

Kroesen, Frederick US Army

[00:00:18.18] FREDERICK KROESEN: I was born in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, in 1923.

[00:00:25.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family?

[00:00:27.54] FREDERICK KROESEN: My family in Phillipsburg was named Sillinger. My grandmother, grandparents were long time residents. My mother grew up in Phillipsburg. And when she was going to have me, she went home to mama to have me born in that town.

[00:00:48.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Be in the right place.

[00:00:49.84] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes.

[00:00:53.03] JOE GALLOWAY: And you consider that your hometown when you were in the Army?

[00:00:56.70] FREDERICK KROESEN: No, not really. My hometown was-- I was born-- I moved to Lawrenceville, New Jersey, which is just north of Trenton. We had a Trenton address at the time. I went to Trenton Central High School and consider myself a Trentonian and a New Jerseyite.

[00:01:25.65] JOE GALLOWAY: What led you to join the Army?

[00:01:29.01] FREDERICK KROESEN: World War II.

[00:01:30.41] JOE GALLOWAY: World War II? That's a good reason. What year?

[00:01:35.13] FREDERICK KROESEN: 1942, I enlisted. But I grew up next door to the New Jersey National Guard Armory in Lawrenceville. Horse drawn field artillery organization, my father was a battery commander there. I lived with a horse trainer. And actually, my first dollar earning job, I got \$10 a month as an exercise boy during the summer months of my high school years, grammar school years.

[00:02:18.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Exercising the horses?

[00:02:20.44] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes. The polo ponies, the jumpers, he was in charge of. And he had two of us exercise boys who ride one, lead too, and go out for six hours a day.

[00:02:36.94] JOE GALLOWAY: So you got paid for riding horses?

[00:02:39.20] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yeah.

[00:02:39.46] JOE GALLOWAY: That's pretty good.

[00:02:41.86] FREDERICK KROESEN: At the age of about 14 or 15.

[00:02:47.08] JOE GALLOWAY: So that was-- you were disposed to the military.

[00:02:51.47] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes. But then when I went to Rutgers, I signed up for the advanced ROTC course. And that was just about the time that the Army did away with the ROTC courses. And they took those of us who had signed up, sent us to basic training prior to going to OCS for commission. If I had stayed in at Rutgers for the ROTC courses, I would have graduated in June of '44.

[00:03:34.42] But they sent us-- they needed second lieutenants in the Army. They sent us to an expedited course. And we finally graduated from OCS in August of 1944, two months later than we would have.

[00:03:51.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Than you would have anyway. JOE GALLOWAY: You enlisted and went to OCS for your commissioning.

[00:04:03.72] FREDERICK KROESEN: Part of-- this was an Army program where all of the ROTC men who were in the third year of their college courses were sent to basic training first, and then held for some time as enlisted Soldiers before we went to OCS. The senior class of the advanced ROTC went directly to OCS when they were taken into the Army.

[00:04:39.63] JOE GALLOWAY: What year was this that you were commissioned, '44?

[00:04:43.32] FREDERICK KROESEN: '44. August of '44.

[00:04:50.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get into World War II?

[00:04:53.10] FREDERICK KROESEN: I went immediately to the 63d Infantry Division, where I became a second lieutenant, platoon leader. Went overseas with that unit--

[00:05:05.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Into Germany?

[00:05:08.48] FREDERICK KROESEN: Into France, then Germany. I was the only officer who went overseas with that unit and was still with it in May of 1945 when the war ended.

[00:05:22.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow.

[00:05:23.42] FREDERICK KROESEN: There were 13 other officers came and went for one reason or another, and I--

[00:05:30.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Hung in there.

[00:05:31.29] FREDERICK KROESEN: I lived through it all.

[00:05:32.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow. JOE GALLOWAY: By the time you come to Vietnam and your first deployment there, what year are we talking about?

[00:05:47.47] FREDERICK KROESEN: 1968.

[00:05:48.89] JOE GALLOWAY: '68. And what was your rank and assignment?

[00:05:54.35] FREDERICK KROESEN: I was a colonel assigned to be a brigade commander.

[00:05:59.12] JOE GALLOWAY: In what division?

[00:06:01.61] FREDERICK KROESEN: The Americal Division, 23d Infantry Division.

[00:06:05.00] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:06:09.35] FREDERICK KROESEN: When I was at the Army War College, I had orders to the Pentagon. The war started just at the time that I was moving to the Pentagon for the first time. A year later, I was to be assigned as a brigade commander in the 82d Airborne Division.

