But the thing was that Diem came-- he'd been appointed prime minister by Bao Dai. But he had no real power. His palace guard was owned, basically, and owed its loyalty to this gangster group, the Binh Xuyen. And Bao Dai had actually sold the police to the Binh Xuyen. So they controlled the police.

[00:08:40.20] So he didn't even have security around the palace. And so Lansdale had to figure out how to help him begin to cope with that, and cope with 600-- almost a million refugees coming out of North Vietnam.

[00:08:56.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Coming out of the North, the Catholics.

[00:08:57.14] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. So it was chaos. It was really chaos.

[00:09:06.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about Ed Lansdale.

[00:09:09.90] RUFUS PHILLIPS: A very unusual person. I would say a fellow who operated at almost a genius level in terms of understanding this kind of conflict that was going on, where you have a revolutionary force, which communism was, trying to overthrow governments. And he'd been through it in the Philippines.

[00:09:35.41] He was a very close friend of Magsaysay's and his main adviser in this whole defeat of the Huks. And then he'd gone over to Vietnam on a trip of a couple of months just to

find out about it before he ever got assigned. So he began to get a real feel about what the problem was there.

[00:09:55.03] JOE GALLOWAY: He was still on active duty?

[00:09:57.04] RUFUS PHILLIPS: He was always on active duty. He was never--

[00:09:59.55] JOE GALLOWAY: He was a major in the Air Force.

[00:10:01.23] RUFUS PHILLIPS: He was at that point a full colonel in the Air Force. And what he understood was not just psychological warfare, but the whole unconventional kind of warfare and the political side of it. And so he became the main adviser to Diem. And some of us who helped him, it didn't make any difference what my rank was, if I could do a job, I had it.

[00:10:30.99] General Collins, who became the ambassador while a lot of this was going on, asked General O'Daniel, who was head of MAAG, he said, who do we have out there with all these Vietnamese army folks? He said, Second Lieutenant Phillips. And he said, Second Lieutenant? And General O'Daniel said, oh, he's one of Ed's folks. And I think Collins thought I was a colonel disguised as the second lieutenant. [LAUGHS]

[00:11:07.08] JOE GALLOWAY: But you liked Lansdale?

[00:11:09.21] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Oh, yeah. Yeah. He was a brilliant guy.

[00:11:12.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Effective?

[00:11:13.26] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. And he didn't speak either French or Vietnamese, but he had an instinctive understanding of people. And he was a great listener. And then he'd come up with ideas in ways that the Vietnamese would think that these ideas were his own-- were their own, not his.

[00:11:35.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Their own. Yeah. Now, he recycled through there two or three times like you did.

[00:11:41.15] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah, well, he came back. Unfortunately, we didn't send him back sooner. He came back in '65.

[00:11:48.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Seemed less effective then.

[00:11:51.67] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, the problem was that he was now dealing with huge bureaucracies. We had already 200,000 troops in there. MACV was basically Pentagon East. You had a huge embassy. You had USIS with a couple of hundred people.

[00:12:13.66] You had USOM with about 1,000 people. And Lodge didn't back him up because he ran into bureaucratic interference right away.

[00:12:25.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah. And it just cut his legs out from under him.

[00:12:28.66] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, made him less effective. The Vietnamese still listened to him. But when they realized that he couldn't change policies, or change our approach, or take their problems into account and actually get some action to resolve them, of course his influence diminished.

[00:12:48.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:12:49.33] RUFUS PHILLIPS: My job while I was there was to convert the Vietnamese army into a civic action force. And then afterwards, I carried on with something that Diem had created was called Civilian Civic Action, where we had a former brigadier in the Communist Viet Minh who defected, heading an operation to put teams of civilians out in the villages.

[00:13:18.19] And so that was my experience through '56. And then I was asked to go up-- I got out of the Army, joined the Agency as a case officer at this point, and then went up to Laos to try to start something called Civic Action up there.

