

## **Erbe, Drake US Army**

[00:00:16.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Where were you born?

[00:00:18.36] DRAKE ERBE: Rockford, Illinois.

[00:00:20.64] JOE GALLOWAY: And who were your family?

[00:00:24.15] DRAKE ERBE: Well, see that's a different-- that's a little different. I was in Rockford, Illinois for four months. And then, from then on I was in many states, many schools. And my mother and father divorced when I was four.

[00:00:42.01] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you consider to be your hometown since you moved all over the place.

[00:00:47.20] DRAKE ERBE: The longest I spent in any one place was in Wisconsin. Between three different places, New Berlin, Wisconsin, Onalaska, and a little bit in Milwaukee, where I got a second degree.

[00:01:07.70] JOE GALLOWAY: So Wisconsin, generally speaking.

[00:01:10.41] DRAKE ERBE: I would say, if I were to say there's a town or a state that I really think is my home state, it would be Wisconsin.

[00:01:25.90] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you enter the military?

[00:01:29.65] DRAKE ERBE: Well, it was interesting. I graduated from high school at 17 years old, became a teacher in Cambridge, Wisconsin. And I entered the military because I was drafted. I had-- I got my draft notice because there was a Rockford, Illinois draft board and I was teaching at Cambridge, Wisconsin.

[00:01:57.20] And so, I got my draft notice in study hall. And I opened it up. Oh my God, I've been drafted. And 150 kids stood up and applauded.

[00:02:12.96] JOE GALLOWAY: You were popular man.

[00:02:15.74] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. So-- so I entered the military because I enlisted--

[00:02:21.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Voluntarily

[00:02:22.59] DRAKE ERBE: Well, I enlisted for OCS. I decided that discretion is the better part of valor.

[00:02:27.95] JOE GALLOWAY: They give you the choice.

[00:02:29.52] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah, I got a choice. And so I did.

[00:02:32.37] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. So OCS is how you got commissioned. How was how was that training?

[00:02:39.45] DRAKE ERBE: Well, that was 26 rather than 14. And that was hell on wheels, sorry. It is, it was some of the hardest and finest training that you'll ever have.

[00:02:57.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you feel that you were pretty well prepared for what you were going to face in Vietnam?

[00:03:03.13] DRAKE ERBE: As an officer, sure. Yeah, there were other things though that occupied my time in OCS. I was the OCS chapel choir director. So I wasn't bored.

[00:03:18.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you do officer basic?

[00:03:23.38] DRAKE ERBE: Officer basic?

[00:03:24.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did they run you through a--

[00:03:28.30] DRAKE ERBE: It's 26 weeks. You're commissioned a second lieutenant after you get done. Yeah

[00:03:34.57] JOE GALLOWAY: That's the whole mechona, yeah. Okay.

[00:03:38.65] DRAKE ERBE: That was Fort Benning, Georgia. Sorry.

[00:03:41.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Fort Benning, yeah. Did you receive other training than your OCS?

[00:03:47.77] DRAKE ERBE: Well, I had a number of different assignments, within the year and a half, before I went to Vietnam. One of them, I went to the 5th Mech in Fort Carson, Colorado. Was platoon leader there. Then I was selected as a Redeye platoon leader. That was a handheld missile for the infantry, first one. I went to Fort Bliss, Texas, figured all that out. And then I was asked to create a platoon for that.

[00:04:32.52] JOE GALLOWAY: For the Redeye?

[00:04:33.41] DRAKE ERBE: For the Redeye. And then ran an ORT, operation readiness test, before I got my orders. They actually delayed my orders to Vietnam to do that.

[00:04:46.25] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you land in Vietnam, and where?

[00:04:49.70] DRAKE ERBE: Long Binh, Tan Son Nhut. And I landed exactly when? Let's see, probably August of 1969. And immediately was advised, because of my father who was a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force, under McCain, who was the CINCPAC. Was advised that the orders that I had were no good, and I was going to do something else. So instead of being in IV Corps, which was the swamps and everything, he decided I went to I Corps. And that's the--

[00:05:37.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think he was doing you a favor?

