

## **Smale, David US Navy**

[00:00:17.96] DAVID SMALE: I was born actually in Royal Oak, Michigan. And when I was about seven, we moved then to New Orleans, where I lived until high school when I came back up to Grand Rapids, Michigan. And when I started at the school I graduated from, people would stop me in the hallway and just say, talk. Then I would talk, and they would go, see? And that southern accent has been gone for many, many years. It was a good childhood.

[00:00:54.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:57.06] DAVID SMALE: I have my parents. My dad was a World War II vet, and went in as a private, came out as a major. And was in Africa with Patton, and was at AF-- he was in the communication corps. And so, very proud of his service, probably wasn't enthused about me going to Vietnam as he went to World War II.

[00:01:29.23] My mother, probably one of the most wonderful people on the planet. And I had all-- my dad was probably a bit of a hard guy, but yet I used to say if you're going to crash on that desert island, my dad's a good guy to have along. If you're going on a business trip and you want to go for some cocktails, he just wants you to work some more.

[00:01:53.35] And my mother actually became my wife's probably best friend. And one of the credos she lived by was-- things work out best for those who make the best of the way things work out. And I think that's a pretty good philosophy in life because things happen. Incidentally, as a Vietnam vet occasionally my speech gets sprinkled with words that aren't commonly used in the world. I'm in construction, So they're probably--

[00:02:26.66] JOE GALLOWAY: There we go. But out of all of that, what do you consider your hometown?

[00:02:34.26] DAVID SMALE: I would say Grand Rapids.

[00:02:39.89] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went in the Navy?

[00:02:45.38] DAVID SMALE: I believe I was 19 when I went in the Navy, and I was actually being drafted, or actually I had been drafted. And the prelude to that is I was going to the local community college while I was trying to figure out what I should be doing for the rest of my life when I thought actually going out West to ski for a while seemed like a really good idea.

[00:03:16.42] When I moved back up North I said, I got to learn to ski. Do something for winter. Loved it. I was out there for several weeks when I called my parents. My dad said, it's here. I said, what's here? He said, your draft notice.

[00:03:31.45] And so I took the physical. And then I ran around looking to see if I could join the Navy or the Air Force with the foremost interest of not going to Vietnam. And nonetheless it became one of the seminal parts of my history. So I think I was 19 when I joined the Navy, and I thought--

[00:03:53.25] JOE GALLOWAY: What year was that?

[00:03:54.90] DAVID SMALE: 1968. JOE GALLOWAY: '68. DAVID SMALE: Yeah, May of '68.

[00:03:58.53] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam at that time?

[00:04:03.39] DAVID SMALE: I was probably somewhat naive like a lot of people were in those days. And I would say that it was beginning to-- my thinking was beginning to shift from being perhaps noncommittal about it to being more opposed to it generally. And I think I'm a bit of either an anomaly or I ended up doing very well at my job in Vietnam, but at the same time, I never was a particularly ardent supporter of the war. I thought it was probably ill-conceived and not very well executed.

[00:04:47.97] JOE GALLOWAY: So you volunteered for the Navy, but with the draft breathing down your neck.

[00:04:53.52] DAVID SMALE: Absolutely.

[00:04:59.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you do your basic training?

[00:05:02.63] DAVID SMALE: Great Lakes.

[00:05:04.39] JOE GALLOWAY: And what training did you get before they shipped you to Vietnam?

[00:05:10.98] DAVID SMALE: The training started out with-- let's see, after boot camp I went to Jacksonville, Florida, for Aviation Ordnance School. I remember in boot camp our company commander, which is what they call the drill sergeants in the Navy said, I want-- everybody put down five things they would like to do for their service. And he said, everybody has to put aviation ordnance as one of your choices.

[00:05:41.67] And so I put it number five, and thinking maybe I won't get it. I got it. I'm thinking I'm going to be a bomb humper, this is going to really be good for me if I get out of the service. And I even thought about becoming a hospital corpsman, which I said, wow, that really has not a very good-- probably that's not a very good choice. Anyway, so I went to Jacksonville.

[00:06:05.39] And following Jacksonville, I went to-- I got orders to Guam. And I'm going, Guam. And the-- but it was going to be in P-3 squadron. I would have been flying around in prop planes that were going to fly all over Asia. And everybody told me these are just incredible orders. And so I really got excited for about five minutes because the next week they were substituted with orders to HA(L)-3, Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron 3 in Vietnam. And I started asking around, and people had no idea what I was even talking about.

[00:06:44.34] JOE GALLOWAY: What that was.

[00:06:45.21] DAVID SMALE: Exactly. And so I thought, well-- then I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds where I had additional training on the UH-1B and C helicopters for being able to handle the ordnance on those helicopters, and to prepare for my duties as an aviation ordnanceman And then after that I went to SERE school like many people. That's Survival, Escape, and Evasion-- it was like three weeks of pure joy and--

[00:07:19.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Eating bugs and running around the jungle.

[00:07:21.65] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, and trying to escape. And people got hypothermia. They got actually pulled out. It was at Little Creek in Virginia. I've always said, send me back to Vietnam, but don't ever send me back to SERE school.

[00:07:34.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Did all the training that you had prepare you for what you were going to face in Vietnam?

[00:07:41.62] DAVID SMALE: Certainly I think the aviation ordinance was very, very helpful to me. The SERE school would have been very helpful if we had in fact been shot down and having to try and evade capture. I went to Imperial Beach, I think it was my last station where we learned things like hand-to-hand combat.

[00:08:04.75] And fortunately that never came into play for me. But it was certainly-- these were useful schools in learning the rigors of what you were going to have to do in teamwork, and probably even building a little esprit de corps.

[00:08:23.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. JOE GALLOWAY: What month and year did you get orders to Vietnam?

[00:08:33.37] DAVID SMALE: Those orders came when I was in Aviation Ordnance School, so I'm going to say it was probably the latter part of '68 because I remember going to SERE school I think in the fall of '68 and then-- no, actually it was February of '69. That's right.

[00:08:51.19] JOE GALLOWAY: So you would have deployed in early '69.

[00:08:54.62] DAVID SMALE: Yes, I actually deployed. I went over to Vietnam on June 6, I believe, of 1969.

[00:09:01.43] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you get to Vietnam, and where did you land?

[00:09:06.15] DAVID SMALE: My journey to Vietnam was a little interesting. I believe we went from San Francisco, and because the night before I was leaving for Vietnam, I'm a young punk in the park down in San Francisco, enjoying San Francisco more than I probably should have. And so I became pretty ripe for-- as an opportunity. And so I got mugged. And I might as well had the little beanie on my hat that says, mug me.

[00:09:40.37] And so I ended up having to call-- and they took my traveler's checks. What I did have was still my orders and some other stuff. But I had to call my dad, who lived in Michigan,

and tell him to wire me money at-- with the time zone. And he said, why am I wiring your money? And I said, Dad, you're going to get-- it's my money. Are you going to wire it to me or not? He wasn't very happy.

