

Fisk, Wayne USAF

[00:00:15.32] WAYNE FISK: I was born in Oregon, on the west coast of Oregon to a Forest Service father and a housewife mother. And my father did not go to war, Second World War-- did not participate in that. He was instead told that he would stay there on the coast of Oregon and serve basically as a-- close assembly, I guess-- would be an Australian coast watcher.

[00:00:42.41] He was in the Forest Service, and they wanted to keep people like him there on the Oregon coast so they could watch for those Japanese submarines that were coming over. And the Japanese were, one, having the submarines over there, are firing on the shore from the submarines and then launching those sea planes. And then also they had the balloons coming all the way from Japan.

[00:01:08.36] And so father was-- being in the Forest Service was stationed on those lookout towers. And he would tell me exploits of those days and then of our mighty Marines going from island to island in the South Pacific. And so I was imbued with just legacies of our great American heroes. And so there was no doubt that I would become-- if I were good enough, become a warrior for America. And so in 1966, as Vietnam is starting, I remember his words which were, son, you'll pay your dues for living under freedom in America. And so I didn't join the Marine Corps but joined the Air Force, and that was the start of it all.

[00:01:56.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Were you married when you deployed?

[00:01:59.81] WAYNE FISK: At that time? Yes, I was married at that time.

[00:02:07.39] JOE GALLOWAY: And your hometown?

[00:02:09.73] WAYNE FISK: I deployed from or joined the Air Force in Ketchikan, Alaska. And that was absolute freedom to get out of Ketchikan. It's an exciting place up there, but escaping Ketchikan through the Air Force and going to Vietnam, it was a win-win situation, I think.

[00:02:29.05] JOE GALLOWAY: When did you enlist?

[00:02:30.58] WAYNE FISK: I enlisted in March of 1966.

[00:02:34.15] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War before you decided to enter the military?

[00:02:40.87] WAYNE FISK: It was a duty. It was a responsibility. America was at war, and again, remembering my father's words that when America called, we were to go. And it was a matter of not waiting to be drafted but to be a volunteer. And so it was a matter of just stepping forward. America at war, we go. I go. And so I stepped into the Air Force.

[00:03:09.78] Basic training was at Lackland-- [COUGHS] excuse me-- Air Force Base in Texas. And it was very much a disappointment because being prepared to go into the Marine

Corps for months and months, Air Force was just something like six weeks. And so in a matter of just a blink of an eye, it was very much a summer camp in my mind. And so finished boot camp at Lackland Air Force Base and was immediately picked up for this thing called pararescue, and then the real training began, but it was only six weeks of Air Force boot camp training.

[00:03:48.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about the pararescue.

[00:03:50.88] WAYNE FISK: Pararescue was a whole different thing, sir. It was a-- this is really what was interesting. Selected for pararescue and then began a year long intensified training. And it was first to go to Fort Benning, Georgia for airborne training. That only lasted a couple of weeks, but it was amazing the transformation that went on there.

[00:04:12.78] Mother and father always said, son, you're not a bird, and they probably really tried to emphasize that one time when I was just a wee child and tried to play superman by jumping off the garage with some cape that I had devised and everything. And then here at Fort Benning, some Army sergeant is pushing me out of the airplane with another cape on my back but fortunately in the form of a parachute. And so that was eye opening.

[00:04:39.66] Then went down to Key West, Florida with the Navy SEALs UDT, and four weeks of training there, then Fairchild Air Force Base for survival, then medical training, and then finally, at Eglin Air Force Base finished training in February of '67. And it was a very good training, trained by some of the finest instructors in the Department of Defense. And that was the formulation of me, of what I was to become as far as a Special Operations warrior.

[00:05:14.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Everybody in training with you believed like you did?

[00:05:20.64] WAYNE FISK: We believed we were sincere in our belief about, one, the defense of America, what America was doing in Southeast Asia, our commitment towards the aggression of communism and stopping communism-- each of us was imbued with this fact that we were going to go over there and we were going to, probably individually, single-handedly stop communism-- and our commitment towards each other. Yes, I think each one of us. Each person on our team was a unique individual who had within himself that spirit. It was a select group of men, and it was imbued in us as the training went on.

[00:06:04.84] WAYNE FISK: We formed the 40th-- four-zero-- the 40th ARRS, Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service. And we deployed from Eglin Air Force Base in August of '67. The whole squadron went across to Southeast Asia-- specifically to Udorn, Thailand. So we deployed in August of--

[00:06:26.35] JOE GALLOWAY: By air?

[00:06:28.15] WAYNE FISK: We didn't take the aircraft over. The aircraft was shipped over by the Navy, but all of the admin folks, our maintenance people, and all the aircrew went over on, at that time, Boeing 707s. And we flew from San Francisco over to Bangkok and from Bangkok, Thailand at Don Mueang, then we went up to where our base was going to be at Udorn,

Thailand. Then our helicopters came over within six months-- six weeks later I think it was down at Sattahip, Thailand and then we were flown up there to Udorn. Yes.

[00:07:06.43] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your first impressions on arriving in Thailand?