[00:06:37.89] My bosses in the Pentagon refused to release me. They kept me in the assistant chief of staff force development office, building the Army that went to Vietnam. We increased the size of the Army from 950,000 about to a million and a half. And that build up was kind of-- not directed by my office, but managed so that the Soldiers going to a unit got there when the equipment was already there or vice versa. They were married--

[00:07:20.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Got together to save time?

[00:07:22.45] FREDERICK KROESEN: --as they got together, and organized the new unit of one kind or another. And we built the Army and I went to Vietnam in '68, commanded a brigade for the full year. I think I was the first colonel to stay in this job for 12 months instead of the six months command tours that everybody else had.

[00:07:46.91] JOE GALLOWAY: That everybody else had.

[00:07:48.13] FREDERICK KROESEN: That was the policy at the time.

[00:07:50.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about your first impressions on landing in Vietnam.

[00:07:58.15] FREDERICK KROESEN: I was on orders to go to the 9th Infantry Division and the riverine brigade. When my plane landed in Saigon, there was a young major who was waiting at the bottom of the gangway. He said, Sir, give me your ticket and I'll go get your baggage, and we'll get on that C--

[00:08:26.71] GALLOWAY: 130?

[00:08:27.08] FREDERICK KROESEN: No, the L-20. We're going to Chu Lai. Chu Lai was commanded by one of my former bosses in the Pentagon. And somehow he arranged that instead of going to the 9th Division, I was to go to the Americal Division where he was the commander.

[00:08:48.29] JOE GALLOWAY: And that commander's name was?

[00:08:56.08] FREDERICK KROESEN: I'm terrible with names.

[00:08:57.72] JOE GALLOWAY: So am I. So we'll pass over it.

[00:09:00.31] FREDERICK KROESEN: But you would know. He was the commander who left the Americal to be the superintendent at West Point. He got tangled up in the My Lai Massacre problem.

[00:09:10.90] JOE GALLOWAY: He got tangled up in My Lai, yeah.

[00:09:13.52] FREDERICK KROESEN: And he was reduced in rank and--

[00:09:17.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Koster.

[00:09:18.55] FREDERICK KROESEN: Sam Koster.

[00:09:19.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Sam Koster.

[00:09:21.03] FREDERICK KROESEN: He was a very fine-- he was a great commander and a leading Army officer and it was a damn shame that he got tangled up in My Lai. And I thought he paid too much--

[00:09:40.40] JOE GALLOWAY: A terrible price.

[00:09:41.78] FREDERICK KROESEN: --for having been that commander.

[00:09:45.79] JOE GALLOWAY: So you get snatched up to go to the Americal Division.

[00:09:50.25] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes.

[00:09:52.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about taking over your brigade and what you did with it.

[00:09:59.38] FREDERICK KROESEN: Well, I had about one week carry-over with the previous commander and got acquainted with the area that we were responsible for, which was, in effect, all Quang Tin Province. And it was the most active province in a combat sense for the entire division. We were where the North Vietnamese traffic went north and south.

[00:10:40.21] And I guess about two weeks after I took command, we were ordered to engage in an operation called Operation POCAHONTAS FOREST. And that was for the brigade to move westward toward the Laotian border, where we would intercept some of the traffic patterns that the North Vietnamese used to move troops and equipment south.

[00:11:31.58] And by the time we finished that operation, I was in command of six battalions of infantry. And I had operational control of our cavalry squadron that was part of the division. So I had seven of the twelve maneuver units of the division, six of the eleven infantry battalions.

[00:12:04.54] [LAUGHTER]

[00:12:06.19] FREDERICK KROESEN: The NVA organization just melted into the distance in the jungles. We never had any major combat operations.

[00:12:19.05] JOE GALLOWAY: With all those battalions, you couldn't round them up.

[00:12:22.35] FREDERICK KROESEN: No. But it was the greatest training exercise I've ever been on because we committed units to go westward. We moved the battalions of artillery to provide support for them out there. And it was a great training exercise. It paid off for the rest of the time I was there, which was nine more months.

[00:12:50.22] And I got to know my battalion commanders very well and the units that they commanded. I was very proud of the way the brigade operated, particularly because we were the ones that had most of the combat action that the Americal Division had for that year.

