

## **Douville, Robert USCG**

[00:00:15.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Where and when were you born?

[00:00:18.00] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I was born in 1941 on the eve of the Second World War, or the US entry into the Second World War, I should say.

[00:00:27.54] JOE GALLOWAY: When about?

[00:00:28.40] ROBERT DOUVILLE: September, I was born in St Paul, Minnesota. But I was raised as a toddler in Wisconsin, and then when I went to school we moved to Michigan, to the-- I'm a Yooper. You know what a Yooper is?

[00:00:45.31] JOE GALLOWAY: I know what a Yooper is. I've been to Yoop.

[00:00:48.95] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I guess we need to tell your audience. It's the Upper Peninsula. Someone from the Upper Peninsula, Michigan.

[00:01:01.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Your family status? What did your dad do? You got brothers and sisters?

[00:01:07.36] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I do have brothers and sisters, but I was raised like an only child by my mother's oldest sister. My mother died when I was 13 months old. Eventually I went and ended up living with my maternal aunt. And I went to Sault Ste. Marie with her when she got a job teaching there. And so I lived with that lady and my grandmother when I was being raised.

[00:01:42.95] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

[00:01:46.56] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I was thinking about that the other day. I think I must have been 23.

[00:01:50.75] JOE GALLOWAY: 23. You were an old guy then.

[00:01:53.12] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah, It was very early in Vietnam. And I didn't realize it. but the youngsters were the age that I was and younger when I joined the Coast Guard.

[00:02:11.56] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you join the Coast Guard? You enlisted.

[00:02:18.46] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yup, in January of 1961.

[00:02:21.52] JOE GALLOWAY: '61. What sort of training did you have before you deployed?

[00:02:26.11] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, of course, I went to boot camp which was a shock for me right there. I joined the Coast Guard because I didn't want to be a faceless person in the Army. And I see you're wearing an Army badge yourself. But that's the truth of it. And I didn't

want to sleep out in a foxhole. And I thought the Coast Guard would be easy. When I got to boot camp, I was disabused of that idea right away.

[00:02:59.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Right away. Right away. Their boot camp probably is no easier than the Army's or the Marine's.

[00:03:07.99] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I don't have any comparative experience, but I doubt it.

[00:03:11.59] [LAUGHTER]

[00:03:14.99] Before we went to Vietnam, which was several years after I joined the Coast Guard, we had weapons training with the Marine Corps down at Camp Pendleton.

[00:03:26.41] JOE GALLOWAY: And what other training did you have?

[00:03:29.06] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I went through what was euphemistically called the Fleet Airborne Electronics Training Unit, Pacific, at Whidbey Island, Washington, which was actually a SERE training-- survival, escape, resistance, and evasion.

[00:03:44.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:03:44.99] ROBERT DOUVILLE: It was all classified then.

[00:03:49.20] JOE GALLOWAY: And anything else?

[00:03:52.58] ROBERT DOUVILLE: That was it. I was not assigned to the boats, so I wasn't trained to operate the mortar or the .50 caliber machine gun that were used on our patrol boats.

[00:04:09.69] JOE GALLOWAY: When you were assigned to Vietnam did you go over as a ship or did you fly in and join a boat there?

[00:04:18.71] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, Squadron 1, as it was called in the Coast Guard, was formed at Alameda, California at Government Island in May of '65. And that was the original group of troops that went. We went from Alameda, we went through training, and then we were flown to Clark in the Philippines and bused down to Subic Bay. And at Subic Bay we met the ship-- the boats, the 82-foot patrol boats were brought over as deck cargo, unloaded off the ships that they brought them over, and outfitted with ammo boxes and extra refrigerator and freezer and the lazarette and so on.

[00:05:07.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, were these new boats or old ones or-- ?

[00:05:11.61] ROBERT DOUVILLE: No, they were existing 82-footers that the Navy-- the commandant agreed to give to the Navy, and the Navy agreed to build replacements for the ones that were taken out of service in the US, eventually. At first, we went with I think it was 17 or 18 boats in two divisions, 11 and 12. Then a little bit later we brought over Division 13, which brought the total up to 27 82-footers total in Vietnam.

[00:05:49.03] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a lot of ships.

[00:05:52.12] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. They were small patrol boats. They had crews of nine, I think it was, on each boat.

