

Anderson, John US Coast Guard

[00:00:16.99] JOHN ANDERSON: I was born March 15, 1947 in Providence, Rhode Island.

[00:00:24.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:26.92] JOHN ANDERSON: My father's name was Tom. My mother's name was Fern. And I had my older brother of two years, his name was Tom.

[00:00:35.59] JOE GALLOWAY: And you grew up in Providence, went to school there?

[00:00:39.37] JOHN ANDERSON: Actually, I lived in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, it's a city just north of Providence.

[00:00:44.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Just north of Providence?

[00:00:45.94] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:00:51.54] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you come to enter the Coast Guard?

[00:00:54.63] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, it all started in probably January 1965. The war was picking up and I didn't want to be drafted into the Army. So I started to look at all the services. And I've had a bad case of poison ivy, and sumac, and oak, and you name it when I was a kid. So the jungle thing was really out for me.

[00:01:15.66] JOE GALLOWAY: You weren't going to do the Marine Corps?

[00:01:17.64] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh no, I wasn't doing the Marines, the Army, and I thought the Air Force was too large an organization. So I opted for the Coast Guard. I love boats anyway.

[00:01:27.49] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is 1965?

[00:01:30.90] JOHN ANDERSON: January, '65. I was a senior in high school.

[00:01:34.90] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam at that point? The war was just barely ticking over.

[00:01:42.84] JOHN ANDERSON: It was cranking up. And I could see this was going to be another one of those conflicts like in Korea. The only thing is it was a jungle instead of basically mountainous area.

[00:01:58.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did the Coast Guard send you for basic training?

[00:02:03.02] JOHN ANDERSON: Cape May, New Jersey.

[00:02:04.76] JOE GALLOWAY: What did it consist of?

[00:02:07.82] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, besides physical fitness you're going to learn things like the Morse code, and they test you on your levels of achievement in high school, and close order drills. We were learning how to fire an M1 carbine right out of World War II. We didn't have any AR-15s at that time.

[00:02:33.47] So in fact, we lived in a wooden World War II barracks. What I didn't know, when I was on my way there, they were doubling up on all the enlistees. So some of the guys got to go in the new modern facility. And we ended up in World War II barracks, which wasn't all that bad.

[00:02:51.92] JOE GALLOWAY: In January and February--

[00:02:54.19] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, It was kind of miserable there.

[00:02:55.85] JOE GALLOWAY: I suspect. Before you were assigned to your first ship, did you get any technical or advanced training?

[00:03:04.91] JOHN ANDERSON: No, not at that point.

[00:03:07.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Just put you on the boat and let you learn it.

[00:03:09.49] JOHN ANDERSON: They put me on the Bibb and off we went.

[00:03:17.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you were on the Bibb doing ocean patrols out of Boston?

[00:03:25.59] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes. Mostly we went to Ocean Station, Charlie. We would leave Boston, and we would go to Argentia, Newfoundland, the Navy base, and we would fuel up and take on water. And then we would go about 1,500 miles northeast and we would sit in the middle of the Atlantic ocean.

[00:03:45.21] JOE GALLOWAY: North Atlantic in winter time is a little bit challenging.

[00:03:50.80] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes, it was. I've seen waves bigger than the mast on the Bibb. And when you ride over one of them, you better hang on on the way down.

[00:04:01.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I bet.

[00:04:02.28] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah. It was scary.

[00:04:03.37] JOE GALLOWAY: You slide right off.

[00:04:05.67] JOHN ANDERSON: It was scary. I know, I was on the wheel. I was on the helm.

[00:04:10.68] JOE GALLOWAY: You were on the helm?

[00:04:11.91] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, and I was hanging on for dear life.

[00:04:16.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, did you volunteer to go to Vietnam? And if so, why?

[00:04:22.63] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, they were offering any volunteer your choice of duty station when you returned. So I wasn't really happy about being on the Bibb after 10 months. I got tired of being a little bit too cold in the winter. And the North Atlantic is really nasty. So I said, I'll go.

[00:04:43.17] JOE GALLOWAY: And you volunteered?

[00:04:44.48] JOHN ANDERSON: And I volunteered.

[00:04:51.99] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you get to Vietnam, and where did you land?

[00:04:57.15] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, after the training in Coronado, the Marine Corps base there and that area.

[00:05:08.52] JOE GALLOWAY: You did SERE training and--

[00:05:11.37] JOHN ANDERSON: SERE training, yeah. I was waterboarded. I didn't know what that was at the time, but I found out the hard way. But not everybody got waterboarded, but I did. One person on each leg and arm, and the fifth guy had a nose-- a hose down my throat and one up my nose.

[00:05:29.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:05:30.21] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, whoa is right. It's really scary. You can't breathe. After the training, we left the San Diego area. We flew to Hawaii, we refueled, then we went on to Wake, Guam, Manila

[00:05:46.23] JOE GALLOWAY: This is military transport or civilian charter?

[00:05:49.95] JOHN ANDERSON: Civilian charter, and we ended up-- after Manila, we ended up in Saigon.