[00:10:07.70] And when I got to Vietnam, all Sailors go through Annapolis Hotel. And so when I got to the Annapolis Hotel, I told them I needed to go to the American Express office in order to get my traveler's checks replenished. And so they sat me over in a corner. Every once in a while somebody would say, what's the deal with this guy? He's got a problem.

[00:10:37.83] And so I was there for probably a day and a half longer than I should have been while they're trying to get me to American Express to get my traveler's checks before I took then a C-130 to Binh Thuy, which is where our headquarters was. And on that there was a bunch of chatter and jibber jabber. And then we took a round through the fuselage, and that quieted everybody. And we said, oh, we're in Vietnam. And one round, no other incident. So that's how I arrived.

[00:11:12.01] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions on landing?

[00:11:14.65] DAVID SMALE: It was hot. It was hot and muggy. It was June.

[00:11:21.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Once you got to Binh Thuy and were assigned, what were your initial duties?

[00:11:26.77] DAVID SMALE: I was in the aviation shop, which did the-- we did the calibration for the helicopters when they came in for various maintenance. And I would have to concede that this was not joyful work for me. I did not like it. And I liked some of the people very, very well. Several others I didn't care so much for. And I found it to be not very challenging for me. And I was working at night.

[00:11:57.94] And I was there for probably 2 and 1/2 months when somebody came around and said, we're looking for people who might be interested in volunteering as a door gunner. And, here I'm thinking, I get drafted, I joined the Navy to avoid going to Vietnam. I get sent to Vietnam. And then all of a sudden I decide to become a door gunner, which is why-- we're there to-- and part of that is-- I generally know about me and my life is I try not to stay on the sidelines. I tend to look for leadership positions and move forward, do some of the hard stuff. And so I ended up volunteering. I had no training for that.

[00:12:41.43] JOE GALLOWAY: None.

[00:12:42.77] DAVID SMALE: I believe my flight to my detachment, which was Det-7, was my first time in a Huey helicopter. I was with Stan Coldsnow, who was going out to be our petty officer in charge. Stan is still a good friend of mine in California. And he looked at me across-- in the back of the helicopter, and he's looking at me and thinking, what have I gotten now?

[00:13:16.68] I'm afraid. I don't want to sit too close to the open door. I'm a little nervous about that, wondering also, what am I doing? But I would have to say three weeks later I felt like I was where I belonged. And I became pretty good at what I did.

[00:13:37.70] JOE GALLOWAY: And what was it that you were doing as a helicopter door gunner in a Navy helicopter outfit?

[00:13:46.46] DAVID SMALE: The Army had been providing cover for the river patrol boats, and not doing a very good job, by their own admission. They just didn't have the resources and the time. And so it was always the last thing on their agenda. And as a result, the Navy said, maybe we need to be doing some of this ourselves.

[00:14:10.59] And so they sent some people over from HC-1 who are what we call our plank owners, the people who were-- and because HA(L)-3 is quite unusual in Navy history. It was commissioned in Vietnam, first-- well, HC-1 went over in '66, and then HA(L)-3 was commissioned in April of '67, and was finally decommissioned in Vietnam in 1972. And so, the only squadron that would have been both commissioned and decommissioned in Vietnam.

[00:14:45.19] And it allowed the river patrol boats, or riverine forces, and the SEAL teams to have their own support apparatus, which was vital to their success. And because we were not now-- they were not last on our agenda, they were our job. We took it very seriously.

[00:15:04.41] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is all in the Mekong Delta?

[00:15:06.83] DAVID SMALE: It is.

[00:15:13.03] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like?

[00:15:16.58] DAVID SMALE: I first went to Tay Ninh, which was a very large Army base. Are you familiar with Tay Ninh? And it was a very large Army base. And we lived in a hooch that-- and Tay Ninh was mortared quite frequently.

[00:15:34.10] We were near Nui Ba Den, which was Black Virgin Mountain, which was owned by the VC, particularly on the upper reaches of it. And so they would send mortars into our base frequently. I've got photos of completely demolished helicopters. And if there was incoming when we happened to be at a fuel cell, that was something that took-- I mean, if you weren't careful, if you didn't jump right back into that helicopter, you're going to be left there.

[00:16:02.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Pucker factor went way up.

[00:16:04.46] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, it went up pretty quickly. And nobody wants to be a little fried critter. And Tay Ninh was-- and we deployed then along the river, so it was-- the 25th Infantry was there also. And we actually did quite a bit of work for the 25th Infantry.

[00:16:25.25] We would fly any time, day or night, often when others wouldn't fly. And we had naval aviators, which I think was-- I consider that to be one of the very key elements. That is no

disrespect to the Army helicopter pilots, because some of them were the finest people and finest helo drivers on the planet.

[00:16:47.24] But they were churning them out pretty fast then. And we had naval aviators, all instruments certified, and started out in fixed wings and then learned to fly the helicopters. And so they were a little more mature, like 23 or 24, so we didn't have any 20-year-olds flying them over there. But it was good work.

[00:17:11.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go after Tay Ninh?

[00:17:15.57] DAVID SMALE: After Tay Ninh we were in the-- Tay Ninh's just above the Parrot Beak area in Cambodia. And so we were starting to do work very close to the Cambodian border. And probably actually had a helicopter shot down in Cambodia, which became quite an international incident. And we went down to Moc Hoa for a while, which was a pretty-- it was an outpost for the Green Beret and Montagnards and was the first experience I had where I actually saw mercenaries with ears on necklaces around their neck and so on. I said, OK, we're someplace different. And we slept in the helicopter, pilots, too.

[00:18:05.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Ate C-rations.

[00:18:06.95] DAVID SMALE: Yeah. Oh, yeah, most of our time we were eating lurps. And that was a temporary duty. And then we ended up moving to a place called Ben Luc that was-- and it was at Ben Luc that I received a phone call asking if I wanted to transfer to Detachment 1. And things had gotten a little slow in Ben Luc. I'm still not very enthusiastic about the Vietnam War, but I had become very good at my job.

[00:18:40.76] One of the things that we had that made us unique is we had-- the Army had had them for a while, too-- was a free M60, which is, you had complete control-- in other words, it wasn't attached to anything. I could jump out of the helicopter with it. But it gave you just an absolute full radius. You could go anywhere. And the thing that you didn't want to do but you could, is shoot your own helicopter down because--

[00:19:09.82] JOE GALLOWAY: You certainly could obviously.

[00:19:11.42] DAVID SMALE: Yeah. And eventually they went to a fixed mount because one of the door gunners shot a pilot. But I was particularly proud of just how good I became as a free 60, ironically. I've had some success in my life, I still think I've never been any better than I was as a door gunner in Vietnam.

[00:19:34.18] JOE GALLOWAY: What exactly did a door gunner do?