[00:07:11.08] WAYNE FISK: Home. It was home. To be over there was fantastic. I think I felt maybe like Lord Jim in the book. It was-- he knew he was home. And the day that we arrived-- it was in the afternoon when we arrived at Don Mueang, and all of the members of the 40th ARRS, were being-- we were moving all of our gear to the Thai Air Force side of that airport, and we were using Thai military vehicles.

[00:07:50.21] And I remember in that afternoon setting sun, beautiful clear day, and seeing the Thais out there working the rice fields, and in the canals, and they were so friendly and waving at us and we waving at them. And it just felt like it was absolute home to the point of we were welcomed, and they wanted us there.

[00:08:16.37] The perception continued to persist over the next few days going into weeks that what we are doing there we were doing something for that nation and for the cause-- or not for the cause, I guess, the prevention of this communist hoard that's coming down from the north. WAYNE FISK: It would be to fly up north, and north was into Laos. We'd fly from Thailand up into Laos and stage at classified CIA sites.

[00:08:55.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Up in the northern end of Laos.

[00:08:57.54] WAYNE FISK: Northern part of Laos. And there in the daytime, we would stage from Lima sites, just dirt strips, up there carved out of the jungle. And then from the Lima sites, we would then follow the Air Force or Navy/Marine air strikes into North Vietnam. When the strikes would go in, we from our Lima sites would be on high alert standing by. And then when the strikes go in, then we were ready to go right into the strike site. Yes, in case anybody got shot down.

[00:09:31.46] Now, here's something kind of interesting. We were going to go with our lumbering, slow helicopters into an area that a fast mover, a jet just zipping through the sky just got himself shot down at. And so he goes out, he gets shot down, and we're going to go jung, jung, jung, jung in to pick him up. But that's what the job was. And our job was to get in there before the enemy had a chance to amass a huge enemy force to surround the guy and then shoot us down. So we tried to be as close to the action in Laos to get in there and get the guy and bring him back before he became a prisoner or worse.

[00:10:25.07] WAYNE FISK: When we were at Udorn-- and Udorn was a huge base. It was a F-4 base, fighter squadrons all around. And we had it absolutely plush, my gosh. It must have been very similar to what the 8th Air Force in the Second World War suffered because they were in England, and they were going to take the B-24s, their B-17s, go across over to Europe, go into Germany, drop their bombs and everything-- boom, boom, boom. And if they make it back out of that mess of flak and whatnot, then they come back to safe, secure England and being able to rest easy.

[00:10:59.78] Well, Udorn, Thailand, for us, was that we would go from Udorn into Laos. We'd go up to our staging sites, back to what we'd call the overnight site, which was Long Tieng, Laos, which would-- we would stay up there for three, four, five days. Go up to the daylight site. Always come back to the secure site for the RON, the rest overnight. Then after three or four days, maybe five days, we would go back to Udorn.

[00:11:27.44] And at Udorn, it was just absolutely secure. It must have been like London after going over on a daylight mission then coming back to London. And it was just absolutely secure. We were in the hands of security there. The Thais were just absolutely marvelous hosts. And so we did not have it like our brothers in arms over there in South Vietnam. We at the 40th had it very, very nice.

[00:11:53.03] I caved if Air Force made it-- the 8th Air Force made it back to England it was very nice. We did not suffer those terrible odds. It was-- there was not a bad guy behind every tree with a triple-A gun position up there where we were in Laos and in North Vietnam, and our skill of airmanship and our intelligence was absolutely superb.

[00:12:21.92] So we had our routes in to the shoot down site. We had our routes into the safe areas, and so we did not typically get shot down in the routes in. When we did have contested area, we would have to fight our way in, fight our way out of the immediate site where the survivor or the individual had been shot down. But it was nothing compared to our warriors of the second war.

[00:12:53.40] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your impressions of the Thai people initially and at the end?

[00:13:00.30] WAYNE FISK: Absolutely marvelous. The Thais were just fantastic. It was home for nearly five years for me in all of my tours over there, and Thailand was just-- to this day it's just warm fond memories of what I had there. They were generous people, caring people. And to this day, many of their customs are my wife's and my customs. They're just good warm memories.

[00:13:33.43] WAYNE FISK: Our associations were with just Americans. We did not interface with indigenous personnel or allied personnel. And our crew members were everything. We were a tight knit group of individuals. And everybody within the squadron and everybody on the base essentially there, we were one cohesive unit.

[00:14:00.86] Now, that's not to say that there were rivalry-- there were not rivalry amongst the squadrons and everything. There were fights and things like that. We were-- everyone is there for the purpose, a purpose. And that was our existence over there and the defeat of the enemy. But it was a group of individuals who were there with the common purpose of defeating the enemy and accomplishing the mission.

[00:14:29.83] For the air crew members, when one is in a helicopter and five people are on that chopper and you're-- one is up in the sky and that's a very small world. That's a whole universe of what goes on. It's like five people being in a foxhole. And the pulse beat of each individual is

felt by all of the other four people. The bonds become immensely tight, and each emotion is shared by the other crew member, bonds which exist today.

