

Livingston, Larry US Marine Corps

[00:00:14.86] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, I was born on 5 November, 1940 in Defiance, Ohio. It's a small farming, manufacturing town, about 15,000 to 20,000. But it was a great place to be. It was actually the site of the original Fort Defiance built by Anthony Wayne at a place where three rivers come together. And before that, it was an Indian village. And Chief Pontiac was actually born there.

[00:00:44.54] JOE GALLOWAY: That's it. That's Indian War times.

[00:00:46.34] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Right. And it sits on three rivers. And from those three rivers, you can go north on the Maumee to the Lake Erie. You can go south to the Ohio River on the Auglaize. Or you can go southwest and hit the Mississippi River and the Wabash River. So it was key. And it was a great place to grow up as a kid.

[00:01:16.67] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: My grandfather was a-- actually, was a first sergeant in the Army in World War I and when they went to Mexico. My father was in was in World War II, of course, after I was born. I remember World War II because I was actually born before we got into it. And we lived as an extended family with my grandfather while my father was gone.

[00:01:46.88] JOE GALLOWAY: That's exactly the same as me.

[00:01:51.44] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: My mother was the oldest of my grandfather's kids. But she had four younger brothers. Two of them ended up going to World War II. One was a tanker with Patton. And one was in the Navy in the Pacific. The other two, and one was closest to me, was about four years-- four years older than I was. But the next one up, Ray, was actually a Marine, walked out of the Chosin Reservoir. Was in-- was actually-- was in Puller's unit, was a telephone man. Used to have to walk the wires in Korea. And the one closest to me, George, was a Marine too.

[00:02:37.41] JOE GALLOWAY: What did your dad do?

[00:02:40.38] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: My father, actually, when he come up, he came from a coal mining family. But after the war, my mother and father separated, divorced. So I stayed pretty much with the mother's side and the rest of it.

[00:03:00.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Grandfather.

[00:03:01.29] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, but our families had come to America in the late 1600s and early 1700s. They're Scotch-Irish, English, Dutch, German, and Seneca Indian.

[00:03:15.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Heinz 57.

[00:03:17.22] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Right, Seneca Indian thrown in along with it.

[00:03:20.82] JOE GALLOWAY: And Defiance is where you grew up, went to school?

[00:03:25.17] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I grew up, went to school, went to high school there. I was an athlete. I had scholarships offered when I got out. I had some pretty good ones. But I didn't have any money. And in those days, the full ride wasn't there. I had some to bigger schools. But I ended up going a year at Defiance College and playing football there before I ended up going into the Marine Corps.

[00:03:55.53] I didn't have a choice about the military. And I wasn't going to be drafted. And I really-- I didn't want to be drafted and go in the Army. I was closer to my two uncles that had been in the Marine Corps, to be honest. But I wanted to be a parachutist. And it was very hard in the Marine Corps because they did away with the paramarines after World War II.

[00:04:23.35] So when I heard-- and my uncle told stories about coming back from Korea, when they were in Korea and at the Chosin. And he told me about a unit in the Marine Corps that actually did paradrops. And it was the Recon unit, the Force Recon. Force Recon unit. So I said, well that's-- I want to be that.

[00:04:51.37] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: So I enlisted in 1960. I went to boot camp at Parris Island. I could have went either coast, but I wanted to the traditional, the family deal. I wanted to go to Parris Island to see if I could make it. So I went to Parris Island and I did well. I got-- I got sick with pneumonia, got set back. And then started training again. So I was on the island 20 weeks before I got off of it. I went up to Camp Geiger for my infantry training and we got our orders.

[00:05:27.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Where's Camp Geiger?

[00:05:28.99] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Camp Geiger is up at Camp Lejeune.

[00:05:31.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Camp Lejeune, yeah.

[00:05:33.52] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I got up there and still didn't know where I was going to go. Because they go through your records and everything. And I ended up, they come out, and they said, well, you're going to go to San Diego to electronics school. And I didn't want any part of that. I didn't join the Marine Corps to be a technician-- JOE GALLOWAY: A radio repair guy. LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: --to go around-- right exactly.

[00:06:05.26] And they said, well, maybe you can change it, whatever, when you get to the school. So we got-- the school then was in San Diego. Come out to San Diego, and I had another friend of mine that got the same thing. And we didn't join the Marine Corps to be radio repairman back in some shop somewhere. So we devised a plan. They give you an entry test coming in for the school. And we took the-- and we bombed it on purpose.

[00:06:39.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Bombed it on purpose.

[00:06:41.35] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Because we wanted to go up to Pendleton to be machine gunners. Well, and we had an old World War II warrant officer running a school. And he called us in and he said-- he said, boy, I can't understand this. He said, look at you, Livingston, you were a series honor man. And you really scored high on your-- high on your-- JOE GALLOWAY: AFQT. LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, on your test and stuff. And I just don't understand it.

[00:07:11.62] I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to let you guys take the test again. And he said, also Livingston, you were in-- they put you in for an officer program. So I said, oh, OK. So we-- they told us to take the test again. So like fools, took the test, and we both passed it. And he called us in and he said, well, he says I'm looking at your test scores here, they're a lot better than they were the last time.

[00:07:41.55] And I kept my mouth shut and nodded my head, yes, sir. And he said, now, he said, listen you two worms, I know what you can do. And I don't give a damn if you stay in this school for two years or your entire enlistment, you're not getting out of this school until you pass it. So I got hung with an MOS that I didn't want to be-- I didn't want to have. But it came in handy later on, really, really handy later on. That set me up into a cycle where I was always trying to get out of that and get into the Force Recon deal.

[00:08:16.81] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you manage to do that?

[00:08:19.15] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, when I went through ITR up at Camp Geiger, I went over to-- the Force Recon company was there. And PX Kelly was the company commander. And I took a PT test. And he had a guy working for him named Hockaday Walker, who was a legend in the Marine Corps, a little crazy.

[00:08:38.50] But I took the test. I did well on the test. And they said, well, when you get out of school, come back. So I got orders. I went to school, 39 weeks to electronic school, radio, so the whole business. You could tear radio down, and build it from scratch, fifth echelon, fifth echelon work on the thing.

[00:09:02.25] So I came back and I got orders. And the orders said-- I told them I wanted to go to the East Coast. And I did well in school, they'd let you go to the coast that you wanted to go. I said, I want to go to the East Coast. They said, all right. They give me orders to the Marine Air Wing at Cherry Point. I didn't want to go to the Marine Air Wing.

[00:09:25.49] On the deal, I called Hockaday Walker. And he did a deal. The Marine Corps is very small. And he did a deal. And the next thing I knew, I was reporting into Force troops at Camp Lejeune. And they said, we can get you to Force troops. But we got trouble getting you into the company right now because we got our fill of techs. And we can't take on another tech.

[00:09:54.97] So they sent me to tank battalion, which really was a blessing because it came in handy later both in Vietnam and in Desert Storm. So what happened, I went there and I was in the tank battalion for about three months, four months before they could work a deal-- because

they had a technician they wanted to get the hell out of there. He didn't want to get up and run every morning and the rest of it. So we did a trade. And that's how I got into 2d Force Recon.

[00:10:27.04] JOE GALLOWAY: It only took three major deals to get you there.

[00:10:31.93] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: But they did it. And that's the Marine Corps. That's what I liked about the Marine Corps.

[00:10:37.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Small enough you could do that stuff.

[00:10:39.08] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: You could do it. You just-- you weren't a number on the thing. And then I went through training there. And because I was a technician, what I would always-- I'd always volunteer to go out on patrol and stuff. And the thing that was good about me, back in those days, we used to use AM and we did long range communications. So you had to know what you were doing. You had to really-- communications was key. So I could always-- I could always get communications.

[00:11:14.51] So I would go on the patrols. And they would like that. And I just built up a relationship with a lot of people that helped me later on.

[00:11:27.07] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I was promoted meritoriously at each step of the way. I went to-- I was a lance-- I was a lance corporal when I went to Force Recon. I ended up meritorious corporal there. And then I ended up meritorious sergeant there. And we did a lot. I mean, we were down in Cuba when the Cuban flap came up in '62 and other places like that. So we did a lot. We locked out of submarines.

[00:12:01.13] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot of Sneaky Pete stuff.

[00:12:03.71] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, all the fun things we did. So I did that up through-- into 1965. I got out because ground troops-- ground troop Marine troops couldn't go to Vietnam. We had helicopters over there at that time, right at the beginning of '65. We had helicopters over there.

