

Ege, Karl USMC

[00:00:15.94] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you went to Vietnam?

[00:00:20.73] KARL EGE: I was 23.

[00:00:23.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Me too.

[00:00:30.14] KARL EGE: Well, I had a father, mother, and a brother. Grew up in a nuclear family on the East Coast of the United States, in New York and New Jersey. Born in Manhattan, lived in East Coast all my life.

[00:00:41.89] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were single then?

[00:00:43.06] KARL EGE: I was single when I went to Vietnam, yes.

[00:00:45.16] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your hometown?

[00:00:47.25] KARL EGE: Well, at that time it was a little town called Locust, New Jersey, which is down on the Jersey Shore.

[00:00:54.09] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you entered the military?

[00:00:59.26] KARL EGE: Well, I was a Navy ROTC student in college, took the Marine option, knew that I was going to be in a service that was going to be the first to fight if conflict erupted. When I made that decision, it was 1962. There wasn't a lot of activity.

[00:01:21.13] There was the Berlin Wall Crisis and the Cuban Missile Crisis, but no active conflict involving American troops. But I knew that that was a possibility. I recall undergoing training in the summer of 1964, being called out onto the parade ground by our Marine drill instructor, who said that the night before US Navy ships were attacked by gunboats of the North Vietnamese in the Tonkin Gulf.

[00:01:54.92] That was August of 1964. And this Marine Corps drill instructor, one of those poster kind of guys, about 6 foot 7, and World War II and Korean vet said, you men are going to be lieutenants and you're going to be leading Marines into combat more than likely. And I'm going to train you as best I can to lead those young Marines. It was a sobering moment, but we all knew then that the likelihood that there would be conflict was more apparent.

[00:02:36.27] KARL EGE: As an officer in the Marine Corps, I received 16 weeks of training in the summer before I was commissioned, the summer of '64. And then upon commissioning at graduation in June of '65, I reported one week later to Quantico, Virginia, and began Officer Basic Training, which is six months of infantry training that every Marine officer, whether they end up as pilots, or artillery officers, or tank officers, or supply officers all go through infantry training. It's unique to the Marine Corps, and I think it sets them apart.

[00:03:13.92] I think we were all trained initially to be combat infantrymen first, and then a specialty afterward. When I left Quantico, I opted for an O8 MOS, Military Occupational Specialty, as an artillery officer. And I was sent from Quantico to Fort Sill-- Army Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and spent, oh, I think, three months training at Fort Sill with a group of Army-- and I think there were 25 of us who were Marines.

[00:03:49.75] The interesting thing, all 25 of us who were Marines were deployed immediately to Vietnam after training. The Army folks were either going back to base in the US, or going to Germany, or Korea. So there was a little different-- we had a little more intense focus on what we were doing since it was going to become relevant very quickly.

[00:04:09.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Very quickly.

[00:04:10.10] KARL EGE: So I thought that by May of 1966 when I deployed to Vietnam, early May of '66, I had had almost a full year of constant combat training, both as an infantry officer, which came in handy because I was with the infantry most of the time when I was in Vietnam, and as an artillery officer, as well.

[00:04:38.65] JOE GALLOWAY: So your deployment to Vietnam was 1966?

[00:04:43.00] KARL EGE: May, 1966, yes, May 4th.

[00:04:45.60] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions on landing there?

[00:04:48.89] KARL EGE: Well, I-- we went-- first, I flew from Travis Air Force Base, which I think most of us flew from, to Okinawa and spent two days in Okinawa, and then flew-- at the Marine base in Okinawa-- and then flew to Da Nang in an old Air Force prop plane, C-123--

[00:05:15.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:05:15.89] KARL EGE: --one of the old big flying boxcar planes, jump seats on the side and your rifle and sea bags. It was-- it must have been a 10 hour noisy, sort of tension-ridden. Everyone-- we knew we were going into a combat zone.

[00:05:35.10] And we arrived over Da Nang, and the plane circled down really fast. I mean, in those days, they didn't do a glide path in-- probably never did a glide path in because--

[00:05:48.27] JOE GALLOWAY: No, it goes down.

[00:05:49.17] KARL EGE: --just straight down-- because the snipers were around the base so we knew we were moving into a hot zone, and landed on the tarmac at the Da Nang Airport. And just as we landed, a group of Air Force and some Marine fighter planes were taking off to go up north to-- on missions or in ground support, and it was noisy.

[00:06:10.89] It was hot. It was humid. It was Southeast Asia. First time I'd been to Southeast Asia. I'd been to Japan and Korea, but not to Southeast Asia.

[00:06:21.24] And so sights, smells, sounds, all assault the senses. There were no troops leaving at the time we arrived-- because I could fast forward to the following year when I was leaving and the new fresh recruits were coming in 13 months later, it was a different scene. And we're all wishing them good luck and we were just glad to be getting on a plane.

[00:06:47.97] But-- so it was a mix, senses of sight, sound, and smells, and you knew you were in a combat zone. It evoked sort of memories of film you'd seen of World War II and Korea and other things. And growing up as a kid, I had five uncles who served in World War II, and my father had a very sensitive government job with the Federal Reserve in New York.

[00:07:13.39] And so the family was always government service and nation service oriented. All the men in the family had participated one way or another in government service from early 1900.

[00:07:27.72] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your initial duties?

[00:07:30.55] KARL EGE: I was an artillery forward observer.

[00:07:32.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Ooh.

[00:07:33.00] KARL EGE: And I didn't spend much time doing anything but-- I spent one day in Da Nang, got on a C-130 and flew to Chu Lai. Landed at Chu Lai, spent one-- two days out at the base at Chu Lai, and then was assigned to Echo Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines out-- west of Chu Lai out in the foothills. Arrived there probably-- I was five or six days in country and I was on a patrol the next morning.

[00:08:04.68] JOE GALLOWAY: That's pretty rugged country out there.

[00:08:07.15] KARL EGE: 'Tis, 'tis, 'tis.

[00:08:09.31] JOE GALLOWAY: And not too welcoming of foreigners.

[00:08:14.26] KARL EGE: Well, it was different country than I had experienced, let's put it that way. It was hot, humid jungle. The people-- the civilians you interacted with seemed friendly, at least the women and children did.

[00:08:36.36] There was a surprising lack of young men. And they were either in the South Vietnamese Army or a member of the Viet Cong, or they were just hiding out somewhere. There were old men, young boys, young girls, and women. And they were relatively friendly.

[00:08:52.78] It's a beautiful country-- I think we all can say that have been there-- physically. Gorgeous mountains, and these idyllic rice paddies, and the farmer with a water buffalo out plowing the rice paddy and harvesting the rice. It's-- and I have come, since I've been back, many times to Vietnam in the last 15 years-- come to appreciate its beauty and its people.

[00:09:19.47] But at the time, it was-- for a kid from New York who grew up in an inner city and then later in the suburbs, it was a different environment. And welcoming, no, it wasn't too welcoming. It was different, though. But it's what I expected.

[00:09:41.95] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your daily routine like, if you had one?

[00:09:45.27] KARL EGE: Well, I was-- said I was attached to a rifle company. There was a captain who was the CEO-- or the company commander. There was a company exec, there were three lieutenants who were the platoon leaders.

[00:10:00.08] JOE GALLOWAY: You were an LT at that point?

[00:10:01.92] KARL EGE: And I was the-- I was the guy who was the artillery forward observer, and so-- and I had a team of a radio operator, a scout sergeant, another radio operator. And whenever a patrol went out, one of us would go. So if there was a squad size or greater patrol going out, they would take either myself or my scout sergeant out and one of our radio operators.

[00:10:25.45] So I was on patrol every other day, every day. I mean, probably dozens of times on patrol, mostly patrolling the area, moving out into the foothills and out toward some of the more dangerous areas. No real mission other than to try to interdict infiltrators that were trying to come into what was basically a protected area at Chu Lai.