[00:05:57.09] JOE GALLOWAY: In Saigon, Tan Son Nhut?

[00:05:59.37] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah.

[00:06:00.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, did you have an assignment in Vietnam already laid out or did they put you in the repo depot?

[00:06:09.57] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, basically, yeah the repo. I was up in Division 12. They put me on a C-47 out of Saigon. They were right out of World War II. These planes was slow, but they were bulldogs. They could handle anything.

[00:06:23.94] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were headed for Da Nang?

[00:06:26.22] JOHN ANDERSON: Da Nang Harbor. That was Division 12. And I was on a waiting list, I was waiting for someone to rotate back to the States.

[00:06:35.10] JOE GALLOWAY: So you would have a billet?

[00:06:36.72] JOHN ANDERSON: I'd have a billet. And I ended up on the Point Welcome.

[00:06:40.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Point Welcome?

[00:06:41.37] JOHN ANDERSON: Welcome.

[00:06:43.34] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was what? What size ship?

[00:06:47.24] JOHN ANDERSON: 82 foot patrol boat.

[00:06:50.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Patrol boat?

[00:06:51.48] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah.

[00:06:52.26] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were working the coastline along--

[00:06:55.71] JOHN ANDERSON: From the DMZ down to Da Nang and just south of Da Nang.

[00:06:58.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. What was Division 12's mission?

[00:07:04.35] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, we searched just about every sampan we could lay our eyes on. We were just looking for ammunition, guns, medical supplies, food.

[00:07:16.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Finding much of it?

[00:07:18.57] JOHN ANDERSON: No.

[00:07:19.05] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:07:19.44] JOHN ANDERSON: We didn't find anything.

[00:07:20.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't find anything?

[00:07:21.81] JOHN ANDERSON: We found these poor fishermen out there trying to catch something for dinner. You talk about primitive. They don't know what the Coast Guard's all about. We didn't look for fire extinguishers, or boat numbers. As long as anyone had an identification card, we were happy.

[00:07:42.56] JOE GALLOWAY: That was it?

[00:07:43.49] JOHN ANDERSON: We never had any bad incidents with them at all. Oh, they're amazing people over there.

[00:07:48.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Now was your patrol part of Operation MARKET TIME?

[00:07:54.93] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:07:55.76] JOE GALLOWAY: And describe that, that was just out there looking for looking for contraband?

[00:08:01.97] JOHN ANDERSON: Looking for contraband, exactly.

[00:08:03.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And not finding any?

[00:08:05.39] JOHN ANDERSON: We didn't find any. The word got out, obviously. We're going to check everyone. JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. JOHN ANDERSON: And anything suspicious.

[00:08:13.80] JOE GALLOWAY: But they know you're out there looking, and they ain't going to be found too easy?

[00:08:19.25] JOHN ANDERSON: No.

[00:08:20.03] JOE GALLOWAY: You working day and night?

[00:08:22.47] JOHN ANDERSON: Day and night. We'd go off for three days and come back for one, go out three back for one.

[00:08:28.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:08:33.05] JOHN ANDERSON: We didn't have AC, and it was pretty--

[00:08:37.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Pretty steamy.

[00:08:38.36] JOHN ANDERSON: --steamy. In the forward bunk area there was six of us, three on both sides. And of course, they had the little mats about three inches thick. And I was about this far from the main deck. And the 81 millimeter mortar was just over here a little bit. Sometimes they wouldn't tell me when they were going to fire it. JOE GALLOWAY: Gonna fire. JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, that thing would be so loud. It would be like being in a barrel, somebody's hitting it with a sledgehammer.

[00:09:07.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my--

[00:09:08.78] JOHN ANDERSON: I'd get up, I'd come up, bang my head, knock myself out. I've done that more than once. I can laugh about it now, but it hurt.

[00:09:20.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, what were your duties on this patrol boat?

[00:09:25.67] JOHN ANDERSON: Basically, I was the helmsman. I worked four hours on, mostly the midnight to 4:00 AM. And then I'd have eight hours off, just keep rotating, four on, eight off.

[00:09:38.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Just keep rotating?

[00:09:40.49] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, grab the coffee when you get a chance and grab something to eat when you get a chance. Search all the junks and boats and--

[00:09:48.65] JOE GALLOWAY: You stay on the same patrol boat the whole time you were on this tour?

[00:09:54.95] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes. I made one trip on the Point Orient. Their guy was going on R&R, and they put me on there for like three days, and then I was back on the way YR-71 until the billet opened up--

[00:10:05.78] JOE GALLOWAY: My recollection is one of the Coast Guard ships was blown up by the Air Force.

[00:10:14.21] JOHN ANDERSON: That's the Welcome

[00:10:15.38] JOE GALLOWAY: That was the Welcome? You were on there when it happened?

[00:10:19.34] JOHN ANDERSON: No, I got there about six months later. But they repaired the outside of the boat. But the shrapnel holes inside they left them as a reminder. We work for the Navy, everywhere the Navy goes the Coast Guard goes. We take our orders from the Navy.

