

Craig, Blair US Army

[00:00:15.91] BLAIR CRAIG: I was born in Bronxville, New York, 4th of December, 1944. And I don't really know anything about New York. I think we left there when I was one or two, so--.

[00:00:34.70] Well, my mother and father got divorced when I was two, so and then we never saw him again. So I don't really know a whole lot about that. My mother was an angel, and she raised my sister and I. And she just worked hard all her life to make sure that we had a good education and stayed healthy, and so she was the real hero in the family.

[00:01:02.56] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you consider your hometown? Where did you go through school?

[00:01:07.33] BLAIR CRAIG: I don't actually, Joe, consider any particular place. I moved from mid-state New York, to New Jersey. And I was in Cranford, and Plainfield, and Summit, and North Plainfield. And then I went to college at Rutgers in New Brunswick, Rutgers State University.

[00:01:31.18] JOE GALLOWAY: So we could say generally New Jersey?

[00:01:34.06] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, New Jersey, I was there the longest. And then the Army's been my home since then.

[00:01:38.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Alright. How did you come to enter the Army?

[00:01:45.40] BLAIR CRAIG: I had always had an interest in the military. And like all young kids living in a rural environment, you would run out in the woods and you would shoot BBs at one another. And so when I got into college, I enrolled in ROTC. And I did very well in that. I left college for a while. I heard there was an opening in.

[00:02:21.07] So I left college my junior year, and I went on active duty with them. I went through basic training, and AIT, and BCT at Fort Dix. And then I went to jump school at Fort Benning, and came back to the reserve unit and went back into college, and then got commissioned through ROTC.

[00:02:44.77] I was the distinguished military graduate from Rutgers, so I had my choice of branch assignments. And I picked armor because I had learned from my time in infantry, as you know very well, that when the noise starts, and the shooting, or whatever, it's very hard and difficult to communicate to everybody else what it is we're supposed to be doing. And I thought armor would be great, because everybody wears a helmet. They're on the same radio frequency. And you say something once, and everybody maneuvers left. And I thought it was all going to be grand. So I went in armor and actually only had one armor assignment. The rest were all cavalry assignments.

[00:03:34.55] I went on active duty just before the 4th of July weekend in 1968. So I was assigned to Fort Meade, Maryland, the 6th Cav. And I had an armor platoon. I had not been to armor basic course yet, but I was given a platoon. And my first act was to go down to the motor pool to see these 58-ton monsters. I'd never been on a tank.

[00:04:04.40] JOE GALLOWAY: What sort of tanks were they?

[00:04:06.77] BLAIR CRAIG: M1A1s.

[00:04:08.24] JOE GALLOWAY: M1A1s.

[00:04:09.26] BLAIR CRAIG: The old gas tanks, yeah. So I reported to Spec 4 Carter, who was the driver of my tank, and I told him I'd never been on a tank. And the first thing he had to do was teach me how to get up on it, and then we were going to move on from there. So it was quite an education. And I was only there for a couple-- three months. And I reported to Ranger School. So I went through Winter Ranger, 1968, '69. And when I finished in May, 10 days later, I was boots on the ground in Vietnam.

[00:04:48.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Right out of Ranger School, here you went?

[00:04:51.37] BLAIR CRAIG: Still lean and mean.

[00:04:54.13] JOE GALLOWAY: God, they didn't even give you time to put 10 ounces on.

[00:04:57.91] [LAUGHTER]

[00:04:59.23] BLAIR CRAIG: One steak dinner, I think.

[00:05:00.46] JOE GALLOWAY: One steak dinner.

[00:05:07.59] BLAIR CRAIG: I ended up in California waiting for transport overseas. And I was at Travis Air Force Base. And I had time, a whole day, or something, until I had to report for the flight to Vietnam. So I put on some civilian clothes, and I went down to San Francisco. And I wandered around, saw that. But the interesting part of that story was that everything closed down-- all the bars, all the restaurants-- and I hadn't rented a room anywhere.

[00:05:40.62] So down there in San Francisco, they've got a big, concrete viewing area. And they use it for Olympic racing-- swimming. And you have a view of Alcatraz prison out in the Bay. And I just sat there by myself waiting till the sun came up, so I could go to the bus station. And this gentleman, who I guess was homeless and had a brown bag full of some magic elixir, he asked me what I was doing. And I told him I was just waiting for the sunrise, so I could go back, catch a bus, and go to Vietnam. And he said, I better sit here with you and protect you.

[00:06:20.04] And I remember that story. That's that human side of-- so he just sat there and made sure nobody else bothered me. And then, in the morning, I got on the bus and went back. I

got on an airplane and flew down. Yep, flew, touched down, and went to Phu Bai and was assigned to the 101st.

[00:06:41.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Now when you landed, you landed at Da Nang or Phu Bai?

[00:06:46.68] BLAIR CRAIG: Tan Son Nhut, I think.

[00:06:47.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Tan Son Nhut.

[00:06:48.81] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah.

[00:06:49.68] JOE GALLOWAY: And did you have an assignment, or did you go through the replacement center?

[00:06:54.90] BLAIR CRAIG: Just like 99.9% of the people, you just came as an individual replacement. You had no idea where you're going to be sent.

[00:07:02.91] JOE GALLOWAY: No idea.

[00:07:03.96] BLAIR CRAIG: They had a thing, the Reception Center, and I was there about three days. And every morning, you had to go look and see if your name was posted. And then they told you where you were assigned. I felt very lucky that I was assigned to the 101st.

[00:07:20.58] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was your assignment?

[00:07:22.23] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah.

[00:07:22.59] JOE GALLOWAY: To the 101st Airborne?

[00:07:24.57] BLAIR CRAIG: And subsequently to Delta Troop, 2nd of the 17th Cav.

[00:07:28.56] JOE GALLOWAY: And they were located at Phu Bai?

[00:07:31.26] BLAIR CRAIG: Camp Eagle. Phu Bai, Camp Eagle.

[00:07:33.51] JOE GALLOWAY: This is way north?

[00:07:35.52] BLAIR CRAIG: Yes, northern I Corps.

[00:07:37.95] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is the year 1969?

[00:07:41.73] BLAIR CRAIG: '69, just after the Tet Offensive.

[00:07:45.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, Tet's at least passed.

[00:07:48.12] BLAIR CRAIG: True.

[00:07:49.17] JOE GALLOWAY: But there's still plenty of North Vietnamese up in that quarter.

[00:07:53.98] BLAIR CRAIG: We had very few Viet Cong. They were almost all North Vietnamese.

[00:08:00.22] JOE GALLOWAY: If you're going to fight, you might as well fight the A squad.

[00:08:04.01] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah, I figured.

[00:08:13.14] The Cav had just transitioned. They had been a mechanized ground cav, and they had just transitioned to helicopters. So there was a standard configuration at that time, Joe, of a headquarters, and then three air cavalry troops with helicopters and one ground cavalry troop with gun Jeeps. We had M60 gun Jeeps, tripod mounted 106 recoilless rifles, 4.2 mortars, 81 millimeter mortars.

[00:08:45.60] JOE GALLOWAY: All Jeep mounted?

[00:08:47.40] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah.

[00:08:48.90] JOE GALLOWAY: That's pretty light travel.

