

Schroder, Bill U.S. Army

[00:00:16.52] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went to Vietnam.

[00:00:19.50] BILL SCHRODER: I was 21.

[00:00:20.86] JOE GALLOWAY: 21, young guy.

[00:00:26.32] BILL SCHRODER: Well, I got married about six months before I left for Vietnam. And my first child was born while I was in Vietnam.

[00:00:35.56] JOE GALLOWAY: While you were in Vietnam.

[00:00:36.90] BILL SCHRODER: Right.

[00:00:37.10] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your hometown?

[00:00:38.58] BILL SCHRODER: Las Vegas, Nevada.

[00:00:40.45] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you come into the Army?

[00:00:44.04] BILL SCHRODER: In 1966 they were drafting 50,000 men a month, and I had just started my third year of college. I was like three weeks into my third year of college, and got my notice. By that time all the deferments had pretty much gone away.

[00:00:56.86] JOE GALLOWAY: This is what year?

[00:00:58.22] BILL SCHRODER: 1966.

[00:01:01.67] JOE GALLOWAY: So you got a draft notice?

[00:01:03.69] BILL SCHRODER: I got a draft notice.

[00:01:04.67] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do about that?

[00:01:06.07] BILL SCHRODER: A phone call from my father in Las Vegas, I was in school in Missouri. And so I had a farewell party and packed up and went home and went to the induction center in Los Angeles.

[00:01:22.34] BILL SCHRODER: Basic training was at Fort Ord. And then there was what they called euphemistically advanced infantry training eight weeks after the eight weeks of basic. That was also at Fort Ord. During that period I had applied for Officer Candidate School, and I was selected to go to the Infantry School in Fort Benning. The classes were full because there was such a crush of manpower.

[00:01:48.89] So I stayed at Fort Ord for about another four months, and I was a shotgun guard at the stockade and all kinds of various things. I was a private E1. And then when my class came in for OCS at Fort Benning-- I believe it was in June of '67-- went down there, and that was 26 weeks at the time. And that was that real intensive training, where you eat square meals and run around the obstacle course three times a day, and do all that. Taught us infantry tactics, all the weapons in the Army inventory, and small unit tactics, those kinds of things.

[00:02:30.35] And it was pretty tough. About half of the class on each class graduated. The other half went back to their normal duties.

[00:02:39.71] JOE GALLOWAY: So you graduated from that, you were commissioned.

[00:02:41.78] BILL SCHRODER: I was commissioned as a second lieutenant. But while I was in Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning I applied for Flight School, and took the test while I was in OCS. And my Flight School class came through about eight months after I graduated from OCS, so they sent me back to Fort Ord as a second lieutenant. And I was a rifle range officer and any kind of trivial duty they can--

[00:03:06.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Morale and laundry.

[00:03:07.58] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah. And one thing I did, though, is I created a camouflage and target detection range. That was the first program they had for that in Fort Ord, and I had to scrounge for the materials and scrounge for the bleachers. But they put it in the training schedule and I thought it went pretty well.

[00:03:23.16] Then the OC-- Flight School called and I went down to Fort Walters, Texas, which everybody did for their primary. We flew those little Hughes 300 as trainers. The interesting part about that was that they didn't have any Army training pilots. Almost all of them at Fort Walters were civilians because all the trained people were overseas. So we had local Texas boys who had learned themselves just six months earlier how to fly. They were our instructors.

[00:03:57.01] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was your instructor?

[00:03:58.61] BILL SCHRODER: That lasted 16 weeks. And then it was on to Fort Rucker, Alabama for what they called advanced school. And then everybody from there started flying the Huey, the UH-1.

[00:04:08.56] JOE GALLOWAY: You got to fly a real helicopter then.

[00:04:11.08] BILL SCHRODER: Right. And you did more tactical type of training with the Huey. That lasted 16 weeks, but I had applied for Chinook transition. And the Chinook is-- the Army calls it the CH-47. It's still in use today. You see it when you look at a newsreel of Afghanistan. It's the tandem rotor.

[00:04:31.07] JOE GALLOWAY: They're the only thing we have that'll fly at high altitudes.

