

Bargewell, Eldon US Army

[00:00:15.28] ELDON BARGEWELL: I was born in Tacoma, Washington, August 1947.

[00:00:18.49] JOE GALLOWAY: '47. Who were your family members?

[00:00:21.37] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I had Mom and Dad. I was raised down in Hoquiam-Aberdeen, Washington area. My dad was a school principal of a grade school. I had a sister who died at age 51 of breast cancer. But I basically was raised the whole time up through high school. And then in a local junior college I went to after high school there until I went in the Army.

[00:00:52.22] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I always was interested in the military, even as a little kid. I mean, I was raised in a very conservative town that had tons of World War II and Korea vets. All my friends' dads had been in the service sometime. We used to play Cowboys and Indians and Americans against the Germans all the time in the neighborhood. And I just always was interested in it.

[00:01:16.10] And in high school, I started watching the news. And I see all these-- I remember distinctly one newscast showed paratroopers from the 101st Airborne somewhere in Vietnam and Westmoreland was talking to them. And kids who were like my age 19-- 18, 19 years old and everything, and I thought, well, jeez, I'm going to probably have to do that sometime.

[00:01:39.17] But it's kind of delayed because I got a football scholarship to play in junior college, a local junior college there. So I went and played for a year. I got my knee injured. They wanted to redshirt me for another year. And at that point, I said, no, I don't think so. I think I'm going to go in the Army. So I joined the Army for airborne infantry.

[00:02:02.91] ELDON BARGEWELL: I had basic at Fort Lewis. And then I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia, for AIT infantry and then to jump school.

[00:02:09.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Fort Benning for jump school?

[00:02:11.27] ELDON BARGEWELL: Fort Benning for jump school. And I remember the last day there, the company got their orders. And they were split about half between 101st Airborne and the 173rd Brigade. And I got orders to the 101st along with a couple of my buddies. The next morning before we were supposed to get on the bus, the first sergeant called me out and said, hey, Bargewell, you're going to a Special Forces training.

[00:02:33.92] I'd taken the test in AIT and I never heard anything about it. I thought, well, maybe I didn't pass the test. So I was here. So they pulled me out of formation and my buddies went off. Unfortunately, two of them got killed in Vietnam. I went to Fort Bragg for Special Forces training in July '67.

[00:02:54.62] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do when you finished Special Forces training? What was your MOS listed as?

[00:02:59.63] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I was initially an 05B radio operator, Morse code. They still taught Morse code on the old AN/GRC-109 back then, the hand crank thing. It's terrible to use. Yeah, I was assigned to 7th Special Forces Group out of Training Group at Fort Bragg. And after about four months in the group-- and it was really kind of a replacement group for Vietnam. Guys were just coming and going. And so we didn't do that much.

[00:03:26.77] So I called Mrs. Alexander up in the Department of the Army and said, hey, please send me to Vietnam. I'm not staying here for the next couple of years. She said, OK. So come-- I guess it was around August of '68, I'd been out of Training Group about six months, I got sent to Vietnam.

[00:03:50.14] ELDON BARGEWELL: Went home on leave to Washington State. Of course, you had the replacement station at Fort Lewis, Washington. So I went up there, or parents took me up there. And I flew military contract air to Cam Ranh Bay. And from Cam Ranh Bay, the 5th Special Forces Group picked up all the SF guys in a truck, took us up to Nha Trang, and we in-processed the 5th Special Forces Group.

[00:04:12.64] JOE GALLOWAY: And where did they assign you?

[00:04:14.83] ELDON BARGEWELL: They assigned me to Command and Control North, Special Operations Group.

[00:04:18.40] JOE GALLOWAY: SOG.

[00:04:19.12] ELDON BARGEWELL: SOG right off the bat.

[00:04:20.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Right off the bat.

[00:04:21.67] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. Now, they had a policy in force then where you could decline to go, but I thought doing reconnaissance kind of stuff was a little more in line with what I thought about doing. So I said, hey, I'll go.

[00:04:34.54] JOE GALLOWAY: That sounds high speed.

[00:04:36.04] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. And we went over-- we had to spend ten days over on Hon Tre Island for the combat operations course, which was just a review, rebluing of patrolling techniques and some other stuff that they learned in Vietnam. And then they flew us up to Da Nang. And I remember getting picked up at the Da Nang airport.

[00:04:57.98] I got there in September about three weeks after the 23 August disaster had already happened. And they picked us up in this black school bus that was shot full of holes. There were holes through the windows, through the doors, through the roof. And I thought, man, what have I got myself into?

[00:05:15.92] JOE GALLOWAY: What am I into now?

[00:05:17.01] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. They took us out to the camp and in-processed, and then I got sent further north into some of the other FOBs. Yeah, that was my introduction to Vietnam was that black bus all shot full of holes.

[00:05:29.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Aye. Your rank by now was sergeant?

[00:05:33.95] ELDON BARGEWELL: No, I was a spec 4.

[00:05:35.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Spec 4.

[00:05:36.04] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. And I was sent to Phu Bai, which is FOB 1. I stayed there about a week. And then they sent me out to a launch site at Mai Loc, which was out fairly close to Cam Lo and LZ Vandergrift.

[00:05:50.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, kind of south of Khe Sanh.

[00:05:53.45] ELDON BARGEWELL: South of Cam Lo. It was kind of a V between Cam Lo and Khe Sanh. I got assigned to a Recon Team or they called them Spike Teams back then, Spike Team Michigan, where I was made the third American on that team, initially.

[00:06:17.74] ELDON BARGEWELL: Up until about '71, all the missions were in Laos or in the DMZ on the North Vietnam side of the river. So my first mission was a reconnaissance mission. I had a team leader named Willoughby that had been a medic there. We went in and spent three days on the ground. We bumped into some bad guys, got into a little tiff with them and called for an out and came out, which was standard procedure not to stay in there and try to run around and get captured or get totally wiped out.

[00:06:48.19] So we came back from that mission. And they came to Willoughby, and he'd just been a team leader a short time and said, hey, we need Chase ship medics. So you're a medic. You're going to have to pull off the team and be a Chase ship medic because they were short Special Forces medic.

[00:07:04.68] It is one of the hardest MOSs to get through. Probably the highest attrition rate within Special Forces is the guys that go in medics. They've got to be really smart guys to get through it. And then I became the de facto team leader of the team because there was no other Americans there. And then they assigned me another American.

[00:07:29.35] And I ran two missions out of Mai Loc. One was a bomb damage assessment, where the B-52s would bomb an area and then they'd send a team right into the base of where the bombs started. And you would basically walk the length of that bombed out area to see if you could pick up any prisoners and all that. And on that particular mission, we didn't find anything but burning wood. So we pulled out after about four hours.

[00:07:57.13] And then I went and ran a reconnaissance mission north of the Ben Hai River that went through the DMZ, north of the river. We got into a fight up there with an NVA platoon or squad or I don't remember how many people there were. There were probably eight or ten at least. And my interpreter got killed, my Montagnard interpreter got killed, got shot right through the face. We managed to run and get out of there, get out of that one and came back down to Mai Loc.

[00:08:27.92] I ran one mission in Laos where it was-- Eldest Son was the name of the program. And it was taking ammunition in to a landing zone, that the ammunition had been fixed to blow up when it was fired through a rifle or a mortar round or hand grenades. So we would stage a firefight on the LZ, make a lot of noise, shoot up the woods and all that stuff and leave all that stuff off, in the LZ.

[00:09:02.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Leave all that stuff in the LZ.

[00:09:04.20] ELDON BARGEWELL: So the thought process was, well, the NVA that are in the woods over there someplace will hear this firefight and think-- and we also took a couple of guys that had AK-47s. So you could shoot the AK-47s. They could hear that. And they could hear the pop-pop of the M16 too.

[00:09:18.20] And the theory was, then they would come investigate the LZ and pick up all that stuff and take it with them, thinking we were bringing it in there to somebody or bringing it in to use. Now whether or not that happened-- but I did hear reports of-- at one point, like in '69, there was a report came in and said that the NVA

were almost afraid to use any ammo they found that they didn't know where it came from. So I guess it had some effect.

[00:09:47.37] JOE GALLOWAY: It must have had some effect.

[00:09:48.82] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. I don't know how-- it didn't stop them. There was a river in Laos that had people floating barrels of gasoline or diesel down and they had these river watch guys with a long pole that would shove that stuff back in as they got caught up on the sides. Our mission was to go in and swim out there and grab one of these barrels and pull it in and put a fuse that they had made. You unscrew the top and put the fuse in it and put the real top back on.

