

## **Adams, Richard U.S. Army final**

[00:00:14.52] RICHARD ADAMS: I was born in Brooke General Hospital at Fort Sam in San Antonio. My dad was in the military, and we were there three weeks, and then we were off and running. RICHARD ADAMS: Three brothers, one older, James, James Ernest Adams, and then two younger, Dan Eugene Adams, the second, Stephen Charles Adams. And I am the first of three brothers to go to West Point.

[00:01:03.37] JOE GALLOWAY: All right.

[00:01:05.11] RICHARD ADAMS: Our father being an ROTC graduate.

[00:01:10.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Now what was his rank in the Army, and what did he do?

[00:01:15.73] RICHARD ADAMS: OK, he was raised on a farm, OK, rode a horse to high school. First in his family to graduate from college, the University of Illinois. And he got into the ROTC program there. And he managed to graduate as the distinguished graduate. And so he was given a--

[00:01:42.25] JOE GALLOWAY: RA.

[00:01:42.58] RICHARD ADAMS: --regular Army, yeah, commission, and in World War II, he was part of the 1st Engineer Special Brigade.

[00:01:57.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:01:58.09] RICHARD ADAMS: Those were the engineering-- Corps of Engineer-- brigades that landed troops in North Africa, Sicily, Italy.

[00:02:09.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Italy.

[00:02:10.54] RICHARD ADAMS: Utah Beach was his landing.

[00:02:12.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Normandy.

[00:02:13.30] RICHARD ADAMS: As a matter of fact, he came in on the sixth wave.

[00:02:15.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:02:16.78] RICHARD ADAMS: He was the beachhead commander, and so his job was to get troops and materiel off the beach and more troops and materiel on the beach.

[00:02:27.76] JOE GALLOWAY: What rank did he retire at? He stayed in for a career?

[00:02:31.69] RICHARD ADAMS: He did, he did. He retired as a-- he was medically retired as a full colonel. He was actually on the BG list, brigadier general list, but suffered a heart attack.

But he fought in Korea, landed troops at Inchon, commanded the regiment, was the district engineer. And I'm kind of sharing this as maybe a reason why three of his sons would want to follow in his footsteps, we just loved our dad, so proud of him.

[00:03:13.78] JOE GALLOWAY: As a Army brat, you obviously moved around a lot. So what do you consider your hometown?

[00:03:26.02] RICHARD ADAMS: We didn't move around a lot. I think maybe 13 to 15 moves, four years in Arlington, Virginia when dad was at the Pentagon, four years in Kansas City when he was a district engineer. But I like to think of Austin, Texas because it's not far from San Antonio where I was born. And I did graduate high school from Stephen F. Austin High School and got my--

[00:04:00.70] JOE GALLOWAY: In Austin.

[00:04:01.75] RICHARD ADAMS: What's that?

[00:04:02.32] JOE GALLOWAY: In Austin or San An--

[00:04:03.58] RICHARD ADAMS: In Austin.

[00:04:04.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:04:04.78] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, in Austin. And-- Go Maroons, whatever that is. And we-- we're still trying to figure that one out.

[00:04:15.64] JOE GALLOWAY: What did your dad-- did your dad have any connection to Vietnam? Did he have any service there?

[00:04:22.30] RICHARD ADAMS: He did, and it-- I really did not find out about that until my brother Dan and I had survived our tours in Vietnam and we had come back. And actually, a few years later, probably in the early 70s, and we're on the back stoops, and we're drinking dad's cheap bourbon. And he says, Rich, do you remember when I was gone for about two months? You would have been about nine years old.

[00:05:06.62] And I came back, and I brought some watches. And I said, well, I remember the watches. They look great, but they were made in China, and none of them worked.

[00:05:16.34] JOE GALLOWAY: None of them worked.

[00:05:16.97] RICHARD ADAMS: None of them worked. And he said, the reason I was gone was I was part of a commission, being an amphibious expert, to visit Vietnam following the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu. And our assignment was to report back our opinion as to whether or not we should get more involved in this affair. And that's when he told me that the unanimous consensus was that we should not get involved.

[00:05:59.21] JOE GALLOWAY: That's exactly right.

[00:06:00.62] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah.

[00:06:01.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:06:01.52] RICHARD ADAMS: And I'm just so glad that we were into cheap bourbons so that I could realize that he was a part of my story. And I can't imagine what was going through his mind as, first I went to Vietnam and then brother Dan did. And brother Steve, when he shows up to the academy in 1970, certainly had every thought that he would be involved. But thank goodness he wasn't by the time he graduated in '74.

[00:06:39.84] JOE GALLOWAY: You received your commission from West Point with the class of '67?

[00:06:46.29] RICHARD ADAMS: Correct.

[00:06:48.08] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you entered West Point?

[00:06:54.38] RICHARD ADAMS: I had no awareness of it.

[00:06:57.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:06:59.12] RICHARD ADAMS: It was something. We knew there was something. There was probably several things out there, but we were more focused on Korea.

[00:07:07.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:07:08.30] RICHARD ADAMS: And probably Germany.

[00:07:09.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Europe.

[00:07:10.67] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, Europe.

[00:07:11.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Fulda Gap.

[00:07:12.62] RICHARD ADAMS: Yep, yep.

[00:07:13.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, as you went through West Point those four years, did your awareness of Vietnam grow?

[00:07:21.14] RICHARD ADAMS: Oh, yes.

[00:07:21.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah. RICHARD ADAMS: Asymptotically. JOE GALLOWAY: You have a feeling you were headed there?