[00:15:04.72] And reunions, when we do get together, my gosh, the reunions-- the bonds are still as tight as can be. Many of our wives don't understand how those bonds survived to today and that it's a different type of bond and love that we experience and share. Those were acutely formed over there and exist to today.

[00:15:31.52] WAYNE FISK: I don't have a vivid memory of any specific mission. They've all pretty much come together to where a most vivid mission would be in the form of an emotion that predominates-- that would predominate my feelings. And the most predominating feeling is when we would bring home a person who had been shot down, bring him home or the team home, and that was absolute joy. My gosh, there is no-- the only thing I ever did over there was booze, and there was no higher high than something like that. That was the top of emotions.

[00:16:24.68] The bottom of that or the opposite of that would be when we would lose our target, our survivor, and he would be scarfed up by the bad guy, knowing that he was going to become a prisoner of war or worse. And there are worse things than becoming a prisoner of war if captured by say the Pathet Laotians, the PL, or the Viet Cong, or the Khmer Rouge, and that was absolute-- that would be absolute hell before death. So there would be worse things than becoming a prisoner of war.

[00:17:03.52] WAYNE FISK: Bringing them home.

[00:17:04.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Bringing them home.

[00:17:04.98] WAYNE FISK: Bringing them home. And my God, it was in the Plain of Jars, the PDJ, in Laos. And we were in a gunfight, and my gosh, we were just-- the close air support is right on us. We've got Sandy coming in, laying Willy Pete and a bunch of rockets right next to this hillside. And one stupid fellow opened up, and I've taken care of him. My ramp gun is blazing away back there. The flight engineer brings our survivor in. He comes in, the survivor comes in, and I'm still looking for more bad guys out of my gun position.

[00:17:42.81] And the survivor comes in. He rips back my flight helmet. And-- what the devil is going on here with you guy? And he says, I love you. Well, that's fine, but don't bother me right now because I'm looking for some more bad guys. And he says, my wife loves you. Now, it's a different story. What's her address I'm thinking to myself. We're going to keep you over here, and I'm going to go visit your wife and everything. My dog loves you. Fine, now, we're getting ridiculous and everything. He was so happy.

[00:18:10.05] And to think that-- and that's because he was in Pathet Lao country, and the PL, the Pathet Lao, were vicious little bastards. And we'd had people-- nobody came out of Laos.

[00:18:21.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody did.

[00:18:21.99] WAYNE FISK: No prisoners of war ever escaped, came out from the tiger cages, the bamboo cages of Laos. When the '73 Peace Accords and the release of the prisoners from Hanoi, there were no Americans who came out of the tiger cages.

[00:18:38.44] JOE GALLOWAY: And we knew there were 330 alive.

[00:18:41.43] WAYNE FISK: We knew they were there, didn't we? And nobody came out.

[00:18:44.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody went back for them either.

[00:18:46.65] WAYNE FISK: Nobody came out. Nobody went back. We lost them all. And so this guy coming up in here and he's ripping my flight helmet back, disturbing me for--

[00:18:55.29] JOE GALLOWAY: He has reason for joy.

[00:18:56.43] WAYNE FISK: Reason for joy, absolutely. And that was perhaps the best. And even to this day, I still get goosebumps thinking about that. That was absolutely marvelous.

[00:19:13.87] WAYNE FISK: My teammate and I wanted to get away from Thailand, and so we thought we'd take an R&R up to Hong Kong. Yeah, go to the big city and do what we needed to do-- what we wanted to do. I lasted 24 hours in Hong Kong. It was just too busy. The buildings were too high. And I'd been over there for about two years on this tour, and I just didn't feel comfortable. Too many people around me, and I lasted 24 hours, flew back to Bangkok to where the pace was easier. I knew I could speak Thai. I knew I was-- Bangkok-- Hong Kong was just so busy. And I felt much more relaxed, so I went back to my hotel at-- flew back to Bangkok, and it feels good here.

[00:19:59.80] And a couple of my teamies had come down from up north at Udorn, and they were surprised to see me there because I was supposed to be in Hong Kong with my teammate. And so one of the guys, they were talking together, and Mike, guy by the name of Mike, came over. And I was in the swimming pool, and said, hey, we got some bad news, had a bad mission up north.

[00:20:22.72] And I said, oh boy. What happened? He said the guy's name. We lost Joe Schmuckatelli. Could be Pete Putz or Dong-- Ding Donk. But we lost Joe Schmuckatelli. And it was such a shock because this individual was such a close teamie.

[00:20:44.11] And I looked up at him, and fortunately I was in water, so he didn't see the response right away and said, thanks man. Appreciate that. And screams underwater at the bottom of the swimming pool don't make it to the surface because that's exactly where I went. I went to the bottom of this swimming pool and just screamed. Had to come to the surface right away because I didn't have any more air in my lungs, but it was-- that was the worst day, I think, when we lost a guy by the name of Mike.