[00:10:20.04] JOE GALLOWAY: And out it back in the river.

[00:10:21.18] ELDON BARGEWELL: Put it back in the water. And we did that with three or four barrels because the theory being, it'll float down there. Wherever they're bringing it out, they'll pick it up and carry it to their storage point--

[00:10:30.00] JOE GALLOWAY: POL dump. Yeah.

[00:10:31.11] ELDON BARGEWELL: And the fuses were like 48 to 72 hours. So this theory was, again, it would get to that storage point in that time. And they'd blow up everything.

[00:10:41.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. You reckon it worked?

[00:10:44.58] ELDON BARGEWELL: I don't recall ever getting a report whether it did or not. Now, there was another team that did the same thing. And I think I heard that there's-- the Air Force verified that theirs did blow up a bunch of-- I think they were on trucks when they blew, carrying them south. So anyway, that was just-- that was really-- it's the only time I ever heard anybody in that other team running that kind of mission.

[00:11:07.71] But they ran the Eldest Son program for quite a while until I think about '70, '71. And I don't know what happened. We had one team that went in on an Eldest Son mission into Laos. And that H-34 Vietnamese Kingbee got shot down and every one of them were killed, six Americans, three crew led by a major. And they recovered the bodies about 2002, I think. And they were all buried in a single grave up in Arlington. Yeah, that was a bad day.

[00:11:44.79] Once I finished those missions at Mai Loc, it was probably by then like the end of November. And they said, OK, we're closing Mai Loc down. We no longer

need this as a launch site. Everybody's moving back to Phu Bai, FOB 1, and we'll launch out of Phu Bai and they're going to build another launch site up in Quang Tri. And I don't know why, because that's way above my level at the time.

[00:12:06.98] So I moved back to Phu Bai. I ran one mission out of Phu Bai, a reconnaissance mission. And I'm staying in five or six days on that one. I didn't hardly see anybody. And I came out of there and got back from that mission. We barely unpacked when we got there from Mai Loc. They said, now, all these teams are moving to Da Nang, FOB 4 in Da Nang. So we packed all our stuff up and moved to Da Nang. And I stayed in Da Nang from January until September '69, to when I left Vietnam.

[00:12:37.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Now all this time, you're SOG?

[00:12:40.97] ELDON BARGEWELL: Recon.

[00:12:41.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Recon.

[00:12:42.50] ELDON BARGEWELL: Recon Team Michigan that whole first year and ran--

[00:12:45.81] JOE GALLOWAY: That was your one tour. You did a second?

[00:12:48.90] ELDON BARGEWELL: I did a second tour in Recon Company.

[00:12:56.62] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, actually, I got out of the Army in September of '69 and went home. I got a job working in the paper mill that I had before I went in the Army in the summers.

[00:13:07.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Out in Washington State.

[00:13:08.17] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah, in Hoquiam. I was sergeant, E-5, but I got out. I thought, well, maybe this isn't what I want to do. And I went back. I had thoughts again about playing football in college. I went home, got the job. After about three months, I said, I miss my buddies too much.

[00:13:29.95] And I'd heard stories come back. Guys had come through the replacement center at Fort Lewis and call my parents' house and say, tell him so and so got killed, so and so is missing. And it just kind of got to me. And I said, I'm not doing this anymore. So I went down and joined the Army again. And they sent me straight back to Fort Bragg in 7th Group.

[00:13:49.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they give you your rank back?

[00:13:51.49] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yep, because I'd been-- I'd hadn't been out over six months. So I got my E-5 rank back. And then I went to 7th Group for about another six months. During that time, I went to Ranger school. I came back from that and made the phone call again and told them I want to go back to Vietnam.

[00:14:08.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Called Mrs. A and said, get me orders to Vietnam.

[00:14:15.88] ELDON BARGEWELL: I went back to Vietnam. I made staff sergeant, E-6 within a couple of months when I got there. And I went right back into Recon Company in Da Nang because I asked to go there.

[00:14:25.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Back to SOG?

[00:14:26.55] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yup. And I became initially the assistant team leader for RT Bushmaster. My best friend, David Robinson, had been working there as the isolation NCOIC. And I said, well, I'll start up a team again, because there wasn't a team. And a lot of our old Montagnards from Michigan, my team Michigan, were over in the Hatchet Force. So he wouldn't recruit at all then back on the team.

[00:14:51.16] And he was an E-7 and I was an E-6. And he said, yeah, but you've got all these missions. You should be the team leader. I said, yeah, OK, I can do that. Because there was some rank difference there between who was the-- we had teams that the team sergeant-- team leader was a sergeant and one was a lieutenant. So it wasn't a big deal.

[00:15:09.08] JOE GALLOWAY: It wasn't a big deal.

[00:15:10.06] ELDON BARGEWELL: The company commander at that time was a kind of conventional, dyed in the wool guy. He says, no, the E-7 he's got the rank. He's in charge. I said, OK, I don't have a problem with that, because I knew eventually they'd moved me to another team as a team leader or whatever. So we ran one mission, got into a firefight, got run all over the place, chased, came back from that, and he quit. He said, I can't do this.

[00:15:33.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Ain't going to do it.

[00:15:34.37] ELDON BARGEWELL: So I became the team leader again after the first mission for the rest of my tour in SOG, which ended in September '72. I ran, I think, eight missions eight or nine missions. On the eighth one, I got shot up real bad. And so I was out of action for like six weeks. Team didn't do anything until I healed

up. And then I run a couple of more. And then by about December, end of November, December '71 is when MACV and MACV-SOG headquarters shut down running the missions. And that's it, no more missions.

[00:16:13.13] JOE GALLOWAY: No more missions.

[00:16:14.12] ELDON BARGEWELL: And so we had one last mission. It went in around the first of December, end of November. And I had a really good lieutenant named Slifka from Montana that died. He drowned in the river of all things. The helicopter had a mechanical failure. And the pilot put it down in the river. And it sunk right up above the-- right up where the rotor blade goes into the ceiling.

[00:16:41.00] And one of the Montagnards fell off, and the Montagnards couldn't swim. They grew up in the mountains, and they'd go in streams and stuff, but they weren't swimmers. So he dives in with all his 60 pounds web gear on, which kind of surprised me because he was Ranger qualified, where you tell you take that stuff off and let it go.

[00:16:59.00] But I'm thinking the guy must have thought he was strong enough to swim that river and grab that Yard. And then if he came out 300 or 400 meters down the river, he'd have his ammunition and weapon with him, but it pulled him under. And he managed to push the Yard back up on the tail boom because it was kind of sticking out of the water. And the Yard grabbed the tail boom and hung on there. And he floated on down the river.

[00:17:21.92] JOE GALLOWAY: And drowned.

[00:17:22.35] ELDON BARGEWELL: He drowned. The next day, they sent a bright light rescue team in there and found his body floating down in the shallows. I think that was the last guy that was killed at CCN on a recon mission or died on a recon mission. And he was a really good lieutenant, which we didn't have that many great lieutenants back then, but he was good.

[00:17:46.79] ELDON BARGEWELL: They were some of the greatest guys in the world. I mean, we had people from all spectrums of life. And we had guys from East LA and guys from the Northeast that went to boarding school. I mean, it's just a--

[00:17:58.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Everything.

[00:17:58.91] ELDON BARGEWELL: Everybody all mixed together, and everybody generally was pretty good. Yeah, there were a few slackers in there, but they didn't last long. They either got fired or they quit because they knew they couldn't deal with

it. But it's just like today having this reunion here and seeing all the guys. I mean, I spent more time in the military after Vietnam, of course, than I did in Vietnam with these guys, but that's where my roots were.

[00:18:22.67] And I still have so much time for them. And they're just really down-to-earth, good people. Yeah, there's some crazy guys in there. And they drink too much, and they do all that kind of stuff, but they're still really great Americans and great patriots, and really enjoyed what they did for their country.

[00:18:48.33] ELDON BARGEWELL: Generally, I thought the company commanders, Recon Company commanders that I had at that time were good, really good. Of course, you had staff officers that worked on the staff there and S3 and all that. I didn't really know them that much. Quite frankly, I'm thinking back to where I was thinking like an E-5 and an E-6 versus how I would think about people as a general looking at a colonel. We were not ever really pleased with our commanders at the lieutenant colonel and colonel level. They just didn't seem to understand what we were doing out there, or what we were going through. And maybe it was a bit of--

[00:19:30.93] JOE GALLOWAY: They were mainly straight leg guys.

