

## **Crecca, Joseph USAF POW**

[00:00:21.27] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

[00:00:24.12] JOE CRECCA: 25 years old.

[00:00:25.67] JOE GALLOWAY: An old guy.

[00:00:28.62] JOE CRECCA: Gung-ho fighter pilot. I was single. I left behind my mother, my father, and my brother. That was my only immediate family.

[00:00:37.74] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you enter the military?

[00:00:40.53] JOE CRECCA: I actually entered July of 1964.

[00:00:46.82] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the situation in Vietnam before you entered the military?

[00:00:53.42] JOE CRECCA: Well, I knew that we were fighting over there and that we were losing people. And when I heard about people being killed and airplanes being shot down I wanted to get into the war because I wanted to fight communism. JOE CRECCA: I went through officer training school at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. And I picked the wrong time of the year to do it, it was right in the middle of the summer.

[00:01:21.75] JOE GALLOWAY: I grew up down there. I know what you're talking about.

[00:01:24.96] JOE CRECCA: Well, I had to go through the basic officer training at Lackland, which was about three months. They used to call it 90-day wonders, which resulted in me becoming a second lieutenant. I was commissioned 28 September, 1964. Then I went to undergraduate pilot training at Williams Air Force Base, Arizona. That's a 13-month course.

[00:01:51.84] And I graduated from there October 22, 1965. After that I went through F-4 conversion as they call it, to train in the F-4C, which is a twin-engine supersonic fighter, at the time, the Air Force's front line fighter. And I finished that sometime around June 1966. And then--

[00:02:21.75] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you like that plane?

[00:02:23.16] JOE CRECCA: Oh, I loved it actually. I wish I was in the front seat. But at the time that I graduated from pilot training there were very few fighter assignments for my class. I was very fortunate to get a fighter.

[00:02:36.42] In the next class it was all F-105s and F-4s. So I would have got my dream assignment, which would have been an F-105, but then I would have either been-- I would have probably been killed but I would have been happier. I finished pilot training and then I was sent after pilot training to the F-4 training and after F-4 training to jungle survival school.

[00:02:59.70] Jungle survival school was entertaining. It was in the Philippine Islands just basically at Clark Air Base. And then they flew you in a helicopter out to the jungle and they planted you somewhere in the weeds and then you had to try to escape and evade from the Negritos, which is impossible. And they would find you no matter where you hid.

[00:03:32.29] JOE CRECCA: I was pipelined straight from pilot training, jungle survival school, right to Da Nang on actually V-J Day, August the 14, 1966 in Arizona Air Guard C-97. JOE CRECCA: The sites that I saw were United States Air Force and Marine Corps airplanes taxiing and taking off with their combat loads of bombs, rockets, napalm, and I thought to myself, I'm finally here. This is the war zone. This is what you've always wanted. You're here.

[00:04:11.44] And I was happy. And even when they opened the door and that mid-August hot humid air hit me and the smell of the jet fuel and the exhaust and everything hit me it didn't bother me. I just wanted-- I was where I want it to be.

[00:04:30.94] JOE GALLOWAY: It's where you wanted to be. JOE GALLOWAY: And what was your initial assignment?

[00:04:36.75] JOE CRECCA: Well, I was in 480th Technical Fighter Squadron of the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing, initially it was the 35th Tac Fighter Wing but that changed a month later. And initially your duties are just to get oriented, initial orientation. You have to be briefed on what the departure routes are, what the arrival routes are, all the different things that you have to know about tanker tracks, frequencies, coordinates, and all the stuff that you really have to--

[00:05:15.30] you can't be looking down at a knee pad all the time. You have to know the stuff because you need to be able to do it just like that-- radio frequencies, coordinates, and stuff like that. And then you have-- of course, you have to get settled, and it takes about a week. So I flew my first mission about a week later.

[00:05:36.00] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were flying back seat?

[00:05:38.01] JOE CRECCA: I was a back seat guy, yeah.

[00:05:39.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me what those duties were?

[00:05:41.79] JOE CRECCA: Well, there was-- it's funny you should ask that. There was a picture of LBJ in one of the buildings, and he had-- it was a particularly poor picture of the man. And he was-- he had his mouth wide open. And it looked like he was screaming.

[00:06:02.34] And somebody had written a caption on it and it was a message to back seaters. And it was Peso, like PSO, pilot system operator. It was, lock on, change channels, and shut the hell up. But that isn't just what we did.

[00:06:22.98] What we had to do, our serious job was to look out for threats coming from behind and the sides and everything while the guy was flying the airplane. His job was to get the bombs on the target, shoot down MiGs if we ever got a chance to do that. And our job was to navigate

to the target and yes, change the channels and use the radar because the radar was very important in knocking down a MiG at long range.

[00:06:53.64] JOE CRECCA: My first mission was a night mission right around August the 22nd. We flew one month of night missions and one month a day missions, and we did that changeover on the night of the 21st, morning of the 22nd. And so my first mission was with a fellow named Murray Borden who was lost two months later.

[00:07:18.51] And it was scary because you're flying along and you see this flash and I thought it was gunfire. And I remember ducking. And I thought, you silly so and so, they got guns that are so big it'll go right through the cockpit and your head. It doesn't make any difference whether your head's down there or up here.

[00:07:40.86] But anyways, I got over it. And I flew that whole month because we started on August the 22nd. I flew a whole month of night missions.

[00:07:50.46] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were flying north or-- ?

[00:07:53.52] JOE CRECCA: Mostly yeah. All the missions at night were north missions because there's no-- you can't fly day missions, close air support, you can't fly those at night.

[00:08:07.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. So what was your first mission? What did you do?

[00:08:12.51] JOE CRECCA: Well, you fly a two ship of F-4s and one airplane has flares. And you fly a route where you know that there's a road, and one airplane drops a flare or two and then you look for trucks on the road. And then the other airplane comes in and tries to drop bombs on the truck. The flare airplane has bombs also, so you both-- and sometimes we would find those trucks on the road and we'd nail them. It was the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

[00:08:44.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Ho Chi Minh Trail.

[00:08:49.93] JOE CRECCA: I started flying missions on August the 22nd. I got shot down on November the 22nd. And so if you looked at how many days that is, that's 92 days and I flew 87 missions.

[00:09:03.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:09:04.18] JOE CRECCA: So there's not a whole lot of time to do-- there's no time for tennis or anything like that. 87 missions in 92 days, so there's not much time to do anything but fly a mission, eat, sleep, and fly another mission. In the meantime, the squadron commander or somebody said, hey, Joe, how about building us a scheduling board. So I built them this enormous scheduling board with fluorescent lights on the top and bottom and so that when you wrote this stuff in grease pencil it would really stand out because of the back lighting. That's probably why I didn't fly 89 missions or 90 missions in 92 days.