[00:21:27.02] WAYNE FISK: Son Tay was a marvelous effort to bring back POWs, our Americans who were being brutalized by the compassionate North Vietnamese. And I felt and do

feel that I was extremely fortunate and still am honored to have been selected for that effort. The Son Tay POW camp was on the outskirts of Hanoi. Four men-- or excuse me-- three other team members on my team at Udorn at the 40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Service, a squadron, and I were chosen. We were in country at that time. The squadron-- the rest of the assault force had been training over here at Eglin Air Force Base.

[00:22:17.66] The four of us were trained at-- I'm sorry, in combat duty in Southeast Asia. We were selected by our team chief because we had proven time in country, proven combat prowess that he thought was absolutely essential and was answering the specifications for our selection from in theater. And he knew we'd do a good job on that.

[00:22:45.66] So he called us in to a very secured area and sat us down-- the four of us. And we were basically at a table like this-- he at the head of the table. And two guys over here, both of them named John and John.

[00:23:00.41] And John and John sat over there, and Randy and I sat over on this side. And so the team chief says, I can't tell you what you're going to be volunteering for if you wish to volunteer, but it's an extremely dangerous mission, and we expect less than 50% of you to come back. Well, that's easy math. John and John, you're not coming back, but Randy and I are definitely coming back.

[00:23:26.36] And I mean, who would pass up a mission such as this? We didn't know what it was, but just the odds alone said you've got to volunteer for it. And so all four of us of course did. We then joined the assault force that trained over here in the States. Went up to Son Tay, and it was a marvelously executed mission. It was absolutely comm out. No communications between any of the aircraft as we went up. No satellite navigation. It was all celestial navigation and times.

[00:23:56.90] And they had practiced so hard and so thoroughly over here in the States that the only communication that one did hear on the hour plus trip up there with different points of navigation going up was something like this-- plus 2, minus 5. And those were plus 2 seconds ahead of where we should be at this particular point, or we're falling back nine seconds. And this was absolutely amazing. No satellites, no GPS-- it was just raw mathematics and navigation.

[00:24:36.47] And so when we hit Son Tay, we knew that we were going to be able to get some-- bring some-- 60--some Americans back. Unfortunately, the camp was empty. The bad guys didn't know that we were there, that we were coming. That is not the reason why the camp was empty. And we came empty-- back empty-handed. That was a very disappointing-- one of my worst moments, coming back without those fine men. But they-- and it was a failed mission on our part. In the final analysis, it failed.

[00:25:08.12] But to the prisoners of war who remained up there who we didn't bring back, they said that was the next best thing to coming back home because it forced the North Vietnamese to close down all of those POW camps on the outskirts of Hanoi and forced everybody to go into the Hanoi Hilton and overcrowded the Hanoi Hilton so badly that they could no longer starve,

and beat, and brutalize, and murder the prisoners of war anymore. And so the condition of the PO-- our American POWs vastly improved, and that was the next best thing to coming home.

[00:25:46.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the circumstances, the mission, and your role in the Mayaguez incident? You got to fire the last shots by an American in Southeast Asia.

[00:26:01.46] WAYNE FISK: Well, it's-- I don't know if it's a dubious distinction. The last one on the final stage going out-- the stagecoach going out of Dodge, but it-- somebody has to turn off the lights. It was a mission-- again, we're talking about guerrillas, guerrilla forces. And Saigon had already fallen, supposedly ending our involvement in Southeast Asia. But the Khmer Rouge, Pol Pot and his regime in Cambodia, which proved to be extremely murderous, had decided that forces of Pol Pot would go out onto the high seas off the shores of Cambodia and hijack a ship. And it happened to be the SS Mayaguez, a civilian-- American civilian ship.

[00:26:50.99] They hijacked that, brought it into Cambodian waters, and were going to hold the crew of the ship and the ship itself for ransom. President Ford finally got word of this and said this is not going to stand and organized an assault force. Now, the assault force was not prepared for anything like this. We had no contingency plan, and so our chopper force up in northeastern Thailand, two squadrons that-- we had been living side by side, but we never trained together. Another fighter force in part of Thailand could deliver F-4s and things like that. A couple of aviation units, in other words, could provide air support. But this was on an island outside of Cambodia, so we needed a naval force or some-- we just couldn't assault it by air.

[00:27:46.02] And so the Navy got involved. We were going to use security policeman as an assault force, but security policeman aren't trained for assaults. And so the Marines became involved. And so we had this hodgepodge of various DoD arms and services that were thrown together and this contingency--

[00:28:06.75] JOE GALLOWAY: A recipe for disaster.

[00:28:08.69] WAYNE FISK: Absolute disaster. And it was thrown together, and in a matter of hours we came up with this contingency that said by golly, this is viable, and we can do this. Unfortunately, we had this gap as far as intelligence. We had heard that there were 27 lightly armed fishermen holding-- fishermen holding these-- this crew. Well, we didn't know exactly where the crew was, but we think it's on the island of Koh Tang. Tang island, and Koh is the word for island.

