

Felker, Timothy US Army

[00:00:14.34] JOE GALLOWAY: When and where were you born?

[00:00:16.86] TIMOTHY FELKER: Actually, Washington DC, 1940. My dad and mother came from Wisconsin in 1935, so we were transplanted here. But my brother and I were born here, and we lived here most of our days. Wife and-- well, now we have nine kids and 18 grandkids. But when I went to Vietnam, I had two and a half.

[00:00:43.87] JOE GALLOWAY: And Washington DC you consider your hometown?

[00:00:47.89] TIMOTHY FELKER: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I went to Gonzaga High School right downtown here. And, of course, lived over in Arlington.

[00:00:55.15] JOE GALLOWAY: You still live here?

[00:00:56.50] TIMOTHY FELKER: Mm-hm. Went to college in Minnesota, but graduated in '62 in ROTC in Army. Commissioned and went in the Army in '62 and came out in '88.

[00:01:08.69] JOE GALLOWAY: How old were you when you took your commission?

[00:01:13.39] TIMOTHY FELKER: I was 21.

[00:01:15.10] JOE GALLOWAY: 21. And that was what year?

[00:01:18.86] TIMOTHY FELKER: '62.

[00:01:19.97] JOE GALLOWAY: '62. We didn't have a war in Vietnam at that point, not to speak of.

[00:01:25.37] TIMOTHY FELKER: No.

[00:01:28.59] JOE GALLOWAY: You were an officer?

[00:01:29.86] TIMOTHY FELKER: Mm-hm.

[00:01:30.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And your specialty?

[00:01:34.52] TIMOTHY FELKER: I was infantry.

[00:01:35.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Infantry.

[00:01:36.38] TIMOTHY FELKER: And I was 26 when I went to Vietnam. TIMOTHY FELKER: Well, actually, my basic training was an infantry officer course at Fort Benning, 13 weeks in '62-'63. And then my advanced training infantry was when I came back from Vietnam, that's a nine-month course.

[00:02:03.15] But before I went, though, I did have the luxury of having a six-week course to be a battalion adviser, and I had a 13-week course in Vietnamese, full time at DLI, and then I had two years of high school French and two years of college French. And it turns out that, of course, my battalion commander was-- never said a word to me in English, but he was fluent in French and Vietnamese, and so we got by pretty well.

[00:02:30.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your training at all prepare you for what you faced when you got to Vietnam?

[00:02:36.14] TIMOTHY FELKER: Well, actually, it did, I thought. I mean, I had-- after my basic course, which in those days was 13 weeks, that's a long time, now they're much shorter. But I had, essentially, three years of command at Fort Dix in basic training, infantry, for enlisted. And then I was at Seventh Army, and I was the honor guard commander. I was in the G3 office, and so I had a pretty good background. Plus the six-week course, and the 13 weeks of Vietnamese language. I thought I was-- most people--

[00:03:08.87] JOE GALLOWAY: You figured you were pretty well prepared.

[00:03:11.57] TIMOTHY FELKER: I mean, as far as that goes, as far as you can prepare for something like that. TIMOTHY FELKER: I went in '67 in February, and it-- I flew in to Saigon. Actually, I seem to remember we went to Japan, and then flew into Saigon.

[00:03:31.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Flew in to Tan Son Nhut.

[00:03:32.74] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. Tan Son Nhut. And MACV II was the building that we had to report as a Military Assistance Command, Vietnam asset. Of course, I had to get my carbine, World War II carbine, .45, and field gear-- jungle boots and all that-- at MACV II in downtown Saigon. And then, of course, I went upcountry to the highlands. I was assigned, actually, in the highlands, MR2, Military Region 2, to the 4th Battalion, 44th Infantry Regiment, 23rd ARVN Division. And that's--

[00:04:12.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Located what city?

[00:04:14.05] TIMOTHY FELKER: 23rd ARVN Division headquarters was Ban Me Thuot, but the 44th Regiment rear was Phan Rang, and the battalion I was with was in Binh Thuan Province out of Phan Thiet. Mountain, coastal, southern MR2. TIMOTHY FELKER: It was a full plate I'll tell you. But essentially, I was a comrade, I was a tactical adviser, and I coordinated the support of the 1st Cavalry, 2d of the 7th, Custer's regiment.

[00:04:52.96] 1st Cav had this regiment in Phan Thiet. And they had helicopters, gunships, medevac, artillery, although ARVN had great artillery, and we usually used ARVN. But anyway, they had artillery.

[00:05:10.03] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd help you when you needed.

[00:05:11.56] TIMOTHY FELKER: They helped when-- and they'd resupply us. If we were gone for more than-- for four or more days, then they'd resupply us with rations and anything we needed, ammunition, troops. The battalion was really good. The battalion commander was a North Vietnamese. Came down in 1954.

[00:05:31.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Was he Catholic?

[00:05:32.68] TIMOTHY FELKER: Catholic. 44 years old. 14 children, two wives. I knew one of them very well. The other one was gone, but-- and a bunch of the kids were in Phan Thiet. And I'd stop off and see them very often when I was in the province headquarters for a meeting. But he was a 25-year field soldier. I mean, he had been in the field for 25 years. And he told his boss off, I think, like a lot of those guys did, and that's why he was still a captain.

[00:06:07.73] But he was just a honest guy, far as that goes. He cared for his troops, took care of his troops. He was a good tactician, and strict, and just a real person. So he had already had two sons killed in the war, and a son-in-law killed. But he was not a bitter man. He had a smile on his face. Really, he was a real person, and a Vietnamese who just understood the world.