[00:04:35.12] BILL SCHRODER: Well, and they carry troops and carry cargo in nets and slings beneath it. And I think by the time that that helicopter is out of the inventory, it will have been in the Army inventory 80 years. The ones we flew, of course, were baling wire. They were the 1965 and '66 models. And the ones they have today are all computer and--

[00:04:57.55] JOE GALLOWAY: All fixed up.

[00:04:58.79] BILL SCHRODER: --hover buttons and great big engines and-- all fixed up, right.

[00:05:02.12] JOE GALLOWAY: All good stuff. But you transitioned from the Huey to the Chinook?

[00:05:07.70] BILL SCHRODER: Right. And that was a six-- I believe it was a six week program. And then I had 30 days off, I had my orders for Vietnam and 30 days off. And I took my bride, and installed her in a residence in Las Vegas near her mother. And left out of Sacramento, headed over. That was in--

[00:05:27.20] JOE GALLOWAY: This would have been what date?

[00:05:27.95] BILL SCHRODER: April 15th, 1969. BILL SCHRODER: It was pretty solemn around that aircraft, I'll tell you that. But I think I can speak for a lot of people. The first impression upon exiting the aircraft was just the heat. It just hit you like a ton of bricks. And then the stench. And of course, we found out later that the whole of South Vietnam had that stench because of burning human waste with--

[00:06:02.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Burning feces.

[00:06:04.14] BILL SCHRODER: Yes, with kerosene poured over the top of it.

[00:06:07.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Where were you assigned when you landed?

[00:06:10.80] BILL SCHRODER: When I was there all the officers like me went to what they call the 90th Replacement station. That was in Bien Hoa. And then from there the 90th Replacement station--

[00:06:22.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Parceled you out.

[00:06:24.00] BILL SCHRODER: Well, pursuant to the request they had four pilots. I had a friend who was an engineer officer in Bien Hoa. And he met me when I arrived. He'd been in country six months, and he was in charge of a huge engineer supply yard. So he said, where do you want to be assigned? And I said, I don't know. What's a good place? And he said, how about Phu Loi? Is that a good place? He said, It's right up the road.

[00:06:47.97] So somehow magically I got assigned to Phu Loi, where all my peers went up to I Corps to some other companies up there.

[00:06:57.01] JOE GALLOWAY: So you got lucky there.

[00:06:59.43] BILL SCHRODER: Very lucky. Yeah, the III Corps was a hard enough place to fly in, but I Corps was particularly bad.

[00:07:10.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Bad. All right, describe getting to Phu Loi and getting about your business.

[00:07:17.20] BILL SCHRODER: Well, they pick you up in a helicopter, take you up there, and you meet the company commander, meet your roommate for the first time. We had hooches that were connected. And they were plywood, and then they had screens for the upper walls, tin roofs. And there were about 12 or 13 hooches connected in a little L shape. And right--

[00:07:40.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Sandbag walls?

[00:07:41.16] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, sandbag outside the plywood. And then at the apex of the L shape was-- we had built a officer's lounge there. And our bunker was in a square right in front of the building. And we built a gazebo over the top of that. So we had pretty good quarters compared to a lot of people in Vietnam, yeah.

[00:08:01.38] And my engineer officer friend came up with a Jeep towing a trailer two days after I got there with more plywood to line the insides of our walls-- mahogany plywood. An Air Force air conditioner and refrigerator and Air Force bunks.

[00:08:19.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, you must have become a very popular guy.

[00:08:21.79] BILL SCHRODER: We were-- yeah, either that or hated. One or the other. So I have no complaints about the living conditions at all.

[00:08:29.56] JOE GALLOWAY: That sounds pretty good. How was the chow?

[00:08:33.09] BILL SCHRODER: It was good. There was a battalion mess hall, there were five companies kind of in a row, and we all went to the one mess hall and it was satisfactory.

[00:08:43.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, what battalion are we talking about?

[00:08:46.09] BILL SCHRODER: Oh, let's see. This would be the 205th, Assault Support Helicopter Company. And I believe it was called the 11th Battalion, 12th Aviation Group. And 12th Group was stationed in Bien Hoa, and they had 33 aviation companies--

[00:09:03.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Scattered all over.