[00:28:39.90] And so we thought that they were on Koh Tang-- only 27 lightly armed fishermen. Yeah, did those fishermen pilot that PT boat that hijacked the ship and everything? So we're not putting everything together, not connecting the proverbial dots. As it was when the island was assaulted by our forces, it was something like 200-plus heavily-armed veterans of the genocide in Cambodia. And so by the time we got there, the first wave just got decimated. The second wave went in, and it got all shot up.

[00:29:13.45] So my involvement began in the daytime around 10 o'clock and went in there, dropped off Marines, brought injured personnel, some of the Marines back out. Dropped them

off at U-Tapao, took more arms, ammunition, fuel, and things like that back out. As the day went on, more choppers are being shot up. We're slowly-- we got the ship back. We got the crew back.

[00:29:40.44] Now, it's a matter of disengaging the Marines before they're decimated by these "27 lightly-armed fishermen." And the Khmer Rouge are tenacious, mean little suckers out there. They've got heavy weapons like .50 cal's. They've got mortars. They've got a lot of forces there, and they're just really chewing up our Marines or trying to. We're trying to disengage these people in an orderly fashion.

[00:30:05.21] And as the day goes on, the sun is going down. Our choppers are getting shot up, and we're pulling in more and more people. When my bird becomes involved, I think we only have three birds left. Two of them are battle damaged pretty good. Ours is still good. And the last lift, we have something like 33 Marines on this last lift to go in.

[00:30:29.68] They're being forced into the water in a horseshoe shape. The island is out here. They're being forced into the water, horseshoe-shaped firepower going out, firepower from different positions in the jungle coming onto the Marines. We try to land into the jungle. LUU-2 parachute flares are popping off in the sky. They're cooking off underneath in the water. It's very difficult to find a accurate horizon.

[00:30:56.57] And so the pilot has vertigo. I'm on the ramp, and we start to go into the trees and yell, pull up, pull up. And so the pilot pulls up. He's just a first lieutenant. Never been in combat in that morning.

[00:31:07.24] His co-pilot is a second lieutenant, and I'm thinking, my God. What have I done? Why are you doing this to me? My last combat mission, and I've got a first lieutenant and a second lieutenant. My God! By the time we finished that mission, my first lieutenant and my second lieutenant were absolutely superb. Why? Because they listened, and we got through this well.

[00:31:30.76] After we almost crashed into the trees on that island and everything, the decision is made to turn on all of our lights on the helicopter making us a perfect target for the bad guys. We swing back around, turn on our landing lights, and finally land down into the horseshoe of where the Marines are at. I go out and don't want to grab the Marine and let him-- to tell him to come into the chopper. So I do the next hazardous thing, and that is to pop a couple rounds from my M4 GAU-15. Pop a couple of rounds and get his attention, and so then they start coming in, folding in very orderly.

[00:32:11.26] When the last man is in, I ask the captain and the gunny sergeant, is this everybody? And he says, yes. Let's get the hell out of here. Something isn't right, Joe. Something doesn't feel right in me. And so I am off intercom. I can't talk to the rest of the crew. So I get the attention of one of the flight engineers, and I said, hold the aircraft. I'm going out, OK? And he gets a thumbs up from my first lieutenant.

[00:32:40.45] So I go out, and as I go out, I immediately get-- and I get maybe 25 feet away from the helicopter. I immediately take fire from a couple of bad guy positions out there. And I'm thinking, oh, boy, here we go.

[00:32:54.75] So boom, boom, I fire a couple of rounds back and get up, and I don't know where I'm going, but something doesn't feel right. I had seen a body, a Marine body on-- in the cantonment area, the staging area with boxes and ammunition and where the Marines had been pinned down before. I wanted to make sure that that body wasn't going to be left behind.

[00:33:17.25] And so I go over there to get that body if it's still there. And taking fire from these two positions, and I would pop off a couple of rounds, and they would immediately come back to me. I'd get up, and run some more towards the body. They'd pop again. And just as I'm beginning to think, this is really getting to be kind of stinky. All of a sudden there's a massive red mass coming down shung, chung, chung, chung, chung, chung, chung, chung, chung, off to my right here, and it's Spectre.

[00:33:48.71] The AC-130 gunship is laying some 20 Mike Mike. Just a beautiful curtain of red hate steel. I mean, it's just coming down. It's a curtain of red and orange and yellow off over here. I'm on the deck. I don't have to be on the deck because Spectre's accuracy is so fine, but I'm on the deck anyway, and I'm just watching this beautiful stuff coming down. And it's like a vacation for a minute, or something like that. And then it stops, chuh. And I'm thinking, oh, my God. Don't stop. And it's all gone.

[00:34:18.52] And then I get up and dust myself off. It's like Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder in that movie Stir Crazy-- when they're in prison. We bad. We bad. And that's exactly the way I was feeling. Don't f- with me, man. I tell you what, I got Spectre up there. It's time to get down to business. So I go over there in that area where the body was at, and I don't see it. And then I thought, oh, my God. We might be booby trapped. This stuff might be booby trapped.

