

## **Donahue, Frederic "Marty" USAF**

[00:00:15.86] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I was born 4 October 1931 in Petaluma, California. And I've got a wife and four children, two boys, two girls, who are all grown up now and everything and have their own children and that.

[00:00:39.76] FREDERIC DONOHUE: My mother had been divorced and gotten remarried about four or five times. And no, I didn't consider Petaluma my home. Basically, a lot of the early life was in California, Southern California, down around San Diego and that area there.

[00:01:02.68] And I lived there and worked there. And my oldest brother was up in Julian, California, and in forestry. And he got me in the summers, so I'd have jobs and things like that from high school and college.

[00:01:20.92] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were commissioned out of ROTC, San Diego?

[00:01:26.47] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yes. Well, I went first 3 and 1/2 years to UCLA. I had an athletic scholarship, mostly for track and field and running. And then I was not doing too well, so I decided to relocate to San Diego State. And I went there as the last year and a half and graduated from there and then was commissioned out of San Diego State. I was commissioned in '55.

[00:02:02.77] JOE GALLOWAY: '55.

[00:02:03.55] FREDERIC DONOHUE: '54, '54, yes. FREDERIC DONOHUE: I was in to go to pilot training, and they washed 40 of us out because they had oversubscribed the school. So I was given a job, and I became a radar intercept controller like that.

[00:02:32.14] And after about a year and a half, somebody told me, they screwed up when they threw us out, and you can now reapply for pilot training, which I did. And I got the wings in '56. And then I started in-- being an air force pilot. And that was my life.

[00:02:54.10] I got my wings as fixed wing, but chose to go to helicopter school after I got my wings and joined-- and started in rescue in helicopters.

[00:03:11.86] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your understanding of the war in Vietnam before your deployment?

[00:03:20.74] FREDERIC DONOHUE: My understanding of the war in Vietnam is that we were involved, and we were needed over there to help the South Vietnamese in their struggles against the North.

[00:03:39.17] JOE GALLOWAY: But you knew, of course, by the time you deployed that there was an antiwar movement going in this country.

[00:03:51.29] FREDERIC DONOHUE: It wasn't very heavy at that time. It wasn't very heavy anti-Vietnam, no. FREDERIC DONOHUE: I really liked it. [CHUCKLE] I like the tropics, I like hot weather, and I liked the rescue mission. FREDERIC DONOHUE: We trained some of the Vietnamese people in the helicopter, in being a flight crew on a helicopter and things like that, the South Vietnamese.

[00:04:27.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. So you interacted on a daily basis for a while anyway.

[00:04:32.88] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I would say yes, it would be on a daily basis, particularly the first two or three years.

[00:04:37.29] JOE GALLOWAY: You like them? Are they good people?

[00:04:40.77] FREDERIC DONOHUE: As far as I was concerned, they were. And I got along very well with them. FREDERIC DONOHUE: We were search and rescue for anybody that was hurt or downed or something like that. And we'd go in, and it was about every third or fourth day that I would be on the number one bird. And so we would be on alert for-- if something went down or somebody bailed out,

[00:05:18.93] we would be out after them. And then the other days, I just worked in training other people and things like that.

[00:05:29.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. Give me a sense of how often you were out there on a mission to recover a downed aviator.

[00:05:40.77] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I would say I was out at least-- I would be on alert at least five or six times a month on alert. And of those times, we would usually be called out if somebody was getting in trouble but not yet bailed out or something like that. We would be scrambled to go up close to where the action was, usually in North Vietnam or in Laos or Cambodia.

[00:06:23.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have a feeling how many times that would happen in a month?

[00:06:28.62] FREDERIC DONOHUE: That I'd go north?

[00:06:30.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, or go out on a rescue call or a standby call.

[00:06:36.30] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yes. I would say in a month-- at least three or four times a month we would scramble and be airborne just in case somebody had been taking hits or something like that.

[00:06:52.11] Usually, a lot of times, they'd come back, but we would be up near the border-- JOE GALLOWAY: Just in case. FREDERIC DONOHUE: --or near the action orbiting. And we had a 130 there in case we stayed and had to refuel because we were of course-- could aerial refuel from the 130s.

[00:07:12.30] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like?

[00:07:16.41] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Very nice. We were in a shed in Udorn, Thailand. And each of us-- we had a bedroom, two of us would be in a place with two single beds. And, of course, chow and everything was served. And we could go to the club if we weren't on alert and have some beers. And they had racquetball courts which I liked.