[00:10:52.44] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like when you were back at least in base camp?

[00:10:58.18] KARL EGE: Slept in a tent, hardback tent, a cot. And that was for the first month or so. We went on operations-- I think about two or three weeks we went on an operation south of Da Nang toward Quang Ngai, and south of Quang Ngai. It was a battalion sized operation and we were sleeping on the ground and we were out in the weeds. We were out for about two weeks at that point and had some fairly heavy combat situation.

[00:11:39.17] Well, as I said, the Vietnamese people seemed friendly enough. They-- I didn't have the feeling that we were an invading army, at least initially. Perhaps later on I changed my views on that.

[00:11:57.52] But it was-- I felt as if we were there to do some good. I probably had accepted the theology of the day, which was the advance of communism in Southeast Asia would end up with the domino theory threatening South Asia and Australia and New Zealand, and so on and so forth. But I changed my mind on that after about two or three weeks, and I'll never forget.

[00:12:34.57] I was on a patrol with-- it was a sergeant who was leading a two squad patrol, probably 20 men. I was the forward observer out with him. And we were up on a ridge top, and we spotted a group of Viet Cong carrying a .50 caliber machine gun on their shoulders.

[00:12:59.44] And they were a little too far away-- had the binoculars-- a little too far away to use small arm fire, so I radioed back to bring in some artillery. And I was told that's not a free fire zone. That's friendlies.

[00:13:13.94] And I-- using a few four letter words, I said, these friendlies are carrying a .50 caliber machine gun. And they said, well, we have to get clearance. We have to get clearance.

[00:13:27.47] And we waited, and we waited, and these guys were down and we could see them. And finally, as it turned out, they had to get clearance from the White House.

[00:13:35.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my God.

[00:13:36.71] KARL EGE: And we were unable to get any fire in. I think in frustration we finally fired some small arms fire and scattered them and then got the hell out of there. But afterward I was talking to this sergeant, he said, Lieutenant, I've been here nine months. This is stupid.

[00:13:52.71] These people only-- they don't care whether their government's communist, or their government's democratic, all they want is to live in relative peace, is to farm their land, and have their-- no one shoots their water buffalo, they don't get ripped off for taxes, and that their children have some opportunity to do something. And he said, this existential communist threat to these people, the people living in the rural-- and these are the people living in the rural areas, and it's probably no different than anywhere else in the world-- are less concerned about government as they are about just their nuclear family and the safety and economic security--

[00:14:36.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Such as it is.

[00:14:36.66] KARL EGE: --of their family. And I said, well, there are bigger things at work here. And I-- but that was sort of a turning point in my attitude toward the war. And it was brought by a sergeant who-- a Marine sergeant career guy who had been there nine months and had seen sort of the futility of what it was that we were doing.

[00:15:05.56] KARL EGE: Well, it's-- the Marine Corps is a fairly close organization. At that point in time, we didn't have any draftees. Everybody was a volunteer. Everybody went through the same training-- the young men, the enlisted men, as well as the officers.

[00:15:22.15] And the Marine Corps is the one service where the officers actually go through more intense training than the enlisted men. And at Parris Island and San Diego, the enlisted men are told, you think this is tough? Your officers that are going to lead you are going through, it's actually tougher.

[00:15:34.90] And that's sort of designed so that they have some-- immediately at least respect you're capable of doing what they're doing. And in fact, you take that to heart and you never ask one of your young Marines to do something you're not willing or able to do yourself.

[00:15:50.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:15:50.86] KARL EGE: And that's leading by example. And that-- you take that true to heart, and you take that true to heart and it carries with you the rest of your life. So I was with this group of people that I trusted, and they were determined they were going to do their job as best they could.

[00:16:10.45] My goal was to make sure that anyone I was responsible for wasn't hurt, that the men that I was responsible for, whether it was an entire company or later a battalion, or my fire team, or the squad I was out on patrol with, no one was killed, no one was wounded, and we got back alive, and we did our mission as best we could. And that, I think, most of the men that I was with had that same attitude.

[00:16:39.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds during your time in Vietnam that you might never have done in civilian life?

[00:16:50.91] KARL EGE: Well, I think my whole experience in the military was that. I mean, I grew up in the East Coast in New York. I went to an Ivy League school and graduated with honors in chemical engineering. And I went to Quantico, and I had guys from Texas and Alabama and Mississippi and Georgia and Washington and South Dakota and North Dakota who were my fellow Marine lieutenants.

[00:17:16.95] And then the young people that I was responsible for, they were kids from rural Tennessee and Kansas, or from the slums of Newark, New Jersey. My driver who saved my life at one point was an African-American kid from Newark, New Jersey. Saved my life by stopping me before I stepped on a booby trap grenade. I forgot his name, but he made it through.

[00:17:50.55] But sure, you develop a mutual bonding and relationship. I didn't form a lot of long-lasting friendships in the Marine Corps. I communicate a little bit with some people now. It's the 50th anniversary is-- these emails coming around and-- but I've remained fairly aloof from the experience.

[00:18:12.83] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation or off-duty activities, if you had any?

[00:18:19.87] KARL EGE: Played a little softball every once in a while when we were back in the rear area. Volleyball, played volleyball. In fact, I have a dislocated thumb that happened when I was in-- we were somewhere.

[00:18:33.01] You could always set up a volleyball net. I was tall and I was-- I played volleyball and basketball before. So I went up to spike the ball and one of the young enlisted men, called him Pineapple, he was a big, tall kid from Hawaii, sort of a mixed racial Hawaiian guy. He came up, spiked the ball, and snapped my thumb off.

[00:18:51.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, that looks painful today.

[00:18:53.61] KARL EGE: And I went to the corpsman, I said, what do we do with that? He says, oh, I'll just tape it up. It'll be all right. But anyway-- so a little volleyball. But there was not much recreation.

[00:19:03.49] Oh, guys would-- we had weightlifting benches. They would take-- make-- tin cans, fill them with concrete and put them on a bar and make-- just keep yourself fit. Jog around a little bit. But when you're out on patrol all the time in 100 degree weather and 80% humidity with 40, 50, 60 pounds on your back, even as an officer, you don't--

[00:19:25.84] JOE GALLOWAY: You're in pretty good shape.

[00:19:26.60] KARL EGE: --you're in pretty good shape. You lose a lot of weight.

[00:19:34.18] KARL EGE: Well, before I left, I mean, look, I graduated from college in 1965. That was the year of music. I mean, that was the year of rock and roll, right? I mean, it's the year of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles and all of the great music.

[00:19:46.87] The world changed when I came back in 1966. The whole world changed. When I arrived back in San Francisco in June of 1966, it was like, I was like Rip Van Winkle.

[00:19:58.28] So-- but when I was there, I had no knowledge of what was going on back home except for occasional letter I'd get. I didn't see any-- I didn't-- there was no movies with no theater. We were up in the boonies. We didn't see anything about what was going on back home, unlike today.

[00:20:15.02] There was no Skype, there was no email, there was no day-to-day contact. You send a tape, had a little tape recorder. You'd send a tape back to your girlfriend, right?

[00:20:24.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:24.50] KARL EGE: And maybe a month later you'd get one back.

[00:20:27.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:28.37] KARL EGE: They had mail call every few weeks and you'd get some letters. And my mother wrote every day but-- or not every day, but quite often, and my girlfriend wrote. But you didn't know what was going on back home.

[00:20:43.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions you witnessed, combat operations in which you participated?

[00:20:51.50] KARL EGE: Well, I was on, oh, six or seven major operations. My unit has three Presidential Citations. We-- probably the most significant was that we relocated to the DMZ area in July of 1966. Operation HASTINGS, Operation PRAIRIE, which was the first encounter of the US forces with the North Vietnamese 424B Division,

[00:21:27.99] which came directly through the supposedly demilitarized zone and across to try to capture the area around Dong Ha up to Khe Sanh. And I was involved in three major operations up in that area-- excuse me-- between Dong Ha and Khe Sanh.

