

## **Gregson, Wallace USMC**

[00:00:15.10] JOE GALLOWAY: When and where were you born?

[00:00:17.69] WALLACE GREGSON: When was 31 March, 1946 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[00:00:22.90] JOE GALLOWAY: And who were your family members?

[00:00:25.38] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, my mother and father. I had an older brother, but he died before I was born. So it was just me.

[00:00:33.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Just an only child then.

[00:00:35.67] WALLACE GREGSON: As it turned out, yes.

[00:00:38.13] JOE GALLOWAY: And you consider that your hometown? You grew up there?

[00:00:45.83] WALLACE GREGSON: Yes. And I'm infected with a desire to follow the Steelers and all those things from--

[00:00:53.07] JOE GALLOWAY: All those things?

[00:00:53.51] WALLACE GREGSON: --normal from Pittsburgh, yeah.

[00:00:59.51] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you come to enter the military?

[00:01:02.79] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, between my sophomore and junior year in high school, my father suggested it would be a good idea if I went away to school. And I said, why? And he said, because I'd like to stay married to your mother. So I found myself at Valley Forge Military Academy. He'd already filled out the application. And so I spent two years in a military high school and then four years at the Naval Academy.

[00:01:30.97] JOE GALLOWAY: You were fated for the military.

[00:01:33.36] WALLACE GREGSON: Apparently, yes.

[00:01:35.31] JOE GALLOWAY: But you were a Naval Academy graduate.

[00:01:37.93] WALLACE GREGSON: 1968.

[00:01:39.34] JOE GALLOWAY: And commissioned immediately.

[00:01:41.29] WALLACE GREGSON: Correct.

[00:01:43.93] JOE GALLOWAY: '68 was a tough year in the war in Vietnam. It was a tough year back home here.

[00:01:53.51] WALLACE GREGSON: It certainly was. At the beginning of the war, when, I guess, the view was that this was going to be a two-medal one promotion short venture, they started a practice of putting names up in the central rotunda there in the place where everybody lives at Annapolis and where all the visitors go. And as the war went on, pretty soon the list of names grew from one board to two boards. And it went from being in the front where everybody - where you couldn't avoid seeing it--

[00:02:30.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Were these the names of KIAs?

[00:02:32.25] WALLACE GREGSON: KIAs. KIA graduates, yeah. Yeah, it went on. So by the time I graduated in 1968, it was, of course, immediately following the '68 Tet Offensive, which added to the casualty board quite a bit. And off we went.

[00:02:54.13] And in my Basic School class, 87% of those without an aviation guarantee were guaranteed they were going to get an infantry MOS. And the other 13% were warned that unless the commanders that we had in Vietnam at the time, the two division commanders and the MEF commander, unless they changed abruptly that their policy was regardless of your MOS, you were going to spend six months as a platoon commander.

[00:03:25.39] JOE GALLOWAY: You were going to be six months in the field.

[00:03:27.85] WALLACE GREGSON: Right. So infantry was a popular field, shall we say.

[00:03:36.77] JOE GALLOWAY: What year?

[00:03:37.56] WALLACE GREGSON: I arrived 1969.

[00:03:40.25] JOE GALLOWAY: '69, the absolute worst year in our whole 10 years of war there in terms of casualties. 3,000 a month KIA?

[00:03:54.33] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, I remember that we had-- by the time I'd gotten there or shortly after, we'd started talking about retrograding the 3rd Marine Division out of Vietnam. So that left us and the 1st Marine Division to defend the Da Nang vital area as it was termed.

[00:04:14.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. How old were you when you deployed?

[00:04:18.82] WALLACE GREGSON: 22.

[00:04:19.20] JOE GALLOWAY: 22. You were a very young lieutenant.

[00:04:23.41] WALLACE GREGSON: That's what my platoon sergeant kept saying.

[00:04:25.34] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of the Vietnam War?

[00:04:28.99] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, I remember shortly after I got there, listening to one of the older gentlemen with many stripes on his arm complaining about a current fight that was going on that when he was there in 1966. They were fighting for the same mountain. So it was pretty clear that we were not on any kind of march to Hanoi. But nevertheless, there is still quite a bit to do.

[00:05:04.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Did the training you had gotten to that point prepare you for what you faced when you landed in Vietnam?

[00:05:12.38] WALLACE GREGSON: In general, yes. In the specifics, the three different regiments had different terrain that they were fighting in. So things got pretty specialized. If, for example, you were in 5th Marines, you were down around the An Hoa area. It was generally a lot of flat land. Triple canopy jungle was not present there.

[00:05:39.41] But if you were in the 7th Marine Regiment, you were up in the mountains, in the Que Son mountains. If you're in the 1st Marine Regiment, you were pretty generally in-- if not in triple canopy jungle, you were in areas with a lot of vegetation and things. So there were minute gradations to the tactics, techniques, and procedures.

[00:06:04.69] JOE GALLOWAY: And your regiment was?

[00:06:06.79] WALLACE GREGSON: I was in an independent battalion, the 1st Reconnaissance Battalion.

[00:06:13.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Are we talking recon Marines here?

[00:06:15.93] WALLACE GREGSON: We are. So our business generally was out beyond the area that the regiments occupied and either--

[00:06:25.09] JOE GALLOWAY: You were Sneaky Pete-ing around the jungle.

[00:06:28.24] WALLACE GREGSON: Sneaky Pete-ing around the jungle with sometimes a variation that was called Stingray where we'd go out there and find some kind of fight to get mixed up in or start a fight. And then hope that the aviators--

[00:06:41.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody would come pull you out.

