

## **Williams, Dave US Air Force**

[00:00:15.84] DAVE WILLIAMS: I was born in Big Springs, Texas in 1945 in April. My dad-- and I was born when he was in the Army Air Corps, stationed at the base down there. My mom was a nurse at the hospital there. And I was the oldest. I have two younger brothers, Jim, who was two years younger than I am, and Tom, who's four years younger than I am. I grew up in Western Pennsylvania in a city called Greenville, which is about 60 miles north of Pittsburgh. That's where I went to high school.

[00:00:55.68] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you enlisted in the Air Force?

[00:00:59.61] DAVE WILLIAMS: I was 21.

[00:01:00.78] JOE GALLOWAY: And what year was that?

[00:01:02.75] DAVE WILLIAMS: That would have been 1966.

[00:01:06.06] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you signed up with the Air Force?

[00:01:14.46] DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, I was educated in an era where we were looking out for communist movements all over the world. And my sense of the war was that that was a place where we were going to try and stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. And that while we didn't have a particularly vested interest there other than that, that was an important thing, to stop the spread of communism.

[00:01:44.59] I never got an indication that I was going to be drafted. But I was concerned. I'd been in school for two years. And my grades were not all that good. And so I figured that, sooner or later, they were going to come after me. And I didn't know really what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go. So I decided to enlist before the Army got me.

[00:02:06.14] [LAUGHTER]

[00:02:13.22] DAVE WILLIAMS: Did basic training in San Antonio, Texas at Lackland Air Force Base.

[00:02:17.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Lackland.

[00:02:18.86] DAVE WILLIAMS: From Lackland, I went to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey and studied Chinese for eight months. And from there, I deployed to Taiwan. And I was in Taiwan for a year before I deployed to Kadena Air Force Base and started flying missions in the Vietnam area.

[00:02:52.57] DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, when I was doing the Vietnam thing, they called us airborne intercept specialists. And what we did was we listened to Chinese military

transmissions, and translated them, and turned them over to our intelligence officers for analysis to find out what the Chinese order of battle was.

[00:03:16.60] When I was in Kadena, we flew over Vietnam. I was doing three missions a week over Vietnam. But I also had two one-month temporary duty assignments in Vietnam. DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, it was hot and humid, very, very hot and humid. And other than that, I don't remember too much about it. We were very busy because we were flying every other day. And on the days that we--

[00:03:55.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Still doing more or less the same job?

[00:03:57.60] DAVE WILLIAMS: The same job, sometimes in the Gulf of Tonkin, sometimes up along the coast of-- or the border between Vietnam and Laos. A lot of times, it was between Vietnam and Laos, because our people out of Kadena were flying in the Gulf of Tonkin. So we did an orbit, about a 10 hour orbit up and-- back and forth along the border between North Vietnam and Laos.

[00:04:30.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:04:31.57] DAVE WILLIAMS: When we flew out of Kadena in Okinawa, we were flying RC-135s. They were configured with about 20 different workstations for linguists, Chinese linguists, Vietnamese linguists, some electronic intelligence.

[00:04:50.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Electronic intelligence.

[00:04:51.82] DAVE WILLIAMS: Electronic intelligence. When we flew in Vietnam, we were flying in 130s, C-130s, that-- some of them had been previously configured for our group. And some of them, they just drove a thing into the back of them. And we would sit inside of a shell, inside of the aircraft.

[00:05:11.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Inside the shell.

[00:05:12.61] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yeah.

[00:05:12.94] [LAUGHTER]

[00:05:13.91]

[00:05:18.75] DAVE WILLIAMS: Most of the time, I was listening to Chinese military, particularly Chinese Air Force. There was always a chance when we were flying that the Chinese would send up some kind of intercept to either monitor us or there was always a fear that they might come after us. So we listened to Chinese fighter traffic and Chinese air defense traffic to ensure that we were safe from them.

[00:05:46.27] JOE GALLOWAY: This is primarily a big year on mainland China and Hainan Island.