[00:19:38.65] DAVID SMALE: Well, obviously when you're in a firefight, you are putting down fields of fire to protect the people that you're trying to protect on the ground. And I think if you were to ask our pilots, they would say, from an arsenal standpoint, we were the most important part because we were the ones that could act-- I mean, when they started shooting the flex guns or the rockets, we're all hoping they're going to go in a place that they were supposed to go, but

they didn't always, whereas with the free 60 you had complete control about where your field of fire was.

[00:20:13.13] And the other thing that we did was the maintenance. As an aviation ordnanceman, I would calibrate the rockets and the flex guns that were on the helicopters. And once you've seen a helicopter, or a rocket go where it's not supposed to go, which might mean closer to friendlies than it should have gone, I realized that as an aviation ordnanceman, I really needed to make sure those things were dialed in as good as I could. That still didn't mean that a grease pencil in the hands of the co-pilot putting a little mark on the window wasn't actually better.

[00:20:54.71] And then we had maintenance duties. The UH-1B helicopter that we had was-- they were hand-me-downs. They were all hand-me-downs. And when we got them they were already worn out. And so the--

[00:21:12.15] JOE GALLOWAY: You were getting them from the Army?

[00:21:14.15] DAVID SMALE: From the Army. And it--

[00:21:16.59] JOE GALLOWAY: They weren't giving you their new ones?

[00:21:18.91] DAVID SMALE: No, they weren't giving us their new ones.

[00:21:22.46] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm shocked.

[00:21:23.39] DAVID SMALE: Yes, we were too. Some of them-- and then when we would filter through them. They would go in for their maintenance, and for the more intermediate maintenance we would get another helicopter back out. And we would have to take it out for a ride to see whether or not it actually had any power, and run it through the paces because some of them had at least reasonable power, some of them didn't have much power at all.

[00:21:52.04] We were deployed off of-- either on land, I was on land at Tay Ninh, Ben Luc, Moc Hoa, or some of our detachments were off of LSTs or barges put together, which I was later. And those you tended to-- you would go off the LST, immediately fall towards the river or body of water until you got enough lift in order to be able to go forward then. And the door gunner's job was to-- if you weren't going to make it, start dumping ammo and start dumping rocket pods. And I never had to do that.

[00:22:31.04] Well, I guess maybe ammo. But occasionally, if you were heavy, you would run alongside the helicopter and then jump in as it started to get some lift. And so that was always kind of a joy. We had two battles-- one was the enemy, the other was trying to keep ahead of the maintenance on these already worn-out birds. And a number of our losses were because of maintenance problems.

[00:23:09.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe your friendships with, and your impressions of your fellow Sailors, aircrew, the people you lived and worked with.

[00:23:18.80] DAVID SMALE: It was actually a little unique because we were-- a fire team was two helicopters and eight pilots and eight crewmen. You frankly became almost as good friends with the pilots as you did with the crewmen because you lived in very close quarters, you relied on each other a lot, and you were with each other 24/7. So in that context we were-- and there were nine detachments with HA(L)-3, the Seawolves. And so when I'm out on detachment, which was most of the time, I really don't know what's going on anywhere else in the squadron.

[00:24:07.92] And you would hear when people got killed. You would hear when people were severely wounded. And some of them maybe you knew in passing-- you would get to know other people even in other detachments. But the relationships were unique. These became-- I mean, particularly after I transferred to Det 1, which is-- Det 1 is where my friends are that I've kept in touch with for the last 45 years.

[00:24:47.14] And I received a phone call one day while I was at Det 7 from a mentor of mine, Thurman Hicks. And he asked me if I would like to transfer to Det 1. Det 1 was known as the Det that probably had more action than any other Det that we had. It was a very busy place, in bad country, and everybody knew it. I was so flattered, I said yes. And when I got to Det 1, my first flight-- and by then I'm now primarily a .50 gunner, of .50 caliber machine gun in the door. And when you were firing the .50 cal, the helicopter went sideways.

[00:25:41.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. That's a lot of ordnance there for a light bird.

[00:25:46.13] DAVID SMALE: And I became very, very good with the .50 caliber machine gun. It became my good friend. And we were partners. I treated it like I would have my best dog. And so my first flight when I got to Det 1, and I'm thinking there are people here who have extended twice already.

[00:26:13.14] Some of the people were already legendary in our squadron. And when I went out on the first flight I was scared to death that I'm-- am I going to be able to perform? And it's very-- you have to know how to be able to see through the canopy. And I really had a knack for that.

[00:26:31.96] And so there we are flying along. I was the first one to see several VC. I took them out and their sampans with the .50 cal. And Jack Ludwig, who was the pilot, and he was near the end of his tour, he went crazy. The other door gunner, Tom Obie, a good friend of mine in Minnesota, went crazy. And I thought-- I have a new home. And I fit in with those guys. They realized that I was going to be just fine.

[00:27:10.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did Det 1 fly out of?

[00:27:14.13] DAVID SMALE: We were at the bottom of South Vietnam. In the larger context, the U-Minh Forest area, which I've got a picture of the operational area. But if you think of the bottom, really at the very bottom of South Vietnam-- Nam Can, and where we had a thing called Sea Float, which was Admiral Zumwalt's baby, and then Ca Mau, which was where Detachment 3 was, and then--

[00:27:46.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Ca Mau, Sa Dec.

[00:27:47.99] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, Song Ong Doc was where Det 6 was, and Rach Gia was where Det-8 was. And so we would see these other people. But we were in an area that there are no roads. You are in complete isolation. When somebody came in with supply, I spent \$20 at that time to buy a reel-to-reel of Simon and Garfunkel's Bridge Over Troubled Water. Probably would have been \$2 at that time, but I thought 20 was a bargain because I had no way to get anything else like that. And so I enjoyed it.

[00:28:31.12] When I first got there, we were on Sea Float. Sea Float was a group of barges that were put together in the Cau Lon River. And I might have rethought going to Det 1 if I'd understood what going to Sea Float was. The pilots and the door gunners slept in the same compartment. We had many more rats in the compartment than we had people. And the Sea Float was-- the VC really wanted to get rid of Sea Float in a very, very bad way. We had concussion grenades going off every 15 minutes around the perimeter of Sea Float, 24/7. While I was there we had--

[00:29:15.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Did the VC have--

[00:29:16.96] DAVID SMALE: --sappers, sappers who were trying to blow it up. And while I was on Sea Float, we had three that ended up floating after-- because they had been killed by the concussion grenades and they were strapped with C-4 or whatever at the time to try and blow us up. And they successfully blew up a South Vietnamese boat while we were there. And that got our attention. They weren't as vigilant about their-- making sure that they were protecting themselves.

[00:29:52.33] And so it was a-- and we were on 24-- one of the things that was nice about HA(L)-3 is that we were on 24 and off 24. But we still got pretty burned out because sometimes at 24 was all 24. And sometimes it was actually not 24 but 36 because we'd get short people, somebody would shot, and so on.