[00:09:43.36] JOE GALLOWAY: You had a couple of days off to build this thing.

[00:09:49.04] JOE CRECCA: My life depended on the other guy and his life depended on me. There's what we call mutual support. When you're flying you're like 9,000 feet to 2 miles away from the other guy, and you're looking out your cockpit and he's looking out his because you can see what's threatening him and he can see what's threatening you. And there were several times when I was flying when I saw the surface to air missile and I called it out and the flight maneuvered so that the SAM didn't get us. And there was another time when there was flak that was just about to get us, and I took the airplane and maneuvered the airplane away from the flak and saved my life, the guy in front's life, and the United States Air Force a valuable \$4 million airplane.

[00:10:48.39] JOE CRECCA: The night missions were, as I said, interdiction missions where we would search for enemy trucks and stuff like that. And the day missions were the missions where we would fly close air support down south or strike missions way up north. And those were the really dangerous missions because you'd be up where the enemy defenses were very, very intense-- SAMs, MiGs, and triple-A.

[00:11:22.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for me a routine day mission.

[00:11:27.25] JOE CRECCA: September the 14, 1966, Volcano Flight. We were up on a railroad bridge. It was target number 1824. It was a single-span bridge, 540-feet long, 8-foot wide. It had two spans knocked down. And we were fragged, that means the fragmentary order to knock down another span.

[00:11:59.32] And I'm saying to myself, this is pretty silly. Do the North Vietnamese have some sort of train that can leap 30, 32 feet and we have to knock down another span to make sure that they don't? Anyways. Anyways, we're after this particular target. And so we're inbound from the east and we didn't hit a tanker or anything like that because we went up the east side.

[00:12:26.02] We go in, and I'm telling you, Joe, it seemed like the entire landscape was lit up with all these sparklers. And every spark is a gun-- a 37, a 57mm, 85mm, up to 100 and 120mm. And all these--

[00:12:44.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Some of it's radar controlled stuff, too.

[00:12:46.90] JOE CRECCA: Some of it is. And this stuff that seems to be floating along is actually going 4,000 feet per second, 4 times as fast or faster than you're going. And there's all these black puffs and white puffs and gray puffs going off all over the place. And you're wondering, how in the hell am I going to get through this without getting hit. But somehow we did, and we got all the way to the target and we dropped our bombs and we came back out.

[00:13:12.92] And one F-105, call sign Lover Two, starts on the radio, he's hit. And as the radio calls go on, the frequency and the pitch of his voice gets higher and higher and higher because he keeps on saying, it flamed out. I got it started again. And his flight leader is saying, get out.

[00:13:38.80] His flight leader's voice sounds like God with laryngitis. It's so deep and so raspy. Get out. Get out Two. You're on fire. And I got it started.

[00:13:50.65] This keeps on repeating itself until Lover Two gets out to the coast and punches out. So much for the leader's advice. He gets into the water. The Navy picks him up, and he goes home.

[00:14:06.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get the span on the bridge?

[00:14:09.64] JOE CRECCA: Yes, I'm sure we did. JOE GALLOWAY: You got it? JOE CRECCA: Oh, yeah. I mean, we had--

[00:14:13.51] JOE GALLOWAY: 8-foot wide is not a big target.

[00:14:15.40] JOE CRECCA: No. We had six 750 pound bombs, they're pretty big. And we had four SAMs fired at us.

[00:14:21.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, man. The pucker factor rises.

[00:14:24.39] JOE CRECCA: Yeah, I mean, we out maneuvered the second SAM and the other two SAMs just outright missed.

[00:14:33.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe the shoot down, what day, and what kind of mission it was.

[00:14:40.14] JOE CRECCA: OK. That was another strike mission. We were going after a JCS target, that's Joint Chiefs of Staff designated target. And whenever they pick a target you know it's going to be a heavily defended target.

[00:14:53.61] And it was the barracks that housed 10,000 NVA soldiers. So we viewed this as a very worthwhile target not some cheap 10-foot bridge somewhere. And--

[00:15:11.82] JOE GALLOWAY: This was in Hanoi?

[00:15:13.77] JOE CRECCA: This was just northwest of Hanoi by a couple of miles. So virtually downtown.

[00:15:20.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Virtually in Hanoi.

[00:15:21.36] JOE CRECCA: Yes. And so we took off with only three airplanes, which was very inadvisable, because of maintenance problems. If I were the flight leader, I would have just-- I would have not taken the flight up that far north with only three airplanes. But our flight leader did anyway, and I was scratching my head about why we were doing this.

[00:15:48.87] Anyways, as we were getting further and further north, we had to fly a route where we went up to a point alpha and then turned directly east to point bravo for two minutes. And then we were going to head southeast on a heading of 138 until we hit the northeast railroad and then turn into our target. When we got to point bravo, we bypassed alpha because we were late. Lead makes a left hand turn. And Scotty-- my front seater was Gordon Scott Wilson from

Hobart, Indiana, 1964 Air Force Academy grad and the best stick and rudder man in the squadron even though he was only a first lieutenant.

[00:16:34.38] And he says, I'll have to clean this up for the camera. He says, what the hell is he doing? And I says, beats the crap out of me, Scotty. But Scotty is expertly flying the airplane around this unscheduled turn. He should have turned right, but he turned left instead.

[00:16:50.34] And in the meantime he calls us on the radio and he said, Dogwood Two, do you have a good nav system? Scotty asked me a completely different question. He says, do you know where we are? You understand the difference?

[00:17:02.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:17:03.12] JOE CRECCA: You don't use the nav system-- you're over a complete undercast. OK? You can't see the ground. You only use the nav system to verify what the nav system is telling you, that's all. You could be in Philadelphia.

[00:17:18.81] So Scotty asked me, do you know where we are? And I said, I'm still locked on to a nav aid. I said, if you get us through the clouds here, I can get us to the target. In other words, if I can see the ground. JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:17:35.07] The cloud deck is at around 10,000 feet. And as we come out of this turn approaching what should have been our turn point, Scotty tells the leader, yeah, we got a good inertial-- we got a good inertial nav system, which is the language that this guy's speaking. And so he says, OK, Dogwood Two, you have the lead.