[00:13:34.21] And then I got out of CIA and joined my father in this family engineering business in '59. And then in '62, I was asked to go back out there by the USAID director to get USAID involved in counterinsurgency. President Kennedy had become very enthusiastic about counterinsurgency, particularly from the Special Forces point of view.

[00:14:07.79] And so we already had advisers out there, and we had Special Forces there working mainly with the tribes in the highlands. But USOM, the whole aid program, was not involved. And I went out and did a study.

[00:14:26.32] I knew President Diem, so I talked to him personally and talked to everybody in the government personally, and then went out and actually observed what was going on in various provinces.

[00:14:36.69] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is 19--

[00:14:38.46] RUFUS PHILLIPS: '62.

[00:14:39.33] JOE GALLOWAY: '62.

[00:14:40.47] RUFUS PHILLIPS: May and June '62. And then--

[00:14:42.90] JOE GALLOWAY: What did it look like on the ground there?

[00:14:45.64] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, it looked like there was some hope, but it looked like there were plenty of problems. And one of the problems was that they'd started this kind of Strategic Hamlet Program, but they'd overdone relocation. And the support that the government was giving just wasn't being used down at the local level.

[00:15:05.43] The bureaucracy was strangling things inside the government. So one of the solutions I proposed to President Diem, which he bought off on, which was kind of unprecedented, was to devolve the responsibility down to the province to a joint American-Vietnamese committee to make these decisions about how to support things. And that worked.

[00:15:29.90] And so I went back. I came back, and then I was asked by the White House to go out and run this thing, and-- in terms I really couldn't refuse. So I left the family business and went out there.

[00:15:42.68] JOE GALLOWAY: When you came back at the end of that '62 mission, were you asked to the White House to brief Kennedy or his people?

[00:15:52.46] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I didn't brief him personally. I briefed a number of his people.

[00:15:56.78] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:15:58.40] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. In fact, I went to a big conference in Hawaii. It was one of those conferences organized by Secretary McNamara called the McNamara Circus. And I spoke up during-- because I was asked to explain what was going on and what kind of programs we were developing or should be developing. And so I spoke up then, and then I spoke up when I got back here.

[00:16:24.47] And so I went out, and I started recruiting people on purely a volunteer basis because we were going to put them out in the provinces under dangerous conditions. And I got volunteers from the age of 60 down to 23 because there were some IVS, some International Volunteer Service guys who were quite young, but spoke Vietnamese, who were there. And men that-- they got really excited.

[00:16:54.32] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot of courage, those guys.

[00:16:55.66] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, also they had the feeling we were really going to mix it up with the Vietnamese. We're not going to be over here and let the Vietnamese be over there and sort of just kind of talking to each other. We're going to actually work together and do something.

[00:17:12.23] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was this period that you recruited a fellow named Vann?

[00:17:16.58] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I did when I came back at the end of '63, early '64. Because I knew him. I'd known-- and got to know him from the earlier period. And I knew that he really understood the war.

[00:17:31.13] One of the things-- he got really upset when there was a lot of bombing and use of indiscriminate artillery fire, and basically was hitting civilians and recruiting Viet Cong. And one of his sayings was, if I had my druthers, he said, I wouldn't arm the Vietnamese forces on our side with anything but a long knife so they could see who they were killing.

[00:18:00.38] I mean, he was that kind of guy. But he understood that part of the war. And he wanted to get back. And so I thought he'd be an ideal recruit.

[00:18:09.89] Some folks in-- the civilians in USAID-- had reservations. What do you mean? This former Army officer. I know. He's an action guy, and he understands the situation.

[00:18:22.94] JOE GALLOWAY: How did he work out?

[00:18:24.56] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Oh, he was tremendous, as you probably know. And no thanks to Neil Sheehan's biography either. I mean, the parts about him and what he did are quite accurate, but making him somehow a metaphor for America's failure in the war, that's ridiculous.