[00:05:52.23] DAVE WILLIAMS: Mainland China. Hainan Island. But we also listened to Chinese SAM sites. Because in Vietnam--

[00:05:59.10] JOE GALLOWAY: In Vietnam.

[00:06:00.24] DAVE WILLIAMS: --they had several Chinese SAM, surface-to-air missile sites, that were targeting our B-52s. And so we would try to locate those, and listen to when they went active to try and warn our B-52s and others when they were active and going after them.

[00:06:22.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, did you pick up other Chinese transmissions from either North or South Vietnam that you recall?

[00:06:33.10] DAVE WILLIAMS: Not normally. Not normally. My concentration was basically on the SAM sites and on the MiG traffic that we listened to. The MiG traffic off of Hainan, occasionally, they'd send up a MiG-29-- or MiG-19, rather, to fly off our wingtip.

[00:06:55.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Shadow you.

[00:06:55.94] DAVE WILLIAMS: To shadow us.

[00:06:58.21] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like both at Kadena and then in Cam Ranh Bay?

[00:07:04.47] DAVE WILLIAMS: Oh, considerably different. Kadena, for a while, I lived on base in very luxurious accommodations. And then when my wife came over to join me, we moved into an apartment that was not quite so luxurious but very nice. And then when I was in Vietnam, we lived in a hooch, which was a metal half shell with bunks and big fans. And it was hot. And I can remember sleeping in pools of sweat.

[00:07:48.03] DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, most of those guys I had gone through Chinese language training with. And we'd been stationed together in Taiwan before we got sent up to Kadena. And so we were a pretty close-knit group. We roomed together when we were in Kadena before my wife came over. And when we were off duty, we played Pinochle, a lot of Pinochle.

[00:08:19.06] Some of the folks that were there that were older than we were, that were higher ranking, our tech sergeant in charge of the flight that I was in was a really nice guy. He'd gone through it long before I had. And he had a master's degree. But he loved the job. And he was going to be a tech sergeant or a master sergeant for the rest of his life. But he was a very cool fellow. The rest of the guys, like I said, we flew together most of the time and became very close. Some of them, I still continue to keep tabs on.

[00:08:56.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial or social backgrounds that you might never have had in civilian life?

[00:09:09.52] DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, there were some-- there were no African-Americans in our group. There were a couple of Koreans that went through training. They ended up going through Vietnamese training rather than Chinese. But for the most part, the folks that we hung out with were all just like me.

[00:09:37.40] JOE GALLOWAY: All Anglos.

[00:09:38.09] DAVE WILLIAMS: They were all Anglos, yeah.

[00:09:42.02] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation or off-duty activities besides Pinochle?

[00:09:48.44] DAVE WILLIAMS: There wasn't much to do. We would occasionally have a barbecue. We managed to trade some things for steak. And so our folks got lots of steaks. And we had barbecues. We occasionally would be able to get a hop, and we went into Thailand.

[00:10:11.00] We would fly into the Air Force base at Korat. And so we could do some sightseeing and traveling there. When we were in Kadena, we traveled all over the place. I visited almost every war monument that there is to see in Kadena and saw most of the island.

[00:10:34.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Kadena is on Okinawa?

[00:10:36.55] DAVE WILLIAMS: Kadena was the major Air Force base on Okinawa. And I think it's still there as a matter of fact.

[00:10:44.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:10:45.82] DAVE WILLIAMS: And that was pretty good living then. My workplace, though, was not on Kadena. When I was on the ground in Okinawa, I worked at Torii Station, which was an Army base. And that's where we did all of the transcription of the tapes and stuff that we took on the airplane. And that's where our intelligence guys worked, was at Torii Station.

[00:11:11.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have any specific memories of the popular culture at that time? Music, books, film? Is there a song that you hear and it immediately takes you back to 1967?

[00:11:25.84] DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, maybe not 1967. But Iron Butterfly was a big outfit back then. And "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida" is still one of my favorite pieces of music.