[00:08:51.45] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, we never really used them. It was more-- that was when they turned in all the tracked vehicles, that's what was there. And our job, as a full ground cavalry unit, was to be a larger increment for division special directed missions of reconnaissance. So we worked at the platoon level. I had the 3rd platoon. I was platoon leader for a year. And then I extended in country to take over as the commander of the unit. But it was a really interesting time, because I got there in April. The Cav was doing a lot of distance recovery, long distance, in the A Shau and Ruong Ruong valleys, up to the Laotian border and the DMZ. And so that's April--

[00:09:44.72] JOE GALLOWAY: You guys have just done Hamburger Hill?

[00:09:47.75] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, we were involved in Hamburger Hill, too, and also Ripcord, but that was a little later. What I was going to pass on for the record is that in June, President Nixon drew a presidential blue line on the eastern side of the A Shau Valley. And he said no US units could go west of that, because he was trying to draw down the US units and keep them from being involved in a major conflict. So all the divisional units of the 101st were restricted to only the eastern plateau and the coastline. The only units that were allowed to work over in the A Shau, Ruong Ruong, Laotian border, and in the DMZ area were the Special Forces units, the MIKE forces, and the SOG.

[00:10:37.91] JOE GALLOWAY: SOG?

[00:10:38.75] BLAIR CRAIG: MACSOG, and 3rd Force Recon Marines, and Delta Troop, and L Company, 75th Rangers. So our unit could never be reinforced by a US unit. And we had a-- and our job was to go in and rescue other people and do prisoner snatches, exploitation, go in and

make contact and try to start a fight, and then have the ARVNs come in and fight their way in to get us. And then we'd fly out.

[00:11:20.18] JOE GALLOWAY: How did that all work out?

[00:11:21.77] BLAIR CRAIG: Fine. No, it worked out fine. So we did that for over a year. And a lot of that was-- sensors would go off. As you remember, Joe, we had those Acoubuoys, ACOUSIDs. And they'd dropped them out of an airplane, and it would pick up seismic sensing. And then somebody had to go in and find out what it was, how big the unit was. And we had the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and that was always very active in terms of the seismic things.

[00:11:52.07] And we also went in for B-52 strikes. We would fly in while the dust was still coming down and do bomb damage assessments, and eliminate the rest of the people that had gotten through that, or take them prisoners. And then capture things, like once we captured an entire hospital, underground NVA hospital.

[00:12:17.99] So it was really very active. We did a lot of our missions. We didn't use fixed LZs, as you were more used to, because you went with a larger unit. We only worked at platoon size-- 24 men, an ACL aircraft, a load of six per bird-- because of the altitude up there and the heat density. That was the maximum load. So we would go in with 24 people, and then Delta Troop had three ground platoons. So if it was bigger, then any time two platoons or more went in, then the headquarters element. And in this case, we went in.

[00:13:01.94] JOE GALLOWAY: I know what it was like out in the field. But what were your living conditions like when you were back at the rear?

[00:13:08.87] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, that's-- when you have nothing, then anything is great. You know how it is. So Camp Eagle had all plywood four by eight--

[00:13:22.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Hooches?

[00:13:23.34] BLAIR CRAIG: --hooches with screens and then metal corrugated roofs.

[00:13:27.30] JOE GALLOWAY: You got the floor in them?

[00:13:29.37] BLAIR CRAIG: They had plywood floors.

[00:13:31.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa!

[00:13:32.10] BLAIR CRAIG: I know. So you had a bunk.

[00:13:34.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Showers?

[00:13:35.70] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, 55 gallon drum. And it got hot enough--

[00:13:39.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Painted black for hot water?

[00:13:42.45] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah. And of course, the latrine facility was the split 55 gallon--

[00:13:50.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course.

[00:13:51.65] BLAIR CRAIG: --full of diesel fuel and gasoline. So you'd stir it and burn it. So but the real comfort of the whole thing, there was nothing bad about being there, except Camp Eagle, they used a lot of that pina-prime to keep the dust down. And I think I can still remember the smell of the pina-prime.

[00:14:17.79] But we had a fantastic mess sergeant, Sergeant Sawyer. And he loved the troops. And so he would make the cooks get up at 3:00 in the morning in every unit. When we came back from the field, if it was 2 o'clock in the morning, he'd have hot chow waiting for us. That was one of those things. And his specialty was making donuts. And people from all over the 101st would come in and try to get donuts. So you remember those things, and things weren't all that bad. And you had a place to stay. And in addition--

[00:14:56.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Could've been worse. You could have been a Marine.

[00:14:58.62] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, the Marines and the Army, we're the only two branch of the services that love one another, because we're the only ones that live in the dirt, and sleep in the dirt, and fight in the dirt.

[00:15:11.32] JOE GALLOWAY: And the Marines are in the dirt 365 a year.

[00:15:17.42] BLAIR CRAIG: I think they do it so they can get more congressional money at the end of the year. I don't know.

[00:15:21.20] JOE GALLOWAY: I don't know about that. They always give money back at the end of the year. It's really stupid.

[00:15:28.95] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, we don't want to pick on them, because one of the other aspects of the job the Delta Troop had to do was, as I mentioned, 3rd Force Recon was allowed to work in the same area that we and the Special Forces worked in. So they would insert by a Chinook. And of course, we used Hueys. But once they got in, then they couldn't be extracted, because there was no way to get a Chinook in a place to pick them up. So whenever they got in a fire fight, Delta Troop would be inserted. We'd fight our way in, and then surround them, and then pull them back to an LZ and get them out, and their casualties and dead.

[00:16:08.73] So we worked a lot with the 3rd Force Marines. And as always, there's a follow-on story, and I can tell you about that later. But our next reunion in April of 2020, this will be the third year that the 3rd Force Recon have come and participated in our reunion. And it started when they heard that we were having a reunion. And they said they would like to come and just thank us for all the times that we pulled them out of the things that they were in. So this year, we're expecting about 15 Marines.

[00:16:50.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Good, good.

[00:16:52.66] BLAIR CRAIG: So that brotherhood is still there.

[00:17:00.47] Well, the Cav pretty much stayed to itself. And the company, we didn't really associate with the brigades of the 101st, because we didn't work in the same area. There were occasions when we were attached to one of the brigades to help them with reconnaissance. So a couple of birds and one of my platoons would be assigned to go work with them up to two months at a time.

[00:17:37.47] But mostly with the Cav, we kind of stuck together. And we didn't get out much, because we were on 24 hour strip alert to go anywhere in the A Shau for rescue missions. So we did all downed pilot missions and extraction of helicopters. We were the only unit to go in and reinforce and extract the Rangers and the 3rd Force Recon when they got in contact. We were the designated exploitation unit for the division G2. And then every time the Cav helicopters went out, they would find targets. And if it was bigger than what their air rifle platoon could handle, then we would go out and exploit the contact.

[00:18:23.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have to do any additional training to transition from tanks to helicopters?

[00:18:32.66] BLAIR CRAIG: Good question. The men in the unit when I got there were all armor MOSs. But with Cav, you always have-- even in the Armor Cav, you got 11-Bravos. But we had Charlies, and Deltas, and Echoes, the usual armor. And when I first got there, they did have problems. I got there in the end of May. In April, they had their first engagement. And they lost quite a few people, because they didn't know how to operate on the ground.

[00:19:07.76] Speaking for myself, having just left Ranger School, I was able to teach them how to walk point in my platoon. And I was very good at artillery adjustments. And I knew how to work aircraft, so I could effectively use the Cobras, and the OH-60, and TAC Air. But I was the only lieutenant at the time that was versed in all those things. So it took a little while to work with the other two platoon leaders. And then pretty much, after you do it a couple of times, then you understand how to do it.

