

Anton, Frank U.S. Army

[00:00:18.05] FRANK ANTON: I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I was an Air Force brat from the get-go. My dad was in the Army Air Corps. I had five brothers and one sister. David and Richard are identical twins, I had Joseph, Billy, and Michael were my brothers, and my only sister Jeannie. And I was 23 when I went to Vietnam from Newburgh, New York.

[00:00:45.26] FRANK ANTON: Joe, I knew nothing about Vietnam in 1965. I was going through a stage of in and out of college. I did that three times, I had about 10 jobs, I ended up working on a golf course, which I loved, and I was-- the guy was going to send me to greensman school. And one day in the-- this whole time the draft board in the New Paltz, New York was chasing me because they thought I was dodging the draft. And I explained to them, no, I'm not dodging the draft, I'm just dodging life. I don't know what I'm doing.

[00:01:12.45] So in late '65, my dad was a major at Newburgh Air Force Base in Stewart Field. And he said to me one morning, he said, this Vietnam thing's going to get bad. I said, I don't even know where it is. He said, well, I want you to go down to the Air Force recruiter, join the Air Force, and I've got it all set up to send you to either missile tech school or computer tech school. And you'll miss Vietnam, you won't have to go. So I said, OK, Dad.

[00:01:40.82] So the next Monday morning I went down to Newburgh to the recruitment center, and there was a sign on the Air Force recruiter's door that said, out to lunch, back in 30 minutes. So I went in and joined the Army--

[00:01:56.29] [LAUGHTER]

[00:01:56.69] --and volunteered for flight school, and my dad went crazy. He said, you know where they're going to send your ass to fly those things? I said, Dad, I don't know nothing about Vietnam. I don't even know where it is. I'm not going there. They told me I could go to fixed wing school. So 17 years later, I got my fixed wing transition.

[00:02:12.50] JOE GALLOWAY: [LAUGHS]

[00:02:18.31] FRANK ANTON: I went to basic training at Fort Lee-- or Fort Polk, excuse me. And made me-- they made me an E5 after that for flight school. And I went to flight school in Texas and Fort Rucker, Alabama.

[00:02:30.73] JOE GALLOWAY: You went to Mineral Wells for flight--

[00:02:32.92] FRANK ANTON: I went to Mineral Wells for basic helicopter school. After two months we started flying little helicopters, TH-55s, little, tiny thing, and spent four months there. And then they sent us all to Fort Rucker, and we flew the OH-13 for instrument training, and the UH-1, Bs at the time, for regular finish up training, and a year later I was on my way to Vietnam.

[00:02:59.65] JOE GALLOWAY: As a warrant officer?

[00:03:01.03] FRANK ANTON: W1.

[00:03:01.63] JOE GALLOWAY: W1.

[00:03:03.36] FRANK ANTON: Mm-hm. 210 hours.

[00:03:03.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you feel you had good training?

[00:03:06.64] FRANK ANTON: I felt like I had wonderful training. It was 210 hours. I felt like I could do anything, and in the first 10 minutes in Vietnam I realized I didn't know anything.

[00:03:15.15] JOE GALLOWAY: [LAUGHS]

[00:03:20.53] FRANK ANTON: I arrived at Saigon. And they put us on a bus and sent us to the 90th Replacement in Bien Hoa, and put us in this bus that had steel on the outside, and windows, and we couldn't figure out, what are they protecting those people from with us? We're not going to hurt them. And then we all realized finally that that was to protect us from stuff being thrown into the bus.

[00:03:40.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:03:40.81] FRANK ANTON: The smell was horrible. It stayed horrible the whole six years I ended up there. I didn't know what it was, but I soon found out when I saw the rice paddies and what they did to them and what was in them. And it was just the poorest people I've ever met in my life, and I met a lot of people before that. And they were just poor, poor people. Good people, but poor people.

[00:04:00.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:04:04.67] FRANK ANTON: I was sent-- oddly enough, I was sent to a place called the Honour-Smith Compound in Bien Hoa. And I walked in there and they said, you're in the-- you're going to be in the 71st Assault. They need one pilot. And I walked into the Honour-Smith Compound, and there was a bar on the left, a bar on the right, American nurses on my left, and then four helicopter companies. I said, are you kidding me? This is Vietnam? And two weeks later, I got my big surprise. They packed us all up in our helicopters and we flew to Chu Lai, two hours north, and stayed there the rest of the time, living on the beach.

[00:04:44.55] FRANK ANTON: Well, I did nothing the two weeks down south. They were flying out there in the Iron Triangle and really into it at the time in the late-- '67. And I was too new to train. They trained me one day, a W2 there gave me a check ride and said, OK, you'll do. Next week we're flying to Chu Lai. And I flew all the way to Chu Lai with an instructor, and he said, you're ready to fly. And a week later I flew my first mission, and we had an engine failure and crashed, and four people in the back were killed, one American, three grunts.