[00:06:51.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you know if he immigrated to this country?

[00:06:55.55] TIMOTHY FELKER: I don't think so.

[00:06:56.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Don't think so.

[00:06:57.35] TIMOTHY FELKER: I doubt it. TIMOTHY FELKER: I tell you, it got cold at night.

[00:07:05.11] JOE GALLOWAY: It did.

[00:07:06.34] TIMOTHY FELKER: In the highlands and up in the hills. I remember nights when it would be raining for four days, nights, four days and nights. And all I had was a shelter half, and my poncho liner, and, of course, I carried my bedroll in the back. But I could just barely keep dry my main body. And it had to be 50 degrees. We weren't that high up. I think it was Pleiku. Is that near Plei Me?

[00:07:43.28] JOE GALLOWAY: No. Plei Me would be 35 miles further, and then up in the mountains.

[00:07:49.01] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. I think the 2d Division was there. They had me as an adviser, go up and tell them how we worked with ARVN. So I did that for a day or two. But anyway, being a comrade, and being there, and we had-- what I did is I split my team into-- my four-person advisory team. I was a captain, had a radio operator (E-4) and a lieutenant, and an E-6 medic. And so that was our team.

[00:08:18.50] And I split the team. The radio operator and I were one team, and the medic and the lieutenant were the other. And we always had one company going on operations way outside

the populated area. And then we had two companies and the headquarters company, the battalion main in the built up-- I mean, village areas, and a lot of-- this is where people lived and a lot of open space. But along the road and maybe 15 kilometers, 20 kilometers from Phan Thiet.

[00:08:52.15] So just surviving-- and we rotated on operations. I was gone for three- or four-day operations every three or four days, then I was back. And then the lieutenant and the E-6 medic went with another company on far-flung operations and came back. And we did that all the time.

[00:09:15.15] JOE GALLOWAY: You switched off back and forth.

[00:09:16.57] TIMOTHY FELKER: Switched off. They rotated companies, and we rotated teams. That's the way it worked.

[00:09:22.86] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like as Americans with a Vietnamese Army unit?

[00:09:28.84] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. This is cool. When I left Saigon, they said, now, look, don't eat the food, and don't drink the water. I mean, I was living with the Vietnamese. So what it was was-- when I got to the battalion, the first day I got there, sat down to eat-- we had a bench there. This was somebody's house. Very often the battalion commander would go to somebody's house and say, we'd like to have dinner here, and gave them money, and they provided some. That happened a number of times.

[00:10:03.18] I'm not sure that was the case this time, but there were women there that served. And so we had a-- I had a bowl of rice. It was absolutely black with flies. And I said, oh, Lord, I'm going to get sick. I never got sick. The flies were always there, all the time. But the food-- the problem was, the food, it tasted OK.

[00:10:31.20] I was a five-bowl rice-- we only had two meals a day, morning and night. And I was five bowls of rice-- no Vietnamese ate more than two or three. Of course, they were much littler than I was. I was six-four, 195 pounds when I got there. And I'm six-two, 190 right now anyway, something like that, six-two-and-a-half maybe. But anyway, I used to be six-four.

[00:10:55.27] But the food was-- you had about two or three ounces of meat. You had chicken for six weeks, and fish for six weeks, and pork for six weeks, and beef for six weeks, and back to chicken, and that's the way it went. And the only time we luxuriated was when we had bamboo. When you go into the jungles, the bamboo would grow up this high overnight like an artillery shell. And those ARVN soldiers cut that off. Boy, we could eat all the bamboo you wanted. And it was tender, too. It was just a shoot, big shoot.

[00:11:33.03] And sometimes we hit it rich, struck it rich, but every month, one day-- I didn't provide any food. I brought no money or anything. ARVN took care of us, all four of us. But once a month, we all-- the four of us chipped in and we threw a feast for the officers, some NCOs, the country priest, district chief, other village chiefs, potentates.

[00:11:59.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Spending like drunk Sailors.

[00:12:00.30] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. I mean, we really-- and, of course, we bought beer and all. But we really had a feast. That was once a month, and we did that every month. And that was the only time. But really, in the field-- and the other exception was when we were on operations for more-- four days or more, the Cav dropped us C-rations. ARVN loved C-rations, and they just served them with rice, and, of course, we did, too.

[00:12:27.12] So you'd have a day or two or maybe more. Sometimes 10-day operations, we'd have C-rations for six days, and the Cav brought them. And when we were back with the battalion, you could buy a beer in the village and even with ice. And so it was-- water was interesting because the water I depended on was in a rain barrel from a village house, or that's probably half of it, and then, otherwise, streams and holes in the ground.

[00:13:08.02] I couldn't believe the holes in the ground. Maybe they're just bigger than a helmet, maybe that deep. It hadn't rained for four or five days or a week, and the damn hole was full of water. It was clean. It had all sifted out, I guess. And that was great water in a stream, but I never drank out of a river. Rivers were bad. Wouldn't dare.

[00:13:29.95] And we had halazone, but I only used it-- oh, most months I never used it at all. I had some halazone tablets. If we went somewhere, we were out in the-- a place in jungle and there was really bad water, I'd put halazone in it. But otherwise, I want to live like the Vietnamese because I'd be sick if I didn't. I was eating their food. I mean, you just had--

[00:13:52.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Eating their food.

[00:13:52.45] TIMOTHY FELKER: But I never got sick. I never ate scorpions. I got stung by three of them. But I never-- I ate snake. We ate those black duck eggs. But I never ate the bad stuff that people talk about.

[00:14:05.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, dogs and cats?