[00:34:42.98] So I run back to the chopper, get inside there, and wave to the flight engineer to get ready to wave to get the hell out of here. And right about that time, boom. Something goes past me like this and knocks my shoulder out and spins me 180 degrees, almost completely around. And I thought, oh, my God. Gooks inside, and they're going to blow us up.

[00:35:05.75] So as I'm spinning around I'm bringing my GAU-5 down like this, and they're round eyes, they're Marines. And they flop onto the floor. I look over here to the captain. What the hell? And he's, what the hell? These guys were pinned down by these two positions here, the bad guys, and they could not make it in. So again--

[00:35:29.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Were they the captain's boys?

[00:35:31.18] WAYNE FISK: Yes. They were two Marines who had been pinned down by the snipers-- the gun positions that were firing at me. When the bad guy positions came on to me, well then these guys could worm their way in to where the chopper was at or apparently break away from bad guys. And so that just indicated to me there might be more out there. So again,

hold the position. I go out, and this time I stayed right in the immediate vicinity of the helicopter and stayed out there just for a few more seconds. No activity.

[00:36:07.16] And again, the gut feeling said get the hell out of here. A green flare came up out of the jungle, an arc through there. And that was a signal for something, and that's enough for me to get the hell out. So got out, got onboard the helicopter and we di di maued. Yeah, that was the last. Lights out.

[00:36:34.10] JOE GALLOWAY: But some good Marines got left behind.

[00:36:40.10] WAYNE FISK: The controversy is that they were still operational. I don't know if they were operational. There was one individual who said that they were at exactly the position where we landed that helicopter. They were not there. And were they alive, I would dare say that I don't know. We're taking the word of-- in that one book that was published, and the author had interviewed one of the enemy.

[00:37:13.15] And we're taking the word of an enemy, and the enemy said that the guys, the three Marines, were executed and then buried out there. But to this date, the enemy has not provided the bodies. Now, why can't he do that? He said they were alive. I question that.

[00:37:36.46] The machine gun position of those three guys was exactly where we landed. They were not there. The gunny and the captain would not have left them back there. Yet indeed those two other Marines came in as the ramp is out there to my left or to my right. I don't know if they were alive. I think there might have been three dead. They might have been wiped out. I questioned whether they were alive when we left. And taking the word of a hardened Khmer Rouge, no. That's hard for me. And for the author to unilaterally and willingly accept that opinion or the word of an enemy, no. I don't.

[00:38:25.17] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your role and your experience with regards to Operation HOMECOMING in '73?

[00:38:33.51] WAYNE FISK: '73, HOMECOMING.

[00:38:35.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, the POWs coming back.

[00:38:41.44] WAYNE FISK: In San Francisco? Or what was that?

[00:38:43.96] JOE GALLOWAY: No. In the release from Hanoi. Did you have any part in that?

[00:38:48.34] WAYNE FISK: No part at all. I was assigned to the States. I came back home in '72. I was at Bermuda for Apollo program and reassigned to Southeast Asia in August of '69. I came back in March of '72, and I watched everything on television. It was something I wish I had been over there. I wish I had been at Clark to watch the POWs come back on American soil, but I had no participation in that at all.

[00:39:27.92] WAYNE FISK: Not very much at all, and that was because we were doing letters, and they were slow. It was just my father who I would have contacted. My mother had passed away, and he-- I think because he had not participated in the second war that he was merely a coast watcher, if you will, that he always had felt diminished that he hadn't done his duty for America. And he didn't know how to participate with me in Southeast Asia, especially as my tours continued, especially as I did more and more tours over there.

[00:40:07.46] I think he felt more and more isolated from me, and so we did not exchange a lot of letters. Certainly there was nothing from any other part of my family-- aunts, cousins, anything like that. There was no exchange. They felt I was probably one of these crazy Vietnam veterans who was one of these people who was over the edge by going back time after time.

[00:40:35.72] JOE GALLOWAY: What news did you get about the war and how?

[00:40:40.10] WAYNE FISK: Well, the news would come over AFVN or AFTN-- Armed Forces Vietnam or Thailand Network. And usually it was the raw news that was being broadcasted back here in the States. We could see many fallacies of it-- Walter Cronkite. And the fallacies were what we felt were gross inaccuracies, and we really didn't pay that much attention to it. We were involved in a situation over there that was very personal to us. When we were up north in Laos or-- well, in Laos. And we were personally involved.

[00:41:19.01] It wasn't a remote or esoteric thing, what we were doing there. We were with our indigenous people, and we saw direct results of the war. We didn't care about what the news was doing. The war was personal to us, and it was something that we were involved in our own sphere-- the red, white, and blue stood for-- flag of red, white, and blue stood for America.

[00:41:44.15] It also stood for Thailand, and we were not going to let Thailand go down, and that was one of the things that the North Vietnamese wanted, as that northeast sector of Thailand. And many of us had the very strong feeling, no, not on my watch. So it didn't affect us that much. We knew that a lot of it was very biased and twisted over there and bent, but we were in our own little news world, and that was good raw intelligence of Southeast Asia.