[00:21:48.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Very different terrain, very different enemy.

[00:21:53.06] KARL EGE: Very different enemy. Fully supplied, fully equipped, trained-- these are the same-- this is the same division that fought the French at Dien Bien Phu. Most of the Vietnamese we were fighting against were in their 30s and 40s. They had had 15 to 20 years experience fighting jungle warfare on their ground, their home ground and against us.

[00:22:20.66] We were there for 13 months and not our home ground. Yet, we held ourselves well. As I would like to say, we won every battle and we walked away from the war. But it was a very intense period of time.

[00:22:41.50] There were lots of casualties, and not just from wounding, but illness and jungle disease, jungle rot. There are all sorts of things that happen when you're out in the weeds for a month at a time. My friend Karl Marlantes who has written this book Matterhorn, which probably some people have read, probably-- that takes place-- it's a novel, but it's based on Karl's experience, and it takes place in the same place where I was in '66.

[00:23:18.24] Karl was there in '88. The book takes place in-- excuse me-- '66. Karl was there at '68. The book takes place in '69. But it's the same terrain, and it's big, steep jungly mountains.

[00:23:32.97] The same hills that we took, Hill 441 in 1966, and then walked back from. Karl Marlantes, when he was there-- and he's a Navy Cross and Bronze Star and wounded three times, and quite the guy-- took in '68. And then his fictional character, Waino Mellas, took in '69--

[00:23:56.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Takes them again, yeah.

[00:23:58.08] KARL EGE: --again and again. And that was, to me, the tragedy of the Vietnam War is that we lost 58,800 men, is that we'd take an objective as we've been trained to do, and then immediately walk away from it so that it would then be there to be taken yet again with the loss of more American lives.

[00:24:21.62] JOE GALLOWAY: And the Marines lost more casualties--

[00:24:25.01] KARL EGE: On a percentage basis, yeah.

[00:24:26.52] JOE GALLOWAY: --percentage-wise than any other unit.

[00:24:29.55] KARL EGE: Yeah. And that's-- I mean, that's historical, too, because they do tend to be the point of the spear, along with some very, very fine Army units, too, believe me. My uncle was a World War II Army-- highly decorated Army major-- lieutenant colonel-- major who suffered greatly and ended up killing himself from PTSD-- untreated PTSD in 1962. But he

fought in the-- he was in the banzai attack up at Adak and Kiska back in World War II. But then--
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[00:25:10.63] JOE GALLOWAY: In the Aleutians.

[00:25:11.07] KARL EGE: In the Aleutians. But then was on D-day with 101st Airborne.

[00:25:15.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:25:15.76] KARL EGE: And later in the Army of Occupation in Germany and-- anyway. So I mean, I come from a family that-- he was very-- and my other uncle, who served in the Army in the Pacific, was very upset that I didn't accept an appointment at West Point. But anyway, so-- but--

[00:25:34.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, your area of operations have changed. What are your emotions at that time?

[00:25:42.19] KARL EGE: Well, you're-- my major focus was to do my job and to ensure that as few Marines as possible died. What really got me upset at that point in time was suddenly the focus changed from achieving a military objective to body count. And I'll never forget,

[00:26:06.94] it was September of 1966. We'd been through an intense firefight, lasted all night. I called artillery, naval gunfire, air support in. We were attacked by a whole division of North Vietnamese. We beat them back.

[00:26:19.57] And this colonel comes in, Marine Corps colonel, he said, headquarters wants to know how many we killed. He said, you fired millions of dollars worth of ordnance. And I said, you want to go out there and count them, Colonel? He said, don't get snotty with me, Lieutenant.

[00:26:40.51] And I said, I don't know. Well, I don't know. When I-- we'll send some patrols out and maybe we'll find some stuff. But we beat back an entire division that was attacking us, OK? And he said, I need a number.

[00:26:58.75] So I said, what kind of number do you need? I said, how about 326? And he said, don't get snotty with me, Lieutenant. And then he walked away. Next day in Stars and Stripes, Marines killed 326 North Vietnamese.

[00:27:14.08] JOE GALLOWAY: He liked that number.

[00:27:15.49] KARL EGE: He liked that number. Well, to me, this became the dishonor of the war was this focus on how many we could kill of them, rather than achieving a military, political, or social objective. And we can outlast them because we'll kill more of them than they kill of us. And therefore, we'll eventually win.

[00:27:34.36] And as I've read afterward, there was this change in policy that happened that that was going to be the objective. But I saw it on the ground in September 1966 when that colonel-- can't remember his name. I don't want to remember his name. I hope he didn't make general.

[00:27:48.76] But he-- all he was concerned about was how many we killed for all the money I spent saving my battalion from being overrun by a division of North Vietnamese. All I cared about was, I spend millions of dollars worth of ordnance and two guys were killed and four or five wounded in our battalion.

[00:28:10.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Not bad against a division of the enemy.

[00:28:12.19] KARL EGE: That's right. And they gave me a medal for it, so--

[00:28:20.77] KARL EGE: Probably that night for reasons-- it was-- scared to death. But you're doing your job. You're keeping your wits about you and doing your job. That was a vivid memory.

[00:28:37.09] There's another vivid memory, too, of a medevac chopper that was coming in to pick up some wounded four or five days later-- again, up near the DMZ. And we were calling in artillery fire, and the chopper didn't check with the fire support center before coming in. And it was hit by a white phosphorus round--

[00:29:03.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my God.

[00:29:05.24] KARL EGE: --and killed two pilots, two Marine gunners, a Navy corpsman, and the two guys on the ground died from their wounds. And that image-- and that vivid image lives with me forever. It was a big investigation and they sort of-- I think the official word was enemy fire, but I know it wasn't.

[00:29:26.98] And it was pilot error, or it was between the control-- either the flight control people back in Dong Ha and the artillery base at Camp Carroll. They didn't check in with each other. I'm out on the ground. I've got fire support, I've got guys calling in asking for missions to be fired.

[00:29:42.82] I was then the battalion fire support coordinator at that point in time. And what bothers me is what I should have, could have maybe done had I known. And I--

[00:29:54.45] JOE GALLOWAY: You can't play that game.

[00:29:56.04] KARL EGE: You can't but, boy, I'll tell you--

[00:29:58.17] JOE GALLOWAY: It's hard to avoid.

[00:29:59.69] KARL EGE: Every September 26, I remember that day. Every time I see a fireworks display, I remember that flash in the sky and the pieces of a helicopter dropping out of

the sky. Middle of the night, couple of weeks later, 250 pound bomb was supposed to have been dropped over in the-- a couple clicks away, landed right on our headquarters.

[00:30:25.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh.

[00:30:25.71] KARL EGE: It was a bunker buster, though. It went off underground, blew everything up in the air. No one was hurt. A lot of us have hearing problems from that.

[00:30:37.35] But it blew up under the ground. I mean, I was tossed out-- I was sleeping in a hammock between two trees. It cut one of the trees off at the base. I got thrown on the ground. We all-- when we ended up counting noses, we didn't lose a single person.

[00:30:48.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Good thing you weren't in a bunker.

[00:30:50.40] KARL EGE: Good thing I wasn't in a bunker. But it does also show-- it showed to me that bomb drops-- just dropping bombs on troops doesn't necessarily work that well unless you really--

[00:30:59.16] JOE GALLOWAY: No, not exactly.

[00:31:00.81] KARL EGE: But like the guy who was bracketed with the bombs, you never forget those incidents because they were so-- it is in the fog of war. It's in the things that just crap happens.

[00:31:14.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:31:14.66] KARL EGE: But, boy--

[00:31:16.10] JOE GALLOWAY: If you're in it, and it's your men--

[00:31:18.51] KARL EGE: --your men, your guts.