[00:18:44.55] I had to come back at the end of '63. I think it was the most depressing period of my life because my father died. President Diem was killed. Then President Kennedy was killed. And I had to come back and pick up the family business. And I couldn't sell it.

[00:19:07.17] So I did that. And then General Lansdale retired, really been forced out by McNamara. And Lodge decided that he'd like to have him come out there and help him in '65 when Lodge went back to work on pacification.

[00:19:27.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Why would he do that when he wouldn't help him the first time around?

[00:19:32.46] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, Lodge was getting kind of-- he realized that he was somewhat out of his depth out there. And so he needed somebody. And Lansdale was the obvious expert who knew counterinsurgency and knew the Vietnamese.

[00:19:47.60] So he thought he could use him. And so Lansdale got an agreement with him, which gave him a lot of latitude. But once he got back out there, he ran into a tremendous bureaucracy.

[00:20:01.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Same thing.

[00:20:02.60] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. And Lodge failed to support him. But what I did was I went out-- JOE GALLOWAY: For the second time. RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. I went out. I took a month off every year to go out there and help him. Because I knew a lot about the Vietnamese, and I could update him. And I could introduce his team to people. And I could facilitate a lot of what was going on. And then my last visit was in '68 when he himself came back.

[00:20:35.99] JOE GALLOWAY: When Lansdale came back?

[00:20:37.55] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah.

[00:20:37.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And that was his last go around out there?

[00:20:42.38] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That's right.



[00:20:43.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And that was your last go around too?

[00:20:48.29] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That's right. Yeah, I went back-- I made a visit in 2002. I had a chance. And it was a brief one.

[00:20:58.40] I found the old house that my wife Barbara and our two small children had lived in '62 and '63. And then I found the apartment I lived in 1954. And I went down to my favorite province just to see how things were.

[00:21:16.34] I've kept up a little bit through photographs. And then I have a friend who teaches Vietnam up at Harvard-- I mean, at Dartmouth. And he's been out there. He's a fluent Vietnamese speaker. And so I keep up. I mean, the development has been tremendous.

[00:21:32.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Incredible. You look at it, and you wonder, how soon would they have got to that if we hadn't come out there to help them?

[00:21:41.39] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well. Yeah, but, man, you know what the North Vietnamese did. A lot of dead people.

[00:21:49.31] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot of dead people.

[00:21:50.39] RUFUS PHILLIPS: A lot of refugees. RUFUS PHILLIPS: I think-- well, there are a bunch of things. One has to do with the people and the climate and how-- I got out in the countryside pretty early on. And of course, I was about 6' 2" then and stood out like a sore thumb.

[00:22:22.88] But as I got to know the Vietnamese, and I could communicate. I was fluent in French. And so at that point in time, a lot of the Vietnamese down to practically the village chief level spoke some French. So I could communicate. And afterwards, after I'd been there for about six months because I was spending so much time with the Vietnamese that I actually felt more familiar with them than I did with a lot of the Americans who were back in the embassy and back in headquarters in MAAG in Saigon. And I think that makes a big difference.

[00:23:02.79] JOE GALLOWAY: They used to call that going native.

[00:23:05.55] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, yeah. But you can go native with a sense of objectivity. And you can view what they're doing right, and what's not going well, and people who are not doing well.

[00:23:20.70] But we got to a point later on in '62, '63 where we were working from inside the Vietnamese government to make changes. I got President Diem and his brother to get rid of a province chief not because I was going through American channels, but because I revealed what this guy was really up to. So they took care of it themselves.

[00:23:46.98] And you get-- the kind of memories I have or where I was being accepted by the Vietnamese as if I wasn't an American. And I was just there as part of their team, that we had a kind of brotherhood going. And those were my most vivid memories.

[00:24:12.85] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your memories of the coup and assassination of Diem? How big a mistake was that?

[00:24:24.44] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That was a huge mistake. And I had in a NSC meeting, which I happened to be called into sort of accidentally, I got asked to talk to President Kennedy directly about this. And this was when he had sent Joe Mendenhall and General Krulak out there to deliver a report about were we winning or not.