[00:19:57.93] But we would always fly out to a mission, Joe, and I didn't even know if I had the right maps, because we got briefed en route. I had no idea where we're going. I didn't even know what the mission was. We were just on strip alert. And we also had the mission to defend Camp Eagle with those gun Jeeps. So we always had one platoon on strip alert, one platoon on base defense of Camp Eagle, and one platoon in training.

[00:20:32.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you guys have any off duty time to speak of? And if you did, what'd you do?

[00:20:39.14] BLAIR CRAIG: We did not, except for twice. We sent parts of one platoon, each of those two times, to Eagle Beach, which was an MWR place where you could swim in the ocean, and have barbecue, and drink beer.

[00:21:01.55] JOE GALLOWAY: This was out on the other side of Hue?

[00:21:05.12] BLAIR CRAIG: It was on the China Sea. It was south of Hue, north of Phu Bai. I never went there, so I don't know.

[00:21:17.23] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't get to go?

[00:21:19.51] BLAIR CRAIG: But we did get R&Rs. So I think that was interesting and good. The dynamics of people who were in your unit are fascinating, because they're mostly young. I think I was the oldest. I think I was 24 when I got there. But you got to imagine, they're 19, 20 years old, and they've never been outside of their hometown. They don't even know where Vietnam is. Their parents don't know either. They just know it is a place.

[00:21:58.53] So you get there and the country is different. The smells, the whole aroma of Vietnam is different. But then you had the social dynamics, where people from the South, the white guys, had never lived with black guys. And now they're Soldiers, so everybody's together. It doesn't matter if you're Chinese, American Indian, or whatever it is. You don't get to pick your bunk--.

[00:22:27.12] JOE GALLOWAY: That's it.

[00:22:28.08] BLAIR CRAIG: Right, so you learn. I think it was a great-- in the military at that time, we probably had more cohesion than the general American population. So that's all positive things. But then we also had the introduction of drugs. And a lot of the young Soldiers, no matter how hard the authorities tried to keep it off base, you still had marijuana and you had other drugs. So for them, it was a time of experimentation. Even drinking beer was new to many Soldiers.

[00:22:59.22] So that whole thing, being away from home, not being able to rely on letters, and then there was the whole rise of the Black Power movement, and that had some impact. Very surprising. There never had been any issue between races until the Black Power movement started. And then suddenly, the blacks themselves would pressure the other blacks to not associate with the white guys.

[00:23:31.33] So I remember having a meeting, getting everybody together. The kind of mission that we did, everybody had a job. And you had to rely upon somebody watching your six. So I couldn't put up with this thing about, I'm not going to fire my weapon, I'm going to let the white guy die. And they all realized that they can do whatever they want when they got home. But when they're working together in the Army and we're all part of a team, then you work for the team. And there's no I in team. So do your job, shut your mouth, work with all of us. And they did. So I never had any problems. But many units, the larger units, did.

[00:24:14.24] JOE GALLOWAY: And there-- the worse problems were in the rear.

[00:24:18.73] BLAIR CRAIG: Yes. Out in the field, everybody-- you either did it right, or you had casualties. So it was back in the rear. And fortunately, we didn't have a lot of time. We didn't come in and stand down for two weeks or anything, so--. But I can only speak for our unit. But we all know that there was a lot of conflict, and fraggings, and drug use, and all those things. I

really believe that all Soldiers are great. And the worst thing you can do is give them too much time with nothing to do.

[00:24:56.84] JOE GALLOWAY: That, I take it, did not happen in your platoon, or company, or battalion?

[00:25:02.63] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, it didn't. The Cav was always busy. And we had a great relationship between our 120 men in the ground side of it. And each air rifle troop had one platoon of about 25 in an air rifle platoon, which did recovery for their own pilots, pretty much, and exploitation of targets. So we all worked together, and we had no reason to actually interface with the divisional brigades.

[00:25:41.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of the leadership in your outfit as high up as you could see it?

[00:25:48.30] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, let's start with the squadron level. I went through five squadron commanders, I think four or five, during the time I was there, the 20-some months.

[00:25:59.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Why so much rotation?

[00:26:02.82] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, Colonel DeLoach was about ready to rotate when I got there. Then there was a Colonel Patterson who came in. And we had a rocket attack, 122 millimeter rockets came into Eagle. That was not unusual. But he was running to get into one of the culverts and stuff over at bunker, and he fell and broke his leg, so then he was gone. And then we got a-- probably not good to mention names. We got another commander, and he was somewhere between bad and worse than bad. He was very self-important and was not a very good leader. He had a strong S3, and so that carried him.

[00:26:59.61] Then the good news is he was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Bob Molinelli, I think the finest Soldier I ever, ever served with. And he was a hard taskmaster, but this was his second tour. He had been over when they had the D model gunships. And he was a real let's go get them kind of guy. And speaking from the ground missions that we had to do, and the same was true for the Air Cav, he'd put you into the mouth of hell. But he'd give you every resource he could. And he'd be right there the whole time you were slugging it out on the ground. One time he even landed on the ground, and I think more for the morale of my troops than it was for anything else.

[00:27:51.50] But he was a fantastic leader, and I would have followed him anywhere. We stayed in touch all the way through his rank to two-star general. He was aviator of the year in 1971. He took over the 6th ACCB at Hood. And then he went up to the Pentagon and developed leukemia.

[00:28:15.58] And so every time-- I was working out of the headquarters at Pacific Command, and every time I had to go back to Washington for something involving the State Department issues, then I would always have lunch with Bob Molinelli. And I called his office, and his secretary started telling me that he had just passed away from cancer. So he was the kind of guy

that you want to always remember, and you wish everybody was as good. And you wish that you were as good.

[00:28:54.34] I've got to believe my philosophy in the military, Joe. And you may have seen it. I thank everybody who makes the military a profession. And those are the ones who don't stop work at 5 o'clock because it's 5 o'clock, and they don't complain if they have to work on Saturdays and Sundays. They are in the Army to be a Soldier.

[00:29:16.54] And so I think Soldiers, people who really want to stay in, have an obligation to find somebody who's their peer, who seems to do work better than they do, and learn from that person. And then we all have an obligation to mentor our Soldiers who are in our unit. And whatever their rank may be, they all need to be helped, and monitored, and mentored, make sure they get the education and the promotions that they need, that their families are taken care of. And I think the third thing is to look up towards somebody, like Bob Molinelli, and have the aspiration that, jeez, I wish I could be like him, and set that as your goal in life.

[00:30:03.32] So in my time in the military, I always, after I got smart, came up with this three-tiered concept. It worked for me, and I think it helped other people to become professional in what they did. So that's the kind of guy Bob Molinelli was. And I probably would have extended again. He let me take over the troop when there was fierce competition, particularly with all the captains in an aviation unit. We had just been through the one prior to me. And he woke up drunk in the morning, he was incomprehensible by noon. He never went to the field. He didn't know if we were in the field. But he was-- someone had put him in to be the commander of the unit. And I didn't want that to happen.

[00:30:59.02] So I had extended to Vietnam, and I was only a first lieutenant. But Bob Molinelli, Colonel Molinelli, I went to him, and he said, you know you're only a lieutenant. What makes you think that you can be the troop commander? And I said, I'm the only lieutenant you have that's served a year on the ground. And this is my unit, I'm not going to have anybody jeopardize my people. So he said, OK, Lieutenant, you got it. Yeah, he was a very unique guy. So in terms of people above that, the only other one I ever met-- because we had many-- the CGs of the 101st were many and varied.