[00:05:17.79] And it was so traumatic. It was traumatic to me, I had to identify the body of the American. And the flight surgeon in the Americal Division said, this is too much for you. You

want a ground job, I'll give you a ground job for the rest of your tour. I said, no way. I went through flight school to fly, I want to fly. So he said, all right. Get out of my office. And they sent me back to-- I was a troop ship pilot. I flew a lot of insertions as co-pilot, and a lot of--

[00:05:44.79] JOE GALLOWAY: You were flying slicks.

[00:05:46.07] FRANK ANTON: Slicks, yeah, D-model slicks. A lot of troop resupply. And that's all I did for the first three months. FRANK ANTON: We lived in huts that were premade. And I didn't know yet, because the Firebirds were yet to come, but they went down to the Seabees and stole the truck and stole the whole house, and built the house. And then when it came time to negotiate for the house, we gave them a jeep, so it worked out good. Chow was wonderful. We had our own mess hall on the beach there, and they had three meals a day, and coffee all the time, so I couldn't complain about the chow.

[00:06:32.87] FRANK ANTON: The Vietnamese people I met before I was captured were all wonderful. A lot of them worked every day on our beach, little compound there, and hooch maids, and we had a little bar that we built, and we had a barmaid that took care of the bar the whole time. And they were nice people, very poor, and they were always scrounging for stuff, for money and other stuff, but basically they were nice people.

[00:06:59.74] FRANK ANTON: Well, at Chu Lai, the only people we ever saw basically were-- there were ROK marines at the flight line, and we'd say hello to them and they say hello to us. But the other Americans were our main compatriots there. And the Marines, we'd go up to the Marine club a couple of times a week. But people were all great. They were wonderful. FRANK ANTON: Went to the bar and drank beer.

[00:07:33.27] FRANK ANTON: In the slicks, they worked hard. They flew eight to ten to twelve hours a day almost every day, six days a week. They were lucky to get a day off. So it was nothing but that. When you got done work at the end of the night, I mean, you know, I felt like going and having one beer and then going to bed, because we had to get up at 5:00 the next morning and head back out. And all we were doing was that-- mainly that single ship resupply, which I respect more than anything. Those guys that went out there by themselves, without any gun cover, and went in and out of places dropping off stuff. It was a hard job, scary.

[00:08:08.79] FRANK ANTON: In July, my one day out of seven off, I'm sitting in the 2nd Platoon hooch that I was a member of, and by now I got two-- 300 hours, so I feel like I really know what I'm doing. And in the middle of July, and Firebird-- the gunship crew chief ran in the hooch and said, I need a pilot. I need a pilot. And I said, I'm a pilot. And they said, no, I need another pilot. So, it's because he knew I was new. But there was nobody else. So they took me down to the flight line and strapped me into a hog, a great big 48 rocket gunship.

[00:08:41.94] And the captain I was flying with, I said-- he said, are you new? I said, yes sir. I've been here three months. He said, OK. Here's your instructions, don't touch nothing. So I flew the rest of the day, and it must have worked out because at the end of the day he told me to get my stuff and I moved into the Firebird hooch, and I became a gunship pilot. FRANK ANTON: We

were southern I Corps. Everything south of Da Nang we covered, all the way down to Duc Pho and out west, all the way to the Que Son Valley.

[00:09:21.80] FRANK ANTON: On the slicks I was in a lot of combat assaults, and that was scary. We'd take 10 to 15 slicks out there, and supposedly, these areas were unknown, but I know the way the military works, and for the days before a mission, everybody'd go out there and fly around, so they always knew we were coming. And they'd be set up, and the guns would strafe the LZ and see if there was any bombs in it and anything else, but it was pretty scary, because the Que Son Valley was 1,500, 2,000 foot mountains, which we weren't used to down south, and I wasn't used to at Fort Rucker. So it's quite different flying in any kind of mountains than it is in flat areas. But a lot of that-- a lot of combat assaults.

[00:10:03.41] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your emotions at the time?

[00:10:05.78] FRANK ANTON: I was scared. I mean, I'd sit there and as I would learn the night later on my shoot down, the guy not flying is the most scared guy because the other guy is too busy to be scared. But it was scary. I mean, on one-- on one assault about a month in, three NVA jumped out in front of us about 70 yards and set up a machine gun and started shooting at us. And for some reason they never hit us. They kept hitting the ground, left of us, right of us. And the crew chief just jumped outside and mowed them down. But it was scary.

[00:10:41.13] FRANK ANTON: Late December, I had already been on R&R to Bangkok, and the poor EM over there we're starving, they're making half the miserable money I was at the time. An R&R to Bangkok came up late in December. And so my XO said, you want that R&R? I said, it'll get me out of here, sure. So I went to Da Nang and I went to Bangkok for a week. And I came back.

[00:11:03.21] And the oddest thing about my trip was the day before I came back on the 4th of January, '68, I went into a monastery. And I was just looking around, and I put some money in this jar, and then a saffron-robed gentleman about 40 years old, bald head, came out and put his arm around me and said, thank you very much. Would you like to see the rest? Then he took me all around and showed me the living quarters and everything. And then took me back to leave, and before I left he took a necklace off of his own neck and put it around mine, and it was a miniature Buddha. And he said to me, as long as you never take this off, you'll be safe. So 24 hours later I'm in Chu Lai, took the necklace off, threw it in my footlocker, and 10 hours later I was captured.