[00:10:36.32] Apparently, the Navy and the Air Force had a little lack of communication. And those two Air Force pilots-- we'd run darkened ship that night, no lights. But you have that phosphorescence from the propellers. So they spot that from up there, and next thing you know they're coming down, they're going to hit you with everything they got.

[00:10:56.69] JOE GALLOWAY: They hit them with everything they had.

[00:10:58.73] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, they killed the CO and a second class engineman that was-- but the man who saved the boat was Chief Patterson. And when I went aboard, I made probably three patrols with him before he rotated back. And my understanding, they recommended him for the Medal of Honor, but they gave him the Bronze Star instead considering the circumstances.

[00:11:26.12] But surprisingly enough, fast forward a little bit too March of-- I turned 20.

[00:11:35.81] JOE GALLOWAY: '66 by now.

[00:11:37.13] JOHN ANDERSON: '67, I was 20. And my mother sent me a letter. And the draft board, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island wanted to know why I didn't show up for induction in the Army. And I said, show them this envelope and my return address of Da Nang Harbor. I said tell them they're too late. And I guess they did.

[00:11:59.27] Well, I showed it to the CO and-- the lieutenant. He said, can I have this? i said sure. It went up the channels. I don't know where it stopped, but I had to let them know that they didn't even know where the Coast Guard was in Vietnam.

[00:12:13.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, right.

[00:12:14.36] JOHN ANDERSON: It was like a big secret. It was wild. I'm glad I was only 19, 20 over there. I don't think I could handle it now.

[00:12:27.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, your patrol boat, what kind of armament did you have? You said an 81 mortar?

[00:12:34.16] JOHN ANDERSON: Right, 81 millimeter mortar. And they had a piggyback .50-caliber on top of it. Very difficult to shoot that gun.

[00:12:41.84] JOE GALLOWAY: I would think.

[00:12:43.40] JOHN ANDERSON: Because of the weight, you've got to-- actually Chief Patterson was the gunner. And he'd just sink it on his belly. And he just-- he could shoot as straight as an arrow. He was really good at it. And then we had four .50 calibers aft on tripods. But basically, that was it.

[00:13:04.97] JOE GALLOWAY: That was it.

[00:13:05.87] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, we had small arms. We never wore sidearms when we were on the boat on patrol.

[00:13:14.41] JOE GALLOWAY: And it was three days out and one day back?

[00:13:17.47] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:13:22.00] JOE GALLOWAY: And you-- your job was on the helm, four hours, eight hours off.

[00:13:29.17] JOHN ANDERSON: Right.

[00:13:29.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Just keep on cycling. Now, when you were back in Da Nang for your one day off, what did you do?

[00:13:40.45] JOHN ANDERSON: That photograph he has there, he has a photograph of me at the open air beer place. It's a little gedunk on the end of the pier. And they didn't know what ice was. So we had warm Pabst Blue Ribbon beer out of a can.

[00:13:58.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Pabst Blue Ribbon in a rusty can, oh yeah. So that was your time off?

[00:14:05.46] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah. I didn't do much more outside of that, washed my clothes maybe. We took on water, and ammo, and food. And we'd always run out of water on the way back, every patrol we'd run out. So you got to wait to take that shower till you get in. It was kind of stinky.

[00:14:25.94] JOE GALLOWAY: A little stinky up there forward.

[00:14:30.43] JOHN ANDERSON: You might say that.

[00:14:31.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe-- did you sleep on the boat even when you were back in-- back ashore?

[00:14:37.79] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:14:38.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:14:43.33] JOHN ANDERSON: They were a bunch of great guys. We were from all over the country. The cook was really good, the first cook we had before he rotated back. And he made the best SOS I have ever had in my entire life. Some people can't stand it, but I just loved the stuff.

[00:14:59.80] JOE GALLOWAY: I loved it.

[00:15:00.60] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, it was good. Good old stick to your ribs food, you know.

[00:15:04.68] JOE GALLOWAY: You get through on that stuff.

[00:15:06.84] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, and the CO was a great guy. The XO was right out of the academy. Of course, I made several trips with Chief Patterson. And I was sorry to see him go, but it was his time to go back. And great guy, big guy, I mean, he had huge hands, I mean, he was broad.

[00:15:29.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds?

[00:15:36.64] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes. There was a young black kid on the YR-71. How I skipped over him I have no idea. But I don't know if he wanted to get on the boat or not, but he never made any waves about it. And I met a-- when I was in training before we flew over, I met

a guy from Natick, Massachusetts. His name is Dick Pickard. He now lives in Cape Cod, Mass. And the third guy-- we called ourselves the Kingston Trio at the time-- Philip McGovern. He's from Brooklyn, New York.

[00:16:17.01] So Dick used to make fun of the way Mac talked, New Yorkese, you know, toity-toid and turd. And then Mac would snap back at him, you paak the caah. We're from Massachusetts. They were going back and forth, and I'd just look at them, shake my head, and walk away. They were great guys. We all got together when we trimmed back to the States.

[00:16:42.77] We went to Mac's house in Brooklyn. Brooklyn, New York's got a bar room on every corner. What a place. We couldn't buy a drink no matter where we went. He knew everybody. So then we went to my parents' house in Pawtucket. And then we ended up in Natick, Mass at Dick's house.