[00:12:30.41] JOE GALLOWAY: By March, they were landing the 1st Battalion.

[00:12:33.23] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I know it. I know it.

[00:12:35.06] JOE GALLOWAY: You got out at the wrong moment.

[00:12:36.89] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I know I did. So I--

[00:12:40.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Otherwise, you and I would have met in Da Nang somewhere.

[00:12:45.14] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And of course, all my friends from the company ended up eventually going over there anyway. So I had stayed in the Reserves. But back then,

you had a six-year commitment anyway. So I come back in through the Reserves, finally worked it so I could come back in and go to Vietnam.

[00:13:02.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Back to Recon?

[00:13:04.23] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, no. No, because I was a radio tech, you see. I had the additional-- the jump MOS and all that stuff, and the lockout MOSs and stuff. But what happened is they come back with orders to the 1st Marine Air Wing in Vietnam. And I said, oh, you've got to be kidding me.

[00:13:31.60] So I reported out to-- they had a staging battalion at Camp Pendleton. Well, the guy running the staging battalion was Captain Walker, who when I reported in, I told him what happened, and he said, we'll take care of this. So he says, here's what we're going to do.

[00:13:55.33] We'll put a hold modification when you get into Vietnam. And what you do is when you get-- as soon as you fly into Da Nang, you stay at the airport. And you call this number. You can't make this stuff up.

[00:14:16.81] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:14:17.80] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: So what happened, we got there. I got in. And I went over. And they had a phone section there at the air station. I called this number. And the next thing I knew, there was a Jeep pulled up. And one of my friends from the old company back at Lejeune was there to pick me up.

[00:14:38.48] And he said-- I said, how do we get around? He said, don't worry about it. We'll take care of it. And he took me. And he took me right to the company. JOE GALLOWAY: to Force Recon. LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: To 1st Force Recon Company, which was at Camp Reasoner. And they said, well, we'll take care of this.

[00:14:59.09] JOE GALLOWAY: We'll fix the paperwork.

[00:15:01.50] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We'll take care of this. And I reported in. The three had been back at 2d Force Recon with me. Two of the platoon commanders had been back there at--

[00:15:13.58] JOE GALLOWAY: So it was an old home week.

[00:15:14.79] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: It was. It old home week. They took care of it. Took care of everything. I was worried. I thought I was going to have to spend a year at Da Nang fixing airplane radios.

[00:15:27.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Or in the brig for being AWOL.

[00:15:31.31] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: But that's how I got into Vietnam. And half of the-- more than half the people knew me. And they were just coming down from up on the DMZ up

north. And to be honest, I had more patrolling experience than a lot of the younger members that were in there and the rest of it. And I reported in. And the three was there. And he said, where the hell have you been?

[00:15:58.91] I mean, that was first thing he said to me. I said, well, it took me a while to get here. He said, all right, he says, what do you want to do? You want to go on patrols, don't you? And I said, yeah. That's why I'm here. I come to see it. I come back in.

[00:16:16.04] And he said, he said, all right, I'm going to put you in the 1st Platoon with Gunny Trevathan. You know Gunny Trevathan? Yeah, I knew him back at Lejeune. He was an old friend of mine. He said, we'll put you in there. We'll let you bird dog for a while. And then--

[00:16:33.95] JOE GALLOWAY: By bird dog, they mean follow somebody--

[00:16:36.17] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Go along, you follow the team leader. Because I was a sergeant. I had six-- I was 26, 27 years old.

[00:16:44.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Old man for those days.

[00:16:45.99] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, and I had more experience than-- patrolling and stuff-- than the troops that were in there. So he said, I'm going to put you in with Trevathan. And we'll bird dog you for a while. And then we got some other plans. And we'll put you in the 1st Platoon. And the 1st Platoon had just, when I was checking in, lost their platoon commander down around-- he was down by Hiep Duc, down in that area, nasty area.

[00:17:13.20] So Trevathan was the platoon commander. And I went in as the platoon sergeant on the thing. Did a couple patrols. I was in the phase where we were-- I was getting broken in, bird dog. And just to show you how unacquainted I was with the North Vietnamese, let me put it that way, or naive, or stupid, I don't know.

[00:17:45.67] We went up on an OP up on Dong Dinh, which is behind the airfield at Da Nang, it's a little bit north. And it's where the river goes by. It's a big-- we had a big OP up there where we would-- and radio relay site because we had to relay our communications, because we worked beyond the lines.

[00:18:05.54] And went up there. And first night was quiet. I was getting used to things. The second night, well, the bad guys come in and they hit a company from the 7th Marines that were down below us. And I leaned over to the gunny and I said, hey, gunny, when did we start using green tracers? And he said, you dumb shit. That's the bad guys.

[00:18:37.99] JOE GALLOWAY: That's the bad guys, yeah.

[00:18:39.63] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: So you know, I had seen green tracers before. Hell, I didn't know.

[00:18:44.07] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd see more of them later.

[00:18:46.14] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, I'd get them later. So that was my first-- that was my first experience with it. And then, oh, there were a couple of things that happened. The last one that I bird dogged, or went along as essentially the platoon sergeant, but they're just-- they're just checking you, make sure you know what the hell you're doing, can read a map and stuff.

[00:19:14.64] The next one, we went down what eventually would end up being Operation UNION I, which-- down in the Que Son Valley. And we went in, and we went in, and all the hills are bare down there. They're not much cover. But there are some elevated hills. We went in there, and we were there for first night, and nothing happened. Second night, nothing happened. There's activity down below. Then the third night, we started seeing the bad guys coming in.

[00:19:51.20] JOE GALLOWAY: Coming for you?

[00:19:52.13] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No, they were coming in. They were-- it was regiments that were coming in. They were NVA regiments. And we called the division and said, look, there's NVA down here. And that's when the NVA first started to go south. And division come back and said, there's no NVA back there. And these guys were marching three abreast. They had gray uniforms on. They had .50 calibers broken down, pith helmets, machine guns broke down on their shoulder. Coming down, just route stepping.

[00:20:26.12] JOE GALLOWAY: You can't get division to bomb them?

[00:20:28.43] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, division didn't believe us. And then there was-- it was either a company or battalion-- no, it was a company from the 1st Marines that was down at Hiep Duc. And we called them and told them what the hell was going on. And they sent a squad out. JOE GALLOWAY: A whole squad.

[00:20:51.16] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah. This is the Vietnam War. They sent a squad out. And we were calling artillery and stuff. Well, the squad went out and they got out about maybe two clicks. And that's all rice paddy and stuff down in there. They got out about two clicks, and they got hit. And then they sent the platoon minus to get the squad that went out to get the bad guys. And they got hit. And then they sent the company minus to go out to get the platoon minus to get the squad minus that went out and got hit. And then they finally realized, we got a problem here.

[00:21:34.77] JOE GALLOWAY: A big problem.

[00:21:35.78] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We got a real big problem. And by that time, the NVA started to come after us because we were hurting them with artillery on the thing. And that's a lesson. Any time you're hurting them, they're coming after you.

[00:21:51.21] JOE GALLOWAY: They're going to come for you.

[00:21:51.95] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, there's no question about it. So they started at the bottom of the hill. They sent a company up. And we were firing artillery. We were keeping

them down, and keeping them down. And that went on for two or three hours. Things quieted down. And then they massed again and they started coming up-- coming up on line. And we were in big trouble from that time on.

[00:22:22.83] We were firing artillery. We were trying to put in air. And the company from the 1st Marines was in trouble. So people were fighting for air, who gets what air, and the rest of it. But we had one dedicated battery that was holding them off, holding them off. And then-- and Gunny Trevathan was really good. He'd spent a tour in the Army too before he went into the Marine Corps.

[00:22:50.05] We ended up-- we were naping them. But they just kept coming. They got a platoon that enveloped us around on the right-- our right side as you look down. And we knew that we were in trouble. So Trevathan was-- he was probably one of the best guys in the field I've ever seen. Trevathan says, he told them, all right, this is what I want. I want you to run nape, come in--

[00:23:21.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Napalm.

[00:23:22.33] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Napalm, come in right behind them. I want a TOT of CS gas. He wanted tear gas rounds on it. He said we want to follow the nape with the tear gas rounds. And that stopped the force that was coming straight up after us. But the ones that had enveloped us, Trevathan said, all right, prep the top of the hill. We were out on the military crest. He said, prep the top of the hill, hit it with nape. And then he told everybody, because we always carried gas masks with us.