[00:11:52.86] We got called out three times during the day, and I was training a brand new guy that was going to be a Firebird aircraft commander, which I was at the time. And everybody had to fly with him and give him the up-- the thumbs up. And I let him fly all day. And about 6:30 that night, we got called out, said there's an Americal company been overrun about 15 miles west. So I said to-- his name was Frank also, I said, Frank, let me have the pilot seat, I don't know what's going to happen. So I jumped in the aircraft commander's seat, and we flew out there, we flew around for 45 minutes till we had 15 minutes of fuel left. And we kept begging the grunts, we said, hey, we see the mortar flashes. Just turn the artillery off, and we'll get them for

you. And they wouldn't. They had been overrun, and they were terrified. Half of them were dead, about 80 guys, 40 were dead, the rest of them were all wounded.

[00:12:47.58] And so finally they shut it down, and we came in and took out the mortars, and then the whole world-- I had been shot at many times. I've been shot down to two-- three times before this. Never saw anything like this. They were like-- it looked like 5,000 people shooting at us. And it turned out to be the 2nd NVA Division getting ready for Tet. And they hit me with .50 caliber and bigger. And they shot out my hydraulics. I had a completely frozen aircraft, no controls at all. I had a beep button to go down, that's all I had. Nothing else worked.

[00:13:23.07] So using the beep button I managed to get into a rice paddy, and tore it up completely, but we all crawled out and walked away. And the crew chief and door gunner went about 50 yards in front of the aircraft, and the co-pilot and myself went to the right of the aircraft. And we figured, well, they'll be here to get us. And we waited there-- well, the co-pilot got away. He said, I'm going for the river. I told him where the river was, I said, go to 200 yards to the tail of the aircraft and there's a river there. Get in the river. And he said, I'm gone. And he went. And as he went, I saw about 100 NVA come out of the tree line shooting at him, and I said, oh, he's dead. So years later, I found that he made it. 2 and 1/2 days later he walked into a compound, ARVN compound, and they rescued him.

[00:14:11.37] The other three of us, I was captured in the morning by accident, a Vietnamese walking along the dike just happened to see me. And I said, I'm not going to be captured. I tried to run so he'd shoot me, and I couldn't run, I'd been laying in the mud all night. And the crew chief and door gunner were captured shortly after that, and the three of us, they walked us around for a month till we got to the first prison camp.

[00:14:33.12] JOE GALLOWAY: They walk you every day?

[00:14:34.74] FRANK ANTON: They walked us every day, took our boots away, and I refused to walk, they gave my boots back. Marched us around in circles. Every day we'd see-- I just saw that two days ago, and they were trying to confuse us. And my big problem was I wouldn't eat. I hated rice. I always hated rice my whole life. So I said, I'm not eating rice, I'd rather die. So for 15 days I ate about six 2-inch bananas a day. And that's all I had to eat. And then after 15 days they were worried that something was going to happen to me and they gave me a chicken, a whole chicken. They cooked it-- of course I shared it with my two buddies, so that made me eat a little rice. And then after that I learned this is all they're going to give me, so I ate it. And now I love rice.

[00:15:22.55] FRANK ANTON: I was terrified. I knew the guns were coming. I'd been shot down twice before, once at night. And the slicks, I mean, they always came to get us. And I waited there and waited there, and then 7:00 in the morning I heard them coming. And then I looked up and there was nothing but fog. From about 10 feet up there was fog straight up. And the way it was out there in the valley, up to about 60, 70 feet there'd be fog, and then there'd be nothing but clear air. But once you tried to get in, you realize you couldn't land. So that's what happened.

[00:15:49.40] The slicks came, and the guns came behind them, and they circled around, and the Vietnamese knew what that meant. They knew we were still out there. So they came and found us. And like I said, I tried to run. I wasn't going to be captured. And I couldn't run.

[00:16:10.28] FRANK ANTON: And believe it or not, after all that marching and walking, we were 26 miles from Chu Lai, directly west of Quang Ngai about 12 miles. That's where we were. We were in an area that was considered the toughest area in Vietnam. When the Chinese fought the Vietnam-- fought the Vietnamese centuries ago, that's where the Vietnamese would go to hide, because they knew the Chinese wouldn't go in there. And it was an area where the Cav was to the north of us, Americal was to the south of us, and that block of land nobody was. There were no Americans in there. So that's how they kept us.

[00:16:46.28] JOE GALLOWAY: And that's where they kept you?

[00:16:47.72] FRANK ANTON: All six camps were there.

[00:16:49.55] JOE GALLOWAY: There was-- you were in six different camps?

[00:16:51.56] FRANK ANTON: Six different camps.

[00:16:52.55] JOE GALLOWAY: And these were VC-operated mainly?

[00:16:54.86] FRANK ANTON: They were VC-operated but they were NVA-run. There was an NVA doctor, there was an NVA commander, and the rest were VC and Montagnard guards.