[00:30:17.30] Then we moved from Sea Float to Solid Anchor, which-- another Zumwalt project, where they brought a bunch of sand down. And we moved to shore, and we were one of the first to move ashore because they wanted us off of Sea Float because we were one of the targets that they wanted to-- and so and I've got a photo of Solid Anchor, and you got all of the hooches for the SEALs, the river patrol boats, and then at the end over here is the Seawolves, so that-- where the fuel is-- and we tended to get mortared a little more heavily than the other parts of the base.

[00:31:04.42] JOE GALLOWAY: My goodness, it sounds like they used you as targets.

[00:31:08.07] DAVID SMALE: They did. Yeah, as a matter of fact, they did.

[00:31:10.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds than you would have otherwise?

[00:31:19.06] DAVID SMALE: To a limited degree. And I would say part of that had mostly to do with being in the Navy. There were not-- and since we were an all-volunteer force, we had

Doc Spence, who was our flight surgeon, was African-American. And he was an extraordinary human being and role model. And everybody in the squadron absolutely just adored him.

[00:31:52.60] And another gentleman named Nesbie, who was a first class, so he was a career guy who was very top-notch. And he was a very capable guy, and I worked with him with some frequency. And I had a friend named Adrian Carr. And Adrian was-- he had black panther on his-- a tattoo on his arm, and he flowed like a black panther. He was very athletic, strong, and he had the agility of a black panther. And Adrian and I got along really great.

[00:32:37.50] But I'll say there was an episode where we went out on a boat for either re-supply or something, I can't remember, and Adrian went off with the other blacks on the boat and wouldn't even talk to me the whole time we were out there. And I thought, wow, this is a friend of mine. I thought he would introduce me or this and that. But I think-- later I realized that-- and I thought it was a little bit-- I thought he was disrespecting me, but in truth it was just seeking friends and alliances.

[00:33:18.27] But our friendship was probably never quite the same after that. And that's too bad, I really regret that. And I think we're both probably a little bit-- it had something to do with that. But we just didn't come in contact with-- I mean, we did a lot of work with the SEALs. There were not very many African-American SEALs. And the SEALs are a different breed.

[00:33:50.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Other than that incident, did you have any social tensions or turmoil of that sort?

[00:33:59.78] DAVID SMALE: No. JOE GALLOWAY: It was pretty tight-- DAVID SMALE: No, we had a very, very cohesive group. I mean, we were under fire a lot, taking fire, and our mantra was, scramble the Seawolves. When we were getting scrambled, it didn't matter if-- there was a scramble one, two, and a three. If it's a one, it's yeah, they're probably going to be some contact. We handled everything like a scramble three.

[00:34:26.38] Our goal was to get in the air in under two minutes, and get to wherever somebody was in trouble. Often it was at night. And the things that we would do to make sure that-- to help them, I mean, people have gone down and landed with them to get them out. I mean, I've jumped out of helicopters and chased VC down, and with a guy named Mike Eltman. Mike was smarter and I was. I weighed about 150 pounds, I jump out with M60. Mike weighs about-- he weighed about 180, excellent shape, he jumps out with his M16. And I'm thinking, yeah, that's what I should have done, too.

[00:35:10.78] But after a bit we decided-- you know what? We could be gone down-- and we had a captain, a naval captain aboard. And he was all excited about what we were doing. And the pilot in front finally reminded him, sir, we didn't do this. This is not part of our normal routine. And as you know, we're not supposed to do this, but we do it occasionally. But we didn't do it. And so he wanted to put us in for something. I said no.

[00:35:36.07] But that was not uncommon. We did whatever we needed to do to help people. And sometimes the SEALs got themselves into some pretty precarious situations. And in fact,

there's a Seawolf helicopter in front of the SEAL museum. And if you ran into any Vietnam-serving SEAL, and told them you were a Seawolf, there is going to be a hug.

[00:36:03.40] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for off duty time, if you had any?

[00:36:09.70] DAVID SMALE: I think we played volleyball. I think we drank a few beers, and maybe even occasionally other liquors.

[00:36:20.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Mixed drinks.

[00:36:21.66] DAVID SMALE: Mixed drinks, yes. I remember once I was-- I did a lot of listening to music. And I had a set of headphones with a cord that was about 50 feet long. And so I wandered pretty far with my headphones on, with my reel-to-reel, and--

[00:36:41.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Cranked up.

[00:36:41.78] DAVID SMALE: Cranked up. And I remember we had half a dozen officers that were over in our hooch on Det-1. And I came in and they started giving me a bunch of-- I had full beard and pretty long hair by then frankly. And they were saying, Smale, what are you? You a hippie? A Weatherman? What's going on? And I had this dichotomy of being against the war, but extending twice. And it was a conflict that I've never completely reconciled in my entire life.

[00:37:27.57] JOE GALLOWAY: You extended your tour two times?

[00:37:30.18] DAVID SMALE: Yes.

[00:37:30.80] JOE GALLOWAY: So you served how long?

[00:37:33.42] DAVID SMALE: I was there 26 months.

[00:37:35.04] JOE GALLOWAY: 26 months.

[00:37:36.63] DAVID SMALE: Yeah.

[00:37:37.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Damn, you must have liked it.

[00:37:45.13] DAVID SMALE: I'm going to quote a day that my son had. He was out in Moab, mountain biking. I was an avid mountain biker at one time and he became-- and he's very enthused about the sport. And he was out in Moab, and sent us a text that said something like this, well, I've had my ass handed to me on a platter, it was a really great day. And so there's kind of that dichotomy. And also-- the second extension was to get an early out. I was not a very-- I was not good material--

[00:38:27.09] JOE GALLOWAY: You were never going to be a career Navy man.

[00:38:30.36] DAVID SMALE: No, although they-- I had encouragement from some of the pilots to test for going to Annapolis and things like that, but I said, probably not for me. Occasionally, I used to think-- wonder what that-- what would my life have been like if I had done that?

[00:38:51.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have specific memories of the popular culture-- music, books, films-- of that time? You hear that song, takes you back immediately? Give me some songs.

[00:39:05.70] DAVID SMALE: Well, Country Joe, Canned Heat, Hendrix.

[00:39:15.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Simon and Garfunkel, you mentioned.

[00:39:16.99] DAVID SMALE: , Yeah, I mean, Simon and Garfunkel were-- and I listened to probably--

[00:39:23.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Credence?

[00:39:24.57] DAVID SMALE: Oh, yeah, Credence. And obviously the Rolling Stones. I mean, one of the things that was very enjoyable was if we we're just flying along and there's nothing going on at the moment, we could listen to the Armed Forces Radio. And you'd have some pretty wicked tunes going on, and you're flying low-level along a river and thinking, sun's out and it's a beautiful day. 10 minutes later it might be different.

[00:39:52.95] But at that moment it was-- and I spent quite a bit of time-- and when I was a Det 7 we had a little, almost like a tent-like office that I'd set up my reel-to-reel and I'd put my headphones on. I mean, music-- and the music of the time-- was important to me at that time.