[00:09:04.68] BILL SCHRODER: --scattered around. Later on in my tour I went to 12th Group and went to work there as the assistant S2 intelligence officer. So I spent three months in 12th Group headquarters.

[00:09:16.17] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your initial duties?

[00:09:20.15] BILL SCHRODER: Well, in my company at that time you had to fly as a co-pilot for 300 hours. And that was basically get oriented to your area of operation, get oriented to the-- how to clear yourself from artillery and all that.

[00:09:36.54] JOE GALLOWAY: All the stuff to keep you alive.

[00:09:38.04] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, and we were frankly glad to have that because in general the aircraft commanders who'd been there more time they were pretty competent. And we learned a lot from them. So it was basically fly every day, six days a week. And there were extra duties. I was motor pool officer for a while, and then I was perimeter security officer for a while, and those kinds of things.

[00:10:01.81] But basically all pilots, unless they were ill, flew about 110 to 120 hours a month. And what would happen is the missions would come in from all over. The operations officer, which I later on got to be, would assign the pilots who had the fewest number of hours that month to the biggest, longest missions.

[00:10:30.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Longest hour missions.

[00:10:31.71] BILL SCHRODER: Exactly. So if you were up flying first, second, or third you had a 4:30 takeoff. The three ships took off. And then as the mission list got shorter and shorter, the takeoffs got later and later in the day, and the guys with the highest hours would take off last, sometimes not take off at all. So it was a rotating--

[00:10:48.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Seniority counts in everything.

[00:10:51.05] BILL SCHRODER: It does. And longevity in that case, too.

[00:10:58.22] JOE GALLOWAY: So you went to flight duty immediately?

[00:11:01.65] BILL SCHRODER: First day.

[00:11:02.60] JOE GALLOWAY: First day. Was there any particular type mission that you were flying more than others?

[00:11:08.18] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, I think the reason it's exceptional is that there wasn't a particular type mission. All the other Chinook companies that I knew of at that time-- I can't speak for the whole Vietnam War. But they were assigned directly to support an infantry unit. And so were Hueys. You could be a Huey company or a Chinook company, and your job is to support the 25th Infantry Division, or your job is support Big Red One.

[00:11:34.48] They had one company in this battalion that was general support, III Corps. And that was us. So all the missions came in from anybody else, we got them. So we'd go into

operations in the morning and get our mission sheet, and that mission sheet would consist of rough time to be there, call sign, radio frequency, and coordinates.

[00:12:00.72] So we'd fly out to the first mission. We'd know we'd have five sorties, or five things to do. We'd call and we'd find out we were working for the Koreans, army. And they had had their little list of things for us to do. We'd do that in a couple hours, and then we'd go on to the next one, maybe we're working for the Australians. Maybe for the Thais. Sometimes ash and trash missions, back and forth just administrative things.

[00:12:25.62] JOE GALLOWAY: You're flying for the Aussies, you're hauling beer.

[00:12:29.09] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, everybody like the Australians, I can tell you that. We also had other duties that were unique to our company because we were general support. I think we were the first company in Vietnam that had fire buckets. And if you don't know what that is, I imagine it was about 400 gallon buckets, and they had slings, cables attached to them. And if you were on fire bucket-- everybody had to be on fire-- there had to be a ship on fire bucket duty all the time, 24 hours a day.

[00:13:04.25] So if this was your day, you would go out with the crew, you'd pre-flight the aircraft, you'd run it up, you'd have it ready to go, and then go back to your hooch, play cards and listen to the radio, whatever you do. But you can't drink. And then like a firehouse, if there was a fire somewhere in an ammo dump or in a village, you'd get the call, and by the time you got to the aircraft, you'd have your coordinates, and day or night off you go.

[00:13:30.58] JOE GALLOWAY: You were out there to dump water on or extinguish liquid of some kind?

[00:13:36.89] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah. You hover the aircraft down to the nearest body of water, whether it's a river, or a rice paddy, or a lake, and get a full load, pick it up, and then plan your route, plan your approach depending on the type of fire it was, of course. And drop it and keep doing it until it's out.