[00:42:16.19] WAYNE FISK: I came back-- I think it was in-- mercy. Probably '70, '71, one time. And I was-- the typical story-- came from San Francisco, or from Travis Air Force Base. I was told not to be in uniform from Travis Air Force Base as I went down to SFO, San Francisco International Airport. Don't be in uniform. I said bull hockey. This is my nation, my country, my uniform. I'm going to be in uniform.

[00:42:47.90] And it was late in the evening. I was going to Reno, Nevada, where my father lived, and I was in uniform, very sharp looking. I'm proud to be back, and I remember walking down this corridor, one of the causeways there, corridors. And there were these three-- and I'll call them-- there's no other word for them at that time because they were hippies. Long-haired, shaggy looking pieces of crap. Two guys and a gal along on a bench along this corridor. And I'm spit shined shoes and dress blue uniform.

[00:43:19.07] And I'm walking along there, and something tells me that, OK, this is-- oh, and the thing was that if there was any altercation in San Francisco at that time, it doesn't matter who's fault, but a military and hippie civilian altercation, it's automatically the military guy's fault, and he goes back to Travis Air Force Base, gets locked up, until he gets shipped back. So with that in mind, I know I'm going to have to be conscious because I do want to see my father there in Reno.

[00:43:49.34] And I'm watching these three people talk over here on this side as I'm walking by, and then my heels are click, click, click, click. Nobody else in the corridor-- click, click, click. And as I walk by, just about at my 9 o'clock position, there's one guy. And he spits, and he just misses my boot-- just misses it. And fresh out of combat, and this is just on 30-day leave.

[00:44:18.62] And I'm raw. I don't give a damn about-- I'm Attila the Hun. I'm the barbarian, the Neanderthal who drags his knuckles on the ground. And I-- and it's just that pause, just that pause that-- no, I want to see father rather than just going back to Travis. And it was just that pause for a second, and then I move on. And it was just that second, but they snickered.

[00:44:44.03] And I then go up to the ticket counter and get my ticket, and I'm steaming. I'm grinding my jaw and everything, but I do make it to Reno. I stay with him for about maybe five days, and I'm listening to the news. It was during the time of the "Laotian invasion," when Nixon has us going-- our forces going into Lam Son, was it? I don't know if it was the mission there.

[00:45:09.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. I made that operation.

[00:45:11.42] WAYNE FISK: Did you?

[00:45:12.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:45:12.53] WAYNE FISK: All right. You know then that there were caches all along that trail that we had to destroy in order for American forces to be withdrawn, and that was the whole purpose to go in there and destroy those caches that had been allowed to build up for years and years under Johnson's cease fire. And we had the caches there in Cambodia also. Well, that's Nixon's "invasion." Bull hockey. It was a strategy to destroy those caches so that we could get American forces out.

[00:45:42.98] And the news, civilian news-- ABC, NBC, CBS-- were just distorting the picture. I remember Cronkite at one time saying there was no indication across the Ho Chi Minh Trail that this was a bad spot. Bull hockey. I had been across this trail at one point, and you took your chances. You either go low and you get small arm and .50 cal, or you go high and you get .50 cal and triple-A, 27 and 23 and 37. And now this pus is telling me and telling the American people that there's nothing at this point in the Ho Chi Minh Trail, yet Nixon is going in there? Why? And I'm listening to this BS? Again, cut my time short with my father and go back to Bangkok.

[00:46:26.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Couldn't stand it anymore.

[00:46:27.80] WAYNE FISK: Couldn't stand it, no. No. And then when I came home or came back to the States in '72 after five years out of country, I came back and two years and six months on that tour, and it was rough. Two years-- this time was a change of duty assignment, until I could--

[00:46:50.49] JOE GALLOWAY: And you didn't home at all in that period?

[00:46:52.70] WAYNE FISK: Well, no. I was stationed in Utah at the pararescue training school, and that was a permanent change of station. So for two years, nine months I lived over here. Again, it was a situation where I don't think the United States was ready for me, and I wasn't ready for them. Certainly they were protesting me, and I was protesting them, but it came to the point where the inconsequential, the uninformed, and the uncaring-- I just don't care what they thought about me, and their opinions didn't matter. And so I went back to Southeast Asia in September, I think it was, of '74. Until they can get over their problems, I'll just stay over there in Southeast Asia, and yeah, and do work where I know I'm needed.

[00:47:39.57] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with your fellow veterans over the years?

[00:47:44.61] WAYNE FISK: Not much at all, Joe. Not much at all. I don't belong to organizations, veteran organizations, mainly because so many of the members of those organizations are not of my ilk. I don't need to go to organizations and listen to basically pussies cry about how hard they had it, how hard they still have it, and that they just can't get over it. I made a decision a long time ago that I wasn't going to have the garbage or the problems of my past influence my todays and my tomorrows.

[00:48:31.52] The garbage of the past stays garbage of the past. Or if that garbage does come forward, then I'm going to put that garbage into fertilizers of today and fertilizers of tomorrow, and that fertilizer is going to foster and promote-- grow good things. Not where the past has always got to be something negative for my todays and for my tomorrows.