[00:11:34.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:11:35.77] [LAUGHTER]

[00:11:39.89] DAVE WILLIAMS: Being in Asia, we were a little bit remote from most of what was going on in the United States. We heard a lot of stuff about the demonstrations and stuff. But

the music, the pop music and everything, we listened to The Mamas and the Papas, a little bit of Janis Joplin. I liked the music, but didn't care much for the politics at the time.

[00:12:07.46] [LAUGHTER]

[00:12:08.39]

[00:12:11.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of the leadership in your units?

[00:12:17.25] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yes. Yeah, we had outstanding leadership. To the man, they were some of the best folks that I've ever worked with. Like I told you, we had this one tech sergeant that was with us both when we were on TDY and when we were working out of Okinawa. And a top notch guy, brilliant fellow, had a pilot's license. So we always knew if there was a problem with our pilot, he could go take over the airplane anyway.

[00:12:46.57] JOE GALLOWAY: He could land it anyway.

[00:12:47.17] DAVE WILLIAMS: But he loved his job. He loved Chinese. And he was very good at it.

[00:12:50.86] JOE GALLOWAY: What about leadership at the officer level?

[00:12:56.48] DAVE WILLIAMS: They were good leaders. But quite frankly, one of the reasons that I decided not to make a career out of the Air Force was because I felt that they did a little bit of nitpicking. When I arrived in Okinawa, we were wearing khakis. And I had been in the States for a while.

[00:13:20.21] So I just purchased a whole bunch of new t-shirts, white t-shirts, undershirts. And so I was wearing one of those in Okinawa one day. And our commanding officer, the base commanding officer, had me called in. And he said, you cannot wear crew neck t-shirts with your khakis in my unit.

[00:13:40.93] And I said, oh. What should I do? And he said, well, you can cut them, cut the crew neck out of them and wear them so that you can't see the white when you're wearing your khakis. So I felt that was a little bit nitpicky. And I wore fatigues for the rest of the time I was in Okinawa.

[00:14:00.78] [LAUGHTER]

[00:14:04.84] Which was pretty warm, by the way.

[00:14:07.18] JOE GALLOWAY: I suspect, yeah.

[00:14:09.46] DAVE WILLIAMS: Other than that, though, to be frank, they were good officers. They treated the men well. They respected us as much as we respected them. DAVE WILLIAMS: One of the reasons that I was hesitant to come and do this is because I didn't feel

that my job was all that useful as far as your history is concerned. But we did have some experiences that-- we were shot at a few times when we were flying out of Cam Ranh Bay.

[00:14:46.39] We never had any problems when we were flying out of Okinawa. The airplanes always worked. We occasionally had a MiG-19 that would shadow us, but never approached us. But we had a couple of interesting things happen when we were flying the 130s out of Cam Ranh Bay.

[00:15:14.42] We would fly the missions. And then we would either land in Da Nang or in Phu Bai to drop off the tapes that we had collected so that they could transcribe them. In Phu Bai, typically, we would land, turn the airplane around. There would be a guy who would come up in a Jeep. And we'd throw a bag of tapes out to him. And then he'd turn around and take off. And we'd turn around and take off. And we'd fly back to Cam Ranh Bay.

[00:15:45.05] And this one particular time, we opened the back door. We were ready to throw the tapes out. And the guy was coming out of the woods in a Jeep. And all of a sudden, we start hearing this thump, thump. And the guy in the Jeep turned around and split, went back into the woods. And the commanding officer of the aircraft said, close the door. We're leaving. Throw the tapes out on the ground.

[00:16:09.26] So I threw the tapes out on the ground, closed the door, and we took off down the runway. And we could continue to hear this thump right behind us all the way down the runway. And they told us after we left, after we got off the ground, that they would-- that somebody with a mortar had zeroed in and they were trying to take us out. And they didn't hit us, obviously. But they--

[00:16:33.96] JOE GALLOWAY: They were walking.

[00:16:35.02] DAVE WILLIAMS: They were walking down the runway, trying to get us.

[00:16:37.55] [LAUGHTER]

[00:16:38.44]

[00:16:39.33] The only other time that we had anything that was exciting happen was we were 10 minutes late coming off our orbit when we were flying into Da Nang to drop off our tapes. In Da Nang, we had a slightly different routine. We would fly. We would land. We would taxi into a revetment and go have breakfast at the club there, the NCO club. And then we would come back out, get in the airplane, and fly back to Cam Ranh Bay.