[00:31:20.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:31:21.60] KARL EGE: Anyway-- so that's probably my most-- now, what's interesting is until I met with a psychologist to talk about PTSD and issues, I never talked about that helicopter incident. But I'm able to talk about it today and live with it because of that. And I urge every veteran to get some good help to deal with these issues, rather than let them eat away at you. Because it affects you and everybody around you-- your family, and friends, and everything else.

[00:32:00.97] JOE GALLOWAY: The absolute best.

[00:32:02.64] KARL EGE: June 4, 1967, I got on a plane and flew out.

[00:32:06.00] JOE GALLOWAY: When you left.

[00:32:06.36] KARL EGE: Oh, no, there were times. I met John Wayne. Now, all this stuff about USO coming to Vietnam to entertain the troops, hey, we were in the Marines. We were up in the boonies. No one ever came to see us but one. Actually, two.

[00:32:23.37] Martha Raye actually came out to see us. But the one who came out was John Wayne. We were in Chu Lai. We were out in the weeds up north to the west of Chu Lai.

[00:32:33.24] And the colonel says, we got a special guest coming in. Who's this, some congressman or something like that? No, the Duke.

[00:32:41.67] JOE GALLOWAY: The Duke.

[00:32:42.87] KARL EGE: The Duke. Oh, geez, everybody started gathering around. This Jeep comes in and here comes the Duke. And he's got his-- he's got a Marine Corps hat on and he's all dressed up.

[00:32:51.63] And he's got some agent with him, or some Hollywood guy. He's in a flak jacket and he's nervous as hell. So the Duke comes strolling up and we all shake hands. And he wasn't as big as I thought he was.

[00:33:02.70] He had big hands, but he was 6'3" or so, but he was the Duke. There's a picture of me with the Duke somewhere. It was really pretty cool.

[00:33:12.09] But-- and then there was a fire-- all of a sudden, some small arms fire off in the distance. And the Duke's going, hey, what the hell's going on? Let's go take it out.

[00:33:21.03] And the poor guy who was his agent, or whatever he was, the handler, was shaking in his shoes and said, we've got to get out of here, we've got to get out of here. Mr. Wayne, we got to leave. The Duke heard nothing of it.

[00:33:32.64] So that was sort of cool. That was cool. But those are happy days. And that's when you're back, and a beer-- and you're having a beer, and talking to the Duke. They were few and far between--

[00:33:44.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:33:45.57] KARL EGE: --few and far between. I went on R&R to Hong Kong, that was sort of nice, and came back. Left a firefight, flew out on a helicopter, and 24 hours later I'm standing-- sitting in an apartment with some friends of my parents on the top of Victoria Peak in Hong Kong drinking Jack Daniels 24 hours after being in a firefight.

[00:34:07.02] And then seven days later, I'm back in a firefight down near Quang Ngai so--

[00:34:11.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:34:13.48] KARL EGE: --crazy. KARL EGE: The day that helicopter was shot down-- the day that helicopter was shot down. I mean, I had a mild case of malaria, had all kinds of jungle rot and things like that-- never wounded seriously enough to get treated. But that day that helicopter shot down because I felt I had failed, even though it wasn't my fault. And it still-- somebody had failed. The system had failed. And five guys on a helicopter and two on the ground all died. Needless death.

[00:35:05.16] KARL EGE: Koreans, a little bit-- but there were some Koreans, there were some ROK marines who were attached to our units. But Aussies were interesting, there were some Aussie spotters that were around. And I remember spending New Year's Eve south of Quang Ngai in a bunker playing cards, drinking Jack Daniels, with a bunch of Aussies.

[00:35:29.19] And it was raining like the devil. And the rain-- we were at a underground bunker kind of thing with slit windows and sandbags on the roof. And the rain was so heavy it was-- the water was starting to come in and fill up underneath. And the rats-- rats don't like the water, so they were running around up in the rafters.

[00:35:50.89] And we had a lantern on the thing and we were playing cards, drinking whiskey. And on New Year's Eve, and I'm going, this is surreal, this is almost like a Fellini movie--

[00:36:03.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Fellini movie, yeah.

[00:36:04.42] KARL EGE: --or something. And there's rats running around in the overhead, and we're going, this is really crazy. The Aussies were good guys. A little derring-do kind of fellows. But I didn't have that much to deal with. I did not deal at all with the Vietnamese-- South Vietnamese army, or whatever they had.

[00:36:22.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Those people.

[00:36:23.23] KARL EGE: No, no, I mean, I just-- we just never had any joint operations. I was just-- I was always with a Marine Corps unit except that one night, a couple of nights we were with some Aussies.

[00:36:40.20] KARL EGE: I went to R-- I went on R&R to Hong Kong, and I called my mother. I think it was \$3 a minute on a pay phone. And I called my then-girlfriend. That's a whole other story, the-girlfriend. It cost about \$20 to speak for six minutes total, or whatever it was.

[00:37:03.23] That was the only contact I had except with letters. I'd get a letter, my mother was pretty good. My aunt would send a gift basket of stuff and things like that. And my girlfriend sent letters from time to time. But very little contact with people back home.

[00:37:23.57] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war from home, if any?

[00:37:29.89] KARL EGE: Well, we didn't have internet, didn't have emails. Stars and Stripes, we occasionally get that. I was out in the jungle most of the time.

[00:37:43.12] It wasn't until I got back to a rear area where we'd even get Stars and Stripes. And we didn't see stuff, especially when I was up in the DMZ area. We were living out of our packs and sleeping on the ground for a month, two months at a time.

[00:37:58.08] I had no-- I had no knowledge of what was going on back home. I didn't know who was winning football games and basketball games and politics, everything. The only thing I remember is I got-- when I began to realize how foolish this situation was, I got really angry with Washington DC-- but that's a whole other thing. That comes later.

[00:38:26.79] June the 4th, 1967.

[00:38:29.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me what that was like.

[00:38:30.98] KARL EGE: Well, I flew first to Okinawa and got all cleaned up and shaved up and got to-- had a bag of civilian clothes I had stored there before I went to Vietnam. And picked that up and loaded up my sea bag and flew to Travis Air Force Base again. Took a bus to San Francisco International Airport and took a red-eye back to New York.

[00:38:54.47] And I flew-- my family lived on the Jersey Shore. And as the plane was landing at Kennedy, I was sitting in the back on the left side, and the wing took a bank and I looked right down the wing and I saw my house, my parents' house.

[00:39:17.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:39:18.56] KARL EGE: It was really sort of symbolic. But we landed at Kennedy, and I was sort of afraid to get out of the plane, just sat in the back. Finally, the stewardess came back and she said, Lieutenant, are you going to leave?

[00:39:34.00] I said, yeah-- because I was the last one out of the plane. And I got out of the plane, and there was my mother and my father and my brother and my girlfriend. And as my brother says, you walked right by your mother and grabbed your girlfriend. I didn't, not quite, but I did say, hi Mom, and gave her a kiss, and then went over to my girlfriend. But it was-- I was glad to be home, seriously glad to be home.

[00:39:58.41] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't have any of the non welcoming-- ?

[00:40:03.55] KARL EGE: Not then. You've got to remember, '67-- well, the world had changed. When I went to San Francisco-- I mean, people didn't spit on me when I got on a plane in San Francisco.

[00:40:14.29] But I noticed that there was a lot more casual-- the world was a lot more casual than when I left. And I had a lot of catching up to do. The whole world had changed. A whole 13 months had gone by.

[00:40:31.28] And as I said, it was almost like a Rip Van Winkle period of time. I was asleep, the world changed, and changed dramatically in that one year period of time. And when I left Vietnam, though, I sort of alluded to it before I got on that plane at Da Nang.