[00:19:33.72] ELDON BARGEWELL: They had to send us out. So it was like, you got to go. And some areas in Laos were just impossible for anybody to go into and come out alive. I mean, we knew that. But Saigon kept tasking us. And one of those areas was called Oscar 8. And I went into Oscar 8 one time and I ran for my life for three days because there were just so many NVA in there. That was a major headquarters for that 593d support group the NVA had to maintain the trail. And that was their main area. And there were just thousands of them in there. And we would go in there and call in airstrikes for two or three hours, and then start running.

[00:20:13.43] But anyway, the leadership, I just really was never that pleased with the leadership. Now, we had some at the major level, like Clyde Sincere and Major Shelton that were really good. But at the lieutenant colonel and above, I just-- and it was kind of later in years, I think back on that time as I was going up through the ranks, the battalion commander and Delta commander and all that about these guys. And we hear a lot about the greatest generation. All these guys are from the greatest generation military.

[00:20:48.28] So I always wondered if, are these the guys that stayed in because they couldn't do anything else, and all the good guys got out? I really didn't understand it because all of the commanders of CCN when I was there had either been a World War II or Korean War vet. And they obviously made it through all that. And I don't know if they were lieutenants and captains back in the '40s and '50s, but they just didn't

seem to understand what it was that we should be doing and didn't seem to have any empathy.

[00:21:16.57] But again, I'm thinking back what I think like an E-5 looking up. And that's not all-- you don't see the big picture. You just see your own little world and wonder about yourself and who's taking care of you. And it's probably not a fair assessment. There's only one that I really-- I know was bad. The rest of them, I just-- they just were kind of there. They didn't have much to do with us.

[00:21:41.95] We had one when I was first there, and the troops loved him, but he was an alcoholic. I mean, he didn't go to work half the time. And it's like, yeah, he's a great guy. He loves us. He comes down to the Recon club and buys us beer and talks to us about our missions and all that. But he's drunk all the time. So you kind of wonder, what the heck's going on here? But that's just-- that was Vietnam.

[00:22:11.28] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I guess I'd have to say the worst day is when I took my Recon Team in-- this is April '69. It was April '69. No. My worst day was in September '71. I took my Recon Team in to what they said was they thought was a regimental bunker complex on this ridgeline. So we landed about 1,000, 1,500 meters away from that area that the AST-- the assessment people-- said there was a bunker line in there. And they wanted to see what it consisted of and how large it was and all this other stuff.

[00:22:52.18] And so we landed about a klick-and-a-half away. One of my Yards, jumping out of the helicopter-- we were jumping out like eight feet from the ground. He jumped out, broke his arm. We all got on the ground. Helicopter takes off. He comes up to me and his arm is out like this. And he says, hey, trung si, I broke my arm. I said, oh crap.

[00:23:13.36] So I got on the horn and called one of the helicopters to come back in and pick him up. It took them about 15 minutes to get organized out there and come back in. And in the meantime, the NVA fired some mortar rounds kind of close. I mean, they landed maybe 400 or 500 meters away in the jungle. And I didn't think anything about it. I thought, well, they must have heard us come in like they normally do. We're close enough to them. They hear the helicopters.

[00:23:38.53] So they came in, picked him back up. And we took off and went up towards the ridgeline about a klick away. And we got into this bunker complex. The first couple of bunkers were empty. I moved up this trail inside this bunker complex. And lo and behold, I got just looking above where it went up, there's six NVA sitting around the table playing cards. I thought, oh shit, I get a prisoner here. That's a big deal.

[00:24:06.32] So I got down and had one Montagnard by me, and we started crawling up. Well, when our heads popped above that visual line on the ground with that-- it was like a regular picnic table, one of the NVA saw me and he jumped up and ran into the bunker and yelled something at the other one. And we just started shooting hoping we could hit somebody and wound them. We started shooting and took them out.

[00:24:33.31] We killed a couple. A few more got into the bunker. And we went on up. We could see their weapons sitting down there. We caught them flat footed. And thinking back on it, I thought, well, they fired them-- they probably fired the mortars. And then when they heard the helicopter come back in, they probably figured we left. So they were just fat-cattin' up there. And they were probably support guys maintaining the bunker complex. Fortunately, for us, there wasn't a regiment in that bunker complex or a company or we would have been all dead.

[00:25:01.21] I went through that. But what I found-- I went into one of the bunkers and found this circular tube map case. And I pulled the top off of it. And I pulled it out just a little bit. And I could see it was a line drawn on the map with little exes and stuff on it. I thought, well, this might be locations or something. So I put it back in there. I took that. I took a bunch of stuff.

[00:25:22.24] I cut out of that bunker, and there was an AK-47 vest laying there on the ground, leaning up against the edge of the bunker. I thought, well, shit, I'll just grab it and take it as a souvenir. So I threw it over my head. It's an AK vest. Remember what those look like. And they had steel magazines. There's three magazines in it. And the guy had American hand grenades in two of the pockets.

[00:25:43.45] So I went around the corner of the next bunker and a guy jumps up and shot me right in the chest. It went in that magazine and glanced off. It went through the edge of the hand grenade. It made a burrow hole right through the edge of the hand grenade. It didn't go off. And it pushed the spring through the magazine into my chest. It put a big bruise on my chest and knocked me down.

[00:26:05.62] I didn't-- I wasn't considered wounded with a bullet in me, but it certainly got my attention. And I thought back about that years and years, how lucky I was because it was between picking up that magazine AK-47 vest, putting it around my neck and moving another five feet and a guy shot me. And if I hadn't have done that--

[00:26:26.02] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd have been a dead man.

[00:26:27.31] ELDON BARGEWELL: I'd have been a dead man. So that, to me, was probably-- that and the significance of the map we found. What they found, that was a

map that showed every logistics support base on the Ho Chi Minh Trail all the way down.

[00:26:42.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:26:42.76] ELDON BARGEWELL: And so that next day or two, the B-52 just targeted every one of those sites. Even though it wasn't-- there was not map coordinates on there, the mensuration guys or the map wizards up at headquarters were able to fit that line to where it went on the trail. And it was only about 100 miles of the trail, but that was significant.

[00:27:01.72] I went and took it in. All that intel went to General Stilwell at 24th Corps, which was the high corps kind of command. He sent word to the camp to send me and my two teammates in there to talk to him. So we went in. We were all grubby and dirty right out of the FOB. And he was real nice. He talked to us and said, hey, this is significant. This is the biggest piece of intel we've gotten in years here. He was very thankful to it and real nice about it. And we left.

[00:27:37.80] We went back to Da Nang, but that-- I mean, I had a worst day when I got my Distinguished Service Cross as far as getting shot up and everything, but that day stands out to me as probably one of the best missions I ever ran because I found that piece of intel. We didn't get a prisoner though. They went down in their bunker holes. And I wasn't sending one of my Yards down those holes to get them. It wasn't worth that much. So anyway, but that was it.

[00:28:07.65] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, by '71, the NVA had taken over so much of the area out there along the Laotian northern South Vietnamese border. We were no longer running missions into Laos. They were all like on the inside-- 30 mile strip on the inside of the South Vietnamese border because that's where all the NVA were.

[00:28:32.74] And because of the amount of NVA that were in there, we were starting to send in-- we'd send in two teams together with a lot of firepower because there were companies roaming around out there, and we were losing Recon Teams right and left. So I went in with RT Kansas. And I was a team leader of RT Bushmaster and RT Kansas team leader was George Cottrell. They put him in charge.

[00:28:58.84] So we decided we wanted to carry a machine gun, so we could keep people off our backs better. Well, I never did like the M60 machine gun because it was always having problems. So I took in a Russian RPD machine gun with the barrel sawed off. And I had ten of those round magazines on it and one in the weapon. I carried them all in the old one quart water canteen pouches.

[00:29:30.20] So we went in. When we landed on the LZ, we walked about 50 meters. A word came up from the tail gunner that two NVA were following us. And that was kind of a normal thing they did. They would follow and track you. So we moved and it was late in the afternoon when we got started. So we only moved about a klick-and-a-half And it got dark. We set up a R-O-N perimeter.

[00:29:53.38] Well, that night, we could hear them coming in, moving in on us. We could hear them talking. We thought, well, crap's going to be on in the morning. So we all got ready. And when it first started getting that gray light you get in the morning, we knew it was coming. And sure enough, boom, the RPG comes right in the middle of the perimeter.

