

Chang, John US Navy

[00:00:18.20] JOHN CHANG: I was born in New York City on January 27, 1947. I have 14 brothers and sisters.

[00:00:26.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:00:29.38] JOHN CHANG: And all eight brothers served in the military.

[00:00:33.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:00:34.71] JOHN CHANG: We were all first-generation. My father is from China. My mother is from Trinidad. My father married my mother with five children, had eight, and adopted two.

[00:00:47.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:00:48.29] JOHN CHANG: Now, that's a hell of a great family.

[00:00:50.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you hold the record right here.

[00:00:52.30] JOHN CHANG: That's right. They were saints. JOHN CHANG: I grew up in Harlem. We were told by my mom and dad that being first-generation here, that this was the best country in the world and you had to serve it. And if you served it, when you got out, you got an education. They paid for it. We were told to do it, and we all did it.

[00:01:20.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Did it.

[00:01:21.51] JOHN CHANG: That's right.

[00:01:22.70] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you signed the paper?

[00:01:25.19] JOHN CHANG: 17.

[00:01:25.89] JOE GALLOWAY: 17.

[00:01:26.72] [LAUGHTER]

[00:01:28.93] This was what year?

[00:01:30.15] JOHN CHANG: 19-- it would have been 65.

[00:01:35.83] JOE GALLOWAY: '65.

[00:01:36.67] JOHN CHANG: Yeah.

[00:01:37.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Vietnam had just started.

[00:01:39.90] JOHN CHANG: Right.

[00:01:40.56] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your understanding of what was going on there?

[00:01:45.11] JOHN CHANG: That there was a war. We talked about it at the house a little bit. My dad being from China did not like the communists, and he said you had to stop communism any way you could. So that's what we knew about it.

[00:02:06.67] JOE GALLOWAY: That's what you knew.

[00:02:06.96] JOHN CHANG: And that's what the South Vietnamese wanted, not to be taken over by the communists, by the North.

[00:02:18.36] JOE GALLOWAY: OK, so you signed up with the Navy.

[00:02:22.23] JOHN CHANG: With the Navy, as a Navy reservist.

[00:02:24.94] JOE GALLOWAY: To be a corpsman?

[00:02:26.62] JOHN CHANG: That's what my MOS was.

[00:02:28.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Was that what you wanted?

[00:02:31.81] JOHN CHANG: I thought a corpsman-- when they said a corpsman, I said, what the heck is a corpsman? They said, well, it's a medical technician of some sort, a nurse. I said, alright. I thought, mm, be in a hospital, that wouldn't be bad duty.

[00:02:46.38] JOE GALLOWAY: [CHUCKLES] Being with the Marines.

[00:02:48.51] JOHN CHANG: Nice and clean-- no, I didn't think about that. When I joined, I didn't think about going to the Marines. I didn't know that until I started at corps school. After Great Lakes, I got assigned to Chelsea Naval Hospital, then they started talking about being ordered into the-- getting orders to the Marine Corps. I did not even think of it until then. But, again--

[00:03:14.96] JOE GALLOWAY: There it is.

[00:03:15.46] JOHN CHANG: --that's just life.

[00:03:16.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, they sent you for basic training to Great Lakes.

[00:03:21.42] JOHN CHANG: I went to Great Lakes for basic training and for corps school.

[00:03:24.36] JOE GALLOWAY: And for corpsman school.

[00:03:25.99] JOHN CHANG: Right. I also did field combat training in Camp Pendleton.

[00:03:32.44] JOE GALLOWAY: With the Marines?

[00:03:34.45] JOHN CHANG: All corpsmen first. It was a training area for corpsmen at Camp Pendleton, and then, training with the Marines.

[00:03:42.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did the training you got prepare you for what you faced when you got to Vietnam?

[00:03:50.26] JOHN CHANG: I had no problems whatsoever with doing my duties, and I was shocked myself doing some of the stuff I did. But that's where the training comes in, secondhand. JOHN CHANG: April 1967. We caught a plane in California, and it was full of corpsmen. No other people on that plane, but all-- all of us were corpsmen.

[00:04:21.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Like 200 corpsmen.

[00:04:22.88] JOHN CHANG: Oh, I don't know how many it was. It was Continental Airlines, it might have been 150, 200. I'm not sure of the amount, but we were all corpsmen on that flight.

[00:04:34.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:04:35.99] JOHN CHANG: Yup. And we all knew why we were coming over together, because they were-- they were taking care of us. I mean, they were hitting us left and right, because when corpsman up, we were up, and we were running--

[00:04:51.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, and they were shooting.

[00:04:52.90] JOHN CHANG: --and we'd get hit. I got two-- I got hit twice.

[00:04:59.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you land? Da Nang?

[00:05:01.83] JOHN CHANG: Da Nang. Da Nang.

[00:05:03.58] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions when they opened that door?

[00:05:06.86] JOHN CHANG: Hot.

[00:05:07.58] [LAUGHTER]

[00:05:10.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Smelly, too.

[00:05:13.01] JOHN CHANG: I don't remember that. People said that, I don't remember that. I remember it was hot. It was hot and I'm standing in line-- and it was very interesting what they

did to us. They just kept saying, Recon, Dying Delta, Suicide Charlie. And I said, where am I going? They said, Suicide Charlie. I said, kiss my butt.