[00:40:44.87] And it was-- this time I flew out on a 707, Continental Airlines 707 was chartered by the government to get us back. And it was a group of guys coming off all in their starched utilities, all looking fresh, ready to go. And of course, this was June of '67.

[00:41:08.83] These are the guys who are in country during Tet in '68. And many of them never survived. And we were getting on the plane. We were pretty grungy looking.

[00:41:20.77] And the look on their faces when they looked at us, we're gaunt and thin and--

[00:41:27.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Something in your eyes, too.

[00:41:29.02] KARL EGE: --and we were giving them a salute and saying, good luck, Marines. And it was-- you could tell they knew they were in for something that they hadn't expected. I was just glad to get on the plane and leave.

[00:41:45.38] But I didn't get the animosity then. It really started later that year when I began my tour as a college recruiter for the Marine Corps for upstate New York.

[00:41:59.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me-- tell me about that duty.

[00:42:02.62] KARL EGE: Well, I was posted to-- this duty station traditionally was one of the plum things for a young officer. I was a regular officer. I was a career path guy that they'd already sort of put a little asterisk next to your name. This is the guy you give all the-- give him the benefits, right?

[00:42:26.80] So this is one of the most plum jobs in the Marine Corps is to be a college recruiter as a-- I was a first lieutenant then, later became a captain. But all that was before the intense outcry and opposition to the war and what the military began to represent to young people at that point in time. And so it was, for those of us assigned to that duty, almost worse than being in combat psychologically, at least, because you were being rejected by the very people you had just sacrificed your life for-- or potentially sacrificed your life.

[00:43:11.23] And you're put on independent duty, which means they trust you to be independent. You wear civilian clothes. From time to time, you wear uniforms when you do your official work. You're given a budget and you've got a staff, and you've got an obligation to visit all of these colleges in upstate New York, which there were dozens,

[00:43:31.75] on a regular basis. You make appointments and drive onto campus in your Marine Corps station wagon with the symbol on the side and US government plates. And sometimes you're met by some friendlies. But most of the time, you're met with nothing but derision, or anger, or violent demonstrations.

[00:43:55.75] I had police escorts. I had state police escorts a couple of times going onto campus. As I said, at Cornell, I was met in fall of '67 by 5,000 students led by 2 Catholic priests, the Fathers Berrigan, who were very, very well-known antiwar demonstrators, antiwar opposition people, and the Students for a Democratic Society, and all of that stuff.

[00:44:22.79] And that made front page New York Times and a whole bunch of other stuff. Marine lieutenant back from Vietnam facing 5,000 students. But you do your job. It eats away at you.

[00:44:40.27] I got married a little bit after-- well, another year and a half later, I ended up getting married, and my wife would say that I couldn't-- I wasn't sleeping well. I was-- it was a tough position. Just shortly after I arrive, I am told, well, we used to have an old warrant officer here that was making the casualty notifications, but he's now retired and doesn't want to do it anymore, and you're the only officer in the upstate region.

[00:45:09.88] JOE GALLOWAY: So you get that duty, too.

[00:45:11.75] KARL EGE: And the Marine Corps only makes casualty notifications by an officer. An officer goes to the family, to the father, the mother, the wife, whatever. So I started getting casualty notifications. Well, so during the week, I would go on a college campus and encourage young men to become officers in the Marine Corps, and go fight in a war that I was beginning to have some questions about. And then in the afternoon, I'd go back to my office and I would get a call from Headquarters Marine Corps that Corporal Smith has just been killed.

[00:45:43.26] Here's his address. We want you to go talk to his wife, go talk to his mother. He's a Catholic. Here's the name of the Catholic priest of their parish, or whatever it was.

[00:45:56.60] And I did that seven or eight times. And apparently, a whole group of us who were recruiting officers raised a stink about, you can't ask us to be positive recruiting officers and do casualty notifications during our off hours. And so they brought some old World War II warrant officers back on active duty to do casualty notifications.

[00:46:20.34] But it really affected me psychologically. That was probably the most down time that I had as a military experience was dealing with that almost schizophrenic existence of being upbeat and trying to convince young men to go to war, and then comforting a mother, a wife, and a family for the loss of their only son--

[00:46:51.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Horrific.

[00:46:52.37] KARL EGE: --or their husband, or whatever. And I did have two young men that I recruited to the Marine Corps, where I later attended their funerals. And that also-- two years later, I mean, in '67 and then early '69, I ended up attending their funerals. And that really got to you, as well. But that's war. I mean--

[00:47:23.89] JOE GALLOWAY: How long did you stay in the Corps?

[00:47:27.02] KARL EGE: I resigned-- I was a regular officer, so you serve at the pleasure of the president. But I had a minimum four year commitment. And in the spring of '69, I decided I was going to go to law school.

[00:47:42.16] I'd been going to-- I went to business school at night at Syracuse. I mean, I had to keep myself active when I wasn't out doing my job, I felt I needed to stay engaged, else I'd-- just like everybody else-- go out to a bar at night. And I didn't want to do that. So I went to school at night every night of the week, to graduate school.

[00:48:00.70] And then I decided to apply to law school. I applied to half a dozen law schools, got into four or five and went to Cornell because it was right down the road. And if I didn't like it, it was easy to just-- if I didn't like it after a year-- and I had the GI Bill to cover a good part of the expenses.

[00:48:19.37] So I requested permission to resign to attend law school. Wrote a long letter as to why I felt I could be more valuable to society not as a Marine officer but as a lawyer. And it was accepted.

[00:48:38.43] And I had tentative orders to go back to teach at the Artillery Forward Observer Program at Fort Sill, and then to go back to Vietnam. And they pulled those-- oh, I said, that's a plum position. That should be given to somebody who's going to be a career officer and I don't intend to be. So they pulled my orders and I left in August 31, 1969, and went to law school on September 4.

[00:49:10.26] JOE GALLOWAY: How-- was it difficult readjusting to life after the war, after the Marine Corps?

[00:49:18.29] KARL EGE: Well, I went to law school, and I went to Cornell where I had been recruiting and having people throw rocks at me. I grew a beard and went incognito.

[00:49:32.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Let your hair grow long.

[00:49:32.74] KARL EGE: I let my hair grow a little long. And I was married at the time. And my wife, really, I owe a lot to her because she-- the girlfriend that I had when I went to Vietnam, we were-- we got engaged when I first came back, but it never worked out and she called it off. And she became antiwar, and I was a symbol of the war, and so that-- the war ended that relationship, and it was a good relationship when it lasted.

[00:49:58.66] I met my wife afterwards. She had two brothers who had served in the Army, one had been in Vietnam, one in Germany. She said, well, you're a pretty good guy, even though you're a Marine. And so she-- but she rescued me in a sense and gave me the grounding that was so necessary.

[00:50:19.87] Without a good woman at your side after you've been through that kind of experience, it's very easy to drift off into irresponsible behavior. So she kept me really focused. And I went to law school. She worked at the university.

[00:50:33.22] I busted my ass in law school. I was on Law Review, I was the managing editor. I graduated with honors and had job offers on Wall Street and turned them down and went to Seattle, for a reason-- to get away from the East Coast to build a new life. It's not without reason that there are more Vietnam veterans who-- a percentage, who live in Alaska, or in Montana and Idaho, Washington, and other places.

[00:51:04.40] We like to sort of be alone a lot. I've got a ranch on the other side of the mountains. I go over there on weekends and I can't see another human being. I live in the city, but I go over there as much as I can.

[00:51:16.58] But-- so readjusting was a challenge, but my wife really helped me. But what I didn't realize is the insidious impact of PTSD, which has a lot of different manifestations. And I've had a long conversation with people about this. And this is words to the wise, as well.