[00:30:13.78] It made it through all the trees. And we were in this bamboo stand and tree stands. It was really thick, but it made it through, showered everywhere with shrapnel. I got wounded the first time with the shrapnel there. And they assaulted. And they came right in to where I had my machine gun. So I let it rip and went through five magazines of them coming in, and none of them made it to the perimeter.

[00:30:36.04] I had two guys. Two of them made it within about five yards of where I was. We had one Yard killed in that-- when they assaulted, and another one wounded. They backed off. And the Yard said they could hear them yelling at each other. And one of them was yelling for their company commander to come up.

[00:30:55.70] So it was probably a company. Although their companies were not more than about 50, 60 guys. I mean, they weren't large as American companies are supposed to be anyway. So I told George, I said, George we can't take it to-- another one of these very long. We were out of ammo. So we need to move. So we booked out the back towards an LZ we saw that was kind of down in the valley and called in A-1E Skyraiders with a Covey overhead.

[00:31:27.44] And the funny thing about the Covey, it wasn't-- the FAC rider wasn't the Covey plane. It was supposed to be covering me. It was another guy way down south named John Plaster. And he heard our Prairie-- we had a code-- our code name was Prairie Fire. If you called Prairie Fire to the airborne triple C circling overhead that meant that you were in dire trouble. And if somebody didn't come to get you up, you weren't coming back.

[00:31:51.77] JOE GALLOWAY: You weren't returning.

[00:31:52.52] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I called the Prairie Fire. George was running around trying to organize this perimeter down on the LZ. They assaulted

again on the perimeter-- towards our perimeter again. A little bit from a distance like, 100 meters away, they were just shooting at us.

[00:32:10.03] I was laying down behind this big piece of bamboo, a bamboo stalk, and it was-- those things were hard rock when they got that big. And a bullet went through that and it obviously slowed it down a whole lot. And the bullet fragmented. It entered my left cheek. It went through. It severed my nasal artery and lodged underneath my eye.

[00:32:30.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, that sounds like it hurt.

[00:32:34.25] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah, it did. It was like somebody hit me with a two-by-four initially, but then I kind of recovered from it and everything. And I could tell-- I wasn't bleeding that much on the outside, but I could tell something was going on the inside. So we fought off another couple of assaults. And we finally got on the helicopters and got out of there.

[00:32:51.92] By the time I got back to the FOB, I was going into shock because what it did, it severed my nasal artery. It was just bleeding inside my throat. And I was just swallowing mouthfuls of blood. So they got me-- they finally got me to the 95th Evac in Da Nang and almost lost me there, but got me back. And I stayed in the hospital a couple of days.

[00:33:14.66] It's funny. At the hospital, the doctors-- I remember I was kind of woozy laying there, and I was throwing up and everything. And two young doctors came in and I could hear them talking about-- they're saying, we're going to have to cut his nose off. We'll just cut down here and lay it back, and we'll go in there and pinch that artery.

[00:33:31.82] This older doctor, old to me-- he was probably 40. I was like 25, 26. He comes in and said, what the heck are you guys doing? Well, we're going to cut his nose off. He said, no, you're not. He goes, runs out, comes back with his tray. And he's got these two tubes about the size of a number two pencil. And he shoves them up my nose. And it felt like he was shoving a hammer up my nose. And he pumped them up with air, and it shut off the blood.

[00:33:57.53] After they put in a bunch of blood in me and a bunch of IVs and stuff, I got OK from it. But from that mission based on what I did with the machine gun and carrying-- helped carrying a Yard that was wounded out of there, I guess they thought that's why I should have got that medal. So I got that medal.

[00:34:12.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Sounds righteous to me. Even if it's only for the nose.

[00:34:17.64] ELDON BARGEWELL: I know. He explained to me later when I got OK the next day back normal, he said, yeah, this is what was going on. It severed your nasal artery. And I still get x-rays at the dentist, and I can see that piece of bone. It's like half the AK round that fractured off the front end of it. About half of it is what went through there.

[00:34:36.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Is it still in there?

[00:34:38.61] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah, it embedded in the cheekbone right here. It didn't go through my skull. So it's just sitting in there. And it's dissolved over the years. I remember back-- after Vietnam, I got teeth X-rayed for something, and it looked pretty large. And then ten years ago, I got another one. And it's a lot smaller. So it's starting to-- your body acid eats it up a little bit, I guess.

[00:35:01.78] ELDON BARGEWELL: I have to say that mission I talked about finding that intel thing as far as military operations, that was the best operation, best mission I ran. I ran a lot of missions where we went in, moved around, got in firefights with the NVA and had to come out. So I mean, those were all kind of the same. And there's a lot of high adrenaline going on with all those missions and everything, but that mission had to be probably the best one.

[00:35:26.17] And then just being in there with the guys. I had another bad day. And it happened inside the camp where a guy ran over the rucksack of-- sitting on an LZ, ran over-- it was a PSP pad LZ at our camp where the helicopters landed. And two Recon Teams, four Americans were out there. And the isolation NCOIC had brought another team out of isolation on the pad.

[00:35:56.83] There was already a team on the LZ pad. And they had laid their rucksacks out. One guy laid his out kind of out away from the other group. Well, when the guy left in the pickup, he ran over the rucksack, set off an M14 toe popper mine, which set off the Claymore. And the Claymore was facing into the rucksack right towards all these Montagnards waiting to go and wiped them out.

[00:36:19.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Wiped them out.

[00:36:21.20] ELDON BARGEWELL: And killed-- severely wounded one American, the guy that had quit my team six months before that had gone to the Hatchet Force. He was out there for whatever reason. It really messed him up, and he got medevacked. But those kinds of things-- we were talking about them in the reunion,

outside of the operation, things that happen, people that died for senseless reasons that you just kind of go, why? It's that survivor's guilt stuff.

[00:36:49.76] One of the best guys we had died swimming at the beach there in Da Nang. I mean, that happens. But, why him? Why did he go out there and go swimming and have the current take him out and he drowned? So those were days that were bad days, but then there was good days when teams were rescued out of a really bad situation.

[00:37:11.25] I went on a few Bright Lights that were unsuccessful and the fact, we could never find the guys and later found out that they'd been killed. And the NVA had buried them someplace. And some of them were found. Some of them have never been found. I think my SOG unit, CCN, CCC, CCS still have 50 people missing.

[00:37:33.26] And I told my son, I said, you guys, you did a lot of stuff and all that. And the Army's a lot better not leaving any bodies out there because it's a Middle Eastern terrain, they're a little easier to find than in the jungle. I mean, you can be in the jungle and be out 200 meters off and you'll miss an elephant.

[00:37:52.94] So I said, we still have 50 missing. I said, can you imagine if one-- and SOG was about the size of a SF Group, not counting the Montagnards. It's a little bit larger counting them. Can you imagine one of the SF, say 5th Group that goes into Iraq and Afghanistan all the time had 50 people missing today?

[00:38:13.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my God.

[00:38:14.48] ELDON BARGEWELL: The government would be going berserk. And it'd be the same thing, people--

[00:38:19.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, quite rightly.

[00:38:20.27] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah, people would be standing in front of the White House. Families and everybody else going, what the heck's going on here? Now Vietnam, there's still 1,200 or 1,300 missing overall. But for our one unit, there's still 50 missing.

[00:38:33.23] JOE GALLOWAY: 50 missing.

[00:38:34.13] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. And we know some of them. The way that they went missing, we'll probably never find them. It's just-- that's the way it is.

[00:38:49.28] ELDON BARGEWELL: Virtually none.

[00:38:51.20] JOE GALLOWAY: I thought that was the case.

[00:38:53.21] ELDON BARGEWELL: I went to Recondo school and there was a Korean team there. But we didn't-- they didn't speak English. We didn't speak Korean. So we didn't know-- I mean, SOG had Vietnamese, South Vietnamese special forces, LLDB guys that were advisers, and a couple of Vietnamese teams, but I never worked with them. I worked with Montagnards my whole time there.

[00:39:18.91] ELDON BARGEWELL: Virtually none with the military. I didn't have a Vietnamese team. I saw them around the compound. I had a lot of contact with the Vietnamese women, but that's another story.

[00:39:29.51] JOE GALLOWAY: That's another story.