[00:06:42.76] WALLACE GREGSON: Right. The aviators could come out and pull us out before anything got too exciting.

[00:06:49.05] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your initial duties?

[00:06:51.63] WALLACE GREGSON: I was a platoon commander for nine months, 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company. And then for 45 days, I was a patient in a hospital in Guam. And then I came back and was a company executive officer for a short time. And then became the assistant

battalion operations officer. And then because we had no more majors or captains left in the battalion below the level of the executive officer, I became the battalion operations officer.

[00:07:24.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Still a lieutenant?

[00:07:26.16] WALLACE GREGSON: First lieutenant, yeah.

[00:07:29.09] JOE GALLOWAY: They were getting their money's worth out of you.

[00:07:31.58] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, either that or-- I prefer that definition, yeah.

[00:07:37.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Now did you only do the one tour?

[00:07:40.20] WALLACE GREGSON: I only did the one tour, yeah.

[00:07:46.97] JOE GALLOWAY: What responsibilities consumed most of your time besides pounding the jungle?

[00:07:55.42] WALLACE GREGSON: Not many others. There were not a lot of collateral duties. By that time, things had been fairly well established in the base camp and things. So it was pretty much an orientation on health and welfare of the Marines when I was still directly commanding a platoon or a company. And then after that, on staff duty, there was plenty of the regular duties, standing watch and handling things to eliminate any other competition for my time.

[00:08:31.18] JOE GALLOWAY: I know this is a broad question, but what were your living conditions like?

[00:08:36.63] WALLACE GREGSON: In the field, very rough because we had to carry everything with us for five days or so. And after you got done with water and ammunition, especially in the summer with carrying up to 16 canteens apiece, depending on where you're going, there was not a lot of room for things of comfort.

[00:09:01.69] JOE GALLOWAY: That's exactly right.

[00:09:03.19] WALLACE GREGSON: So we tried to go as light on those things as we could. In the rear, we had what the Marine Corps called sea huts, Southeast Asia huts. Generally, plywood with corrugated tin roofs that--

[00:09:16.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Wooden floors.

[00:09:17.41] WALLACE GREGSON: Wooden floors, elevated to keep the varmints, most of them anyway, out of the--

[00:09:22.73] JOE GALLOWAY: And the mud away.

[00:09:23.84] WALLACE GREGSON: Yes. So life in the rear was actually pretty good with--

[00:09:28.73] JOE GALLOWAY: You just didn't see it very often.

[00:09:31.77] WALLACE GREGSON: No. It was quite a collection. I remember when I got my platoon, the senior Marine present was a lance corporal. And there were 15 or so Marines in a platoon. A lot of it were normal transfers out without any transfers coming in. It wasn't because of any massive casualties or anything.

[00:10:01.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Not because of casualties.

[00:10:02.42] WALLACE GREGSON: Right. And so I thought, well, this is interesting. They hadn't mentioned that--

[00:10:06.39] JOE GALLOWAY: You were really in charge of a reinforced squad.

[00:10:10.43] WALLACE GREGSON: Right. And a marvelous lance corporal. And the next day, we got about 36 replacements. And I went down to take the morning report again. And the same lance corporal is still the senior Marine in the platoon. Everybody else is privates or PFCs.

[00:10:24.84] And he smartly salutes me and said, the platoon is formed. And I looked, and he's got a couple of knuckles that are really bruised. And he's got a mark underneath his eye.

[00:10:35.12] JOE GALLOWAY: He'd sorted them out already.

[00:10:36.87] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, trying to keep a straight face, I said, is everything all right? And he said, it is now, sir. So OK, I understand this. The collection of Marines that we had for the vast majority of the time-- by the way, I got him promoted to corporal and then to sergeant meritoriously, I figured that was the least I could do

[00:11:00.03] --were a mix of folks from hillbillies from Appalachia to inner city guys, and all perfectly attuned to the effort. One of my attempts at demonstrating leadership and concern for the troops was interesting. We were on an outpost, and I was talking to a Lance Corporal Lopez. And I asked Corporal Lopez, how did you get in the Marine Corps?

[00:11:34.50] And he said, well, I was going to City College in New York. And I said I was going to drop out. And my friend said, don't drop out, you'll get drafted. I dropped out, and I got drafted. And my friend said, well, when you get down to the draft facility, don't get in the line for the Marines.

[00:11:50.87] So I went down to the draft facility. And they pulled me out of the long line and put me in a short line. So I end up in the Marines. And I go back to my friends, and they say, well, just don't get into the infantry after boot camp. And they said-- you know where this ends?

[00:12:05.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I know where this is ending.

[00:12:06.42] WALLACE GREGSON: And they said, well, as long as you don't end up in recon. And then they said, well, as long as you don't end up a radioman. And you make me a radioman, and you expect me to be happy about it. OK, I got it. So they were a challenging bunch. And it wasn't a situation that required strict Simon Legree, do-it-my-way leadership, but I found that--

[00:12:35.16] JOE GALLOWAY: But you were recon Marines, but you were just getting straight replacements who hadn't been trained for that?

[00:12:43.69] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, there were two types of Marine reconnaissance in Vietnam. There were the guys from Force Reconnaissance, who had all the airborne training and other stuff and were pretty much a--

[00:13:00.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Special Ops force?

[00:13:01.85] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, at least they thought they were special.

[00:13:05.10] JOE GALLOWAY: They thought they were anyway.