[00:17:13.04] And we were late, 10 minutes late, coming in to make our landing. And as we made our approach, the revetment that we would have landed in or parked in took 12 rockets. If we'd have been on time, we'd have been sitting in the revetment when those rockets hit. So of course, I've always been convinced that the Lord looks after me. And that day, I'm sure he was looking after me.

[00:17:41.34] JOE GALLOWAY: He was keeping an eye on you. You mentioned having a certain wariness of flying in the vicinity of the North Vietnamese port city of Vinh.

[00:17:55.28] DAVE WILLIAMS: Ah, yes.

[00:17:56.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that.

[00:17:58.52] DAVE WILLIAMS: Vinh had an Air Force base that was principally staffed with North Korean aircraft, MiG-17s and 19s. And the North Koreans, of course, are a little crazy, always have been. And so we had a Korean linguist onboard the aircraft. And his sole responsibility was to keep tabs on--

[00:18:23.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Those guys.

[00:18:24.63] DAVE WILLIAMS: --those guys to make sure, because we were always concerned that they would actually send somebody up and try and shoot us down. We had knowledge of an incident where they had flown out of North Korea and shot down an EC-121 with 11 or 12 guys aboard that were doing the same kind of job that we were doing up in the Yellow Sea.

[00:18:50.18] And that was right around the time that the Pueblo had been taken. And these guys had done their orbit. And they were on their way back to Japan. And the North Koreans sent a plane up and shot them down. It took five minutes for the entire thing to happen, from the time the guy took off until the time they attacked the 121. So we were always very, very careful, very alert when we were flying close to Vinh. The North Koreans are crazy.

[00:19:27.63] DAVE WILLIAMS: My wife and I took-- one of the advantages of being with the Air Force was we could get these hops anytime we wanted to. So we took a hop out of Kadena, and went back to Hawaii, and spent some time in Hawaii. And I think that the best part of that was, I was getting ready to be discharged. And I didn't want to have to pay for her flight, because I was less than four years in the service. And so she was there at my expense.

[00:19:59.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:01.17] DAVE WILLIAMS: So we took a vacation hop to Hawaii.

[00:20:04.34] JOE GALLOWAY: And she got off there.

[00:20:05.36] DAVE WILLIAMS: She got off in Hawaii. And we sent her home from Hawaii rather than sending her home from Okinawa.

[00:20:10.61] [LAUGHTER]

[00:20:11.88] And that worked out very well.

[00:20:13.46] JOE GALLOWAY: It saved you some bucks.

[00:20:13.85] DAVE WILLIAMS: It saved me some bucks. Yes, sir.

[00:20:15.17] [LAUGHTER]

[00:20:15.56] Definitely. They don't do that anymore. I think all military get their wives traveling with them now, no matter whether they're in for four years or more. But back then, you had to be over four.

[00:20:27.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Before they'd pay.

[00:20:29.38] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yeah. DAVE WILLIAMS: We didn't have a whole lot of contact at all. When I was in Cam Ranh Bay on the first TDY, we knew that the Republic of Korea troops were there. We heard stories about them. But we never really had any contact with them. They told the story about-- they had a really nice beach at Cam Ranh Bay, beautiful beach. And when we were off-duty, we could go down and swim because it was within the security perimeter.

[00:21:08.13] And the first time that we ever went down there, there were these piles of what looked like meat scattered out down along the coast about 60, 70 yards apart. And I never confirmed whether this was true or not. But they told us that those were Viet Cong who had tried to infiltrate the beach. And the South Korean troops caught them, and cut them up, and just left them there as a warning to any North Vietnamese that wanted to come in that way. Whether it was true or not, I won't swear to it. But it sounded like a good story.

[00:21:43.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:21:44.10] [LAUGHTER]

[00:21:45.96] Did you have anything to do with the South Vietnamese, civilian or military?

[00:21:51.30] DAVE WILLIAMS: Not really.