[00:39:32.05] ELDON BARGEWELL: I worked with Montagnards solely in my two tours and they were great soldiers, great warriors. In fact, when I went back to Vietnam three years ago, I was able to find my Montagnard team leader up in Khe Sanh village.

[00:39:47.14] JOE GALLOWAY: I'll be damned.

[00:39:47.86] ELDON BARGEWELL: He's still alive. He's 62 years old.

[00:39:50.44] JOE GALLOWAY: That's old for a Montagnard.

[00:39:52.30] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. I think he was like 16 when he was my team leader. And came-- a Catholic priest in Khe Sanh village went to his Montagnard village out on Route 9 close to the border, brought him and his family into the church. And me and my assistant team leader spent the whole day with him. That was one of my best days in the last 10, 20 years, just to be able to see him.

[00:40:15.24] JOE GALLOWAY: How is he doing?

[00:40:17.12] ELDON BARGEWELL: He's actually doing pretty good. He looked pretty healthy. His wife was sick all the time, he said. And they have this thing where you had to pay like 150 American dollar equivalent to get into the Vietnamese hospital. And she had some kind of internal problems. They couldn't do it.

[00:40:33.08] And we intended-- not because of that, we intended to do it anyway-- we gave him probably \$1,000 between me and my assistant team leader. More money than he'd probably seen in five years. But we told him, get your wife in the hospital,

and then get whatever you got. He brought two teenagers-- 12, maybe 20-something-- kids with him.

[00:40:49.85] And he was surprised how-- they wanted to talk to us and talk to us about iPhones and stuff. These are Montagnard 20-somethings. I mean, they're already kind of westernized in that sense. And they took down our phone numbers and we took down theirs. And I tried texting the daughter a message, and some connection didn't work. So it never worked out.

[00:41:10.46] But they were all interested in that and what was going on in America and talking about movies. They'd seen movies in Khe Sanh, American movies. They'd come down from their village and go to the movies. That, and the way that we were-- when I was on this trip, the way the South Vietnamese people treated us very well when we were there. They were very friendly.

[00:41:30.98] And they just kept asking us, why don't more Americans come here, more Americans come here? And I explained to them, I said, you've got beautiful beaches. You've got great hotels here, luxury hotels. But I said, it's a long ways to go. And Americans can go to Mexico or Caribbean or Europe in eight hours and have beautiful beaches, but it's 20 hours to get here. And it's very expensive, I said. But it is very beautiful there.

[00:41:55.28] JOE GALLOWAY: It's gorgeous.

[00:41:56.12] ELDON BARGEWELL: And I just ran-- right where Recon Company sat there next to the Da Nang Bay is a Japanese luxury resort, right through the middle of where Recon Company used to sit. And we went over there and walked in. And they kind of all looked at us. And it was all Japanese tourists. And we walked in there and looked around. And they kind of looked at us like, what are you guys doing in here? But we just wanted to see out to the beach, because that's where Recon Company was. And of course, it's all built up in that area, but anyway--

[00:42:29.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Just letters?

[00:42:30.69] ELDON BARGEWELL: Not much. I got a letter about once a month from my parents. I tried one time to do the MARS station thing. And that didn't work. That thing was screwed up. So I gave up on that. But about once a month, I'd get a letter. I'd write them about once a month. I went on R&R to Hawaii in April '69 and called them from there.

[00:42:55.89] But really, it's nothing like today. I mean, my son is in Iraq. I talk to him on internet, texting every day. When I was in Iraq, the deputy chief of staff for

operations for General Casey, I had a satellite phone. I could pick it up and call my wife. She answered the phone like I was like next door. So, totally different world today about that.

[00:43:19.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. They get on the computer and talk back and forth all the time.

[00:43:22.53] ELDON BARGEWELL: My son does FaceTime with his two little kids all the time when he's deployed. Of course, you got to watch the opposite thing about doing it, where you are and what you're doing and all that, but as long as you stay away from those subjects and just talk. I think it helps them a lot.

[00:43:37.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Well, they got to have something. They're doing eight or ten or twelve combat tours.

[00:43:44.59] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. My son's been nine or ten times. Now, his first two tours were one year apiece when he was with the Corps LLRP unit. And then when he got into Delta, they go for like four months and come back for six. Go for four, back for six. But it's still a grind. I mean, six month out, four months in, come back, try to get settled in, get used to being married and all that kind of stuff that goes on, coming back into the house, and then they're getting ready to go again. It's wearing on him.

[00:44:18.16] JOE GALLOWAY: It wears.

[00:44:18.97] ELDON BARGEWELL: I almost-- I was talking to the commander there. And I said, I almost think the one year tours in Vietnam were probably better because once you got there and you got-- you said, OK, I'm going to be here for a year. And I just got to let the family go. I'll write them a letter or whatever, and just kind of just forget about it in a way, and just get on with your job for a year and then go back. These guys, they're just in and out all the time.

[00:44:45.07] So I don't know if that's a good way to do it. They think it is, the four-month. They used to do six months. Now, they do four months. There's probably some benefit to that, but I'm not quite sure what that is. Maybe they're not away from families for a whole year. Of course, as you know, during Vietnam, at least Fort Bragg, all the families went home. There very few of them stayed, unless you're married to a local Fayetteville girl. They all just went home. Now, it's not like that.

[00:45:14.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Go home to mama.

[00:45:15.31] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. Now, they all stay in their houses or their quarters, and they just stay there.

[00:45:19.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, when Hal Moore deployed as a battalion commander, they gave Julie 30 days to clear post. Get off. Get out.

[00:45:31.02] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. They stay on post and most of them didn't want to stay off post without a husband in those times. And so they just went home to mama like you said. It's not like that now. They're getting ensconced in that house in Fayetteville. They ain't moving for nothing. So that's good, though.

[00:45:47.07] JOE GALLOWAY: That's good.

[00:45:47.80] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah.

[00:45:48.64] JOE GALLOWAY: When you were deployed, how much news did you get about the war you were fighting, Stars and Stripes?

[00:45:56.56] ELDON BARGEWELL: Stars and Stripes, that was about it.

[00:45:57.94] JOE GALLOWAY: That was about it.

[00:45:58.78] ELDON BARGEWELL: And it was mostly about the major infantry operations and a little bit on politics. And quite frankly, at that age, mid-20s, we didn't pay much attention to it.

[00:46:08.32] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't care what was going on back home?

[00:46:12.01] ELDON BARGEWELL: We'd read about the riots and stuff like that, but we didn't have-- we had a few black guys in SOG. I think we had one or two in Recon Company, some in support, but that was never a problem. They never got upset about all that stuff going on in Detroit. And the antiwar demonstrations, we, of course, said they're all a bunch of communists.

[00:46:35.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course.

[00:46:36.80] ELDON BARGEWELL: We didn't pay a whole lot of attention about that. It was way above our intellectual interest at that point in our lives.

[00:46:51.50] JOE GALLOWAY: And that second tour, that was your last Vietnam tour?

[00:46:55.19] ELDON BARGEWELL: Right.

[00:46:55.52] JOE GALLOWAY: And you left at what rank?

[00:46:57.98] ELDON BARGEWELL: Staff sergeant, E-6.

[00:46:59.30] JOE GALLOWAY: E-6?

[00:47:00.05] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah.

[00:47:01.52] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you come to get a commission?

[00:47:04.61] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, when I was there on the second tour, the company commander and the CCN commander, I guess they liked what they saw in me running missions and said, you really should go to OCS. And some of the officers were saying, yeah, he's just as good as any of us. And I think he could do that.

[00:47:25.80] So I was going to apply for OCS over there. And they told me, well, you got to have a board. You got to do all this. And it's probably wouldn't happen by the time you're going to leave here. So I got sent to Fort Devens, Massachusetts in 10th Group, 10th Special Forces Group and started all the paperwork again. I had a lot of support from my team sergeant, Master Sergeant Billy Boggs, and went to the board, passed the board, and got assigned to OCS.

[00:47:52.11] And at that time, we only had to have-- I had two years of college credits equivalent. I think you only had to have a year to get into OCS. So I went into OCS in-- six-month infantry OCS. I think it was the last or second to last six-month infantry OCS they had there. And I graduated in April '73.

[00:48:16.50] I finished high enough in my class to get my choice of assignments. So I thought, well, I've been gone from my-- I haven't seen my parents much since six and a half years of my enlisted time. So I'll go to Fort Lewis and be in the 9th ID. So I said, OK, I'll just be a regular infantry platoon leader. That's what they trained me for. That's what they hired me for. No problem.