[00:14:07.09] TIMOTHY FELKER: Oh, no. But the worst thing I had was wolf. We did have-- I can tell you about that. That was another one of those feasts where the Vietnamese expected me to eat a lot because they knew I was starving. I lost 50 pounds, five-zero. Went down to 145 pounds. Never got sick. But when we had wolf, it was several months into the tour. And man, they cooked that on a spit, you just were smacking your lips all day long. And they served me a huge portion of it, and it was the wildest, terriblest stuff.

[00:14:42.00] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. I mean, I lived with the Vietnamese, really. I had a hammock. First of all, I had a driver. I had a jeep. I had a houseboy, no house. But when I was with the battalion, then he would string my hammock and clean my rifle. Americans, there were just the four of us. Two of us were gone all the time, so down to two of us.

[00:15:08.06] I honestly can't remember those guys names, but they-- I mean, we were just brothers, that's all, and-- like I was with the Vietnamese. The whole thing is you're a comrade because we're all in this together. There's no way out. And they ate, and drank, and slept just like I did. And it was--

[00:15:35.68] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation or off-duty if you had any off-duty?

[00:15:40.36] TIMOTHY FELKER: We didn't have any off-duty. But every about two weeks, if I was there, I would go to the battalion-- to the province headquarters because there was another ARVN battalion, the 3d of the 44th, and an armored cavalry squadron, ARVN, and ARVN artillery in the province. And so two ARVN battalions. I was the senior analyst to one-- senior adviser.

[00:16:08.47] The province would collect us and have a meeting, so they could have a war council. And they had a little mess hall there, lunch counter. And so I did eat when I was there. I would eat that meal. But that was the only recreation. And if they had water, I'd take a shower. But normally, it just-- I couldn't stay overnight, never stayed overnight, had to be with the battalion.

[00:16:35.50] So recreation was just talking at night. I didn't tell you, we had a far-flung company all the time, but the other-- the battalion moved every night, at least once, maybe twice. Because when we didn't, mortars. So they didn't know where we were, they wouldn't shoot. And so we moved every night and slept during the daytime. So your recreation was-- you fit that in with-- I mean, there wasn't any recreation, but OK.

[00:17:06.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have any specific memories of the popular culture back home at that time? Music, books, film? You hear a song it takes you right back?

[00:17:18.94] TIMOTHY FELKER: Honestly, very little. And the reason why is because in Vietnam I had no access. And before I went to Vietnam, I had been in Germany. And before that I was a basic training company commander working all the time. And after Vietnam, I went to the advanced course at Fort Benning, and then I went to MI training. And so really, I kind of missed the '60s. I heard about the drugs and the--

[00:17:44.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll. You missed it all.

[00:17:47.48] TIMOTHY FELKER: I missed it all. But when it came to--

[00:17:49.40] JOE GALLOWAY: And me, too.

[00:17:50.18] TIMOTHY FELKER: It's true. It's true.

[00:17:51.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Your whole area of operations for your whole tour was that Phan Thiet area.

[00:17:58.70] TIMOTHY FELKER: Battalion stayed there the whole time. About nine or ten months, the division-- I think it was their MR senior-- the military region senior adviser, colonel, came down and said-- I'd had my battalion time, would I consent to come up to the division because they needed somebody who knew something about ARVN operations. So for Tet-- I left

17 days after Tet. And 17 days after the Easter Offensive on my second tour. For Tet, I was in Ban Me Thuot.

[00:18:33.16] And I went up to the division and-- they say Ban Me Thuot was almost overrun, but they killed 1,000 VC downtown-- in the rubber plantation, if you know Ban Me Thuot and around there. But anyway, so I was in the MR 2 area, the Binh Thuan area. We went in the mountains, the jungle, the rice paddies to the coast. Supposed to go on a junk fleet operation at night. Broke my heart because we went-- we were right there at the shore, but a storm came up and they said, we cannot run this operation. I say, we got to-- battalion commander said no. He said, they're afraid because these junks are-- so that one was canceled.

[00:19:14.43] JOE GALLOWAY: You never got to go on that.

[00:19:15.10] TIMOTHY FELKER: We did have air assault operations, eight or nine or ten of them, the Cav ran, took a company in. I went in on-- eight or nine or ten times. One of which we never should have done. It was-- I mean, we suited up for this thing right over at the Cav base, and got on helicopters. And they said, now, we're going to take your place where there's Agent Orange. And don't sit down, don't eat, anything like that. Don't breathe, and all of that. When we went into this LZ, I mean, the whole place looked like a movie set, it was just this thick with Agent Orange. Everything was dead. Dust all over the damn place.

[00:19:58.25] And so we went-- and there were VC, punji stake pits and all that stuff all over. It had been a VC area, but there were no VC in there. And we went through it the whole afternoon. I never sat down, I never ate a thing. ARVN did. We told those guys not to, but anyway. It was three or four hours just walking through this jungle that was total-- and, you know, I had six kids after that. Nobody ever showed up anything. Because things that they talk about with Agent Orange, birth defects-- thank the Lord. But I was careful, but how careful can you be?

[00:20:50.13] TIMOTHY FELKER: At the regimental headquarters, there was a major and a captain, U.S. They were at the regimental rear. I mean, the headquarters there for the regiment. I went there one time on the way home, with a-- another story. But anyway, the regimental headquarters-- so they were good people. They didn't bother me. They came down about-- on or the other of them would come down every two months and just check me out and all.