[00:24:03.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Get your mask on.

[00:24:03.99] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We always carried a CS grenade and our gas mask because that was the last resort for us. He said we're going to go-- as soon as the nape goes, we're going to throw tear gas and we're going through them.

[00:24:22.71] JOE GALLOWAY: How'd that work?

[00:24:24.45] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We went through them.

[00:24:26.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you lose anybody?

[00:24:28.17] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We had a couple wounded. But they didn't have gas masks.

[00:24:32.58] JOE GALLOWAY: That's right.

[00:24:33.12] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Which was a saving grace. And nobody had pulled that on them down there. And that's the only thing that saved us. And we got to the topographic--

[00:24:41.82] JOE GALLOWAY: How many were in your group there?

[00:24:43.81] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, we-- I think we had 12 to 14 because it was an OP type of thing. And we went a little stronger than we normally go because there wasn't-- there wasn't any cover in there. So it was 12 to 14 on the thing.

[00:25:03.01] JOE GALLOWAY: And you got them all down the hill?

[00:25:05.08] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, we went up. We went to the top of the hill. And then from then on, it was TOTs and everything else. Nape. And we got-- and by that time, it was getting dark. And we were up there, we were still firing. And we were screaming for an extraction. We wanted out of there. And what-- the three back at the-- now, I'll try to be nice.

[00:25:35.20] The three back at the company-- JOE GALLOWAY: The operations officer. LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah. He said, no. He said, we want you to stay in there. And Trevathan was screaming, we got to get out of here. And the CG from the air wing was up. Because that was the real-- by that time it was UNION I on the thing, the Operation UNION I.

[00:26:02.50] And it was about-- it must have been about 10:00, 11:00 o'clock at night. And we were arguing back and forth. And of course, I carried one of the radios. We were arguing back and forth with headquarters. And finally, this voice come up on the net. And told-- calling, team call sign. He said, this such and such 6, be ready. And it was the wing commander.

[00:26:35.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Wing commander, he said pull them out.

[00:26:46.74] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Sorry. Sorry.

[00:26:53.80] JOE GALLOWAY: That's all right, hard times, hard memories.

[00:27:00.91] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah I'm doing better and getting over that one. But anyway.

[00:27:09.76] JOE GALLOWAY: That guy saved your bacon.

[00:27:11.41] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Oh, no question. And the story even gets better. What happened-- and the CG of the wing was running the pickup. Because they know when there's a problem, the longer you let it go, the more it hurts the wing. I mean they're the ones that get shot up.

[00:27:30.46] What he said was, all right, we're going to roll in. I got four sets. We're going to put the big bombs lower. We're going to put the napalm close. And be ready. And they did. Boy, they rolled in. They rolled in. The helicopters rolled in right behind them. And we went out. And the assault lines were still coming up the hill after us because we were really putting the hurting on them, on the deal.

[00:28:05.89] We got out of there. Of course, the helicopters got shot up. But they didn't go down. And it used to be a standard joke with the 46s, they didn't have any windows in them

because every time they'd do a Recon pickup that was hot, the windows would get knocked out. Bust them out and shoot it up.

[00:28:25.64] So we got back to Da Nang, we were at Camp Reasoner, which is another guy that was in Recon. But anyway, we got to Reasoner and it was late. It was about one or two o'clock in the morning. And the three and the company commander were down there. And we got off the helicopters. And they were angry.

[00:28:53.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Because you got pulled out?

[00:28:55.97] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Because we got pulled out, yeah. And I'll never forget it. And I learned some valuable lessons that night. What happened was the company-- the company commander he said, well, I'm sure with a little bit of intestinal fortitude and some good marksmanship, you guys could have held that hill. And the gunny looked at him-- this is funny as shit, excuse my language.

[00:29:25.64] JOE GALLOWAY: That's all right.

[00:29:26.51] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: The gunny looked at him and he said, yeah, and you could have come out with a reinforced battalion working party in the morning and policed our dead asses up in rubber ponchos. And walked off. And I had never seen that. Had never seen that, talking to a-- oh, you don't do that.

[00:29:45.17] JOE GALLOWAY: But he did.

[00:29:46.05] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: But I learned-- and the big thing that I learned, and learned it right there, you have to listen to the people that are in it. And if you don't, it's not going to work.

[00:29:58.32] JOE GALLOWAY: It won't work. People are going to die.

[00:30:00.24] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yep, and they're going to die big time. That was my attention gainer.

[00:30:08.90] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: First class, first class, the only thing that I'll say, and I found it during my time in the Marine Corps, and I talked to my uncles, and I talked to my relatives that have been in the military and stuff, most of our leaders were top notch. I mean, they were as good as you can get. And they were professionals. If you're in Force Recon and stuff, you're a professional.

[00:30:37.02] The only problem that I would say is there was a level in Vietnam between the World War II guys who knew their business, no question about it, and the Korean guys, who knew their business. But the guys that were in between, there was a level of field grade officers that hadn't been shot at or had the shit scared out of them that really understood what was going on.

[00:31:08.16] And they didn't have the formative years of getting scared and knowing what was going on before you moved up the ladder. And there's stratas in there. And you can see it. And I'm sure that's the reason for it. They just-- they don't understand. They want to run things back here. They want to tell you--

[00:31:29.30] JOE GALLOWAY: They haven't got the background that allows them to do it instinctively.

[00:31:34.28] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: They don't understand and they don't listen. And I can't say that enough. They don't listen. They want to move things on a map or this or that.

[00:31:47.71] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is kind of major, lieutenant colonel level?

[00:31:52.83] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Back in Vietnam-- and now, there are a lot of them were very good. I'm just saying--

[00:31:58.89] JOE GALLOWAY: There were some there.

[00:31:59.75] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: There were some there that had it. And they got positions where they had to move people around in dangerous areas that they really didn't understand on the thing. But I can't say enough for my leadership, the people that were over me, basically. And you get one, or two, or somebody in that strata that I talked about. And the Marine Corps is very small. You know. I mean, if the guy's got it, you know it. And if a guy doesn't have it, you know it. And it's dealt with accordingly, I think.

[00:32:41.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Dealt with accordingly. Did the quality of the officers and enlisted men change during the course of the war?

[00:32:49.63] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I'm a strange case because my first tour in my enlisted tour, we we're professionals. I mean, the people that you dealt with, they were in it to be professional and no two ways about it. I worked with a lot of line units and stuff. And they were pretty good by the most part. You would get-- you get people in there that weren't that good. Or even-- we even got some Cat 5s that had been drafted because we were down on people and stuff.

[00:33:31.55] JOE GALLOWAY: The project 100,000.

[00:33:33.37] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: 100,000. And don't get me started on that.

[00:33:36.73] JOE GALLOWAY: I'd like to get you started on that.

[00:33:38.90] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, I'll tell you a good story in a minute on it. But what happened with us, I think the leadership was good. The training was good. I was there at the right time. Later on, I could see it. And then when I went back on my next tour, I was with the Vietnamese marines. But I could-- and I worked with a couple of Army units. And you could see some of the Army units and some that weren't, people that weren't really trained.

[00:34:11.86] Didn't want to be there. They were pulling the Americans back. They didn't want the Americans to get hurt. And I'm sure you're familiar with that. And I got a story on that too when I was with the Vietnamese marines. But when I was there, it was all fighting. Everybody was fighting from-- like I say, from the time that the NVA went south in early '67 up and through when I finally left after Hue City, it was fighting. And people knew what they were doing.

[00:34:53.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you go into Hue City at Tet?

[00:34:56.49] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah.

[00:34:58.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that.

[00:35:00.27] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well we-- I just-- let me tell you one thing before we went north because that was later in my enlisted tour that we went to the north. There were a couple things that we were into. But one of them, we all wanted to make a combat jump. I mean, you can understand. We're jumpers. We went to Army jump school and the rest of it. And we had a lot more--

[00:35:32.87] JOE GALLOWAY: You were trying to get to 65 bucks. I know about you guys.

[00:35:36.62] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, that's right. Well, in the Marine Corps, it was bad because they finally changed the symbol for the jump wings for the Marines. But I mean, I had-- but when I went to Vietnam, hell, I had close to 100 jumps. But I still had to wear the basic Army jump wings because the Marine Corps didn't allow--

[00:36:05.54] JOE GALLOWAY: You wanted a combat star.