[00:51:42.33] One of the ways PTSD-- when you become so accustomed and life depends on everything working perfectly, people being on time, people doing what they're told to do, what you-- it's very hard for you to tolerate people not doing things on time, things not working as they should, and people not doing what they're told, or not obeying the law because people die, in combat. If that artillery shell doesn't go where it's supposed to go and it malfunctions, or the rifle malfunctions, or the tank doesn't-- round doesn't go off, or something doesn't work properly, people get hurt and people die. Good people die, the people you're responsible for.

[00:52:31.16] If that fire mission comes in too late or if that helicopter didn't check in with the gun-- with the fire support center, people died. If people don't-- and so you become very, very much intolerant of things not working properly, of people not doing what they're told to do, and people not doing things on time, which affects your kids, your work colleagues, and your life. And learning to be a little less intense about that stuff-- I'm also-- my father's German so I grew up in a German family where alles Ordnung und pünktliche, right?

[00:53:13.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:53:14.30] KARL EGE: So-- but being--

[00:53:16.29] JOE GALLOWAY: And a Marine on top of that.

[00:53:17.00] KARL EGE: And a Marine on top of that. That's right. But being-- accepting some slack, and you don't realize it that you've been living a life for-- I'm 73 years old, OK? I've been living a life for 73 years without giving people a lot of slack, or things a lot of slack.

[00:53:35.48] And I'm learning to deal with that, finally, and I mean, it had an effect on my kids. It's had an effect on my marriage. And-- but I've sort of gotten it now, and I'm understanding it. And I've got another appointment this afternoon to sort of work on more of that.

[00:53:50.81] But it's not just waking up with the nightmares. I don't have those anymore. It's this other stuff that creeps into your whole way of operations that makes it difficult, because the

workaday world doesn't necessarily demand everything working on time, everything working properly, and people necessarily doing what they're told immediately.

[00:54:17.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Well--

[00:54:18.36] KARL EGE: You got to--

[00:54:18.93] JOE GALLOWAY: --we can try.

[00:54:19.68] KARL EGE: We can try. Wish that it were, it would be easier. But things would work better.

[00:54:29.95] 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?

[00:54:42.19] KARL EGE: Incredible, absolute loyalty to the young enlisted man, the people who go out in front and do the dirty work every single day. My life-- my radio operator saved my life. I saved his life. But that driver who was out in front of me who said, Lieutenant, don't step there. Jesus, it was grenade, it was booby trap. It was a kid from the slums of Newark.

[00:55:20.17] Absolutely you understand the value of the people, the people that clean the floors, the people that take out the garbage, the people that do the day-to-day work that you don't have to do because you've been fortunate in your life. You had a family that was supportive. You had an education, you've had skills, and maybe you had a little bit more smarts than somebody or just luck.

[00:55:44.89] But respecting the value of what the lower level in rank people do to make things happen. It's something you never forget. I've never forgotten that. And I learned that early in life, but also in the Marine Corps.

[00:56:05.86] We were on a field mission when I was going through Quantico. And I don't know if the other services do this, but we were out for three, four days at a time in November 1965. It was rain, and cold, and wet down in Virginia. And we finally were going to have some hot meals that were being brought in.

[00:56:25.93] We all gather around. And I expected whoever the lieutenant or the captain or whoever was in the-- the leaders to eat first. No, they all stood aside, and we ate first. And then the last person to eat was a major who was sort of head of all of the recruiting.

[00:56:47.94] And when I was in Vietnam on Christmas Day south of Quang Ngai, a bunch of helicopters flew in. And we had been in combat operations for about two weeks. And they brought in hot food-- turkey and all the dressings and everything else. And the first person who got in line was a private, and then the Pfc's, and the lance corporals, and then the corporals.

[00:57:14.52] And the last person who got in line to eat was a battalion commander who was a lieutenant commander, lieutenant colonel. We made sure there was food left for the lieutenant colonel. But it was just a symbolic gesture, but it's always done.

[00:57:31.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Always done.

[00:57:31.72] KARL EGE: Always done, that the most important person is that private, because he's the one who's out point. He's the one that's on point on a patrol, and he's the one that's the most important. And you never forget that, and you use that in your day-to-day life.

[00:57:51.42] And it's saying hello to the guy who cleans the stalls in the bathroom, and how are you doing, and just treating them with the dignity and respect that they more than deserve. That sticks with you for the rest of your life. And that's what military service probably did for me as much as anything.

[00:58:13.02] JOE GALLOWAY: How did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:58:20.25] KARL EGE: Well, I've spoken on a number of veterans events, and made the statement one time at a-- I work with a group called Hire America's Heroes-- it's run by General Jimmy Collins, who is a retired Army general--

[00:58:35.28] that's designed to help returning veterans get jobs. Basically, it's supported by some of the major companies in the Seattle area-- Costco, Starbucks, Microsoft, all have programs for giving veterans priority. Amazon's now involved. And I've been involved in doing pro bono legal work for them, as well as promoting.

[00:58:54.81] And I went to the dinner, and I spoke-- or made a personal contribution to their efforts, as well as the firm made a contribution. And I said, when I returned home, I was shunned by society, by everyone, because of the war. And I said, if you have a problem with a decision made by the civilian political leaders to use the Department of Defense and the military as an instrument for foreign policy, take it up with them.

[00:59:33.46] Take it up with your elected leadership. Don't take it out on the men and women who volunteer and to put themselves on the line and sacrifice their lives. Never again must we treat returning veterans the way we treated Vietnam veterans when they came back. And I've said that several times.

[00:59:56.56] It is dishonoring. It's dishonorable to do that, and it's dishonoring to them when you should be honoring them for at least making the effort and the sacrifice. If you have a problem with the decisions that sent them there, and whether it's Iraq and Afghanistan or ISIS or Vietnam or wherever, take it up with the political leadership that makes the decisions.

[01:00:21.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Hate war, but love the warrior.

[01:00:25.93] KARL EGE: Yes. The war is horrible. You know that. I know that.

[01:00:29.28] JOE GALLOWAY: I know that.

[01:00:29.95] KARL EGE: We all know that. It's a terrible waste of human effort. But if it's necessary, you want the best trained people to do that mission. But hopefully, the decision that's made to use that instrument of war is one that's a sound decision that's based upon no other alternatives, and is not motivated by purely political and other reasons, which--

[01:01:03.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Hard to get that these days.

[01:01:05.33] KARL EGE: Yes, especially when there's so few people who ever served that sit in the decision-making bodies.

[01:01:12.34] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think--

[01:01:13.62] KARL EGE: And we have John McCain and John Kerry, and have three or four others in Congress who have ever worn a uniform, and certainly have never served in combat.

[01:01:22.73] JOE GALLOWAY: There used to be at the end of World War II, you couldn't get in Congress if you didn't wear the Ruptured Duck.

[01:01:30.22] KARL EGE: Yep, something. Yeah.

[01:01:32.75] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today, or is it?

[01:01:39.31] KARL EGE: Well, it depends. For my grandchildren, it's their grandfather's war. Both of my-- my son's wife's father was in the Army and served in Vietnam. So my oldest grandson, who is 9 years old, both of his grandfathers served in Vietnam.

[01:02:01.39] And he did a really neat thing on Veterans Day at his elementary school with photographs of his two grandfathers in sort of combat gear in Vietnam. So he remembers it. My son and daughter remember it. But it will be-- but it's grandfather's war.

[01:02:23.39] It's viewed today as a tragedy, perhaps, a war that probably should not have been fought. And when we look at the casualties, 58,800 dead, 300,000 wounded, some of them terribly, and maimed. And the two or three million who served, and the PTSD, and the psychological problems, the homeless. Plymouth Housing Group in Seattle says that most of the elderly homeless men are Vietnam veterans.

[01:02:56.05] They came back to a society that shunned them. There were no job opportunities. They turned to drink and drug and they-- and with all of the other baggage that they had never really had a fulfilled life. So it's a blot tragedy in that respect.