[00:21:17.76] I had to send a guy back because of a PTSD problem, and they came and picked him up in an hour, two hours and replaced him. But it was just one of those things that-- that fellow was the best of the four of us, from day one working with the Vietnamese. But he just-- there were so many mines, and I think that just got to him. And he just exploded one day. So I said, can you be ready to go in 30 minutes? He said, yes, sir. And that was it. It's just one of those things.

[00:22:09.09] Just a couple of things that I want to hit. One is the-- a real privilege was going home with the battalion XO. He was a captain. ARVN captain. And you said relationships we had with the Vietnamese and the Americans. And he was the XO, deputy battalion commander. And just a real good guy. And he wanted me to come home with him. I was riding shotgun in his jeep. We drove 150 miles to Nha Trang, where his wife and five sons were. Little kids. We

walked in on them, they didn't know we were coming. We didn't tell anyone we were going. I told my boss. I said, I'd like to go home with with the dai uy. He said, OK, do it.

[00:22:53.25] So it was a 150-mile ride. The roads, Highway 1. All torn up. There was no good way to get there, it took a while. We went through Phan Rang, which was the regimental rear, and up to Nha Trang. And we drove back. But anyway, we stayed two days, and he had a lovely wife and neat kids. And we had a great time there. Just stayed with him. She had a little stove about that big that had charcoal, and immediately cooked us a dinner when we got there and all. It was just a cool time.

[00:23:28.33] But you see, here's a guy, he could have had three soldiers go with him in the jeep. But just the two of us went. And I had my carbine right here. .45 and two grenades, always carried them. But the thing is, nobody bothered us. Nobody knew we were going, and this was in probably September of '67, well before Tet. This is a VC-- coastal Vietnam was more VC, not NVA. We didn't fight the-- they had NVA advisers like ARVN had U.S. advisers, but anyway so--

[00:24:09.02] The other thing is, I got some neat memories of good days and bad days. And I wanted to comment on that. Soon after I got to the battalion, they brought me a girl who was 16 years old. They said she was she 16, she looked like she was 40. She was full-grown and heavy. And I never saw a heavy Vietnamese in my whole time. Except, she was. I mean, heavy-- I mean, she was-- weighed 30 pounds more than anybody else. Girl. And she had no nose, no upper jaw, nothing, between here. A couple of ragged teeth here. Total void. Her eyes were intact. And like I say, nothing in here at all. And she always-- I'll never forget, she held her hand just like this.

[00:25:09.25] And so I talked to her, and we talked to her. And afterwards, I said, to the , the battalion commander, I said, what have we done about her? He said, oh, they tried to do something, nothing can be done. So I said, well, I'm going to check on that. So I went over to the province headquarters a week or so later. And I asked them about her, and I said, what can we do about this? And somebody in the province said, there's some Chinese doctors downtown, go see them. So I did.

[00:25:43.08] I had a driver. We went down and talked to these guys. They were from Taiwan, spoke English. And I told them about her, and they said, bring her here and we will take her to Taiwan. And she will probably be gone two years, and-- if that's OK. I said, that'll be fine. So I went back. And the next time I went to town was about a week later. And brought her family. We talked to the family. And she didn't bring-- I don't remember her bringing hardly a thing. I just brought her in my jeep. She was in the back, had a driver, I was in the front. We drove downtown and left her off. I never heard another word. I know she went to Taiwan.

[00:26:32.86] JOE GALLOWAY: They were going to do the surgery--

[00:26:35.17] TIMOTHY FELKER: Plastic surgery, yeah. They said it would probably take two years. I said-- that was one thing. But there was lot of neat stories there. I've got a list of them here, but I hate to miss any of them. I'll come back. I had some bad stories. The bad stories were

the night that we killed one of our own guys because he was out relieving himself. And came back in the perimeter and the guard shot him.

[00:27:12.48] JOE GALLOWAY: It happens. It happened a lot to American units.

[00:27:14.34] TIMOTHY FELKER: I know it. I know it. And then every time, every one of the many times that an ARVN soldier stepped on a mine, it was identical every time. Blew the leg off right here. Ankle, foot, totally gone. Didn't seem to bother the rest of them. I had the morphine. Vietnamese didn't have morphine. But the advisers-- so my lieutenant had it, or the medic in the other team. I had it. And that's why God made this stuff. We inject them with that, and they could be at peace. This was strong stuff. And the Cav took them. And-- never saw any of these guys again. Every time there was a mine.

[00:28:05.61] I don't know-- the last one I was going to tell you about was-- the most innocent one was the beeline. When we were deployed, we'd stay about ten meters apart. And 90 men in a company. VC could never overrun our company. Not 90 men. I mean, the VC were just small groups and all. So they attacked us with mortars and mines, for the most part. But anyway, all of a sudden, this ARVN soldier from behind me ran past, like, right there. Ran-- just kept on running, threw his helmet, threw his rifle, and I think-- pistol belt just threw it all and just ran. They call it a beeline, but it was a column of bees. Bees don't fly in a line. They file, one back-- it's a column.

[00:29:07.29] But anyway-- the word is beeline. They came and they hit him in the back of the head. And I bet you, 25 of them hit him. One after the-- just like that. The guy was-- I mean, 25 bee stings in the back of his head and neck.

[00:29:21.76] JOE GALLOWAY: And he was taken off.

[00:29:24.19] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, he was hurting, too.

[00:29:25.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:29:26.38] TIMOTHY FELKER: But--

[00:29:27.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your second tour.

[00:29:30.99] TIMOTHY FELKER: The second tour was MACV J2. MACV headquarters in Tan Son Nhut Air Base. And I was the senior analyst for MR4, which was the Delta, Mekong Delta. And I'd been in the Highlands first tour, but at least I'd been with ARVN. And the guy I was replacing as senior analyst was a navy commander. I was a major at that time.