[00:21:51.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Not really.

[00:21:52.11] DAVE WILLIAMS: They weren't near us. About the only thing, when we'd get a haircut.

[00:22:00.14] JOE GALLOWAY: That'd be it.

[00:22:00.92] DAVE WILLIAMS: That'd be it. Yes, sir.

[00:22:07.06] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:22:12.47] DAVE WILLIAMS: Actually, we did pretty well with that. At Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa, they had a MARS station. And so we would, at least once a week, go up to the MARS station. They would connect us with a--

[00:22:28.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Ham radio.

[00:22:28.98] DAVE WILLIAMS: --ham radio operator in the United States, who would then contact by phone to either my family or my wife's family. And we could talk to them. So it was pretty constant. And I think one--

[00:22:42.18] JOE GALLOWAY: And you did that fairly often?

[00:22:43.77] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yeah, at least once a week.

[00:22:45.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:22:45.78] DAVE WILLIAMS: And one of the interesting things about that was that in 1969, when we landed on the moon, the MARS station was broadcasting from-- they were picking up all of the transmissions from the MARS aircraft. So we were able to go to the MARS station and listen to the--

[00:23:10.07] JOE GALLOWAY: The spaceship.

[00:23:11.09] DAVE WILLIAMS: --the spaceship landing on the--

[00:23:12.98] JOE GALLOWAY: On the moon.

[00:23:13.77] DAVE WILLIAMS: --moon direct. It wasn't--

[00:23:17.62] [LAUGHTER]

[00:23:18.89] That was great.

[00:23:19.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Pretty cool.

[00:23:20.69] DAVE WILLIAMS: That was pretty cool. Yes, sir.

[00:23:25.94] JOE GALLOWAY: And how much news did you receive from home about the war and about the antiwar demonstrations, that sort of thing?

[00:23:36.42] DAVE WILLIAMS: Oh, well, of course, we had the Air Force Times newspaper. And--

[00:23:41.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Stars and Stripes.

[00:23:43.24] DAVE WILLIAMS: Stars and Stripes, yeah. And the AFRT radio. So when things happened in the United States, we knew about it. We tried not to focus on that. Because, at least for me, it made me angry that we didn't have more support. I did not look forward to going back to the United States because of that. So it was a little depressing, a little disheartening to have all of that going on while we were over there doing what I thought was a valid mission, so--

[00:24:31.84] DAVE WILLIAMS: I separated from the Air Force in early December of 1969. And we flew back to Travis Air Force Base. I separated, went down to Southern California, and picked up some stuff, and then drove back. I was accepted at the University of Pittsburgh to go back to school. And so we got back to Pittsburgh in late December of 1969.

[00:25:03.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Now you were leaving military service and going straight to a college campus. What was that experience like?

[00:25:11.88] DAVE WILLIAMS: That was not fun. It was pretty obvious when I arrived there that I was former military. The only shoes I had were military shoes.

[00:25:20.80] [LAUGHTER]

[00:25:21.80] And--

[00:25:23.23] JOE GALLOWAY: And your haircut.

[00:25:24.35] DAVE WILLIAMS: And my haircut was a military haircut. And so there was a lot of folks on campus that gave us a bad time. They never got violent with us. But they would taunt us or give us-- it was uncomfortable, particularly during the first year. After that, it wasn't so bad, because I had pretty much grown my hair out.

[00:25:47.96] JOE GALLOWAY: You grew your hair out and got some new shoes.

[00:25:50.01] DAVE WILLIAMS: I got new shoes. The folks that I was in school with, my classmates, all knew that I was former military. And every once in a while--

[00:25:59.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Were there other military guys in there as well?

[00:26:01.50] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yeah, there were. There were several folks that had come back from military service and were now going through school. So my youngest brother Tom had done a four-year stint in the Air Force. He got out and went back to school at the University of Pittsburgh. He'd gotten an undergraduate degree there. He went back for a graduate degree. So he was there at the same time I was.