[00:18:00.24] And this is a moment that I haven't told very, very many people. But right at that moment there was like a flash of blue. And I felt this, I heard like a [IMITATES BUZZING] like, a buzzing sound and I wondered, what the hell was that? And to this day I don't know what the heck it was-- a blue flash and a buzzing sound.

[00:18:27.18] And-- when he said, you've got the lead. And right then I said, you're too close, you can't check our six. And I wondered if that was when the SAM locked onto us or something like this-- some mental thing. But anyways, 10 seconds later there's this loud explosion. And you know what temporal distortion is, where your mind speeds up and slows everything down?

[00:18:54.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:18:55.26] JOE CRECCA: Well, the explosions sounded like, boooooom, like that, like a B here and an M there and about 26 Os in the middle. And in the middle of all that we hear all this clanking noises, like--

[00:19:12.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Pieces falling off.

[00:19:14.50] JOE CRECCA: --turbine blades and compressor blades saying, so long. And I knew it was all over even before I looked in the rearview mirrors. I got one up here too on the sides, and all I could see was orange flames and black smoke.

[00:19:31.42] Now, Scotty, on the way up he had-- he was on his 95th mission out country, north mission. I was on my 75th. And he said, we're both short timers, Joe. And I knew what he was going to say. He was going to say, let's not get into a panic if we get hit.

[00:19:51.64] And what did he say? Don't get into a panic if we get hit. I said, don't worry I'll clean this up too. I said, don't worry, Scotty, this frapping thing's going to have to blow up seven frapping times before I jump out of it. Famous last words.

[00:20:04.94] I look over his shoulder-- all the fire and overheat lights are on, all the bad lights, the red and amber lights are on, no green lights are on. And the next thing the guy that was warning me about not getting into a panic if we got hit does is yells on the intercom, get out! Split my eardrums. Boom, he's gone like that.

[00:20:26.30] And I remember looking up and thinking, you silly so and so. He's going that way at 600 miles an hour. And then there's this-- a second temporal distortion occurs.

[00:20:39.07] I'm looking in the cockpit and I see the stick is kind of just wandering around in the cockpit. And I see the throttles are over there in the afterburner range but the airplane ain't accelerating. It doesn't dawn on me the engines are shot.

[00:20:57.52] And I'm thinking, that way, heading 225 is the fastest way out of North Vietnam, not that northern Laos is that much more hospitable, you know what I mean? But I want to get out of North Vietnam as fast as I can. And I'm thinking, I should grab the stick and turn the airplane.

[00:21:15.58] But this guy just jumped out and he's no dummy. He knows what's going on. I just saw all the bad lights on. And I'm sitting in the back seat. I have 3.2 seconds of backseat F-4 solo time. I'm sitting in the back seat of this burning airplane so survival instincts overcame all of these feelings of glory of saving the airplane and flying it and I went-- and I'm out--

[00:21:44.28] JOE GALLOWAY: And you're out.

[00:21:45.17] JOE CRECCA: --just like that. And the next thing I know, my chute's open. And here's the sad part is I look around to get my bearings and there's the airplane in the ground.

[00:21:58.51] I've come through the clouds and there's the airplane in the ground, big smoking hole in the ground. And I look in the opposite direction and there's Scotty and his chute, but there's something wrong. Right where his chute is there's another brown and white cloud characteristic of a surface to air missile burst and Scotty's chute is right next to it.

[00:22:23.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:22:24.25] JOE CRECCA: So they fired-- the first SAM hit us from dead six right from behind us. And they fired another SAM at the 10,000 foot altitude, in case we maneuvered to try to get away from that SAM the second SAM would get us. And that SAM went off right where Scotty's chute opened.

[00:22:42.40] JOE GALLOWAY: And got him?

[00:22:43.42] JOE CRECCA: And got him. It didn't blow him away, but the warhead of the surface to air missile, which is 400 pounds of high explosive-- level this whole building-- is surrounded by 1-inch stainless steel balls. And any one of them hitting him almost anywhere would have probably killed him, And I think it did. So anyway--

[00:23:11.47] JOE GALLOWAY: He didn't live to see the ground?

[00:23:13.42] JOE CRECCA: No. His arms and his head were hanging down in his chute, just hanging down like that. He didn't have his hands up on the risers. So that was the first thing that I saw. I didn't even see the SAM cloud, I saw him and he was like limp. And so that was at 10,000 feet.

[00:23:30.55] And then at 2500 feet I can see hooches-- little tiny buildings down there-- and I saw this black thing on the ground, didn't know what it was. And then I get down to about 1500 feet-- pilots are good at estimating altitude incidentally-- I see this black thing as changing shape, it's amorphous. And I realize it's a horde of people. Talk about terror. You know what I mean?

[00:23:55.72] JOE GALLOWAY: And they're waiting for you?

[00:23:56.86] JOE CRECCA: And they're just-- and actually they're moving towards where I'm going to land. And the reason they were black is because they were wearing the black pajamas. That's why they call them raggedy bastards in black pajamas.

[00:24:12.72] So anyways at about 600 feet I'm only about a minute from hitting the ground, and I turned toward Scotty-- my oxygen mask is off. And I saluted Scotty. And I said out loud, so long, Scotty. And I figured that he was dead for sure and that I would join him on a list of KIAs in about a minute because that's what was going to happen to me.

[00:24:36.84] And I hit the ground and they were on me just like that. And they were-- I was getting hit with all sorts of things, I don't know, clubs, rifle butts, rocks, whatever. And my helmet was taking most of the blows on my head-- well, was taking all of them. And then I was relegated to death. I thought I'm here, I'm going to die right now. I don't know whether it's going to be a knife, a bullet, anything--

[00:25:07.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Pitchfork or what?

[00:25:09.21] JOE CRECCA: Right, right. And I felt this piece of metal come up next to my throat and start to go like this back and forth. And I thought, very matter of factly, because this



blanket of calm-- this is the way I felt it-- a blanket of calm came over me. And the medical people told me later, you were going into shock.

[00:25:30.74] And this thing's going back and forth, and I thought, very matter of factly, they're going to cut my head off. But the blade was going that way, not this way. They were cutting my chinstrap off. And they're simple people-- I'm not making fun of the Vietnamese. They didn't know about the snap, the snap on my chain strap that would have made my helmet come off.

[00:25:53.99] And then after they cut that off, off comes my helmet. And if I thought that it was loud before with my helmet on, boy, is it really loud now because they are-- there's 300 of them. And they're screaming and yelling, and now that all the blows that my helmet have been taken for me, my head's taking. Bang, bang, bang all over my body.