[00:05:39.88] DRAKE ERBE: He thought he was doing me a favor, yeah.

[00:05:42.28] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd have been better off in the swamps.

[00:05:45.79] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah, because you fight Viet Cong there, you don't fight North Vietnamese regulars.

[00:05:50.62] JOE GALLOWAY: That's exactly right. And then you don't have them supported by their own artillery either.

[00:05:55.14] DRAKE ERBE: That is correct

[00:05:55.93] [LAUGHING]

[00:05:59.67] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. Your first impressions on getting off that airplane at Tan Son Nhut, or Long Binh?

[00:06:09.62] DRAKE ERBE: Well, I wasn't there that long, so I didn't see what became Saigon. I didn't see that much. I was put on a chopper, and sent to Chu Lai. The first impression I really got-- JOE GALLOWAY: That's a long chopper ride.

[00:06:29.18] You think? Yeah, it was a Chinook. Came down in Chu Lai. Then immediately after being received and all that, went to my first assignment, which was Firebase Professional. And the way they did that--

[00:06:50.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Located where?

[00:06:51.77] DRAKE ERBE: It's hard to describe. But if you know Vietnam, it was in between Tam Ky and--

[00:07:02.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Da Nang?

[00:07:03.59] DRAKE ERBE: It's not that way, no. It's south of Tam Ky.

[00:07:07.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Tam Ky, OK. Nasty country.

[00:07:11.57] DRAKE ERBE: Yep.

[00:07:12.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Quang Ngai down that way.

[00:07:13.43] DRAKE ERBE: That is correct.

[00:07:14.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Nasty, nasty country.

[00:07:16.28] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. So my first impressions were from a Huey. And of course in-- the first guys that get there, the Huey drivers make sure that you see the view this way.

[00:07:32.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, of course.

[00:07:33.64] [LAUGHING]

[00:07:35.66] DRAKE ERBE: From 5,000 feet, right?

[00:07:37.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:07:38.60] DRAKE ERBE: Strapped in, hopefully.

[00:07:41.90] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. What were your initial duties? You're a second lieutenant now.

[00:07:46.22] DRAKE ERBE: Yep.

[00:07:46.73] JOE GALLOWAY: You get off that helicopter, and you're in the Americal Division, roughly speaking?

[00:07:53.02] DRAKE ERBE: It was 196th Light Infantry Brigade, 1st of the 46th. And originally, I was assigned to A company at LZ Professional. Now, interestingly enough, they had enough platoon leaders. So I became the 60 millimeter mortar section leader. They carried a handheld 60 millimeter mortar.

[00:08:23.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:08:24.35] DRAKE ERBE: That was fun.

[00:08:25.58] JOE GALLOWAY: I suspect. What responsibilities consume most of your time?

[00:08:37.41] DRAKE ERBE: In the span of Vietnam?

[00:08:38.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:08:40.32] DRAKE ERBE: Well, as I said, I've kind of had a varied career. So the first three months, I was in A Company, as this extra lieutenant, basically. And because of this Redeye thing, I had obviously extended. So I was assigned to B company as the executive officer, because I had been made first lieutenant in the field. That's a cute story. And so I was B company for the rest of my tour.

[00:09:27.03] JOE GALLOWAY: For the rest of your tour.

[00:09:28.44] DRAKE ERBE: But what's interesting is I was B company executive officer. Then we had a new colonel come in, who decided that all lieutenants need to go to the field. All

lieutenants who hadn't seen six months, or more, he wanted to go back to the field. So I went back to the field and DEROSed from an LZ.

[00:09:52.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:09:58.51] DRAKE ERBE: At that time, and this is anywhere from I'd say September or October '69 to August of '70. Some of the finest people that you'd ever see on Earth. I had a platoon sergeant, when I was back in the field that was second to none. And the people, the enlisted guys, were all just top notch. We didn't have the difficulties that some of the other brigades, and battalions, and companies had. I do want to say this. There's one thing I'm very proud of. And that's no man under my command ever got killed, or wounded to the point where he had to go back to the world.