[00:31:42.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Very varied.

[00:31:43.73] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah, and a Berry in there also. Sid Berry was a brigadier. And he-- ordered isn't the right word. There was a mission that had to be done, and so my unit got sent out. When I talked to him about it afterwards, he said he was expecting 90% fatality rates. But he knew that somebody had to go.

[00:32:16.41] So my unit was-- on the 8th of July in 1970, we had caught an entire regiment coming across the border north of Firebase Saigon. And so we were inserted. I had two air rifle platoons reinforcing my three platoons. So I had about 110 against 700. And we were air assaulted directly in on top of them. And my orders were to kill or capture the command group. And that was the highest priority, and along with that, whatever documents. So we did, and I lost six wonderful men.

[00:33:08.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Six?

[00:33:08.85] BLAIR CRAIG: Six. And two wounded.

[00:33:11.73] JOE GALLOWAY: That's not bad for where you landed and what you landed with.

[00:33:15.94] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah. It was a hell of a fight. And when they pulled us out, we had captured all the documents and killed the command group. And the only-- I didn't have any artillery. It was beyond our artillery range. I couldn't get fast movers in, so all I had was aerial rocket artillery and the Cav's helicopters. But we got pulled out, and then they put an ARVN unit in the next morning. And so there was about 140 dead still left on the battlefield. And we had captured all of the maps and the battle plans for northern I Corps for that entire regiment.

[00:33:59.49] So when I talked to General Berry and he told me that, I was angry. I was angry, but I realized that somebody had to make the decision. So he was a superior, who I never really knew. But from that one context, I both disliked him and I liked him, because he did what had to be done. And in the end, it came out OK. So you can't really pick who you work for in the military, you know?

[00:34:40.69] JOE GALLOWAY: True.

[00:34:47.47] BLAIR CRAIG: I think at some point, we have to get outside of ourself. So it was easy to do in Vietnam, because you didn't worry about anything. You couldn't do anything about yourself, except to do your job and hope everybody else did their job. And you got letters, or you didn't get letters, depending upon your family. And you wrote letters, or you didn't write letters, depending upon you.

[00:35:12.16] So you tend to focus on the environment you're in, and then small expectations of going on R&R or whatever that might be. At some point, you have to stop and appreciate why you're there. And you have to look outside of your own personal needs. I think one of the great things for me was learning more about the Vietnamese people. They had been fighting-- every Vietnamese everywhere had been fighting their entire life. They knew no peace. They only knew death. And they only knew threats and intimidation, whether it be from the NVA, the Viet Cong, or from us. You either do it our way, or we're going to pick up your whole village and we're going to move you. And the South--

[00:36:04.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Or we're going to kill you all.

[00:36:06.43] BLAIR CRAIG: True. And occasionally, we would go out on a MEDCAP. And I'd take my medics, and we'd go out and just stop in a village, set up security, and then people would just start coming to you. And I had an E-6 South Vietnamese army translator. And I was the first unit in Vietnam, perhaps because of our mission, to have the Kit Carson Scouts. So my lead Kit Carson Scout was an NVA. And he and I eventually got along fine. I depended upon-- relied upon him with my life.

[00:36:50.40] So we would go out, and we would talk to the people. And , who was my NVA scout, had taught me so much about the people, and the war, and his perspective. He had been fighting for over 10 years. And he had been lieutenant and had killed a lot of Americans, mostly against the 4th Infantry Division. He was always very successful. But even why he surrendered is a fascinating story, but I want to answer your question.

[00:37:24.42] So I started to appreciate and look at the Vietnamese people in the villages. And I tried to make it-- we had very little contact with them. But we did support an orphanage. And I'd make sure the mess hall would put together stuff and have my supply sergeant drive it out. We had-- our uniforms were washed by this orphanage and dried over buffalo poop. So it always smelled like you're all living with buffaloes. But I think that was important.

[00:38:04.55] And you think a lot about your family. And so family becomes very important. And I think when you come back from an environment like that, you have high aspirations that what you did was the best you could do. And you come back and you find a very dysfunctional society. I think that's one of the huge problems that our young warriors today face coming back. They come back to the United States where everybody hates one another. Nobody respects the Office of the President, the elected officials. And everybody wants to know, what's in it for me? Give me more money. I'm entitled to something.

[00:38:48.36] In the military, there's a strong sense of tribe, just like the American Indians. And some of my best friends are Indians. Everybody in the tribe has a job to do, and everybody does it. And they are respected because they have values, and they share common values. And that's what the military is. When people came back from Vietnam, they didn't find that. Their family didn't know how to talk to them. These parades that people talk about are stupid for people to talk about it, because you can't have a parade for one person coming home. We all went over as one, we came back as one. You went to your hometown. And whatever happened, happened. And how you got readjusted was up to you and your family.

[00:39:44.37] So I think that when you're in a combat environment particularly, you rely so heavily on the people you're with, that when you come home and find that that's absent in Ashtabula, Ohio, or wherever it is, you're kind of lost. And I think that's the second thing--

[00:40:06.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Where and when did you earn your Silver Star?

[00:40:11.91] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, I didn't. Our unit earned that. And it wasn't just me. General Berry awarded four Silver Stars.

[00:40:24.57] JOE GALLOWAY: To your unit?

[00:40:26.04] BLAIR CRAIG: Yes. I was the only one who was alive. The others were part of the six that died. So it was that day, the 8th of July. And there were many other missions that were not quite as dramatic as that, but our unit never put anybody in for awards. It wasn't one of the things that we even thought about.

[00:40:57.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there other specific operations that stand out in your memory as either great successes or great failures?

[00:41:08.77] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, I hope we never had a failure. Yeah, I can. But in the time I was there, I think perspective-- I mean, I know that I went in on well over 70 combat assaults. And most of them were down through triple canopy. We'd call in a set of fighters, blow a hole, come over in the helicopters, and rappel down 100 feet or more.

[00:41:38.49] So that was the type of thing we did. So we were sent out one day at the beginning of the monsoon season of '70, so October, November. And there was an enemy that had been reported on this hillside, so we were told to go in. And en route, I was told, watch out, because there was a 220-man NVA unit down on the water in the river down slope from where we were being put in.

[00:42:10.63] So the thing was to get in, get out. Well, we couldn't get out. We did find a large cache of stuff and limited contact, but then the weather socked in. And we always traveled, Joe, with just a lot of ammunition and one day's ration. We ended up being there five days in driving rain and mud.

[00:42:39.26] JOE GALLOWAY: At least you wasn't thirsty.

[00:42:41.00] BLAIR CRAIG: Yes, that's true. But it had an impact. Your body starts to-- particularly guys who were weightlifters, their muscles would start to just spasm because of the cold and rain. Vietnam was still in a monsoon. It was pretty cold. We really couldn't move a whole lot, because I was told there's this unit. And we would change our NDPs each night. And sometimes, we'd go back and look and see footprints where we had left that last ones. So they obviously knew where we were. And it didn't look like they were going to get us out.

[00:43:17.63] That unit that I told you about, the Hac Bao, was waiting to come in. But the weather wouldn't break so that they could. The division had called it a Tac E, a Tactical Emergency, and had grounded all aircraft.

[00:43:31.07] JOE GALLOWAY: What's an NDP?