[00:17:05.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you-- you had an NVA doctor, they actually gave you medical care?

[00:17:09.96] FRANK ANTON: He didn't do anything. He didn't know anything. In fact, much later he killed one of the ARVN prisoners, cut his throat trying to do a tracheotomy on him, and Kushner stood there in awe, kept saying, give me the medical kit, I'll save his life. And instead they killed him, because they didn't know what they were doing. It was horrible.

[00:17:32.88] FRANK ANTON: There were a total of 24 Americans, nine died over the next three years. Most of them died the first year, eight died in the first camp we were in. And there were-- in '69 there were five German nurses captured, three women and two men--

[00:17:48.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:17:49.29] FRANK ANTON: --and three of them died. And the other two, one man and one woman were marched to North Vietnam before we were in '71. It got so hot out there for Americans. They finally figured out I think where we were. In the last camp we were in, they raided. They tried to raid, and two weeks before the raid I was out in the middle of the compound one night and I saw an airplane go across me. And I looked up and it was an airplane but there was no noise. And I said, wait a minute, an airplane's got to make noise. It was a YO-3, I looked it up later. And there's one of them in the aviation museum at Fort Rucker. It's a glider that they

put a big prop on, and it made the sound of a lawnmower. That's the only sound it made. And they were taking our pictures, and I was waving at him and everything, and sure enough, two weeks later, 50 or 60 helicopters circled the camp like they were coming in.

[00:18:46.26] And the Vietnamese were stopped from shooting at them. They wanted to shoot at them. And they almost got us. And I hid in the bomb shelter, and they lost count of me for a while. And when I came out, there was an OH-6 hovering 30 feet above my head, with the captain in the back door looking at me. And I'll tell you how close he was. He was an infantry captain I could see his brass, and he was black, and he had a pair of binoculars in his right hand. And I just shrugged my shoulders at him, and he shrugged his back, and then they all flew off. They got the mission canceled. And the odd thing about that was I had been on three POW raids before that in late '67. They all get cancelled at the last minute. I don't know who was doing it, but somebody was canceling the raids. And they left.

[00:19:30.57] JOE GALLOWAY: And you never heard why?

[00:19:32.73] FRANK ANTON: I never heard why. I've talked to people that have written books about it that said after 1969, the US gave orders to all its commanders, don't lose any more troops, we're getting out of here. And that's the way they looked at the war. It just turned-- it turned a bad war worse is what it did. And a week later we were told we were going to North Vietnam, and we walked-- in the spring of '71, we walked 500 miles. We walked south for a ways to Kontum, crossed over onto the Ho Chi Minh Trail. And out of that 500 miles, we rode one night and rode a train one day, and that's it. We walked the rest of the time. It took me six months.

[00:20:09.66] JOE GALLOWAY: To Hanoi?

[00:20:10.41] FRANK ANTON: Mm-hm. Took Kushner three months, but took me six months. I was really in bad shape.

[00:20:14.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Because Doc Kushner told me that he would walk one day and collapse with malaria the next and--

[00:20:22.20] FRANK ANTON: We all had malaria. It was bad. It was tough. It's a miracle any of us lived. It really is. The last day they put us on a train. That was the train ride in a cattle car on a train, and all the Vietnamese, every time we'd stop would beat on the doors like they were coming to get us. And we got to Hanoi and they put us in a car, a van, and dumped us off at the front door of the Plantation Gardens where Kushner and the rest of the guys were. There were two of us that ended up-- we spent over six weeks in Laos in hospitals. I used to lay in a cot out in the sun and wave at the helicopters. They'd fly over and wave back. They didn't know. Luckily they weren't shooting. But it was pretty bad.

[00:21:10.90] FRANK ANTON: I got down below 90 pounds in the jungle after about six months. And most of that was my own fault, I wouldn't eat. I wouldn't eat. I gave away my food every day. And finally after a couple of months when I saw seven people die in front of me, I said, I better start eating. And I started eating, and after about a year, they started killing-- after

we lost so many Americans, they started killing pigs and giving us a third of the pig meat. So that helped, and other things, but it was bad.

[00:21:40.36] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think kept you alive when 11 other guys died?

[00:21:47.20] FRANK ANTON: Luck. It was a lot of luck, Joe. I was weaker than a lot of people. I mean-- I mean, I'm sure Kushner or some of the guys would tell you about some of these guys. Russ Grissett was the toughest man I ever met, and he had been captured two years before they got us. And he used to-- I'll tell you how tough he was. They used to go on wood runs, and during the break during a wood run, he'd do Marine Corps push-ups in front of the guards, and look at them and smile. I mean, he was tough. He stayed in good shape. And come 1968, he just gave up. One day he just gave up and lost the will to live, and he died.

[00:22:24.70] JOE GALLOWAY: That's exactly what Doc Kushner said, that he watched 11 Americans just give up.