[00:17:03.04] JOE GALLOWAY: So you stayed in touch with these guys--

[00:17:05.71] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah--

[00:17:06.19] JOE GALLOWAY: after you left the Coasties?

[00:17:07.93] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, Mac died about 17 years ago. And I talk to Dick probably on a weekly basis. I keep in close contact with him.

[00:17:16.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Still?

[00:17:17.20] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah. He's a good guy.

[00:17:25.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for us the leadership in the Coast Guard as high as you could see it, what did you think of those guys?

[00:17:36.13] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh, the academy guys are good, most of them are really level headed people. The CO on the Point Welcome, terrific man. He was a first class pharmacist's mate. And he went to OCS. My guess, he probably had 20 years on me, anyway, age wise. But he was--

[00:18:03.99] JOE GALLOWAY: This is the CO?

[00:18:05.35] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, he was a lieutenant JG.

[00:18:09.48] JOE GALLOWAY: With 20 years in?

[00:18:11.88] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, yeah. I don't know how many years he had in as an enlisted man before he switched over, but it was a good move on his part because he had the right temperament, nice man, never raised his voice. Good guy, good leader.

[00:18:30.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you described your job, and the CO's job, and the cook, what other jobs were there on that boat?

[00:18:40.35] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, we had a second class electrician's mate-- keep the radar going, and the radios, and all that. He was-- you could tell he was like a book guy. Just that personality he had, he didn't say too much. And we had the enginemen of course. And then you had the deckhands. I went from E3 to E5 before I made it back home. So I jumped up to grades, which is pretty good.

[00:19:08.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, when the Air Force attacked the Welcome, they partly sunk her, if I recall right?

[00:19:16.99] JOHN ANDERSON: It was-- yeah, it had a couple of holes in the bottom. And they were taking on water, but the pumps handled it pretty well.

[00:19:23.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Handled it OK.

[00:19:24.88] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah.

[00:19:25.63] JOE GALLOWAY: And they refloated and repaired?

[00:19:28.18] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah they-- yeah, that one-- actually, Chief Patterson brought it back. The steering was knocked out. And he just used the controls, port and starboard engines, to keep going straight there. But he took that boat back all by himself. Amazing.

[00:19:44.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Indeed, quite. Amazing any of them survived.

[00:19:49.81] JOHN ANDERSON: They were lucky, yeah. I know they had a fire on the back, on the stern where we kept the gasoline for the Boston Whaler we had. They hit that, and that thing blew up. And that caused a little bit of a panic. Now you got to put the fire out, so it doesn't go down into the engine room and cause real havoc. But I know the man you're talking about. He was a little bit critical of the way the guys were handling all this craziness.

[00:20:22.54] He said they looked like they were kind of running around, didn't know what to do. Well, there's a lot of running around to do because a lot of valves to open up. You've got to energize the firehose, and then what you do is you hit it with the hose and you blow the gasoline right off the stern of the boat. And all the fire's gone. But it takes a few minutes to think of all these things. I'm glad I wasn't there. Waterboarding was bad enough.

[00:20:52.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, other than drinking warm Pabst Blue Ribbon, what did you do for your recreation off duty time back in Da Nang, go fishing? Go bar hopping?

[00:21:08.08] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, we made a couple of trips to the naval base about two miles south of us. It was just a dirt road at the time. And we would hitch a ride on a deuce and a half, whoever was going by. Just stick your thumb out, jump on the back, and off we go.

[00:21:25.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Go down to the EM club or something.

[00:21:27.19] JOHN ANDERSON: Go to the EM club, yeah, now you're going to get cold beer because they knew what ice is.

[00:21:31.80] JOE GALLOWAY: They knew what ice was, yeah.

[00:21:35.38] JOHN ANDERSON: And we would stay there a while and then we'd come back. In 24 hours, you've got to sleep at least eight of those. So it's not a lot of time to fool around with.

[00:21:43.60] JOE GALLOWAY: That's true, and then you're off again.

[00:21:45.58] JOHN ANDERSON: We're off again.

[00:21:48.87] JOE GALLOWAY: The whole tour, the mission is still the same, the DMZ to south of Da Nang?

[00:21:58.43] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes. Yeah, I did make-- let me correct myself. We went TAD, temporary assigned duty, to Vung Tau in the late-- or the early summer of '67. We spent about three, four months down there.

[00:22:18.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Vung Tau?

[00:22:19.56] JOHN ANDERSON: Vung Tau, in-country R&R center. Well that was a lot of fun on our day off, that was a different thing.

[00:22:25.53] JOE GALLOWAY: A whole lot better than the end of the pier in Da Nang.

[00:22:29.79] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, the open air bar, yeah. Yeah, if you wanted a nice steak dinner, you just-- and it was cheap in-country. We ate, drank beers-- cold beer. Yeah there is not much else to do.

[00:22:46.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, were the Coasties co-located with the Navy in Da Nang, or did you have your own base?