[00:13:06.14] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, and then there was Recon Battalion, which belonged to the division. Force Recon belonged to the division's boss, the MEF commander, which was doing ground reconnaissance on behalf of the ground element commander, the division commander. So there was not a long degree of specialized training.

[00:13:28.15] However, we did make sure that every officer we had was thoroughly schooled in how to call for artillery fire, how to call for and direct close air support both of the fixed wing and rotary wing variety. And then we had definite training programs both simulated and live fire for any of the corporals or sergeants that we were going to make patrol leaders so that they were competent to call for supporting arms and all those things.

[00:13:56.54] JOE GALLOWAY: So at least they could get themselves out of whatever trouble they got into.

[00:14:00.64] WALLACE GREGSON: Right. Which is why we were also very careful of who we made the radioman, back to my favorite Corporal Lopez again.

[00:14:07.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Back to Mr. Lopez.

[00:14:08.00] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, because those were the guys that then graduated up to be patrol leaders.

[00:14:15.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Sounds like fun.

[00:14:19.62] WALLACE GREGSON: It was under the circumstances.

[00:14:22.40] JOE GALLOWAY: '68, '69, is your time frame?

[00:14:26.34] WALLACE GREGSON: '69, '70.

[00:14:27.21] JOE GALLOWAY: '69, '70.

[00:14:28.31] WALLACE GREGSON: 18 months.

[00:14:29.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Serious social tensions and turmoil at home, did any of that translate over to where you operated?

[00:14:40.00] WALLACE GREGSON: It did, but generally not with a battalion like ours where we had the ability to selectively move people on.

[00:14:54.97] JOE GALLOWAY: If they didn't cut it.

[00:14:56.97] WALLACE GREGSON: Yes. It's one thing to operate in a somewhat larger unit even like a platoon with 20, 30, 40 people. It's another thing to be operating with six or eight people for five days at a time where a certain reliability is required.

[00:15:18.48] JOE GALLOWAY: If you don't trust two of them, what do you do?

[00:15:21.19] WALLACE GREGSON: It's a little too late once the helicopter drops you off in the bush.

[00:15:25.28] JOE GALLOWAY: That's true. Other than moving them along, what did you do to deal with them?

[00:15:31.73] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, I didn't really have that problem. One thing we were blessed with was that-- the old adage, the officers come and go, but they don't hurt the regiment. We had a cadre of really good first sergeants and company gunnery sergeants who were actually very terrific. And I took a lot of leadership lessons from these guys.

[00:16:01.21] One of whom-- I got to tell this story. First Sergeant Richard C. Tasch was our company first sergeant. And he was absolutely adamant that after every patrol, the lieutenant had to sit down and write up something on everybody that was on the patrol, something laudatory hopefully.

[00:16:23.53] And I asked him one time, why do you want all this stuff? Because, Lieutenant, when you get killed or get medevacked, I want to have some kind of file to write up and after an end-of-tour award for these people who deserve it. OK, I got it. Thank you very much. I'm really glad I asked.

[00:16:43.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Smart, though.

[00:16:44.51] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah. And he led the company by setting the standard. It really mattered less who the company commander was because the company commander didn't

go to the field. The platoon commanders went to the field, and our squad leaders went to the field, leading patrols.

[00:17:03.76] There was also another great line that's worthy of Corporal Radar O'Reilly of M\*A\*S\*H. I came back from one patrol. And it was in the hot weather, and everybody was exhausted. And company driver comes down to the LZ. And he's got a trailer on the Jeep filled with ice and soda and beer. And he looks at me and says, Lieutenant, you must be all right. The first sergeant says you're OK. OK, I'll take that as a compliment then.

[00:17:35.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Absolutely. Do you have any specific memories of the popular culture at that time, music, books, movies? I don't know how much music you got to listen to.

[00:17:48.13] WALLACE GREGSON: Two years in a boys high school, four years in an all-male college, nine months at the Basic School, which was essentially all-male, then, no, I don't remember culture.

[00:17:57.11] JOE GALLOWAY: You don't remember any culture.

[00:17:58.60] WALLACE GREGSON: No, except the Philippine USO shows that used to come in and sing "We Gotta Get Out of This Place" in--

[00:18:07.18] JOE GALLOWAY: In bad English.

[00:18:08.62] WALLACE GREGSON: --bad English, right, yeah.

[00:18:12.64] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation and off-duty time if you had any?

[00:18:19.15] WALLACE GREGSON: I don't really remember much other than an R & R but--

[00:18:27.01] JOE GALLOWAY: That's it.

[00:18:28.01] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah.

[00:18:33.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Your whole tour was in northern I Corps?

[00:18:38.48] WALLACE GREGSON: Correct. Quang Tri province.

[00:18:40.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Quang Tri province. Know it well.

[00:18:42.61] WALLACE GREGSON: 101st Airborne was to our north and the Americal was to our south.

[00:18:46.78] JOE GALLOWAY: And the last trip I made to Vietnam in 2005 was to Quang Tri province to look at the mine clearing and ordnance clearing operations



[00:18:58.10] WALLACE GREGSON: And the Vietnamese still take really numerous casualties every year.

[00:19:03.50] JOE GALLOWAY: They lose 3,000, 4,000 a year, mostly farmers and little kids.

[00:19:09.08] WALLACE GREGSON: Little children, yeah.

[00:19:11.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of the leadership in your outfit?

[00:19:17.27] WALLACE GREGSON: Company leadership was generally good. Battalion leadership was good. Had 1, 2, 3 battalion commanders each with wildly different leadership styles, but it all worked.