[00:07:46.98] And I was running a lot then. I was running maybe eight or ten miles a day. I was running marathons when I had free time and things like that.

[00:08:05.98] FREDERIC DONOHUE: They were lasting friendships, and we were dedicated to the job. And we would train hard. And if we were going to fly, no beer, no nothing, you know. We were--

[00:08:24.45] JOE GALLOWAY: Total business. Total business.

[00:08:27.44] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yes, yes. A day and a half before, we were just getting ready to go and studying the scenes and things like that.

[00:08:41.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe some of the significant actions that you were involved in, combat operations?

[00:08:48.56] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah. I brought you a bunch of papers. The most significant one actually was a failure. It was called the Son Tay Raid. The POWs, the guys who had been shot down and caught in Son Tay prison in North Vietnam-- and finally, they decided that we could make a raid into that prison.

[00:09:24.69] I was the lead helicopter on that. There were three helicopters that we went in. And they had softened it up before, the fighters had, and everything. And we went in and landed. I took out the guard towers. I was the lead one. And I took out the two guard towers on the side towards the river and then went in and landed.

[00:09:57.06] And the others behind came in with troops, and they went in and started searching all the buildings. I was empty. I didn't have troops there, and I was to take out the first load of guys. However, they took over the camp in about, oh I would say 18-21 minutes completely, and took care of the people who were there guarding it.

[00:10:35.10] And there were what we called items. We were there to get the prisoners, and we had the nickname. No items, get out of here. And so we left. And that is in my memory, and I hate it to be in my memory because we were there, and we would have got them. But they had been moved. JOE GALLOWAY: Just missed them. FREDERIC DONOHUE: They moved them before-- our intelligence wasn't good in North Vietnam.

[00:11:05.67] Our ground intelligence in North Vietnam was not good, and we didn't know that. So that was one. But you know, otherwise, the things that were significant and made me happy is

when I got pickups or when we made pickups. When guys bailed out, they would naturally head towards Thailand or something. But sometimes, they'd be in the north.

[00:11:35.31] And you would go up and you'd try to get them, too, there because that was the same day. And there was fighter cover if a guy got shot down. There were other fighters up there, and they would circle up there.

[00:11:47.04] And they would call the Jollys, and they'd say, OK, come on in. He's here. And they would give you a tone and you'd home on them, tchew, and go down in and pick the guys up. And you would find them because they had found them.

[00:12:05.61] JOE GALLOWAY: The ones that had been there been down a day or two or three were harder to find, I take it.

[00:12:12.03] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Very definitely. The plan was to get them that day, the day or night they went down. And we found out later, it worked out much better to go up there at night and get them because of the enemy's reaction to us wasn't so good. They couldn't see us and things like that.

[00:12:44.88] And the people who had found them, where they were. and ascertained that, would put out flares that would go and ignite on the ground. And we'd fly up. We would see those, and that's where we knew we were going to land and pick up the guys. And that was good.

[00:13:14.01] FREDERIC DONOHUE: There were many. I was lucky enough to make pickups. And any one of those days was the best day I had, when I got a guy who had bailed out and would have been caught if we didn't get them within the few hours after they bailed out. So those were basically the best days for me, I thought.

[00:13:46.50] FREDERIC DONOHUE: The day they weren't there. The day we went up there and took over the camp in the north. And there was nobody. They said, no items.

[00:13:58.53] JOE GALLOWAY: No items. Nobody home.

[00:14:00.30] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah. FREDERIC DONOHUE: I would say Son Tay. Son Tay was it. You know, when you say remember the most, when you pick somebody up, that is a big day. But luckily, we went up there a lot and got guys a lot and everything. But that would be it.

[00:14:36.94] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I probably would talk to my wife once a week.

[00:14:40.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Had some telephone contact.

[00:14:42.97] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yes, yes, yes.

[00:14:44.89] JOE GALLOWAY: The MARS, or something better?

[00:14:48.61] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Well, we had it all set up in the officers' club. And you would hope you would get through. So it was by telephone, not MARS. As far as I remember it was straight by telephone.

[00:15:13.72] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you get about the war?

[00:15:18.71] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Well, seeing as we were in it ...

[00:15:20.36] [LAUGHING]

[00:15:24.89] Well, you know, you had the Air Force Times and the--

[00:15:28.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Stars and Stripes.

[00:15:29.66] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yes. Yes, exactly. Those were some of what we got, but we got our classified briefings daily. Daily. When we'd go in, in the morning, like 6:00-6:30, if we weren't on alert, we would go in and get a general briefing. If we were on alert, we would be there in the alert shed, ready to go right-- with the helicopters right outside.