[00:29:58.56] He wasn't leaving for two weeks, so I had the advantage of going for two weeks down to the Delta. And I went to about nine provinces. And saw how they operated, talked to all kinds of people. And so I got a pretty good idea of what goes on down there.

[00:30:13.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, is this immediately after your first tour, or did you have a break?

[00:30:17.86] TIMOTHY FELKER: No, I came back, went to the advanced course, infantry. Nine months. Went to the six months area intelligence course for military intelligence. I branch transferred to MI. And I spent two years in a national-level Army collection unit that collected worldwide. And my area-- I was the Latin America branch chief. And so I was responsible for two field stations in Latin America, and one in Miami. And I did that for two years, then I went back to Vietnam.

[00:30:53.56] JOE GALLOWAY: So your second tour began in what year?

[00:30:57.91] TIMOTHY FELKER: '71

[00:30:58.93] JOE GALLOWAY: '71--

[00:30:59.68] TIMOTHY FELKER: April of 71.

[00:31:01.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Getting near the end of our involvement.

[00:31:03.46] TIMOTHY FELKER: Right. '71, '72. I left 17 days after the Easter Offensive, which was the big one. Tet and Easter.

[00:31:10.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Obviously, two very different tours. Tell me about the second one.

[00:31:16.69] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, the second tour was really-- I mean, first of all, we had to be at work at four o'clock in the morning, and could not leave until six at night. Six days a week. On Sunday, the briefing was moved up an hour, and we could go in at five and leave at five. So a 12-hour day on Sunday. But that was seven days a week.

[00:31:39.38] The only time we got any relief from the briefing was one day, and that was the day that the VC blew the ammunition dump in Saigon. And actually, that was the second time they did it. The first time they blew it, I was going home the next day. I had already signed out of MACV. We were out at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, where the ammo dump was. And we were all outside the barracks there, smoking and joking. I wasn't smoking, but that's another good story I'll tell you.

[00:32:16.81] But anyway, smoking and joking. And the ammunition dump went up like an atomic bomb. I swear. And the ground where we were-- and we were probably half mile away. The ground went up for 10 feet. I mean, the dirt just came straight up for 10 feet, and then the wind from the blast knocked everybody down, and dust all over the place.

[00:32:46.62] JOE GALLOWAY: This was as you were getting ready to go home?

[00:32:49.24] TIMOTHY FELKER: I went home that morning, four or five hours later, on a plane. But nobody was hurt, not where we were. But I mean, they did a job on that ammo dump, two times. Reminds me, in that tour, one of my little coups was tobacco. Alcohol-- I think I told you a little bit about alcohol. But I'll tell you a little bit, too, here. But tobacco-- when I first got to the battalion and had to go into a meeting at the province headquarters, the battalion commander said, oh, dai uy. He said, could you bring me some cigarettes? So I don't smoke, but anyway-- I didn't know what to say. I don't-- I don't think I flinched. I said, sure, dai uy, Captain, sure.

[00:33:34.12] So went to the province headquarters, bought a carton of cigarettes. U.S., which-- they had them there. And of course, he knew it. And I brought them back. And I handed them to the battalion commander. He said, oh, hey, let me pay. I said, no, dai uy, I couldn't do that. He never asked me again. The Vietnamese can't ask you for anything. That's their culture. And of course, he did, but this was not going to be a gift, in his mind. It was going to be-- and for me, the only way I could do it was a gift. Because it's illegal, and I just didn't want to get involved in it. I couldn't keep on doing this. So he never asked me again, ever.

[00:34:13.78] I smoked some of his cigarettes. I never had smoked in my life, but-- he had Turkish type cigarettes. And I never inhaled them, but I did smoke a few. He knew I didn't smoke, but-- he'd say, what are you doing for relax at night and all? And so he'd give me a cigarette. It wasn't too many times, but every week or so. And of course, we'd have a beer or a Japanese whisky. They said don't drink it, but I drank that. But then anything that they drank, I drank.

[00:34:44.14] So that's what we did. But I'd smoke a cigarette. But anyway, alcohol-- three or four times on those battalion-- not every time-- but on the battalion operations-- that reminds me of-- on the battalion operations, three or four times, dai uy-- the whole battalion is gone. Three companies. Or at least two-and-a-half companies would be gone for ten days or more. And so he said, dai uy, I think we need to have some beer. I said, OK, dai uy.

[00:35:12.82] So I called a cab. Said, ARVN soldiers coming over to the base camp there. He'll have some cases of beer. Bring him to us. They did-- whatever the guy on the ground wants, he gets. That reminds me of another story, too. So anyway, they-- and I said, now listen, dai uy, one beer per soldier, that's it. And as far as I know, that was a rigorous-- I mean, some soldiers maybe wouldn't drink a beer, but I think most all these guys would. First of all, it was clean, and you know, anyway--

[00:35:45.05] But it reminds me of another story in the same way. We were in a bad area. It was a dry stream bed, and a company, and it turned a corner. And the company commander was a lieutenant. Great guy. And he and I just came out of the bed, the stream, and up on the top. This high up. And walking that way. And a ten-foot python came out of a hole and it came right there. I just stood there. I had a .45. That lieutenant took out his .45, shot that snake right between the eyes. And of course-- OK, that wasn't the end of the story, though.