[00:19:33.66] JOE GALLOWAY: All in one year?

[00:19:35.57] WALLACE GREGSON: All in 18 months.

[00:19:36.79] JOE GALLOWAY: 18 months. All wildly different, but all more or less good?

[00:19:45.31] WALLACE GREGSON: Yes.

[00:19:45.71] JOE GALLOWAY: In their own way?

[00:19:46.67] WALLACE GREGSON: In their own way, yeah.

[00:19:52.79] JOE GALLOWAY: And you just did that one 18-month tour?

[00:19:57.52] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah.

[00:19:58.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Or two tours of 18 months.

[00:20:01.40] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, one tour of 18 months. And my family was upset with me enough for volunteering for an extra six months, but I didn't want to test the homefront much more.

[00:20:13.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Much more than that. Were you married by then?

[00:20:15.37] WALLACE GREGSON: No, no.

[00:20:16.39] JOE GALLOWAY: So you're dealing with your mom and dad. And they were not happy.

[00:20:20.65] WALLACE GREGSON: Right.

[00:20:22.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant actions that you participated in? Or better yet, could you describe for the viewers of this interview what you did on a typical operation or mission?

[00:20:46.44] WALLACE GREGSON: First bit of excitement was trying to get into one of the landing zones where the helicopter would fit. And of course, these were all very well marked. And we've been fighting in the area for-- 1969, 1965, at least four years, five years.

[00:21:06.15] JOE GALLOWAY: So the enemy knew there were limited places you could land.

[00:21:09.67] WALLACE GREGSON: Absolutely. So if he wanted to keep you out, then the first adventure was--

[00:21:16.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Getting in.

[00:21:16.90] WALLACE GREGSON: --getting in. There were some that held that we ought to be able to force our way in. My view was we're only eight people. If we've found the enemy because he's shooting at the helicopter, my job here is done. Take me back.

[00:21:38.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Drop a daisy cutter on it.

[00:21:40.56] WALLACE GREGSON: Right. We went through a lot of coordination, which the usual thing that you're well familiar with. That the simplest things are difficult to get the helicopters comfortable with breaking left or breaking right because we wanted to bring all the artillery within range down on the area around the LZ. And that was harder than it looked.

[00:22:09.25] Second adventure was after you got into the LZ, wait a while, see if somebody is going to come to check you out. And rather than run off into the jungle, I always thought it's better-- OK, if somebody's going to come looking for us, I want to be next to the LZ. I don't want to have to fight my way back to it.

[00:22:29.29] Other times, things were pretty boring and prosaic, mapping out trails, describing the condition, looking for things that NVA or VC may have left behind that would give some clue as to their discipline. So generally, then we'd have five days to go around the area we were supposed to patrol and pick up all the information we could about terrain, about trails, about anything else that might be indicative of whether the enemy was gathering there or where he was moving, et cetera.

[00:23:08.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Your purpose was not to go out there and get in a fight.

[00:23:11.94] WALLACE GREGSON: Not under the leadership we had then, no. By then, I mean when General McCutcheon was the Amphibious Force commander. We got into enough fights without looking for it. And generally, you're starting from a disadvantage because you've walked up on somebody or you've stumbled into somebody. And if you've only got eight guys, it's almost a lead pipe cinch that--

[00:23:36.64] JOE GALLOWAY: They got more.

[00:23:37.44] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, like I said, if you run into somebody, that's either their point element or their flanker. And there's a bunch of other guys around. Oftentimes, I think that the enemy commander had different orders also. Rather than pursuing us and bringing in all the artillery and aircraft that we could bring to bear, which as you know from Ia Drang, would generate casualties on the enemy side, that they'd just sort of withdraw. And you'd just get this eerie feeling that, OK, I know they're watching me.

[00:24:09.42] JOE GALLOWAY: They're watching me. What do I do now? Once you have made that encounter and they've backed away, what's your next move?

[00:24:20.34] WALLACE GREGSON: If I was on the patrol, my next move would be to call battalion operations and try and be persuasive that, OK, my job here is done.

[00:24:31.24] JOE GALLOWAY: We're compromised. Get us out of here.

[00:24:33.47] WALLACE GREGSON: Check. Oftentimes, the battalion operations officer would have more courage back there in the rear than those of us deployed would.

[00:24:43.37] JOE GALLOWAY: They always do.

[00:24:46.31] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, and it would be--

[00:24:47.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Continue, Lieutenant.

[00:24:49.58] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, something like that. Move 500 meters to your north. 500 meters to my north is a cliff. Well, it doesn't show that on the map. I can't help that, sir. But that type of thing.

[00:25:07.26] There were times when we did things that didn't make sense to the guys in the field. One was-- and this was an episode after I was in the battalion 3 shop, where we had team after team after team going into the Que Son mountains over the course of a day and immediately making contact and all sorts of fighting and everything. And we'd pull them out. And the battalion commander was adamant we'd put another team in in a different spot and back and forth.

[00:25:43.84] Come to find out much later that what was going on at the time was General Binh, the NVA three-star was moving from his forward headquarters to his rear headquarters. And we bagged a bunch of his staff including his paymaster, as we found out later, but we never got General Binh. So that was--

[00:26:08.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Still, I would think his staffers would be of use.

[00:26:10.86] WALLACE GREGSON: Oh, very much so. The various folks that were concerned with interrogating prisoners were very happy with it. So I think--

[00:26:20.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Gleeful.

[00:26:21.78] WALLACE GREGSON: But it was not only a workout for the battalion. It was a workout for the aviators. And in many ways, their job was more stressful. A CH-46 is not a clandestine weapon.