[00:07:26.12] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes, we-- well, by the time we got to our first year, our senior year, we knew we were going. And we started to have these veterans speak to us about their experiences and what we might expect. And we would hear from the poop deck and the mess hall there at West Point that we lost another academy graduate in the war in Vietnam.

[00:08:03.67] JOE GALLOWAY: I always go to the Post Cemetery when I visit West Point.

[00:08:08.02] RICHARD ADAMS: Amen.

[00:08:08.56] JOE GALLOWAY: And troop that line of tombstones along the back fence, all the Vietnam casualties.

[00:08:16.51] RICHARD ADAMS: My class and the class of '66 had the most casualties.

[00:08:23.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:08:24.71] RICHARD ADAMS: KIAs. We suffered 30 in each class and some in my company, my cadet company. And almost all I knew from some aspect of the four years at the academy. So it-- that was tough. But when I graduated-- at the academy, you could pick your branch and your first assignment. So I picked the field artillery, and I picked the 101st. And that really drove the rest of my life, the reality of what happened, because I was in the first group of my classmates to set foot in Vietnam.

[00:09:26.41] JOE GALLOWAY: How quickly did you go? Obviously, you had to go to Fort Sill and do all that.

[00:09:31.84] RICHARD ADAMS: Well, two months of graduation leave after a June graduation, and then field artillery basic, officer training. And during that time, the six of us that had picked the 101st were pulled out of class, and we were advised that if we wanted to retain our unit assignment with the 101st--

[00:10:06.34] JOE GALLOWAY: You got to move.

[00:10:07.28] RICHARD ADAMS: we would have to forego Ranger school. We could go to jump school but then report straight to Fort Campbell. And so that's what we all did. We all wanted to stay with the 101st. We all jumped out of planes and showed up, and we were all immediately sequestered. I think we were there for about three weeks, and I had the pleasure of one more jump in my career as airborne.

[00:10:49.30] And it was out the tailgate of a Chinook. So that was kind of cool.

[00:10:53.80] JOE GALLOWAY: That's cool.

[00:10:54.40] RICHARD ADAMS: But very little training, really, with the company that I was attached to, D company in the 1st of the 506th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Brigade.

[00:11:08.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Had you gotten enough from the artillery school that you could function as an artilleryman?

[00:11:15.37] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, the officer basic trained us up to be able to read maps and call in fire missions and--

[00:11:30.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Do all that you had to do.

[00:11:32.30] RICHARD ADAMS: Do all that we had to do. It would have been nice to have had the Ranger training, though. That would have been useful.

[00:11:41.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Could you describe how you got your appointment to West Point?

[00:11:46.43] RICHARD ADAMS: Sure, and let me say I'm a man of faith because somebody was watching out for me. I was the second alternate, OK, for a slot. I checked off all the blocks really well, except maybe for the academics. So I was honored just to get a nomination and then second alternate, with the suggestion I find another college. And so dad got me into VMI.

[00:12:40.30] We paid \$2000 tuition for VMI, and they were happy. And then I think mid-May, I get a telegram from Uncle Sam that it's yours if you want it. So here I am wondering what happened to the primary, what happened to the first alternate? But I quickly move on to just being so happy that I got that telegram. So we got our \$2,000--

[00:13:11.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Hope your dad got his money back.

[00:13:12.80] RICHARD ADAMS: He got his money back, and I got my quarter of a million dollar education.

[00:13:20.02] JOE GALLOWAY: There it is.

[00:13:21.10] RICHARD ADAMS: And an RA commission. So that's how that happened.

[00:13:28.16] JOE GALLOWAY: How long before you get orders to Vietnam?

[00:13:32.97] RICHARD ADAMS: They were already planning--

[00:13:35.55] JOE GALLOWAY: They already had orders.

[00:13:37.72] RICHARD ADAMS: The 1st Brigade was already over there. I think they went in '65.

[00:13:41.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:13:42.57] RICHARD ADAMS: And so as I recall, the six of us arrived in Campbell in probably early November, maybe the tail end of October, because that was our-- that's when we went to jump school three weeks. I think it was in October.

[00:14:01.38] JOE GALLOWAY: That's 196--

[00:14:02.85] RICHARD ADAMS: '67

[00:14:03.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Seven.

[00:14:04.03] RICHARD ADAMS: So we're just, at that time, maybe four months out of the academy.

[00:14:09.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:14:12.54] RICHARD ADAMS: But we were-- almost immediately, we got out of spit shine boots and starch fatigues into these rather comfortable jungle garments.

[00:14:31.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:14:32.26] RICHARD ADAMS: And comfortable boots and told not to bother spit shining them. And like I say, we were locked down. And I think either on the 29th or the 30th of November, the 2nd and 3rd Brigades massive airlift troops on C-141s, materiel and tanks and stuff on C-5As. We take off, and it seems like we stopped maybe some other places. But Hawaii, obviously, and--

[00:15:20.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Maybe Guam.

[00:15:22.42] RICHARD ADAMS: Guam and Clark, Philippines, and then in a very humid place.

[00:15:34.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you land in Vietnam?

[00:15:36.23] RICHARD ADAMS: Bien Hoa, I think.

[00:15:36.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Bien Hoa.

[00:15:37.30] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, Bien Hoa or Long Binh area. I don't know if it was Tan Son Nhut or whatever, but some--

[00:15:42.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, Bien Hoa had its own airfield.

[00:15:44.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I bet we did there because when we land, it is very clearly a military cantonment.

[00:15:56.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:15:57.08] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah.

[00:15:58.54] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your first impression when they dropped that tailgate?

[00:16:02.68] RICHARD ADAMS: It was hot. It was hot. And it--

[00:16:10.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you land at night?

[00:16:12.51] RICHARD ADAMS: No.