[00:48:56.99] And there-- it just seems like we have so many guys from that era who are just simply locked in the past. And that kind of a person is not welcomed in my very tight circle. So I don't belong to those organizations. And it's unfortunate, but I want to be around warriors who are proud of what they did. They can handle what they did and proud to move on.

[00:49:25.52] JOE GALLOWAY: That would explain why you're here at the Jolly Greens.

[00:49:30.48] WAYNE FISK: Yes. Yeah, got a lot of proud warriors.

[00:49:36.71] JOE GALLOWAY: How did-- did you have difficulty readjusting to normal life after combat?

[00:49:44.56] WAYNE FISK: There was a period, yes. When I came back in '72, I had been over there for two and a half years. Two and a half years straight, and that was a long period of time-- for two and a half years. And so when I came back in March of '72, it was rough. Fourth of July

'72 was a very bad period. That 4th of July was rough, and just to see the sky rockets or-- yeah. The rockets going up and the celebration of what a typical 4th of July was to be when I was a child, it didn't mean the same.

[00:50:26.62] A skyrocket going up is a SA-2, surface to air missiles, 2 or 3. And the firecrackers just sounded too close to the real thing, and so it took a number of months to adjust, but that was a matter of just, again, putting the past in the past and realizing, my God, I can be slave to this past if I'm not careful, or I can just close the door to it. Take that 20 pounds of crap, lock it in a 10-pound capacity room, lock that up. Never open it up. Sure, some other stuff may seep out a little bit, but just stay away from it. And don't do anything to exacerbate the opening of that up again, and that's what I've done.

[00:51:15.13] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered today in our society?

[00:51:22.75] WAYNE FISK: I think-- by the protesters, I think that-- well, I hope they remember it, the protesters and those who felt that America was wrong, and they protested against that. I hope they remember it with shame-- personal shame and personal dishonor. For the silent majority, I think that-- I would hope they remember it for the mistake for them not speaking up. For those who went to war honorably and served over there, I hope they remember it with honor and pride for a job well done at a very difficult period of time. That they did not forsake what our forefathers had taught us of the Vietnam generation through World War I, World War II, Korea.

[00:52:15.85] And that was that when our nation calls, as our forefathers had taught us, that we go. We do what's right, and that is to defend the principles of America. I think it be remembered as a time of great American turmoil, of crappy political leadership, of an emerging political left-- some might say even a treasonous left as we see it today. Again, a time of great disappointment, when America let down its fighting men and women, terribly. And they allowed those American men and women who stood and went over there to Vietnam to come back in not dishonor, but they heaped dishonor onto that fighting force. They came back from Southeast Asia.

[00:53:18.78] They allowed them to come back in disgrace. But having realized that, America's men and women today are having the return of our American fighting forces from Southwest Asia come back as the heroes of-- and honor and pride and respect as American warriors should come back. And if there is anything to be learned that America has grown out of that or America has learned from Southeast Asia is do not let our American warriors come home as we did in Southeast Asia. Treat them as they did in the Second World War, and treat them as they are in Southwest Asia. That is the key.

[00:54:01.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have a feeling that the warmth of the welcome home today is partly out of guilt for not having extended a helping hand or a warm welcome to those coming back from Vietnam?

[00:54:18.75] WAYNE FISK: Yes. Now, whether it's guilt or just a lesson learned, but it's definitely that. Yes. Whether it was Southeast Asia and somebody thinking that it was the wrong

war or whatever it was, I don't believe that's it. I believe what it is is that they know that they were bamboozled or whatever it was. They were suckered into the treatment of Vietnam veterans. Veterans under whatever political calling, when they go to war-- warriors I should say. When they go to war are to be returned as honored warriors for the nation, and that's what we're seeing today in Southwest Asia, and that's the way warriors have got to be returned.

[00:55:09.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from that deployment, those deployments more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:55:20.52] WAYNE FISK: Absolutely. I think for me, Joe, the whole thing about Southeast Asia, it validated to me my purpose in life, and I think that my purpose in life was what my father had taught me when I was very young, and that was one of those things as far as paying my dues for being in America. And I paid those dues by being in my armed services. I just prayed as a young boy could pray in those days that I would be good enough to be in the armed forces of America. And of course, I could envision myself being a Marine.

[00:55:57.87] And the war in Southeast Asia validated me as far as being a warrior for America. Yeah, everything. It has taught me to be more positive. Every day I wake up, it's another day of freedom in America. After realizing and seeing what people over there-- even in Thailand. What they have in Vietnam, South Vietnam, what they were fighting for, and how the communism eventually overran them.

[00:56:27.32] The war has formed me of what I am today and what I believe in our country and believe in our people. There has been no loss. There was no diminishment. Vietnam did not diminish me by going over there. If anything, it made me stronger and made me the basis of who has the honor of sitting before you so that it didn't take away.

[00:56:51.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you.

[00:56:52.82] WAYNE FISK: Thank you, Joe. Appreciate it, very much.