[00:05:40.10] [LAUGHTER]

[00:05:42.65] And that's how we got assigned

[00:05:43.54] JOE GALLOWAY: That's how you were assigned.

[00:05:44.71] JOHN CHANG: Simple as that.

[00:05:46.21] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were assigned to Suicide Charlie.

[00:05:48.38] JOHN CHANG: I was Charlie Company, Suicide Charlie.

[00:05:51.01] JOE GALLOWAY: In what battalion?

[00:05:52.26] JOHN CHANG: 1st Battalion, 5th Marines.

[00:05:54.22] JOE GALLOWAY: 1st of the 5th.

[00:05:55.27] JOHN CHANG: Yup.

[00:05:55.84] JOE GALLOWAY: And they were located in the Da Nang area, more or less.

[00:06:01.31] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, not far. They put us on a bunch of trucks and everybody went different ways to report. It was interesting for me. Like I started-- my father is Chinese, and I heard some crappy crap from some of the guys. They called me a gook, and I didn't appreciate that. I didn't appreciate it at all. And I thought, you better wa-- I'm from New York City, you don't--

[00:06:29.96] JOE GALLOWAY: You don't talk to people like that.

[00:06:30.32] JOHN CHANG: --screw around with people in New York City.

[00:06:32.38] [LAUGHS]

[00:06:33.38] And I told them, I said, keep that crap up and you get hit, I won't make that house call. I didn't do it, but that's what I thought.

[00:06:42.98] JOE GALLOWAY: But that's what you told them. I bet they sharpened up.

[00:06:44.95] JOHN CHANG: I didn't put-- well, I didn't put up with nobody's crap. Being from a large family, being from Harlem, you either get your ass kicked or they beat you. But I don't take it. I still don't take it from anyone. And that was a big problem out there, you know,

ignorance. That's all it was, ignorance. And these young men didn't know the damn difference, that's how stupid they were. I straightened them out. I did, honestly, I straightened them out.

[00:07:25.36] JOHN CHANG: At the first base, we were in tents, yes. Within 2, 2 and 1/2 weeks, we were on Hill 110. It was Union I the operation, but Hill 110. And, boy, they kicked our ass, the North Vietnamese, for the first four or five days. I was the only corpsman who walked off that hill alive.

[00:07:51.27] JOE GALLOWAY: How many went up?

[00:07:52.72] JOHN CHANG: God, I don't-- I don't even know the amount. None of them were killed, but several were wounded, but I walked down. I know it was me, and there might have been one more. It got so bad, there were a number of Marines bringing me the wounded. I couldn't run, I couldn't get to everybody, and I said, hey, bring them to me. I can't get to everybody. They had us pinned down--

[00:08:18.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Was the whole battalion on this hill?

[00:08:20.94] JOHN CHANG: No, Charlie Company.

[00:08:22.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Just the company?

[00:08:23.04] JOHN CHANG: Yeah.

[00:08:23.97] JOE GALLOWAY: So they took what kind of casualties?

[00:08:26.49] JOHN CHANG: Oh God, I think-- I really don't know. I don't know numbers. I don't know how many. Boy, I just don't know-- it wasn't my thing, numbers.

[00:08:41.77] JOE GALLOWAY: You were up there how many days?

[00:08:44.71] JOHN CHANG: A couple of weeks.

[00:08:45.48] JOE GALLOWAY: A couple of weeks.

[00:08:46.56] JOHN CHANG: Yeah. It might have been a week or two. I blocked--

[00:08:50.98] JOE GALLOWAY: And the enemy was pressing you all the time?

[00:08:53.35] JOHN CHANG: Oh God, they overran us a little bit. Oh, yeah. There was a regiment of North Vietnamese, and they beat the crap out of us for a while, until-- till we got back, and we did good. And I think Delta or Alpha came in to help us, and we came out of it. But, boy, we lost a lot of guys.

[00:09:16.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have artillery and air support?

[00:09:19.06] JOHN CHANG: Later on, yeah, not right away. Being there for the first-- just a couple of weeks and hitting the crap so bad-- I think it was like the top six battles of Vietnam, it was so bad. And that helped me understand that I wasn't going home alive.

[00:09:39.61] I knew I was going home in a body bag. I just knew I was not going to live. You know, that was going to be the way it was. And that was a good thing, 'cause knowing you're not going to make it, you don't give a shit about anything.

[00:09:57.70] JOE GALLOWAY: That's right.

[00:09:58.45] JOHN CHANG: And that's a good thing. My head's screwed up for it, but, I think, almost every Vietnam vet in combat has a screwed up head. Hell, anybody from World War II, Korea, it makes no difference, you're in combat, you're going to be screwed up.

[00:10:16.00] I was 20 years old, and I was one of the older guys. Remember, there's 17, 18, 19-year-old guys there, and I was older than any of them, a lot of them. When you're that young, everything gets hardwired into that brain, and nothing let loose. But I'll tell you, the sad part about it is, I learned-- just a couple of weeks in-country-- not to know people well, not to get too friendly with people. Because it was going to be too tough--

[00:10:51.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Watching them die.

[00:10:53.85] JOHN CHANG: When you can't save them for a certain reason, it's a bitch. That was my job, but I'll tell you, I learned not to get too friendly with too many people.