[00:48:34.26] And I didn't want to go back to the Special-- I could have gone back to Special Forces as second lieutenant, but there was too many-- my buddy was saying things were really bad at Fort Bragg. And they weren't doing anything. And guys were getting in trouble. And just, it wasn't good during the '70s.

[00:48:51.49] So I went to Fort Lewis. And I was standing in the PX the first day I was there buying some stuff, and a captain walked up to me, and I looked at him. And it's my old teammate from Vietnam who was an E-7, Joe Conlon, at that time. He had

gone to OCS. He was assigned to the old B Company, 75th Infantry LRRPs that was at Fort Lewis, 7th Corps LRRPs.

[00:49:14.16] They'd been at Fort Carson. They got so much trouble there the CG got them thrown out of Fort Carson. They moved to Fort Lewis. They were just getting in there when I got up there. And he said, what are you doing? I said, well, I'm going to the 9th Division. He said, no, no, you need to come in the LRRPs.

[00:49:27.69] JOE GALLOWAY: You need to be in the LRRPs.

[00:49:28.98] ELDON BARGEWELL: So I went in the LRRP-- was a LRRP platoon leader for two years. And then from there, I went to the Ranger Battalion for three years. So that's kind of how I progressed up through the infantry stuff. Now, when I finished my time in the 2d Ranger Battalion-- and I'd been out of the Ranger Battalion nine months as an aide to the Brigadier General Cothai, who was the deputy commander of Fort Lewis. And I went back to the Rangers as XO for Jim Dubik, who is a retired three star now.

[00:50:01.35] But you had to have a company before being a Ranger company commander. It had to be your second company. So I said, OK, I'm going to go to the 9th ID and get a company, which I did. I ended up working for Glenn Marsh, probably the best battalion commander, best leader I ever had.

[00:50:16.95] It was straight leg infantry, we didn't have a dime to do anything. And we walked for five miles to get to the woods to train, but I had a good company. They were great in the field, but there were a bunch of yahoos from California on that volunteer thing where if they joined, they'd be stationed at Fort Lewis or Fort Ord. So I had enough problems in the barracks to keep me busy. But in the field, they were good. I trained them up to be pretty good in the field.

[00:50:44.89] But after I did that, I left Fort Lewis. I spent 1973 to 1979. And the Ranger battalion wanted to hire me as a company commander because I'd finished my command time in the 9th ID, but infantry branch said, no. No way. You've been there too long. You got to go to the advanced course. I said, you're going to go to the advanced course, you're going to be going with mostly first lieutenants.

[00:51:11.35] We're sending first lieutenants now at the end of their time to the career course right before they make captain. You've been a captain three years. You got to go to the advanced course. After the advanced course, you can apply and see if the Ranger battalion want to take you back as a first battalion or a second. There wasn't a third at that time. And you can end up going to one of those. I said, OK.

[00:51:30.43] So I went to Fort Benning. I went to the career course. And in the time I was there, the infantry branch guys came down to brief everybody on what they were going to be doing. And the deputy infantry branch chief was Roger Dimsdale. I don't know if you remember him or not. He had been at Fort Lewis when I was there. So I knew him at Fort Lewis.

[00:51:52.84] He said, what are you going to do when you get out of here? I said, well, I don't know. I said, branch has told me I've got to go to degree completion first because I didn't have a degree. And to get promoted to major, you had to have a degree. So I said, I'm going to go to a degree completion for 15 months. I said, I can do two years in 15 months.

[00:52:13.60] So I did it right there on Fort Benning at Troy State. I went to degree completion. I got a bogus degree from Troy State. And then Dimsdale called me back up and said, well, what do you want to do? And I said, well, I don't know. I said, I'm thinking about going to Delta Force. And he says, no. He was an old infantry guy. No, you don't want to do that.

[00:52:31.93] He said, let me tell you something. I'll do whatever you want to do, but will you become my infantry branch representative in Fort Benning in Building Four for a year? And then we'll deal with the Delta Force thing or whatever, Rangers, whatever you want to do, Special Forces. And I said, yeah, OK.

[00:52:47.49] And the reason I did that, I'd gotten married about a year before that. I had a little baby girl. And I thought, well, what the heck? I'll stay here another year. She'll be two years old by the end of that time. And I can do whatever I need to do. So I stayed there as an infantry branch rep for about 14 months, actually. And in that time, I-- at the end of it, I managed to go to Delta Force selection in West Virginia and I made it. I came back. They sent orders.

[00:53:14.34] JOE GALLOWAY: This is what year?

[00:53:15.49] ELDON BARGEWELL: Huh?

[00:53:16.27] JOE GALLOWAY: What year?

[00:53:16.90] ELDON BARGEWELL: This is '81.

[00:53:18.10] JOE GALLOWAY: '81. OK.

[00:53:19.30] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. I went to career course in '79. I was in a degree completion most of 1980. And this was like-- I ended up signing into the OT,

the officer-- operator training course in June '81. And the rest of the time I spent there until I got--

[00:53:39.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Who was commanding Delta then?

[00:53:42.19] ELDON BARGEWELL: Rod Pascal.

[00:53:43.87] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:53:44.74] ELDON BARGEWELL: Beckwith had left. I don't want to get off track here, but he had been-- 2d Ranger Battalion when I was out there, one of them was Bo Baker. Great guy. He was over as the SOTFE commander in Europe, which was the organization before SOCEUR, Special Operations Command or Special Operations Forces Task Force or something like that. He was doing that. Beckwith knew him from Project B-52 and Delta in Vietnam. They worked together.

[00:54:19.50] So back then, it was kind of like Beckwith had a lot of say in who would be the next commander. So he said, I want Bo Baker. Because nobody had been there long enough to grow up through the ranks and become the Delta commander that was also an operator. So they were picking guys up. About a month after that, he got selected to be the Delta commander. He's swimming in the morning over there and got out of the pool and dropped dead from a heart attack.

[00:54:42.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Damn.

[00:54:43.50] ELDON BARGEWELL: So Rod Pascal, SF infantry guy, was scheduled to take 7th Group. So they snatched him out of taking command of 7th Group and put him in command of Delta. So he was the second guy. Quite frankly, he didn't work out. He spent about 20 months there and the Department of the Army moved him somewhere else.

[00:55:01.06] And then Sherman Williford came in from-- he'd been-- Ranger Regiment background, 173d Airborne in Vietnam. And he did OK. And then Bill Garrison, who I consider probably one of the best commanders Delta ever had, the Army ever had. The guy is so smart. And so-- I mean, he just is such a great commander. And he kind of got screwed over the Somalia deal.

[00:55:25.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, he did.

[00:55:26.83] ELDON BARGEWELL: He was fantastic. Now, he was a Phoenix Program guy and an SF and infantry guy in Vietnam. So he had some credibility with the guys because of that. Schoonmaker then took his place who was really the first

guy that had been an operator down in the troop and had come through the rank up through the troops as an officer, the Schoonmaker. And then it went on up with guys that had been formerly operators in the unit.

[00:55:52.75] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you retire from the Army?

[00:55:56.77] ELDON BARGEWELL: 1 January 2007 after four months of leave, using up leave.

[00:56:04.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Using up leave.

[00:56:07.69] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah, I came back from Iraq in June, July 2006. I'd already put my retirement paperwork in. They assigned me as a special assistant to the commander of Fort Benning, which is just a bogus slot to keep you someplace. And I knew who he was. And he said, hey, just go home. And if I need you to do something, I'll call you.

[00:56:32.83] JOE GALLOWAY: I'll call you.

[00:56:34.39] ELDON BARGEWELL: Matter of fact, he did. He called me once. He said, I need you to go. I need a general to go to a funeral for a vet. So I went. It was up in Opelika or someplace. I put my uniform on and I was the general at that funeral.

[00:56:47.16] JOE GALLOWAY: The funeral general.

[00:56:48.58] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah.

[00:56:51.63] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do after you left the Army?

[00:56:54.16] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I didn't know what I was going to do. I had several offers from companies up in DC, some of the larger companies that just like to hire generals to be a consultant for six months, and then they fire them. But my old war colleague classmate, Hank Kinnison, he was 101st battalion commander, great guy, he was the president of a company called-- named Wexford Group.