[00:36:07.37] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We wanted a combat star because people, they'd look at it, like, you're a basic jumper? You understand that. But anyway, everybody wanted to jump. Everybody wanted a combat jump. I mean, it just-- if you're professional and you're into this, you want it. I mean, that's-- I didn't come back--

[00:36:31.38] JOE GALLOWAY: The Army jumped a whole division and spread two divisions out to protect them while they did it.

[00:36:37.62] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I know. I know. Well, we didn't do that, which is worse. What happened is we kept begging for a jump, begging for a jump. All right, we're going to put a jump together. And we're going to jump-- we're going to jump in-- deep into Happy Valley.

[00:36:57.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my God.

[00:36:57.99] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Which is bad to start with. And when you get deep into Happy Valley, it's jungle. I mean, they've got little clearings and the rest of it. So we put together-- we all wanted to. We were all ready for it. We were gung ho. And about a week before the jump, they looked around and all the experienced jumpers were team leaders.

[00:37:27.16] I was in it. Everybody in there had 60-- 60 to 200 jumps on the thing. But we all wanted to get that star on it. And then the three said, hey, we can't do this. I mean, these are all our team leaders. This is all our experience if we lose it. So they revised it, everything. And they had Gunny Webb was a Korean Marine. And he-- boy, a damn good one.

[00:37:59.29] He was a jump master. And he knew he had a couple-- he had 300, 400 jumps, knew what he was doing, and the rest of it. But they pulled the rest of us out. But similar to what the Army did, what we did is we put three teams around it. Now, when you fly in into Happy Valley, you go through a big pass, and I think Dak Mar, Dah Mar or whatever, one of the big mountains on one side, big mountains on the other side.

[00:38:27.73] And they were supposed to go in about four or five clicks or a little bit farther. And there was an area that had been farmed before, of course, been farmed by the bad guys, you know the deal. But it was going to be a night jump. So everything was going to be OK. But we weren't sure how to get to the drop zone.

[00:38:47.96] So we put three teams in, one on the south side, one on the north side, and one deep. So they didn't go past it. And they were going to hold strobe lights to mark-- to mark the zone. Well, time come we got a Caribou. And I was one of the teams that had to go in and hold a strobe light.

[00:39:13.60] So this thing was set up. And they were moving in. And we heard the Caribou, because they were jumping out of a Caribou. And they had made runs the previous nights to make it look like it was a standard resupply out to whatever, to Laos. And we turned on the strobe lights. And they come in, they jumped. Of course, they missed the LZ. They landed in the trees in the middle of the night. And those are big trees out there. Everybody that held the strobe lights, we took incoming fire right away.

[00:39:46.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course you did.

[00:39:46.88] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: On the deal.

[00:39:48.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't need strobe lights. You could use the green tracers and jump on them.

[00:39:53.18] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, we could see where they were with the green tracers. And then the race was on for us. I mean, we were moving and getting to get to some kind of-- we went for two days before we could get to a place where they could pull us out. They chased us for two days.

[00:40:13.61] JOE GALLOWAY: They chased you for two days?

[00:40:15.47] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: On the thing.

[00:40:16.19] JOE GALLOWAY: What about the guys hanging in the trees?

[00:40:20.09] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: They got split up, of course, on the thing. And they finally-- they finally got down. We grew up jumping at Lejeune because you got big trees back there. And you know, well, you just drop your reserve. And if that doesn't work, you drop-- you go down your reserve. And then you drop your helmet and all that. Well, it was a fiasco. It was--

[00:40:42.53] JOE GALLOWAY: But they got their stars.

[00:40:44.27] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, they did. And they got into two groups. And they finally-- two groups finally got back together. We lost a corpsman who was-- the corpsman in the 1st Platoon. And LaPorte was his name. And there's stories that he went over to the other side, that he didn't go over to the other-- they've been investigating it for years. We don't-- don't know the answer. John Laporte was the name.

[00:41:13.31] JOE GALLOWAY: He's still listed MIA?

[00:41:15.89] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: He-- we used to have trouble with him because we'd get in a firefight, he didn't want to be the corpsman, he wanted to be the shooter on the thing. But he had a Vietnamese wife. And he had been there on a tour earlier with the Navy on the thing. And we never found him.

[00:41:34.52] And they had reports later of a white guy running with the NVA and stuff, or a white guy going up to a village, and getting water, and provisions, and stuff like that. But we never saw him. And he was a good friend of mine. But I don't know. And I wouldn't put it past him, one way or the other, whether he's dead, or the likes of it.

[00:42:02.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Living happily on a farm somewhere.

[00:42:04.75] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Or unhappily on a farm on the deal. But it was a mystery. But that was-- one of the parachutists went down his reserve, got caught on the inside of the reserve going down, had a hell of a time getting out. But it was a fiasco. We should have known better. We were more interested in getting a combat jump than we are in common sense. But that was it. And then we moved up to Phu Bai. And that's--

[00:42:36.71] JOE GALLOWAY: That's when Tet took off.

[00:42:38.92] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah.

[00:42:43.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about Hue City and your involvement.

[00:42:46.29] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We moved north, the company went north with what they call Task Force X-ray. We moved up to Phu Bai. Just before-- we did that just before Tet started. And that's when one of my platoon sergeants got killed. I wasn't there when he got killed. But if you go up through the Hai Van Pass, you up a little bit farther, there's a fishing village off to the right. I can't think of the name of it right now.

[00:43:17.85] Well, they wanted to do a rubber boat insertion, sneak in, see what was going-- because we knew-- we were getting too many indicators on stuff. And they were even talking about NVA getting resupplied through the village and stuff. They made-- Huff was his name, Sergeant Huff. They made a rubber boat insert.

[00:43:45.55] And I was-- I think I was on R&R. And they grabbed him for the insert. And he wasn't that good a swimmer. Of course, I knew that. He got into Recon in Vietnam. He wasn't one of the-- he was one of the younger guys. He didn't have all the qualifications. They got in there, I think they got ashore for about 20 minutes, they got in trouble. They went back to the boats, went back out, they got caught in the surf. The boat broke, boat breached. He went over to the side and ended up drowning.

[00:44:27.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Drowned.

[00:44:28.19] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, on that. But anyway, we moved up. We knew something was coming. We weren't sure. But there's just a lot of activity. If you work beyond the lines, you get a feel for what's going on. I mean, you can tell generally what they're up to or something's coming just by the way the buildups are, and resupplies are, and the rest of it.

[00:44:57.79] So we went up with Task Force X-ray. And I-- the night they came, I was on duty at division COC. And what we did, our company always had a watch officer at division COC. That way, if a team was in trouble, we were right there where we could get help, artillery, air, the whole business. We had a seat in the COC, actually. So we had direct line.

[00:45:26.33] Well, the night they come in, we were there with a company from First Recon Battalion because we were all co-located, located together. We got a call said-- it was up by a place, I think it's Bach Ma. There used to be a big old resort after you go through the Hai Van Pass and the big mountain up on the north side. There was a big, big French resort up there in the old days.

[00:45:54.39] Got a call and from the company-- or from the patrol. Said we got movement. We got movement coming down the road. We can hear them. They were watching the road that come down out of there. And this is while the truce was on for Tet. There's no fire, nothing. You couldn't do anything. Artillery was in the tank, couldn't do anything.

[00:46:23.09] And Sergeant Sleeper was the guy's name, a good guy I knew. He said I'm going to-- he said, I think it's a patrol. I'm going to take them on. So he set up an ambush, and come down the road, and they nailed them. But what they didn't realize is that was the point for the regiment that was coming down to hit the battalion that was down below, just as you come through the Hai Van Pass off on the right in the low area. 3/5 was over there.

[00:46:55.33] Well, and this is while the truce was on. He hit them. And then and I was sitting there and listening, he said, uh oh, we got a problem. JOE GALLOWAY: We bit off more than we can chew. LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: [LAUGHS] Yeah, so they started-- they started moving down. And of course, it was dark. It was at night. And all they could do is move, and move fast, and get out of it.

[00:47:20.70] And what it was is a regular NVA infantry regiment that was going down to hit the 3/5 that was down below. It made them mad. It made him mad. The ceasefire was on. Sleeper was screaming for fire. Give me target such and such, and such and such, and such--

[00:47:41.42] JOE GALLOWAY: Not happening.