[00:24:51.52] And so I got called into that NSC meeting and into that discussion. And he knew who I was and he asked me what I thought. And so I tried to explain what was really going on and how important it was to separate the Diem's bad brother, Nhu, from Diem. And

[00:25:13.24] I recommended he send Lansdale back out there. And of course, he thanked me and took some notes. But nothing happened bureaucratically because there were too many people opposed to having one guy out there who really knew what the situation was. And everybody had fixed positions about what needed to be done or what didn't need to be done.

[00:25:38.30] And so we missed an opportunity, which I think would have worked. So I felt tremendously sad. I think I've cried at the deaths of two presidents. One was Diem, and one was Kennedy.

[00:26:04.52] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I think the best day I had was probably at the end of this operation in central Vietnam, which is an area of about two million Vietnamese that had been under Viet Minh Communist rule for nine years. And the army went in and occupied it.

[00:26:25.23] And they worked so well with the population that at the end of this occupation, which went in sort of stages from north to south, the population was voluntarily coming out and giving the troops water. And the troops were helping the people. As a result of that, President Diem went up there about two weeks after the operation was complete and flew in and received a tremendous reception from this crowd of people.

[00:27:00.03] And part of it was because word had leaked that he and the army were fighting the Binh Xuyen who were supported by the French, the remnants of the French, and actually beating them in Saigon. This was going on at the same time. And so all of a sudden, Diem was a nationalist figure, which he had that reputation, who was getting the French out of the south of Vietnam.

[00:27:31.49] Ho Chi Minh may have gotten them out of the north, but Diem got them out of the south. And when I saw that reaction of the population, I thought, this is for real.

[00:27:44.69] JOE GALLOWAY: This is how it's supposed to work.

[00:27:47.15] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. I felt a tremendous feeling about it. RUFUS PHILLIPS: I think the worst day was the day that I found out from Lou Conein, who was a friend of mine, who had come back to his house after the coup had occurred. And he had-- he was not in headquarters when the decision was made out there basically by General Big Minh to kill Diem.

[00:28:21.11] And he comes back, expecting that-- because the arrangements were to be made to fly Diem out of the country. And he comes back and finds out that Diem had been killed. And then he came back home to his wife and kids, where I was. And he told me about it.

[00:28:37.95] And as I said, I was both angry and tremendously sad. I think that was probably the worst moment. Oh, and by the way, I had seen him about three or four days before the--

[00:28:53.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Before the coup.

[00:28:54.38] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Before the coup. And it was interesting because I had been attacked by the newspaper as a CIA agent-- I mean, I had been at one time, but-- supposedly involved in coup plotting. And this was through a newspaper that was controlled by his brother Nhu. And so I wrote a letter to the president and said, this is wrong.

[00:29:27.17] I went home because my father was dying. They supposed I had come back out with instructions. And so this shows you what kind of person he was.

[00:29:38.28] He invited me over there to apologize and say, this article is none of his doing.

[00:29:45.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Nhu or Diem?

[00:29:46.91] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Diem.

[00:29:47.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Diem.

[00:29:49.49] RUFUS PHILLIPS: And then after the coup, I went down to the palace. And I went back to where we had been seated. And there was a kind of a sofa and two side chairs and a table.

[00:30:01.76] And the sofa and the chairs were riddled with bullet holes.

[00:30:08.03] JOE GALLOWAY: I thought they killed him in the back of the--

[00:30:10.19] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Oh, they did. But they had shot up the palace in the meantime. He wasn't even in the palace at that point.

[00:30:21.13] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you-- you look back on that whole experience from '54 through '68 that you invested so much in that country and then in '75 watch it go down? What did that do for you or to you?

[00:30:40.84] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, it made me very, very sad. Very sad. Particularly because Vietnamese friends of mine died in prison. Some of them eventually got out of these concentration camps. Some of them became boat people. And I kept up with them.