[00:11:01.13] Our unit got the Valorous Unit Citation while we were there, so-- .

[00:11:05.38] JOE GALLOWAY: You saw your share of the fighting, you just kept them alive. That's something to be proud of.

[00:11:11.32] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah, that's the one thing I'm very proud of. But they were really top notch people. And I had a company commander who was crazy as a bedbug. But in combat, you didn't want anybody else around. He was unbelievable.

[00:11:34.00] JOE GALLOWAY: First class, huh?

[00:11:34.99] DRAKE ERBE: Yep.

[00:11:37.35] JOE GALLOWAY: In America, things are upset. There are assassinations, and riots, and demonstrations.

[00:11:46.20] DRAKE ERBE: I didn't care.

[00:11:46.89] JOE GALLOWAY: All of that. Does any of that come over where you are?

[00:11:50.29] DRAKE ERBE: No. The only thing I saw--

[00:11:52.32] JOE GALLOWAY: The draftees aren't bringing it with them?

[00:11:54.45] DRAKE ERBE: No. Well, you got to understand 1970 was when they stopped the bombing in Hanoi. There weren't any replacements being provided, very few. So you had who you had.

[00:12:14.38] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was it?

[00:12:15.70] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. People would rotate out, and so forth. So you sort of had what you had, and had to deal with it.

[00:12:23.32] JOE GALLOWAY: So you didn't see any of the social tension or turmoil that was going on back home?

[00:12:29.05] DRAKE ERBE: No. The only thing I saw--

[00:12:30.34] JOE GALLOWAY: The dope came in.

[00:12:34.87] DRAKE ERBE: There was another battalion-- sorry, brigade, within the Americal Division that had serious problems in it. And basically, they were two eyed events command had allowed: the overrun of the first areas of Chu Lai, of the Americal. That was the 198th. They had problems. We didn't have problems.

[00:13:03.87] JOE GALLOWAY: And you didn't have them. What did your troops do for off duty time? I don't suppose you had recreation. Go sit on the beach?

[00:13:13.23] DRAKE ERBE: Well, when I was in the rear, and the executive officer, sure. They went to sit on the beach, and that sort of thing. But recognizing, every once in a while, they'd send over a 122, to make our day just a little miserable.

[00:13:34.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Little more exciting.

[00:13:37.62] DRAKE ERBE: People went to the clubs. I'm not sure social was exactly running rampant. But you asked before about an indication of unrest.

[00:13:54.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:13:55.31] DRAKE ERBE: It was a time when black power was a big deal. And so you saw the raised fists, and all of that. We didn't see it in the field, but you always saw it in the rear.

[00:14:06.52] JOE GALLOWAY: You served your entire tour in that AO?

[00:14:10.84] DRAKE ERBE: Well, no. Now, this will get a little interesting. And you got to give me a little time. LZ Professional was a very, very good firebase. Very good. Well established. You didn't get, even though my first patrol, we had a little difficulty. But normally, you didn't get a lot of problems. Then we were assigned the mission of going to a place called LZ Mary Ann.

[00:14:49.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah, yes.

[00:14:52.27] DRAKE ERBE: And we helped establish LZ Mary Ann as a firebase. And most of us looked around and said, you got to be kidding me.

[00:15:06.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Shouldn't be here.

[00:15:07.60] DRAKE ERBE: Absolutely should never have been there. It was the--

[00:15:10.30] JOE GALLOWAY: And it was overrun, was it not?

[00:15:12.55] DRAKE ERBE: In February, March of the next year, it was overrun.

[00:15:19.39] JOE GALLOWAY: You were happily not there?

[00:15:21.25] DRAKE ERBE: I wasn't there. But people I knew were. But the problem there was, first of all, it was the furthest extent from the Chu Lai home base. So artillery support had to be on the base. And any air support was really stretched. They had stopped the bombing. So we immediately had difficulty, shall we say. And it was a very, very, very poor decision for a firebase. It was something that I tried to tell people, this is nuts.