[00:36:37.51] See, when we got resupplied by the Cav, the warrant officer pilot dropped off some stuff. And I said, I want you to take this soldier and this snake to your base camp, and then

I'll have ARVN pick him up. He said, no, sir. I've never said this before. I'm giving you a direct order to take this soldier and that snake to your base camp, and I'll have them picked up. He said, yes, sir.

[00:37:14.92] The guy who's on the ground is in command. I didn't belong to the Cav, but he supported me, right. Never heard about it again, the snake was gone. That's a very valuable snake. It was that big. The skin, the meat. I mean--

[00:37:29.54] JOE GALLOWAY: They were going to sell him.

[00:37:31.64] TIMOTHY FELKER: Probably sell him.

[00:37:32.53] JOE GALLOWAY: For sure

[00:37:32.80] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. So anyway.

[00:37:35.45] JOE GALLOWAY: All right. So your second tour.

[00:37:38.22] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, MACV headquarters. It was four o'clock in the morning till six o'clock at night, like I said. We lived in a hotel right off the base. And we had a military taxi pick us up and take us home.

[00:37:53.54] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were working seven days a week.

[00:37:55.25] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, seven days a week. Every day. I never took R&R until the end.

[00:37:59.09] JOE GALLOWAY: You were basically preparing the briefing for the commander-

[00:38:02.60] TIMOTHY FELKER: Oh, yeah, I wrote the briefing every day. I had a seven-man team. My branch, MR4, had seven people. That's day and night. I mean there was totals--

[00:38:12.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Just for your region?

[00:38:13.55] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, just for my region. But they weren't all there. To cover the 24 hours, I had six people and me. So they would give me a whole bunch of articles and briefing items and all, when I got there at four in the morning. The briefing was six or six-thirty. And so I had a little time. That briefing went out just the way that I wrote it. That was the end, that was for MR4. But every day I heard the briefing for MR1, MR2, MR3, MR4. And of course, North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Every day for a year.

[00:38:51.29] So I felt like I had a pretty good understanding of how we operated, how the Vietnamese operated, and how that war was fought. And that was a big year. We saw the Easter Offensive coming, three, four, five months in advance. And as a matter of fact, that's one of my little coups. Every quarter, we had an infiltration briefing for the J2, and that was published. And

it was what the status was for forces in all of those seven areas at-- three months later-- at that time.

[00:39:36.05] And so at the end of my briefing, General Potts said to me, Major Felker, you mean to tell me there are more VC in the Delta today than there were three months ago? And you've killed more VC in the Delta, than all the rest of Vietnam put together, almost every day in the last three months? I said, yes, sir. It's the first time he heard that. And he waited about ten seconds. He said, OK. And that went out.

[00:40:10.95] They made a neat cartoon of me, and I had blood running off of my pointer and all this stuff, down to the floor. Because, I mean, we could see it that much in advance. This is four or five-- it was probably-- it had to have been either December or October. So I don't know what-- it was a long time before April Offensive. But anyway--

[00:40:42.11] But you know another story about General Potts. I'll never forget. One day we had a readout from a B-52 strike, and it was microphones. Readout from the microphones that were put in the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They'd put them in by airborne means. And then we used to follow-up with Special Forces, but they'd get ambushed, so we didn't do that anymore. But anyway, so they had this readout from the mics.

[00:41:13.82] And I can remember General Potts sitting there, his fist clenched, and tears came to his eyes. And he said, this is terrible. This is terrible. And it was the screams and the cries of people and animals. And it was unnerving. Loud and clear. And it really got to him. This guy was a World War II Soldier. So he was accepted to go to West Point. He died here. I went to his funeral. He died here in Arlington. Oh, now it's been ten years. Not ten years, but-- yeah, ten years, I'd say.

[00:42:01.38] But anyway, he was accepted to go to West Point in 1942 or something. And he said, I'm not going. He enlisted in the Army as a private, so he could be in World War II. And of course, ended up in Abrams' tank regiment. Tank battalion. Tank company, I suppose it was. I don't know what rank he was. And all, but he was with Abrams. He got a battlefield commission, he never went to West Point. He was with Abrams all those years, through major general and then lieutenant general.

[00:42:45.69] And then the last thing I want to say about that was, every Tuesday night, the seven of us senior analysts-- One, Two, Three, Four, North Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia-- we got a van from the headquarters, JUSPAO, and went downtown to Saigon and went to a neat restaurant. Different one every week. And so we did live one night a week. Tuesday night. And we spent probably 15 bucks each. I mean, ten, whatever. We went to the best restaurants.

[00:43:21.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Living large

[00:43:21.93] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah. So that was some pay. TIMOTHY FELKER: Actually, when I was with ARVN, I wrote a letter almost every day, and Ann did the same. You didn't get a letter every day, but they were all delivered. But the Australians delivered my mail to me in the field. An O-1E, or it was a single-engine aircraft. It would land and drop off mail to

me. And so I had personalized service out in the field. But anyway, letters are more intimate anyway.

[00:44:04.12] But when I was in Saigon, I still wrote. We'd sit on the-- and I didn't tell you that the restaurant-- the hotel we were in was the Massachusetts. It was like a four-story hotel, just off the base. And it had had a swimming pool on the top. Before I ever got there. And the VC ran a truck-- dump truck or something, into the bottom of the hotel lobby, blew it, and it blew down the whole damn thing, and the pool and everything all the way down. So they rebuilt the hotel.

[00:44:37.82] JOE GALLOWAY: No pool?

[00:44:38.75] TIMOTHY FELKER: No pool. But on the top deck was a deck. And so we'd sit up there at night and take a little food up there, and sit and have a beer and write a letter. And so that was our recreation. So twice. Christmas and another time, I think near my anniversary, I called home. You had to wait for hours to get to--

[00:45:02.07] JOE GALLOWAY: The MARS system.