[00:26:36.27] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:26:36.75] WALLACE GREGSON: And it's generally not carrying any armor. And it reacts very badly to holes that Boeing didn't put there. But the pilots--

[00:26:49.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you ever have those rope pickups?

[00:26:52.19] WALLACE GREGSON: We did that, which is--

[00:26:55.92] JOE GALLOWAY: That's always an exciting ride home.

[00:26:57.64] WALLACE GREGSON: That's high adventure. And I mean, pick your metaphor. You're hanging below the helicopter with people that are happy to take a shot at you on it. So you're the pinata or you're the-- it's hard to explain the survival rate of the aircraft and the crews.

[00:27:29.22] We had a couple of incidents where the enemy managed to bag a helicopter. And it was always mass casualties. But for the 18 months that I was there, we were remarkably fortunate. We lost a battalion commander shortly after I left. That was Lieutenant Colonel Bill Leftwich, for whom the Leftwich Award at the Basic School is named for now. But that was an accident on extraction.

[00:28:02.94] Leading up to the Tet Offensive of 1970, we were getting all sorts of activity done in the Que Son mountains and very, very little activity in a place up to the north that we called Elephant Valley. And I was in the operations shop at this point. And part of my duties were to go up to the division G2 every Sunday along with the intel officer.

[00:28:32.43] And the intel officer who was an enlisted Marine with a temporary commission, who actually grew up in the intel field, so he was a real pro named Rodney Cook. Wonderful man. And I would go up there and Rodney would describe what we did the previous week, and I would describe what we're going to do the next week. And the battalion commander would sit there without saying a word and leave the two of us up there to dance in front of the division G2.

[00:28:59.76] For two weeks in a row, the division G2 would ask at the end of Rodney's brief, what does it all mean, Rod? And Rod would parrot back Marine Corps doctrine saying, well, as you know, Colonel, the lowest echelon in the Marine Corps that can do intelligence analysis is your level, we're just mere collectors, et cetera. And the third week, we went up there and got the same question.

[00:29:27.42] And let me back up a little bit that despite the fact that we had no live sightings or any fighting that we could generate in this area that we called Elephant Valley, our most

experienced patrol leaders would come back and say, I can't prove it, but I'm sure they were watching us. The trails are exceptionally well groomed. The harbor sites have not a bit of trash left in them. Somebody is up there, and somebody is really good, but we can't grab them.

[00:29:54.96] And this was completely anecdotal, of course, which was not something accepted by the division G2. So anyway, the third week that we're up there in a row and the division G2 says, what does it all mean, Rod? He flips to a little tab in a spiral bound notebook and literally starts with Sun Tzu and his philosophy.

[00:30:14.79] And in about five quick minutes leads up to, make a big noise in the south and come from the north. Therefore, sir, your attack from Tet this year is going to come out of Elephant Valley. And he was roundly boo hooed. Oh, you're crazy. Won't happen.

[00:30:33.20] JOE GALLOWAY: And it did happen.

[00:30:33.93] WALLACE GREGSON: Before the next Sunday's brief, they split the seam between two of our regiments where-- the coordination is never perfect. Got all the way up to the division CP and were stopped by the division band as provisional rifle battalion.

[00:30:53.16] JOE GALLOWAY: It's too bad they didn't get the G2.

[00:30:58.16] WALLACE GREGSON: He was not a bad guy. But I learned something from Captain Rodney Cook there about the value of actually studying that stuff. He made a connection during his five minutes between what Sun Tzu was teaching and what Vo Nguyen Giap had learned and displayed during the campaign against the French et cetera, et cetera. And he had all these things lined up to say that-- and we can't find anybody up north, and that's why it's going to come out of the north.

[00:31:26.91] JOE GALLOWAY: It's coming out of the north.

[00:31:28.46] WALLACE GREGSON: It was perfect.

[00:31:29.43] JOE GALLOWAY: And did.

[00:31:30.12] WALLACE GREGSON: And it did. They never questioned him again. It was when I was the executive officer of Delta Company. We had just dispatched a platoon from Delta Company to go up and relieve another platoon manning one of our permanent outposts. It was Hill 119 that served two purposes, an observation post and also more importantly, a radio relay for everybody out in the field.

[00:32:04.74] And the lieutenant was fairly new. And I'd warned him that I know what they taught in the Basic School. There is no rationale-- reason to patrol outside the wire because you can see everything you need to see from the top of the hill. And the NVA and the VC have the whole place littered with booby traps, and you're not going to find those. So don't go off the hill and set them off with your feet or your arms.

[00:32:34.54] The battalion commander went up there for an inspection tour, asked the lieutenant, what's over there? Sir, I don't know. Lieutenant Gregson told me never to go over there. Well, let's go over there.

[00:32:43.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Boom.

[00:32:44.99] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah. In the patrol, was the lieutenant walking point, which officers don't make good point men. It was the battalion commander second. And it was two guys who should have known better, first sergeant in a gunny, walking a deep third and fourth.

[00:33:02.19] And the lieutenant set off a booby trap. Was very severely wounded. The battalion commander was wounded, not quite so severely. And we had to medevac both of them.

[00:33:12.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You were wounded?

[00:33:14.12] WALLACE GREGSON: I was.

[00:33:15.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that day and about your hospital stay.

[00:33:23.42] WALLACE GREGSON: The mission was to go check out this place where they gave me a pretty accurate six-digit grid coordinate to see if there was an ammo cache or a food cache there. And at the time, I didn't think to ask if you already know it's an ammo or food cache--

[00:33:43.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Why are you asking me.