[00:26:29.33] And I remember one particular time when Kent State happened, there was a problem on campus. The radio was announcing that all the classes were cancelled. I was not there to demonstrate. So I called the chancellor's office and I said, is this true? Are the classes cancelled?

[00:26:54.11] And he-- the chancellor said, no. It's up to the professor. So if you haven't been notified by your professor, you should go to class. But there were people outside of the classrooms that were demonstrating and giving former military particularly a hard time because of what happened at Kent State. So that was a little bit tense.

[00:27:19.79] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do after your tour of duty was over, and you left the Air Force, and got through college? What kind of a degree did you take?

[00:27:29.99] DAVE WILLIAMS: I took a degree in history. My experience in Okinawa and being overseas really changed the direction of my life, because I decided when I was in Okinawa that I wanted to become a Foreign Service Officer and join the State Department. So I took a degree in history. And then I took a master's degree in international relations at the University of Pittsburgh.

[00:27:56.19] And I tested for the State Department and, after a couple of different tries, managed to get accepted by the State Department. And in 1973, I-- '73? Yeah, 1973. I moved down to Washington DC, and went through their, what they call A100, which is the basic Foreign Service officers course.

[00:28:25.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:28:26.99] DAVE WILLIAMS: And so I spent 22 years with the State Department after that.

[00:28:34.34] JOE GALLOWAY: What were some of your assignments?

[00:28:37.13] DAVE WILLIAMS: Well, because I had learned Chinese and knew it very well, they immediately sent me to France.

[00:28:41.87] [LAUGHTER]

[00:28:46.97] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. Are you sure you didn't join the Army?

[00:28:48.76] [LAUGHTER]

[00:28:50.54] DAVE WILLIAMS: Anyway, I spent two years in Paris. And then they finally decided to take advantage of my Chinese. And they sent me to Taiwan. And I was the administrative officer for the State Department Language School in Taichung in Taiwan. I went from there back to the United States, and then to mainland China for assignment, and then back to the United States, and then to Panama. And I finished my career in Mongolia as a deputy chief of mission at the embassy there.

[00:29:29.59] JOE GALLOWAY: How cool is that?

[00:29:31.22] DAVE WILLIAMS: That was a great assignment with one exception. And that was that my daughter was in high school. And they had no education facilities over there. So I was there by myself. My wife and daughter were in the United States, living in Fairfax. My daughter came over to visit. But it would have been much more enjoyable if they'd have both been there for it.

[00:29:54.91] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd both been there with you.

[00:29:56.50] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yeah, Mongolia is a great country, by the way. I loved it.

[00:30:01.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to civilian life after the military?

[00:30:07.38] DAVE WILLIAMS: I did not. Other than the tensions that were there from the people that were against the war, I didn't have any problem at all. My wife and I went to Pittsburgh. I finished up school. And about six months after I finished school, I got accepted by the State Department.

[00:30:34.10] But as far as adjusting to civilian life, no trouble. No trouble. But one of the things was, I never suffered any of the trauma that a lot of the folks that were on the ground suffered. People that were on the ground in Vietnam, they came back, had a lot more difficulty, I think, adjusting than those of us that didn't have any real combat experience.

[00:30:58.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in the military affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:31:10.82] DAVE WILLIAMS: It definitely does. It definitely does. I don't think we do nearly enough for the veterans coming home today. I don't think we did enough for the veterans coming home from Vietnam either.

[00:31:24.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, right.

[00:31:30.56] DAVE WILLIAMS: Part of that-- if I might make a little commentary-- part of that is because the Veterans Administration has never been a particularly easy organization to work with. But I think part of it is that the general public doesn't understand the sacrifices that those folks make. Not me, particularly, but the people that are on the ground that are actually doing the fighting, that are in harm's way all the time. They don't understand.

[00:32:03.09] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:32:15.40] DAVE WILLIAMS: Hm. I don't think it's remembered fondly. I think the generation of kids that are going through school today really don't know that much about it. They're clueless about what drove us there, the problems that went on while we were there, and the things that made us pull out.