[00:43:32.93] BLAIR CRAIG: Oh, a night defensive position.

[00:43:35.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Night defensive position.

[00:43:38.24] BLAIR CRAIG: That's where you're out patrolling it and doing reconnaissance. And then at night, you have to come back to some one place, and you set up your Claymore mines and defense.

[00:43:48.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Ambush positions.

[00:43:49.91] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah, and then send out some patrols and listening points. So anyway, the end of the story is that Colonel Molinelli, this Soldier's Soldier, he got all the pilots

together at the O club and said, we've got to go get Delta Troop. And this is an all-volunteer mission. So everybody is going to volunteer. And the entire Cav, all three troops, volunteered. And so the next day, he ordered the birds to fly. And he didn't tell the division, because they would have said no.

[00:44:30.42] So they flew out low level, and they went out to the Ruong Ruong Valley. And then they staged, put the air rifle platoons down to protect the birds. And he got up, and he got radio contact with me. And he himself is the lead bird. He said, I'm going to follow a Loach, and we're going to follow the water line. And then when you hear us, you tell us when to turn right. And then we're going to work our way up. So they came through. It was zero visibility. I mean, I could see maybe 50 feet. And they did, those wonderful guys.

[00:45:11.08] JOE GALLOWAY: You could hear them?

[00:45:12.75] BLAIR CRAIG: I listened. I told them turn. And the Loach came first. And he flew sideways, so he can look out the side door, because you couldn't look out this way. And he flew up until he came to this clearing that we had already surrounded and had our troops on. And so he took the first two out. And then Colonel Molinelli landed, and he took four. And then the rest was pretty much done just two people at the time, with the one pilot flying a Loach until all of--

[00:45:43.09] JOE GALLOWAY: They evaced with Loaches?

[00:45:45.52] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah. Well, that bird was the easiest one to get up the river. And remember that river is where they told us the 220-man NVA unit was. So that's what G2 said. So yeah, we all got flown out to where they had staged. The air rifle platoons were protecting the area. And then we got on the Hueys, and we went back. And it was when we had all been recovered that Colonel Molinelli called the division, and then he had to go up and report to the CG about why he had lied.

[00:46:17.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Had pirated all the Loaches.

[00:46:21.31] BLAIR CRAIG: So that was another great story. I have nothing but admiration for all those young warrant officers. I know one warrant officer. Right now, I can't think of it. He was shot down four times in one day. Each time he was shot down, he went back on another bird and flew out again. Because the Cav, Colonel Molinelli was in charge of all aviation assets for Lam Son 719.

[00:46:48.52] JOE GALLOWAY: These guys were crazy. I think they put the press with them on purpose.

[00:46:58.84] BLAIR CRAIG: Obviously, I think our lives, those of us who made it out-- in Vietnam from '69 to '71, I left at the very end of '70. And Lam Son 719, we actually set up when I was still in Delta Troop. We found the headquarters of the NVAs over in the Laotian escarpments by doing a wiretap on a single copper wire coming out of Laos. We did that with the

Rangers. So from that, then they set up Lam Son 719. And Molinelli was the lead guy in that. So those are both bad days, good days.

[00:47:46.75] JOE GALLOWAY: He won there.

[00:47:53.53] BLAIR CRAIG: And sometimes, they're not so good. After I left, I had-- one of my platoon leaders was Bob Chennault. He was the grandson of Claire Chennault from the Flying Tigers. Bob was a good guy from Galveston, Texas-- Gonzalez, Texas, I think. He was a lightweight boxing champion. Bob went in to rescue the Rangers-- Ranger Team Cub in April of '71. And the Rangers were really pretty much all shot up and dead. And then our platoon, the 2nd Platoon, Delta, got ambushed. And so then they had to put in the 506th Infantry. And somebody else ended up putting in a full two battalions to rescue the Rangers.

[00:48:51.87] But not all the stories come out without casualties. And so I mention that, I guess, because I've looked and there were very few casualties in I Corps with the 101st after that big April engagement. Politically, we were trying to extract ourselves. And the NVA were playing a cautious game of wait and see, and then seize the opportunity. So April was the last major conflict for I Corps.

[00:49:37.32] My mother would write all the time, and I think that was the warm spot. I wasn't married. I didn't have a girlfriend. All the girlfriends I had were back in the States, and I was hoping to get back to them. But the high point was when I extended, Colonel Molinelli told me to take leave and go home and see my family. So I flew home to see my mother, and my sister, and my grandfather. And he meant a lot to me.

[00:50:22.11] So I was there, but actually I didn't even stay the 30 days. I wanted to get back. I had asked Colonel Molinelli not to put Delta Troop in the field until I could come back. And he said he'd try to respect that if he could. So he sheltered them and used more of the air rifle platoons until I got back. So I think after about 17 days, I called and told the Army to pick me up and move me out again. So I went back.

[00:50:54.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't even take your 30?

[00:50:57.26] BLAIR CRAIG: No, because I think it goes back to what I said. My family really had become the men in my unit, and I didn't want them put out in the field without me there.

[00:51:16.46] They're all great Soldiers. I know more about the Koreans because I've spent many, many months and years in Korea since Vietnam. But I never personally worked with any of them. And the only Aussies I ever ran into were FACs. And you can tell by their accent that they were not exactly our Air Force. So I really had none.

[00:51:40.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And your impression of the South Vietnamese military, ARVN?

[00:51:49.87] BLAIR CRAIG: I never worked with the ARVN straight up. I had an interpreter who was really there to help me call in Vietnamese artillery. And so the only ones I can speak to

are the Hac Bao, the Black Panther unit that was the ones who would come to rescue me and my unit. And Dai Uy Duan Captain Duan was the commander. And I always had great respect for him. We worked well together. It turned out that a friend of mine from-- John Zimmerman was their adviser.

[00:52:42.04] Anyway, I could always depend upon them. If they were tasked, they would come. And if we were on the ground, they would--. So my experience really with the regular ARVN units was minimal. But you heard stories, and so it wasn't firsthand. So I don't want to say other good things or bad things about them.

[00:53:03.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have a hard time leaving command and leaving the unit to go home?

[00:53:11.47] BLAIR CRAIG: You know, Joe, I think you're the only one that ever has asked that. And so that hurts a little bit. I did. And for 20 months, I never-- I mean, I'd been shot at. I've had bullets hit all around me. I've had branches disintegrate all around me. I never worried about that. I worried about the mission and the men.

[00:53:43.15] And it got to the point in November where I started thinking more about, am I going to make it back from this mission? I mean, how often can you keep pressing the button? And then I realized that I was a hazard to my unit, because you can't go out there trying to protect yourself and not get hit when you're supposed to be setting the example and leading the men. So that's why I went to Colonel Molinelli, and I said--

[00:54:17.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Then you knew it was time to go?

[00:54:19.08] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah. That's the first time I ever told anybody that.

[00:54:22.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you recall any memorable holidays during your tour-- Christmas, Thanksgiving? Did the Army ever deliver you some turkey and dressing?

[00:54:35.97] BLAIR CRAIG: Well, I told you about Sergeant Sawyer, Big T, the mess sergeant. He would put on a turkey dinner that was just like back home, and it actually tasted good. I mean, he was a great mess sergeant. So I remember the Thanksgivings. And I was only there for one Christmas. And Bob Hope and his entourage came in. And as I mentioned to Marc earlier, Connie Stevens, for us, ended up being a significant person. But his whole troupe was there.