[00:05:59.32] JOE GALLOWAY: And they worked the whole coastline.

[00:06:01.89] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. And some on the rivers, and so on.

[00:06:05.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me what your first impressions were on arriving in Vietnam.

[00:06:11.85] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, I went over on an old LST. It was a regional, temporary mother ship for the 82-footers in Squadron 11. So when I got to Vietnam we dropped the hook by An Thoi on Phu Quoc Island, the village of An Thoi. You could see the village, and see the island, but when I got to Vietnam I was just on the ship that I was--

[00:06:44.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Sitting on the same ship, yeah.

[00:06:47.46] ROBERT DOUVILLE: We were not out at sea. We were close in. Matter of fact, we went to general quarters at one time, later on, when they thought that the VC were attacking the ship with, maybe, recoilless rifle fire.

[00:07:12.96] JOE GALLOWAY: So what was your job aboard ship, or aboard boat?

[00:07:16.14] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, I was on the squadron staff. In those days I was a junior enlisted petty officer, and I was a journalist. But I was sent to Vietnam in the yeoman billet, which is a clerk typist billet. But my job was to do whatever the squadron commander and his staff needed to be done in the way of typing for letters, and orders, and so on. And then, as time permitted, I went out and took photographs and--

[00:07:48.60] JOE GALLOWAY: --did the journalist thing.

[00:07:49.92] ROBERT DOUVILLE: --did the journalist thing. I had gone through the Navy journalist school in '63 at Great Lakes.

[00:07:57.30] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. And you went over in May of 1965 with the first group.

[00:08:02.76] ROBERT DOUVILLE: The first group of Coast Guard people that went over.

[00:08:05.25] JOE GALLOWAY: You do a full one-year tour?

[00:08:07.74] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, my tour was counted from May when I was assigned to the squadron. So I left Vietnam in May of '66.

[00:08:19.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you would have been there when one of my roommates, a photographer named Tim Page, was aboard a Coast Guard cutter that was attacked by the US Air Force and sunk.

[00:08:33.62] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I don't think that boat was sunk, although there were a couple of guys killed on it.

[00:08:38.45] JOE GALLOWAY: There were several killed, and several wounded, including my roommate.

[00:08:43.49] ROBERT DOUVILLE: They shot them up pretty good.

[00:08:45.18] JOE GALLOWAY: They did indeed.

[00:08:45.89] ROBERT DOUVILLE: It was a terrible error. But it was a problem with communications. The surface unit didn't have-- Coast Guard unit did not have ability to communicate with the aircraft that were returning with unexpended ordnance from North Vietnam.

[00:09:05.14] JOE GALLOWAY: So they thought it would be a good place to drop them, right on top of that ship.

[00:09:10.14] ROBERT DOUVILLE: They saw these boats and they didn't identify them as US. And they were in a free fire zone, apparently. Now that boat was assigned to Division 12 out of Da Nang.

[00:09:26.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:09:27.24] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And the squadron commander, who I worked for directly, was also the commander of Division 11 which was home stationed on the mother ship at a place called Phu Quoc Island, which was all the way down and around the Ca Mau Peninsula in the Gulf of Thailand. Matter of fact, the island was claimed by the Cambodians, but occupied by Vietnam.

[00:10:02.21] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like?

[00:10:07.13] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, on an LST or on an ARL, which was a converted LST, the Krishna came later on. We went over on the Floyd County and later lived on the Krishna. But the enlisted living was the same. You had compartments down between the outer hull and the tank deck, one after another. No air conditioning so they left the doors open at night. And they turned the fans on, on the tank deck, which were big eight foot fans that sucked exhaust from tanks and trucks and so on-- when they were using them-- out through the litter ports that were aft near the hospital spaces. And we lived in-- our bunks were four high.

[00:11:01.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:11:03.31] ROBERT DOUVILLE: So you had about this much room between. And the wind sucked through there at night to try and provide some cooling.

[00:11:16.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Did it work?

[00:11:17.96] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Not really. And in the morning your chambray shirt, and your trousers, and your cigarettes, and stuff out of your pocket would all be-- JOE GALLOWAY: Soggy. ROBERT DOUVILLE: No. It'd be pushed up against a bulkhead from the wind running through those spaces. But we didn't have to live in foxholes or out in the jungle.