[00:16:08.31] JOE GALLOWAY: This is a bad idea.

[00:16:09.64] DRAKE ERBE: This is a bad idea. Yeah, there was no escape. There was a cliff on the back side of Mary Ann. So if somebody were to assault you, duh.

[00:16:23.67] JOE GALLOWAY: You can't go out that way.

[00:16:25.36] DRAKE ERBE: You can't go that way. So it was just not good. And of course, everybody has read now what happened. So I don't need to recount that, because I wasn't there. But I will say this. The commanders, and most of the troops that I dealt with, and had-- either my superiors, or eventually subordinates, were not present at that. There had been a whole scale change in command at that time.

[00:17:07.21] So those folks that were part of that action, for the most part, weren't ours, I'll just say. That was a very, very sad experience, of course, in the 1st of the 46th. And the burning rope, our insignia, obviously took a bath.

[00:17:38.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe for us the quality of the leadership in your company, battalion, brigade, division?

[00:17:47.79] DRAKE ERBE: The company leadership was outstanding, as I said. And I could give you example after example of that. The battalion commanders were excellent. As you got a little higher, the brigade commander at the time when I had my most action, had been replaced. And there was another one who I don't know what his history was. I never researched it, or anything. But I was not as comfortable with that. The division commander had been a General Ramsay, I think had just been replaced as well.

[00:18:33.99] So there was the change at the top, that wasn't as stellar as it had been.

[00:18:44.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions that you participated in, big operations, Battle of Hiep Duc?

[00:18:52.62] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. Well, you know big operations are relative. We were the reaction battalion for the brigade. And the Hiep Duc, better known as Death Valley, erupted

many times during the Vietnam War. That was a common here we go again. Again in '70, in the June of '70, since it was clear that there was not going to be any more bombing, no more replacements, or anything. We were woken up one time. 1st of June. And we were CA'd, combat assault, to the other end of the valley. And for 11 days, we swept that valley, where we're the 1st of the 46th. The 2nd of the 1st, and the 4th of the 31st were "battle weary."

[00:20:03.65] And so we were supposed to work their area of operation. The first thing we noticed when we got down. And the company commander was told that there was a night laager, where you bed down. And we were told by one of the other battalions in that area, Hawk Hill I believe, that this was a really good night laager. This was a good place where you could bed down, OK?

[00:20:36.65] So we did. And then we noticed that there were telephone wires across--

[00:20:49.20] JOE GALLOWAY: This is not good.

[00:20:50.19] DRAKE ERBE: Across the valley.

[00:20:52.57] JOE GALLOWAY: This is very unbad.

[00:20:55.03] DRAKE ERBE: This is not only bad, but really bad. So at 2:00 in the morning, he got us all up, and he moved us out.

[00:21:05.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Let's cut some wire as we go.

[00:21:07.44] DRAKE ERBE: And he said cut everything you see.

[00:21:09.39] [LAUGHING]

[00:21:11.19] And we did. But we got hit. The last platoon out was the 1st Platoon, and they got hit. But not as hard as we would have, and that was the first day.

[00:21:24.24] JOE GALLOWAY: That was the first day of how big an operation, how long?

[00:21:27.90] DRAKE ERBE: It was 11 days.

[00:21:28.86] JOE GALLOWAY: 11 days.

[00:21:29.88] DRAKE ERBE: Yep.

[00:21:30.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Is that about average, for your ops?

[00:21:32.79] DRAKE ERBE: No.

[00:21:33.15] JOE GALLOWAY: No?



[00:21:33.48] DRAKE ERBE: No, no. Well, what we did-- in LZ Professional, what we did was we went out for 30 days at a time. If you know the area, it's mountainous. And so you'd climb up an 850 meter mountain and then you'd be told to climb back down, that kind of thing.

[00:21:49.17] We were working the area of operation. But it was clear that when we did-- when we were in Hiep Duc, that hadn't been done.

[00:21:58.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:21:58.99] DRAKE ERBE: Because what we ran into, and I'm sure you know, is we ran into a division of NVA. And we ended up with a whole lot of stuff, culminating in the B-52 strike, the Arc Light strike at the end.