[00:32:36.02] But I think the ones that do get exposed to it look at it as being a question mark as to why we were ever involved, what we did. And so I don't think it's well-remembered. I think that's a shame. When I finished my tour with the State Department, I became a school teacher. And I taught high school for 12 years. And I taught history.

[00:33:04.28] And one of the things that I always tried to do when I was teaching history, regardless of which war it was, I, II, Korea, Vietnam, was to try and give the students a clear

picture of what was going on in the United States when those wars took place and what the mentality or the mind thought was that put us in those positions.

[00:33:31.64] Because you can look back on something like that and say, wow, that was the stupidest thing we've ever done. But when you were involved in it and going through those times, there were pressures and influences that made our leadership go in a particular direction, that we don't look at those anymore. And I tried when I was teaching to explain those a little bit better than I think some of our teachers do today.

[00:33:59.81] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from the Vietnam War that you would like to pass on to those students you taught and teach?

[00:34:10.68] DAVE WILLIAMS: Boy, that's a tough one. I think part of it has to do with the way that we view the United States in the world. I am a firm believer that the United States should be a leader in world affairs, because I think we have the moral, and ethical, and other standards that would be good for everybody to follow.

[00:34:55.57] People are generally good people around the world. And they should be treated with respect regardless of where they're from or what their ethnicity or whatever is. Other people in the world don't look at the world that way. So I think that our leadership is important. But I think our leadership, in that regard, also puts a great deal of-- how should you say this-- responsibility on us to try and get it right.

[00:35:32.73] And I think, all too often, we do things and we don't get it right. In retrospect, should we have been in Vietnam? Maybe not. But we didn't do it right once we were there. I think the same thing is true of a lot of times. When we involve ourselves in things, we tend to go in with the best intentions. But we don't manage to do it right. And I think that's the thing that we should learn from any of our experiences overseas, is if you're going to do it, do it right.

[00:36:10.98] JOE GALLOWAY: And in order to do it right, you should understand the culture and the history of the country that you're about to invade.

[00:36:18.03] DAVE WILLIAMS: That's true. And that's, basically, what I taught my students, that an understanding of what went on in countries around the world that led us to where we are today is really, truly important. And unless we understand that, we really can't do it right.

[00:36:41.73] JOE GALLOWAY: It always saddens me when I go there, because some of the folks that I graduated from high school with are names on the Wall. It saddens me because we have all those folks that gave their full measure. And the outcome of the whole thing was not what it should have been.

[00:37:09.46] And it saddens me because we have a whole lot of folks that came back from Vietnam that were really mistreated. And we have a lot of them today that are still out there and not being treated very well. So for me, it's a lesson to go there. I tried to get some field trips to take my students down there when I was teaching. And we just didn't have the money. But it's a lesson. It's a history lesson in itself.

[00:37:55.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you previously heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[00:38:02.99] DAVE WILLIAMS: I have indeed, since my cousin has been deeply involved in that. And we actually went to the ceremony at the Wall that was done-- what-- two years ago?

[00:38:19.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Two-- three years ago.

[00:38:20.29] DAVE WILLIAMS: Three years ago?

[00:38:20.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Three.

[00:38:21.35] CREW: 2012.

[00:38:21.94] DAVE WILLIAMS: 2012.

[00:38:22.15] JOE GALLOWAY: 2012. Four years ago.

[00:38:23.51] DAVE WILLIAMS: Four years ago.

[00:38:25.28] JOE GALLOWAY: So you were there when President Obama declared it?

[00:38:29.45] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yes, I was.

[00:38:30.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:38:30.84] DAVE WILLIAMS: It was--

[00:38:31.23] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts about that effort? Do you think it's a good thing?

[00:38:36.79] DAVE WILLIAMS: Yeah, I think it is. I think that any time that we can remember the sacrifices that have been made for this country, whether it was sacrifices in the Vietnam conflict or in other conflicts around the world, when we can remember that and hold that up as a-- I don't think we should run around involving ourselves in everything. But when we do, the people that go out and sacrifice themselves for those causes, that should inspire us to be better people. And I think that that's basically how I feel about the Vietnam situation.

[00:39:19.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Commemoration. Thank you, sir.