[00:13:53.29] JOE GALLOWAY: That's fascinating, I didn't know about that.

[00:13:58.18] BILL SCHRODER: That worked against us in one case. Now I didn't fly this mission, but I heard about it. And I believe the person who told me the story. He got a call at 3:30 or 4:00 in the morning, and got the coordinates, and he said, we had no idea where the hell we were going. It was out in the middle of Indian country. And it was dark. And he said, we got there with the smudge pots were lit. And so they got a call, yeah, dump it right here. And there was nothing there, no fire, nothing.

[00:14:31.89] And so they hovered over to a nearby river, got a load, and went over and dropped that load between those smudge pots and went home. And they heard the next day that General Westmoreland was coming to visit that LZ, and the colonel in charge didn't want him to get dusty when his plane landed. I was told that story, and I believe it's true.

[00:14:56.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Sounds like it. Sounds like it.

[00:14:59.96] BILL SCHRODER: We also had the duty of picking up downed aircraft whenever a Huey or a fixed wing or any other aircraft would get shot down or fall down. We would pick up a rigging crew called Pipesmoke, and a small security team, and take them out to the crash site. And we'd land, and we'd help them secure the bodies in the bags, put them in the back of our helicopter, and then they would rig up the downed aircraft. We'd get up, pick it up, carry it in somewhere-- the nearest base-- and then come back and pick up the security team and go home. And we got that mission a lot. That was an ugly mission.

[00:15:38.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Ugly mission.

[00:15:39.68] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah.

[00:15:40.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Your area of operations was largely III Corps.

[00:15:45.80] BILL SCHRODER: A little bit in IV Corps, but yes, mostly III Corps. Now I'm sure that the other companies never went out of III Corps because they were assigned to infantry units that were in III Corps, but we'd go down to Tay Ninh and some places down in IV Corps to do ash and trash things.

[00:16:04.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions you witnessed? Combat operations in which you participated.

[00:16:12.04] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah. We don't have names for them, there wasn't any A Shau Valley type names, or Hamburger Hill, or any of those kinds of things. But generally the days were pretty uneventful. But it happened frequently where something would erupt that wasn't planned for, and then you have to drop all your other planned activities and go over and support that. And we did that a lot, too. And I know one time we went to Tay Ninh Province because a big firefight had just erupted, and we were actually doing something else. We had already flown 10 or 12 hours that day.

[00:16:58.81] So we went over and picked up some supplies for them. And every time we'd try to make an approach in there, I mean, it was nothing but a field of red and green tracers. And so they'd wave us off at the last minute and we'd go over. And the closest place to sit down-- by this time it's 11 o'clock at night. And the closest place to sit down was an abandoned Special Forces star-shaped base. Nobody there.

[00:17:24.09] And so we could just sit, drop the load, hover over beside it, sit down, and we'd wait. And it was 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock, OK, we'll try it again. We'd pick up, go back out, and try it again. Same thing couldn't get in. And we did that all night long. And then the fog started coming in at our landing zone, where we were waiting. And that made it doubly interesting. But you know that kind of stuff, you get the call.

[00:17:55.81] BILL SCHRODER: I liked them. My notions of saving them from communism was disabused six weeks after I got to country, and I recognized-- not because I'm so smart, I

think everybody would recognize that these people, they don't benefit from their masters' struggles for power. They owe their allegiance to their village chief and that's all. And they just wanted to stay alive. And that really changed my thinking. Of course, I was trained-- I was trained, I'm going to save the world from communism. Then I found out that wasn't really what it was all about.

[00:18:33.22] And because we lived in a good area, a fairly secure area, we were able-- as officers we had to pay them, of course, but we had Vietnamese women do our laundry, and keep our boots clean, and things like that. We had a Viet--

[00:18:45.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Keep you hooch clean.

[00:18:46.66] BILL SCHRODER: --keep the hooch clean. And ours was about 85 years old. At least she looked like she was. And her name was Doy. We became good friends with her. Very nice woman.