[00:47:41.98] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Not happening. Well, and then they ask for permission to fire. They went down to Da Nang to I Corps headquarters, wish for permission-- requested permission to fire. No, the truce is on. We want to see more of what's going on.

[00:47:58.93] And there was a guy named Archie Van Winkle, the Medal of Honor winner, I think, in Korea. He was a lieutenant colonel. And he sat there and listened. And he was a watch supervisor. And he was really-- he was a combat veteran. Sit there listening to it, and he went back down, he called back down. And no, we can't get permission. We got to go to Saigon. Saigon is not going to do it.

[00:48:28.94] Van Winkle said BS. He called the artillery. He said shoot it. And that's the only thing that triggered the whole deal. And once they found out what the hell was going on, well, then we started to get support. But they didn't know until the next morning. And then what happened is 3/5 sent their mortars out. Before we got the point where we could use the artillery, they sent their mortars out to the base of the mountain. So they'd be in range. So they could provide some kind of fire support for the team. So they'd get down and link up with them. And that's what they did.

[00:49:08.12] They just-- they beat the bad guys down to the bottom of the hill. But yeah, they ambushed the regiment that was going in to hit them. And then from then on, it was Katie bar the door because they were coming. And they were coming hard, and coming fast, and coming strong.

[00:49:25.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Every direction.

[00:49:26.71] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: They're coming in the road that the Marine Corps built, 4th Marines built outside of Hue to go into A Shau Valley, come right down the road.

[00:49:35.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Right down it.

[00:49:37.63] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And they moved in. And then things really started going bad. A friend of mine, Ray Smith was with the 1st Marines. He was in-- they were in the compound at Hue City on the deal. And they were in trouble. He ended up a second lieutenant and running the company. And when it was over, they told him he'd keep the company. He did that kind of job.

[00:50:06.32] JOE GALLOWAY: So lucky. What were you doing?

[00:50:10.09] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I was setting the watch that night. And so I saw-- well, I was running and talking to Van Winkle all the time. And that's how I know he said, bullshit, fire. And then--

[00:50:26.14] JOE GALLOWAY: When-- did you go into Hue City?

[00:50:28.87] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Oh yeah, this is only-- Hue City was a long time. People don't realize how long it was stretched out before we kicked them out. I did patrols on the perimeter. And then the last patrol that I took out, I was on the south side of the road coming out of Hue. And I had a friend of mine, Staff Sergeant Leeds was on the north side of the road. And we were covering the road.

[00:51:00.40] And they were starting to pull out of the city. We'd seen-- we'd seen columns coming out of the city with civilians. I mean, they were herding the civilians out on the thing. And I told-- I called back. And I said, what are we going to do? They're down there. But they got-- they got civilians. They're marching them out at gunpoint. That's what it amounted to.

[00:51:24.09] And they said, well, you can't-- you can't take them under fire. You're going to get the civilians. So what I did was I fired artillery, fired it over their head. And I fired it short. And I fired it in front on the east side, where they were going back into A Shau. And the only hope I had was that there was so much commotion that civilians would-- and that's what happened on the deal on two occasions.

[00:51:57.54] And then it's the old story. We were hurting them. And they come up after us. And it was the last patrol I was on. They come up. We saw them-- we knew they were working around, trying to get into position to hit us. So about-- we could hear them, but about 11 o'clock at night, 12 o'clock at night, they're coming in. We had-- I had Starlight scopes. So we could see them. We just stayed quiet. And then I fired-- fired a TOT. And they still kept coming.

[00:52:43.26] We had maybe 15, 20 of them we killed with small arms there, and M79, and stuff. And then we started running. So I was calling for an extract. I knew we were in trouble. And I called back. And by this time, Walker, the guy that had got me in there, was the company commander.

[00:53:10.72] And I said-- I said, we've got to get out of here. And he said, no, you better stay there. I mean, we need to know what's going on. I said, we're not going to be here. I said, we got to get out here. No, you better stay. And I-- that's when went back to my recollections with the gunny. I said, look, I'm coming out. You send the helicopters, I'm going to walk out of this place. I'm not going to die on this hill here.

[00:53:37.93] He said, well, we'll work on it. And then daylight, by first light, we were on the move. And they were on the move after us. Yeah, they were on the move after us because we were controlling the southern side of the escape route. Make a long story short, we had a running gun battle. We cut an LZ in some bamboo thickets that screwed up the planes. But we come out, we come out under fire. But we got out. Everybody got out.

[00:54:10.53] And I called my friend Leeds on the other side. I said, they're coming out. You got to get the hell out of there. He said, no. He had a good position. He said, I'm in a good position. We can hold it. It's not a problem. I said, look, they're coming out. I mean, get the hell out of there. He said, no, I'm going to stay. I got enough to stay one more night. We got plenty of grenades. I got plenty of artillery support. We're going to stay. He stayed one more night and didn't make it.

[00:54:42.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Lose the whole patrol?

[00:54:43.56] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Half of it.

[00:54:44.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Half of them. This is your first tour?

[00:54:53.50] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah.

[00:54:54.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, you go back?

[00:54:56.97] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, well, there was a little bit more. After that patrol, because they were mopping up, and they were cleaning up, there were remnants around. I ended up being a company gunny on a reaction force, where we would go out and the rest of it. And then I got my TAD orders to-- go back to the States to go to OCS.

[00:55:22.44] So I flew back into San Francisco. And I had three days. Flew to Travis and then went down to the airport at San Francisco. I had three days to be at Quantico for OCS training. And I had to stop and get my car in Ohio on the thing.

[00:55:48.88] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I got my first taste of the antiwar business at San Francisco airport. And they were there on the deal.

[00:56:00.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that.

[00:56:01.45] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, there were four of us that were coming back.

[00:56:06.79] JOE GALLOWAY: You were in uniform?

[00:56:08.71] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We were in utilities. We'd come back in cammies. I mean, that's--

[00:56:14.02] JOE GALLOWAY: All you had.

[00:56:14.71] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, cammies and sea bag. Actually, I didn't have a sea bag. I had a parachute kit bag when you store parachutes and stuff. I had a friend of mine that punched one of them out. And they backed off. On the thing, we're coming out, and they got up in his face. And he just nailed a guy, and dropped him right there. And then they all backed off. Then the cops come around. And they said, you guys, go on get out of here on the thing.

[00:56:46.70] So then I picked up my car and I went straight to OCS. And then I realized what old General Chapman told me about when I went through the officers boot camp. It was similar to going through the enlisted boot camp. But I made it. I had--

[00:57:09.11] JOE GALLOWAY: You went in there knowing that they were probably going to give you a harder time than the average cadet.

[00:57:16.04] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: They did. They wanted-- they wanted to drop me out.

[00:57:18.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Why? Just because you were enlisted?

[00:57:24.02] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And they were enlisted, probably. I don't know. I actually don't know.

[00:57:30.58] JOE GALLOWAY: They just had to make it harder for somebody that's a mustang.

[00:57:32.94] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: The series commander was really good. The company commander had been in Recon Battalion. And I'd worked with his company before. So that wasn't too bad. But I had-- I wasn't in good shape when I come back. I mean I had-- I was down in weight. I could walk-- I could walk them to death.

[00:57:56.25] But they would run and stuff. And they'd walk-- and their big thing was they'd go out on the hill trail at Quantico. And it's just up, down, up, down, up, down, walking. What I would do, and the only thing that would save me is--

[00:58:12.25] JOE GALLOWAY: What month did you start?

[00:58:16.64] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: April or so. It was after--

[00:58:19.79] JOE GALLOWAY: At least it wasn't dead winter.

[00:58:21.50] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Oh no.

[00:58:22.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Or dead summer.

[00:58:22.94] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No, no, no, that's the only saving-- well, I could probably have taken the heat. But what I would always do was move to the front right away as quick as I could because the company would be strung out. And the more hills you get on, the farther the company gets strung out. I understood that game. So as quick as I could, I'd pass them and go right up, right up to the front.

[00:58:51.11] And they'd have five or six platoons in a company, you know. And they'd be on the side of the road. I almost got booted. What happened, we were on the hill trail. And one of the drill instructors went back, and he was picking up stragglers and stuff. And he was going

back up to get up to his platoon which was ahead of him, or ahead of us on the thing. He'd been back behind.