[00:40:15.05] JOE GALLOWAY: We Gotta Get Out of this Place.

[00:40:16.31] DAVID SMALE: Sure, sure. But at the same time, I knew I wasn't going anywhere.

[00:40:26.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for me the quality of the leadership in your unit.

[00:40:32.05] DAVID SMALE: Amazing. When I first went to Det 7, Merle Scott was the officer-in-charge. He was a lieutenant commander, or maybe he was a full commander by then. And he became one of my top five mentors or most important men in my life.

[00:41:08.73] He was not an easy man, but he was very professional and he was-- I'm a 20-year-old punk who's just volunteered to go out to be a door gunner on the detachment, and I am green as grass. And I certainly needed some mentoring and a lot of his was by example. But I still, I'm going to be 68 next month, he's still one of my mentors that I think of with emotion that helped set some of my thinking for the things that I would try to conduct-- in ways I would conduct myself for the rest of my life. And certainly we had the pilots.

[00:41:58.72] These are naval aviators. Some of these people-- Lieutenant Petrovic, I mean, Doc Schmitt who was our officer-in-charge on Det-1. When I did my second extension my dad wrote a letter to him-- and wondering if I was on drugs, and I had gambling problems, I had any number of other things. And I didn't even know that-- well, I guess I did, but I'd forgotten.

[00:42:31.99] But Commander Schmitt wrote back to him. And I actually found the letter that he wrote, after my parents had both died, in a briefcase that we uncovered, that also had a letter that I had written to my dad at his office where I first told him that-- oh, my letters have been vague and I should probably explain to you why I volunteered to be a door gunner. And then I went on to say, but it's not too bad. And then you turn another page and I said, there's something else I guess I should tell you. And that is that I've extended.

[00:43:07.96] And the unkindest thing I ever did to my parents was extend twice in Vietnam. I did not know this fully until I had children of my own. But I did have the good fortune to be able to apologize to them for that. I don't know that I would have changed what I had done, but I--

[00:43:28.00] JOE GALLOWAY: What did your commander write to your dad?

[00:43:30.81] DAVID SMALE: He said I was wonderful. I mean, in a nutshell. I have the letter here. He basically said I have no issues. I don't have a drug problem. I don't have financial problems. I didn't play cards with the Navy guys. Those guys would fleece you. And he was very complimentary about my work, my sensibilities-- that I hadn't gone-- I hadn't become a whack job.

[00:44:04.47] And I don't know if it completely put my dad at ease-- I'm sure it didn't-- but coincidentally or not, and this I just also had found out at the same time I found this letter, is our commanding officer of the squadron had sent my dad a letter that said I had been promoted to aviation ordnanceman, second class. And that was a field promotion. So that happened-- I didn't do anything. I didn't have to take a test or anything. But I mean, I had good leadership skills. But I wondered, I thought, well, I wonder if Commander Schmitt called the commanding officer and said, let's give this guy a field promotion and send a letter to his dad, so he's going to feel--

[00:44:47.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Make him feel better.

[00:44:48.88] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, that at least he knows he's doing his job.

[00:44:52.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience with that superb leadership change over two tours?

[00:45:01.76] DAVID SMALE: I differentiated. And certainly not everybody had that same level of skill. But by and large, we had some wonderful, wonderful petty officers-in-charge and officers-in-charge. All of the officers that came to HA(L)-3 had volunteered. That's mostly true also with the enlisted people.

[00:45:31.10] Now, I'm specifically talking about on detachment. When I was working in the aviation ordnance shop, I wasn't as enthused about the leadership. But on detachment-- and

Freddy Stark, who is a very good friend of mine today, lives in Washington, he came out the Det-1, and one of my jobs at that time was to train new gunners.

[00:45:57.14] And Freddy came out. I weighed 150, and I'm thinking-- Freddy comes out and he's probably pushing 220, and I'm thinking, we're having trouble getting off the ground. Freddy seems a little big for being sent out here. I wasn't sure that I thought Freddy was a good choice for our detachment, and I knew it was my job to train him so that he could be my boss and tell me what to do. And so I thought that I want to live just like he does. And so I did a pretty good job of training him to be a good petty officer-in-charge.

[00:46:28.79] And he went on to be an extraordinary petty officer-in-charge. I mean, he's got a bunch of testosterone-loaded 20 to 24-year-old guys who are a little full of themselves occasionally. And he had our back 24/7, all the time. I could not say enough about the leadership.

[00:47:02.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions that you-- or operations you participated in? Your primary mission was support of the Brown Water Navy, is that correct?

[00:47:16.27] DAVID SMALE: Yes. First and foremost, the Brown Water Navy and the SEALs.

[00:47:19.27] JOE GALLOWAY: And so you're out there flying cover and pulling these guys out of bad situations?

[00:47:26.93] DAVID SMALE: Yes. And I remember the first medevac that I had to do. And the guy had had his leg blown off. And my training for medevac as you may have-- can surmise is pretty thin. And we're calling somebody, what should we do? Put a tourniquet on it. With what?

[00:47:57.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Your belt, idiot.

[00:47:59.10] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, and that's what we're looking for.

[00:48:01.94] JOE GALLOWAY: And give him some morphine while you're at it.

[00:48:04.66] DAVID SMALE: Well, you know we didn't have any morphine. And so it was-- I mean, it was a harrowing ride because this guy was in just horrible, horrible pain. I believe they had given him some morphine before. And one of the things that still sticks with me, with these, the medevac guys, my hat's off to them a lot of the time, and certainly I am beholden to a Dust Off pilot and his crew today. But I remember just how sticky the floor was with blood. And I thought-- it's going to take us a long time to clean this out.

[00:48:49.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Think if you had been flying all day long-- pulling wounded out.

[00:48:54.55] DAVID SMALE: Exactly.

[00:48:56.18] JOE GALLOWAY: They had a hell of a time cleaning those choppers out at night.

[00:48:58.84] DAVID SMALE: They sure did. They did. And it gave me-- I realized, you know what? I can always find another job that's not as good as mine here. And we had-- well, there were a lot of experiences-- I mean, the worst, my worst day in Vietnam was the helicopter trap at VC Lake, and when-- it's been written up a half a dozen times in magazines.

[00:49:34.67] And the-- two of the pilots were awarded Navy Crosses. Both have been put in for the Medal of Honor. And probably one of them had gotten it if they hadn't had two of them put in on the same day. But we were-- a Dust Off, Dust Off 86. This is September 15, 1970, also the day my daughter was born, and so my worst and best day. And it was a-- unbeknownst to us, it was the NVA 95th Regiment, if I can recall correctly. And the Dust Off needed air support for friendlies that were-- I think it was South Vietnam-- Vietnamese friendlies that were wounded and needed to be extracted.