[00:31:01.25] And so I don't think people realize what the after effects was because we sort of got out. And we're quick here in America to forget the past and move on to the future.

[00:31:21.06] JOE GALLOWAY: It wasn't as visibly horrific in Vietnam as it was in Cambodia.

[00:31:26.90] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah.

[00:31:27.41] JOE GALLOWAY: The butchery.

[00:31:28.55] RUFUS PHILLIPS: No, it wasn't, but it was hidden.

[00:31:30.62] JOE GALLOWAY: It was hidden. Much better hidden.

[00:31:32.69] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah. And the same thing happened up in Laos. It was a better hidden up in Laos. But if you look at the consequences of the North Vietnamese takeover of the South, it was going to be automatic that Laos and Cambodia were going to go.

[00:31:48.05] JOE GALLOWAY: They were going to fall.

[00:31:48.95] RUFUS PHILLIPS: So if you wanted to look at the bottom line in terms of effect, you'd have to pull all those people together. And that's a hell of a lot of people that suffered.

[00:32:02.33] We didn't realize that we were dealing with a bunch of folks that didn't care how many Vietnamese died so as long as the Politburo remained intact and in charge.

[00:32:14.72] JOE GALLOWAY: And in charge. And so they are.

[00:32:20.18] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Here I am at 87, Joe. And I suddenly realized that I am the last living member of the original Saigon military mission. I'm the last living American who had any real personal contact with President Diem.

[00:32:39.62] And it kind of weighs on me, you know. This is a complex story. And it's hard to tell because in the record you can select out almost anything to prove a point that you want to make, that you've already thought about. And so there's enough in the record to prove anything.

[00:32:59.99] But a balanced point of view about this whole thing is still hard to come by because people don't understand the kind of people nature of this sort of conflict. It's about human beings more than it is about impersonal forces. And so folks lost on our side. But I think we could have done a better job of helping them out, frankly.

[00:33:28.74] You asked about Lansdale.

[00:33:30.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:33:31.59] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I believe that he is one, maybe the only person, who received two national security medals. One for his work in the Philippines. One for his work in Vietnam in the early period.

[00:33:51.58] So he was understood and appreciated in some part of the government. But people like McNamara couldn't understand him because McNamara was a numbers person. And you couldn't reduce things to numbers.

[00:34:08.19] JOE GALLOWAY: He wouldn't want to know about it.

[00:34:09.33] RUFUS PHILLIPS: He wouldn't listen to you. So we missed. We made some mistakes.

[00:34:17.02] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation?

[00:34:22.93] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I guess it meant different things to different people. And a lot of it depended on how well you knew the Vietnamese and how concerned you were for their fate. There was a difference in, not all, between folks who served as advisers and got to know the Vietnamese and folks who served purely in a combat role.

[00:34:48.22] Now, some people who served the combat role felt as strongly about the conflict as the advisers did. But by and large, there was just a difference of experience there. So if you got involved with the Vietnamese, then you shared their cause.

[00:35:05.59] And if you didn't get involved with the Vietnamese, well, it was just a pure war against an enemy. One of the other things that happened was that we had constant rotation of people. And in the beginning, if you were an adviser out in the province, a military adviser, you could not sign on for an additional tour of duty.

[00:35:30.49] And then they modified that. So you had some of these people that stayed on for two or three tours because they really got involved in what I call the Vietnamese cause. And some of the combat people came back too, but I think that there's just a difference of experience there that had to do with how deeply you were involved with the Vietnamese and how much you believed that they have the right to freedom.

[00:35:59.56] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today? Or is it?

[00:36:06.13] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I think it's-- yeah, I think it's remembered mainly negatively as kind of a total misadventure without understanding the reasons why we got involved and how that worked itself out. So it's used as a bad example. Supposedly, we keep repeating Vietnam.