[00:11:38.57] JOE GALLOWAY: That's true. How was the food aboard ship?

[00:11:47.04] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Listen. When I went to Vietnam, I was a landlubber. And I went on this-- somebody who hated sailors designed the LST because the mess-- when the galley windows were open on the main deck athwartship and when you got through going with your tray and getting your food, you came to a ladder. And the mess deck was down one level on the first deck.

[00:12:14.87] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you carry a tray with your food and your drink down a set of ships-- ?

[00:12:21.02] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Very carefully, especially when the guy on the step below you is a second class boatswain's mate who's a WESTPAC sailor and has been out there for years.

[00:12:32.30] JOE GALLOWAY: And you didn't want to mess him up.

[00:12:34.49] ROBERT DOUVILLE: So your wrists are kind of your gimbals for keeping from spilling the bean juice down his neck.

[00:12:41.90] JOE GALLOWAY: I'd think so.

[00:12:43.52] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And then they put the bug juice machine, the Kool-Aid machine, at the foot of the ladder. So the line backed up the ladder.

[00:12:52.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, wonderful. JOE GALLOWAY: What were your impressions of the Vietnamese people, civilian and military, that you had anything to do with?

[00:13:08.53] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, I was intrigued by them. They were new and strange to me, and so on. I did interact with some of them from time to time. There was a Special Forces camp on Phu Quoc Island. It was the last one of a series of Special Forces camp between the Laotian, Vietnam and Cambodian, Vietnam borders. And the last camp was on Phu Quoc Island.

[00:13:43.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Was Phu Quoc Island the prison island?

[00:13:46.98] ROBERT DOUVILLE: No. That was Con Son. That was around in the Gulf of Thailand.

[00:13:51.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:13:52.80] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Anyway. We operated with the Special Forces sometimes. Matter of fact, one of my most vivid memories is of the operation with the Special Forces, which I'll tell you about, if you want.

[00:14:08.96] JOE GALLOWAY: We'll do that. We'll get to that.

[00:14:16.30] ROBERT DOUVILLE: There were three of us who were assigned to the clerical staff of the squadron. A first class yeoman, a second class, and myself. And we worked 24 hours a day. If these guys got up at 2 o'clock in the morning and wanted a letter written, and so on, then we got up and did the letter writing. So those guys I was pretty good friends with. And then, I remember some memorable characters. There was one guy. I don't know if I can tell the story.

[00:14:59.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Go ahead.

[00:15:02.15] ROBERT DOUVILLE: He used the f-word as every part of speech you could think of. And we used to entertain ourselves by counting the number of times that he used the f-word in a given sentence.

[00:15:20.05] JOE GALLOWAY: I mean, average would be eight or nine.

[00:15:23.50] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Oh, he could beat that easily. The other thing that I remember about the troops over there was the Filipinos, who were in the Navy and Coast Guard. In those days, of course, they were only stewards and cooks.

[00:15:44.83] They were great for shooting dice at night. And they would get into the area forward, between the first bunk space, and close the door. And you could hear the dice, and hear them chattering with one another, and hear the dice as they threw them up against the bulkhead. And that went on until 3, 4 o'clock in the morning.

[00:16:13.81] We got paid in MPC, Military Payment Certificates, which was scrip, not in real dollars and so on. And in those days there was no such thing as automatic transfer, electronic payments, or anything. If you didn't have an allotment out of your pay, you got paid in cash.

[00:16:39.50] So we'd end up on this ship with a locker full of this MPC. Guys would open their locker and it would spill out on the floor, on the deck. Matter of fact, when I left Vietnam I bought a new car.

[00:16:59.66] JOE GALLOWAY: With MPC?

[00:17:01.40] ROBERT DOUVILLE: No. I had to get rid of the MPC.

[00:17:05.96] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation, off duty activities, if there was such a thing aboard a Coast Guard vessel?