[00:22:53.15] JOHN ANDERSON: No, that was the YR-71. That was a Navy repair ship. They could take one of your diesel engines out, bring it on board, strip it down to nothing, and rebuild it in less than 24 hours. They were good.

[00:23:09.78] JOE GALLOWAY: So you guys co-located with the Navy?

[00:23:12.26] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes we did.

[00:23:13.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, and they took care--

[00:23:14.90] JOHN ANDERSON: But that was a South Vietnamese naval base.

[00:23:17.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:23:18.44] JOHN ANDERSON: And they had this World War I, probably a destroyer, or whatever you want to say it is. It didn't look like much. And they didn't have flush toilets, they had a toilet hanging off the starboard side. I don't want to go into any more details, but I'm surprised the thing was still floating. What an embarrassment. The South Vietnamese Navy, it didn't even exist really when you think about it. All the antiquated machines they had. That's why we--

[00:23:57.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, whatever they inherited from the French, who God knows who they inherited it from.

[00:24:04.28] JOHN ANDERSON: They inherited all our 82s in the early '70s. They were never coming back to the States. So we left them there.

[00:24:12.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Just left them?

[00:24:13.61] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, they were-- it was 1950 vintage technology. The new boats, the 87 they have today, steering with this little joystick. It's amazing what they can do.

[00:24:29.15] JOE GALLOWAY: So you have a high opinion of the quality of the leadership in your outfit. And that includes the petty officers, the chiefs.

[00:24:40.46] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:24:41.36] JOE GALLOWAY: They did their job.

[00:24:42.74] JOHN ANDERSON: They did their job. Whatever the chief said, I did it. There's no questions. Go do this. Yes I will, Chief. Don't call him, sir. Chief.

[00:24:55.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Now did your experience with that leadership change as you shifted different vessels you served on in the Coast Guard, or was it pretty much the same?

[00:25:08.33] JOHN ANDERSON: Pretty much the same.

[00:25:13.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Was that leadership different in Vietnam in that duty as opposed to the Bibb and Atlantic duty, or again pretty much the same?

[00:25:26.51] JOHN ANDERSON: I'd say it's pretty much the same. Overall, it's all the same. You have the officer in charge and he's the man. He says, you do, period.

[00:25:43.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Now you said the boats themselves were '50s technology, did you see any cutting edge technology, science that was deployed where you were working?

[00:26:00.70] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes the night scopes. They were big and heavy. They first came out. They probably weighed about 30 pounds. And you need two hands to hold them up. And to turn it on-- and you could--

[00:26:14.48] JOE GALLOWAY: And you got to see green things moving.

[00:26:17.27] JOHN ANDERSON: You can see the beach. You can see all the people with their coolie hats running up and down the beach. And they're not supposed to be there after dark, yeah. We'd throw a couple of 81-millimeter mortars on the ground, and that spooked them off for the rest of the night.

[00:26:31.52] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd go away for the rest of the night.

[00:26:33.44] JOHN ANDERSON: They'd go away.

[00:26:34.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Time to go home boys.

[00:26:37.36] JOHN ANDERSON: Hell, yeah. We had--

[00:26:37.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Nothing like an 81 mortar.

[00:26:40.58] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, I've got to explain, we had free fire zones. And then 10 feet this way it was a neutral zone. Why they had a free fire zone is beyond me. Because it really didn't matter. If you're walking down a beach carrying a gun, you're going to get shot at. Somebody is going to take a pop at you.

[00:26:59.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody will shoot you.

[00:27:00.49] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah. So we-- it was interesting, never a dull moment. But the Starlight scope, that was beautiful. But we had a Vietnamese naval officer on board on several patrols. And I had instructions, do not let him look at this Starlight scope. I'm like, OK.

[00:27:24.62] He'd say, hey, what are you doing? I'm looking at the beach. Can I see it? No. Not allowed to give you this. That was top secret at it's day, That was '67.

[00:27:35.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Amazing.

[00:27:37.04] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah. I understand they're a lot lighter today. They're only--

[00:27:40.79] JOE GALLOWAY: They got them hooked onto your glasses, I think, or on your helmet anyway.

[00:27:53.64] JOHN ANDERSON: We were down at Vung Tau. And the skipper mentioned something about taking a group of guys onto the beach, didn't explain why, but we were going to

take a walk into the jungle. And he looked at me, he goes, Andy, he says, you're going to be the point man.

[00:28:12.20] I know that's a military term, but I was never-- no one ever mentioned point man to me before. So he says, yeah, you're going to be number one. I said, if I see-- give me an AR-15 and a couple of clips. I say, if I see one guy with a rifle, I'm going to light the whole jungle up. And the XO came with us and I told him that.

[00:28:31.95] And he just looked at me and he didn't say a word, because he knew I meant it. I didn't know what I was doing. I'd look for something, a gun barrel, somebody to jump out in front of me, I didn't know what to expect. But we went about a half a mile into the jungle, and we came upon this village. And what I wasn't told is we were bringing medical supplies. The guys behind me were carrying.

[00:28:55.83] JOE GALLOWAY: It was MEDCAP.