[00:26:14.75] They're cutting my G-suit off, my flight suit. They're cutting a perfectly good set of flying boots with the laces on. They cut those off and I'm thinking, oh, what a waste.

[00:26:28.49] Anyways, the next thing I know they stand me up. All I have on is my t-shirt and my shorts. And it's 40 degrees, it's November the 22nd. The Chinese border is only about 50 miles away. And I'm freezing, it's really cold.

[00:26:45.23] And all this blood comes running down into my face because of all the blows I've been taking. And then they carted me off to a little hooch. And this young Vietnamese couple put bandages on my head and then they threw me in a motorcycle with a sidecar, took me over to a little building, kept me there for about five hours, threw me in a truck, then took me to Hanoi where the fun and games began with an interrogation.

[00:27:17.24] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a pretty busy, exciting day.

[00:27:20.84] JOE CRECCA: Yeah. That SAM ruined my whole day. Killed Scotty.

[00:27:28.23] JOE GALLOWAY: What was going through your mind at the moment that you were taken by the mob?

[00:27:34.20] JOE CRECCA: Edwin C. Newman interviewed me right after I came back. He was a CBS guy. And I have to answer the question the same way to you as I did to him. I want my mommy. That's what's exactly the way I felt.

[00:27:55.62] JOE CRECCA: Yes, I was taken to Hoa Lo Prison.

[00:27:59.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Hoa Lo Prison.

[00:28:00.90] JOE CRECCA: Right. Maison Centrale. They threw me unceremoniously into the back of a truck blindfolded, handcuffed, bound hand and foot, just boom, threw me in the back of a truck.

[00:28:11.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe life in that camp, the daily routine once you had settled into a daily routine.

[00:28:21.45] JOE CRECCA: The daily thing was there'd be a gong in the morning that would wake you up, and they'd open the door and you go out and empty your honey bucket. You'd come back. Each door had a regular door that opened like this, but then they had a smaller door with a-- what do you call it? A Judas door or something? Speakeasy door.

[00:28:54.25] And they would open that and they'd put three cigarettes on it. And you'd take your cigarettes, and then they give you a paper punk that was smoldering and light your cigarette and they closed the door. And then about-- that was like about 6:30 or 7:00 in the morning.

[00:29:12.70] And then sometime around 9:30 or 10:00 there'd be the first feeding of the day where you'd get a bowl of rice, a bowl of soup, and more or less of a flat plate which we optimistically called the entree. And then from about 12 to 2 it was happy hour. And that doesn't mean drinks, that means siesta.

[00:29:39.76] And then around 3:00 there would be the second feeding. And then around 4 or 5 o'clock there was Hanoi Hannah for the daily broadcast of propaganda. And then at 9 o'clock there'd be the gong which meant go to bed. And this was--

[00:29:58.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Two feedings a day?

[00:30:00.16] JOE CRECCA: Yeah. This was frequently interrupted by the United States Air Force. Sometimes you would hear the sirens first and then you'd hear the triple-A, the big triple-A in the distance, and then the smaller triple-A. And sometimes you'd actually hear the AK-47s in the courtyard, and then you'd hear the airplanes and the bombs. And other times the 105s and the F-4s would catch the VC completely by surprise. And you'd think the roof was coming off of the building that you were in because four Thuds just flew over the top at 600 or 700 miles an hour.

[00:30:38.74] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. You were cheering quietly.

[00:30:42.55] JOE CRECCA: It was the only chance you had to yell at the top of your lungs, yahoo [LAUGHS].

[00:30:51.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe your interaction with your enemy guards?

[00:31:00.56] JOE CRECCA: At first the guards didn't speak English. But after a while they trained the guards to speak a little bit of English so that they could converse with us, they could tell us to do things like stop, go, be silent, and stuff like that. We gave the guards names. And there were two guys, one was taller than the other, we called them Mutt and Jeff.

[00:31:27.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Mutt and Jeff, of course.

[00:31:31.04] JOE CRECCA: Yeah. But we had names for all of them. A lot of them were not very complimentary. But I never let myself get very friendly with them because I knew that it's possible-- it would be possible that sometime I might have to-- I hate to say this, but I might have to kill them. There was a possibility that maybe somebody would try to get us out or something like that and I didn't want to hesitate taking out a guard because he was about to take out a friendly. So I never let myself get that close to them.

[00:32:20.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Were there differences among them, some bad, some good?

[00:32:24.17] JOE CRECCA: Yes, definitely. Some of them were very friendly-- not very friendly, some of them were personable, some of them were antagonistic.

[00:32:38.44] JOE CRECCA: When you're in a small group of one or two-- two or three guys in the same room for years you're bound to get on each other's nerves. You know, like, Joe, will you just quit walking that way? You're shuffling your feet. Or Joe, I heard that story in '68. I heard it in '69.

[00:33:01.27] JOE GALLOWAY: How many times are you going to tell it?

[00:33:02.46] JOE CRECCA: How many times are you going to tell me that duck story? Stuff like that. But on the whole we got along pretty good. After the Son Tay Raid, which was November the 21st, 1970-- two-and-a-half days later, they moved us all from any outlying camps outside the city and put us right into Hoa Lo. So now we're in 50-man-- 45, 50-man rooms.

[00:33:31.72] And now it was much easier because you had a lot more going on. We had classes. I taught physics. I taught math. I took Russian, stuff like that. So it was a lot-- it wasn't so harsh a psychological environment.

[00:33:50.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. And when you were two or three to a room you were pretty dependent on each other?

[00:33:56.92] JOE CRECCA: Oh sure. Oh sure. There was-- did you know about the Cuban Program?

[00:34:05.77] JOE GALLOWAY: No. I've heard something about it that they sat in on the interrogations.

[00:34:10.66] JOE CRECCA: Oh, they didn't sit in. They ran--

[00:34:12.85] JOE GALLOWAY: They ran them.

[00:34:13.75] JOE CRECCA: --they ran the most brutal interrogation program ever.

[00:34:19.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Before we go there, I've always heard that in the interrogations they were more focused on the backseat guys than the pilots. Everybody knew

what a pilot did, but the electronic counter warfare stuff was what they were focused on, at least early on.

[00:34:41.11] JOE CRECCA: I think you're talking more about the B-52 guys or the Wild Weasel guys.

[00:34:46.42] JOE GALLOWAY: So more the-- probably the Wild Weasel.

[00:34:50.02] JOE CRECCA: I made the supposition that the B-52 EWOs would have been the target of interrogations and stuff like that. And I was told by a B-52 crew member that wasn't the case. And I was surprised because I would have thought that they would have been.