[00:33:44.68] WALLACE GREGSON: --why are you asking me. Anyway, we got close to finding that place. And it was a point-on-point engagement. I don't think the other guys knew we were there. We certainly didn't know they were there. A short fight ensued. And only one person on our side was injured. And that was me.

[00:34:09.57] And it was a very fortunate wound, if you will, if you're going to be wounded. It was a gunshot right between my Achilles tendon and my ankle bone. It didn't do anything of any damage other than a hole.

[00:34:26.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Other than punch a hole where you didn't have one.

[00:34:27.77] WALLACE GREGSON: Right.

[00:34:28.80] JOE GALLOWAY: And you got shipped off to Guam?

[00:34:31.32] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, I did. After being asked by the medical people where I would like to go, Japan or Guam, I selected Japan. I got to Guam.

[00:34:42.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course.

[00:34:44.21] WALLACE GREGSON: One example of the small Marine Corps. On the helicopter ride on the way out, I asked the crew chief who was flying the airplane. And he said Lieutenant Burgess and Lieutenant Harris. And the two previous times that I'd flown with these guys, one of them was wounded. Lieutenant Burgess on one flight. Lieutenant Harris on the other flight.

[00:35:07.50] So I quick scribbled a note that I was the guy in the back and had the crew chief take it up there. And he came back with a note from the pilot saying, OK, new ground rules. We are never flying together again in this war.

[00:35:22.17] I go medevacked to the *Comfort*. Stayed on the *Comfort* for a while, then to the hospital in Da Nang and then the long flight to Guam. And got a 45-day stay, all told on the medevac.

[00:35:38.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Clean sheets, All of that.

[00:35:41.51] WALLACE GREGSON: Clean sheets. And I was ambulatory, so it was pretty much an extended R &R on Guam. I got out early and got back through Okinawa and back to Vietnam in time to see the Bob Hope show from about 500 meters away with a transistor radio to hear what was going on.

[00:36:10.44] And I'm thinking to myself, why in the hell do people like to do this? This is nuts. He's not that good, by the way. I was still there when President Nixon brought in Vietnamization.

[00:36:31.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:36:32.79] WALLACE GREGSON: Remember that?

[00:36:33.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:36:35.24] WALLACE GREGSON: We thought we'd be exempt, but we weren't going to be exempt. So it was decided at headquarters, well above my pay grade that we would start going out on patrols with four American Marines, four Korean marines. OK, eight guys, two languages. Yeah, very interesting.

[00:37:00.79] We discovered that we had some doctrinal differences. Usually, the Americans in the recon battalion, if you're out trying to sneak through the woods and you hear a gunshot especially close aboard, you go prone real quickly. We discovered that we'd go prone real quickly, and then you'd have to reach up and grab the Koreans who went running by you--

[00:37:22.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Because he's running.

[00:37:22.56] WALLACE GREGSON: --to charge somebody. No, we're recon. We don't do that. This led to-- after a period of time, then we started going out with Vietnamese marines.

[00:37:33.97] JOE GALLOWAY: A little better.

[00:37:35.49] WALLACE GREGSON: Well, yeah, a little better. There's nothing wrong with the Korean marines after you tried to get it through that there's nobody behind you. Don't go charging. Guaranteed, there's more of them than there are of us. The Vietnamese were fine.

[00:37:56.29] But still the big challenge. It's hard enough with eight folks who speak the same language, went through the same training. When you have folks that speak a different language, it puts a whole new premium on hand and arm signals and things like that. And there's a nagging worry that everybody's not going to be on the same page if they need to be.

[00:38:24.58] And the corporals, the sergeants, the lieutenants who were leading these patrols and the guys who were going with them, I have all the respect in the world for them. We were not putting them in a good position. The other contact I had with our allies was being shot at by an ARVN artillery battery.

[00:38:45.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, not good.

[00:38:47.11] WALLACE GREGSON: No. And after long conversations at high decibel level on the radio between me and various people figuring out that, OK, all the Marine battalions are in cease fire. And I said I'm still being shot at. And they worked through the system. And finally got to some ARVN who was exercising initiative when it was not a good thing to do.

[00:39:23.48] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm assuming you had some contact with Vietnamese villagers, people in the countryside.

[00:39:32.64] WALLACE GREGSON: Very, very little. We did have some mandatory civic action things that the battalion had to do, but I never got involved in it.

[00:39:44.91] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact did you have with your family back home?

[00:39:49.65] WALLACE GREGSON: Pretty good because mail was reliable. And most of the time, unless you were stuck on one of our outposts, it wasn't a weekly delivery from the mail helicopter or something, but it was--

[00:40:04.86] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war that you were fighting?

[00:40:11.51] WALLACE GREGSON: *Stars and Stripes* daily.

[00:40:15.18] JOE GALLOWAY: AFRS radio or any of that?

[00:40:18.34] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, that. Adrian Cronauer and all that. Good Morning, Vietnam was a staple. Because we had reliable mail every day, of course, we would get Life, Time, Newsweek. Those magazines that are now pretty hard to find.



[00:40:35.39] The Kent State riots occurred while I was in Vietnam. And the-- emblematic of what was going on in the greater American society, the Marines were universally very much in the disapproval mode of the rioters. And it showed a difference.

[00:41:11.01] Left Vietnam August 1, 1970. Got back to Okinawa to find that some clever person in a supply warehouse had erroneously listed me as KIA and took all my stuff. So I had to buy an ill-fitting uniform to get back to the United States.