[00:50:30.56] Well, what they had done is they had-- the NVA had surrounded them and had-- were anticipating that there would be helicopters coming in. And so they had .50 cal set up. And it was certainly, I thought, oh, it was more later I thought, now I know we're taking fire. Because it was-- before you'd be taking fire and say, this is pretty bad and then you'd realize, oh, it can get worse.

[00:51:00.88] And so we had married up with another detachment because we had a bird down in maintenance. And our sister ship from Det-6 was shot down. They were on my side. And we were taking heavy .50 cal fire, and then we were shot down almost immediately after them. Our pilot, Lieutenant Lambert, had the good sense to direct us, auto-rotating, over into VC Lake. Because there were just-- we were under intense fire the whole time, even on-- when we landed in VC Lake.

[00:51:47.17] And I'm thinking, lake, we've done some work on this, and you never know which way the helicopter is going to go up. And so you're wondering what's going to happen with the rotors, and was this a good idea. Oh, and since I was on the .50, the .50 caliber throws off a lot of brass. And so you're kicking it around on the floor.

[00:52:10.88] And so, I didn't like the monkey belt that you typically wore, which was a nine-foot monkey belt that was attached to the floor, so if you fell out of the helicopter you'd only fall three feet maybe. And so I didn't use one. So I was just standing behind the .50, firing. And I used the .50 as my block to keep from falling out. So as we're going down, Lieutenant Lambert thinks I've fallen out of the plane or out of the helicopter. And I said, no, sir. I'm holding on for dear life to the back of your seat.

[00:52:45.23] But we landed in VC Lake. And I grabbed the .50 off of its stand. And I'm wanting to preserve it so we don't have it coming back and shooting more helicopters down. I'm standing on top of the helicopter when, I think at the time Lieutenant Ledford, Ken Ledford, who was awarded the Navy Cross, came through. And his crew chief was looking-- I'm holding the .50. Get the .50 out of here. Throw it in the water. And I was mad-- I'm still mad today that I didn't

take the butt plate off. If I'd have taken the butt plate off then you can't use it anyway. And so here I am 45 years later, still knocking myself for not taking the butt plate off.

[00:53:36.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Before you threw it away, I hope you used it to give them .50 caliber guns some of their own back.

[00:53:44.10] DAVID SMALE: We had. We had. And it was the third pass. We were under pretty heavy fire. And it was the third pass that they were finally able to pick us up and get us out. And then we're going-- we're probably back up at about 1,500 feet when Ken Ledford announces we're going down to get your buddies. And I remember thinking, what? I was pretty-- turned out not to be true, but I thought they'd all been killed.

[00:54:16.48] And one thing I did know is they were right smack dab in the middle of all the VC. And so he didn't-- I've read your book. Medevac crews don't always show themselves to be willing to go into places that are really hot. This was as hot as you could get, and at the time-- he became colonel, but Lieutenant Ledford didn't think twice about it. And I thought he was so professional he had ice in his veins. It was unbelievable.

[00:54:49.52] And he put us down a little further than I would have liked from the helicopter. And one of our pilots and the crew chief jumped out to go see what was going in our a helicopter. There were two alive. And so then they called for more help. I went over after-- we were under fire in the helicopter, so I was using an M16 to-- and I'm thinking, this is it. We're not getting out of here. And then we were under intense fire as we were trying to rescue the two guys that were in the helicopter.

[00:55:23.20] We were being mortared by the VC. And we ended up with 11 people in the helicopter with a tree line that is imminent. And I'm thinking, I do hope that we're going to be able to get out of the tree line. But he was remarkable. And it was my other crewman, Bill White--

[00:55:50.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have to run alongside that one to get the lift?

[00:55:53.89] DAVID SMALE: No, fortunately it wasn't a UH-1B. But certainly everybody knew we were in for a challenge to get out. And we skimmed the tree tops getting out of there. He was just-- he was remarkably skilled. And it was a harrowing day. And one of our helicopters from Detachment-3-- it was Lieutenant Baratko-- I'm not sure I quite have that right, but his helicopter was full of holes. Everybody else had either been shot down or had to go back, so he was the only cover that we had. And he was out of fuel, and knew he was out of fuel, and yet he would not leave the station while we were trying to pick up our shipmates. And I believe he was awarded the Navy Cross for that as well. When he finally was able to leave the station and land, they literally-- I mean, they had fuel that had been dripping out and left a puddle of about a foot to 18 inches and that was all the fuel that they had.

[00:57:03.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Just that much.

[00:57:04.14] DAVID SMALE: That much. And so there were a lot of people who did heroic work that day. I got a Bronze Star-- and several Silver Stars and so on. And it was-- but we got out and my other crewman, Bill White, good man, but I always wondered why are you out here, Bill? He had five children. And he quit flying that day-- which you could in our squadron.

[00:57:36.40] You could quit. It was volunteer. And so if you wanted to quit, that's all you had to say is I'm done. Didn't happen very often. In fact, quite a few of the others extended like I did. Well, you became really good at your job. And that was part of my rationale.

[00:58:01.75] DAVID SMALE: Well, ironically in retrospect, I would say one of the best days, and it is ironic, is when I transferred to Det-1, and-- because that became my peer group. And these are guys who--

[00:58:28.31] JOE GALLOWAY: That's where you had to go.

[00:58:31.27] DAVID SMALE: I would go to hell and back for them. And so it was-- and of course I didn't know it as it was unfolding that day that it was going to become a meaningful event for me. And of course, there is always leaving, which is I'm sure on a lot of people's list for their best day.

[00:59:00.49] For a fairly-- our uniform of the day was cutoff Levi's. And I've got photos of the enlisted guys, the door gunners on our Det-- and we're all in cutoff Levi's, no shirts, and flight boots-- so you can put your flight suit on. And then after that we took a photo with everybody. And it was pretty clear that with the pilots added in, the uniform of the day went up a notch.

[00:59:33.19] Some of them had shorts that were not actually Levi's, but they were still bare chested and not wearing anything that approached a standard uniform. And that laxity certainly-- but we worked very hard and very long hours and under conditions that weren't so hot a lot of the time. So it was-- the esprit de corps was important.

[01:00:11.21] JOE GALLOWAY: And I'm assuming you covered this answer with your previous description-- describe the worst day you had during your tour.

[01:00:20.01] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, I would say--

[01:00:21.30] JOE GALLOWAY: That was close.

[01:00:22.43] DAVID SMALE: No question. I have been on flights-- I was on a flight where I was the only one that didn't get wounded. And I'd have to put that probably on the better side of the ledger. And then people started thinking, fly with Smale. He's lucky. Oh, wait a minute, don't fly with Smale because he's never going to get hit, but you're going to, somebody else is.

[01:00:53.93] It was interesting on that worst day I remember being asked-- I got bruised up a little bit. You got knocked around and somebody said, so did you get wounded? And I said, I don't think so. I got bruises. Well, you know you intend-- I said-- I already know we got people who are in really bad shape and dead. I said, no, I'm OK.