[00:22:30.59] FRANK ANTON: They did. I tried to give up and my crew wouldn't let me. And the other grunts who were there wouldn't let me. They came and pulled me out of the bed and threw me in the dirt, and said, get out of the bed. Move around. And finally, the end of '68 I realized, if I don't move around, I'm going to die. And even though I had made the statement many times-- look, we're all going to die anyway, what's the difference? I recovered, and by the time we got to North Vietnam I still weighed less than 100 pounds. And two years later when we were released, I weighed almost 140. We gained--

[00:23:03.01] JOE GALLOWAY: You gained that much weight?

[00:23:04.60] FRANK ANTON: Well, the last month they gave--

[00:23:05.98] JOE GALLOWAY: They stuffed you.

[00:23:06.70] FRANK ANTON: --us so much food, we couldn't believe it, right? FRANK ANTON: The camps were all the same. They were all on a hillside. They were all near water. Usually the water would run down the hillside into the camp, and I used to go up-- when I'd go up and gather wood, I used to do things in the water line because I'd know it went to their kitchen. But I kept my attitude the whole time. I didn't like them. But the camps were-- like I said, they were all on a hillside, they all had water leading to them. They made us a kitchen which was all under earth, then the smoke would be dispensed by going 50 yards out in bamboo-- half a bamboo tree.

[00:23:48.15] And they'd wake us up by a gong at 5:00 in the morning. We wouldn't eat anything. We'd eat-- we'd eat two meals a day, basically, and for a while it got to where we'd eat one. We'd eat-- we had two teacups of rice a day, which our cook, one of the grunts from the Americal would cook, and we'd have rice. And it'd usually be plain rice. Then once in a great while we'd get a little bit of meat with it. And when we'd go on wood runs and stuff, we'd get peppers off the trees, hot peppers.

[00:24:17.43] In fact, one of the trips we went through a Montagnard ville, and I stole-- we used to tie our pajama bottoms up, so you could put anything in there, and I stole 70 bananas. And of course, a banana in Vietnam is only three inches long, but still 70 is a pretty good number. And when I got to the camp, to go through the Montagnard camp, they knew. And they held me there, and they beat me up, and they made me eat all the bananas myself, and they said they were going to kill me.

[00:24:47.58] And after three days, they let me come back to the-- they turned me back over. I was scared. They put me in stocks for about two months, and the other Americans would sneak food to me. But that was basically all the camps. They were all the same. They were just nothing. They were a bamboo bed-- when there were 20 of us, the most there ever were, it was a 25 foot long, 7 foot wide bed made out of bamboo slats. It would give us horrible welts. We'd sleep on it.

[00:25:22.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Did the Vietnamese ever try to turn you?

[00:25:27.48] FRANK ANTON: Oh. yeah. They had--

[00:25:28.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Propaganda?

[00:25:29.91] FRANK ANTON: --they had a camera crew come in and they filmed us, and how good things were. And I have-- over the years I've seen the pictures they drew of some of the people. They had a three week political course where they put signs up all over saying the Vietnamese are good people and the Americans are horrible people. And they were so stupid, they didn't even know how to do it. At one point, they said, have you ever been to-- have you ever been to Niagara Falls? No. I've never been there. They said, see. All the bigshots in America have been to Niagara Falls, but you've never been there. And if you work in a car dealer, you can make the car, but then you have to pay for it. They said, that's America. I said, yeah, that's America. That's the way we are. And-- but the political didn't work at all on anybody, except one guy, I'm sure you know about him. And he was crossed over, Garwood.

[00:26:25.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Garwood.

[00:26:25.83] FRANK ANTON: And he stayed crossed over, and he came home 15 years later, and now-- he pled insanity at his court martial. I testified against him. And it's a shame, because all I wanted was an apology. I went to his lawyers the night before I testified, I said, look, the guy screwed up. He was a Marine before he was the enemy though, and I respect him for being a Marine, he joined the Marine Corps. So they said, no. That's not going to happen. He's not going to apologize. I said, OK. I'm going to testify against him. And they were shocked at how much I knew. For some reason, I had a photographic memory of everything he ever did. And I recounted to the judge everything he did, and it was overwhelming.

[00:27:12.30] FRANK ANTON: Most of the guards were good people. Most of the guards were poor people from Vietnam. We had a couple of-- of course we named them all, which was an American trait, and we've gotten flak for that. We called one of them Frankenstein. He was a Montagnard, and he was crazy, and he was mean. And most of them you couldn't mess with, but we had one guard I'll never forget. He was a second grade teacher in Hanoi, and he spoke out

against the war. And because he spoke out against the war, they sent him to it. They took away his teaching job and sent him. And he became a guard in our camp, and we used to talk to him all the time. And he used to ask us about-- he used to ask us about Rolex watches and Marilyn Monroe and everything, and we could tell that he'd been reading.

[00:27:59.10] And one day we went on a wood run with him, and we're sitting down, and one of the EM said to him-- his name was Quang-- Quang, can I see your rifle? So Quang looked around and took the clip out and gave him the AK. I said-- I'm sitting there and I'm saying, Davis, find the safety. That's what none of us know where it is. He said, I found it already. And then when I came home from Vietnam, that's one of the things I said, you got to school pilots and other Americans on these weapons. Because we had our hands on an AK-47, no bullets. But we told Quang-- at one point we said to him, if an American helicopter landed, would you shoot us? He said, no, I'd go too. And we said, you'd be a millionaire. If you could get us out of here, you'd be a millionaire. We'd make sure of it. But I always felt bad for Quang. He was a good little guy.