[00:17:14.73] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, the one I was on was not a Coast Guard vessel. It was the Navy, but it was integrated. The Task Force was 115, MARKET TIME Operation. The ship was a task unit of the task group, or task force. And the squadron commander was the task group commander. The ship reported to him under the task group, but it was a Navy ship and it had both Navy and Coast Guard people embarked on it. The primary purpose of the ship was to serve as support for the vessels. When the Krishna came-- the ARL which was a converted LST-- they had-- all of the tank deck was converted to shop spaces. And the shop spaces they built--

[00:18:07.79] JOE GALLOWAY: This is for repairs, and--

[00:18:09.74] ROBERT DOUVILLE: For repair. The 12 boats. And later on, after the 82-footers, the Swift Boats were brought in.

[00:18:21.92] JOE GALLOWAY: So you had a floating garage there.

[00:18:25.19] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. They had a big A-frame on one side of the hull. They could lift up the stern of an 82-footer and replace the wheels.

[00:18:33.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:18:34.01] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I watched the ship fitters one day. They had a refrigerator freezer in the galley on the 82. The galley was about the size of the galley on a railroad dining car. And they came in and took out the piece of the deck around the hatch of the crew's quarters.

[00:18:58.51] Took out the door, and the bulkhead, and the frame around it. Went in and got that refrigerator, took it out, put a new refrigerator in and button that ship back up. Welded it water tight again and put it under way the same day.

[00:19:16.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:19:17.88] ROBERT DOUVILLE: They spent about 80% of their time on patrol. We had two relief crews that lived-- at any given time you'd either have a relief crew on the 82, and the 82 underway. And the assigned crew that lived with them would come and stay aboard the support ship.

[00:19:35.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. So they were hot. They were just switching out and the ship was running constantly.

[00:19:42.60] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Almost, yup. They ran about 60% of the time Stateside, but about 80% of the time in Vietnam. Their mission was to stop junks and any seaborne, indigenous traffic that they saw, inspect their cargos, and check their documentation. ROBERT DOUVILLE: Matter of fact, one of my stories is about spending some time with the Special Forces.

[00:20:16.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Tell me about that.

[00:20:19.07] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, one day the chief of staff called me in and said they wanted me to go to the Special Forces camp at Duong Dong, which was the district town on Phu Quoc Island. That's where the Special Forces had their camp. There was an A-team, and the A-team had CIDG troops.

[00:20:44.09] The CIDG troops bunked in between the inner perimeter and the outer perimeter, and were not allowed to come inside the inner perimeter at night. But I spent three days at the Special Forces camp typing up a list of VC suspects that they had. Of course, in retrospect, it was kind of ridiculous because every other guy was named Nguyen Van Nguyen.

[00:21:09.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:21:10.27] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Which was like Smith Smith. But I typed it up. And when the A-team captain saw that I was a typist and all-- of course, there was no mimeograph machines or anything like-- no computers in those days.

[00:21:30.96] He saw I could type, and so he asked me to type up some of his reports for him. And I said, sure, Captain. I said, what will you give me? So he gave me a Tiger suit in return for my typing. I wish I still had it. I couldn't get it in it anymore.

[00:21:51.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Those were awfully good-looking uniforms.

[00:21:55.02] ROBERT DOUVILLE: But one night I went out with the Special Forces when they went with the Ruff Puffs. You know what the Ruff Puffs are trained-- or regional forces.

[00:22:04.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Regional force, yeah.

[00:22:05.55] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Like National Guard, I think.

[00:22:07.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, state militia, more like.

[00:22:10.80] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Anyway. They had these four-deuce mortars with the biggest mortar in the arsenal. And they had two of them. And the base plate weighed what a Vietnamese guy weighed. And they took two of them out by the airport, which was unsecured. And this company of Ruff Puffs were going to shell the VC inland on the island.

[00:22:44.07] But the Special Forces got nervous because it was a Chinese fire drill. And they were waving flashlights around, and didn't have a perimeter set up, and were arguing with one another about their targets, and so on. The Special Forces guys-- I don't know if this was for my benefit or not. It might have been.

[00:23:08.58] They portrayed themselves as getting nervous and they said, we're going to go back and get a .30 caliber assault rifle. Which was a .30 caliber machine gun with a bipod.



[00:23:21.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Right.

[00:23:22.17] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And they had one of those Army trucks. What do you call them?

[00:23:26.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Deuce and a half?

[00:23:29.40] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. They had no cover on it, and they had the tailgate open. And they said, if we get attacked, you get on the machine gun in the bed of the truck and start shooting. And we know the way around here so we'll drive, and get us the hell out of here. And he pointed at the Ruff Puffs and he said, don't worry about them. He said, if they get in the way, shoot them, too. Well, fortunately, we weren't attacked.