[00:11:10.99] JOHN CHANG: The bravest guys I have ever met in my life, unbelievable. I'm so proud to had served with them. I never wanted to be a combat person. Honestly, I didn't. Some people joined the service to go and fight in the war, I didn't do that. But I'll tell you what, Marines are the best trained military going in this world, and I was proud to serve with them. That's what I thought about them. And some of them were pain in the asses, but they got straightened out.

[00:11:46.32] JOE GALLOWAY: But you straightened them out.

[00:11:48.07] JOHN CHANG: Well, you know, certain things you just don't-- you don't do.

[00:11:55.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds in that milieu, that you might not have in civilian life?

[00:12:07.71] JOHN CHANG: I grew up in an all-black neighborhood.

[00:12:09.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah, OK.

[00:12:11.59] JOHN CHANG: We were the only Asians in the neighborhood, and for blocks, we were the only non-blacks. So no-- I mean, I had it way before--

[00:12:20.88] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't see anything you hadn't seen before.

[00:12:23.02] JOHN CHANG: No, no, no. I'll tell you a story. I was sitting on a bunk at one time with Corporal Vega and a machine gunner, Fleming; a black guy, a Mexican, and myself. And here comes down a young Marine, just in country, and looks at us-- we're eating our C-rats. And he looks at us, and he said, damn, back home I wouldn't even say hello to you guys. Now, that's pretty stupid of a young Marine.

[00:12:56.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, it is.

[00:12:58.02] JOHN CHANG: And he said, look at you guys, a gook, a nigger, and a spic. Can you believe that shit?

[00:13:08.98] JOE GALLOWAY: [LAUGHS] Did you all get up and kick his ass.

[00:13:11.74] JOHN CHANG: You damn right. He learned a quick lesson.

[00:13:18.09] JOE GALLOWAY: A hard lesson too.

[00:13:20.04] JOHN CHANG: We weren't going to put up with that kind of stuff. But that stupidity of a young man, and he just learned a hell of a lesson. I bet he never did that for the rest of his life. I'll tell you what, I don't remember who the hell it was, I just remember it was a young man. Yeah, stupidity, but, again, a young man.

[00:13:40.57] JOE GALLOWAY: With a lot of bruises.

[00:13:43.09] JOHN CHANG: A lot of understanding of what life's about.

[00:13:50.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you went over in '67?

[00:13:53.99] JOHN CHANG: '67.

[00:13:55.83] JOE GALLOWAY: The war is well underway. Back home, there's a lot of tension, there's racial tension, there's antiwar protests, all of that going on. Does any of that come over to where you are in Vietnam?

[00:14:11.13] JOHN CHANG: The only thing I remember about that protest is hearing about hippies, you know, people saying that we were nothing but baby killers. The tension with the black community, saying that the United States was not taking care of them and they weren't going to do their job.

[00:14:38.66] We heard that-- and I don't know how true it is, there was scuttlebutt. In the Marine Corps, green is green, man, and there's no black, white. Some of the guys talked stupid, but that's not true. We had heard some of the Army guys would not want to go off the base camp, and said to hell with it, at a certain time.

[00:15:05.46] The problem I had with all of that-- it wasn't in country, but it was going home. I brought my best friend's body home. I mustered out-- I was finishing up my tour in Vietnam, went to Okinawa, that's where I staged all my gear. I got from Vietnam, got into Okinawa, they gave me a rack. I just wanted to shower, have something to eat, and go to sleep. And that's exactly what I did. I showered in my fatigues, because I had nothing on me but the fatigues I had; bloody, nasty, crappy.

[00:15:46.04] JOE GALLOWAY: And you got into the shower.

[00:15:47.31] JOHN CHANG: And I got in the shower with it and washed everything, and I took it off as I needed. Hung up the clothes on the bunk and went to sleep. Got up, went to the chow hall, came back, and went to sleep again. The next morning, I got woken up by a corporal. And he said, hey, Doc, and he shook me. He said, come on, the base CO wants to see you. I tell him, tell him to go kiss my ass. I'm coming out of the service, I've got three weeks left in the service-- that's all that's left, three weeks left.

[00:16:23.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, what are they going to do, send you to Vietnam?

[00:16:24.64] JOHN CHANG: Dunno. I said, nah-- I was in no trouble. I went to sleep. I didn't go out. I don't drink. Tell him to go take a hike. And he said, Doc, you gotta get up and see him. And I got up, put my fatigues on, and went over with him. And he told me, he said, Doc, I hate to tell you this, but Mr. and Mrs. Santaniello--" [CRYING] excuse me.

[00:17:02.23] JOE GALLOWAY: That's OK.

[00:17:07.81] JOHN CHANG: [SOBBING] --requested that you bring their son home.

[00:17:12.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Agh.

[00:17:16.89] JOHN CHANG: He was my best friend. They couldn't find my sea bag, so they put me on a fricking plane and sent me to El Toro. They fitted me with two uniforms, and a day later, I was in an Air Force base in Delaware-- Dover, Delaware. [SOBBING] And by that afternoon, I was sitting in a hearse with my buddy's coffin in the back, riding back to New York City. It's a fucking hell of a way to come home.

[00:18:09.47] JOE GALLOWAY: A hell of a way to come home.