[00:16:12.99] JOE GALLOWAY: No, daytime.

[00:16:13.45] RICHARD ADAMS: Landed in the day, daytime. And it seemed like already we were indoctrinated to the smells right then and there. We get off, and somebody's burning-- you know what they're burning.

[00:16:31.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah

[00:16:32.02] JOE GALLOWAY: And there's just, yeah, it-- and there was artillery firing in the distance. And we were told that it's our guns going out and not to worry. So we were there for about three days, and then the brigades head out. And we replaced the Big Red One in Phuoc Vinh. I may have the distance wrong, maybe 50 miles north.

[00:17:10.51] But we very quickly learned that we were not airborne, we were airmobile. And we were going to be making a lot of combat assaults and initially into, I suspect, friendly areas, just make sure we knew how to get on a helicopter and get off and root around a little bit, get back on, and that sort of thing. But soon enough, we were engaged.

[00:17:47.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Once you get to Phuoc Vinh and you've got your assignment, what are you doing? You leading a platoon?

[00:17:56.53] RICHARD ADAMS: Well, no, as a forward observer I'm attached to a company. And now my battery, the second of the 319th, is there also. It's the battery supporting that firebase. And-- big firebase, airstrip, you could land F-4 Phantoms and that sort of thing. But I would-- initially I had a RTO and a recon sergeant. And if we were in camp, every night there would be ambush patrols we'd send out.

[00:18:46.33] And I would send out my recon sergeant and sometimes the RTO because he was good. He knew his stuff. Then I lost my recon sergeant, and I remember going out on ambush patrol. But the bulk of my time was waiting for the next-- being in the hip pocket of the company commander--

[00:19:13.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Company commander.

[00:19:18.82] RICHARD ADAMS: --for the next ops order to get us back out. And I would say, because it plays out in my life and in this latest book that I'm writing that we can maybe talk about later, in the infantry company area, the platoons were in Quonset huts. And I was in a Quonset hut with the 1st Platoon leader, slash, executive officer. And we were in the same alcove-- cots, mosquito netting-- got to know each other very well.

[00:20:00.70] And he did not survive his tour. And we might be able to talk about that later when we get to the Battle of Song Bé. So for three months for three months, through probably February, late February '68, well into the Tet Offensive, I'm an FO.

[00:20:35.91] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your experience of Tet?

[00:20:40.05] RICHARD ADAMS: It was that lots of bad stuff was happening all around, but very quickly it seemed like the feedback was we were winning. We're winning, and we're just kind of involved in what I would call minor stuff.

[00:21:04.74] JOE GALLOWAY: You did not get directly attacked at Phuoc Vinh? Did they go around you?

[00:21:12.66] RICHARD ADAMS: I'm sure there were mortar attacks and that sort of thing, but I believe that we were already somewhere else. We were air mobile. We would pick up the firing battery. We were in I Corps, II Corps, III Corps, and IV Corps.

[00:21:34.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:21:35.60] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, during the entire time I was there, 13 months. And my recollection was the battery and the supported infantry unit, 1st of the 506th, we were somewhere else.

[00:21:52.70] JOE GALLOWAY: I think you guys were up near Phu Bai in I Corps during Tet..

[00:21:56.78] RICHARD ADAMS: That came later. No, that was, I think, 2nd Brigade.

[00:22:02.48] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:22:03.38] RICHARD ADAMS: That may have been the 2nd Brigade. JOE GALLOWAY: I know there was a brigade up there. RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, we later went up there. Yeah, we were up there probably in October of '68.

[00:22:15.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Charlie Beckwith had a battalion up there during that.

[00:22:19.02] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes. Yes.

[00:22:21.00] JOE GALLOWAY: And Barsanti was the commanding general.



[00:22:24.42] RICHARD ADAMS: I've got a picture. You'll see a picture of Barsanti pinning medals after the Battle of Song Bé.

[00:22:35.85] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like? Well, you told me you were in a Quonset hut and you had a cot and a mosquito net.

[00:22:42.21] RICHARD ADAMS: And well, that would be when we were Phuoc Vinh. But we would go to, golly, there were all kinds of fire support bases that were temporary. They were literally on top of mountains, hills. And there, you would be, basically-- JOE GALLOWAY: In a bunker, or foxhole. RICHARD ADAMS: --in bunkers. There may still be cuts and that sort of thing, but--

[00:23:08.70] JOE GALLOWAY: A little more rugged.

[00:23:10.76] RICHARD ADAMS: It was more out there, more out there. And then obviously, when we're snaking through the jungles, and across rice paddies, and just doing the search and destroy mission, at night we would basically dig in-- JOE GALLOWAY: Dig a hole. RICHARD ADAMS: --dig in and put out outposts. And I would call fires. JOE GALLOWAY: Good old Claymores. RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, we'd put out the mines, and so that--

[00:23:56.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Kept you busy,

[00:23:57.25] RICHARD ADAMS: --that tightened things up. Those nights were tight.

[00:24:06.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Could you describe for us your friendships with and your impressions of the officers, NCOs, and troops that you served with?

[00:24:21.88] RICHARD ADAMS: I was impressed. I was impressed. We went together as a TO&E unit.

[00:24:29.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:24:30.49] RICHARD ADAMS: And I think in the battery, every gun chief had prior combat experience, Korea-- JOE GALLOWAY: Or Vietnam. RICHARD ADAMS: --or prior Vietnam, absolutely. Our battery commander had been with the 1st Cav, yes. They called him Wild Bill-- let's see. I can't remember his last name, but he knew how to run a battery and how to excite his young lieutenants, of which I was one.