[00:13:22.48] I was satisfied when I left that we really had won that war. Militarily, the war was won. There were still raids taking place or combat actions that were required, but I don't think they had any more of those during that-- at the end of that year than we have in the United States today.

[00:13:50.14] JOE GALLOWAY: This was '68, '69 time frame?

[00:13:53.22] FREDERICK KROESEN: Right.

[00:13:53.86] JOE GALLOWAY: After Tet?

[00:13:55.39] FREDERICK KROESEN: After Tet. And I just thought our area anyway was not militarily contested anymore.

[00:14:07.45] JOE GALLOWAY: That was a pretty rough area, too. As I recall, the folks down there didn't like foreigners at all.

[00:14:14.40] FREDERICK KROESEN: The Quang Ngai Province was the seat of the Viet Cong--

[00:14:23.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Uprising. For 40 years they had been--

[00:14:28.82] FREDERICK KROESEN: And they were-- and north of us was Quang Nam Province, which the Marine Division held. And that was an area where the airfield was attacked regularly by rockets and so forth. And I went back for a second tour in 1971--

[00:14:54.42] JOE GALLOWAY: And you went then--

[00:14:57.09] FREDERICK KROESEN: --and I was assigned as a J3 in MACV headquarters. And at that time, General Abrams relieved the Americal Division commander. And I was an immediate availability, so he asked General Westmoreland, who was then the chief of staff, to appoint me as the division commander.

[00:15:24.93] I had been one of General Westmoreland's battalion commanders in the Korean War, so he knew me and he was satisfied that I could take over the Americal Division, which was-- had suffered major public problems from 1968 on. After My Lai, they became the fountain of bad information.

[00:16:02.58] We had columnists who came and wrote stories about how bad things were at our firebases or in the towns around our firebases, so much so that I once wrote a letter to the editor of the New York Times complaining about a female columnist who had gone through our area and wrote a disastrously improper account of what she found there.

[00:16:36.89] I never got an acknowledgment or an answer from--

[00:16:40.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Or a correction.

[00:16:41.10] FREDERICK KROESEN: --from the New York Times. But I was really disturbed at the way the press was dealing with the war then.

[00:16:55.26] JOE GALLOWAY: You said when you left as a brigade commander in '69, you thought the war was going our way. And what did it look like when you came back in '71?

[00:17:07.63] FREDERICK KROESEN: Well, when I came back, I had the same feeling. One of my proud moments at the end of 1968 was to restore the town of Hiep Duc, Hiep Duc province. No.

[00:17:30.86] JOE GALLOWAY: District.

[00:17:31.55] FREDERICK KROESEN: District. It was completely abandoned during the earlier periods of the war. And the people were living in refugee camps up and down the coastline out there. And I talked to the district chiefs and we decided it was time to reestablish Hiep Duc. And we did.

[00:18:06.68] And when I came back, we built a firebase out there. So we had a battalion that was overwatching Hiep Duc town and the development of it. When I went back as the J3 at MACV, I was visiting my old unit. Flying over Hiep Duc, I was really proud of the fields of rice growing and the number of water buffalo with kids riding on the backs of them, the sampans in the river, the Song Thu Bon.

[00:18:47.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Life had gone back to normal.

[00:18:49.85] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yeah, everything was back to normal. And in 1972, the Easter Offensive, the NVA-- after the Americal had been relieved of duty there, I had taken the flag home to Fort Lewis, Washington to inactivate the division.

[00:19:19.38] The Vietnamese 3d Division was-- no, 2d Division had taken over the area, but they didn't have enough troops to protect the area the way we had when we were both there. And so the NVA, one of their early conquests in the Easter Offensive of March '72, they wiped out Hiep Duc again.

[00:19:48.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Wiped it out again.

[00:19:49.88] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes. And it was a tragedy for me to have that happen because I was back there. After the Americal left, I was appointed the deputy commander of XXIV Corps. Then XXIV Corps--

[00:20:08.54] JOE GALLOWAY: That was up north.

[00:20:10.18] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes, Da Nang area. And XXIV Corps headquarters was supposed to move to Japan to become the senior command in Japan. I was the first commander of the First Regional Assistance Command, which was an expanded MAAG organization. And we built that to be a peacetime kind of advisory group, heavy on the G1 and G4 area.

[00:20:49.76] JOE GALLOWAY: This is in Japan.

[00:20:51.12] FREDERICK KROESEN: No.

[00:20:51.89] JOE GALLOWAY: No. Still in Vietnam?