[00:18:14.18] JOHN CHANG: After all that shit in combat and to come-- and I stood guard over his coffin with a young Marine for four days. And then I went to Brooklyn Navy Yard and mustered out. A shitty way to come home.

[00:18:44.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of the leadership in the units you served in?

[00:18:50.98] JOHN CHANG: Oh, outstanding Marines, outstanding officers. Truly outstanding. Well-trained. Did their job. Very proud of them.

[00:19:04.67] JOE GALLOWAY: The war was real hard on lieutenants and corporals.

[00:19:07.90] JOHN CHANG: Oh, no question.

[00:19:09.76] JOE GALLOWAY: How many lieutenants did you lose?

[00:19:12.39] JOHN CHANG: Three.

[00:19:13.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Three.

[00:19:13.77] JOHN CHANG: Yep. And the last one was Lieutenant Polk, a real nice man. He was enlisted, went to OCS--

[00:19:22.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Mustang up.

[00:19:23.77] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, Mustang up, that's right. He was a good man. This is only my-- I think, my seventh reunion I've gone to. The first one I went to, I asked, is Lieutenant Polk around? And he had just died of a heart attack the year before.

[00:19:47.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:19:48.10] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, bitch.

[00:19:49.07] [CHUCKLES]

[00:19:53.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you just did the one tour.

[00:19:55.64] JOHN CHANG: That was one, and I was out.

[00:19:58.25] JOE GALLOWAY: One and out.

[00:19:59.24] JOHN CHANG: They did me a nice job, they sent me for the last 12 months of my time in Vietnam.

[00:20:05.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Your last 12--

[00:20:06.77] JOHN CHANG: Last 12 months. JOHN CHANG: I can't think of one.

[00:20:16.00] JOE GALLOWAY: You can't think of one.

[00:20:17.37] JOHN CHANG: There was no best day in Vietnam, I'm sorry. There was no best day in Vietnam, not for me.

[00:20:26.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Not for you.

[00:20:27.43] JOHN CHANG: No. No, sir.

[00:20:32.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Was it on that hill? Two weeks after you got there?

[00:20:37.19] JOHN CHANG: That was a learning lesson. It was hell, there's no question about it.

[00:20:41.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Did anything worse come along?

[00:20:44.70] JOHN CHANG: Not after that time. I mean, Hue City. [LAUGHS]

[00:20:48.39] JOE GALLOWAY: You hit Hue?

[00:20:49.91] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, I did. I was in country at a real nice time.

[00:20:54.77] JOE GALLOWAY: You hit it when it was absolutely bad.

[00:20:56.08] JOHN CHANG: I hit Hue, right at the-- yeah.

[00:21:00.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about Hue City?

[00:21:03.44] JOHN CHANG: That was kind of interesting, because we did nothing but jungle fighting. They hit us, and they ran, hit us and ran, but then, we hit-- the NVA would not hit and run, they'd stay and--

[00:21:16.67] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd stay.

[00:21:17.80] JOHN CHANG: --they'd stay and fight. I'll tell you what, there was some good-- very good, I'll say, soldiers they had.

[00:21:28.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:21:29.42] JOHN CHANG: They really did. And, boy, they really had us in Hue City. They pinned us down for days in Hue City. We couldn't fricking move. Every time somebody went out, down they went. They had snipers that-- shit, they were hitting guys left and right. We were dragging people back in. There was bodies laying out in the fricking street we couldn't get to, because if we did, everybody went down.

[00:22:00.11] I ran. A couple of times I would-- here's what the Marines did with corpsman after a while-- because, see, when you hear corpsman up, as corpsmen, at least me, by the time I got to somebody and did whatever I had to do to patch them up, to save their lives, don't ask me how the fuck I got there. Because I never knew how I got to places, I just ran. It's like, you're on automatic. You just do it.

[00:22:35.26] JOE GALLOWAY: You just got there.

[00:22:36.34] JOHN CHANG: You just get there and do your job, to save a man's life.

[00:22:42.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Was there ever a situation where they had to bring them to you, in some cases?

[00:22:49.43] JOHN CHANG: There was a couple of them, yeah. They knocked my ass down when I was running-- well, a few times, they would knock me back down and say, Doc, you can't do that. Stay the hell down. One of the sergeants-- and he'll show up, he's blind now-- John Erskine. I don't remember this-- he tells people the story about me, that I was up on the wall, running to go find somebody.

[00:23:22.26] He says, they yell corpsman up, and you're on the fucking wall, Doc, running on top of a wall. How the hell-- ? I don't remember. I don't remember doing that. Some of the stories that I know now, what I did, is from the Marines telling me what I did.

[00:23:43.39] JOE GALLOWAY: You can't remember.

[00:23:44.68] JOHN CHANG: I don't-- so many stuff, I don't remember.

[00:23:47.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:23:48.19] JOHN CHANG: I don't.

[00:23:49.81] JOE GALLOWAY: How long was the battalion in Hue? The whole month?

[00:23:55.06] JOHN CHANG: Oh, I don't know if it was a whole month, every day is every day. [CHUCKLES] In the beginning, I thought, I don't remember times, I don't remember days. It was at least a month, maybe longer. But until they started giving us artillery and airstrikes, we were in deep shit.