[00:28:58.23] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, we were dropping off meds for the local people in the village. And they were friendly people, too. They were all sitting there, smoking away.

[00:29:06.68] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a good thing none of them moved too quickly-- JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah, I was ready to go. --the point man would have lit them up.

[00:29:12.22] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, they put me on point on the way out of there. Yeah, we made double time. I was going down that pathway-- where's the-- where's the Boston Whaler?

[00:29:24.11] JOE GALLOWAY: So walking in the jungle was a bad day for you?

[00:29:28.67] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, that's probably the worst day of my life. I didn't expect to come back. The best day? I cheated death. General quarters, I was down below. General quarters alarm went off. And I ran up and turned to the right to go down the starboard side because I knew the beach was on the other side. I could use part of the boat as a shield.

[00:29:56.02] And I had a cut in my pocket, I had a Coast Guard cigarette lighter. And I took two steps up onto the forward deck and the lighter pops out, and hits the deck, and it starts sliding over towards the port side. And it's like a half round there, the way the ship is constructed. And I ducked down to pick it up. And a bullet went, pchew, right over the top of my head.

[00:30:21.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa

[00:30:22.26] JOHN ANDERSON: Whoa is right.

[00:30:24.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Would have got you.

[00:30:25.87] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah. I wouldn't be sitting here.

[00:30:27.61] JOE GALLOWAY: But for a dropped lighter.

[00:30:29.80] JOHN ANDERSON: I got the lighter though.

[00:30:30.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Zippo saved your life.

[00:30:32.71] JOHN ANDERSON: Zippo-- my Coast Guard Zippo-- it's now in the Barnstable Coast Guard Museum, Barnstable, Mass. Yeah, I made a donation to them.

[00:30:46.54] JOE GALLOWAY: So pretty good day that was?

[00:30:48.91] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, I knew I was bulletproof after that. I was told up at Monkey Mountain, which is right across the street from where we were moored in Da Nang harbor, they had a contingent of South Korean forces up there. And they were-- their job was to keep that mountain clear of snipers and any infiltrators at all. But I never saw one.

[00:31:20.99] JOE GALLOWAY: You never saw anyone or had anything to do with them

[00:31:22.10] JOHN ANDERSON: I never saw them. They were good at hiding in that mountain. I'm telling you. I never saw anybody up there, which is fine with me. We had a lot of dalliance with the US Navy people. They were great. If they ever need anything, they'd come and talk to us, and swap this for this. And hey, it's part of the service.

[00:31:47.36] Let's see-- the Aussie destroyer, we got ice cream from them. They were about eight miles off the beach, and we went up alongside, hey, you got any ice cream? And they gave us this big thing of ice cream. We didn't have ice cream. We ate that up in two days, it was gone. Well, it was just a lot of good fun.

[00:32:15.18] As the year went by, I came to the conclusion that 90% of the people were either farmers or fishermen, and all they care about is tilling the soil and catch as many fish for dinner as they could. They wanted three meals a day. And they didn't care less about politics.

[00:32:35.92] What are we doing there? So my whole aspect of the war was going downhill fast. We were wasting-- they didn't want to fight for themselves. What are we doing there? I just think it's wrong now, totally wrong. It was just a bad scene. We lost all those good American kids for what? My heart goes out to them. It's over.

[00:33:08.58] JOE GALLOWAY: That MEDCAP into the jungle, was that the only MEDCAP you guys did?

[00:33:14.70] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:33:15.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, just that one. Tell us about the Glita incident.

[00:33:20.76] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh, the Glita. Old rusty small time freighter coming out of Da Nang harbor. And it ran into-- it lost power. It smacked into this Navy tugboat and the barge it was pulling behind it. And the mast hit the forward mast on the Glita. That scared everybody off the bridge.

[00:33:49.63] JOE GALLOWAY: They just abandoned it.

[00:33:51.26] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh, everything-- they ran off the bridge. No doubt in my mind, because here comes the Glita. And I'm saying, well, what? This thing's not stopping. And they dropped the anchor about 50 feet from the YR-71. That's not going to do anything. This thing's cruising right in. And it went right between the YR port side and the Coast Guard cutter that was rafted alongside of it, snapped the line, and it came to a stop.

[00:34:20.40] And some of the boats, there was nobody on them. We had boats two or three wide going around in circles trying to get the Glita out of the way. And then the Navy push boat came in and--

[00:34:33.00] JOE GALLOWAY: This a freighter, what flag did it fly?

[00:34:38.39] JOHN ANDERSON: Nothing that I recognize.

[00:34:41.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah. Panama or something.

[00:34:42.80] JOHN ANDERSON: I don't know, maybe it's in one of those photographs, I didn't even bother looking. But they cleared the whole scene out in about an hour. They had one little dent in the Coast Guard boat that was the patrol boat, but that was it.

[00:35:02.66] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:35:09.21] JOHN ANDERSON: Well, probably weekly mail. That's about it. I think I called my parents' house when I was in Yokohama, Japan on R&R. I called them from Japan. I don't know what the time difference was. I really didn't care. I probably woke them up at 1:00, 2:00 in the morning. Hi, I'm in Yokohama having fun. But that's probably the only time I ever spoke to them in between.