[00:55:15.07] One of the things I just turned over to Marc to put in the Library of Congress is the full video of that 1969 Christmas day at Camp Eagle Bob Hope show. None of my people got to go, because being that elite reconnaissance unit, we were all sent out. The first range of mountains was where the 122 rockets would come in and hit Camp Eagle.

[00:55:45.72] JOE GALLOWAY: You had to go out and keep the rockets off of Bob Hope--

[00:55:49.38] BLAIR CRAIG: We did.

[00:55:50.22] JOE GALLOWAY: --and the girl dancers.

[00:55:53.40] BLAIR CRAIG: Absolutely. So it broke our heart, but we did it. And as I had mentioned to Marc, the follow-on story is in 2005. I guess it could have been at our Delta Troop reunion. They started in 2002. And in April this year, we'll have our next one, so every two years. And in 2005, I got in touch with Connie Stevens. And I told her that we missed the show in '69, and would she be willing to come to our reunion in Nashville? So what a wonderful lady. So she said, yeah.

[00:56:32.33] So I got the airline to comp her a first class ticket. They got the hotel to give her the president's suite. We talked some company in Nashville out of a 30 foot stretch limo. And one of our guys is a Lakota Sioux Indian. And he had been in a movie, Rough Rider. And he didn't have a speaking part. I think his one speaking part was something like, I can ride anything. It was one of those. So we had Bob be her escort officer, because he's the only actor we had.

[00:57:14.84] And she just was such a trooper. She came and did everything with the troops. If we were sitting down in the evening at the bar, she'd come sit down. She bought a whole bunch of pizza one time just to be with us. And everywhere we went, if we went out Fort Campbell, she dressed in the same reunion shirt we wore.

[00:57:35.49] And so she's quite a hero to us. I would-- I know this is a little out of script, but she told me something one time, and I think it's worth passing on. We should all admire Bob Hope, there never will be another Bob Hope and what he did for soldiers, and sailors, and Marines, Airmen, Coast Guard. But Connie told me one time when we were just sitting around-- she would talk about Bob Hope. And she said, when she first started going on those tours to be with the soldiers, part of what they did was go to the hospitals.

[00:58:20.56] And she went to the hospitals and she just started crying. And Bob Hope took her aside and said, what are you doing? And she said, I just, emotionally, I can't see, I can't take the damage, their blown up bodies, and yet they're in the bed and they're smiling as if nothing's wrong.

[00:58:46.19] And Bob said to her, don't you ever do this again, this isn't about you. This is about them. And you're going to put a smile on your face and a song in your voice, and you're going to shut up and make them feel like they're the most important person in the world. And she said, I learned to do that. And that was the biggest lesson that she ever had as an actress. So, yeah.

[00:59:20.29] Interesting, because what may seem new to me or cutting-edge certainly wasn't to somebody who was involved in procurement or in the special ops team. We worked with them a lot in the same area. But they had things like a burster device, so they could store their messages and then they could send them all. It was a burster.

[00:59:54.92] Well, we, on the other hand, worked well beyond artillery range and I couldn't be supported by any units. And often, I worked with no radio communications with anybody--

[01:00:08.15] JOE GALLOWAY: At all.

[01:00:09.23] BLAIR CRAIG: --except for twice a day. There was birds that flew out of Thailand-- Hillsboro and Moonbeam. So cutting-edge technology for me was waiting till I got a beep-beep in my headset. And then that was either Hillsboro during the day or moonbeam at night passing over and checking in on us.

[01:00:36.32] JOE GALLOWAY: And you could--

[01:00:37.22] BLAIR CRAIG: And I could click back. And if I added a short message, like need food, need ammo, whatever--

[01:00:43.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Two words.

[01:00:44.94] BLAIR CRAIG: Whatever it was. And then they would relay that. So to me that was cutting-edge. And that one mission that we went on I told with the Rangers, we actually-- it was a-- we used to call it a stay behind. You all come in, and then you leave one detachment there to do what they were supposed to do. And then you go somewhere and you come back, pick them up, and get out.

[01:01:12.26] Somebody in the 20th Radio Research Unit in Saigon, we had found a wire coming out of Laos. And it was a single wire about a foot off the ground. So we had always been looking for their headquarters, which was back in these mountains. And they had our anti-aircraft artillery that they rolled in and out on railroad tracks, and they'd shoot at any aircraft that came that way. So we figured there had been this headquarters, this mythical Qazvin.

[01:01:40.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Qazvin.

[01:01:41.72] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah. So someone down in Saigon came up with the idea of developing this tap, a wiretap. And so I was trained in how to do it, and the Ranger Team leader in case they got compromised. So it was kind of cutting-edge. It was a burster device, but you could bury it in the ground, and then the one wooden stake, this 12 foot high stake. It came with a variety of different waxes. And so after you buried the burster device in the base of the thing, you took your bayonet, you cut a slit in the wood, inserted the transmission antenna, the antenna in that, and then you had to color match the wax to the wood to--

[01:02:34.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Cover it up.

[01:02:34.82] BLAIR CRAIG: --cover it up. And then those aircraft I was telling you about-- Hillsboro and Moonbeam-- because it had to be ones with a certain electronic warfare ability--

[01:02:43.79] JOE GALLOWAY: They could trigger it--

[01:02:44.15] BLAIR CRAIG: --they could trigger it--

[01:02:44.85] JOE GALLOWAY: --and collect it--

[01:02:45.62] BLAIR CRAIG: --and collect it.

[01:02:46.64] JOE GALLOWAY: --in a burst.

[01:02:47.75] BLAIR CRAIG: And that is what ended up being the intelligence that launched Lam Son 719. Because we were able to-- Saigon was able to-- oh, and we thought we were so smart. When we pulled it back out and tried to play it back, there was nothing there because it had all been encrypted and encoded. So only the people who weren't in Saigon and Washington-- they flew directly from Saigon back to the Pentagon. And the next thing we knew, they came up with developing the plan for the invasion into Laos.

[01:03:25.13] JOE GALLOWAY: And left you with the encrypted data?

[01:03:27.95] BLAIR CRAIG: No, no, the whole device went. We just thought we'd play it and be able to find out what it was.

[01:03:33.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:03:40.13] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah, as I said, it was bittersweet. I didn't really want to go, but I knew I wasn't any good if I was worrying about myself. So I don't really remember anything. But one of the former platoon leaders, first platoon leader when I got there, was a guy named Ed Cruickshank. And he had been in touch with me. He'd send me postcards. He lived in Hawaii. And he'd send these pictures of semi-naked women on the beach with a thatched roof hut and stuff that doesn't really exist, but it was nice to get a postcard anyway.

[01:04:15.35] And when I had gotten word to him that I was starting to feel like I ought to come home, it was around Thanksgiving. He said, why don't you come here and just decompress for a while? So I got off the plane in Honolulu and spent five days with him and his family, and then got back on a plane and then flew to see my mom.

[01:04:43.77] So there's always a personal side to it. But Joe, I think sometimes we forget that those of us who stayed in the military had a far different experience of separation or memories than majority of the conscripted or volunteer enlisted primarily who were--

[01:05:11.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were on one tour and out.