[00:20:53.19] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yes. We formed the First Regional Assistance Command to replace the XXIV Corps when it moved. And I was the first commander of that unit. And seven days later, the Easter Offensive began. And I had to practically rebuild the XXIV Corps G2 and G3 capability that we had given up because we weren't going to need it.

[00:21:21.66] JOE GALLOWAY: You weren't going to need it.

[00:21:22.46] FREDERICK KROESEN: The war was over. And then the NVA came down across that 17th Parallel and the South Vietnamese army got bad press over the way that war went. They lost Quang Tri Province initially, but they retook it with our air help and Navy help somewhat, but no American forces.

[00:21:58.78] One brigade, my old brigade, the 196th was still there. It was the last American unit in the north part of South Vietnam. We had one other brigade down in the Saigon area. We were not allowed to engage in combat with the infantry forces that were part of the 196th.

[00:22:26.14] And the 3d Division was a relatively newly organized division in Quang Tri Province. And they were hit very hard. They ended up with the commander and his staff in Quang Tri. [LAUGHS]

[00:23:03.25] And when the crisis really occurred and most of his troops had been driven south, I had to send seven Jolly Green Giants into Quang Tri to evacuate him and his headquarters. They piled on those Jolly Greens so rapidly and in such great numbers that the last two of the six aircraft didn't have anybody to pick up.

[00:23:40.15] [LAUGHTER]

[00:23:44.11] Four airplanes landed in Quang Tri one at a time inside the citadel. And they escaped with the NVA troops climbing over the wall of the city.

[00:24:01.52] JOE GALLOWAY: As they left.

[00:24:02.64] FREDERICK KROESEN: And the fourth plane left. This fifth plane landed and there was nobody there, but they're the ones that saw these guys climbing over the wall.

[00:24:13.14] [LAUGHTER]

[00:24:14.21] They took off and advised the sixth plane not to land.

[00:24:18.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Not land. Yeah.

[00:24:19.13] FREDERICK KROESEN: They don't need you.

[00:24:20.00] JOE GALLOWAY: The Vietnamese were pretty good at packing aircraft. I saw a DC-3 come in from Dalat in 1975 with 100 Vietnamese aboard.

[00:24:32.52] FREDERICK KROESEN: Well, that's the way they packed these--

[00:24:36.11] JOE GALLOWAY: These helicopters.

[00:24:38.44] FREDERICK KROESEN: And that commander then was court-martialed by the South Vietnamese government, unfortunately. Again, I thought it was a miscarriage of justice because what had happened to him was not his fault. I blame the corps commander for the--

[00:25:03.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Collapse?

[00:25:04.66] FREDERICK KROESEN: --yeah, kind of decisions that should have been made. But he was, I guess, a political appointee out of Saigon and he retired from I Corps command to a job in the Defense Department in Saigon.

[00:25:30.79] FREDERICK KROESEN: We were at that time a draft Army. We had Soldiers who went through basic training and then were immediately deployed to be replacements in our

system. We rotated troops in one year from there. I thought that was a terrible decision that it applied to the leadership as well as the privates and the PFCs.

[00:26:01.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Not only that but in combat command, you only got six months.

[00:26:05.75] FREDERICK KROESEN: That's right. And we rotated our non-commissioned officers. We sent basic trainees. The best trainees were then held in the States and sent to the NCO academy or whatever to become instant E-5's, sergeants. The honor graduates of that schooling became instant E-6's. And they came to Vietnam as non-commissioned officers with--

[00:26:43.60] JOE GALLOWAY: With no experience.

[00:26:45.00] FREDERICK KROESEN: --nothing really, except--

[00:26:48.95] JOE GALLOWAY: 90 days training.

[00:26:50.65] FREDERICK KROESEN: --the training that they had. And so dealing with the inexperienced NCO corps was not the easiest thing in the world for the company commanders and the battalion commanders.

[00:27:08.08] And I thought-- when they arrived in the Americal Division area, we sent them to school again for another period of training, particularly the NCOs to become acclimated in understanding what our mission was and how we were going about it. On the whole, I thought we had a good organization. And I was satisfied with the division battalion commanders and regimental commanders.

[00:27:53.91] When General Abrams sent me up there to take command, he said, you can make any changes you want in the leadership. Fire anybody that needs to be relieved. I never relieved anybody. I just made the statement that all of you are doing jobs that you're qualified to do. Somebody thought you were qualified to be a sergeant major or you're qualified to be a battalion commander, let's just go to work and--

[00:28:30.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Do the damn job.