[00:45:02.41] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, MARS. Ann didn't like that. I mean, it's nothing private about it. It's all, over. Hey. So I think I made-- I asked her. I said, how many times did I call you? She said, I think it was twice. I said, that's what I thought. I just asked her that yesterday. So, I mean, otherwise we wrote letters.

[00:45:21.24] Ann was not a big subscriber to the war, as Brian I'm sure would tell you. The thing is, we had a growing family. That was one of the great days when I was out in the field. Four months into my tour, third daughter-- third child was born. And we had six afterwards, like I told you. But we had a growing family. Ann kept me totally plugged in with the family. And the bigger family.

[00:45:52.03] But as far as other news, I never-- when I was in the field, I'd talk about all the neat little stories, but not the bad stuff. And of course, with just the jokes-- the Vietnamese jokes, the Soldiers-- that was always a neat day when the Soldiers would do their slapstick routines. These guys were amazing. They were just like Oliver and Hardy. And so that kind of thing. But honestly, we never trafficked in--

[00:46:32.21] TIMOTHY FELKER: I left Vietnam about three days early because I hadn't had R&R. So they let me out three or four days early because I had-- I guess it was three-- whatever it was. It was 17 days after Tet. After Easter Offensive. No, after Tet. After Tet. No, wait, first tour, I'm sorry. That was the second tour. The first tour, I had a Hawaiian R&R. And when I came home, I flew into Washington National. And of course, family met me, and my wife was living in Columbia with the kids at that time. And we just gorged ourselves on togetherness and food.

[00:47:20.74] I had an extra leave, I wasn't even charged for because I was going to Georgetown for my master's program in Russian Area Studies, the area part of it. And so, it seems to me I had six weeks leave. And I was only charged for maybe 20 days or 30 days that I the leave saved up.

And the rest of it was just stay home. And then of course, I had graduate school, and it was really-- and then I went to language school, I went to Garmisch for two years, for area studies in the language.

[00:47:52.45] So, I mean, I didn't have to worry about recovery from Vietnam. I had a built-in sanity here with-- that was-- actually, I'm mixed up, that's my second tour. But my first tour, I went to Fort Benning after we went down there. And then I went from Fort Benning to Fort Holabird. So again, I had these long courses. Nine months and six months.

[00:48:22.44] When I went to Fort Benning, afterwards, I had to inventory the museum. So I did that. But then-- before the class started. We had a nine month class. But anyway. No, I mean, my family always respected my decision to go. Because actually, my second tour, they offered me a tour in Korea. I said, I ain't going to Korea. I said, it's too cold, and not just that. I just said, you know, I didn't trust the Army to give me full credit for a Korea tour. I knew if I went back to Vietnam, I'd get full combat tour.

[00:48:59.71] So I said, send me back to Vietnam. They said, you want to go back to Vietnam? I said, yeah, I do. So they said, OK. So they sent me to-- and I didn't know where I was going, but they sent me to Saigon, and sent me to MR4 desk. So, I mean, it was a very interesting tour, to say the least.

[00:49:22.05] TIMOTHY FELKER: For me, it was a really deep personal people trip. I mean, all these personalities and all these situations. And, I mean, all these crises, and the cold beer once in a while. I mean, it was really-- and the equality of all of us. I'll never get over that. I mean, Americans, they don't know what E pluribus unum even means. I think, if it wasn't Obama, it was the attorney general said-- just had that on the television last week about, hey, it means from many, one. And of course, that's exactly what happens to you, like in Vietnam.

[00:50:25.29] And the basic equality of everybody. The human genius. I don't mean 157 IQ. I mean being able to deal with these different, totally new circumstances, and instantly. I mean, it made me want to stay in the Army, which I did.

[00:50:48.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you do a full career in the Army?

[00:50:50.79] TIMOTHY FELKER: Twenty five years.

[00:50:51.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Twenty five years. Did your experience in Vietnam and in the Army affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:51:01.41] TIMOTHY FELKER: Well, yeah. I mentioned what I would call-- I didn't know about PTSD then, but we had it in my team. And the thing about PTSD is, people react differently to different things. Some people just can't put it out of their mind that their next step is going to be on a mine. Or if you step on one and it blows off your leg or something, then you live with that for the rest of your life.

[00:51:33.96] These people need more help than we can ever give them in many ways. But, I mean, I think that the VA tries hard. I mean, but let's face it, the Lord makes all things whole, but not necessarily in this life. And people need help here. We can't just put it all off to heaven. Yeah, we're all going to heaven, but that's later.

[00:52:02.26] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:52:08.11] TIMOTHY FELKER: I really have always believed that Americans never understood how we can fight a war for seven or ten years, or however you want to count it, and not understand it at all. It's a little difficult to realize, but you just have to realize it. And today, people don't know anything about Vietnam. And of course, when we started, nobody knew where Vietnam was, including me. Back when I came in the Army in '62, I was more oriented on Europe. I had French in high school and college, and, well-- I heard of Vietnam, but it was not-- Asia was not really on my screen so much. But what was the question again?

[00:53:00.53] JOE GALLOWAY: How the war is remembered in our society.

[00:53:02.76] TIMOTHY FELKER: Oh, yeah. Well, I mean, it's just-- it's not remembered, because it was never learned. But I mean it's-- it's just a flash and--

[00:53:15.72] JOE GALLOWAY: And it's gone.

[00:53:16.59] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, it's gone.

[00:53:19.32] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on?