[00:25:15.10] And just a side note, before we actually get on the planes, the night before we get on the planes, we're in his office. And all the lieutenants were sitting there against the wall, and he's behind his desk. And we're passing around a bottle of tequila to see who gets the worm and talking stuff. So by the time we got on the plane, we were fighting ready, didn't remember the first part of the flight.

[00:25:52.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, but basically good people?

[00:25:56.45] RICHARD ADAMS: Good people, all of the lieutenants were untried, but good people.

[00:26:09.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:26:21.49] RICHARD ADAMS: But yeah, I think that's probably enough there.

[00:26:25.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, it's early days back home, but there is a beginning of social tension and racial tension in America. Any of that come over with you?

[00:26:39.43] RICHARD ADAMS: Not coming over, I think, because of Tet. That's when you know it really became-- I'm sure there were those who said we shouldn't be there before, but it I think escalated. JOE GALLOWAY: That really kicked it into high gear. RICHARD ADAMS: It really escalated because the news back home was pretty frustrating.

[00:27:20.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:27:20.80] RICHARD ADAMS: Frustrating how, I guess, for the average citizen to understand how are we going to win this war. And then, of course, politically, we do things that kind of tie our hands behind our back. And that really makes you think. The interesting thing about my time there, from late November of '67 to the end of '68, is I was there when we were increasing in troop strength, when it was at the zenith, and when it started to decrease.

[00:28:01.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:28:10.10] RICHARD ADAMS: But I would say that not until the very end, like when I get back, when I'm getting off a plane, suggestions are being made you might want to get into some civilian clothes or avoid going out this way from the airport because of just protesters and what was going on outside.

[00:28:41.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, just during that 13 months, things had changed both places.

[00:28:47.64] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes.

[00:28:49.48] JOE GALLOWAY: If applicable, what did you do for recreation and off duty time if you had any?

[00:28:59.22] RICHARD ADAMS: Played cards.

[00:29:00.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:29:02.52] RICHARD ADAMS: Won money, lost money. Let's see. In Phuoc Vinh we had officers club. There was a pool table and just jawing with the mates, reading.

[00:29:27.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have a lot of downtime? Not really?

[00:29:33.49] RICHARD ADAMS: No. I don't recall that.

[00:29:36.37] JOE GALLOWAY: I bet, I bet. Now, at some point here, you switched to aviation.

[00:29:48.58] RICHARD ADAMS: Well, that came-- OK, that comes later.

[00:29:50.74] JOE GALLOWAY: That's later.

[00:29:56.56] RICHARD ADAMS: The big thing that happened that I think is useful to get out for my tour is the Battle of Song Bé because after the Battle of Song Bé I'm brought back to the battery, and I'm a fire direction officer for the balance of my tour.

[00:30:17.47] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:30:18.22] RICHARD ADAMS: And we're still moving all around.

[00:30:20.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell us about the Song Bé and how that developed.

[00:30:23.29] RICHARD ADAMS: Song Bé, that was our true baptism for Delta Company of the 1st of the 506th. We entered the village.

[00:30:40.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Where is it located?

[00:30:42.79] RICHARD ADAMS: Song Bé is east of Tay Ninh, north of Phuoc Vinh.

[00:30:53.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Rubber country?

[00:30:54.80] RICHARD ADAMS: No, no, that would have been south, Michelin and that sort of thing, more Cu Chi area and that sort of thing. But I think that if I had a map, I could point it out. But probably not more than, I would say, 80 miles from Saigon to the north, roughly. And in the bend of the Song Bé River, which-- bé is small. It's a small river, and in fact you could walk across it in areas, but not where we were. And we combat assault in, and we move through. And we accomplish our mission and lose three of our four lieutenants.

[00:31:48.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:31:49.64] RICHARD ADAMS: One KIA, my hooch mate, and two severely wounded. And it was during-- right at the end it's starting to taper down, enemy activity. We learned that there are two Quad-50s that are in their hands, and I remember like yesterday there's this sergeant in the armored--

[00:32:29.50] JOE GALLOWAY: These are our Quad-50s that they've captured, or they brought them down?

[00:32:35.50] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. They captured them. And the sergeant in the armored cav unit that was a part of defending that village, I guess, and I think there was a fire

support base there. I don't know that they were overrun, but something happened. Otherwise, we wouldn't have been called in.

[00:32:59.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:32:59.89] RICHARD ADAMS: And some other companies, too, but we were the ones to go in initially. And he said, sir, would you come with me and see if we can get some more people to go out and retrieve? Because I knew that my hooch mate was out there somewhere. And we had lost obviously other guys, enlisted.

[00:33:33.78] JOE GALLOWAY: So in taking the village, you had gotten into a hell of a fight if you've lost three lieutenants.

[00:33:39.99] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes, and so he's in a Jeep. So I'm in the Jeep, he's in the Jeep, and he wanted me to call in fire missions or whatever. And then the company commander's RTO, who is very, very good at-- because he, really more than myself because I was handling the artillery, would work with a FAC and bring in air power. JOE GALLOWAY: Bring in the air. RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah. So we drive up, and we're passing bodies, and we come to the Quad-50s.

[00:34:23.59] And there they are. And he hops out, and the odd thing is everything is a blur to me, except for the reality that we-- he did something to the firing pin or whatever. There's no way we could get the Quad-50s physically out of there, but you know he just disabled the two Quad-50s. And we retrieved the bodies. We lost one man on our patrol to get the bodies and had them draped over the hood.

[00:35:07.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, are you going to call artillery in on these Quad-50s?

[00:35:11.65] RICHARD ADAMS: No, because this is a village. This is a village, and I could not control that. It was a controlled fire area. And I don't know if it was-- I think he was a specialist, specialist fifth class, black trooper, amazing. He was already calling in-- I think we had gunships, I think maybe cobras, whatever. And so that was pretty much there. I see Dick Fox, Lieutenant Fox. He was my hooch mate. And he's gone.