[01:03:11.21] There are a few of us who were older, who had education, who just got angry and went on with our lives and got educated. And we do what we can for those veterans, Vietnam veterans, as well as new ones. We, too, will pass by.

[01:03:30.79] The last World War I vet died a few years ago. The World War II vets are down to a little more than a couple of handfuls 70 years after the war ended. So those 20-year-olds are now 90. 10 years from now, there'll be very few of them left.

[01:03:48.92] And I remember when I was graduating from college, there was a 50th reunion of the Class of 1915. And almost all of them had fought in World War I. They're long gone now.

[01:04:06.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[01:04:07.17] KARL EGE: So it will pass, and it will be another footnote in history. But one that I hope, like the Civil War, is viewed from a historical perspective, and it will be remembered for a failure of foreign policy and a misuse of the military, my frank judgment. But still fought hard and tough by Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen.

[01:04:37.08] And the eight women, and the 58,800 men who lost their lives did so, in most cases, honorably, and with good conscience. The bad conscience are those that sent them there in the first place.

[01:04:57.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[01:05:07.39] KARL EGE: In life lessons, perhaps so. I was very angry by the time I left the Marine Corps, because not just the Vietnam, but the post-Vietnam schizophrenic life I had as a-- but I've always been very loyal as a Marine and as an American. And I start-- whenever I go to Seahawks, I'm a season ticket holder--

[01:05:32.51] and whenever they play the National Anthem, I stand there with my hat over my heart, and I get tears in my eyes. I am a Patriot. I'm American through and through. I'm the grandson of immigrants who came here looking for a future for their children and grandchildren. And I'm living that today.

[01:05:53.09] I'm living the dreams of my grandparents and great grandparents. I love this country. I get very frustrated with it, obviously, both sides of the political spectrum. I try to do as best I can.

[01:06:10.53] I came back from Vietnam with a commitment to do good, and I've tried to do as well as I can. So that was a positive. So I think on balance, it made me who I am today, probably more than anything else. And that, I guess, when the final tally is taken, the assets and liabilities, it'll probably be a positive.

[01:06:38.24] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[01:06:47.58] KARL EGE: Don't ever send our military into combat without a clear mission, without clear and convincing reasons for doing so. Don't shed a drop of American blood on a

foreign soil unless absolutely necessary-- absolutely necessary. I'm not an isolationist, I'm a globalist.

[01:07:21.32] But I think there's a time and a place for military intervention. It's not nation building. It's a defense of freedom, the defense of democracy that already is-- exists. You can't create a democracy in a place that's never had it, and it doesn't want it.

[01:07:40.81] But we want to preserve those places that have democracy because we think it's the best way. But I-- it's very easy for those who have never served to make a decision to send the point of the spear out so that they look tough, and they look good in the eyes of their constituents. That's the message. And I've said this to political leaders when I've had an opportunity. And I'd say it again, and again, and again.

[01:08:17.43] It is the most serious decision that you will ever make as an elected representative and elected leader, sending young men and women to defend this country with honor and integrity. And use it wisely.

[01:08:39.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you been to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?

[01:08:43.15] KARL EGE: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

[01:08:46.72] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your impressions when you go there?

[01:08:55.68] KARL EGE: I was there right after-- I was invited to the dedication. I paid some-- gave a little contribution to the fund, but I couldn't make it. It's a little far away. But about two months afterward, I was in Washington for a meeting and I went to the memorial. And I stood there and cried.

[01:09:24.04] The person I replaced as the Marine Corps recruiter in Syracuse, New York was Marine Corps Major Daniel Keating, father of five, Fordham graduate, intense Irish-Catholic guy, Marine Corps-- uber Marine Corps officer. He went to Vietnam that year. He left in July '67, and he went into Force Recon and was a Recon Marine, which is sort of Army Special Forces on-- it was like Navy SEALs.

[01:10:02.72] And Dan was killed in May of '68, leaving five children. I escorted his body to Arlington at the request of his wife, and buried him. He's just a couple of levels away from the two Kennedys, Kennedy brothers.

[01:10:25.21] I've been to his grave several times in Arlington. And I went to the memorial, and the first name I searched out was that of Major Daniel Keating, United States Marine Corps. He's on the far right side about the third panel in, about halfway down.

[01:10:42.40] I put my hand on that and I cried like a baby. He was like an older brother to me, a really wonderful guy. And further down are two of my college classmates who were Marine officers killed at Khe Sanh, Dave Hackett and Steve Kelsey. There is a good friend, Ned Hall.

[01:11:06.71] There's my radio operator. There's dozens of others who are in my unit who were killed up at the DMZ. I go there every time I go to Washington. I've probably been to the Wall 20 times.

[01:11:26.39] And it's interesting to see the people who are there. When it first opened, there were mothers and fathers. They're all gone now.

[01:11:42.20] JOE GALLOWAY: They're gone now.

[01:11:43.83] KARL EGE: And then there were mothers and fathers and veterans. We all know who we are. We stand in the back and we just look and we nod at each other, because we're then in our 40s and 50s and 60s and now 70s.

[01:11:57.26] And then there were some children. But now, it's more the curious and the tourists. The disconnect is growing. But it's a poignant reminder of the loss, the magnitude of the loss, that war happens.

[01:12:16.28] When you read 58,000 names, that's a lot of names. And then you reflect on World War I when four million combatants-- no, eight million combatants lost their lives, another ten million civilians. Or World War II and another 10 million combatants, and 10, 20 million civilians lost their lives. I mean, we're talking orders of magnitude, you realize what the tragedy of war is.

[01:12:39.85] I just did a series of lectures on World War I, the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. But those 58,800 names stand out. Everyone had a future.

[01:12:55.79] Yes, some would have been bums, and thieves, and murderers. One of those guys in my college class we thought would be a senator someday. He's from Pennsylvania, Dave Hackett.

[01:13:10.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Who might have cured cancer.

[01:13:12.19] KARL EGE: Or another one might have cured cancer. Another one might have been the president of the United States, or the president of a university, or a great football player, basketball player, athlete, entertainer, preacher, man of God. Never had that opportunity.

[01:13:28.45] And the one thing that I've talked about with my fellow veterans, we have an obligation, those of us who survived, to live our lives as best we can in honor of those who had not had the chance to fulfill their lives. And if we screw this up, and we don't do the best we can, we haven't honored them.

[01:13:56.46] JOE GALLOWAY: They'll haunt us.

[01:13:58.19] KARL EGE: Well, yeah, they'll haunt us, right. But we do have a responsibility-- a responsibility to live a life worth living because they never had a chance. And that's the message

that every time I look at that Wall and I remind myself and I walk away from there renewed with-- I'm sad, but renewed with commitment to do what I can to make the world a better place.

[01:14:27.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Sacred obligation.

[01:14:29.40] KARL EGE: Sure, it is. They never had a chance.

[01:14:37.69] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts about this effort?

[01:14:40.04] KARL EGE: Well, I think it's time. Anniversaries-- like I'm going back to a college 50th reunion in May, right? So these are seminal events. You turn 50, wow. And then 50th reunion, 50th anniversary of anything is sort of a seminal one, because there will unlikely be 100th anniversary, right?

[01:15:00.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, exactly.

[01:15:02.27] KARL EGE: I have a dad who's 101 so--

[01:15:03.59] JOE GALLOWAY: We won't be here to celebrate.

[01:15:05.09] KARL EGE: That's right, we won't be here to celebrate it. I have a father who's 101, so maybe the genes will work. But the 100th anniversary of the Vietnam War will be for grandchildren to discuss, just as we're discussing World War I now.

[01:15:21.77] But I think it's appropriate, and I think the world-- American society has come to a better place with respect to Vietnam. I support a couple of organizations. One of them that's very near and dear to my heart is a group called PeaceTrees Vietnam.