[00:24:20.74] JOE GALLOWAY: You couldn't do anything.

[00:24:21.96] JOHN CHANG: Oh, we were so-- I mean, the guys got hit so bad. The guys were getting hit, bleeding, and still fricking fighting. Marines are un-fricking-believable, let me tell you. I would never want to do that again in my life, but I would never do it with anybody else, but the Marines. Tough men.

[00:24:47.90] That's how I survived, though. I survived by not getting too friendly with too many people. And I don't remember crap. I went through too many operations, Union, Union I, Union II, Swift, Hue City-- the major crap of that war I was in, I don't remember hardly anything. You know why? The only thing I'd do is follow the Marines.

[00:25:17.38] JOE GALLOWAY: That's plenty.

[00:25:19.22] JOHN CHANG: I'd follow them wherever the hell they went. I don't remember the days, the time.

[00:25:22.96] JOE GALLOWAY: You got through Hue City without a wound?

[00:25:26.43] JOHN CHANG: I didn't get-- I didn't get wounded in Hue City.

[00:25:28.17] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't get wounded.

[00:25:28.91] JOHN CHANG: No. Two wounds-- I've been wounded twice, and both times was because of shrapnel. One of the guys stepped on a mine and I got some shrapnel out of it. I patched him up, his leg was gone, got him squared away.

[00:25:47.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Patched yourself up.

[00:25:49.42] JOHN CHANG: Oh, it was some shrapnel, it wasn't a big deal. When you get back to base camp, you took care of it; throw a fricking bandage on it.

[00:25:59.87] JOE GALLOWAY: But you made it through Hue City without a wound, that--

[00:26:03.53] JOHN CHANG: No wounds.

[00:26:03.82] JOE GALLOWAY: --that's incredible.

[00:26:05.75] JOHN CHANG: When God doesn't want you to get hurt, you don't get hurt.

[00:26:10.43] JOE GALLOWAY: That's true.

[00:26:12.46] JOHN CHANG: The man upstairs, when it's your time and it's your ticket, that's when he takes you. One of the guys I know and was a little friendly with, got wounded five times before he left-- in Hue City, twice-- but it wasn't his time to go.

[00:26:30.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:26:32.10] JOHN CHANG: And I never said anything about it until six years ago. No one even knew-- the people I worked with-- that I was in the military. Because it's not a good fricking thing to remember. You know when I see the war, you know when I remember it, when I go to sleep-- shitty ass dreams-- faces-- faces. When you can't save somebody--

[00:27:13.04] JOE GALLOWAY: That's the worst.

[00:27:14.05] JOHN CHANG: --that's the bitch. So many guys-- it's amazing, so many guys would say, Doc, Doc, I just want to go home. [SOBBING] I just want to go home. I used to say to them, you're going home, man, don't worry. And I made a sign of the cross on their heads, because I knew where they were going home to. I'd lie to them [CRYING] just so there's some peace before they died. Son-of-a-- too many. And I don't remember names, but boy, shit, I remember faces. Life.

[00:28:26.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, it's hard.

[00:28:27.85] JOHN CHANG: When you go to war, you know somebody's gotta-- can't make it. JOHN CHANG: Body counts, stupid. Stupid. OK, there was no line, with this line or that line, so we had to do body counts to prove-- to prove that what? That we killed more of them than they killed of us? I always-- that pissed me off to no end. The bottom line is, they're fighting for a cause, just like we did.

[00:29:00.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:29:03.54] JOHN CHANG: Did I patch up the North Vietnamese? You're damn right I did. After our people were taken care of, I patched up the North Vietnamese. They're human. They're people. Hell, I looked at them, it could be my brother. We took care of the villagers too, every chance we got-- a lot of the chances I got. I told my lieutenant, I said, I'm taking a couple of guys out, I want to go do--

[00:29:32.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Do a MEDCAP.

[00:29:33.24] JOHN CHANG: That's right. And one time I did a MEDCAP, I'll tell you, it was unbelievable. This little girl, she couldn't have been eight, nine years old, come up to me, and her whole arm was just pus, gangrene. It was the nas-- you want a smell, Holy Christ!

[00:29:55.96] And I told the radioman, I said, tell Lieutenant Polk, I want a fricking helicopter here. We're going to medevac this gal to Da Nang. And he said, we can't do that, Doc. I said, bullshit. If you don't do it, I'm going to call the CO, and I'm going to tell him I want a goddamn medevac. We're getting this kid out, because this child won't live.

[00:30:18.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:30:20.28] JOHN CHANG: And they did it. See, people don't know the stuff that we did for the villagers.

[00:30:25.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. I did, I went on MEDCAPs.

[00:30:28.95] JOHN CHANG: Beautiful people, only trying to live.

[00:30:34.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Trying to survive.

[00:30:36.07] JOHN CHANG: Trying to-- that's all, trying to survive. A tough, tough life. I would hate to see the people in the United States--

[00:30:46.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Go through this.

[00:30:47.39] JOHN CHANG: --go through combat, 'cause I don't think a lot of them could do it. We did good for the people of that country, the South. And I'll tell you, the North won, God bless them.

[00:31:09.38] JOE GALLOWAY: You know what, it's a--

[00:31:10.48] JOHN CHANG: God bless them, they're people.