[00:18:56.35] And if you talked to them, most of them would speak enough English eventually to let you know that they just didn't want anybody in their country, Americans or anybody else. So I tried-- I have a little bit of a tendency toward egalitarianism anyway, it's natural to me. So I tried as often as possible to put on the good American Soldier face, and be as inoffensive as I could.

[00:19:31.32] BILL SCHRODER: I only remained friends with two. And one was my room-- well, matter of fact at one time or another they were both my roommates. But I didn't-- the other officers didn't get along well with the other officers. None of us. I mean, everybody seemed to have one buddy--

[00:19:46.62] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was it.

[00:19:47.76] BILL SCHRODER: --and that was it. And there were 33 or 34 officers there, and they were all either warrant officers or captains. So there wasn't a rank thing. It's just that there was a time in the military where promotions were kind of automatic, and people were going up-- I mean, you can go from second lieutenant to first in one year, first to captain in one year, and captain to major in three, or 3 and 1/2 as long as you didn't have any stumbles along the way.

[00:20:14.33] So there was always threats about I'm going to get a bad OER for you-- Officers Efficiency Report for you. And if you don't give me that chair because you're leaving country, that chair you bought in Saigon if you don't give it to me to put in my hooch, I'm going to get you. I mean, it wasn't a fun environment. It wasn't healthy. And the enlisted men had the same problem. The enlisted men fought with each other all the time, and it wasn't just racial.

[00:20:41.74] And looking back on it now with my 68-year-old brain I'm going, "This is a citizen's Army, it's not an Army like a well oiled machine like we have today. It was a citizen's Army and it's tacky. Citizens armies are tacky. But I still believe in the concept of citizen armies over the all volunteer.

[00:20:59.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. What did you do for off-duty activities if you had any. Recreation.

[00:21:11.22] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, we had a lawn, our bunker was built out in the square with the gazebo over it, and we had planted some grass and some of the guys played croquet. And some of the guys played ping pong. And we could show a movie in the gazebo. One of those old 16 millimeter things. If you wanted to risk getting rocketed you could do that.

[00:21:34.56] I took some time during that nine month period, I took some time four or five days at a time, and I got permission to go up to visit friends from flight school. And I went on several occasions to Tay Ninh. They had a--

[00:21:50.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you fly up?

[00:21:51.99] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, somebody would pick me up is what it would be. Or I'd fly with a ship that's already going there. And I'd meet my buddies, and they happened to be flying for-- I forgot the company now, but it was a Cobra company. They were attack pilots. And they were the ones-- they called themselves the Rat Pack, and they had the Flying Tiger image painted on the nose. So I'd go get to sit in the front seat of a Cobra and do some gun runs and some rocket runs. And that was very otherworldly to do that.

[00:22:27.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Like riding a motorcycle.

[00:22:28.80] BILL SCHRODER: Well, it's like riding, yeah. It's really something. But I enjoyed that. I enjoyed flying different kinds of airplanes when I could.

[00:22:41.39] BILL SCHRODER: I didn't hear-- I mean, I knew what was going on in the States, and secretly I was hoping they'd win, the people in the streets, I mean. But I was pretty well wrapped up with one particular British author in those days that I liked called William Somerset Maugham.

[00:22:56.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, Willy Maugham.

[00:22:57.53] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, and I read all of his stuff that whole year I was in Vietnam. And I didn't care much for music and-- rock music. I missed that whole acid rock scene because I was sequestered, I was in training from 1966, and then overseas till 1970, and then I didn't get out until '71. By that time I was married and had two kids, I wouldn't go out to some rock band.

[00:23:20.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Sex, drugs, and rock and roll passed you by.

[00:23:23.28] BILL SCHRODER: Gone, yeah.

[00:23:26.29] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your emotions at the time?

[00:23:31.66] BILL SCHRODER: Well, I missed my family. I went to see them in Hawaii on R&R, my daughter for the first time. But my emotions at the time were kind of centered around, I hope nobody really has to die-- not a lot of people-- for this crazy cause. That was what preoccupied my mind.

[00:23:59.91] JOE GALLOWAY: I assume you had more than one tour.