[00:16:07.96] FREDERIC DONOHUE: The return home was a lovely day, and it was great to be back to family. And I went back, and I immediately went into training crews to go back there. By now, I had a lot of helicopter hours, and I was training a guy. And so my return home, I enjoyed it because I was still involved.

[00:16:39.46] And, of course, later on, I got to go back again for a special mission-- later on, a special Son Tay mission again. Again. [CHUCKLE]

[00:16:54.79] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with your fellow veterans through the years since then?

[00:17:00.97] FREDERIC DONOHUE: With my fellow what?

[00:17:01.99] JOE GALLOWAY: With your fellow veterans, guys you served with, like the Jolly Greens and so forth.

[00:17:08.68] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah. Well, Jolly Green reunions are every year. And in fact--

[00:17:14.47] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a lot of contact.

[00:17:15.94] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah. And I was an instructor in the-- it used to be H-3 helicopters which are smaller ones. And then I got into the 53 program. And I was the first one to go up to Sikorsky and get a 53 and take it back. And I was just flying a lot. I had a lot of contact, instructional contact.

[00:17:52.15] And then unfortunately, as I got promoted, I didn't get to fly as much when I got to be full colonel and that.

[00:18:04.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Was there any difficulty for you in readjusting to normal life after combat?

[00:18:11.90] FREDERIC DONOHUE: For me there was none, I don't think. I was happy to be home. And I was wrapped up in training and flying. And it wasn't a problem at all. I was happy.

[00:18:33.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any memory or experience from your service in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting influence on your life?

[00:18:46.39] FREDERIC DONOHUE: When we say Vietnam--

[00:18:53.00] JOE GALLOWAY: The combat tour.

[00:18:54.32] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah. To me, I was very happy and overjoyed to have used my skills and gone over there and been able to perform and be lucky and--

[00:19:07.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Save lives.

[00:19:08.39] FREDERIC DONOHUE: --and save lives. And I came back a couple of times with-- I think the most was with 36 holes in the bird and everything. And I was just overjoyed to do the job. That's what I was trained for.

[00:19:32.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience then affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:19:43.15] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I think the guys that are coming home-- you mean like now?

[00:19:49.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, yeah.

[00:19:52.42] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I think a lot of them are a bit bitter now because we were in it all the way. Now, they send them over there piecemeal to Laos or to some place.

[00:20:12.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Iraq or Afghanistan.

[00:20:12.99] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah. And I sense now, when I associated with some of the guys today, they're not as happy as we were back in the '50s and '60s. I don't think they're as happy about going in there.

[00:20:39.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Some of them do five or six or seven tours back to back. I think it's very hard on them, hard on the families.

[00:20:48.13] FREDERIC DONOHUE: If they're TDY, if they're on temporary duty and go over for 30 days and they might go back. But generally speaking, the ones that go over now never go over for more than a year. Now like when I was there, I was involved with Vietnam for a good solid three to four year portion of my career.

[00:21:19.36] But it was very different than now where they tell them, you're going to Laos, or you're going to somewhere. And they're over there, and the most is 12 months. And a lot of times, it's not that long. It's not that long now.

[00:21:40.81] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today in our society?

[00:21:47.68] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I don't think it's remembered very much. It's not a popular thing to them. And I don't think it has-- people have a feeling, oh, that's great. You did a great job or something like that. I think it's not big on the mind of the American people, the Vietnam war back then.

[00:22:20.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:22:21.13] FREDERIC DONOHUE: And now we've got--

[00:22:21.73] JOE GALLOWAY: I think the kids don't know anything about it or very little.

[00:22:27.01] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Well-- [LAUGH] my kids do. But no, I agree with you. I agree with you, yes.

[00:22:37.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from that war more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:22:50.44] FREDERIC DONOHUE: Yeah, I did. I mean, to me, that's what I was supposed to do, and I was happy. It was something that I liked, having been there. And I got back a second time for some special missions which were shorter. And it wasn't the three-year tour like before.

[00:23:21.83] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you learn from that service in Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:23:42.75] FREDERIC DONOHUE: I don't know. To love your job and love your country, and train hard and not bitch or something like that about long periods of time or-- away, or think to-- I don't know. I think they're not as dedicated as in those days and that time. Now, in the 2000s, it's different. That's what I think.

[00:24:17.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, Colonel.

[00:24:19.32] FREDERIC DONOHUE: All right, sir. All right.