[00:24:03.78] JOE GALLOWAY: That's good, but did they fire the four-deuce?

[00:24:08.13] ROBERT DOUVILLE: They did. And one of them had-- the increments must have been damp, or something. Because they'd fire them simultaneously and the one would come out of the tube. And the flame would shoot out on the sides about eight feet. And the round would drop short, and you'd hear, boom, (SPEAKING SOFTLY) boom, way in the distance. I don't know. With the rounds dropping short, I hope there was no friendlies there.

[00:24:41.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Amazing.

[00:24:46.87] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I think the most vivid memory is the day that Sergeant Pruitt got killed. The same Special Forces camp-- two of the patrol boats were assigned to go up there and take a squad of CIDG, led by a Special Forces sergeant, in-- with each squad. One squad embarked on one of the 82-footers, and one on another. And we went up to the north end of the island. I was assigned to go along as a supernumerary because of my journalist role.

[00:25:30.48] Anyway, we inserted-- we went up the night before, and we were shooting the bull with Sergeant Pruitt and the other guys. And early in the morning they went ashore with their rubber boat. And along about noon time they were ambushed by some Viet Cong because the inner part of the island belonged to the VC.

[00:26:08.31] He was shot. And they sent in a Boston Whaler, a small boat, from the 82-footer to pick him up and one of the CIDG troops who had been shot in the behind. When they brought him out he had just been killed. He was shot through the receiver. He had an M16, which was brand new to Vietnam then.

[00:26:40.04] And the bolt must have been open from the last round being expended. And the round that got him went through the receiver, through the ejection port. And the receiver frame was just stamped metal, and it went through the side into the--

[00:26:59.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Got a burst of shrapnel.

[00:27:00.77] ROBERT DOUVILLE: --and caught him right in the gut. Killed him.

[00:27:04.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Killed him.

[00:27:06.44] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yup. That was in September of '65. We took his body back to the Special Forces camp and transferred it to them that evening.

[00:27:27.19] JOE GALLOWAY: The day you left?

[00:27:28.72] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I guess it must have been. By the time I left, I would become a Saigon Warrior. Because in January of '66 the Coast Guard fleted up the command of the squadron to an O-6, to a captain. And the Naval Advisory Group admiral, Norvell Ward, wanted that guy, that Coast Guard captain, up there in Saigon where he could keep his eye on him, I think. So I went to work in Saigon because they--

[00:28:06.64] JOE GALLOWAY: They moved the headquarters up there.

[00:28:08.44] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah, the staff was moved up there.

[00:28:12.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Well, tell me about life in Saigon that year.

[00:28:16.58] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, I remember that I-- our office was across the hall from the awards office that the Navy had there. And this one guy, one lieutenant, got a Purple Heart because the hotel that he lived in was attacked by a Viet-- VC.

[00:28:46.35] They bombed it. They brought up a truck-- one of these little Renault trucks-- and had a gunfight with the Canh Sat, the white mice policeman out in front. Then when he thought it was all clear, he went in the head in the hotel to take a leak. And that's when the bomb went off. And he got a Purple Heart for being injured while he was taking a--

[00:29:10.06] JOE GALLOWAY: While he was in the latrine. It's hard to claim much glory out of that.

[00:29:17.86] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. Tell that to your grandchildren.

[00:29:23.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How was life in Saigon, when they weren't blowing up your latrine?

[00:29:29.57] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I lived in a small hotel, and its only protection was that it was too small to be a target.

[00:29:38.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, that's good enough.

[00:29:40.19] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And we had to charge a quarters watch at night that rotated amongst everybody who lived in the hotel. And they had an M14 that came with being in charge of the quarters. We had no mess hall or anything in that little hotel. And you had to go down-- If you wanted to eat in the GI mess hall you had to go down to one of these big hotels, like the Metropole.

[00:30:10.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Or the Brinks BOQ, or somewhere.