[00:57:24.28] And they had contracts with the Asymmetric Warfare Group, the SOF center out by Dulles that they run and some other contracts. And he said, hey, why don't you come work for me? He had an office in Columbus, Georgia. Come work for me. He's going to pay me good money to be kind of a consultant to go to these different units and talk to not only our employees, but also the people that work there. So I did that for like seven years. And it was convenient. I wasn't in the DC rat race.

[00:58:00.05] And then the guy that owned the company was a retired three-star. He started the company. Retired three-star named Bill Reno. They were asking-- people were asking him, why did you name it Wexford? And he said, well, when the corporation guys came over to establish the LLC or whatever he had to do legally, they said, well, what are you going to name the companies? He look around and thought, well, I live on Wexford Street in Northern Virginia. So I will call it Wexford.

[00:58:25.61] But anyway, he sold a company for \$105 million to CACI. And it was an employee owned company. So everybody got their little share from that, which was good. And we all went to work for CACI. Well, CACI started monkeying around with the organization like those big companies do to save money.

[00:58:48.14] And what came out at the bottom was they wanted me to move to Chantilly to keep my job, my position. They were going to get rid of Hank, totally. All the guys that-- we had an office in Southern Pines. They get rid of most of them. They get rid of our recruiters because they had their own recruiters, even though they didn't get that we were recruiting for the AWG.

[00:59:09.71] They had civilian teams on it and the JET, the Joint Explosive Technology office that sent teams overseas to advise infantry units on how to find IEDs and stuff, mostly former SF and Delta guys and a few Rangers. Well, they said, well, we'll recruit those guys. And we said, hey, this is not going to work.

[00:59:29.64] So after about a year of being under CACI and they wanted me to move to Chantilly I said, no, I don't think so. I'm not moving up there. You're not going to pay me any more. My wife's not going anyplace. I said, I'm not traveling. I asked them. I said, will you pay for me to fly back and forth on Friday night and Sunday night? No. I said, OK, I'm staying here. I took my severance pay.

[00:59:49.55] About a month after that, I got hired by General Dynamics. I was at a range at Fort Benning doing a demonstration there, watching a weapon demonstration or something. The guy I knew from General Dynamics walked up and said, well, what are you doing? I thought you work for Wexford. And I said, no, it blew up. It no longer exists. It's under CACI, but it's kind of all fragmented. He said, what are you doing? I said, nothing. He said, well, come work for me. So I did that for like a year doing consulting stuff.

[01:00:18.89] On the side, because I'd done work with the AWG, they still hire me twice a year to go up there to mentor their new captains and NCOs that go through their little operator training course, which is easy to do. And we just sit around and talk about the Army and what they're going to do. And I ask these captains why they're there and where they're going. And it's just kind of a fun thing to do, but that's

all I do. That's all I've done since then. And it's enough because my wife would like me to get out of the house every now and then and do something else.

[01:00:49.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Absolutely.

[01:00:57.80] ELDON BARGEWELL: I think it affected it for the good. I mean, I obviously grew up, more or less became a man during my time in Vietnam. It taught me how to see good people and bad people and to see through BS and how to read people when they're trying to tell you to do something. And I learned some of that the hard way, but I learned eventually.

[01:01:25.58] And it really made me focus on what I wanted to do. And I wasn't that way when I got out of the Army after the first tour. And it was pretty rough tour. I mean, wounded a couple of times, even in that first tour. And I thought, well, maybe I shouldn't do this. But when I went back in, I was fully in my mind going to stay in the Army.

[01:01:53.96] And I thought-- after observing the lieutenants that I saw in Vietnam, some were good and some were terrible, I thought I can do as good as these guys. And set aside the lack of education or whatever I had, I said, I can still do this. And of course, Vietnam was still going on. And I thought, well, you're not going to end up back in Vietnam as an infantry platoon leader, which I knew I could do, but it finally ended before I got commissioned basically--

[01:02:18.96] So it just really-- it gave me that focus to know which direction to go. And it gave me some pride and honor in what I'd done. I was proud of that. A lot of people weren't. I had a lot of high school buddies that when I went home on leave, they looked at me and go, oh man, you were in Vietnam, right? Why the hell did you do that? And I just say, hey, I was over there-- my country, your democratically elected Congress and president sent me over there.

[01:02:49.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Sent me there. Yeah.

[01:02:50.78] ELDON BARGEWELL: He wasn't a Republican, he was a Democrat. So don't give me all this liberal crap. That's the same way today. I tell people that today. It drives them nuts down in Eufaula, Alabama, because there's a lot of liberal people down there that moved from the Northeast down there to the warm weather when they retired. And they don't like to hear about that stuff. Anyway, that's another story.

[01:03:15.34] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today, or is it?

[01:03:23.26] ELDON BARGEWELL: I think at this point, it's kind of faded into whatever people think about the Korean War. I mean, the World War II had such an impact on the nation. I don't think people are going to forget World War II because that was a global thing that threatened our shores essentially. But the Korean War and Vietnam War are starting to-- it's like another one of those things that happened back before I was born.

[01:03:48.82] JOE GALLOWAY: In the ancient days.

[01:03:51.64] ELDON BARGEWELL: I don't still-- it's been too long to see any real negative reaction to the Vietnam War or Vietnam War vets, but what concerns me, and I know this is part of what you're trying to do, is the education of our high school and college, the people, about what really went on over there and why it played out the way it played out, good or bad. I don't know. This CBS thing they had on TV a year or so ago, I mean, that was a total-- that's why-- I couldn't come up to Fort Benning with Bill Kushner there and talk about all that, because I probably would have got upset. But anyway.

[01:04:34.68] JOE GALLOWAY: I don't either.

[01:04:36.97] ELDON BARGEWELL: I don't know. Of course, people are very respectful to me. They know my background in Vietnam, and they know-- I'm talking about civilians in my hometown, anyway, my adopted hometown, Eufaula. They're all respectful of that. And they understand it. And Eufala had one kid killed in Vietnam.

[01:05:00.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Just one?

[01:05:01.13] ELDON BARGEWELL: It was a classmate of my wife. And so I mean, they've got a memorial to him down there in the middle of town and all that. But it's not like-- it's not on people's radar. They don't think about that. When I first retired, I did a Memorial Day speech down in Eufaula and I talked about Vietnam and everything. And people just kind of looked at me like, OK. Yeah, no problem. It wasn't-- to them, it was like too far back.

[01:05:28.26] But I think it's still-- the education piece of it or the information piece, although it'd be flaky information, is going to our high school and college students, not only on Vietnam, but a lot of other areas of politics and government and history. And there's a lot of biased people out there that really, they just drive that point in the way they want it to go and don't tell the whole story. And that concerns me. It's just too much of that going on in society today.

[01:06:01.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there lessons that you took from your time in Vietnam that you think are worth passing on?

[01:06:11.63] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I think militarily, I think it's the age old thing about rehearsal and planning, covering every detail and what-iffing everything that you can come up with. Now, the old saying that you can what if things to death, I understand that. But you need to sit down. I see in my time since then in Desert Storm-- I had my squadron in Desert Storm in Iraq, what my son has done over there and all that.

[01:06:43.27] And some of the planning that those units go through is very, very weak. They don't really-- I'm not talking about Delta. I'm talking about just lay it out. The British SASs are terrible about that. They don't plan for anything. They just say, hey, we're going to go to this point and do this. OK, everybody get their kit and get on the Jeeps and away they go.

[01:07:03.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Away they go.

[01:07:03.76] ELDON BARGEWELL: They don't really plan stuff. And I saw that in Desert Storm. It cost them a lot of lives. People died from hypothermia out there, lost. And other people were shot and killed. And you just kind of wonder, well, why don't they go through some kind of planning thing?

[01:07:20.06] My focus throughout my career was based on that, plan and detail, but it also-- since I had been an NCO and I understood how NCOs really were capable of doing more things than a lot of officers think they can do and smarter than a lot of officers that I knew, I gave them a lot more responsibility than most officers did to plan stuff, particularly when I was a squadron commander in Delta.

[01:07:50.04] My command sergeant major was just as capable as I was of running that squadron and taking it on operations. And I'd put it down to them because I wanted them to be authors of the plan. If you just-- if the officers all get off in the corner and come up with a plan and throw it at the NCOs and they have no say, it ain't going to work.

[01:08:07.76] JOE GALLOWAY: It ain't going to work.