[00:24:02.60] BILL SCHRODER: No, one tour, yeah, April '69 to April '70. I suppose just the nighttime firefights and the nighttime flying duties. It was monsoon season half the year, and really rough weather. And then you had to clear yourself through artillery. There was an artillery central. Tell me if I'm telling you too much.

[00:24:25.49] JOE GALLOWAY: No, that's OK.

[00:24:26.09] BILL SCHRODER: There was an artillery central, and when a infantry unit would call in an artillery strike on a-- be it on a communist unit or a Vietnamese unit, there would be a certain number of rounds, and they'd be a certain kind of round, and they'd be at a certain altitude going through the air. Sometimes miles. So when you were flying, especially at night, you had to call this radar room, rocket central, artillery central, and you had to say, Geronimo 225 to Xuan Loc, Phu Loi. And they'd say, Xuan Loc, Phu Loi, clear. And they'd say, Xuan Loc, Phu Loi, stay above 2,500 feet, or stay below 1,500 feet. Because if you didn't--

[00:25:11.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody's going to shoot you down.

[00:25:12.82] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, you could get a artillery round right through your side of your helicopter. So keeping all that down, paying attention at night because there was no sophisticated navigation. We had an ADF radio, an Automatic Direction Finder radio was all we had. And looking out the side windows, watching things burn all around you, and dodging the weather. I think, night flying was the most interesting.

[00:25:36.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Pretty sporty.

[00:25:37.07] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah.

[00:25:42.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for me the best day you had during your Vietnam tour.

[00:25:48.89] BILL SCHRODER: I don't think I can do that.

[00:25:52.58] JOE GALLOWAY: No best day?

[00:25:54.12] BILL SCHRODER: No.

[00:25:54.49] JOE GALLOWAY: They were all kind of--

[00:25:56.68] BILL SCHRODER: I'm sorry, I just can't--

[00:25:58.28] JOE GALLOWAY: No, that's OK.

[00:25:58.69] BILL SCHRODER: --I can't conjure that one up.

[00:26:04.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for me the worst day you had.

[00:26:07.18] BILL SCHRODER: Well, I think that would be that day out near Tay Ninh, Quan Loi

[00:26:13.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Trying to get supplies.

[00:26:13.85] BILL SCHRODER: And having to go back in the fog and sitting around with no security around the aircraft of any kind.

[00:26:27.41] BILL SCHRODER: Lots because we flew for them. Now, didn't fly for any Filipino units or any New Zealand units, but we flew a lot for the Koreans and the Aussies and the Thais.

[00:26:38.16] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your opinion of each of them?

[00:26:41.01] BILL SCHRODER: Well, Thailand is the land of smiles, and that's what I felt when I was working around Thai troops. The Koreans scared the bejesus out of everybody. Those guys were serious, no nonsense people. And it was good to fly for them because they were really well-organized, and really knew step by step what exactly they wanted done, and how they wanted it done. And so there was no mystery, you just did it. And of course, the Australians were-- they were the most fun. And when we'd fly there, they had a camp called Nui Dat.

[00:27:19.58] JOE GALLOWAY: That's it, Nui Dat.

[00:27:21.26] BILL SCHRODER: And we'd go down there quite often, and we'd always try to time it for lunch because they had a really nice mess hall. And it was interesting to go in there, they had a big picture of the Queen up on the wall, and before you sat down you had to acknowledge the Queen, and then they'd tell bawdy stories while the Queen's watching.

[00:27:39.20] JOE GALLOWAY: And drink Foster's.

[00:27:41.09] BILL SCHRODER: Foster's Lager, yeah.

[00:27:44.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Your general opinion of the South Vietnamese troops you worked with?

[00:27:51.79] BILL SCHRODER: They were in a tough spot. They were farm boys, and they got conscripted too. And they were more worried about their own families than they were about anything else. And like in these wars we've got going on now, most of those peasants don't have any allegiance toward a national government at all. And especially the one in Saigon at the time, I mean, they knew how corrupt those guys were. So I just-- you really ought to feel sorry for

them. It's really what you ought to do. Because they're forced to fight in something they have absolutely no stake in.