[00:30:15.43] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. So I ate a lot on the economy and didn't bother to try to go down. But one night-- I have to tell you this. This is as close as I came to getting killed while I was in Vietnam. The Buddhists were uprising in Saigon, and burning themselves up, and GIs got kind of tense. We had a first class storekeeper that had been in the Coast Guard for years and years, and he was an alcoholic. And he used to fortify himself for the trip home, back to the billet, with a six pack before he-- Ba Moui Ba, or Biere Larue, or whatever they had.

[00:31:01.70] JOE GALLOWAY: That was just for the trip.

[00:31:03.62] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. And he was packing. Now, the garrison troops in Saigon were not supposed to be armed, but many of us were. And he packed a .45 in his satchel. And when he-- I have to tell you this, too. One of the things that we did was go to these Indian tailors in Saigon and get a pair of black pajamas made. Tailor-made black pajamas for lounging, and so on.

[00:31:38.98] But he didn't know that. So I was back in the billet ahead of him, and I had put on my black pajamas, and I was sitting in a room by the stairs with a Navy guy who was an acquaintance of mine. He came up the stairs, and he looked in the room, and went a few steps by. And he came back and he had that .45 out, pointed right at me. And he said, take off them VC clothes. So guess what? I did.

[00:32:11.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I bet.

[00:32:12.41] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And he said, now, put on some Coast Guard clothes. So he walked me down, marched me down, the hall to my billet, my room. And I put on my dungaree trousers and a chambray shirt. And he said, OK. Don't let me catch you in them VC clothes again. Of course it was peasant clothes.

[00:32:37.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:32:38.44] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And he jacked the slide on that .45. And when he did, the round flew out of the chamber and, ping, went up and fell on the bed. And he had taken the magazine out already so when that round came out, and he was stumbling around trying to get it, I dove over his back and grabbed it. About that time, somebody had called the shore patrol, or the MPs, and they came and--

[00:33:07.98] JOE GALLOWAY: --carted him away.

[00:33:09.72] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yep.

[00:33:10.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever see him again?

[00:33:12.09] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Oh, yeah. He lost his stripe about a month later.

[00:33:22.17] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, I guess I just did. That was pretty bad. No, the worst day was when we saw Sergeant Pruitt get killed.

[00:33:32.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:33:33.20] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Later on, years later, I went to the Wall in Washington and found his name. And I have a picture of his tombstone now.

[00:33:42.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Was he buried in Arlington Cemetery?

[00:33:45.34] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I don't know if he's buried in Arlington. I found this online on a website.

[00:33:59.41] JOE GALLOWAY: How much, if any, contact did you have with our allies? The ROKS-- the Koreans-- the Australians, the New Zealanders, Filipinos--

[00:34:08.65] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Oh, I flew once with the Australians, back from Saigon to Phu Quoc. And I was in a Caribou. And there was a load of palletized mortar ammunition in there. And I was sitting in the plane, like this, and that mortar ammunition was stacked up right in front of me.

[00:34:34.40] When we landed, he corkscrewed in right over the airfield. He didn't come in a long glide slope so he wouldn't draw fire. And that air crewman stomped fingers to get the Vietnamese who wanted to grab a ride off the back of that tailgate on that Caribou. Stomped fingers and away they went. When they took off you couldn't see anything but ground out that back--

[00:35:09.03] Yeah. It took off like that.

[00:35:10.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Like that. Yeah.

[00:35:11.94] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Anyway. They landed it, finally. And they said, all right, mates. Here we are. And we said, no, we're not. He said, we're not? We said, you haven't flown over any open water. This place where we're going is an island. So they got out their charts again, and started looking, and we got back on the plane and flew away.

[00:35:36.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Did they eventually get you to Phu Quoc Island?

[00:35:40.05] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Oh, yeah.

[00:35:40.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Eventually.

[00:35:41.67] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah.

[00:35:42.12] JOE GALLOWAY: But they were going to load you off on the mainland.

[00:35:45.03] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Somewhere down, way in the south, on the Ca Mau Peninsula.

[00:35:55.76] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:36:00.26] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Not much at all.

[00:36:03.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Letters?

[00:36:04.28] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I got two pieces of memorable mail. One was my draft notice that they forwarded to me. I'd been in the Coast Guard for about five years then. The other was a scholarship from the University of Wisconsin at River Falls. I had applied for, and been turned down for, a returning student scholarship from them before I volunteered to go to Vietnam with the Coast Guard.