[00:29:01.11] FRANK ANTON: It was tough. At one point-- at one point they-- one of the guys, it might have been Kushner, said, it's like being locked in a closet with your wife. You're going to fight. And we did fight. And the Vietnamese at one point in '68 introduced-- we had seven black soldiers, and they played the race game. They separated the blacks, they gave them double food, and after about a week they figured it out, and they used to send the food over to us-- the extra food. They weren't going to play that game. They told them straight out, we're not playing this game. So they put us back together. But they tried everything, between the political courses and everything, and they tried everything, and it didn't work on anybody.

[00:29:44.61] FRANK ANTON: Once we got to Hanoi, they were using the tap code in all the rooms. But they put Kushner and I far down. For some reason, they took us away from our EM, because they thought we were a bad influence on the EM. And they put-- on one side of us was a recreation room that had books and chess games and checker games in it. And on the other side, I didn't know what it was. So when the other prisoners would start the tap code from three doors away, I found a nail, and I drilled a hole in the wall that I could look through. And it turned out it was the interrogator's room that they'd bring people in. And they found it of course, and I said I didn't do it. But we used the tap code a little, but not very much.

[00:30:29.19] JOE GALLOWAY: How-- describe how that works.

[00:30:31.26] FRANK ANTON: It was just a 5 by 5. It started, you know, one-one was A, and one-two was B, and the guys got so good at it, it was unbelievable. It was like speaking a language.

[00:30:42.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Carrying on a conversation.

[00:30:42.85] FRANK ANTON: They would carry on. And then when it got so bad that they didn't allow them near your room, they used to flash fingers out the windows, and it was amazing. It was amazing the ingenuity of the American Soldier.

[00:31:00.62] FRANK ANTON: The episode where I thought they were going to rescue us stands out. And January 31, 1973, they announced to us that the war was over. And it was funny the way they did it. They said, the war is over. The United States has surrendered, and you'll be going home shortly. And then they had a Vietnamese, and they had about a 60 foot flagpole in the middle of our compound, but they had no way to run it up. He climbed up with the flag in his back pocket and put the flag on upside down. And I'm laughing so hard, and then finally they came to me and they go, what are you laughing at? I said, nothing. Nothing. And they had no idea that the flag was upside down.

[00:31:45.60] FRANK ANTON: Getting there and seeing how dirty it was, and how smelly it was, and what in the world are we going to do with this place? And I look back at it now, and people tell me that they make cars in Quang Ngai and they make other things, and it's almost hard for me to believe. But they're totally under communism, and they always will be now.

[00:32:09.91] FRANK ANTON: The day we went to the airport, we didn't believe it. A couple of times they'd put us on the bus and then bring us back in and say, canceled. The whole thing is canceled. And then they hinted to us that they were going to shoot down the airplanes when we took off. And so that got in our mind. But when they actually took us to the airport, and we waited like two hours, and they offered us food and stuff at the airport, sandwiches, and we didn't want them, we told them no. And then those C-141s came in, and typical Air Force, they came screaming down the runway at about 100 feet, climbed back up, came around and landed. And it was a big show for us.

[00:32:46.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:32:46.99] FRANK ANTON: But that was pretty spectacular. FRANK ANTON: Of course the day I got captured. Even when we were new, I knew we were going to have to crash land, it didn't occur to me that anything-- I figured, I'm going to get us through this. And technically I did, they all crawled out of the aircraft. Three of us had broken backs, but we all crawled out. But when I realized in the morning that there was nothing I could do, and he's pointing a gun at me, and I couldn't run, that was a pretty bad feeling. All three of us survived.

[00:33:25.83] JOE GALLOWAY: All three of you made it.

[00:33:26.58] FRANK ANTON: Amazing.

[00:33:27.21] JOE GALLOWAY: You still in touch with them?

[00:33:28.56] FRANK ANTON: Yes. Yeah.

[00:33:30.45] JOE GALLOWAY: And with others from the camps?

[00:33:32.67] FRANK ANTON: Yes. Once in a great while, we email each other.

[00:33:39.12] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your general impression of our allies, the Filipinos, the Thais?

[00:33:44.31] FRANK ANTON: I was pretty impressed by all of them. I went to Saigon once, and I ran into two Aussies in a bar, and they were making comments about the damn Yanks, this is why we're here, and I got angry. But they calmed me down, bought me a beer. But you know, war is hell, and it really is. The people were OK.

[00:34:02.46] The ARVNs were poorly trained. I flew them several times where they'd pack them in the aircraft and two or three of them would refuse to get off. And when we'd get up to altitude, we'd call up and say, we got three of them still back there. You want us to bring them back to base? They said, no throw them out. Well, that's another story that's a rumor. We never threw them out. We took them back and made them get out.