[00:35:14.08] JOE GALLOWAY: And I always heard that you guys were.

[00:35:18.13] JOE CRECCA: I played dumb. I mean, I had them convinced that I was on my third mission when I got shot down.

[00:35:28.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe the interrogations that you underwent personally.

[00:35:33.65] JOE CRECCA: Well, the first one was the-- really the only one. And they asked me what my target was. And I could not under any circumstances tell them what my target was because if I told them anything about it then any subsequent flights that were coming in to hit that target would be subject to more intense anti-aircraft defenses. And so I had to make up a story.

[00:36:04.52] Now, we were shot down well short of our target. In fact, we hadn't even gotten to our last turning point. So I had to make up a story and tell them that-- I told them that our target was the northeast railroad, which was believable, but who would target the northeast railroad? That was more heavily defended than any other place because that was a line of communication.

[00:36:32.00] But eventually I got them to believe that because I told them the same story the day I got shot down and for the next week. Every day I told them the same thing. And then finally, I think they quit. They got tired of hearing that and they quit asking me that.

[00:36:49.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Were you subject to subsequent interrogation?

[00:36:52.94] JOE CRECCA: Oh, they asked me questions about-- I think you'll like this one. They asked me questions about the F-4 and the missile systems and stuff, and there wasn't anything about the F-4 that wasn't already in Jane's All The World's Air Aircraft. And so one time I was talking to an interrogator through an interpreter.

[00:37:15.11] And I told them-- they said, how fast is the F-4? And I thought this is common knowledge. I'm not telling them any secrets. I said, Mach 2.4. And I could see this go back and forth and confusion on the guy's face.

[00:37:30.74] So I converted it into kilometers per hour, which would be understandable. And I said, 2,400 kilometers per hour. And this went through, and this was understood, but then the guy went, like-- and the guy said, no, that's not possible. And I said, yes it is. It's faster than a MiG 21 [LAUGHTER].

[00:37:59.35] JOE CRECCA: The method that we used for communicating was the 5 by 5 tap code. Now, we know that the alphabet has 26 letters in it, but if you imagine the letters of the alphabet arranged as AFLQZ down the left-hand side and you start the communications session with a shave and a haircut.

[00:38:31.84] So [MUSIC - "SHAVE AND A HAIRCUT"] that's Shave and a Haircut. And then the answer from the other side of the wall would be [MUSIC - "TWO BITS"] Two Bits, OK? So that's Shave and a Haircut, Two Bits. That means, OK, go ahead.

[00:38:48.04] JOE GALLOWAY: You're opening the conversation?

[00:38:49.87] JOE CRECCA: Right. Now, if there was danger, you'd hear a bump on the wall. [THUMP] Like that. That meant stay away, there's a guard there.

[00:38:59.26] Or you wouldn't hear anything, which means don't start communicating. Now, the funny thing is when I was being interrogated on that first day and I was being asked all these questions and I wouldn't give the answers that the guy wanted and he went out to go get his hooligans to torture me, I'm sitting there by myself and I'm looking at this table with all these scratches in it. And I look down and here's the tap code scratched into the table.

[00:39:34.36] JOE GALLOWAY: In the interrogation room?

[00:39:35.65] JOE CRECCA: Right in the interrogation room. And it says, POWs, learn this code. And I'm just-- I'm dumbfounded. And I see this thing and it says, tap down. So you tapped down to the row and over to the column.

[00:39:50.48] So if I was going to say, hi, Joe or something like that, I would tap down to the second row and over to the H. So it'd be--

[00:40:00.55] [TAPPING]

[00:40:04.65] That's hi. And then Joe would be--

[00:40:07.14] [TAPPING]

[00:40:13.23] That's Joe. And the guy on the other side goes--

[00:40:16.29] [TAPPING]

[00:40:18.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Gotcha.

[00:40:18.94] JOE CRECCA: And so one time I was tapping to a fellow named Ben Ringsdorf. And at this time they were giving us these Albanian cigarettes that were spelled L-E-K-A. And I'm tapping over to Ben and I was tapping to him with a tap code. I said, before you decide to quit smoking take a Leka. So we had fun with this too.

[00:40:57.51] JOE GALLOWAY: At any point during your captivity were you tortured?

[00:41:01.47] JOE CRECCA: Well, that first day, yes. And one time when I got caught trying to pass a note. I was a little bit too bold and they caught me. And they beat me up on that particular occasion and they tossed me into a room actually. It didn't have a door, I had to crawl in through a window.

[00:41:25.61] And I wound up right next to John Sidney McCain. And he tapped on the wall and he said, who are you? Because I had just arrived. And I said, I'm Joe Crecca. I got caught with a note. And he was encouraging me.

[00:41:40.86] This guy, he'd been through more than most guys. When he got shot down he had a broken arm and a broken leg. And he wound up at 20-feet deep in one of those lakes in Hanoi and managed to flop his way to the surface once and then down to the bottom, up again.

[00:41:58.92] And the Vietnamese broke one of his arms, re-broke one of his arms when he wouldn't accept one of their offers to go home early and be a propaganda tool. And here he is encouraging me to be a stalwart POW. And I said, OK, John, I'll make it. But he is a super guy.

[00:42:23.23] JOE CRECCA: When it was announced that we were going to be coming home I remembered an Air Force chief master sergeant named Erben, E-R-B-E-N. And he was as big as a house. His shoulders were like that wide. He was a 6 foot 5. And he was our survival instructor at Stead Air Force Base, Nevada.

[00:42:49.36] And he said, remember the problem-- meaning your survival training school problem-- is not over until you're on the bus going back to the base. And I remembered that. I took that to heart.

[00:43:05.00] There was something like 130 of us in the Sierra Nevada mountains that winter. It was just before Thanksgiving. And came time for us to go-- for the problem to be over and it was snowing like hell.

[00:43:26.52] And we were supposed to go down the hill at 7:30. Well, 7:30 came and went. 9:30 came and went. Finally sometime around 10 o'clock-- and here's a 130 guys standing around in the snow with their ponchos on and bitching and moaning and stuff and I was thinking about Sergeant Erben, the problem is not over until you get on the bus.

[00:43:50.34] So finally we start down the hill, and the NCO in front of me, his pack comes apart and all of this stuff falls out into the snow. And the guy starts crying. I grabbed him by the shoulder and I said, screw it, leave it there. What is it going to cost you? \$40?

[00:44:07.77] Just screw it. Leave it there. Walk down the hill. We walk down the hill, we get down to the bottom the buses are not there. I'm cool, the problem is not over until you're on the bus going back.