[00:31:11.85] JOE GALLOWAY: --it's a beautiful country today.

[00:31:14.35] JOHN CHANG: Well, I won't go back there.

[00:31:16.08] JOE GALLOWAY: You should.

[00:31:17.09] JOHN CHANG: Oh, bullshit.

[00:31:18.00] JOE GALLOWAY: They would welcome you.

[00:31:18.82] JOHN CHANG: No. I don't want any memories, I've got enough. And I know it's different and everything else, but I had enough. JOHN CHANG: I come from a big family.

[00:31:36.00] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot of letters?

[00:31:37.02] JOHN CHANG: A lot of letters.

[00:31:38.94] JOE GALLOWAY: A few packages?

[00:31:40.78] JOHN CHANG: Oh, yeah. Not too many packages, because I was poor.

[00:31:45.33] [LAUGHTER]

[00:31:48.31] Letters, they suited me well. I didn't get packages.

[00:31:56.55] JOE GALLOWAY: And you didn't tell them what you were going through.

[00:32:01.34] JOHN CHANG: No need to. No need to.

[00:32:05.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Any of your brothers in Vietnam while you were there?

[00:32:08.38] JOHN CHANG: Five of us.

[00:32:09.67] JOE GALLOWAY: All of you?

[00:32:10.42] JOHN CHANG: No, no, no, no. One brother was Navy, and he was on an aircraft carrier, so he wasn't in country-- so that was fine. But my two younger brothers, one went over. He was Army. He was married and he had a child when he went to Vietnam. And my brother just older than him-- he was the youngest, Mike-- and my brother, Tom, drafted into the Marines. You know how that went--

[00:32:56.22] JOE GALLOWAY: I know how that went.

[00:32:57.00] JOHN CHANG: --Army, Army, Marines. And here's how he got into the Marines. He was with El Toro, the 11th Marines, and he got my brother out of there, because he was serving. But five of us served in Vietnam, three in Korea.

[00:33:13.65] JOE GALLOWAY: All got home OK?

[00:33:15.11] JOHN CHANG: Everybody made it home, and I'm the only one that got wounded over there. You know why? Because my mother prayed for us.

[00:33:24.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. [CHUCKLES]

[00:33:27.41] JOHN CHANG: That's why. She used to say to us all the time growing up, you tie your shoes by yourself, and you pray to God every day. Real simple.

[00:33:44.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, how much news did you get about the war that you were in, and about the politics, the demonstrations, and all of the stuff that's going on at home?

[00:34:00.98] JOHN CHANG: I heard it from everybody in-- that you made contact with in Vietnam. I didn't hear it from back home. My folks, and family--

[00:34:08.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get a newspaper? You get Stars and Stripes once in a while?

[00:34:11.74] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, once in a while, we'd get a paper and we'd read it. It's sad, that's all I can say. It's a sad situation that the people-- what they did back home to the vets. I mean, it is the worst. I think every combat vet wants to wait until-- stay alive until Jane Fonda dies, so we can piss on her grave.

[00:34:37.00] [LAUGHS]

[00:34:41.64] That woman, we heard about her. But, you know, the North Vietnamese did a hell of a job, I think. Especially with Jane Fonda spreading the word what we were doing over there, which were lies from them. It became too political. The press got it, it just became too political. History will never, ever show that we never lost a battle-- never, ever, ever, but yet, the war was lost.

[00:35:14.32] It wasn't our fault, it was the fricking politics. And I don't want to get into that, because it pisses me off more than anything else. [CHUCKLES] I told you, I went home from Okinawa. One day out of Vietnam and I landed in El Toro Marine Air Base. Came off the plane-- and those days you walked off, you know, they pulled down the stairs-- walked along the fence line, and they're there with the signs, yelling and spitting at us.

[00:35:50.11] JOE GALLOWAY: On a Marine base?

[00:35:51.19] JOHN CHANG: Right outside.

[00:35:56.31] JOE GALLOWAY: They've got some nuts to do that.

[00:35:58.57] JOHN CHANG: Oh, you're damn right. And a guy just coming home, two days out of Vietnam, I'll tell you what, this crap that you have to go through. And you know what that did? It made me never say anything about Vietnam to anyone for a long, long time. See, I'm crazy, but I'm not insane.

[00:36:21.70] [CHUCKLES]

[00:36:28.78] JOE GALLOWAY: What'd you do after the war, after you got out of the Navy?

[00:36:34.09] JOHN CHANG: I went to college.

[00:36:36.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Studying?

[00:36:37.75] JOHN CHANG: Marketing.

[00:36:38.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Marketing.

[00:36:39.43] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, didn't want to stay-- I did not want to stay in the medical field. I could have, I thought about it, but that was just too much for me. And too short a period of time, I did not want to deal with it again. I went to marketing. But here's the funny part, my daughter is a trauma nurse.

[00:37:05.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, is she? An RN?

[00:37:07.71] JOHN CHANG: An RN. My adopted daughter is a nurse practitioner. And I always thought I should have retired in the military, my son retired after 25 years. So they did what I needed to do and helped me out. Isn't that funny?

[00:37:28.38] JOE GALLOWAY: That is funny. Did you have difficulty readjusting to civilian life after that tour in Vietnam?