[01:01:19.94] I would probably have more medals if I was willing to write them a narrative even myself to give to somebody then who could then spruce it up. But that was-- I knew I wasn't going to be career, and I really-- that was not something that was important to me--

[01:01:33.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't make a blip on your screen.

[01:01:37.55] DAVID SMALE: No.

[01:01:43.04] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact, if any, did you have with our allies? By that-- the Koreans, the Australians, New Zealanders, Thais, Filipinos, any of that lot?

[01:01:57.09] DAVID SMALE: I got to go to survival school in the Philippines for two days. It was really a veiled R&R. And it was known as such. But I would say we had contact primarily with the South Vietnamese, and certainly with the SEALs, and the South Vietnamese marines.

[01:02:26.83] And we had people who literally lived-- when you would put a base together, around the perimeter that base, all of a sudden you would collect Vietnamese who would be living there. And we had that, and we had relationships with them. But we were in-- I was always in fairly remote areas with a-- where there weren't a lot of roads, and so I would say I didn't have that kind of contact.

[01:03:05.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your impression of the South Vietnamese, both military and civilian, that you had anything to do with.

[01:03:20.25] DAVID SMALE: Mediocre. The Kit Carson scouts that worked with the SEALs were-- sometimes you weren't sure which side they were on, but they were certainly tough hombres. And the South Vietnamese, it was hit and miss. Some units were good. I found that the-- we had a fair amount of contact with the South Vietnamese marines, and they tended to be a little stronger.

[01:03:56.90] These were people they may have joined the marines, and they were more capable than-- but certainly I liked the Vietnamese people and the culture of the people. I think they'd been at it a long time, and I'm not sure that their heart was in the same way the North Vietnamese seemed to have their heart in it, or else had the leadership to have them have their heart in it. And so it was-- but there again, that was not part of my normal routine.

[01:04:39.72] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[01:04:45.27] DAVID SMALE: Oops.

[01:04:46.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Oops.

[01:04:51.02] DAVID SMALE: Not a lot, which didn't win me many prizes back then because--

[01:04:58.18] JOE GALLOWAY: You were not married at the time?

[01:05:00.23] DAVID SMALE: No.

[01:05:01.01] JOE GALLOWAY: So you were supposed to be writing your mom and dad.

[01:05:04.30] DAVID SMALE: I did. But I had my first-- my first extension leave-- you could go anywhere-- the service, the military would send you anywhere in the free world. And 99% of the people go home. I went to Switzerland to ski. And I had my ski boots sent over to Vietnam. And I still remember all the South Vietnamese when I'm going through customs are laughing at me.

[01:05:34.38] And then I ended up buying new skis when I got to Zermatt, Switzerland. And then so I skied for a month, met. And literally told virtually-- I told one person that I had just come from Vietnam. And that was a guy who was on a European trip provided by his parents. He was a Yale student, and his draft number wasn't as good as you would have liked. And so they were giving him a sad number-- draft number-- trip. But he and I had a great time. We spent quite a bit of time together.

[01:06:15.29] And then when-- I actually had great orders, I flew around the world, went home. And my commander said, be back in 40 days. And so I got off-- I was in Switzerland and Austria for a month and-- skiing, and then got off the plane in Chicago, went up to Grand Rapids, spent seven or eight days there. Met a girl, a woman who then became probably-- she was my girlfriend.

[01:06:51.26] I mean, and actually with my second extension, I did come home, but I went and lived with this person and my parents were not very happy about that situation. And my wife did not know her, but she met her later and that probably didn't go very well either. But they were-- I wrote to them. I didn't tell them a lot of what was going on. It was probably like a lot of young people, but it wasn't the right thing to do.

[01:07:31.52] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you guys receive from home about the war you were fighting, about the people who were against the war you were fighting?

[01:07:41.64] DAVID SMALE: All of my friends were against the war. And so it was definitely the-- so almost everything they wrote to me was against the war. But they were not against me personally. And-- but so I did not get-- I followed the Tigers. I've been a lifelong baseball fan, and I followed the Tigers. They were a pretty hot team back then. But we didn't get-- I'd have to say that I felt like I was a long, long way from the U.S. for 26 months.

[01:08:31.30] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you finally come home?

[01:08:35.04] DAVID SMALE: Figuratively, or--

[01:08:36.90] JOE GALLOWAY: No, literally.

[01:08:38.37] DAVID SMALE: OK.

[01:08:40.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Your last day.

[01:08:41.52] DAVID SMALE: Yeah, it was July-- I'm going to say I think it was roughly or probably July 28, 1971. And I was-- got out in San Diego. And a friend of mine from the squadron was getting out at roughly the same time, and he lived in Wisconsin. He had a truck in San Diego. So he waited a couple of days for me to get out, and then we were going to drive across country together. And then I would take the proverbial bus from Wisconsin to Michigan.

[01:09:25.73] And it was good that we had that trip because we had-- it was the typical-- I'm in Vietnam for a couple of years and now I'm landing in-- even that month that I had been home was pretty consolidated, and didn't spend much, think about much. And it was my first exposure to the misfortunate parts of being a Vietnam vet. And except for my very best friends, people were not very kind. Figuratively, took a little longer.

[01:10:09.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Took a little longer, did it? What did you do after the war, after your tour was over? Did you still have any naval commitment left, or were you done?

[01:10:20.16] DAVID SMALE: No, I had Reserve commitment, which required nothing. And so I was out after that, and started back into school. And actually met my wife in German class when she was-- we were both doing-- in different schools.

[01:10:46.66] And I graduated from Michigan State University on the GI Bill, and went from getting out to in school, went through the whole year, and including the summer, then the other whole year. And I realized I'd been just going to school, trying to catch up for almost two years when I said, I need a breather. And I gave myself a trip out West, backpacking, climbing.

[01:11:20.18] And actually when I got back home, one of the things I had-- I took up motocross racing and that was because I still needed an adrenaline fix. I didn't do that for-- I did that for maybe a year. And that German class, I'm not very good at German, but I do have a wonderful wife of 40-plus years. And so that was-- I'm very glad I took that class. And I've had-- while I was at Michigan State, I had the good sense to seek out some mental health counseling.

[01:12:05.35] And I was troubled by the fact that I probably had extended twice, I used to play God. I would literally, like to remember Lieutenant Petrovic saying, so Smale, these are just fisher people here. And I said-- he said, because you seem to have lost your ability to be able to shoot anything. And I said, well, that is my assessment, sir. And he said, I think you're probably right.

[01:12:35.86] But I did put myself sometimes in that position where I made a decision whether or not I was actually going to kill them or not. And that was troubling. And also just my whole-- I actually when I went back to school, I went into-- instead of going into business like I might have done if I were pursuing things differently, I entered a program that was called Justice-- enclave within Michigan State that is now part of their honors college, James Madison. And my major was Justice, Morality, and Constitutional Democracy.

[01:13:16.00] And what I was really trying to figure out is why political entities, people and so on, can't-- we were looking at Rousseau, Aristotle, Plato, a lot of political theory and understanding and trying to sort out how a polis could live together and settle their differences differently. And obviously that's not something we've achieved much skill at.