[00:28:31.39] FREDERICK KROESEN: But I didn't have to make any changes, except one brigade commander was dissatisfied with one of his battalion commanders and they were not getting along. And I had to back the brigade commander in his decision to relieve that one man. But otherwise, the command chain had no changes until we all disappeared because the division was inactivated piecemeal.

[00:29:02.95] I said goodbye to every battalion in the division, except those in the 196th Brigade, which was going to be the last American unit in northern South Vietnam.

[00:29:22.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe significant combat operations in which you commanded your brigade or the division?

[00:29:35.65] FREDERICK KROESEN: One of the reasons I said I thought the war was over was that we never had another major operation which I would call a historical problem or a historical event.

[00:29:57.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. No mass casualty events.

[00:29:59.41] FREDERICK KROESEN: No. We didn't have that kind of thing. We had companies in the field three times out of four. That is three-quarters of the time the companies were out in the field just tracking down. I required the battalion commanders to put troops into every grid square on their map, in the area that they were responsible for, to be sure that the North Vietnamese were not using the area.

[00:30:41.39] We had one big operation by the 4th Battalion of the 31st Infantry. Louie-- I can't think of the name, one of his Soldiers got a Medal of Honor. And he had about a three-day operation where he had to attack and clean out the side of a hill mass where the North Vietnamese had dug in and really had surprised us that they built a base area in that location.

[00:31:29.34] [LAUGHTER]

[00:31:29.99] FREDERICK KROESEN: But it was a good operation for that battalion, but not the kind that made headlines in the newspapers or anything. It was just constant patrolling and seeing that the North Vietnamese or any Viet Cong that were still--

[00:32:01.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Around.

[00:32:02.68] FREDERICK KROESEN: --around, we were denying them the use of the area.

[00:32:13.08] FREDERICK KROESEN: We had a big wind, a typhoon in November of 1971 that wiped out about one third of the buildings and so forth in the base area of the Americal Division. The 2d Division-- Vietnam division commander who was assuming control of that area when the Americal left said it was OK with him because he didn't have enough troops to occupy all those buildings anyway.

[00:32:51.55] [LAUGHTER]

[00:32:52.32] FREDERICK KROESEN: But it was a tremendous typhoon. And the eye of this typhoon came right over Chu Lai and we suffered more damage and casualties in that 24-hour period than the enemy had ever-- [LAUGHS]

[00:33:10.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Inflicted on you.

[00:33:11.76] FREDERICK KROESEN: Right. I can't say that there was any incident that sticks out particularly. There were so many things. It was a varied kind of existence.

[00:33:37.89] For example, the Marines used to put their troops out on an outpost, platoon at a time, for a month at a time. And they saw a helicopter once a week, bringing in supplies,

ammunition, whatever was needed. I used to fly to those-- just drop in on the Marine positions out there.

[00:34:09.49] And I became intimate with them because for a whole month they were just sitting on a mountaintop observing, trying to identify locations in the Quang Nam Province where the enemy was still moving around and so forth.

[00:34:35.32] We had Special Forces camps in the area and dropping in on them periodically to see how they were getting along and what they needed and so forth. But it was sort of a routine thing that--

[00:34:52.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Just day to day.

[00:34:58.29] FREDERICK KROESEN: I guess-- there are so many days that are memorable. I had one Soldier that we thought ought to have gotten a Medal of Honor. The problem was he wasn't killed when he did it. And so he ended up with a Distinguished Service Cross.

[00:35:25.47] But he was engaged with his unit in a real firefight with major enemy forces. And one of those John Wayne kind of activities where he had his machine gun on his hip and went out there by himself and mowed down people.

[00:35:54.23] I thought we had a very good operation when Tien Phuoc, one of the district chief towns, major town, had a Special Forces detachment located there came under a major attack and the 196th Brigade turned two battalions south and cleaned it up. A very satisfying operation.

[00:36:31.06] So it was a big day for me when we called that success. That was when my helicopter got shot at with an RPG round. I carried ammunition. I resupplied the ammunition to the company that was in one particular location and the enemy fired.

[00:36:58.27] When we got there, I unloaded the ammunition. And I was loading up a couple of casualties to take back to our aid station and an RPG round landed under the airplane on the ground. I said to the pilot, will it take off? He said, we can try it. So we flew out of there with the casualties. There were about 150 holes in the airplane when they counted them back in the base.