[00:53:24.72] TIMOTHY FELKER: Yeah, I like to say, first of all, loud and clear, that the Vietnamese really did want to be free. And I understood that when I got there on my first tour. And the thing was, when I came back after the first tour, and I had almost four years-- three-and-a-half years or something until the second tour. And I was reading all the papers and all in this country. Then I started to wonder myself if the Vietnamese were giving up. South Vietnamese.

[00:53:57.33] But of course, when I went back to Vietnam, I could see instantly. Hey, this is the same. And so it's amazing. Anyway, the biggest bottom line for Vietnam-- and I know, I have a son-in-law who is Vietnamese. I know his family very well. They've got seven kids, and we have parties with them all the time. But having served in Vietnam like I did, it's incredible forbearance and understanding that the Vietnamese people have as a people.

[00:54:38.75] Because here, they accept our support, with gratitude, for what-- we thought it was for the good of Vietnam to have this war. And of course, it wasn't. It was a mistake. Never should have done it. But again, Vietnam was a product of the fall of China. The domino principle. Falling of the dominoes. The McCarthy era, the witch hunts, the--

[00:55:19.55] JOE GALLOWAY: The Cold War

[00:55:20.25] TIMOTHY FELKER: The Cold War. We let China go. We never shipped one round of ammunition to the Guomindang, to Chiang Kai-shek's party, army. We never shipped one round of ammunition to them for the last 18 months of their fighting the Red Chinese. Because we said Chiang Kai-shek was crooked. Yeah, well, tell us about who's not crooked.

[00:55:53.26] And so really, it's-- with that legacy, nobody could sit back and let Vietnam go. We can't politically do it. So once the we reneged on our promise, our signature, at Versailles in 1954 with the French, that there would be free elections in Vietnam in 1958. And when we reneged on that, and the elections would not be held because we knew at that point that Ho Chi Minh would win. And he would have. So at that point, from '58 to whenever you want to start counting it-- '62 with advisers and all-- we inexorably, I would say, were moving to war because we didn't know what else to do.

[00:56:48.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Miserable excuse for a war.

[00:56:50.57] TIMOTHY FELKER: It's a miserable excuse. But I'd say that's what it is. And again, the forbearance of the Vietnamese-- any other country, certainly our country, would have an awful lot of hate to get over if we lost three million of our citizens in this war. It was not a colonial war. They knew we weren't colonialists. We were picking up from the French. Eisenhower, by the way wouldn't support the French in Dien Bien Phu. They called for American aircraft. Eisenhower said, no. But we wound up in Vietnam.

[00:57:30.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?

[00:57:33.89] TIMOTHY FELKER: It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say 25 times. I was a professional Soldier all my time. I wasn't going to be, I was going to come in for two years, but then I loved the Army, and I stayed. Vietnam solidified that. But when I got back from Vietnam, and they started talking about this memorial, I said, we need to wait on that, we don't need a memorial now. But I was wrong about that.

[00:58:07.76] And of course, hey, it's a stunning idea and a stunning memorial. I mean, it's the right one. And of course, I wasn't thinking of what kind of memorial it would be. I guess I was thinking of some Soldier on a horse or something. Not really. But anyway-- but I'll tell you, those three Soldiers and the nurse pavilion. And of course, the Wall. And every time we have house guests and family and friends from all over, we go down there, and the Lincoln Memorial.

[00:58:45.11] And we go at night. Almost invariably at night. I went to one celebration of the memorial during the day some years ago with my brother-in-law. He was here from Texas. And he wanted to go down for the daytime celebration. So we did. But otherwise, I've only been there at night. And it is a serene place. And the people who there are so reverent.

[00:59:09.07] TIMOTHY FELKER: Oh, no, I think I think it's a good idea. Yeah, I think it's a good idea. Because it's an education process, however great or small. And for people to realize that, hey, you know, war is not where it's at. It's not good. And we got to get away from it. Violence, guns in the wrong hands, it's just-- and people just can't control. And then you get on to a war, and you can't get off that track. And it's really--

[00:59:47.05] We need to come to realize what we're doing, what humanity is doing. It's just not- - everybody, the prayers here today. Just heard it. Just for five minutes before we left to come here. The prayers down in Dallas, for the policeman down there. Beautiful prayers, and how everybody is equal. And where God is the parent of all of us and all--

[01:00:16.09] I mean, they had the Protestants, the Catholics, the Jews, the Muslims, and others. I mean, ministers of all these faiths, all of them saying the same thing. And if our politicians-- if our leaders would just realize that that's what we should be feeding. And not this other stuff that's fictionary and misleading. And it really, it's-- we need--

[01:00:53.02] And Vietnam, people never ask me about it, and I really never tell them. I teach a course in ethics at the jail. And I have some combat stories that I tell them there. I don't beat them up on the Army and all that. But I let them know that I was a Soldier for 25 years, and then 21 years in Defense Intelligence. HUMINT. You know what HUMINT is. And so that's pretty deep stuff.

[01:01:25.09] But really, the simple stories tell so much. And I always work five or ten of them in eight classes in the jail. Somebody will say, well, did you ever see any snakes? I can tell you a few snake stories. But anyway, like I said, I don't beat them up-- but the principles are there. And so it's good to let people realize that this is not good.

[01:02:02.85] JOE GALLOWAY: This ain't good. Thank you, Mr. Felker. Appreciate you.

[01:02:06.51] TIMOTHY FELKER: Thank you, sir. Joe.

[01:02:07.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Appreciate you coming in.

[01:02:08.73] TIMOTHY FELKER: OK, well. Hey, I enjoyed thinking back.