[01:05:14.43] BLAIR CRAIG: Yeah. And in their time, they-- I mean, they went to basic training, maybe AIT, so that's four or five months, and if they got any special training after that. Then they were shipped over. They spent a year. If they were-- there was a tooth-to-tail ratio in Vietnam of about 10 to 1. So for every one soldier carrying a rifle out in the field, there were 10 other people doing all jobs that had to be done. But they were back in base areas, or they were radio announcers, or Good Morning, Vietnam guys, or air traffic controllers, or offloading ships at ports, whatever they did.

[01:05:54.05] But so not everybody had a lot of trauma going back, or memories of things that they cause what we now call post-traumatic stress. But in two years, they were back home. And

then they had nobody really to talk to, or if they had issues that were leftover from memories. Whereas if you stayed in the military--

[01:06:17.79] JOE GALLOWAY: You were inside the perimeter.

[01:06:19.68] BLAIR CRAIG: --you were still inside the perimeter, and you still had that support and you still had your tribe. And the wonderful thing was you'd go someplace like the club, or you'd be out in the field and on exercise, and it would remind you of a story. And you'd tell a story that you thought was so wonderful, like the two I already bored you with. And that next guy would tell you a story that'd just make your hair stand up.

[01:06:46.14] [LAUGHTER]

[01:06:47.00] So you realize that everybody had stories to tell, and you could talk to one another. Well, we had our first reunion in 2002 in Branson, Missouri. My old platoon sergeant and I are the ones that started this whole thing. We found people, and we put it on. But what I wanted to tell you was one of the men came up and-- it doesn't matter what was your rank. I mean, it was a lieutenant colonel, retired at the time. But they remember you as a lieutenant or captain. So it's either, Captain, can I talk to you, or LT, can I talk to you?

[01:07:29.66] So he told me that he'd been bothered. He was very successful in Disneyland, but he said that he had this problem. And without going into it in detail, he had been in a helicopter. It was a hot LZ, so they were taking fire. It was just a one platoon operation. And it was my old platoon, and therefore I had been his platoon leader up until a couple of weeks before.

[01:08:01.14] And I had a new lieutenant, and they had to rappel down through-- and they're being shot at, and he had to rappel down to the ground. But the lieutenant froze on the skid. And this guy, this trooper, was carrying the radio. And he pushed the lieutenant to get him off the skid, because you got the four guys in the helicopter that are going to die along with you if it crashes.

[01:08:25.06] So the lieutenant went down, but he hadn't set properly to do the rappel. And he hit a tree stump because we had blown the LZ. And so we just we had a thing, it was like a McGuire rig. We'd just put a snap link in their LBE, their load bearing equipment, and then pull back up into the helicopter a little bit. But anyway, the bird took off with him dangling 100 feet below it.

[01:08:50.10] JOE GALLOWAY: The lieutenant?

[01:08:51.33] BLAIR CRAIG: Lieutenant. And we never saw him again. But at this first reunion, the lieutenant was there. And this young trooper said, I thought I'd killed him. All these years, I thought he was dead and I had killed him. And he's a ghost, he's here now. I don't know if I can handle that.

[01:09:10.60] So all it took for all the demons to go away, those 40 years of demons that he'd been carrying inside of him with nobody to talk to him. I told him, you did absolutely the right thing. Because if you hadn't gotten the lieutenant off the skid and that bird went down, then you

all would have died. People on the ground would have died. And so you did what you had to do, Dan. And that's all it took, that's all he needed. His wife came up to see me at the end of the reunion and said that she didn't know what the conversation had been about, but he was an entirely different man than he was the day he arrived at that reunion.

[01:09:49.17] So I think there's a lot of stories about people going home. Number one, I think we ought to get off this thing about parades. And I do recognize that the people who had no one to talk to when they came back, they could bear that only within themselves. Because most Soldiers will tell you, if you're not a Soldier, you can't understand my story, so I don't have anything to tell you, right? Because you've never experienced anything like I did if you really experienced some things.

[01:10:18.42] So then the third part of that is, if you stayed in the military, then you still had the support group. You're still part of the tribe. You're all warriors together. And you can laugh and let it be a memory, but not let it be a nightmare.

[01:10:39.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think your Vietnam tour changed you and affected your life for good or for less than good?

[01:10:51.89] BLAIR CRAIG: I have a larger perspective of that. The military was the best thing that I ever did in my life. It taught me responsibility, leadership, management, appreciation for the small things when you have them and not to worry about the bad things when they all seem to be all you got. I was quite sure I was going to die several times in Vietnam. So one of the greatest things was nothing since then has bothered me.

[01:11:26.49] I don't worry about dying because I didn't think I was going to be here. I'm 75 now, and I thought my life would end when I was 25. So when you look at it that way, then life becomes a lot more pleasant. You don't let little things bother you because the biggest thing is you got one more day. And I think that's probably a good thing.

[01:11:56.36] I think the only-- Joe, the only negative thing, when I came back, I was assigned to Fort Knox to teach cavalry tactics at the Armor School. And General Patton was the commandant of the Armor School at the time. And I had grown up in the woods and enjoyed-- I played in the woods, I hunted in the woods, I loved the woods. I felt safe and secure. And Vietnam made me apprehensive.

[01:12:29.28] I could hear small sounds, and I could see things. I could see leaves move. And so the jungle and the forest, when I left Vietnam, was a place I had to reacquaint with. And so one of the things I did, I bought a trail bike, a motorcycle. And we had this large training area, and I had access to all the training areas because I taught cav tactics.

[01:12:59.77] And I'd go off by myself on a motorcycle and just-- the wonderful thing is you get 20 inches in front of a wheel. And that's all that exists is that 20 inches to jump streams, go over logs, avoid rocks. And it gave me time to then focus on that, and then just look around and realize that the woods were still my friend. And I could take the time to see the red-tailed hawks and the other birds and listen, too, and look for frogs and whatever.

[01:13:34.30] So it may seem like a small thing, but the only negative thing that I realized was that I was not comfortable in the woods until I came to grips with it.

[01:13:49.62] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[01:13:59.23] BLAIR CRAIG: It seems every time you ask me a question, I've got to go back a little bit. But one of the things that I did in the military, the military gave me-- I got a master's degree and I had great times. But when I was in Hawaii working at CINCPAC headquarters, they found out that I had gotten blown up a couple of times. So I had some damage to my hips, and so they actually ended up medically retiring me, which was not what I wanted at that time. But I had more than 20 years, so they just said, you can't do your worldwide combat mission.

[01:14:41.28] So I started doing other things. And I started teaching at the University, Chaminade University. And I taught both history and political science for-- I don't know-- maybe 10 years total, because I stayed in Hawaii. The point I'm leading up to is I ended up teaching some very successful courses on the Cold War and the Vietnam War, 1945 to 1975.

[01:15:10.11] And I taught another one on American history, art, music as culture. And I focused all three of those on the period of the '60s, '70s, and late '50s. So when you look back at that era, to answer your question, and the whole controversy about Vietnam, and you have the opportunity to teach and to educate or to talk to or expose young people to some of the realities, then you find you're able to see a larger perspective of what Vietnam was about, and what the social issues were at home, and the political issues, and all the rest of that.

[01:15:59.61] So I feel-- for me personally, I believe in the Domino Theory. I felt that it was a reality that communism-- if you read-- one of the great problems of the American public is that they don't read anything. But if you did, then you can look at Africa and South America, you can look at Che Guevara, you can look at all of the inroads that communism was making around the world. And clearly, Indochina, French Indochina, was the focal point that we were in.