[01:08:08.79] ELDON BARGEWELL: So I wanted to make sure they were the authors of the plan. They'd come back to me and I'd tweak a little bit of it. And then if we had a disagreement, we'd have a debate. I told my command sergeant major, I said, if there's one thing I'll fire you about, if you know something that I'm doing is screwed

up, and it doesn't make any sense whatsoever from your side, you better tell me about it. If you don't and we go ahead and do it and there's a problem--

[01:08:31.35] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm going to fire your ass.

[01:08:32.46] ELDON BARGEWELL: I'm going to get rid of you and find somebody that's got enough gumption to come up to me and say, hey, you're so far out in left field we're not doing this. And then a little bit of that went on. I never had any major problems with that. But as long as my NCOs-- and I learned that in Vietnam, because it was a lot top-driven down. You're going to this place, do this, at this time. Period. Boom.

[01:08:56.76] Well, how about going in over here or doing this or how about doing some other stuff? Oh no, no, you're going here and doing that. So in Vietnam, I kind of figured out on my second tour over there and from my reading since then about Vietnam, it's kind of like we were early warning triggers. They'd send Recon teams out into Laos. They'd run into the bad guys. There'd be a firefight. Some of them would come back, some of them wouldn't come back.

[01:09:23.56] But the NVA were just like the American Army. They talked from platoon to company to battalion to regiment to division. And all our spook stuff up in the air, even though it was limited compared to what it is today. And that big electronic eavesdropping thing they had in Laos, it would pick up the signal charge strength.

[01:09:50.25] If you have a PRC-25, it's a certain signal strength that goes out. And we have electronic stuff that can pick up that signal strength and it says, oh that's a PRC-25 Well then, that's probably at the platoon or company level. When you get up higher, you have bigger radios at the battalion and the division, and they send out a much stronger signal. And that's picked up. And you can say, oh, that's probably a regiment or division. So that's kind of what we were doing. We were going in, triggering off somebody, and they'd talk up the chain and get picked up.

[01:10:22.15] JOE GALLOWAY: And somebody's listening to them.

[01:10:22.78] ELDON BARGEWELL: And that's how Saigon, I guess, knew that there was a division here and a regiment there and one moving here and one moving there. And certainly, it wasn't us going in there walking-- watching them walk down the trail. Say, well, that's 29th Division. They're going to Ban My Thuot.

[01:10:38.00] It didn't work that way. We didn't know. And you couldn't go up and ask them. So I mean, that was all about them getting in contact with us. So I think

some of the missions that came down were just for that point. You go to this area where we think there's an NVA unit of some kind. You bump into them, and they start talking on the radio.

[01:10:55.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Turn them on. They'll start talking.

[01:10:56.53] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. And they would also talk verbally too, and that would get picked up. Now, they started putting in landlines. I ran several missions where we went in with a tape recorder with a snap, hook, snap, and hook it into the line and run that line off and hide there. And we'd listen-- record them talking on that landline.

[01:11:14.59] And I don't know if anything we ever picked up was worth a darn or not, because it was all in Vietnamese. And I couldn't speak Vietnamese. And we turned it in to the intel guys. They'd go off somewhere. But that was a big mission for SOG guys to go find a telephone line or the landline that ran along their trails and plug into them and record. We'd record for 12 hours.

[01:11:36.48] You had to watch where it was plugged in because they had guys would walk down the trail with a stick, with a hoop on the end of it they'd put around that line, checking to see if we-- they knew we did that. They'd come along and see if anybody had spliced into the line or hooked on the line. I saw a guy doing that one day and I pulled my clips off. I pulled them back in the brush. We sat there waiting for a helo to come in. And he went on down the trail. And we left.

[01:12:09.89] ELDON BARGEWELL: The first time I went there was about a year after or two years after it was made, and it was very uplifting to me to be able to see the names of the people that I knew on there. I looked up everybody's name that I knew. I went there at night because I didn't want to go during the day. There's a lot of people there during the day and all that.

[01:12:27.92] I went there at night. It was all lit up and everything. And I had the Vietnam directory, that big, thick book that has all the names in it. And I'd written down all-- everybody's name that I knew, about 30 or 40 people. I spent about six hours out there that night looking up names.

[01:12:44.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Listing every one of them.

[01:12:45.20] ELDON BARGEWELL: And to include, there was a couple of guys from my hometown that died, Hoquiam, and my two buddies that went to 101st. When I was so lucky to go to SF training, they went to 101st and got killed. I looked

them up. But I've gone back there several times. I've taken my wife there, taken my kids there. It's pretty good. I always try to-- you know Dave Maurer?

[01:13:08.45] JOE GALLOWAY: I know the name.

[01:13:09.96] ELDON BARGEWELL: He's an operator here, a SOG vet here. He was 1st Cav at LZ Columbus. Columbus was next to Albany, right?

[01:13:21.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Columbus-- Albany was over here. Columbus was over here. Columbus is where the artillery moved to.

[01:13:30.18] ELDON BARGEWELL: OK. He was there during the Battle of Ia Drang. He was a FO. It really messed him up. I mean, he was crazy as a bug. I met him in Training Group. He got out of the Army, came back in, and we've been friends ever since then. I don't know his whole story about that, but I know he was in some bad stuff in there because he's kind of messed up. But he's a good friend of mine. I told him I was doing this interview.

[01:13:53.49] But anyway, the reason I brought his name up, I tried for years to get him to go to the Wall. He refused to go because it was-- he knew it would be too emotional for him, too bad for him. And he just recently went after all these years. He was a features writer at a Charlottesville, Virginia paper for 20 years. He wrote articles about Civil War stuff and community stuff going on out there and all that stuff.

[01:14:22.27] And finally, he retired and moved back to St. Cloud, Minnesota where he was raised. But he finally went to the Wall. And I tried for years to get him to go. I said, I'll even drive up to Virginia, pick you up, take you up there, get a hotel room. We'll stay overnight and go to the Wall. No.

[01:14:37.71] JOE GALLOWAY: He wouldn't do it.

[01:14:38.55] ELDON BARGEWELL: He can't do it. But I think he has since then. But it was really-- I think it's-- you know, it's the most visited memorial in Washington, DC.

[01:14:46.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:14:47.07] ELDON BARGEWELL: And I wish I could figure out that dichotomy between that and what people think about the Vietnam War. Because there's all got to be 30, 40, 50-year-old kind of people, the majority of people, the tourists kind of people that go to DC and you kind of wonder, well, gee, they were all kids.

[01:15:03.07] JOE GALLOWAY: One thing about that Wall is that you got 58,000 names on there. But if you spread it out and take in relatives, classmates, it works out to a connection to about 20 million individuals have some connection to a name on that Wall. And they got to go see it. And they do.

[01:15:35.07] ELDON BARGEWELL: That's good.

[01:15:40.30] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, I think it's a great thing. And I knew it was probably something was going to happen at 50 years. And I don't know when-- what they determined 50 years was.

[01:15:50.99] JOE GALLOWAY: We did it for World War II. We did it for Korea. It was our turn, I guess.

[01:15:55.55] ELDON BARGEWELL: So I mean, it should be a big deal. I hope I can get up for some of those celebrations if they have any up in DC or whatever.

[01:16:03.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, they ought to have one in your hometown.

[01:16:05.91] ELDON BARGEWELL: Well, they should.

[01:16:06.89] JOE GALLOWAY: That's what we're trying to get everybody to do is not so much the big ticker tape parades as--

[01:16:14.36] ELDON BARGEWELL: The only celebration I've seen there-- I don't know if it's a celebration, an event, the Daughters of the American Revolution.

[01:16:24.35] JOE GALLOWAY: They're big partners of ours.

[01:16:26.30] ELDON BARGEWELL: They had all the Vietnam era veterans come to the church there and gave everybody a nice certificate and a pin.

[01:16:34.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Pin? They gave you a pin?

[01:16:36.14] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah.

[01:16:36.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Those DAR ladies, I tell you, they're big supporters of this.

[01:16:42.15] ELDON BARGEWELL: That's the only thing I've ever seen done there. Now on Memorial Day, they have-- the Vietnam Memorial has new flags on it and flowers and all that stuff. But the city does that, not any specific group. I don't know. I'll check around my town, see if anything's going.

[01:16:57.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Stir them up.

[01:16:58.86] ELDON BARGEWELL: I'm still in Columbus, Georgia.

[01:16:59.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Get the DAR ladies to work it.

[01:17:03.30] ELDON BARGEWELL: OK.

[01:17:04.08] JOE GALLOWAY: It's always good to see you.

[01:17:05.49] ELDON BARGEWELL: Yeah. Good to see you too. Thank you.