[00:44:22.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Are they messing with you? JOE CRECCA: Huh? JOE GALLOWAY: Are they messing with you?

[00:44:25.59] JOE CRECCA: No. I'm just smoking my Winstons, eating my-- what did I have? Life savers, I had a couple left. I'm just-- I'm keeping cool, and these guys are bitching and moaning.

[00:44:38.58] Finally, the buses show up like around 11 o'clock, but the guys don't get off the bus, OK? They got bacon and eggs in their stomachs. They got nice clean shaves and everything. We look like Doctor Zhivagos.

[00:44:53.28] These guys are starting the riot against the guys in the bus trying to-- get off the buses, get off the buses. Not me, I'm just calm. Finally, these guys get off the bus. We get on the bus.

[00:45:05.91] I see a couple of guys from pilot training. They look at me like I am Doctor Zhivago. And I said, don't give up, get on the bus. Finally, I get on the bus. I sit back and I relax and I think, it's over.

[00:45:18.30] The same thing when they told us we were going home from Hanoi. When they said we're going home, I said, Sergeant Erben. I'm not going to believe that it's over until I'm on the 141 or whatever kind of airplane they're going to send us home in.

[00:45:34.65] In fact, the night before we were supposed to go home I was making up a physics problem for the next day for my class because I wasn't convinced that it was going to happen. And that served me well until we got on the 141. And even then, I wasn't convinced until we were 25 miles from the coast and outside the SAM rings. Then I knew that there were Navy and Air Force F-4s on our wing escorting us out. And the thing that I regret most is not walking up to the cockpit and looking out the window so I could see those fighters.

[00:46:17.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever lose hope during the whole time you were there? You were there how many years?

[00:46:22.44] JOE CRECCA: Six years and three months. And, Joe, I didn't think we were going to get out alive. And after I read the book Inside Hanoi's Secret Archives I realized how lucky we were to actually survive that.

[00:46:41.30] JOE GALLOWAY: And not all did.

[00:46:42.72] JOE CRECCA: No, there was several that died up there.

[00:46:49.22] JOE CRECCA: The day that-- when we actually got out and released, it was a euphoric day.

[00:46:56.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe it for me?

[00:47:01.39] JOE CRECCA: Here we are, you look out the window, you hear airplane engines that you haven't heard before. And what is that? It doesn't sound like a MiG-17 or a MiG-21. It isn't one of those enormous Russian helicopters. It's a 141.

[00:47:19.57] And you look out the window and it's a C-141. Holy Jesus. And there's a lot of emotion. And what they're doing is they're taking a look at this miserable excuse for a runway that they have there, right?

[00:47:37.03] And the first group actually went out on February the 12th. We were supposed to go home by order of shoot down, but with the sick and wounded first. And this was dictated by us. That's what we said was going to happen. That's the way it was going to happen.

[00:47:59.83] And then on February the 14th our senior ranking officer Ev Southwick, Navy F-4B guy-- super, super guy-- gets called out of the room along with all the SROs from all the buildings in Hoa Lo. And he comes back and he says, there's going to be an out of cycle release. And he said 20 guys are going home.

[00:48:28.06] And he said, I know that it's supposed to be order of shoot down, but this is a printout, and there's 20 guys on this list and there's five guys from this room. I know I'm not going to be on that list. So I went about getting my lesson for the next day ready. And of course, I was the fifth name called.

[00:48:48.01] So he said, get your stuff together and move out. So me and 19 other guys went to another room. So I'll try to make this as short as possible. The 14th, the night of the-- they suited us up, gave us go home clothes-- dark blue pants, blue shirts, shoes, and stuff like that, haircuts, and stuff like this.

[00:49:11.17] And then the 15th goes by, the 16th goes by, and our senior ranking officer within the group, Jim Pirie-- another Navy guy, super guy-- is telling the telling the VC, we don't like the sniff of this. This doesn't pass the sniff test. We think you guys are up to something. We're not going.

[00:49:31.02] You refuse release? Your refuse to go home? Yes, that's right. And we won't go home until we get to talk to the new senior ranking officer who is Colonel Gaddis The previous one was Colonel Flynn, Air Force.

[00:49:46.53] And so by the 17th there's this major, Air Force-- Vietnamese army major who lines us up and says, "do you refuse to go home, yes or no?" And Jim Pirie says, "well, we can't really answer that question." And now this guy screws himself through the overhead.



[00:50:05.89] And he says, "do you refuse to go home, yes or no?" And the veins are standing out on his neck and everything like that. And Jim Pirie just stays cool and he says, well, we can't answer that question until I talk to Colonel Gaddis.

[00:50:19.80] And this guy goes exit stage right in a big flurry. The next morning at 6 o'clock in the morning you see the figure of an Air Force officer in his blue raincoat and a Vietnamese guard come walking across the courtyard over to where Colonel Gaddis' room is. And we were looking out the window because we were up early and we were always vigilant.

[00:50:44.13] And you see Colonel Gaddis' door open. Colonel Gaddis comes outside. These guys salute and shake hands. They talk a little bit, then these guys walk away. A guard and Colonel Gaddis comes over to our hooch, our room.

[00:50:58.35] And he says, I've just talked to Lieutenant Colonel Robeson of the United States Air Force and he assures me that this release is completely legitimate. And he said, to make things easy on you guys I order each and every one of you to accept release. Godspeed. Goodbye [LAUGHTER].

[00:51:16.50] Yes sir. So we went out and got all cleaned up and shaved and everything like that and went home. And does that answer your question?

[00:51:27.18] JOE GALLOWAY: It does.

[00:51:29.62] JOE CRECCA: And so that was the best day. And what I wanted to get to was we got on the bus. We got on the airplane. I was greeted by Lieutenant Colonel Abel after I was released.

[00:51:43.65] And we got on the airplane. And there was a euphoric feeling, a surge of cheers that went up when those engines ran up for takeoff, and another one when the airplane rotated for takeoff. I mean, it was fantastic.

[00:52:04.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever find out why you 20 went first?

[00:52:08.97] JOE CRECCA: No. One guy had a-- we tried we tried to figure it out amongst ourselves that first night-- if there was a common thread. Was there problems at home? Was there divorce? Was there sickness in the family? Could never find a common thread.

[00:52:23.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Couldn't find a common thread?

[00:52:24.33] JOE CRECCA: No. We were known as Kissinger's 20. We were told that it was a goodwill thing because of Kissinger's visit. But I've never been able to find out.

[00:52:35.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Why.