[01:13:43.09] JOE GALLOWAY: We haven't yet.

[01:13:44.32] DAVID SMALE: Not yet.

[01:13:46.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think that you had difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

[01:13:54.16] DAVID SMALE: Sure. It would be-- I mean, that's a unique experience. And it certainly was-- I mean, my girlfriend and I broke up three weeks after I got home. I think that's a very common theme. And she threw all my stuff out in the driveway, and I collected it. And the sad part is that I wrote what I thought was my journal to her my second year in Vietnam.

[01:14:32.04] And it was all typewritten. I have very bad handwriting and I happened to be walking by a small office when I was in Binh Thuy for routine maintenance and there was a portable typewriter sitting nearby. And I thought, I really know how to type, typing was the most important class I took in high school.

[01:14:53.24] And so it's the one thing I can-- that I honestly know that I dishonestly took. And but it was a savior for me because I loved-- because I wrote-- I mean, and I wrote this woman 10-page letters that were really my journal. And so after I broke up with her, she would not give them back to me. And so I've never seen them since. And I still wish I had those journals. But so it goes.

[01:15:23.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Burgle her house.

[01:15:26.27] DAVID SMALE: I think that ship has sailed.

[01:15:34.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans who are coming home from combat today?

[01:15:43.20] DAVID SMALE: My experiences in Vietnam have affected every part of my life, mostly to the good. I think I'm a better human being. I know I'm a better leader. And I have-- and certainly I have great respect for those in the uniform today and have reached out in my own way. A guy comes back, and he's in buying shoes with his family, and he got back two days before,

[01:16:27.65] I bought all their shoes. Yet-- and just because I realized that this is an opportunity. So things like that. And meals. And thanking. And I did some work for a little while with some other veterans groups, Buddy-to-Buddy program. But I have a very busy schedule as a business owner and I knew I didn't have the time for it at that time being a small business owner. But, yes.

[01:17:06.63] JOE GALLOWAY: What did that war mean to you and your generation?

[01:17:12.22] DAVID SMALE: I think you were shaped by it, regardless of which side of the equation you were on. And because it-- I mean, the morality or lack of it, or how we think of getting in and intervening in other people's business or is it really a communist threat? I mean, you look at Vietnam today, my son was in Vietnam two years ago. He spent a number of months out of the country and loves the Vietnamese people, and would love to go back. And he thinks just the world of them and yet--

[01:18:05.34] I think everybody was shaped by it because it became the anthem, whether you were for it or against it. And it probably had some impact on your perspective on whether or not we should engage in other such activities as we have since. I was not an advocate of going to Iraq. One of the things I felt that I had learned was they wanted to go small. I don't believe you can go small and win. And I also-- I mean, we had-- there were so many things we couldn't do because of rules of engagement.

[01:18:49.44] And it became even worse. One of my good friends, his son was going to be a career Army, but became so disillusioned with-- he said, I can't even protect you as an infantry officer. He said, I don't even have the tools to protect my own men. And this is not-- no, we want we want to do everything with clean hands-- can't be done. Not in life, not in war.

[01:19:26.13] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you learn from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations?

[01:19:34.36] DAVID SMALE: Was that on the list? Maybe I didn't read the whole thing. JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, it's on the list. DAVID SMALE: Probably is on the list. I think hubris tends to come into play and-- where we think that we have all the answers, that we think-- and therefore we make ill-conceived judgments. When something happens to me even in business, and I might think-- and somebody might say, that could be good for us. And I'll say, let's be careful because if it looks like it's good, that doesn't mean that it is.

[01:20:22.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Look for the ambush.

[01:20:23.67] DAVID SMALE: Exactly. And I think we-- I mean, there is certainly a time when we have to engage in conflicts. I mean, ISIS is a very bad machine and-- that needs to be eradicated. But even with that, Americans don't really have the stomach for it. And so we never seem to learn very well the lessons of history.

[01:21:12.84] DAVID SMALE: The first time I went was on a business trip to Baltimore. And I had already told them that I was going to be going to the memorial by myself, and-- because I didn't want to go with anybody else. You cannot be a Vietnam combat vet and not be affected by going to the Wall. It certainly-- you think a wall with names plastered on it that you walk along, how can that really have the impact that it does? But it's extraordinary.

[01:22:15.13] It was important to me to go there then by myself and to find names that I-- of people that I knew, also by-- from graduating class in high school of '66. We had our share of

people on the Wall as well. And then I went back. We did a trip with my family, we all flew out there. And it was a big day for my daughter and I because we got rubbings of the guys who died on September 15, and yet she was born September 15.

[01:23:07.57] And so it's kind of an important day with us. And then I went back-- I believe that was maybe during the day. Then I went back with my son that night. I'm not sure what words I would want to use because I'm not sure that I want to put the experience-- I don't want to try and wrap it with some words of wisdom or how it feels because it is bigger than that for me.

[01:23:49.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[01:23:54.86] DAVID SMALE: No. Not until Mike Brinck, who was one of my pilots on Det-7. He is deputy staff director of the House Committee of Vietnam, our Veterans' Affairs. And he contacted me. He was invited to be a participant in the oral history, and he told Devon that he had somebody else that he thought might be good. And so Mike contacted me and asked me if I would be interested. And so that was frankly the first that I heard of it.

[01:24:42.74] JOE GALLOWAY: First you had heard of it.

[01:24:43.64] DAVID SMALE: Yes.

[01:24:43.99] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about the idea?

[01:24:45.65] DAVID SMALE: I think it's a great idea because I think--

[01:24:48.36] JOE GALLOWAY: And by the way, Mike was right.

[01:24:58.35] DAVID SMALE: We don't have-- we were realizing too late that we were not getting the stories from Vietnam-- excuse me, World War II vets.

[01:25:12.85] JOE GALLOWAY: World War II. They were dying before we could get to them.

[01:25:17.17] DAVID SMALE: Yes, and certainly we're dying. My squadron's dying faster than the general population. I was in an area that was very heavily defoliated with Agent Orange. And I only worried about it frankly when my kids were born.

[01:25:37.39] But I think-- yes, I think-- and that was one of the reasons that I agreed to do it. I wasn't sure if any other members of my squadron have been asked. And so I felt the burden of having to have our story out there. We are fortunate that apparently there's going to be a documentary about the Seawolves. And the History Channel is even considering it being a number of episodes.

[01:26:11.25] And I'm going to learn more about that at our reunion. And it's-- they've copyrighted the-- they've got some deal with Warner Brothers. And so that's-- again, I think it's

good in terms of teaching some of the history. But I think it's an excellent thing that we're recognizing that we should have this kind of archive.

[01:26:38.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, sir.

[01:26:39.24] DAVID SMALE: OK, thank you.

[01:26:40.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Good interview.

[01:26:41.49] DAVID SMALE: Thank you.