[00:36:29.39] Well, Vietnam was a one-off in many ways. We may keep repeating some of the mistakes we made in Vietnam. But any time we get involved on-- overseas in some kind of difficult situation, the tendency is to say, oh, that's another Vietnam. But that just displays unfortunately ignorance about what Vietnam was all about.

[00:36:57.44] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would pass on to future generations?

[00:37:04.43] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, I've written quite a bit about that. I said, generally, you have to have people on the ground that understand the country. And that understanding has to be reflected back up in the high levels of government here.

[00:37:22.75] So you understand what you're doing there and what the forces at play are and who the enemy is and how you can help the local combat the enemy. And if you don't get all that right, then you'll likely do wrong and do harm. And we're still kind of stuck on that because we don't understand very well what we're doing. And we don't do it consistently.

[00:37:51.43] John Paul Vann had a saying about the Vietnam War that it was a ten-year war conducted one year at a time.

[00:38:01.15] JOE GALLOWAY: One year at a time.

[00:38:02.20] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, the same thing has been said about the Afghan war, 13 years--

[00:38:07.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Thirteen years, one year at a time.

[00:38:09.46] RUFUS PHILLIPS: One year at a time.

[00:38:11.09] JOE GALLOWAY: It doesn't work.

[00:38:12.32] RUFUS PHILLIPS: No, it doesn't work. No, you have to have a consistent approach. And we don't get enough overlap between the people on the ground who stay there long enough to understand what's going on. And then they are replaced by somebody who doesn't understand.

[00:38:26.31] So then it takes them nine months to understand if they're good or nine-- or twelve months, or eight months, or whatever the tour is to do bad because they don't understand anything.

[00:38:38.63] JOE GALLOWAY: And Vietnam was a six-month command tour from platoon up.

[00:38:45.27] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, one of the reasons why they combined CORDS, the pacification advisory effort was so successful, was that people stayed there. I know guys that served two, three, four tours.

[00:39:01.44] JOE GALLOWAY: It takes a long time to figure out what's happening, and you've only got one year--

[00:39:04.28] RUFUS PHILLIPS: That's right. And also to establish--

[00:39:06.92] JOE GALLOWAY: --you're only way out.

[00:39:08.09] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, and the other thing is you need to establish relationships of mutual trust with the locals that you're trying to help so that then they begin listening to you. And they tell you what their problems are. And if you don't understand their problems, you're not going to be effective in helping them.

[00:39:26.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Not going to be much help.

[00:39:32.69] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Well, it's a beautiful memorial. It really is, the way it turned out, I think. And I've gone with Vietnam veterans who lost people. One is a civilian who came back with USAID. He was a Marine.

[00:39:54.38] And he was driving down in a province in the delta. I think it was in '65 or '66. And the Jeep hit a mine and blew all of them up in the air, killed the two military guys he was with and put him in a hospital for 12 months. And he recovered. So I think the most moving moment for me was to accompany him up to the Wall and--

[00:40:25.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Find those names?

[00:40:26.21] RUFUS PHILLIPS: And he found those names and touched those names. RUFUS PHILLIPS: I heard about it when it started.

[00:40:37.70] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about that?

[00:40:39.02] RUFUS PHILLIPS: I think it's a good idea. And I think one of the things that I wanted it to do-- and I don't know to what extent it has-- is to contact the Vietnamese veterans of their side of the war so that they get some play in this. And I don't know what's happened on that. I don't know if you know, but out in Westminster, California--

[00:41:04.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:41:04.91] RUFUS PHILLIPS: --there's a memorial out there where there's a GI and a Vietnamese soldier standing arm in arm. And I'd like some focus on that, some acknowledgment of that.

[00:41:19.52] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. Thank you, sir.

[00:41:22.10] RUFUS PHILLIPS: You're very welcome.

[00:41:23.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Appreciate you coming in and talking.

[00:41:25.04] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Oh, yeah. Great to see you.

[00:41:26.70] JOE GALLOWAY: It's good to see you, Rufus.

[00:41:28.16] RUFUS PHILLIPS: Yeah.