[00:52:41.10] JOE CRECCA: Same day, about six hours later. We got to the hospital. We had our nice little meal and then changed clothes into the hospital garb. We were on the top floor.

[00:52:58.38] JOE GALLOWAY: This is in the Philippines?

[00:52:59.82] JOE CRECCA: Clark Air Base.

[00:53:00.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Clark.

[00:53:01.38] JOE CRECCA: Right. And I'm sharing a room. My room is right off the elevator, right-hand turn right into the room. I'm sharing a room with another POW. And I'm standing there by the counter, close to the counter, and I see that the vice commander of Operation HOMECOMING, Colonel Moore, my assigned public affairs officer, Captain Carl Eppig, and an NCO come out of the elevator. And very shortly they are escorting my roommate out of our room to another room.

[00:53:39.30] And it isn't-- my brain's not working. I'm not clicking at what the hell is going on. And then they say, Joe, can we talk to you? And so they get me into the room, and they said, we have some news for you. Would you like to sit down?

[00:53:55.08] And I said, no, I'll stand up. And then they tell me that-- they say, your wife divorced you. And I had no idea. It was just complete shock. And I said, when did that happen?

[00:54:08.46] And they said, January 1972. And so then they told me the details of where she was, that she was remarried, and all this other stuff. That wasn't the half of it. And I said, OK, thanks.

[00:54:26.34] And they said, that's not all of it. I said, what? They said, your father died. I said, when did that happen? They said, 1968.

[00:54:39.21] Now, I got over the divorce in 45 days. It took me almost 20 years to get over the death of my father. So the best day and the worst day were the same one.

[00:54:50.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Same day.

[00:54:53.65] JOE CRECCA: For some guys it was after they got home that they found-- that their wife said, I want a divorce. One guy found out that his wife was taking dancing lessons. Not a big deal, except the dancing lessons were in Paris.

[00:55:15.39] JOE CRECCA: I received six letters and one postcard. And of course, we got a couple of packages in there. But I tended-- me particularly tended to receive fewer than the rest of the guys. And I know one of the guards-- one of the friendlier guards was-- which was the taller one, Jeff? Mutt and Jeff. Jeff was the taller one.

[00:55:41.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:55:42.15] JOE CRECCA: Jeff said to me, no news is good news. And I didn't know what that meant until I got to Clark and I was told that my wife divorced me.

[00:55:56.25] JOE GALLOWAY: And you think the guard knew that?

[00:55:57.72] JOE CRECCA: I think they knew about it. She also wrecked my-- well, she sold my GTO, which would have been grounds for divorce anyway.

[00:56:05.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, exactly.

[00:56:12.02] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news, if any, did you receive about the war?

[00:56:16.49] JOE CRECCA: Well, we had the Hanoi Hannah squawk box on the wall. And that was mostly comic relief. That was propaganda. We knew it was all BS. I mean, we didn't believe any of that.

[00:56:32.29] I'm trying to remember, it was-- this is the Voice of Vietnam on the 42:140 meter bands. We never took any of that seriously. They would inflate all their airplane shoot downs, you know, they shot down 400 airplanes today and stuff like that. It was all-- JOE GALLOWAY: All BS. JOE CRECCA: It was just a laugh.

[00:56:56.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Any visits from Americans? Antiwar people?

[00:57:00.66] JOE CRECCA: Oh, yeah. oh, yeah. They were over there constantly. They had Women Strike for Peace was one. Jane Fonda was over there. They were all antiwar groups and stuff like that.

[00:57:26.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Among the prisoners themselves, were there those who cooperated with the enemy more or less?

[00:57:36.44] JOE CRECCA: There were some guys-- I'm reluctant to really speak about them. But there was one guy that I can think of who had deep psychological problems over his being alive and his front seater or back seater-- I don't remember which-- being dead. And it affected him so, so deeply that it was a guilt problem. And it affected him in such a way that he went against the war and tended to be cooperative with his captors.

[00:58:23.11] JOE GALLOWAY: But you saw that more as a mental issue than a disloyalty thing?

[00:58:29.53] JOE CRECCA: Yeah. There was a couple of guys that I would take issue with and did not appreciate-- I'm putting it mildly-- what they did.

[00:58:44.21] JOE CRECCA: My hometown was something else. I showed you those pictures. The man who was my fifth grade teacher was now the principal of my grammar school. There was a mob outside my house, I mean, it was-- the street was absolutely blocked. It was-- you couldn't drive through there. It was just wall-to-wall people all over the place.

[00:59:06.83] And they had a parade for me at Picatinny Arsenal, which is where I used to be an ordinance engineer. It was just over the top. Fantastic.

[00:59:24.75] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with your fellow POWs over the years?

[00:59:31.14] JOE CRECCA: There's a few that I keep in contact with and have seen more often than the rest. But we're all over the United States, in fact, we're all over the world. But there's one guy, Guy Gruters, that I see more often. In fact, there's a man from my squadron who wasn't a POW that I visited in Cape Cod last year and who came to my 70th birthday party in 2010. So there's a few key people that I see more often.

[01:00:07.41] But the reunions, I'm having a reunion in Vegas next month. I'm going to see all these guys. It's going to be 1,000 people there.

[01:00:15.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[01:00:16.05] JOE CRECCA: 1,000 of the Red River Valley Fighter Pilots Association.

[01:00:21.57] JOE GALLOWAY: What date is that?

[01:00:23.49] JOE CRECCA: 13th to the 17th.

[01:00:26.34] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm in Vegas at some point. JOE CRECCA: Are you? JOE GALLOWAY: I'd love to--

[01:00:30.15] JOE CRECCA: It's going to be at--

[01:00:30.63] JOE GALLOWAY: --cross paths with you.

[01:00:31.95] JOE CRECCA: --it's going to be at the Tuscany.

[01:00:37.52] JOE CRECCA: I think I got back into the swing of things fairly quickly. I had those emotional problems to overcome, but I got back into retraining in the F-4 and that caused me to focus on something that was difficult, and therefore required a lot of focus to keep on doing that.

[01:01:07.13] And I did something that I always wanted to do. I wanted to get into the front seat of the F-4, fly low, shoot the guns, and all that business. And so I was--

[01:01:15.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You got to do that?

[01:01:16.76] JOE CRECCA: --I was having a ball doing that-- flying Mach 2.4 and stuff like that.

[01:01:20.51] JOE GALLOWAY: You stayed in the Air Force?

[01:01:22.04] JOE CRECCA: I did.

[01:01:22.79] JOE GALLOWAY: How long?