[00:36:01.79] And I'm looking for a wound, and all I can see is, through his temple, just a laceration. Some fragment, some shell fragment, had pierced his skull. And he was engaged to be married, was supposed to go on R&R. And these and other memories are the genesis for my book that we may talk about later, Song Bé.

[00:36:32.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Can you describe the quality of the leadership in the units that you were either in or attached to as high as you could see as a second lieutenant? How good were they?

[00:37:01.99] RICHARD ADAMS: A second lieutenant with a company, it would be a stretch for me to assess anybody above company commander level.

[00:37:15.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:37:15.95] RICHARD ADAMS: And so I won't. I did feel that we had enough training missions once we got in country, as I mentioned before, to kind of understand how it worked, how to quickly disperse from a landing zone and load up at a pickup zone, be pulled out, and how to operate as a controlled unit moving through the different kinds of terrain that we had to move through.

[00:38:00.46] I'm not sure that Captain Green, my company commander, had any prior combat experience, but I think he did fine. I think he did fine, and I think that with the mission to move into Song Bé given as it was, it was the first formidable enemy attack.

[00:38:37.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, now, are you fighting the North Vietnamese Army regulars?

[00:38:41.80] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes.

[00:38:42.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Now, you served a second tour?

[00:38:49.99] RICHARD ADAMS: I had a second short tour. And kind of long story short, I get back to the States, and I'm a company commander of the basic training company in Fort Ord, knowing full well what these young men are about to get themselves into and trying to prepare them to go on to AIT because then they're going straight over as replacements. And while I'm there, I make a branch transfer from field artillery to Corps of Engineers.

[00:39:31.85] And I would have picked Corps of Engineers at the academy, but I wasn't high enough in the class. And we don't need to go there. And as a result, when I got the branch transfer, the Army sent me to Fort Belvoir for the advanced course Corps of Engineers. So in my class, I'm the first member of the class to go through the advanced course, and that was cool. In the advanced course, I fall in with some aviation types.

[00:40:08.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Always a bad move.

[00:40:09.92] RICHARD ADAMS: Oh, yes. Yes. And one took me up, fixed wing, in a T-41, just a Cessna deal, and explains how to drive the thing, and gives me control, and says, you really-- you're flying this thing just fine. He had me doing turns. He was trying to make up his minimums and playing the instructor pilot and teaching me. You really ought to-- because you're on orders-- at that time, I'm already on orders back to Vietnam as a replacement.

[00:40:49.45] I would have gone as a replacement. You really ought to put your papers in for aviation school. Put it in for fixed wing. You won't get it. You'll get choppers. One out of 10 gets fixed wing. So I put in the papers, and I get fixed wing.

[00:41:08.94] JOE GALLOWAY: This is right about the time we're going to give them all the way to the Air Force?

[00:41:14.59] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, and so while I'm in-- this is, again, how the Lord works. While I'm in flight school, I meet and fall in love with my beloved, and we've been married now about 49 years.

[00:41:32.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:41:32.41] RICHARD ADAMS: 49 years, two kids, five grandkids, and life is good. So I am transitioned into the U8 Seminole twin engine to go back to Vietnam, sent to Fort Huachuca, Arizona for some special avionics training. And when I get there, in my class, nobody else in the class has been to Vietnam. And they need somebody that flies the U-8 somewhere else, and they offer that somewhere else to me.

[00:42:16.03] And that somewhere else was Saudi Arabia.

[00:42:18.55] JOE GALLOWAY: My.

[00:42:19.99] RICHARD ADAMS: So I have a short tour in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia when there was one paved road in the entire city, from the old King Faisal Airport down to the Souks.

[00:42:36.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:42:36.94] RICHARD ADAMS: And so I'm flying for the Corps of Engineers, which is the contract officer for the Saudi government in the construction of the military bases that have played out since in the Persian Gulf War and now on the Yemeni's border, in Khamis Mushayt. And you might ask me what was my real responsibility as an aviation officer there.

[00:43:09.49] JOE GALLOWAY: What was it?

[00:43:11.11] RICHARD ADAMS: It was to fly the tea shipment, the liquor ration, to the-- every military or DA civilian under Corps auspices, every month, got a ration of two bottles of liquor or a bottle of liquor and a case of beer. And so sure, every once in a while, I ferried an officer here and there, took officers wives to Dhahran for commissary shopping. But it seemed like my most important responsibility was to make sure--

[00:44:01.21] JOE GALLOWAY: The liquor got through.

[00:44:02.32] RICHARD ADAMS: --that I didn't disappoint. And I never did. And probably the most pressure I've ever had on me, including Vietnam, was making sure that I got the orders right so that everybody got what they wanted.

[00:44:17.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Now obviously, Song Bé is big in your memory.

[00:44:25.13] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes.

[00:44:25.88] JOE GALLOWAY: You're writing a book about it.

[00:44:27.36] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes.

[00:44:30.68] JOE GALLOWAY: What was achieved at what cost in that place, in that battle?

[00:44:39.18] RICHARD ADAMS: It was liberated. And as a matter of fact-- and at the cost of-- I'm not sure because there were other units involved. But within my company, at what I thought was considerable cost. But as Soldiers with an objective, we secured the objective, and the village was back in friendly hands. And my brother, who graduates just a year after me, who also goes field artillery, he was a forward observer and served with the infantry company.

[00:45:28.00] And he said he spent quite a bit of time in Song Bé, all the way over to Tay Ninh, kind of in that area. And not an airmobile unit, so that was where he was the whole time he was there.