[00:34:27.03] But they were poorly trained soldiers, that I saw good from them, but-- But the ROKs, the Koreans were ferocious soldiers. And it's kind of funny when I read about the war in Korea, the Americans in Korea said how horrible they were, but in Vietnam they were great. They were hated by the Vietnamese. I saw several of them in the prison camps and they told me right out. They said, they're not going to keep us. They're going to kill us.

[00:34:55.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they?

[00:34:56.82] FRANK ANTON: Most of them, they did. Yes. FRANK ANTON: I never got any news. My dad being an Air Force major at the time-- or colonel by the time I was captured-- he jumped on an airplane from McGuire Air Force Base and went to the Pentagon and got a briefing. And for some reason, they told him through contacts they had in the jungle, that your son's alive, he's in fairly good health, and he's in a prison camp. So he was at least told that. So he knew that I was alive.

[00:35:29.28] JOE GALLOWAY: But you didn't hear a thing from-- ?

[00:35:30.60] FRANK ANTON: No. I never heard a thing from home.

[00:35:31.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever get a package--

[00:35:32.86] FRANK ANTON: No.

[00:35:33.22] JOE GALLOWAY: --from the Red Cross?

[00:35:34.41] FRANK ANTON: I got a package four days before they released me, that had been gone through by the Vietnamese. Never got a-- never got a package.

[00:35:42.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get much news about the war from home or from anywhere else?

[00:35:47.22] FRANK ANTON: No. The only news we got about the war was every day Hanoi Hannah on the radio saying-- and I used to keep track-- they shot down 60 million airplanes and killed 400 million troops, and if you added them all up, it was ridiculous. But that's the only news we really got. I did write one letter home. The 10 line thing, you'd write 10 lines.

[00:36:06.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Did it get there?

[00:36:08.07] FRANK ANTON: The first one had no code in it and it got there. The second two I was allowed to write, one of the other Americans said, I need to borrow your letter. I said, why? He said, I've been through some kind of training. I can't tell you anything about it, but I need to borrow your letter. And he put code in it, and it didn't get home. So somehow they knew.

[00:36:24.66] JOE GALLOWAY: They knew.

[00:36:28.82] FRANK ANTON: March 13, 1973.

[00:36:32.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe what that was like.

[00:36:33.65] FRANK ANTON: Oh, it was absolutely awesome. We got to-- we refueled in Hawaii, and went to the Philippines, and spent three days in the Philippines. And when I got to the Philippines, they said, everybody can call home tonight. They're going to allow you an hour on the phone. So I got ready for that. And then they said, and there's a mess hall open 24 hours a day down on the first floor. And I went down to the mess hall, all 130 pounds of me, and I got in line. And there was an Air Force major there, and she was the police that tell you what not to eat and what to eat, and I said, what? She said, OK, order whatever you want. So she stood there and I said, I want a dozen eggs, a steak, a milkshake, and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. And she said, why don't you get six eggs? I said, OK. So I-- and I ate every bit of it. Didn't have one bit of trouble.

[00:37:29.97] FRANK ANTON: It was wonderful. I got into McGuire, and there were like 20 people on the airplane. And then since my dad was based there, out of the 1,000 people that were there, 500 of them were holding up signs for me. And my cousin and several of my nephews were in the line, and the Airmen there were holding them back, and they said, you know you can't go out there on the tarmac. And my cousin said, sure. And so sure enough there's a famous picture of me with them all mobbing me, and it's in my book in fact.

[00:37:58.86] But they mobbed me, and then the funniest thing-- and one of the funniest things that happened, I had a lieutenant colonel, Army, assigned to me at Fort Monmouth where I was in the hospital for three weeks. And he was there on the tarmac, and he drug me away from my family. He said, oh no, come, we got to go. We got to go. We got to meet your family at Fort Monmouth. I said, well, they're not here? And he said, no. They're waiting for you in the hospital. I said, OK. So we turned around, and I figure he's going to put me in a car. And behind the staff car is three helicopters-- three Army helicopters. And it was half of the Lakehurst flight detachment. And they had heard about it, and they volunteered to come get me.

[00:38:35.05] So one guy, former warrant officer, he was then a captain, his name was Jack Morrissey. And Jack ran over and said to the colonel, I'm going to put Mr. Anton up front. And the colonel said, oh, you can't do that. You can't do that. He said, I'm not going to let him touch anything. I'm just going to put him and let him sit there while I fly. So the colonel said, oh, OK. But don't let him touch nothing.

[00:38:59.52] So within 30 seconds I was flying the helicopter all the way back to Fort Monmouth. He let me fly it. And it's like riding a bicycle, you never forget. But when I landed there, the general met me at Fort Monmouth, and they put me in a car and took me to the hospital. And my mother and father were alone in my hospital room waiting for me, and it was pretty spectacular for a little while. And they never thought they'd see me again, and here I was.

[00:39:25.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Was it difficult readjusting to life after the war?