[01:15:38.96] It was started by a woman here in Seattle, who lost her brother in Vietnam. He was a helicopter pilot. He was shot down, I think, in '68, Army helicopter pilot. He was on a rescue mission and his chopper went down.

[01:15:55.14] And when we normalized relationship with Vietnam, she decided she was going to do something in honor of her brother. She got involved with some people who had some entrees into Vietnam, and she started this project to help de-mine-- and mining is a bad word because it's not necessarily mines, but unexploded ordnance mostly.

[01:16:20.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Unexploded ordnance, yeah.

[01:16:22.51] KARL EGE: --UXO, and in Dong Ha just south of the DMZ, which is the most devastated place in the whole of Vietnam--

[01:16:29.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Quang Tri Province.

[01:16:30.27] KARL EGE: Quang Tri Province is the most devastated province of Vietnam, because it was just south of the DMZ. The North Vietnamese were lobbing over shells all the

time. We were lobbing shells. But it was fought over back and forth, back and forth, for seven years-- literally, laid waste.

[01:16:44.89] There's more UXO in the ground there than any other place on Earth, including World War I and World War II battlefields. But she started this process, and with a group of volunteers that has now morphed into huge-- I mean, the US government, State Department, anti-mining group is doing work, the Vietnamese government is fully supportive. And I've been there-- I went-- well, they wanted to build a school on the site of what had been the Marine Corps fire base at Dong Ha, and where there had been an airstrip, and an ammunition dump, and a bunch of hardback tents,

[01:17:25.83] they wanted to build a village, a school, and a community center. And through volunteer effort, they built 100 homes, and they needed money to build a school. And I got involved and I couldn't believe it was the same place where I had served 40 years before, 35 years before.

[01:17:45.24] I sent an email out to a bunch of my classmates because I had two college classmates who were Marine officers that were killed right near there. Got permission from their families, and we built the Kelsey Hackett Kindergarten School in Dong Ha-- or just outside Dong Ha. And I went there in 2002 for the dedication.

[01:18:02.17] I went with my daughter, who was then 24 years old, and it was great to have her along, take care of dad while he goes back for the first time in 35 years to Vietnam. And I dedicated the school and spoke. And I said, it is particularly, for me, an honor to be back here doing something positive for the people of Vietnam, rather than fighting.

[01:18:35.76] And it was actually taped and it was on television and everything. And it was a slow news day in Vietnam so they-- in Hanoi, it was run for about a week of a dedication of a school by a group of veterans, American veterans that had come back 35 years later to do something positive in Vietnam. Since then, PeaceTrees Vietnam has built about eight or nine schools, community centers, and has de-mined about 1,000 acres of land outside of Dong Ha. And it just keeps growing and growing and growing.

[01:19:10.15] In fact, they're at a mission over there now, coming back this week, so I'll talk to Jeryl and find out a little bit more from her how it's going. So that's been a very positive thing for me and for other veterans to do. There are some who don't even want to mention the word Vietnam.

[01:19:30.88] Their experiences were so negative, they cannot come to grips with even imagining going back to that country. I found it very therapeutic to heal internally, and to be welcomed by the Vietnamese people. I've been back three other times.

[01:19:49.77] In 2006, I was part of an APEC delegation that met with-- in Hanoi with all of the leaders of the 21 APEC countries. And that was an interesting-- I'd never been to Hanoi before. That was an interesting experience-- beautiful city.

[01:20:10.38] In 2008, I led a group of institutional investors to visit Vietnam. Went to Thailand, then to Vietnam. And we went first to Saigon. Had a great reception there, and then we went to Hanoi.

[01:20:25.21] And in Hanoi, we had a dinner with the US ambassador, Michael Michalak, who is now retired, lives here in Seattle. And he said something that was fairly profound. He said, every year, the US embassies around the world do a sort of a polling of the local populace of their feelings toward the United States-- extremely negative, negative, neutral, positive, extremely positive. It's sort of a 1 to 5 scale.

[01:20:56.76] And they sort of gather all that data. It's not a Gallup perfect poll, but it at least gives some indication of how the local populace feels about America. And he put it to us, he said, guess what country, of all of the places where we have embassies and consulates and official US delegations, what country has the highest composite rating of its attitude toward the United States?

[01:21:21.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Vietnam.

[01:21:21.97] KARL EGE: France, no. Canada, no. Mexico, no. England, Australia, Japan, no. Vietnam. Somebody says, why is that? Well, first of all, we fought a war, they sort of won, we gave up. A better way to put it, we abandoned the war.

[01:21:43.80] Still can't come to the defeat, but we didn't. We won every battle. We walked away from the war. But they unified the country, which is what they wanted to do.

[01:21:53.72] We accepted in our country tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of boat people, made them full citizens. They have done well. I mean, the Vietnamese immigrant community in this country have done extraordinarily well.

[01:22:09.57] They are doctors, lawyers, business executives, fine citizens. Yeah, there's some bad apples, too, like in every society. But they've done very well and are in every community.

[01:22:20.94] A lot of reparation payments are paid back to families that are still in Vietnam. We normalize relations. And what do we do?

[01:22:26.73] American businesses begin to invest in Vietnam. The largest employer in Vietnam is Nike-- makes all their shoes in Vietnam. And it's not a sweatshop. They actually pay good wages.

[01:22:35.22] And they build soccer fields for the kids in every place where they have a plant, so US companies-- and US veterans have come back and have done positive things. All of those have sort of helped to establish this great relationship between the United States and its former enemy Vietnam. And we can say the same about Japan. I've been to Japan 30, 40 times.

[01:23:00.81] Japanese think highly of the United States. And, boy, my uncle, who fought in the Pacific in World War II, would not buy a single thing that was made in Japan. I mean, look for the label and no way. So we have-- it's extraordinarily positive.

[01:23:20.02] Then when I was in Vietnam in '08, I led the delegation to meet with the president- or the prime minister of Vietnam, Prime Minister Dung, in the presidential palace. And we sat around the table. He was in the center, I was next to him, and then the Vietnamese delegation to one side, and this group of institutional investors from around the world on my side.

[01:23:45.76] And that was an existential moment for me. The president of Vietnam was a Viet Cong medic for 13 years. He started when he was 16 years old as a medic in the Mekong Delta, and was there until he was 29. And we finally walked away from the war in '75-- '74, '75.

[01:24:07.09] And he moved up through the ranks, and he's the president. And we shook hands, and behind him was a statue of Ho Chi Minh. And this, to me, was sort of this-- I just had a very existential moment-- and helped me come to grips with the fact that this is a country that we do business with, that we have good relations with, and that this man who fought to-- as a-- for 13 years to help unify his country.

[01:24:38.46] Yes, under a socialist regime, although, if you go to Saigon, they say, oh, it's-- socialists are all up in Hanoi. We don't really care.

[01:24:46.17] JOE GALLOWAY: We don't care down here.

[01:24:47.96] KARL EGE: Oh, Mr. Dung-- or Mr. Truong drives me around in his Bentley down in Saigon. It's as capitalist as you can imagine. And the Vietnamese people are beautiful people. I mean, the women are gorgeous people. The men-- everybody's a-- beautiful people. And they love America.

[01:25:09.24] And for those veterans that have not gone back, I urge them to do so. They will be very surprised. I had friends who were-- one was a Swift Boat captain who-- wounded several times in Vietnam-- went back for the first time last year and couldn't believe how welcoming and wonderful it was. It really helped him to--

[01:25:29.78] JOE GALLOWAY: The slogan is, Vietnam's a country, not a war.

[01:25:32.40] KARL EGE: That's right.

[01:25:33.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:25:34.03] KARL EGE: Spot on. It is a country. And it's a beautiful country, and it's a country of great history and fantastic food, by the way.

[01:25:44.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, sir.

[01:25:45.21] KARL EGE: Thank you.

[01:25:46.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Appreciate it.

[01:25:46.77] KARL EGE: I hope this was valuable to your effort.