[00:41:32.55] And came back after-- the Marines, I don't know whether it was on purpose as a decompression period or whether it was just traffic management. But generally, the Marines were held up for like about a week on Okinawa before going back to--

[00:41:51.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Before going back to the world.

[00:41:52.40] WALLACE GREGSON: --going back stateside.

[00:41:54.39] JOE GALLOWAY: How was your reception? Where did you land?

[00:41:58.18] WALLACE GREGSON: Landed at Pittsburgh International Airport finally.

[00:42:01.71] JOE GALLOWAY: But there had to be a West Coast stop there somewhere.

[00:42:04.91] WALLACE GREGSON: Yeah, Travis Air Force Base.

[00:42:07.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Anybody mess with you?

[00:42:09.63] WALLACE GREGSON: Not that I remember.

[00:42:11.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Nobody spit on you.

[00:42:13.56] WALLACE GREGSON: No. That had to wait until I got to my next duty station, which was San Diego. For example, San Diego is a Navy town. The political leadership certainly understands that it's a Navy town and it's supportive. And they wanted-- this is 1970 now-- they wanted to have parades for various patriotic holidays. And we would have to have drill instructors and officers in civilian clothes going along the sidewalk flanking the color guard to--

[00:42:45.80] JOE GALLOWAY: To keep them from spitting on the flag?

[00:42:48.54] WALLACE GREGSON: Or people that wanted to run out and grab the colors and things. And Marines generally take a dim view of that. But it was good to-- I was fortunate in a way that coming back from Vietnam and staying in the Marine Corps and going to the next duty station, I was still inside the military cultural bubble, if you will. So it wasn't the same experience that people who came back, got out, and tried to go to school experienced or go to work experienced.

[00:43:23.27] JOE GALLOWAY: You stayed in?

[00:43:24.99] WALLACE GREGSON: I did.

[00:43:26.50] JOE GALLOWAY: And became something of a foreign area specialist on Asia?

[00:43:35.81] WALLACE GREGSON: Only towards the latter part of my career. Like I said, well, I had about-- the last 10 years, I was in the Marine Corps. I was either in Washington working on Asia things or in Asia doing Asia things, and got to be very comfortable with that.

[00:43:50.72] JOE GALLOWAY: John Allen is an old friend of mine.

[00:43:53.33] WALLACE GREGSON: John Allen's a terrific guy. John Allen replaced me in a job in the Pentagon dealing with East Asia with one guy in between us. He did a far better job than I did.

[00:44:07.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Good man. Good man. Now there's a question I must ask. You had a pretty good tour there as a first lieutenant and a captain.

[00:44:24.49] WALLACE GREGSON: Just first lieutenant.

[00:44:27.98] JOE GALLOWAY: And then rose through the ranks in the Marine Corps, a three-star general. As a young lieutenant, you expressed some concern with the orders from higher headquarters. Did that shape and guide your future as a commander? Did you try to avoid issuing stupid orders, is what I'm trying to ask?

[00:44:57.78] WALLACE GREGSON: Certainly tried to avoid issuing stupid orders. Secondly, if I was getting an objection from somebody, I'd give it a listen. The third corollary on that is I would try to explain as often and as many times as I could to folks why-- what we're trying to do, why we're doing it. I'm not so naive as to think that I didn't say anything stupid or issue any stupid orders, but I tried to minimize the damage.

[00:45:31.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you live your life afterward?

[00:45:45.09] WALLACE GREGSON: In all likelihood, yes. But not knowing what the alternative was, I'm not sure if I hadn't gone to Vietnam whether it would have--

[00:45:54.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Would it have been different.

[00:45:56.17] WALLACE GREGSON: --been different, yes. The-- maintained a high regard for the folks out on the pointy edge that were doing the real work.

[00:46:11.13] JOE GALLOWAY: That was the other question is, how did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:46:21.39] WALLACE GREGSON: With a lot of respect, a lot of empathy. Especially, it's hard to avoid when you visit places like Walter Reed at Bethesda or Balboa Hospital in San

Diego and things. It's impossible to miss the veteran population. Even though most of them tend to-- those that are resident there tend to, on their own volition, not to spend a lot of time out in public during normal working hours.

[00:47:03.97] I learned this from some folks that work with these groups at the hospital. They want to avoid folks that are going to continually say, thanks for your service, and all these things. They've heard that. They got it. It's not a mean thing. It's just that they want to be left alone to a point.

[00:47:25.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, to a point.

[00:47:26.37] WALLACE GREGSON: Because they're permanently disabled or are still recovering, especially those with traumatic brain injury and things.

[00:47:35.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Poor bastards. How much contact have you had with people you served with in Vietnam?

[00:47:50.24] WALLACE GREGSON: Our battalion has a vigorous alumni association or veterans association. And they're back here frequent-- here in the national capital region frequently because the place where Mark Franklin works, and the Marine Corps Museum down there at Quantico has got a big monument for Recon Battalion down there. So we pay a call, and folks generally stay in contact via the internet and things.

[00:48:20.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Internet, email, Facebook.

[00:48:22.74] WALLACE GREGSON: Matter of fact, the guy I started this interview with, the guy who was my lance corporal platoon sergeant, Lance Corporal Klein, later Corporal Klein, later Sergeant Klein, later medevacked, the last I heard of him, or saw him was when he was medevacked. And he found me on the internet a few years ago. And so we re-established our association.