[00:36:34.58] Then, later on, they sent me another letter and said, oh, wait a minute, we-- This was after I was already in Vietnam. We found it possible to give you a scholarship not for one semester, but for two semesters. And not just for fees, but for books and everything. Tuition and fees and books. And I had to send that back and say, well, I have a prior commitment.

[00:36:59.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you send the draft board a rude letter back?

[00:37:02.99] ROBERT DOUVILLE: No. I explained to them I'd been in the Coast Guard for several years. And they weren't going to let me go in order to go report for my draft physical.

[00:37:13.73] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war?

[00:37:19.45] ROBERT DOUVILLE: From outside?

[00:37:20.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Stars and Stripes, Armed Forces Radio, any of that stuff?

[00:37:26.05] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I never saw Stars and Stripes while I was in Vietnam.

[00:37:29.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Really? Even when you were in Saigon?

[00:37:33.13] ROBERT DOUVILLE: You have to remember that in '65 was well before-- '66 when I came back, it was well before all of this hate and discontent had arisen about Vietnam and the war. And I was insulated from all that. I went about my business in the Coast Guard, back to regular Coast Guard duties.

[00:38:00.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. It didn't matter.

[00:38:02.56] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. I wasn't really conscious of the hate and discontent that had been arisen because of the war until later on, after I got back to the States, of course.

[00:38:20.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about going home.

[00:38:23.15] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well, we got on a commercial airliner. I think it was Continental. I'm not sure. And we flew to Japan, and they fumigated us. We couldn't get off the plane, but they came through with bug bombs and fumigated us. That's what they thought of us, I guess. And, from there, we flew on back to the West Coast to Travis. And from Travis I made my way down to Alameda, and picked up my new car, and drove across the country home.

[00:38:58.64] JOE GALLOWAY: There you go. No problems? Nobody says boo diddley to you?

[00:39:05.94] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Nope.

[00:39:10.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, did you stay in the Coast Guard?

[00:39:12.92] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Hmph. Did I ever. When I was in boot camp, though, after about three days, I realized I'd made a horrible mistake. And I swore I was going to get out of that chicken outfit when my four years was up. Of course, when you're 19 years old, four years seems like forever. And I did get out. After 36 years I finally found my way out.

[00:39:42.35] JOE GALLOWAY: It took you that long to find the door, huh?

[00:39:45.41] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah.

[00:39:46.37] JOE GALLOWAY: 36 years. You went on to serve as an officer?

[00:39:53.84] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. I made chief, and as an enlisted man, E-7. Like, what, a master sergeant in the Army? And then I went to warrant grade, W-2 and W-3, for five and 1/2 years. And I finally convinced them, at my fourth try, with a little help-- you know, a rabbi is a mentor with clout.

[00:40:18.42] JOE GALLOWAY: One of those helps.

[00:40:20.70] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And I got selected for OCS and had another career as an officer, retired as an 0-5 commander.

[00:40:29.04] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. Very good.

[00:40:31.68] ROBERT DOUVILLE: But I have a shameful little secret. I never was assigned to the crew of a Coast Guard cutter in that 36 years.

[00:40:40.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Not in 36 years.

[00:40:42.96] ROBERT DOUVILLE: No.

[00:40:43.43] JOE GALLOWAY: No sea duty.

[00:40:45.86] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Except when we went to Vietnam, and then I was embarked staff, which didn't count.

[00:40:51.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't count. JOE GALLOWAY: Did your Vietnam experience affect your life afterward in any way?

[00:41:02.87] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Very much. Although I never anticipated then how it would affect it until years later. But about 12 years ago, or so, I had prostate cancer. And the DAV helped me file a claim with the VA. And then I came down with Parkinson's disease later which, of course, has no cure. The prostate cancer was taken care of with surgery. But I went to the VA and-- the Parkinson's-- and I'm 100% now because I was in Vietnam. Parkinson's is now one of the presumed Agent Orange diseases. Yeah.