[00:35:38.25] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you guys get about the war that you're fighting in-- Stars and Stripes? Armed Forces Radio?

[00:35:47.52] JOHN ANDERSON: Stars and Stripes.

[00:35:48.60] JOE GALLOWAY: That was it?

[00:35:49.38] JOHN ANDERSON: That was it.

[00:35:51.16] JOE GALLOWAY: And not too regular either?

[00:35:53.38] JOHN ANDERSON: No, not really, all too slanted, yeah. They're careful what they print.

[00:36:02.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Now back home they're starting to get some antiwar demonstrations, and racial tensions, and riots, does any of that come out to where you are in Vietnam?

[00:36:15.35] JOHN ANDERSON: No.

[00:36:15.95] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:36:16.58] JOHN ANDERSON: No, most of that started around '68. And the Tet Offensive really kicked off more than one war. They kicked off the demonstration war here.

[00:36:35.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you only do the one tour?

[00:36:37.91] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:36:39.18] JOE GALLOWAY: When you finished that tour, how did you go home?

[00:36:43.10] JOHN ANDERSON: 707 out of Da Nang, full of troopers, and--

[00:36:52.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Headed for?

[00:36:54.40] JOHN ANDERSON: Korea, South Korea.

[00:36:56.17] JOE GALLOWAY: South Korea--

[00:36:57.40] JOHN ANDERSON: We fueled up and then we went directly to San Diego.

[00:37:01.07] JOE GALLOWAY: San Diego.

[00:37:02.14] JOHN ANDERSON: That's a long flight.

[00:37:03.16] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a long flight.

[00:37:07.00] JOHN ANDERSON: They put us on a bus. OK, you guys that are going to Boston, OK, we're going to go to Chicago first. You go to this plane over here, that took you right to the plane. You walk on, you get your tickets in hand.

[00:37:18.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't see any demonstrators or anybody spitting at you?

[00:37:23.10] JOHN ANDERSON: No, I think it was just a little bit too early for that.

[00:37:25.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Too early for that? This is '67, you're coming home?

[00:37:30.52] JOHN ANDERSON: Right.

[00:37:31.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, now do you still owe the Coast Guard some time in your enlistment?

[00:37:41.89] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yes, I spent the next year and a half in Castlehill Coast Guard Station in Newport, Rhode Island.

[00:37:47.95] JOE GALLOWAY: In Newport, so you're close to home again?

[00:37:50.78] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh yeah, a 45 minute ride.

[00:37:54.97] JOE GALLOWAY: On shore or on a boat?

[00:37:57.31] JOHN ANDERSON: We were on shore. And we had several rescue boats-- the 44357 of the old 40-footers, 522. And we had another one, the 30533 that was made out of plastic. The gas-- the fuel tank leaked. And it caught fire one day when I was out hot rodding around in it. And I opened up the engine compartment, flames were all over the place. IU took out the fire extinguisher-- JOE GALLOWAY: Plastic melts.

[00:38:28.39] I got to say this about the Coast Guard, right near the end of my enlistment, they were broke. They didn't have any money at all. I fueled up the 40-footer on a Friday morning. So I had the duty weekend, so I wanted to make sure this boat's got a lot of fuel on it. And I get back in, and I got my ass chewed out.

[00:38:50.00] JOE GALLOWAY: For filling up with gasoline?

[00:38:51.68] JOHN ANDERSON: Filling up with diesel fuel.

[00:38:53.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Diesel fuel?

[00:38:54.26] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, they didn't have any money. Well, if you don't tell me that you don't have any money, then I won't put any more fuel in there. I'll just go out there and run out of fuel. Then you have two boats to bring in. That was so embarrassing. They tried very hard to get me to reenlist. And I said no, no, no.

[00:39:14.21] JOE GALLOWAY: I've had enough.

[00:39:16.01] JOHN ANDERSON: But the home security-- Homeland Security they're with now, they've got more money than anybody. They all pack sidearms on the stations.

[00:39:28.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have many difficulty readjusting to life after a combat tour?

[00:39:35.48] JOHN ANDERSON: No, not really.

[00:39:36.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Not really?

[00:39:37.70] JOHN ANDERSON: I was just so happy to be home. But when you're at a rescue station, there's a lot of exciting rescues you can make at the mouth of Narragansett Bay. That water gets really nasty. I hauled in a guy, a lobster pot boat. And I just got there, he was hanging on to a lobster pot buoy line, which is probably half inch.

[00:40:07.95] And he's got a boatload of lobsters, and he's about 50 feet from going up on the rocks. And it was a 10 foot sea. And then we got the bell. We were out the door, we run down jump on the boat, put the seatbelt on. This is going to be a rough one. And I got alongside of him.

[00:40:26.88] I had the 44 laying over on its side when we crossed over the first wave. And it caused me to pop right back up. Well, if I didn't have that seat belt on, i would have gone right over the side.

[00:40:39.00] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd have gone right over.