[00:45:42.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:45:48.78] RICHARD ADAMS: So I think that would be my response for specifically right there. JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:45:53.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe the best day you had during that combat tour.

[00:46:06.61] RICHARD ADAMS: Other than the day I left?

[00:46:08.62] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah.

[00:46:10.60] RICHARD ADAMS: I would say-- and the day before I went on R&R? Other than those two days, it might have been when we first got to Phuoc Vinh, and we realized that we were going to be in this war.

[00:46:50.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:46:53.98] RICHARD ADAMS: Every day after that things happened that made the days less good. JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:47:07.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for us the worst day you had during that tour.

[00:47:21.48] RICHARD ADAMS: I would say it was the Battle of Song Bé, and the worst moment was when I see Dick's-- Dick Fox's body. I was struck by mortality and everything. It just-- by the grace of God, that could have been me. JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:47:47.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there any technology or scientific advancements that you used or observed during your tour? Or are we dealing with old fashioned infantry stuff?

[00:48:08.32] RICHARD ADAMS: You had to see the enemy. Yeah, we didn't have infrared or scopes or anything like that. It was infantry unit weapons and hand grenades.

[00:48:28.81] JOE GALLOWAY: These are the same 105s you were shooting in Korea and World War II.

[00:48:32.98] RICHARD ADAMS: Well, ours were-- no, we had split tail. So yeah, they could have been. They could have been, yeah, split tail 105s.

[00:48:48.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:48:49.98] RICHARD ADAMS: I think they were split tail, as opposed to the roller kind.

[00:48:54.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you're going home at what rank? Are you now a first lieutenant?

[00:49:01.77] RICHARD ADAMS: I've been elevated to first lieutenant. And six months later, after I'm home, I'm a captain.

[00:49:14.92] JOE GALLOWAY: A captain, outstanding, you're a shooting star.

[00:49:19.15] RICHARD ADAMS: Shooting star, along with a number of other folks.

[00:49:24.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell us about what training you went through and what birds you flew.

[00:49:32.91] RICHARD ADAMS: On the aviation side?

[00:49:35.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:49:38.08] RICHARD ADAMS: All I flew were the planes that I flew in flight school, which would have been the T-41, a Cessna high wing plane and the T-42, a twin engine low wing Beechcraft, and the Bird Dog. And by the way, back in Vietnam, when I was not--

[00:50:01.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Bird Dog being the L-19 or a variation?

[00:50:06.03] RICHARD ADAMS: A variation, yes, high wing with a couple of rockets under each wing and tandem seats. And I did some aerial observation work when I was not on the ground doing something else during my tour in Vietnam. So that also piqued my interest, along with falling in with the flyboys at Belvoir.

[00:50:41.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, at some point, are you trained for helicopters?

[00:50:46.41] RICHARD ADAMS: No, but I was-- I became very good at flying a Huey. My last assignment after Saudi Arabia was Germany.

[00:51:01.98] JOE GALLOWAY: So you didn't get back for a second tour in Vietnam?



[00:51:05.05] RICHARD ADAMS: Never got for a second tour. And that was '73, '74, Germany. And I had to make my flight minimums, and there were no fixed wing available. I had to make four hours up to get my flat pay.

[00:51:23.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, so you're flying a Huey.

[00:51:27.14] RICHARD ADAMS: They said you can get it in a Huey, just flying co-pilot and just sit there. Well, I get this great warrant officer, IP, who says, I've got you for hours, don't I? I said yeah. He said, would you like to learn how to fly this thing? I said, yeah, sure.

[00:51:48.04] JOE GALLOWAY: You betcha.

[00:51:49.39] RICHARD ADAMS: And so I learned to hover, taxi, take off, fly the pattern. I don't think we ever left a pattern, four hours of doing that. But as a result, I got pretty good.

[00:52:11.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And you got your paycheck, too.

[00:52:14.02] RICHARD ADAMS: And I got paid. So yeah, not qualified, but-- JOE GALLOWAY: You got to fly it anyway. RICHARD ADAMS: --at that time, I could have got you off the ground. Probably for the next year, my memory bank would have held. But now, nah.

[00:52:37.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about going home.

[00:52:42.52] RICHARD ADAMS: From combat?

[00:52:43.48] JOE GALLOWAY: From the combat, yeah.

[00:52:50.93] RICHARD ADAMS: So I have my R&R in Tokyo. That was good. And I don't get killed for the rest of my tour.

[00:53:01.35] JOE GALLOWAY: You spent the last part of your tour, you said, in a headquarters, battery headquarters.

[00:53:07.28] RICHARD ADAMS: Well actually, in a battery size fire base.

[00:53:15.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Fire base, yeah.

[00:53:17.42] RICHARD ADAMS: As far south as south of Cu Chi and as far north as Hue, Phu Bai, Evans, and Eagle, and Dak To. And like I say, we made a lot of moves to be where we were needed. To answer your question, I was not supposed to return until January of '69, but I got word that I could leave a month early, before Christmas. And so I was elated.

[00:54:05.50] And I got on a-- it was a commercial jet-- JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Freedom bird. RICHARD ADAMS: --with what we called stewardesses back then, flight attendants now. And beverages flowed, and next thing I know, I'm stateside.

[00:54:31.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go to? San Francisco?

[00:54:34.27] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes, yes, yes, and from there a flight to Austin, Texas.

[00:54:41.45] JOE GALLOWAY: So you're going to go from the Air Force base to San Francisco International to catch your flight. Do you run into any demonstrators or problems?

[00:54:54.65] RICHARD ADAMS: I can't remember. I can't even remember if for a fact I went into a Air Force base, or if maybe we would have flown-- but it seems like we would have, right? I would think so because everybody's going different directions.