[00:59:23.49] And I couldn't tell who it was. I was just looking out of the corner of my eye. And by that time, I was up right across from my platoon commander. And he was a little bit behind me. And I just saw this guy coming up through here in a column of twos. And the guy was pushing people, and pushing them off, and he pushed the platoon commander. And I just turned around and nailed him. And it was-- it was permanent personnel.

[00:59:50.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:59:54.15] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And I went to the company commander who had been, interesting enough, in Recon Battalion. And I was-- and they understood on the thing. So I got through OCS. And I ended up, I got into basic school. And I did it the way I wanted to because I understood what would happen afterwards. No, I knew.

[01:00:24.67] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And on my second tour-- I got married before I went back. And my wife, bless her, she's-- her father was a World War II Marine, and a Korean Marine, and had been Kennedy's crew chief at HMX-1. So she understood the Marine Corps. And I told her, I said, you know, I want-- I want to go back and do another tour. So she said, OK.

[01:00:51.73] So I went back. I went to the MATA course at Bragg and everything. And I got my couple of weeks of Vietnamese or whatever it was. But I got-- I got to go back. And of course, the Marine Corps was standing down earlier than the Army was. But interesting enough, all the advisers I knew, we'd been together before the war. We'd been together during the war. And now, they were back there.

[01:01:28.24] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were coming in as an adviser to the South Vietnamese marines?

[01:01:33.62] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Marine corps, right.

[01:01:34.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Good guys.

[01:01:35.85] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Dai qon luc tien. Boy, tough.

[01:01:38.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Tough guys.

[01:01:39.71] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Tough. They were the original French Riverine Force. And they come down out of Hanoi. And all the battalion commanders were North Vietnamese. And they were tough. And they were good.

[01:01:55.29] They're the reason that I Corps held during the Easter invasion. So what-- I checked in. And they were there to meet me at the airport with John Ripley, who had been back in Force Recon at Lejeune with me. And it's one-- it was up at the bridge later on.

[01:02:18.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Ripley at the bridge. Legendary.

[01:02:19.56] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, him and another guy, they picked me up about four o'clock. And we went-- of course, it was in Saigon. And we had permanent rooms at the Splendide Hotel in Saigon. So they picked me up. They took me over and got me fitted for a uniform right away. Am I going too long?

[01:02:45.82] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[01:02:46.35] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: They got me fitted for a uniform, got tiger stripes, and everything. And Ripley said, well, we'll show you a little bit of Saigon before we go back. So they showed me a little bit of Saigon. And naturally, they showed me too much. And about-- we were coming back in at about one o'clock. Well, Saigon had a curfew at 11:00.

[01:03:16.20] So we're just about two blocks from the Splendide Hotel. And the MPs pulled up behind us. So they got our names, and everything, and the rest of it. So when I reported in the next morning to the senior adviser, I already--

[01:03:35.07] JOE GALLOWAY: You already had a black mark.

[01:03:36.06] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yes, I was in trouble thanks to Ripley. It was his fault, wasn't mine. I didn't--

[01:03:42.39] JOE GALLOWAY: What are they going to do? Send you to Vietnam?

[01:03:45.66] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah. No, they're going to send you north. But what-- you can't make that stuff up. And I went in. And captain's mast, and they chewed me out, and this and that. He said I'm going to put you in the 1st Battalion. They've got-- they need a-- they need an assistant adviser in there that can help them.

[01:04:13.38] So I said, OK. And then that afternoon, I was on a plane headed to Saigon-- or headed to Da Nang from Saigon. There, I got into a Jeep. We drove up one, over the Hai Van Pass. And the last time I was in the Hai Van Pass, it was nasty. Drove through Hue, drove all the way up to Quang Tri and Dong Ha. And at Dong Ha--

[01:04:42.92] JOE GALLOWAY: In an open Jeep?

[01:04:44.03] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: In an open Jeep.

[01:04:45.83] JOE GALLOWAY: This is 1971?

[01:04:48.95] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, oh, the fields were being farmed. They actually had some tractors besides the water buffalo in it. It looked wonderful. It looked peacetime.

[01:05:00.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Like we'd won the war.

[01:05:01.79] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, exactly, that's exactly what it looked like. I couldn't believe it because the last time I'd been through Hai Van Pass, it was a problem.

[01:05:10.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Shoot and scoot.

[01:05:11.16] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah. They got me up there. And my battalion was up on the DMZ. And they were running combat patrols just on the south side of the river, the DMZ. So I went up and joined them. I was kind of a nerd. I was there for about two or three days. And the first thing, I started getting sick on the food because I wasn't used to the food. And when you're with the Vietnamese Marine Corps, you eat what the Vietnamese Marine Corps eats.

[01:05:43.23] So we were out, about the third day, we got-- we were sweeping. We ran into some bad guys, platoon of bad guys. Well, there's a company, I think, that was across on the south side of the river. And we-- firefight for about 20 or 30 minutes. And I was doing my thing, communicating, everything. Next thing I know is stand by, get ready to pull out. I said, what do you mean? He said, we got a helicopter coming in for you. I said, what for? That's what I'm here for.

[01:06:18.00] He said, no, he said-- brigade-- or not brigade policy, but corps policy is we pull the advisers back. If they're getting in contact, we're going to pull the advisers back. I said, you've got to be kidding me. He said, no. So a helicopter come in took me away while the two companies were out and engaged. Well, makes you feel like a fool. And you know you're losing face.

[01:06:46.25] JOE GALLOWAY: What are you looking like to the troops you leave behind?

[01:06:49.55] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Absolutely. So the sweep was over. It wasn't a big thing. It was just-- they were looking for--

[01:06:56.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Any time you hit contact, they were supposed to pull the Americans out?

[01:07:01.25] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yep. Because it had been so peaceful and stuff. And they didn't want any casualties. So anyway, it took me a month to get over that with the Vietnamese. And I didn't get over it until we really got into it, and they saw what I could do with the artillery and the air. And then from then on, I was in. But it was a lonely four or five weeks there with them on the deal.

[01:07:31.81] That was it. We did some patrols and stuff. And then we rotated. My battalion rotated down to Saigon. After about, I guess, two or three months, because what they would do, they'd go out three months, they'd go to Saigon, it's a base camp they got below Saigon.

[01:07:53.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Palace guard duties.

[01:07:54.73] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, they go there to R&R. Their families were there. The Vietnamese marines families were there on base. So they'd go over there for a month. And the brigade would rotate back up. So it was our turn to rotate back up. Ripley's battalion went up first. And while we were rotating up is when the offensive broke. And Ripley's battalion just got in on the ground. My battalion was coming in behind. We landed at Phu Bai and then motored on up.

[01:08:30.02] JOE GALLOWAY: This is the Easter Offensive when they came across with tanks and everything?

[01:08:35.30] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Right, we were-- yeah, we were just coming-- we were just coming in on the thing. So of course, the Leatherneck Square was in real trouble. And we had units on each one of them, Alpha 2, and Con Thien, and the rest of it. Those were manned by the Vietnamese marines. The 3d ARVN army was in charge.

[01:09:11.60] Things started to go south pretty fast. And that's-- they started falling back. And that's when you get into Ripley blowing the bridge and the rest of it. I got in originally-- the Vietnamese marines used French tactics. They have a four company battalion. But they have-- the XO is a fighter in the Vietnamese marines. He fights two companies. And the CO fights two companies. He's the reserve. And he's everything.

[01:09:46.79] And it's a good philosophy. If you live through the lead companies as an XO, because you're the one that's always out front, you get to survive. You get to be the battalion commander. You know what's going on and the rest of it. And a lot of their tactics are French vice ours.

[01:10:06.05] So that's what we got in. Ripley went north. And it was mass confusion by that time. Turley-- it's a good thing Jerry Turley was up there. He was just up-- I don't know if you've read his book or not, The Easter Invasion. I'll show it to you after we're done here. He's the thing that held it together because the 3d ARVN Division commander and the Army adviser to him beat feet.

[01:10:37.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Beat feet?

[01:10:38.94] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And he turned it over to him.

[01:10:42.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, at least they left it to somebody who would fight.

[01:10:44.94] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Oh yeah. And originally, it was chaos. We ran up the road to back up Ripley with two companies. And we were just in the way up there. We come back down. And they sent us out west to what's called Pedro because that was-- and that's eventually the way the NVA come in. But it was later on the deal.