[00:48:49.27] A couple of guys I knew as PFCs retired as sergeants major. One a really strong, tough guy named Sergeant Allen, in the days when you could still join or be drafted after you dropped out of high school, he was one of those guys. And he was called Sergeant Huey because he could carry so much. Really a remarkable fella. He had one tour extended once, extended once for two straight years. And finally, the battalion commander said, no, you've done your bit.

[00:49:26.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Go home.

[00:49:27.04] WALLACE GREGSON: It's time to go home. And at one of these reunions, my wife said, what did you do after you came back? And he said, well, I went back to high school and got my diploma. And then he came back in the Marine Corps. And he also retired as a sergeant major. So these were the kind of folks we had.

[00:49:43.32] We had lance corporal, then corporal, then sergeant, then Staff Sergeant Fehely who was actually eligible to be a member of the staff NCO Club without being 21. So legally, he

couldn't drink. He was one of these heroes. And he was finally wounded on his 63rd patrol. And the battalion commander said, that's it. You're going. Your luck's run out, and--

[00:50:07.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Go home.

[00:50:08.31] WALLACE GREGSON: --I don't want to test this anymore. You're a living legend. Go away. So those were the kind of guys. And there's still many that stay in touch.

[00:50:19.97] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:50:25.09] WALLACE GREGSON: Wrongly.

[00:50:25.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Wrongly.

[00:50:28.27] WALLACE GREGSON: We didn't go to Vietnam because we had any particular animosity toward Ho Chi Minh or any particular animosity toward the Vietnamese. If you look at what was going on in 1965, Cold War was at its height. Russia and China were both-- the Soviet Union and China were both aligned against us. We had survived the Cuban Missile Crisis, if that's the right word. We had various other things going on.

[00:50:58.52] And we went to Vietnam initially with advisers and then more, as we all know, to stop the southward march of communism into Southeast Asia. Indonesia was communist at the time. Singapore was not, but was threatened. Thailand was not, but was threatened. In the goal of stopping the spread of communism, we succeeded.

[00:51:22.16] By the time 1970 rolled around and things, the situation had changed. It was no longer 1965. The original purpose that we went there got lost. And various mistakes were made. Obviously, we could have been more intelligent about it. But no, I think that it's remembered wrongly.

[00:51:47.39] It's not going to Vietnam to bash Ho Chi Minh for the sake of bashing Ho Chi Minh. He was part of a much bigger element that we were trying to stop. Could we have done it better? Sure. But we did.

[00:52:01.07] And no less a person than Lee Kuan Yew, the longtime leader of Singapore, before he died not just a few years ago, credited us with stopping the march of communism and allowing Thailand, Singapore, and the others to develop vigorous capitalistic economies. And even Indonesia threw the communists out and implemented a democratic government.

[00:52:33.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial?

[00:52:36.90] WALLACE GREGSON: I have.

[00:52:38.06] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts when you go there?

[00:52:43.38] WALLACE GREGSON: It's always an emotional experience, sobering. Always look for the names of the folks from the battalion that I knew and the folks that I knew otherwise that are memorialized on the Wall there. I think that the movement famously led by Jim Webb and others to put that statue up there was exactly the right thing to do.

[00:53:05.68] JOE GALLOWAY: I like that statue.

[00:53:07.83] WALLACE GREGSON: There is a somewhat similar memorial on Okinawa at the site where the horrific battle for Okinawa ended. And they have memorialized on acres of stone the names of everybody who died in the battle, Japanese, US, allied, and local civilian.

[00:53:28.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:53:29.14] WALLACE GREGSON: And it's about 300,000 names. And it's a similar sobering experience.

[00:53:36.61] JOE GALLOWAY: They organized it as a wall or on rocks?

[00:53:39.81] WALLACE GREGSON: Series of walls. Not quite like the Wall there, but like church pews, but taller. And around the park, there are extending out from that area where the names are. There are a number of other memorials that are all in Kanji. And nobody hastens to explain to you what they're memorializing. No need.

[00:54:08.16] What we did with the Wall here down on the Washington Mall, I think, it was the right thing to do. But I also think adding the statue so that it's not considered a wall of shame was exactly the right thing to do also.

[00:54:33.42] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration obviously since you're participating in one of the projects. What are your thoughts about that?

[00:54:46.34] WALLACE GREGSON: The veterans, the folks that had the one tour or two-year tour or whatever, Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps over there, no amount of validation is enough. So the better we can make-- the more we can let them understand that their contribution was valued, the more we can let them understand and their families understand that their contribution was valid, especially in the context of the times, we can't do too much of that.

[00:55:22.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Have you received your Vietnam veteran pin?

[00:55:26.09] WALLACE GREGSON: I have not.

[00:55:27.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, we're going to remedy that right now. We've created it. It's an eagle. It's our version of the Ruptured Duck from World War II, which my dad--

[00:55:40.46] WALLACE GREGSON: I remember that.

[00:55:41.09] JOE GALLOWAY: --and all my uncles came home in their lapel.

[00:55:43.30] WALLACE GREGSON: And one of the Doolittle bombers wears the Ruptured Duck.

[00:55:45.84] JOE GALLOWAY: It's got Vietnam War veteran. And it's got six stars on it representing our allies who fought beside us. But best of all, on the back, it says, a grateful nation thanks and honors you.

[00:56:01.62] WALLACE GREGSON: That's terrific.

[00:56:04.08] JOE GALLOWAY: There we are. Thank you, sir.

[00:56:06.33] WALLACE GREGSON: No, thank you. It's a pleasure.

[00:56:07.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Appreciate you coming in.