[00:40:39.06] JOHN ANDERSON: I would have, like a boomerang. I was gone. But we got him back into Newport Harbor.

[00:40:44.06] JOE GALLOWAY: With his boat?

[00:40:45.38] JOHN ANDERSON: With his boat.

[00:40:46.49] JOE GALLOWAY: And the lobsters?

[00:40:48.35] JOHN ANDERSON: And all the lobsters got a free Coast Guard ride back to the station. He gave us over 120 of them. the whole day load that he caught. I said, hey, take some of these. He's says, I'm quitting. I'm not doing this anymore. He was scared.

[00:41:02.91] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm done with lobsters.

[00:41:04.25] JOHN ANDERSON: He was scared to death. Boy, he was-- and I'm saying, hey calm down a little bit. Jesus. But we ate good for the next several days.

[00:41:19.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think your Vietnam experience changed you, affected your life for good or less good?

[00:41:28.85] JOHN ANDERSON: I think I'm a little more objective to a lot of things. I don't trust the government. They tell big lies. Huge You know I looked at-- John Kennedy was assassinated, President Kennedy. If you know anything about ballistics, when you have a little hole in the front and a big hole in the back. This is the point of entry, and this is the point of exit. Well he didn't, if he got shot in the back from the depository, he would have had his forehead blown off. That's not the way it ended. So someone got him from the grassy knoll. That's the way I look at it.

[00:42:12.47] So I haven't read the Warren Report yet, but I've heard of some interesting stories about who actually did that to him. It's not pretty. But then you get a guy like Lyndon Johnson taking over. And what does his state do? Guns, bullets, or any kind of war stuff. And Kennedy wasn't going to put combat troops on the ground in South Vietnam, which was a smart thing to do. And as soon as LBJ took over, he just turned this whole war-- cranked it up. And that's the history of the United States government. I just don't trust them.

[00:42:52.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your time in Vietnam affect the way you think about the troops coming back from the wars today?

[00:43:02.19] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, I got the same feeling. We got a lousy reception when we got home. It didn't get better for a lot of years. And it's finally turning the corner. But I feel the same way. These guys they feel rejected, post-traumatic stress disorder, a lot of that out there. It's hard. Sometimes you don't even know--

[00:43:26.73] JOE GALLOWAY: They're sending them on eight or ten combat deployments these days. Guys just keep going back again and again.

[00:43:35.55] JOHN ANDERSON: Yeah, they're pushing the envelope. That's the way I look at it. Give somebody else a shot at it. A year is long enough.

[00:43:47.47] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:43:55.88] JOHN ANDERSON: I hope it will be a lot better as we move along than it was back then. It was-- this country really split apart, '68. It really went crazy after the Tet Offensive. And we were losing a couple hundred guys a day over there in '68. That's too many.

[00:44:17.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any story that we haven't asked you about that you feel like you would like to tell?

[00:44:27.71] JOHN ANDERSON: No, I don't believe so. I still have my good friend Dick. And I got a lot of memories.

[00:44:45.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC?

[00:44:49.61] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes, I have.

[00:44:50.81] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts when you go there?

[00:44:54.03] JOHN ANDERSON: They should build another one dedicated to all the guys who died from Agent Orange. I had a heart attack three years ago, Agent Orange related. So I got it. It was blowing in the wind. You could see these planes over the DMZ dropping barrels of this stuff, loaded with Marine Corps guys up there. A lot of those guys are well passed on by now. I mean, they really dumped it on them heavy. But that's the worst thing, it'll get you.

[00:45:27.84] JOE GALLOWAY: It'll get you.

[00:45:28.73] JOHN ANDERSON: It gets into your skin, get into your brain, you're gone.

[00:45:31.58] JOE GALLOWAY: You're gone goose.

[00:45:32.93] JOHN ANDERSON: I've lost a couple of friends to that already.

[00:45:40.30] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[00:45:45.19] JOHN ANDERSON: Yes.

[00:45:46.24] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts about that?

[00:45:48.91] JOHN ANDERSON: About time.

[00:45:50.34] JOE GALLOWAY: About time?

[00:45:52.80] JOHN ANDERSON: It's been a long road.

[00:45:54.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you received your Vietnam Veteran lapel pin?

[00:45:59.22] JOHN ANDERSON: No.

[00:45:59.73] JOE GALLOWAY: No? Well, we're going to fix that.

[00:46:01.95] JOHN ANDERSON: Oh, good.

[00:46:02.55] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm going to hang one on you right now. It says "A grateful nation thanks and honors you."

[00:46:11.40] JOHN ANDERSON: Thank you.

[00:46:15.64] JOE GALLOWAY: And I'm sure glad you didn't get to Vietnam in time to get sunk on the Welcome. There you go. Thank you for coming in. Thanks for sharing your story.

[00:46:28.39] JOHN ANDERSON: Pleasure meeting you.

[00:46:29.18] JOE GALLOWAY: My pleasure.

[00:46:30.02] JOHN ANDERSON: Thank you very much.

[00:46:31.13] JOE GALLOWAY: You bet.