[01:11:08.53] So my battalion held to the west. And Ripley's battalion held to the north. And he handled the bridge. After that, the next evolution, it was fighting all the time then. After the

bridge was blown, they did an envelopment, went down along the river, and crossed over, and then started to come in from the west.

[01:11:34.26] That's when Quang Tri City went up. And I-2 was the combat base, which was coordinating everything. That's when that started to fall. We had two big mountain OPs on the south side of the river above Quang Tri. They were Sarge and Nui Ba Ho. I don't know if you're familiar with them. They ended up getting overrun. That's when the whole situation in I Corps really went from bad to worse on the deal.

[01:12:17.70] JOE GALLOWAY: You wear a Navy Cross. What action was that for?

[01:12:22.13] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: That was later on, going back up into-- taking Quang Tri back.

[01:12:28.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Tell me about that action.

[01:12:30.77] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Two things, one, we had a big tank battle before that, before we lost it. And that's another tank battle that I was in that helped me. I don't know if you want to know if we're cut for time. That was Firebase Pedro. And I put the--

[01:12:48.54] JOE GALLOWAY: That's just where your tank training came in some use?

[01:12:51.98] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, absolutely. I put the minefield in at Pedro. So when they finally flanked and came around to hit us from the west, the 6th Battalion was at Pedro, they got pushed off of Pedro. And the bad guys stopped at Pedro. We went out with the Bravo group, two companies and a tank company, we were all mounted. We went back out to fight.

[01:13:18.80] And what it was a NVA tank company and an NVA-- two battalions of NVA that were mounted. And we had the Battle of Pedro. On that day, it was a three-day battle. We nailed them, make a long story short. And again, it's funny. We rolled up most of the tanks, we ended up-- we captured two. And the rest of them were blown up.

[01:13:50.70] But when we got there, and I'll never forget it, because my counterpart, oh, Major Fue. One of the tanks was caught in a gully.

[01:14:01.38] JOE GALLOWAY: One of ours?

[01:14:02.10] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No, one of theirs. It was a T-54. And this is after we were counterattacked. We knocked out most of their tanks. They only had three left. And two of them, they abandoned and run. And this other guy was trying to get out and he hit the gully. And he couldn't get out of it. He'd rev it. And he'd go up one side. And then he'd rev it back up, and he'd go up one side. And he'd go back up.

[01:14:27.03] He couldn't-- and he was just revving his engine the whole time. And the XO, which was my counterpart, we had him surrounded. The guy couldn't get out. The XO went

down, I said, what's he doing? He walked down. He got about 20 feet away from the tank. And they're buttoned up inside, going up and down. And he starts holding a class on the tank for his troops. This is unbelievable, but it's true.

[01:14:57.20] JOE GALLOWAY: He's lecturing.

[01:14:58.65] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: He was. And he was pointing to this part of the tank and this part of the tank. And what to do, shoot here. And then he calls for a benchy to bring him the LAW. And he runs up, and he brings him the LAW. And he opens the LAW, instruction, and goes through the whole business. And he lines up on a tank, and he's only about 20 feet away from it. And he hits it.

[01:15:25.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course he does.

[01:15:26.85] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And the hatch blew off. And the smoke was coming out. And the guys that were inside, they were coming out and surrendered. But the whole time, he held a perfect class on how to knock out a tank--

[01:15:41.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Knock out an enemy tank.

[01:15:43.23] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And it's unbelievable. But in the second day, and he really taught me a lot, we were going across compartment because they still had their APCs, BMPs, and stuff. So we were attacking across compartment. And he spread out all the AABs that we had, or the Army 113s is what they were, spread out to tanks. And we went into the attack. And he would just bring them up all along.

[01:16:13.32] So the whole time, they were dug in on the next ridgeline, low ridges. He just-- we'd keep constant fire going on. And just send an envelopment force around, roll it up. And we went through three ridgelines like that. And we just knocked the hell out of them.

[01:16:30.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Sounds like classic.

[01:16:31.74] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Oh, he knew what he was doing. He was really good. And then we got to-- what we were doing, we were going over to get to the brigade headquarters because they were in trouble there at a little place called Mai Loc. And so we fought our way over to them. That was the second day. And then we detached the tanks. And when they were screaming they had movement out in front of the brigade coming from the northwest side.

[01:16:59.41] So the next day, we dismounted. And we went out there with two companies. And it was an old French plantation and stuff and some heavy-- not jungle, but heavy brush and stuff. And we were going down. It's was kind of a horseshoe area. So we started down. And we went down and we hooked up with the corner of the horseshoe. And we started working up.

[01:17:26.67] And the lead company, the guy got off track. He swung over and he got into the center of the horseshoe as we were going up. So the XO's stopped him, went down there, and did

a little Vietnamese justice and instruction on him. Got him back over. We got back up on the side of the ridge. We moved up maybe, oh, 75 meters and stopped. He wanted to make sure that we were going.

[01:17:59.37] So I went over to the-- got on def-- got on the radio. And my old recon training, you get on the radio, you get down and the rest of it. And that's when they opened up. And they killed the XO. They wiped out the command group except for-- one company commander was hit bad. And the second company commander wasn't hit. That was the only thing that--

[01:18:24.02] JOE GALLOWAY: You were OK?

[01:18:25.10] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I was OK. I was down. But I had to go get the-- I got my counterpart, drug him back. Got the company commander, we got it organized. And started-- got the bodies back. And we started pulling back because--

[01:18:46.20] JOE GALLOWAY: What did they hit you with? Tanks?

[01:18:48.21] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No, it was infantry. And what we were doing is we walked in where the crew served weapons were set up on the ridge because they were set up for that horseshoe ambush. And if we had gone into it like the lead company was going, we'd all been--

[01:19:04.44] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd all been dead.

[01:19:05.34] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: We'd all been dead. So that was-- that's where I got the Silver Star.

[01:19:12.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Silver Star or the Cross?

[01:19:14.40] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No, it's Silver Star. On the Navy Cross, we were going back, in the attack going back up--

[01:19:26.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Go back and take Quang Tri again?

[01:19:28.77] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: After we had stopped him at the My Chanh Line, and our battalion had stopped them on the My Chanh River too. And that was a nasty battle. But that's what saved Hue. Two battalions of Vietnamese marines, and we held off what amounted to be two divisions on the thing. And then we started getting more strength, started moving back up north after that counterattack, going back up.

[01:19:55.95] We were trying to take-- the army tried to take Quang Tri. They couldn't do it, Vietnamese army. Couldn't do it. Couldn't do it.

[01:20:04.68] JOE GALLOWAY: They were holding the old citadel.

[01:20:07.02] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, the whole thing. The whole town. I mean, they were in there big time. So what happened, the Vietnamese commandant, who was North Vietnamese, really knew what he was doing, he said, we'll take it. And the army, the Vietnamese army backed off because they couldn't do it. They took too many casualties.

[01:20:31.74] And the commander of the Vietnamese marines, he went out, got 100-- an extra 150,000 rounds for the prep on the thing, going back in. And that was just the beginning of the thing. So what happened, they had-- they had the city almost encircled, except for the top part of the north. And they kept resupplying the guys in the city.

[01:21:00.90] Well, when I got my Navy Cross, I was with the 1st Battalion. And that's the vanguard. That was the old battalion. That's the vanguard. Our job was to go in and close the circle on the thing. So we attempted-- and I got my statement after I come out in there. You can read that. You get a better feel for it.

[01:21:31.66] We went in. And it was a little later on in the day, we had to wait for the dew and everything to burn off. We were going in a helicopter-borne attack on the thing. And the bad guys had the high ground to the west. They could see what the hell was going on. They knew what was going on. To shorten the story, we loaded up, we went in, 30 helicopters, we went in two waves.

[01:21:58.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Air assault?

[01:21:59.05] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, and the Army was leading us in. Boy, we had a great-- and I can't give them guys good enough credit, the U.S. Army. I was trying to think of the teams, what they called the teams, but anyway.

[01:22:12.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Pathfinders?

[01:22:13.78] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No, no, no. Well, we used Pathfinder, but the regular-- it was regular, big time-- gunships, the whole business.

[01:22:22.93] JOE GALLOWAY: The whole nine yards.

[01:22:23.89] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah. It burned off. We went in. We went in two waves. And it's funny, we were loading up. And by that time, I was the only American with them as-- I was the only adviser there. But we were good friends after what we've been through. And the guy said, we go, we go on 53. CH-53. We don't want to go on that one. We'll go on a smaller plane.