[00:42:09.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:42:16.27] ROBERT DOUVILLE: It does now, yeah. For sure. The big difference that I saw between when I joined the Coast Guard and went to Vietnam, and today, was the difference in the way that the National Guard and the Reserve is used by the Army, in particular. But by the other services, even the Coast Guard, more so. I can remember, I was president of the local chapter of the Military Officers Association here in St. Tammany Parish. And we had a speaker one time, was a 25-year-old Air National Guard helicopter pilot. When he came and spoke to us-- this must have been six, eight years ago-- he had two tours. Two or three? Three tours in combat, in Iraq, behind him already. And he was the company commander. And he was an Air National Guard pilot.

[00:43:26.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Some of them now have had 12 or 14 tours in combat.

[00:43:33.15] ROBERT DOUVILLE: But that was what made me really aware of the difference between the way that-- the National Guard, when I was a kid, was a place-- JOE GALLOWAY: A social club. ROBERT DOUVILLE: --to get away from being sent to Vietnam. Today--

[00:43:52.44] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd get sent quicker.

[00:43:53.81] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. You'd get sent-- you'd be in the front lines before you knew what happened to you.

[00:43:58.88] JOE GALLOWAY: That's exactly right.

[00:44:00.62] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I really think that I was sold a bill of goods when I joined. But listen, I want to say, the Coast Guard was very good to me. And I may not be the smartest guy that ever passed through the Coast Guard, but I'm damn sure that one of the luckiest. And I haven't told you the half of the story, either.

[00:44:26.05] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today, or is it?

[00:44:35.40] ROBERT DOUVILLE: It's interesting that you ask me that. I think it's remembered with more forbearance by the people who do the remembering than-- even the North Vietnamese-- than it was when it was a hot war, and we were shooting. There's a lot more empathy and sympathy. I think that finally the Vietnam veterans--

[00:45:09.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Getting a little respect?

[00:45:11.02] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Exactly.

[00:45:16.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful in your life than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:45:28.10] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Well. I think I went over-- I was still pretty much a boy. And when we went on that operation, and later on in the Rung Sat Special Zone, I went on another operation, the reality of the situation-- when we went to Vietnam, the Coast Guard was the first time a large group of people had been assigned to the Western Pacific in a generation. We were, Johnny goes marching off to war, hurrah, hurrah. And it sobered us up.

[00:46:16.54] JOE GALLOWAY: I reckon it probably did. Are there lessons that you took from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations?

[00:46:29.23] ROBERT DOUVILLE: You know, I haven't really thought about it in those terms. I have tried to urge all the Vietnam veterans that I come in contact with, if they haven't, to get their VA claims made. There are a lot of guys running around who haven't made claims and, by god, they are deserving. Especially the guys who were out in the jungle and bearing the brunt of it, the combat troops on the front lines. So that's one lesson that I've taken away, especially when you consider how the government gives away money to people who are far less deserving than these veterans.

[00:47:27.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC?

[00:47:32.83] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I have. As I said earlier, I found Sergeant Pruitt's name on the Wall.

[00:47:41.41] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your feelings when you go there?

[00:47:49.68] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Makes me very, very sad. There are two names on that Wall that I know. One of them is Pruitt, and the other one is a kid who was a year behind me in high school. He was a helicopter air crewman, was killed in Vietnam. So it's a sad experience, quite moving.

[00:48:21.08] JOE GALLOWAY: It is that. JOE GALLOWAY: Have you heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration project?

[00:48:32.92] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Only recently, yes.



[00:48:35.29] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think about that?

[00:48:37.15] ROBERT DOUVILLE: I think that it's a good thing.

[00:48:40.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, we better do it now before everybody's gone.

[00:48:44.77] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yup. I volunteer at the World War II Museum in New Orleans. We have the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

[00:48:55.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. I've been there.

[00:48:56.57] ROBERT DOUVILLE: And those old boys that come in, World War II veterans, they're getting to be fewer and fewer every day. I heard there was like 600 a day dying off. And you and I are Vietnam veterans, and we're 74 years old.

[00:49:16.42] JOE GALLOWAY: There it is. I don't-- given Agent Orange, and all that other good stuff, I don't think we're going to last as long as the World War II guys.

[00:49:32.22] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Yeah. You may be right.

[00:49:35.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Because they're all in their-- they've all hit 90 by now, I'm sure.

[00:49:40.80] ROBERT DOUVILLE: Oh, yeah.

[00:49:43.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Has to be. Well, thank you, sir.

[00:49:46.51] ROBERT DOUVILLE: You're welcome.