[00:37:42.25] JOHN CHANG: Anybody that goes through combat has a tough time adjusting. But the adjustment I made was not to talk to anybody about it, not to deal with anybody about it, because people didn't like vets. You figured that out pretty quick when you came back home, with all the crap that was going on. All the protesting and all the crap, it's disgusting.

[00:38:09.94] JOE GALLOWAY: So you just locked it away.

[00:38:12.97] JOHN CHANG: I locked it up, until it kept coming back and coming back. Hell, I've seen psychologists and psychiatrists for the last 15, 20 years now. You can't hide it, it comes out. Sooner or later, it'll get you.

[00:38:31.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How much contact-- have you kept up with fellow veterans, people you served with over there?

[00:38:43.62] JOHN CHANG: Seven, eight years ago-- I don't know how the hell they did it. There's a young-- young, I'm calling us young, old folks over here-- Jerry Regan is his name. I came home about seven, eight years ago. It was a Saturday evening. I just went to dinner, came home with my wife. The phone's ringing, I answer it.

[00:39:07.81] And a guy says, is this John Chang? I thought, OK, yeah, it is. And I'm in marketing, so I'll let the marketing guys talk to me, you know, they've got a job. That's what I thought, he was selling something. He said, you served in Vietnam? I said, yes. Charlie One Five? I said, what you selling, buddy? What are you selling?

[00:39:30.52] He says, this is Jerry Regan. Don't you remember me? I said, no, I'm sorry, I don't. He said, we've been looking for you for the last 15 years. And how the hell they found me, I don't know. I had moved nine times since I'd been back in the States. They just kept calling a John Chang, and there's shitloads of John Changs.

[00:39:57.12] JOE GALLOWAY: There's a lot of John Changs in this country.

[00:39:59.69] JOHN CHANG: And he found me. And he said, we've got a reunion-- yadda yadda yadda. And I said, yeah, I'm not sure about that. And then he said-- he said, do you remember Ernie Coleman. I said, yeah, I do remember Ernie. He said, I'll have Ernie call. Because I wasn't sure about Regan, because I couldn't remember his name.

[00:40:22.56] And Ernie Coleman called me the following day, and he said, hey, Doc, he said, how you doing? I said, tell me what I did to you? And he said, you told me I was a fucking asshole. I said, OK, Ernie, I believe you now.

[00:40:45.42] He got an M79 one time. One of the blooper guys, he got out-- what was his name? It's kind of funny, because I kept in touch with nobody, but now I do, two guys-- three of them, actually. His name is Jim Coxen, he was the blooper man in our company. He mustered out, and he gave Ernie his M79.

[00:41:13.65] And Ernie said, hey, Doc, look what I got, I can't wait to kill somebody with it. And I said, you're a fucking idiot, get away from me. I got no problem, we're in war, you gotta-- before they shoot you, you shoot them, but don't tell me you want to kill somebody. I saw too much of fucking death to hear something stupid like that, and I chewed his ass.

[00:41:39.60] And when he told me about it, I knew it was Ernie. And now, when I think about it, I did shit to these Marines. It's amazing they didn't shoot me, honestly. The first reunion I went to was in Tennessee, and there were several guys that came up to me, [SOBBING] and thanked me for saving them.

[00:42:18.93] JOE GALLOWAY: There you are. That's a good thing.

[00:42:23.85] JOHN CHANG: Oh, yeah, but it's tough. I didn't fucking remember their names. I said, show me a picture, when you were young, and I remembered their damn faces. That's silly,

isn't it? Un-fricking-believable. The sad part about it is to ask about guys. Hey, what happened to Lynch? He committed suicide. Fuck. Sad.

[00:43:02.03] And it's not like it's yesterday, but the memories are so fresh. They're so fresh in your head. Three years ago, at one of the reunions, one of the guys that was a sergeant, told a guy, and his brother and sister, that I patched up their brother. I wasn't sure of the name-- he said I did, I guess I did. And they wanted to know about it.

[00:43:45.20] I said, just show me a picture of his face, and I'll see if I can remember him. And I did. [SOBBING] Yeah, I remembered him. They just wanted closure. And I told them that he died peacefully. They just want closure. People want closure-- sad. It tore their family apart. The death of their brother tore their family apart, what a fricking shame.

[00:44:45.51] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think that war is remembered in our society today?

[00:44:50.36] JOHN CHANG: They don't know anything. I get a kick out of, thank you for serving. It's full of shit. If they wanted to thank us for serving, why didn't they do that when we came home. Oh, I like to say it to the young Marines and corpsmen-- I've visited Pendleton a number of times, because I live in Arizona-- those young men, thank you for serving.

[00:45:44.85] JOE GALLOWAY: That's because nobody said it to you.

[00:45:49.28] JOHN CHANG: I cried my butt off. This is probably about-- my wife knows better than me-- probably about 12 years ago. I was in a grocery store called Meijers in Ohio, and I never wore-- I never wore anything that said I was a vet. No hat, no shirt, no anything, no pins, nothing.

[00:46:22.62] I have for the last six years or so, seven years, because of these reunions. You know, I've come out. It's like I'm gay, I've come out of the closet. It's the dumbest goddamn thing in the world, isn't it?