[00:37:38.35] JOE GALLOWAY: But he made it back with you.

[00:37:40.91] FREDERICK KROESEN: That's where I got my next Purple Heart.

[00:37:44.46] JOE GALLOWAY: You pick up a wound out of that.

[00:37:46.57] FREDERICK KROESEN: Yeah.

[00:37:47.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Mercy.

[00:37:48.45] FREDERICK KROESEN: I still carry some fragments in my tail end from that shot.

[00:37:55.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Should have been sitting on your helmet.

[00:37:58.31] [LAUGHTER]

[00:37:59.98] FREDERICK KROESEN: I was out loading up the kids, the casualties, and it hit right where it caught me with the shell fragments.

[00:38:18.08] FREDERICK KROESEN: I had a very good relationship with the South Vietnamese province chiefs, district chiefs, and their people, with the commander of the 2d Division. And we established some collective operations.

[00:38:48.17] It was the time when our secretary of defense decreed that combat was over for the American units in Vietnam. We were not allowed to go on the offensive. We were only able to defend ourselves. But we were to encourage the South Vietnamese organizations to conduct the same kind of patrols and so forth that we had conducted.

[00:39:17.72] So I decided that when a South Vietnamese or 3d Division unit was going on an operation out west that I was supposed to support them. And I would send an artillery battery to give them fire support. And when I sent the artillery battery, I had to send infantry units to protect them. So it was sort of a joint operation that we had going on.

[00:39:49.71] And it was protection for the Chu Lai base of the Americal Division and to keep patrolling, to deny the use of Quang Tin Province for any purpose that the North Vietnamese might want. And that's the way I describe my mission-- deny the enemy any use of Quang Tin.

[00:40:22.66] FREDERICK KROESEN: Well, the Korean Marine Brigade, located just South of Da Nang, was an allied unit in this general area. I used to visit them. I thought their commanders were in good shape and I could rely on their area being mollified and whatnot.

[00:40:55.15] But by that time in the war, the Korean units that were there were pretty much cherry of having any casualties. They did not want to engage in missions which caused casualties, which caused commanders to be in trouble with the Home Office back in Seoul.

[00:41:22.51] JOE GALLOWAY: The Home Office.

[00:41:23.32] [LAUGHTER]

[00:41:24.27] FREDERICK KROESEN: So they were not particularly active unless they were attacked by the enemy. They were not offensively organized. And I kept the Americal Division on an offensive requirement.

[00:41:48.92] FREDERICK KROESEN: I wrote a letter to my wife almost every day. And I was able to call her maybe two times on the--

[00:42:02.43] JOE GALLOWAY: MARS System.

[00:42:03.77] FREDERICK KROESEN: MARS System through Mr. Goldwater's--

[00:42:09.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Ham radio guys.

[00:42:11.18] FREDERICK KROESEN: --Arizona station. And that was the extent of the contact, except I got my once-a-year visit to Hawaii where I met my wife for seven days. Other than that, no contact at home, which my wife was getting used to, you see.

[00:42:39.77] The same thing when I was a brigade commander and then again when I was a division commander in Korea. I had the same situation. I was there for 22 months with no contact except letters back and forth. Snail mail.

[00:43:06.28] I envy the Army of today that can let the Soldiers use their iPhones and whatever to make contact at home routinely. We didn't have that back then.

[00:43:19.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't have that back then. While you're over there commanding your brigade and then commanding a division, a lot of things going on back home-- antiwar demonstrations, anti-Nixon demonstrations, things like that. How much of that did you pay attention to, or did you?

[00:43:50.31] FREDERICK KROESEN: We paid attention to it because we did get news of those kinds of things through the Stars and Stripes newspaper. AFN television was available to those who might have a television set. I never did.

[00:44:08.13] [LAUGHTER]

[00:44:09.70] FREDERICK KROESEN: But I couldn't believe some of these rifle companies would go to the field and the guys carrying a--

[00:44:16.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Carrying a little TV.

[00:44:17.97] FREDERICK KROESEN: --television set on his back. Yeah.

[00:44:18.61] [LAUGHTER]

[00:44:19.51]

[00:44:19.96] FREDERICK KROESEN: So there was that kind of thing. And it was disgusting for most of us, the kind of things we would read about what was going on in Vietnam that was a terrible distortion I thought of the war that had already been won. And the stories of how Soldiers were treated when they got home and were told to put on civilian clothes if you're going to fly or take a train out of San Francisco.