[00:55:05.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, that's what they did. They flew them into the air base and then bused you over to the terminal.

[00:55:10.97] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, that makes sense. Now, another reason I may not remember is besides-- and I definitely did not have a drinking problem, but I was so glad to be alive that I remember buying a fifth of Chivas Regal when I got on the plane. And when I got off, it was empty.

[00:55:44.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:55:45.36] RICHARD ADAMS: And so it's just not real clear.

[00:55:48.00] JOE GALLOWAY: It's all a little blurry, is it?

[00:55:50.51] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah, maybe not reflecting great honor on the Corps or the Army, but I was glad to be home.

[00:55:59.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:55:59.91] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah.

[00:56:01.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after combat duty?

[00:56:06.41] RICHARD ADAMS: No, none at all.

[00:56:09.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, did you stay in the Army for a full career?

[00:56:12.71] RICHARD ADAMS: No, like I say, I got out after seven years. For me, being an Army brat and understanding the reality of World War II and Korea and at West Point, it's all about mission. In other words, you understand the concept of casualties and moving on. And it can be real tough, but it is-- you're kind of programmed that way. So I didn't have trouble.

[00:56:54.21] The reason I got out was it was just a difficult time in the military, the VOLAR Army, '74. My last assignment, I'm with the 24th Engineer Group-- actually down in Karlsruhe

with the 79th Construction Battalion as the civil engineer, S3 civil engineer. And it was then I put in my papers to resign because there was a reduction in force taking place then.

[00:57:30.70] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is not the Army you signed on with?

[00:57:33.73] RICHARD ADAMS: No. And I said there are a lot of people that want to stay in, some really good OCS guys, and I don't. And the next thing I get is orders up to Kaiserslautern to become the race relations, alcohol and drug control, equal opportunity officer.

[00:57:57.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody loved you.

[00:57:59.29] RICHARD ADAMS: For seven months, I'm administering the race relations seminars. I've got a cadre of teachers-- excellent, excellent-- a black lieutenant, black corporal, Hispanic staff sergeant, I believe, and a Caucasian master sergeant. All of them were teachers, and I was responsible for making sure everybody in the group got in these small groups for the two-day seminar and address the realities of what were very extreme racial tensions.

[00:58:52.49] JOE GALLOWAY: They were. They were burning barracks in some bases.

[00:58:55.93] RICHARD ADAMS: In Germany, it was not good, not good at all.

[00:58:59.38] JOE GALLOWAY: It was not good. I talked to first sergeants who said to go through their barracks after dark, they chambered a round in the .45 and carried it like this.

[00:59:09.61] RICHARD ADAMS: Wow. In my story of Song Bé, told in flashback from current day, addresses the evolution of civil rights from that time until now.

[00:59:25.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:59:29.92] RICHARD ADAMS: And builds upon my experiences as the race relations officer.

[00:59:35.44] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do when you left the Army?

[00:59:39.64] RICHARD ADAMS: My dad, when he was medically retired, Corps of Engineer, got his master's at Harvard, civil engineering. He was picked up right away in Austin, Texas to run a geotechnical engineering company. They had drill rigs, and they would go out and take rock samples.

[01:00:02.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Doing seismic stuff?

[01:00:04.21] RICHARD ADAMS: And basically defined the engineering properties of the subsurface, and groundwater issues for excavations and waterfront structures, and provide structural engineers from a soil mechanics standpoint the data they needed to size foundations, drilled shafts, piers, retaining walls. And so he trained me up to be like him.

[01:00:38.34] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't go to Harvard, though?

[01:00:40.41] RICHARD ADAMS: No, no, I got my master's started overseas, when I was in Germany, from Boston University, finished it at St. Edwards and got some additional civil work at the University of Texas and got my EIT and professional engineer registrations. And basically as a geotechnical engineer, and then after about a year, I moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where Debbie and I, we raised our family.

[01:01:17.74] And I worked as the exec VP for a small geotech firm for a few years but, pretty quick, opened my own firm.

[01:01:27.92] JOE GALLOWAY: In Baton Rouge, or--

[01:01:29.11] RICHARD ADAMS: In Baton Rouge. One employee, and 16 years later, 120 employees, 10 offices around the Southeast, I sold it. It was just--

[01:01:46.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Moved back to Austin?

[01:01:48.83] RICHARD ADAMS: --living the American dream. And then since that time, after I sold the company, I continue to consult. I'm considered a expert in a number of areas, so-- forensic stuff. But then I write books that hopefully have a lot more meaning than my old consulting reports.

[01:02:16.15] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you maintained with 101st Airborne people you knew in combat?

[01:02:26.02] RICHARD ADAMS: I'm going to have to say, other than just being on the 1st of the 506th Currahee's website, and getting the newsletters, and that sort of thing, I've never gone to let's say a reunion.

[01:02:41.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Reunion or anything like that.

[01:02:47.59] RICHARD ADAMS: You see what's on my lapel here. West Point has had an unbelievable influence on my life, and so I continue to be, and have always been, very involved in West Point affairs. From the 20th reunion on, and they come every five years, haven't missed one. And I would say, well, my first book is a legacy to it. The Parting: A Story of West Point on the Eve of the Civil War is a very factual treatment of what it was like back at that time for those cadets when the nation unraveled and what happened.

[01:03:38.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Split apart, and some went South, and some went North.

[01:03:42.43] RICHARD ADAMS: Yes.

[01:03:43.96] JOE GALLOWAY: And you're out there fighting your friends.