[00:46:43.71] We go over-- four or five of us at times, have gone and talked to the young Marines before deployment, and we tell them like it is. We tell them just like it is. It's no fun, there's no fucking glory, but they've got a job to do. And I tell them, just be the best you can be. If you can't master what you need to do, you talk to the guy who's doing it well. You master everything you can. And take care of the next guy. And don't ever, ever talk down to another person that's different than you, different religion, different color of skin, it don't mean shit when you're in combat.

[00:47:32.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there lessons you took from your service that you would like to pass along?

[00:47:40.13] JOHN CHANG: That this country is the best country in the world. Serve this country. This country gave my family eight boys. All of us went to college, and we'd have never gone to college unless it was for the military. I have tons of nephews and nieces, and

grandnephews and nieces, who've served this country. I've got 92 nephews and nieces, and grandnephews and nieces.

[00:48:15.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:48:16.03] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, whoa. And we served this country. And we're all different shades. Latinos, blacks, Asians, whites, it makes no difference in our family. This is America, the melting pot. My mom and dad said there was gold on the streets, they needed to get to the US-- gold on the streets. And what my dad said, it was right, because the only thing you had to do is work and you made money.

[00:48:51.96] JOE GALLOWAY: And you made money.

[00:48:54.05] JOHN CHANG: You work hard, you'll do well. If you don't, you're a bum. That's what he used to tell us, you're a bum if you don't work hard. Everybody in our family has a college education, pretty damn good, huh?

[00:49:10.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Pretty good.

[00:49:11.43] JOHN CHANG: I've got an Irish brother and an Italian sister.

[00:49:14.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow-wee.

[00:49:16.49] JOHN CHANG: Adopted.

[00:49:17.24] JOE GALLOWAY: What can I say.

[00:49:18.30] JOHN CHANG: And you know how they adopted them? Just bring them in, no adoption. My Irish brother was a friend of one of my brothers. His parents were druggies, alcoholics, they did drugs, whored around, everything-- bring him in.

[00:49:36.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Bring him in.

[00:49:37.41] JOHN CHANG: Same with my elder sister, bring her in.

[00:49:39.20] JOE GALLOWAY: If you've got 15, what's another one?

[00:49:40.65] JOHN CHANG: What the hell's the difference? That's right.

[00:49:42.06] JOE GALLOWAY: What's another one?

[00:49:42.68] JOHN CHANG: That's right.

[00:49:44.32] JOE GALLOWAY: They need somewhere to live.

[00:49:46.31] JOHN CHANG: So what did it teach me? It taught me discipline. I learned it young, at home, but, boy, I really learned it in the service. And I learned that you can't do it all, you need always help from other people. And just ask for it.

[00:50:03.97] And if you don't master something, whoever's doing the best, learn from them. And we all did well. Six of my siblings have died-- are dead already. I'm the middle child; eight in the front and eight in the back. But that's what we learned, and we all did well. I retired from two major corporations.

[00:50:33.04] JOE GALLOWAY: If you live long enough enough you get to retire--

[00:50:34.50]

[00:50:34.64] JOHN CHANG: Executive-- executive levels. I did very well for myself. Why? Because we learned not only from my family, but from the military, and with the blessing of God, that's why.

[00:50:59.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC, the Wall?

[00:51:04.70] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, several times.

[00:51:06.39] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts when you go there?

[00:51:10.38] JOHN CHANG: I get fucked up for at least five days, if not longer. My wife always says-- doesn't like me to do it, because I'm always screwed up afterwards. It's tough.

[00:51:21.68] JOE GALLOWAY: All those names.

[00:51:23.11] JOHN CHANG: I grew up with-- four of us-- three good buddies. They didn't live in Harlem, they lived outside, but they were really good friends of mine. I'm the only one who came home alive.

[00:51:39.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Their names are on that Wall.

[00:51:41.28] JOHN CHANG: Bobby, Georgie, and Vinnie, [CRYING] they're all still young men. There's not a day that goes by I don't think of them.

[00:52:07.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You're a good man, John Chang.

[00:52:12.09] JOHN CHANG: My best friend, Vinnie Santaniello-- he was my best friend out of the four-- three of us. His nephew made contact with me five years ago. Out of the blue, he called my son. My son's name is John Vincent Chang, after my buddy. And Ralph Vincent Morales calls my son and wants to know am I the John-- was he the John Chang that knew his uncle, Vinnie. And my son said, my middle name is Vincent. Of course.

[00:52:59.65] My son called me and said, is it OK if I give him your phone number, because he wants to talk to you? Because he knows I don't-- I don't talk about anything. And he did. And I've communicated with him several times. He wrote a nice book-- he hasn't published it yet-- about his uncle.

[00:53:25.45] And I met him two years ago. The last time I saw Ralph was when he was about 10, and now, he's a grown man and has five children. What a sweet man he is too, Vinnie would have been proud of him. JOHN CHANG: It's nothing, thank you. 50 years ago--

[00:53:57.19] JOE GALLOWAY: 50 years.

[00:53:57.65] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, 50 years, right.

[00:53:59.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Half a century.

[00:54:00.47] JOHN CHANG: Yeah, well, it's-- again, too late. I'm sorry, to me, it's too late. Thank you, but no thank you.

[00:54:13.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, John Chang.

[00:54:16.05] JOHN CHANG: Thank you very much.