[00:39:29.01] FRANK ANTON: Tremendously difficult. In the five years I was a POW, I couldn't believe what happened to television. When we got to the Philippines and I saw Johnny Carson and the way he looked, I couldn't believe it. I said, why does everybody look like this? They looked different five years ago. And then the language-- and I went to the racetrack, I was invited to the racetrack in Freehold, New Jersey, and I brought a whole bunch of people, and I could not believe how people talked in front of women. It was just amazing. And nobody else around me could see it because they had generally adapted to it over the years, but they didn't do that. They didn't treat women like that and talk to women like that before I was a POW. And it took a while to get used to. I guess I'm used to it now, but it was weird.

[00:40:17.28] FRANK ANTON: I'd say a lot of positive things happened. I-- I was sort of a troublemaker as a W1 and they said, you made W2 as a POW when your first classmate made W2, you made W3 when your first classmate made W3, and so that was lucky. And I didn't have to go back to Vietnam. Of course it was over by the time I got home, but at the end of my first tour, I was two months from coming home when I got captured and I thought, well, I'm going to have to come back here. I didn't like that. But over the years I'd say-- I met my wife through the thing and it was wonderful. One of the enlisted crew chiefs with me in Chu Lai was-- his sister introduced me to my wife, and we've been married since '74.

[00:41:07.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you stay in the Army?

[00:41:08.76] FRANK ANTON: I stayed in the Army until '87. And at the time, I was a W4 at Patrick Air Force Base, and it was one airplane and two pilots, and we had the greatest job in the world. We'd come in once or twice a week to check the answerphone, and we'd fly the colonel on weekends to Puerto Rico or Miami, wherever he wanted to go. But he was afraid to fly. So if we didn't want to fly, we'd tell him, it's kind of bumpy, sir. And he'd say, I'll drive. I'll drive. So we didn't fly very much.

[00:41:37.23] But I stayed in, and then in July of '87 American Airlines was hiring. So I retired and went immediately to American in Dallas, and took the simulator test for a 727, which I'd never been up front in, and passed it, and went to work for them. And I worked for American for 11 years, and one day they did an eye test on me, and lo and behold, they changed the eye test. And I had been cheating on the eye test my whole time, I couldn't even see it.

[00:42:10.38] And it's funny because it was bad in a way. I'd look out-- we'd be on Miami on 9-Left ready to take off, and the tower would say, 4-6, you got an airplane landing, then after he lands you're clear to take the runway. I'd look to my right and see three airplanes, one on top of the other. But I knew the middle one was the airplane, because I played softball at Patrick, and

when I played the outfield, I'd catch the middle ball, and it would always be there. So I knew the middle airplane was really there. But my eyes were bad by the time they retired me. I had had great eyes my whole life, and it turned bad. And after that they treated me good. They medically retired me, and I've done well.

[00:42:58.57] FRANK ANTON: I just remember the people at Chu Lai. And like I said, I always remember the guys that flew those single ship aircraft. I could not believe they did that. I wanted away from that. And that's why I wanted the guns, I wanted to shoot back. And if they're going to shoot at me, I'm going to shoot at them. And-- but I always remembered how good they were, and how good all the pilots were.

[00:43:25.40] FRANK ANTON: Well, I think greatly of them. I think that the shaft that the Vietnam guys got, it was atrocious. It was a shame. I get sort of mad now when I see the commercials on TV to give \$20 to support a vet. Why should we be doing that? The military and the government should be taking care of their vets, not-- they shouldn't have to depend on us, but they do. And it's good and I do it, but it makes me angry.

[00:43:57.93] FRANK ANTON: It's remembered badly. My son brought home his 10th grade history book in Satellite Beach, Florida there, and all it said was, Vietnam, the war we ever-- the only war we ever lost. That's all it said. It didn't say anything else. But I don't remember losing much over there. Everything we fought, we won.

[00:44:20.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:44:28.79] FRANK ANTON: Believe it or not, I think I did. I met a lot of good people, I saw a lot of hard work, and it was a miracle that I survived. As bad as it was in the jungle, it was a miracle.

[00:44:44.44] JOE GALLOWAY: What does that war mean to you and your generation?

[00:44:47.77] FRANK ANTON: It means quite a bit. I've always said, and I've spoken several times on certain days of the year, and I've always said, we didn't lose the war. The government and the press lost the war. We didn't lose it. But it was a shame.

[00:45:09.40] FRANK ANTON: I'd sure wish they'd look at these current wars different. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. And we don't do it well. We do it halfway.

[00:45:19.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think the political leadership has not learned those lessons?

[00:45:23.94] FRANK ANTON: They haven't learned. No. They haven't learned.

[00:45:32.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration?

[00:45:37.05] FRANK ANTON: I hadn't until Mark and you contacted me, and then I read up on it, and I think it's an absolute wonderful thing to do. It's very smart. If we can show the school-aged children the real deal and the real things that happened, it's all good.

[00:45:53.82] JOE GALLOWAY: And say a fond, welcome home, belatedly.

[00:46:00.09] FRANK ANTON: Thank you.

[00:46:01.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, thank you.

[00:46:02.49] FRANK ANTON: And say that, yes.

[00:46:03.90] JOE GALLOWAY: I appreciate it.

[00:46:05.64] FRANK ANTON: I appreciate your service too. I've read it and seen it.