[00:28:31.26] BILL SCHRODER: Oh, I would say the typical MARS line call once a week, now and then a letter. My wife had a young baby, and her mother was ill, and so she had her hands full. And I'd hear from my parents now and then. It was very difficult to get through then on MARS lines. And do I need to explain what MARS lines were?

[00:28:56.22] JOE GALLOWAY: No, everybody's talked about it. I love you, over. Trying to get your wife up to speed on--

[00:29:04.56] BILL SCHRODER: With some ham radio operator setting his pajamas in Philadelphia, monitoring your conversation.

[00:29:11.53] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war from home, if any.

[00:29:18.96] BILL SCHRODER: I would say of the news that was happening, 5% we'd hear about. And then it was sanitized. It was the armed forces radio and television network. We had a little TV set in our officers club and mostly it was Bobby Troup and Julie London, if you can believe that. So not much.

[00:29:37.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Not much. Were you aware of any particular political or social events or movements back home? The antiwar stuff.

[00:29:49.31] BILL SCHRODER: Sure, I mean, I was there in the States when it was going on.

[00:29:53.82] JOE GALLOWAY: When it was going on.

[00:29:54.75] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah. And I think the biggest historical event that happened while I was there was that Ho Chi Minh died. And everybody was sure that night in the bar in the officers club that this was going to be the end of the war. Everybody was convinced that they were going to throw up the white flags.

[00:30:11.87] JOE GALLOWAY: It didn't make a bit of difference.

[00:30:12.57] BILL SCHRODER: No. And that's a lesson learned. BILL SCHRODER: April 15th, 1970.

[00:30:23.52] JOE GALLOWAY: 1970. Describe what that was like.

[00:30:30.96] BILL SCHRODER: I recall distinctly when the-- it was an old DC-8, and when the wheels left the ground, 180 people, and there were quite a few nurses on board, cheered and cheered and cheered and cheered and cheered. But then I don't remember anything else about that flight from then on out. It's completely lost from my memory.

[00:30:49.34] JOE GALLOWAY: What about landing at the other end?

[00:30:53.36] BILL SCHRODER: We were all told to get in our civilian clothes as soon as possible. So I went in the airport in Sacramento and changed. And from then on out you didn't mention that you went to Vietnam.

[00:31:10.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Did that-- did that bother you?

[00:31:13.90] BILL SCHRODER: Not at the time.

[00:31:15.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Not really.

[00:31:16.20] BILL SCHRODER: Not at the time, uh-uh.

[00:31:19.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Reception from family and friends?

[00:31:22.17] BILL SCHRODER: Had the obligatory Welcome Home party. Had the obligatory 12-year-old come up and ask me how many babies did I kill. Friend of the family. But I felt strangely kind of removed from all that. I couldn't get into the back slapping and belly laughing right away. So it was fairly difficult, I had a divorce just probably a year and a half later.

[00:31:57.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have difficulty readjusting to life after the war?

[00:32:04.28] BILL SCHRODER: Let's just put it this way, I toughed it out. I just pushed through it. Put them in boxes and just pushed through it. I didn't find out about my very mild PTSD symptoms-- that I even had that-- until 25 years after.

[00:32:25.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:32:26.62] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah. And I was out to dinner one time with a friend of mine and his wife, and she was a psychiatrist and a veterans counselor in Phoenix. And I had just met her, and so we were having dinner. We didn't talk about the military all night, but I said, Mary, I know about PTSD, but don't really know anything about it, tell me about your work. And she said, well, Bill, you should know you've got all the classic symptoms. She said, yours are very mild, I can tell, but you've got them.

[00:32:53.04] And then she started reading me my personality. She read my personality to me like she had known me for 30 years. And I thought it was just because that's the way I am. I got home, I was talking to my own wife about that. And she said, well, we've been married 28 years, and we haven't talked about this, but I never liked it when you would not go back to Disneyland with the family. Never liked it when the play is in intermission, you can't get up and go out in the lobby and mingle. Never liked it when certain situations arise you don't respond like other people do. Never liked it when you don't share feelings in crowds, and can't stand to be in crowded areas, and need to be away.