[00:22:21.09] JOE GALLOWAY: How did that go?

[00:22:23.53] DRAKE ERBE: Arc Light?

[00:22:24.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:22:24.88] DRAKE ERBE: Well, you really don't want to be within 7,000 meters of that because it'll bust your eardrums. And so we got out. We were told to leave the valley, get up on the hill. And we did. And they laid out 250 to 500 pound bombs. And you just bounced.

[00:22:50.84] It's hard to believe that anybody survived that. On the other hand, we saw-- After that, we saw enemy with ears bleeding, and wandering around, and all that kind of stuff. So, people did survive.

[00:23:10.71] The day I left.

[00:23:11.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:23:13.48] DRAKE ERBE: Mm-hm. 365 days and a wake up, right?

[00:23:19.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, you've survived.

[00:23:22.12] DRAKE ERBE: Yes. Well-- Yeah.

[00:23:24.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Prevailed.

[00:23:25.69] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah.

[00:23:25.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Maybe?

[00:23:26.68] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. I counted 11 times when I should have been dead. So, I don't have any luck anymore because of it.

[00:23:33.61] JOE GALLOWAY: You used it all up.

[00:23:37.46] DRAKE ERBE: I have no more luck, and I don't ask for it.

[00:23:45.37] Well, it was probably the day that-- The fourth day of the CA in Hiep Duc. And we were in-- We were preparing. We had done a routine combat operation. And we were doing our recirculation, and repair, and all that.

[00:24:18.25] So, it was a flat-- Just a little, flat hill. So, the brigade commander decided that he wanted to come down and survey the area. But he changed his mind when we got the first mortar round. And that killed two in another platoon.

[00:24:44.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Two of your guys?

[00:24:45.57] DRAKE ERBE: Not mine. But in the other platoon.

[00:24:46.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody else's?

[00:24:47.88] DRAKE ERBE: Yes. So then he decided to leave. I mean, he was hovering and he decided he'd better leave. Then he came back. And it turns out, we hadn't gotten everybody. Because there was a guy in a hole, that was waiting for somebody big. So, he took a couple of shots at the brigade commander, and they lifted off.

[00:25:10.29] But right after that, then we started getting mortared and everything. And you get in your hole-- The hole that you dug.

[00:25:20.58] But the hardest part was, the platoon sergeant and I got in the same hole. And we counted 11 recoilless rifle rounds going straight over our hole. He must have hit a tree, because he never lowered it.

[00:25:39.43] JOE GALLOWAY: He had you bracketed very nicely.

[00:25:41.77] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. But he never lowered it, so he couldn't take care of business. So that was once that we had. But that was a good time, but it was a bad time. And that was probably the worst, just for sheer panic.

[00:26:03.91] Because you can't do anything. You can't help. You can't try to command. You can't do anything when you're in a hole and this stuff is going over your head.

[00:26:17.97] I can't say enough about the ROK Marines. The South Korean ROK Marines, we called them, they were stellar. They were unbelievable. And our other allies, the ARVN's, weren't. But the ROK Marines didn't take anything from anyone, they just-- They took care of business.

[00:26:47.60] JOE GALLOWAY: They did that. They did that.

[00:26:50.01] DRAKE ERBE: They did.

[00:26:56.56] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your impressions of the Vietnamese people, military and civilian?

[00:27:03.34] DRAKE ERBE: Well, you had to be cautious. I told you about Tam Ky, which is probably the only real village where we had any chance of feeling relatively safe. But you had to be cautious. I mean, the stories of the grenade with the four-year-old, that's true.

[00:27:28.13] But-- I mean, people are people. So, there wasn't the animosity you would think. Now, remember, I was in I Corps, I wasn't in IV Corps. So, it's different. There wasn't the animosity. They just knew that this was happening, and they were making the best of whatever they did.

[00:27:49.34] There were people on the base in Chu Lai when I was an XO, that helped. And to the extent you could, you trusted them. But there were always those that-- I mean, you heard stories of people going into a tactical operations center and throwing a grenade.