[01:16:29.24] Now whether or not we should have gone in after the French got defeated in Khe Sanh, Dien Bien Phu, there were reasons-- our alliance with France, Charles de Gaulle appealed to the government, all those things. And maybe that was right. So I don't think Soldiers worried about that, Joe. I know none of my people ever worried about that. They only worried about what was the next mission and how many days till they got to go on R&R. So those were the only two things that really mattered.

[01:17:04.34] I think that Vietnam should be remembered in the same context that other wars have been fought. And Soldiers don't hate the enemy. We were willing to kill the enemy because the enemy is willing to kill us. But the last person who really wants war is Soldiers, because they're the only ones who have to face it. So I don't think Soldiers hate the enemy. I don't hate the enemy. I don't hate Cam, who was my Kit Carson Scout.

[01:17:36.99] And when you look back at what we did with Germany, everybody hated the Huns and had nothing good to say about Germany, until suddenly we decided we were going to rebuild

Germany. So we rebuilt the half that we were allowed to rebuild, and the Soviets did what they were supposed to do with the other half. And the same thing happened in Korea and in China and Japan. One of the three largest economic engines in the world is Japan nowadays. And they were completely destitute after we dropped the nuclear bombs on them.

[01:18:14.77] So I think people should stop looking at small bits of history. I don't care whether Jane Fonda went over and sat on an antiaircraft artillery piece. And I don't care if John Kerry threw his medals away. I think we should look at war as a military response to a political decision. And I think we should look at people as people.

[01:18:43.09] And the people in Vietnam didn't want a war. And yet I've done an awful lot of reading, and I know that Ho Chi Minh-- I would have liked to have met Ho Chi Minh. You know that Ho Chi Minh, when they defeated the French-- and they were supposed to, by agreement in the international, they were going to have their own government.

[01:19:03.82] The constitution that he read in Hanoi when-- and we had American advisers there with him. That day there was a flyover by American aircraft in support of the fact that the Viet Minh had won and defeated the French and were going to get-- and that constitution, if you take the time to read it, starts off with, "all men are created equal with certain inalienable rights."

[01:19:33.11] And this is Ho Chi Minh reading that constitution to his people, but we rescinded our agreement to support that government because he had been educated. And they believed in France, and they thought he was a communist. So they said, OK, we can't support you anymore. The same thing happened with Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-Shek.

[01:19:54.56] So I think people need to stop being so emotional and just take the time to actually learn what these wars were about, what some of the causative factors were. And then we-- everybody loves the Germans now, and everybody loves the Japanese.

[01:20:13.76] And three years ago when-- the gentleman that was the commander of Delta Troop when I got there, Fred Rees, was a captain, a West Point graduate, class of '66. And he is the longest serving adjutant general in Oregon. I think he went through four different governors. But he retired in 2013, and I was asked to come and speak at his retirement.

[01:20:38.93] Prior to that, there had been this partnership program, a state partnership program, between the National Guard and nations. Vietnam, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is now a state partner with Oregon. And so to this delegation came a three-star general who was 19 years old when Fred and I were in Vietnam. At this conference, a three-day conference, there were over 300 military people. The three of us were the only three who ever served in Vietnam.

[01:21:11.51] And so to sit down with this three-star general who was on the-- chief of staff of the armed forces, to sit down-- and he had been an engineer trying to repair the highway that went through A Chau Valley. And every day we'd blow it up, and every day they'd come in and fill up the holes and do whatever.

[01:21:34.96] But to sit and talk to him-- and his initiative then was to try to get more people from the United States to attend the university, and have more of their people come to our universities, and set up joint industries where-- they had a lot of trees, and they wanted to make furniture. It went on and on and on for three days. I was just amazed to sit down and talk with the only person there that I personally-- we fought in the same rice bowl. I mean, the A Shau valley was our place.

[01:22:06.33] And when you have a perspective like that, Joe, where the opportunity I had to talk with Cam about what got him involved in fighting and killing Americans and then working with us, there's a personal side to it, but there's a historical side. And I don't think most people take the time to get educated. They just emotionally say, well, we should never deal with the Vietnamese again.

[01:22:36.29] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration. You're part of it today.

[01:22:42.20] BLAIR CRAIG: Yes I am. Yes I am.

[01:22:44.12] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about that?

[01:22:46.43] BLAIR CRAIG: Actually, I'm part of a larger part because one of the things that I did was when I moved to Florida from Hawaii, I went to the National Guard. And they ended up hiring me to be their-- you will understand, but the plans writer.

[01:23:03.74] So I wrote all the-- I rewrote all the plans for the National Guard to make them easier to execute. And so I was the J35 and the J5, but I was a civilian contractor. So the Florida Guard, I convinced them to become a partner. And I put on the events for them to honor Vietnam veterans. And they were very gracious, and they fully supported it.

[01:23:34.10] And I'm a member of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1084 in St. Augustine and St. Johns County. And we have signed up and we are a full partner in the Commemoration. So we've handed out probably 150 of these pins to different people. I carry them with me when I travel, and I do that.

[01:23:58.22] We have saluted Gold Star Mothers and Blue Star Families as recently as-- well, we do it every time we find a person who is eligible. But a year ago, March of '19, I put on a big event for the parents-- the mother-- she's 97 years old-- of Leo C. Chase, who was with you in the Ia Drang Valley and died that day. Leo C. Chase was from St. Augustine, Florida, the first person from St. Johns County to die in Vietnam. And so last March, we had a celebration as part of the Commemoration. And the whole Chase family was there. We were able to present Blue Star pins to his sisters, brothers, and a Gold Star to his mother.

[01:24:59.47] And as a guest speaker, I brought in Lieutenant Colonel Barry Bridger, who I met when I was at the Command and General Staff College. And Barry was a POW for almost six years, an Air Force pilot that was shot down. And so he was kind enough to come and be the speaker and talk not just about being a POW. He just talked more about being in the military.

[01:25:28.01] But I asked Barry to come because when I was at Command and General Staff College, we'd have these guest lecturers. And you'd maybe have 800 people in this big conference room and have a guest speaker. Barry was our guest speaker one day. And I know he talked about the tap code and all the other things that POWs also do.

[01:25:45.80] But he shared this story, which I think is worth repeating. And it's lived with me since that time in 1979 when I heard it. He said he and one other person were in the Hanoi Hilton. And they didn't have any mattresses, they just had a metal bed and one blanket. And they had a number 10 can. And that number 10 can was their a whole bathroom, right? So that's where-- everything that went in that can was not going to go on the floor.

[01:26:23.68] And that Christmas they had gotten, through the Red Cross, a package. And the guards stole everything in the package except the toothbrush. So Barry and his cell mate had this one toothbrush, and that was a prized possession when you have nothing. Barry was sitting in the corner and his cell mate was brushing his teeth with the prized toothbrush. He was standing over the pot, the number 10 can. And suddenly, the toothbrush slipped out of his hand.

[01:26:59.97] JOE GALLOWAY: It fell in the commode?

[01:27:01.83] BLAIR CRAIG: It fell in the commode. And Barry's-- it was just this pregnant pause. And he paused on the stage and he said, I didn't say anything and he didn't move. And he didn't look down. And finally, he slowly lowered his head. He came up with a big smile and said, bristles up.

[01:27:23.56] [LAUGHTER]

[01:27:23.99] JOE GALLOWAY: The five second rule.

[01:27:25.54] [LAUGHTER]

[01:27:26.79] BLAIR CRAIG: So he could get it out, and now they still have their toothbrush.