[00:33:34.81] And so that's what tipped me off. And so I thought, well if my very mild symptoms have affected my family-- I wasn't worried about myself because I did just fine-- but if those symptoms affected my family, what about the other guys? The guys that really have it bad. That's why I wrote that book.

[00:33:59.81] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact, if any, have you had with your fellow veterans over the years?

[00:34:06.27] BILL SCHRODER: The two that were at one time or another my roommates, still best friends. So one of--

[00:34:13.03] JOE GALLOWAY: So you talk to them regularly.

[00:34:13.81] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, and one of them's getting-- he's getting up there. Boy, I wish you had a chance to talk to him. He's got two Distinguished Flying Crosses and two Silver Stars.

[00:34:22.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Where does he live?

[00:34:24.10] BILL SCHRODER: He lives in Arkansas. Harrison--

[00:34:28.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, we might get down that way once of these days.

[00:34:29.35] BILL SCHRODER: --Harrison, Arkansas. He's a genuine hero.

[00:34:38.88] BILL SCHRODER: I would say my military experience in general taught me a lot about how to get things done, don't take no for an answer, identify the mission, go get it done and get it behind you, and get ready for the next one. That's something that I see in all-- most military trained people. The PTSD, less positive effect, but it stayed with me the whole life.

[00:35:02.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today? The new veterans.

[00:35:12.69] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah, if I hadn't gone to Vietnam, today I wouldn't be able to feel sorry for them. But I feel sorry for everyone that comes home today. Not meaning that I wish they'd stay there. But that they didn't have to go in the first place.

[00:35:30.81] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:35:35.75] BILL SCHRODER: It's not.

[00:35:36.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Not.

[00:35:37.31] BILL SCHRODER: No, completely not. Our society has a tendency as-- oh, it's not just our society, we whitewash history like crazy. I mean, how much does anybody know

about the Spanish-American War, and why we fought it, and that we killed 400,000 Filipinos so that we could occupy those islands? How many people know that? None. Very few. Lessons learned in Vietnam were learned, utterly forgotten.

[00:36:01.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Utterly forgotten. If they had been learned and kept, we might have avoided two wars that I know of.

[00:36:11.05] BILL SCHRODER: I got you on that one.

[00:36:14.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:36:22.56] BILL SCHRODER: No.

[00:36:23.44] JOE GALLOWAY: No. Just wasn't there.

[00:36:27.70] BILL SCHRODER: Nothing good.

[00:36:30.54] JOE GALLOWAY: What did that war mean for you and your generation?

[00:36:37.96] BILL SCHRODER: Here again, I want to reinforce my belief in citizen Army. I don't like an all-volunteer Army, a perpetual all-volunteer Army. But I had a little bit of a notion that that generation, my generation, was looked upon by a great many powerful people as just disposable.

[00:37:02.97] JOE GALLOWAY: As--

[00:37:03.87] BILL SCHRODER: Disposable. That's what I took away from it.

[00:37:09.57] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a sad thing. What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:37:24.26] BILL SCHRODER: I wished-- I would tell them to look long and hard before granting a blind and fear filled obedience to political leaders.

[00:37:48.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you been to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC?

[00:37:52.69] BILL SCHRODER: Yeah.

[00:37:53.59] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts when you go there.

[00:37:55.25] BILL SCHRODER: Oh, it's brilliant, of course. And everybody goes and looks for the people they know, and it's quite a moving experience. And we were just in DC a couple of years ago, I went to the World War II exhibit, and yeah, Women in Combat. They have that exhibit now, too.

[00:38:19.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration project?

[00:38:24.59] BILL SCHRODER: Not until I was contacted.

[00:38:27.70] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts about that?

[00:38:30.16] BILL SCHRODER: Well, I think if it doesn't get whitewashed out of history I think it'll be a great thing.

[00:38:40.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, Mr. Schroder.

[00:38:42.73] BILL SCHRODER: Thank you Mr. Galloway, it's a pleasure.

[00:38:46.06] JOE GALLOWAY: All mine.

[00:38:47.16] BILL SCHRODER: I'm a big fan.

[00:38:48.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, I appreciate that.