[00:28:14.13] I mean, they were enemies, so you had to treat them as enemies. But there were some really good interpreters, really good-- There were some good ARVN officers that we dealt with. So, the people were just trying to survive, I think.

[00:28:39.51] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home during this tour?

[00:28:44.70] DRAKE ERBE: None.

[00:28:45.30] JOE GALLOWAY: None? You didn't write to speak of?

[00:28:49.38] DRAKE ERBE: Well, family is relative. That's why I said-- You know?

[00:28:55.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:28:58.80] DRAKE ERBE: I was single. And then, I didn't have family.

[00:29:03.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Right. How much news did you get from back home about the war, about politics, about what's going on back there? Stars and Stripes, or any of that?

[00:29:17.73] DRAKE ERBE: Stars and Stripes, a little bit. But I ignored most of it. When I went over-- In the service, I was young. Like I said, I graduated from high school at 17. And so I was not as aware of a whole lot of things, and I didn't want to be.

[00:29:41.70] I knew I was going to spend three years, at least three years. And I didn't think that was too much to give for living in the freest country in the world. And so I just kind of blocked out all of the noise. I had a 30 day R&R in New York City, and that was enough for me. I didn't need it anymore.

[00:30:15.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your trip going home, going back to the States.

[00:30:20.68] DRAKE ERBE: At 4:00 in the morning, Seattle. It was a commercial airliner. And I'm glad we got in at 4:00 in the morning, because they didn't know we were coming.

[00:30:32.52] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't know you were coming, so the demonstrators weren't there?

[00:30:35.90] DRAKE ERBE: No. We knew about them, but it was like, OK.

[00:30:40.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, were you finished with the Army at this point, or you still owed them some time?

[00:30:47.37] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah, I still-- I owed them some time. I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. And there, I was in a training battalion. And then what was interesting is, they tagged me for an umpire in another operational readiness test. And that was fun. We spent, I don't know, 24-- 48 hours, I guess, in the field.

[00:31:19.84] JOE GALLOWAY: You were not thinking of making this a career, though?

[00:31:23.61] DRAKE ERBE: No, I was a professional opera singer. So, there was no reason for me to think that I was going to stay doing this.

[00:31:32.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Be an Army officer.

[00:31:33.99] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah, right. No, I was-- Thing I was going to do is, I was going to go to-- Well, continue to work, possibly teach, and then audition at the opera houses in Europe.

[00:31:52.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

[00:31:57.30] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah, sure. Everybody does. But nothing that incapacitated me. You have to understand, when you are an officer in charge of others, you put yourself on hold. Your only responsibility is to your men.

[00:32:21.30] You're responsible for what they do and fail to do. And you make sure that they fail less. And so you really don't have a personal life when you're leading men in combat. You just don't. And you shouldn't, in my opinion.

[00:32:41.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you maintain contact with the people you served with over there?

[00:32:49.60] DRAKE ERBE: They have a reunion every year, but I've chosen not to go to the reunion. You have to remember that for the last-- Well, let's see. Since I-- 1970. It hasn't been, until '95 or so--

[00:33:16.24] JOE GALLOWAY: That they started having them?

[00:33:17.86] DRAKE ERBE: Where it was-- No. They had them. But it was-- Where it was reasonable to even talk about being in Vietnam, or being painted with the brush of being in Vietnam. So, I haven't-- I don't talk about it. I don't-- Nobody-- I don't-- Until recently. And I'm doing this for posterity, my family, and so forth.

[00:33:51.44] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation?

[00:33:58.21] DRAKE ERBE: Personally, I think the draft was a good thing. I think you ought to bring it back. But there was a discipline, there was a love of country, there was patriotism, and all of that. And people, when they had two years of service, no matter what service they were in, became better people. And so I just think that it did, for me, a lot of good.

[00:34:39.66] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot of good.

[00:34:41.83] DRAKE ERBE: It allowed me to become the person that I finally became.

[00:34:46.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there lessons you took from Vietnam that you would like to pass on?