[00:44:58.64] It was hard to believe that the American people were that ill-informed, that they were treating Soldiers as criminals almost when they got home.

[00:45:11.96] That didn't happen to us after Korea. Although the Army was not popular when the Korean War ended because we'd had two years of stalemate at the end of that war. And it wasn't a very popular thing for Soldiers to be involved in. But it was nothing like what happened in the Vietnam War when the '60s people made all those antiwar demonstrations and so forth.

[00:45:51.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you had two homecomings from combat tours in Vietnam. Did you personally experience any of that nonsense on the West Coast?

[00:46:05.92] FREDERICK KROESEN: I never did. That never happened to me. I wore my uniform whenever, wherever. And I didn't have any problems, personally attacked or anything like that.

[00:46:30.40] I didn't pursue. I didn't dare anybody to accost me. And so I just never had a personal attack on my being.

[00:46:48.47] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't go home by way of Berkeley.

[00:46:51.92] FREDERICK KROESEN: No.

[00:46:56.70] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans of that war and your other wars over the years, reunions, things like that?

[00:47:11.54] FREDERICK KROESEN: I kept contact with a few of my World War II company. There were a few people who made it through the whole six months of combat, I guess, is what we had. We were in the Colmar Pocket. And we went across the Rhine at Baulmes down through Mannheim and Heidelberg and Schwabisch Hall, all through Baden-Wurttemberg and across the Danube at Leipheim.

[00:47:54.80] And I had a few NCOs. And I had the initial group of six officers in the company. And I said I was the only one that started and finished. I kept track of about three of them pretty well until all of them died.

[00:48:18.94] I kept track of only one or two people from the Korean War, and maybe four or five from the Vietnam War.

[00:48:33.86] JOE GALLOWAY: From Vietnam.

[00:48:34.95] FREDERICK KROESEN: But I guess my contact was limited with those who wanted to call me. And I have two or three battalion commanders who I stayed in contact with, a couple of brigade commanders. But I have not been a joiner of-- except for AUSA, I have not been a joiner of the military veterans associations.

[00:49:12.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Is there any memory or experience from your time in Vietnam that has stayed with you through the years and had a lasting influence on your life?

[00:49:26.89] FREDERICK KROESEN: I guess, again, I don't have an individual remembrance of some specific thing that happened. I have carried with me the fact that I'm ashamed of what we did to the South Vietnamese people when we abandoned them.

[00:49:55.10] I thought the Paris Agreement that was signed after the Tet Offensive-- I mean, after the Easter Offensive--

[00:50:06.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Easter Offensive.

[00:50:07.55] FREDERICK KROESEN: --was a giveaway of everything we promised to do in South Vietnam. And I have been ashamed of our Congress that quit in 1973 and would not go back to support the South Vietnamese when that '75 operation occurred and the abandonment of everything. I just think it was a terrible display of wrong decisions made by our government.

[00:50:47.48] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today, or is it?

[00:50:54.73] FREDERICK KROESEN: I think the memory of Vietnam is people who think we made a mistake for being there and the satisfaction that we finally got it over with and got out of there. I don't think there's any appreciation or very little appreciation for what we were supposed to be doing and tried to do and the success that we had up until we gave it all away.

[00:51:32.09] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on to future generations of Americans?

[00:51:44.28] FREDERICK KROESEN: Well, I believe that we have a responsibility to the world that we assumed from the British who had that responsibility during the 1800s of just assuring that there is a logical spread of liberty and democratic form of government that is available to the other nations of the world and we will help them provide that.

[00:52:38.04] I'm not sure that that promise is still extant within our government, but I think it will be-- we'll have to assume it again because somebody has to do it. Otherwise, the world is going to be taken over by the Islamic State and the al-Qaeda kind of government of the people.

[00:53:13.50] I've developed that thought not only in Vietnam but also out of the Korean operation. I think we have that responsibility and ought to be pursuing it.

[00:53:37.45] FREDERICK KROESEN: Well, I think it's a requirement almost that the Army be recognized for what it did in Vietnam, for the total military forces of what we tried to do in Vietnam. And I think it might be a way in which to better explain to the people what I've always thought that, as I said, we won that war militarily, we lost it diplomatically.

[00:54:13.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, General Kroesen.

[00:54:16.04] FREDERICK KROESEN: OK, Joe.