[01:03:47.23] RICHARD ADAMS: Three months-- three months after all of these cadets graduated, they were confronting their best friends across Henry House Hill at the first Battle of Bull Run. And knowing your relationship with Hal Moore, he loves history. He loved history, and he read a manuscript, my manuscript, before I published and was so kind to endorse the book. Have you seen the book?

[01:04:27.31] JOE GALLOWAY: I have not seen it.

[01:04:29.14] RICHARD ADAMS: OK, I'll make sure you get a copy because on the back of it is Hal's endorsement. But-- not selling the book, just the reality that-- because it's factual. All the cadets are real and their relationships. It's all real.

[01:04:46.24] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a subject of interest to me so I'd love to have a copy. JOE GALLOWAY: Did your Vietnam experience change you and affect your life afterward for good or ill?

[01:05:04.26] RICHARD ADAMS: For good. Ultimately, for good. Right away for good in that, as I mentioned, I realized my mortality, and I've been a man of faith ever since. And what a comfort that's been and will be. From an evolved, let's say, perspective I was like a lot of folks, defending what we did there. If we'd just been given the latitude to do what we needed to do, we could have accomplished the mission.

[01:06:02.87] But it's been about 50 years, right?

[01:06:04.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:06:05.78] RICHARD ADAMS: And one, I'm not sure that that would have made a difference.

[01:06:12.30] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm not either.

[01:06:13.22] RICHARD ADAMS: Yeah.

[01:06:16.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Not without another half a million men.

[01:06:18.74] RICHARD ADAMS: Exactly. And the reality-- later I realized that part of the world-- Vietnam, Indochina-- has been fighting somebody for the past 1000 years, trying to maintain its own--

[01:06:37.70] JOE GALLOWAY: If not 2000.

[01:06:39.74] RICHARD ADAMS: 2000, probably. And that is just a pity. I don't know that you're going to ask me, but maybe we can't embrace the lessons we've learned longer than we do.

[01:07:03.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your time in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from war today?

[01:07:11.47] RICHARD ADAMS: Well, I've always thought that we were ill treated when we came home, and we were. And it's just so inspiring to see that that has changed. That has changed. And I think it's very sincere. I think people truly recognize that it is--

[01:07:43.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Soldiers don't start wars.

[01:07:45.97] RICHARD ADAMS: Soldiers do what they're ordered to do. They do not start wars, and they don't come home until they're told they can come home.

[01:07:59.72] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation?

[01:08:09.93] RICHARD ADAMS: It totally changed society. That war and things that sprung up around it in terms of, I think, communications and people thinking independently and realizing they can't trust leaders, lots of things changed. But some really, really good things have come from that, and it is just such a treat. Let me just point out one thing. We're in the panhandle of Florida, just below Alabama and Georgia.

[01:09:11.71] And Debbie and I have lived in San Destin, on the beach, for 21 years. And up until about three years ago, you would never see a black person. Now every day when-- and we walk the beach just about every day, there are black families just totally enjoying the same things we've enjoyed. The reality of the transition means so much to me from, again, being the race relations guy back in '73 and '74.

[01:10:05.41] And so much has happened since then, until now. And obviously a president who's black, Asian, some really good things come to pass has been inspiring to me.

[01:10:26.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there lessons you took from your Vietnam service that you would like to pass on? What are you going to say to that young second lieutenant out of the class of 2020?

[01:10:57.85] RICHARD ADAMS: And actually I've-- for a number of years, I've been an adjunct assistant professor at the academy. And I've addressed, I've lectured, folks in the environmental engineering program there. And in my lecture, I always save about 20 minutes to say OK, enough about hydrogeology or whatever I might be talking about. Let's talk about your future. And what I communicate to them is, first of all, I hope you all stay in for 20.

[01:11:37.61] You're going to have plenty of years to do something else later. And I know what you're facing when you go out there and the hardships, in my mind, much harder than-- I had one tour.

[01:11:57.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, they have seven, eight, ten.

[01:11:59.92] RICHARD ADAMS: Seven or eight, yeah. And what it does to families and all of that, just I think encouraging them to keep the faith and make the academy proud.

[01:12:29.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC?

[01:12:33.41] RICHARD ADAMS: Oh, yes.

[01:12:34.40] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts when you go there?

[01:12:38.63] RICHARD ADAMS: I always go to see Dick Fox.

[01:12:43.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Where is he, what panel?

[01:12:49.79] RICHARD ADAMS: I can't tell you right now. And then classmates and those in the year groups that I knew. What an incredible way to remember, individually, the sacrifices.

[01:13:38.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[01:13:47.76] RICHARD ADAMS: And what I have on the cover artwork of my-- tentatively anyway, unless publisher says, I think you can do better than that, but I think it speaks volumes, I have a picture of the three Soldiers, one Caucasian, one black, one Hispanic.

[01:14:11.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, or Indian, I don't know which it is.

[01:14:14.71] RICHARD ADAMS: Well, that's true. And we know that they're looking at the Wall. And it just speaks volumes to the importance of the individual fighting Soldier.

[01:14:39.13] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration. You're part of it today.

[01:14:46.21] RICHARD ADAMS: I have, and I believe that my good friend Chuck Merkel gave me a pin some time ago, outside this armament museum, connected with that reality. Now, I can't swear I know where the pin is because it really didn't make that much impression on me. But after sitting with you--

[01:15:20.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Let me give you another one, and I'm going to tell you--

[01:15:23.14] RICHARD ADAMS: OK, good.

[01:15:23.62] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm going to tell you why I think it might make more of an impression. If you look on the back, in very tiny letters, it says, a grateful nation thanks and honors you.

[01:15:41.17] RICHARD ADAMS: Finally.

[01:15:42.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Finally.