[00:34:54.99] DRAKE ERBE: Well, Vietnam, or the military experience, are two different things. With Vietnam, I would say that we shouldn't-- If you're going to have a war, declare it and get it over with. Give the resources. Give-- Not worry about the collateral damage. Get it done. And we don't seem to learn from Vietnam.

[00:35:30.26] JOE GALLOWAY: We haven't seemed to. We're having a 17-and-a-half year war already.

[00:35:35.00] DRAKE ERBE: Exactly.

[00:35:36.14] JOE GALLOWAY: For what purpose?

[00:35:37.97] DRAKE ERBE: Well, that's the question.

[00:35:40.04] JOE GALLOWAY: That is the question.

[00:35:41.37] DRAKE ERBE: So, what I learned is, if you're going to do a job, do it. Get it done.

[00:35:45.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Get it over, and get it done, and get the hell out.

[00:35:48.44] DRAKE ERBE: That's the mission.

[00:35:52.33] You asked about Hiep Duc Valley. I think you know the awards I got, and you've seen that. So, I don't have to talk about it. But that was-- The 1st of the 46th Infantry at that time was an amazing group. And it swept the valley, did its thing, completed the mission and left.

[00:36:29.87] And I have to tell you, I'm very proud to have been in the 1st of the 46th. I needed to say that.

[00:36:43.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial over here?

[00:36:46.94] DRAKE ERBE: Oh, yeah.

[00:36:47.42] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think when you go there?

[00:36:49.52] DRAKE ERBE: Well, solemnity. I know people on the Wall. And it's very hard, but it's necessary.

[00:37:11.28] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration, you're part of it today. What are your thoughts about that?

[00:37:20.08] DRAKE ERBE: Well, I think it's great. I didn't know about it, I have to tell you, until Floyd Steward, the person who created the pin--

[00:37:33.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Stuck one of them on you.

[00:37:35.11] DRAKE ERBE: Well, that's a whole different story. Actually, was awarded it. But Floyd and I spent about 45 minutes at the Pentagon talking about this. And he was-- I have to tell you, he was wonderful. And it was wonderful to talk to him. And he's the guy that recommended me talk to you guys.

[00:37:57.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Great.

[00:37:58.24] DRAKE ERBE: So, that's when I learned.

[00:38:00.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Glad that he did. Glad you listened. And glad you got the pin

[00:38:06.19] DRAKE ERBE: I have one short story for you, if that's OK.

[00:38:09.29] JOE GALLOWAY: You bet.

[00:38:12.61] DRAKE ERBE: Small world. I went to Milton College. Milton College had 600 kids. And I was in music, as I said. Many productions. And so I'm over in Vietnam, after the sweep of the valley, and so forth. It's about July. And I'm finally going to get replacements.

[00:38:45.84] So, we're in the middle of nowhere. And the chopper comes down, and I see two or three guys get off. One of them, I vaguely recognized.

[00:39:02.82] So, long story short, the company commander assigns this guy to me. It's raining. We go back into my area. And we start doing the, where are you from, what did you do, where did you go, all that kind of stuff.

[00:39:21.38] Well, it turns out, this kid was the stage manager for our stuff in Milton College. Can you believe it? So I said, well, I can't really-- So, old times. Well, I can't really play favoritism here, but I will give you a chance to do what you want in the platoon.

[00:39:48.66] Now, this kid was about 139 pounds soaking wet. He chose to handle the M79 grenade launcher. I said, you know you're going to have to have ammunition and all that kind of stuff? He says, yeah. And he did.

[00:40:10.59] And the reason I'm telling you this story, not just because of that, but he was on LZ Maryann when it was attacked.

[00:40:20.99] JOE GALLOWAY: When it was overrun?

[00:40:23.18] DRAKE ERBE: Yeah. And he lived. And I had-- Floyd Stewart found him for me. And I have talked to him since.

[00:40:32.31] JOE GALLOWAY: He was a good Soldier.

[00:40:33.55] DRAKE ERBE: He was a good Soldier.

[00:40:36.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you for coming.