[01:01:24.14] JOE CRECCA: I stayed in till 1978 and then I got a job with Flying Tigers flying DC-8s and 747s.

[01:01:35.90] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. Did that for how long?

[01:01:39.74] JOE CRECCA: I did that until-- FedEx bought us in 1989. And I did that until 2003 when I-- actually till 2000 when I had to go back to flying in the back seat because you can't fly past age 60 at that time. And then I had a medical problem where I had to call it quits in 2005.

[01:02:13.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any memory or experience from your time in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting influence on your life?

[01:02:26.80] JOE CRECCA: I think increased vigilance against the enemies of the United States, both external and internal.

[01:02:41.28] JOE CRECCA: Vietnam vets coming home weren't greeted with open arms and any warm welcomes. But I think that the country has grown up a lot since then. I don't think that that stuff is ever going to happen again.

[01:03:01.77] These days Soldiers and Marines coming home are greeted at the airports with flags waving. And even before they come home we're sending them packages. I myself have single handedly sent them almost 500 packages since 2003 when they were in Iraq and still sending them to a group in Afghanistan. Right now I'm sending packages to a 82nd Airborne group.

[01:03:35.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think that the warm welcomes is at least partly out of guilt over how they treated the Vietnam veterans?

[01:03:43.19] JOE CRECCA: I think it's a real realization of how we shouldn't have done things before. I think that people were overly influenced by an antiwar movement and frankly a mainstream media that was against the war, guys like Walter Cronkite and people like him that were-- and a weak president that didn't fight the war to win it. That's my personal opinion is that if we had a stronger president we could have won that war.

[01:04:25.29] Look what happened in Desert Storm. It was over in 100 hours and we took 129 casualties because you got in there and-- don't commit your forces unless you're going in there to win the war. Period.

[01:04:44.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Desert Storm I've always said was a graduation exercise for all of the negative lessons drawn from Vietnam. Anything that was done wrong in Vietnam they did right in Desert Storm.

[01:04:58.51] JOE CRECCA: We had 500,000 troops there to start the war not gradual.

[01:05:03.21] JOE GALLOWAY: No ratchet.

[01:05:08.70] JOE CRECCA: Sadly, I think that if you asked a lot of people they wouldn't even know about Vietnam much less the war. There's a couple of schools in my local area where the teachers make it a point to make sure the students know about Vietnam. Snohomish High School, which is not really local to where I am but like a long drive up north, they have a Vietnam Veterans Forum where they have three periods in the morning, three periods in the afternoon, and they get 12 to 15 veterans to come up.

[01:05:43.59] And I applaud the teachers for doing this because the students didn't know jack about Vietnam or the war. And the Vietnam veterans come there with their memorabilia. I bring my F-4 model and I wear my jacket with all the patches on it and stuff like that and bring books and stuff like that and show these kids. And the kids are great.

[01:06:09.93] Afterward the teacher has the kids write a note to the veteran that they talked to. Each veteran sits down with four or five kids, and then all the kids write a note to the veteran. The teacher puts the notes in a plain brown envelope and mails the envelope to the veterans, so he gets, what? 20 or 30 notes from these kids.

[01:06:32.64] And you should read these notes. I mean, they are great. One kid said, hey, that tap code really came in handy during a chemistry test I had to take [LAUGHTER].

[01:06:49.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, tears, and years?

[01:06:58.12] JOE CRECCA: When I went to Vietnam communism was a regime that up to that time had murdered over 100 million people. So fighting against that sort of a regime couldn't have been all bad. And since that time the Berlin Wall came down, East and West Germany are reunited. In fact, prior to that Brezhnev and Mao said, the Americans will never make a stand in Vietnam, and the Soviet Union is crumbling from within.

[01:07:39.88] So I think that it was worth the investment. I just wish that it didn't cost 58,267 names on that Wall. I think it could have been done much, much faster and much less loss in and lives and treasure.

[01:08:02.39] JOE CRECCA: Never give up. That's why the POW survived. They were never-- the VC we're never going to beat us no matter what. They were going to-- they could kill us, but they were never going to beat us.

[01:08:14.72] And one of the things that kept me going was a quote by Calvin Coolidge. And it's called press on. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

[01:08:31.94] Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts.

[01:08:41.12] Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan, press on, has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race. Calvin Coolidge said that.

[01:08:53.66] And there was a POW named Mike Christian. He said about communists he said, the international communist revolution is a deadly serious business and we must become aware of it. We need not panic, but we absolutely must deal with communism from a position of strength. Peace at any price politics will destroy us.

[01:09:21.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you been to the Vietnam War Memorial in DC?

[01:09:25.78] JOE CRECCA: Yes, several times.

[01:09:28.19] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts?

[01:09:29.00] JOE CRECCA: It's a very sobering experience because you know all those names that are on that Wall and it brings me right back to Vietnam. Since the time that I was in Vietnam I've flown over Vietnam in a 747, a route that took us right over Da Nang and China Beach. And so you're flying along the southern, southwestern part of the country right over Da Nang. And I look down at the jungle and it's a really funny feeling to look down there and be those places where you were and look down there and remember all the Americans that died down there.

[01:10:08.77] JOE GALLOWAY: You've not been back to Vietnam?

[01:10:10.63] JOE CRECCA: No.

[01:10:11.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Would you?

[01:10:13.69] JOE CRECCA: My wife has tried to encourage me to go back there, and my answer is, why would I want to spend perfectly good vacation money to go back there and maybe open up some wounds. I don't really want to do that.

[01:10:29.53] JOE GALLOWAY: You don't want to do that?

[01:10:33.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration project?

[01:10:38.42] JOE CRECCA: I certainly have, Joe.

[01:10:39.80] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about that?

[01:10:41.00] JOE CRECCA: I commend the people who are doing it. And I think it's a very worthwhile thing for America to know the sacrifices that were made by so many-- the combat vets and the families who suffered as a result of it.

[01:11:02.16] JOE CRECCA: Get in it to win it or don't get in it at all. The rules of engagement that we had to fight under in Vietnam were not designed to allow us to win. We have rules of

engagement right now in the Middle East that are the same thing. The enemy is laughing at us the way we conduct things. And it's just going to just go on and on and on and we're not going to win anything.

[01:11:27.29] I admire the American fighting man, I always have. I had an uncle who was in the Battle of the Bulge. I had a cousin who was a bombardier in a B-26.

[01:11:37.01] I had a cousin who knocked out three Tiger tanks and another cousin who was in the war. And those are my heroes. And that's why I joined the military. And that's why I'm here today. Thank you.

[01:11:53.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, Mr. Crecca.