[01:23:03.54] He said, OK, he said, what about this one? And we just looked at it because we had the command group and stuff. Looked at it, and it had 13 on it. For some reason, and I'm not normally superstitious, I don't like that one. So we jumped on another one. We loaded up, first wave went in, and went in at treetop level over the bad guys and stuff.

[01:23:29.19] Nobody-- got on the ground, birds started coming out, and they hosed them down. They nailed the birds coming back out. First two companies were on the ground. So we were committed because we-- second two companies, we were coming in, we were coming come hell or high water. And they knew it.

[01:23:51.93] So we come in. And they shot the hell out of us going in. The 53 that had our BAS, or our aid station on it, was trailing behind us. What happened, and we were coming in, we were coming in at 20 feet, treetop level. We were busting limbs. Going in and low, low and fast. We got-- our plane got hit. And we flew right over the guy, he was on a BMP. But he couldn't get his gun cranked up to get us. And we were probably 10, 15 feet above the guy. But the 53 was trailing a little bit off. He blew the 53 out of the air. We lost 53 guys.

[01:24:33.79] JOE GALLOWAY: 53?

[01:24:35.92] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Vietnamese, their little-- load them up. It was our BAS, our aid station on the thing. They got blown out of the air. The pilots got out. But the plane burned. And the troops in the back just, they'd had it.

[01:24:53.44] We got into the zone. And we were in big trouble. We landed between the division headquarters and the reserve regiment--

[01:25:03.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Of the bad guys?

[01:25:04.32] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Of the bad guys-- of the NVA.

[01:25:06.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Not good.

[01:25:07.41] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No. And we had-- and we were out in the rice paddies. So coming off-- and the plane was hit and hit bad. We were out in the rice paddies. We were getting shot at from all sides. My radio-- not my radio, yeah, my radio man got shot too. But my naval gunfire, who was an American, got shot, got nailed, got shot in both legs. But we-- I looked at the battalion commander, there's only one thing we could do. And that's go attack the tree line.

[01:25:47.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Attack the line.

[01:25:48.21] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: That's all we could do. So we-- and in my statements in there, you can see my statement on the thing. But we got into the first tree line and stuff. And there were a couple of houses and stuff. We cleaned them out. They had a trench line in there. It's cleaned out. I had to go back get my naval gunfire guy.

[01:26:11.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Your ANGLICO guy is laying out there in the paddy shot up.

[01:26:15.17] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, he's shot. He's hit in both legs.

[01:26:18.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Is he still able to call fire?

[01:26:20.10] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: He's talking. He's talking. Well, and it's not really funny, but it happened. We're coming off the plane. And we hit the paddies because we were under fire. We got-- hit the dikes and stuff. And we got up to go to the next one, and I said, Bidoff, lieutenant, big kid from-- lieutenant from Idaho, I think, or somewhere out in the West.

[01:26:47.07] We took off and we started in the assault. And I said, get up and run. We're going to the next paddy dike. And he says, I can't. And I said, get up off your ass and move. He said, I can't, I'm shot in the legs. Just as calm--

[01:27:06.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Both legs?

[01:27:07.62] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, both. Guy says, I can't move, sir. Of course, I felt like--

[01:27:15.01] JOE GALLOWAY: IOf you don't mind, I'll just stay here.

[01:27:15.97] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, of course, I felt like an ass. But so anyway, make a long story short, we got into the first tree line. I went back and got him, carried him out. He played football in college. He's a big guy, too.

[01:27:31.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Big guy.

[01:27:31.69] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yeah, they're always big guys when you got to carry them. Got him-- got him out. And then I told-- he had a sergeant-- or Corporal Hernandez was his radio man. I said, you stick with him. And-- the whole time, and I'll be back to get you guys again. So we continued to attack. It was about 500 meters before we got into the village. And it had three trench lines we had to clean out.

[01:28:06.11] It was nasty. I mean, it was bad. And that went on for five days before we could get out. In the statement, judge of the good, the bad, and the ugly, and it's one of those deals they either promote you or court martial you for it is what it amounts to.

[01:28:27.38] JOE GALLOWAY: You seem to have lucked out on all of those decision points.

[01:28:32.39] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I had good people above me, simple as that. And they looked at it and they understood.

[01:28:46.20] JOE GALLOWAY: How did the Vietnam War affect the Marine Corps?

[01:28:49.44] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: I think, in the long run, it made it better. Because it trained another level of leaders to carry it on. And particularly, I think what hurt more was the downsizing, and the money chops, and the rest of it. But we had leaders that knew what they were doing. We had-- PX Kelley ended up being the commandant. We got-- we ended up getting maritime prepositioning, which was fabulous. And we--

[01:29:28.86] JOE GALLOWAY: And a generation of leaders who were ready to do the job when the Persian Gulf came along.

[01:29:36.27] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Yep, yep, yep. And let me-- and let me tell you, when we went to the Persian Gulf, I know this is not part of Vietnam. When we went to the Persian Gulf, I was a regimental commander in the 6th Marines. Division commander was Bill Keyes, probably one of the best Marines I've ever known. And the MEF commander was Walt Boomer.

[01:30:07.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Walt Boomer.

[01:30:09.71] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Well, one of the Marines on the OP that fell up at Nui Ba Ho and Sarge was Walt Boomer, Major Walt Boomer. One of the Marines that helped me out when I really got into it, when I got my Navy Cross was Bill Keyes. We knew-- you didn't have to say it. You knew what they wanted and you did it.

[01:30:43.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Mike Myatt had a division.

[01:30:45.59] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Mike Myatt, another adviser. Mike Myatt was my MEU commander when we took out the first MEU SOC when we got back in the technical special operations business. I was the battalion-- Al Gray, who was a major across the street when I was in 2d Force Recon when I was a sergeant was the commandant and said, BS. We can do this. And we can do some of it better on the thing.

[01:31:22.04] So he pulled me up as a battalion commander in 3/4 for the first special operations capable battalion to train it, to get it into the Med. And we were in there when we run the Libyan strikes going after Gaddafi on the thing. I can't speak-- and I've been lucky that I've had people like that over me. I don't know, we started talking about Desert Storm there.

[01:31:54.00] JOE GALLOWAY: But yeah, but it's-- Desert Storm was the graduation of a long line of tuition paid for in blood, and sweat, and tears.

[01:32:08.26] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And I had the breach force for the 2d Division. I had a battalion of tanks, reserve battalion, and four battalions of infantry.

[01:32:22.26] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a pretty good little force.

[01:32:23.79] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: And we did it the old fashioned way. We blew our way through. We didn't snoop and poop.

[01:32:32.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Go get them. Hey diddle, diddle, right up the middle.

[01:32:34.86] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: Right out of the textbook, the old fashioned way. And let me tell you one story about it. We were rolling them up in Desert Storm. And I was out ahead because we just went balls to the wall on the thing. And we had all kinds of prisoners. I

mean, they were-- our regiment captured over 6,000 of them on the first day. And we were getting inundated with them.

[01:33:10.76] And they called back. They wanted to know how many prisoners we had. And I said, I said-- I don't know. I'm going to let somebody else count them. We were-- and they were pissed. It went all the way up. It went up to Schwarzkopf's office. And he laughed about it. Instead of stop everything you do, count the prisoners because that's more-- that's more important. Schwarzkopf had a big laugh out of it on the thing. But it-- I had a great shot at it. And no regrets.

[01:34:04.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Ever been there?

[01:34:05.31] LAWRENCE LIVINGSTON: No. Let me tell you, I was the base commander at Camp Lejeune when the traveling memorial went out, the traveling wall. And I ended up giving a talk in front of the guy that was supposed to do-- I was the base commander. I just was there to introduce the speaker. And the speaker got sick and stuff.

[01:34:33.51] So make a long story short, I gave a little talk in front of it. But I get bitter. It-- the way they did it in D.C. is just-- it's line up the dead instead of celebrate. It's the way they do it compared to other memorials.

[01:35:15.28] I'll tell you what I said. And it was emotional, because I had to get up out of nowhere and take over for the guy that didn't show up. And I said, I'm going to speak because I feel like I'm out in front of a formation. I just buried too many people.

[01:35:42.52] But it makes me mad. I know they're bringing them honor and the rest of it. It's just the way that they did it. And I'm sure it's all the other stuff that goes with it. But I still have trouble with two lost platoon sergeants and a platoon commander.