

Lynch, Allen US Army

[00:00:17.32] ALLEN LYNCH: I was born in Roseland, which is now part of Chicago, in 1945.

[00:00:21.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:23.48] ALLEN LYNCH: My father was Leroy J. Lynch, a World War II veteran. He never went overseas, served in Florida. He trained dogs. And my mother was a mom.

[00:00:36.85] ALLEN LYNCH: I enlisted. I had nowhere else to go. I was like that guy in-- Richard Gere in Officer and a Gentleman. I was bullied through grade school and high school. And I was a very poor student. And, of course, back in the '60s, to go to college, you had to be smart and had to have good grades. I had no interests.

[00:00:56.29] And when I graduated in June 1964, I went to work in a factory which was going to be my lot in life. I knew that, eventually, I was going to get drafted. And I thought, after going through high school, I wanted to take charge of my life so I joined the Army, 1964. November 6, 1964. Just a few days after Lyndon Johnson was elected president.

[00:01:22.60] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam, if you had any sense at all?

[00:01:27.88] ALLEN LYNCH: I had no sense at all. No sense at all. We knew-- I mean, I knew very little about Vietnam. I could point to it on a map because geography was the only thing I got an A in-- and history. And I knew what was going on there, that there was this conflict. The North was trying to take the South. And there were Green Berets over there. But other than that, I didn't care. I was just-- my biggest thing was trying to find a girl to take out on Saturday night.

[00:02:03.61] ALLEN LYNCH: I took basic training at B93, Fort Knox, Kentucky.

[00:02:07.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Fort Knox? And advanced?

[00:02:10.66] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, actually, I was supposed to be a personnel specialist. And I got about-- I think it was my sixth, seventh week of basic. And I wasn't as dumb as I thought I was because evidently I tested pretty high. And so a bunch of us were called on to our battalion commander's headquarters and asked if we wanted to go to officer candidate school at Fort Benning.

[00:02:32.08] I thought, well, this is a chance to make my mom and daddy really proud of me. So I switched MOSs-- military occupational specialties-- for 11B infantry and ended up going to Fort Gordon, Georgia for infantry training.

[00:02:50.44] JOE GALLOWAY: And what about OCS?

[00:02:53.53] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, I did real good at OCS for about four weeks. And then I had a little situation. And I decided that I wasn't going to-- made to be an officer, so I dropped out.

[00:03:05.05] JOE GALLOWAY: You dropped out?

[00:03:05.86] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, they lost my pen--

[00:03:08.23] JOE GALLOWAY: The MOS went with you.

[00:03:09.25] ALLEN LYNCH: Oh, yes, it did. It sure did. There was no going back.

[00:03:12.88] JOE GALLOWAY: For our civilian watchers, that's the military occupational--

[00:03:17.80] ALLEN LYNCH: Specialty.

[00:03:18.65] JOE GALLOWAY: --specialty-- the MOS.

[00:03:20.95] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah.

[00:03:21.43] JOE GALLOWAY: And 11 Bravo was infantry.

[00:03:24.25] ALLEN LYNCH: That's it. And after about three weeks after I got out of OCS, I dropped out of OCS, I got sent to a little place called Gelnhausen, Germany. And I was there from about the end of November 1965 through April 25, 1967-- or '66.

[00:03:43.77] JOE GALLOWAY: Sixty-six.

[00:03:44.80] ALLEN LYNCH: And I re-enlisted. And again, not the sharpest pencil in the pack, I wanted to go to Berlin because I started getting frostbite in my feet when we were always out in the field because the Russians were coming every 5 minutes. So in Germany at that time, we did a lot of field maneuvers in the wintertime. And it's cold in Germany in the winter.

[00:04:04.78] JOE GALLOWAY: Yes, indeed.

[00:04:05.47] ALLEN LYNCH: And I got frostbite. And I decided that I'll take a short, what they called a short enlistment. They only added about a year to me so I enlisted. I went to Berlin. I went home on leave for 45 days and came back and went to Berlin, Germany. And in Berlin, I served with the 3rd of the 6th Infantry headquarters company. I was in a four-deuce mortar platoon. I'm infantry trained, but they kept throwing me in mortars which I didn't like because I was infantry. I liked infantry. I knew infantry. I didn't know mortars. And so I was a substandard Soldier in my mind.

[00:04:41.41] In Berlin, I got two Article 15s because I told my squad leader what he could do with himself and called him a few names. And the second-- when I went AWOL-- actually, I went AWOL to get one of my buddies who had got some bad news from home went out and

decided to get drunk. So me and another guy went down and tried to get him to come back. And it didn't work so well. We got caught.

[00:05:06.10] JOE GALLOWAY: You ended up in trouble.

[00:05:07.72] ALLEN LYNCH: I ended up in trouble. I got my second Article 15. And then I think it was in February, I decided to volunteer for Vietnam.

[00:05:15.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh. You just kept piling it on.

[00:05:18.13] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, like I said, I'm not the sharpest pencil in the pack. I asked for the 1st Cavalry Division. I asked for Vietnam, the 1st Cav. And I got everything I wanted in spades.

[00:05:30.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I would say. Did all of this service and your training prepare you for what you faced when you landed in Vietnam?

[00:05:41.71] ALLEN LYNCH: In a way, yeah. I was-- by then, I was getting ready-- I was already in the military way of doing things. Vietnam was totally different from any of the training that I had had. We had trained for conventional war against Russia and against the East Germans. And here we were in the jungle with a weapon I was not familiar with, the M16. I trained on the M14. I was pretty darn good shot with the M14. The M16 was different. It was a lot easier to fire and all that. And if you knew what you were doing, when it jammed, you could clear a jam pretty quick.

[00:06:15.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And if you took good care of it, it wouldn't jam.

[00:06:18.67] ALLEN LYNCH: Right, you had to take good care of it. I cleaned it like I-- boy, I cleaned that thing every day, sometimes twice and three times a day.

[00:06:26.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, a matter of life and death.

[00:06:27.85] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

[00:06:35.90] ALLEN LYNCH: I got to Vietnam through Fort Ord, California. I came home first on a 45-day leave. I think it was like a delay en route. I went to Ford Ord. I think I was there about five days. Actually, I went AWOL again at Fort Ord, but I was kind of angry because they had us in this big barracks with bunks three stacked high. He had some little sergeant E-5 that was screaming over the intercom.

[00:07:00.77] And to me, I volunteered. I should have been treated differently. I should have been treated like I wanted to go. And so they put us in this big bloody barracks. And me and another guy got to grousing one day. And we knew our time was short. And we said, it would be nice to go down town and get a steak dinner and enjoy some of the extracurricular activities.

[00:07:25.10] JOE GALLOWAY: And what are they going to do, send us to Vietnam?

[00:07:27.77] ALLEN LYNCH: Exactly. So we're going there anyway, so we went AWOL. We have one of our buddies let us in. We had to be back by 10 o'clock which was I think bed check. So we made it back at 9:30, but we went downtown. We had a few drinks. We had a nice dinner. We did a couple other things, came back, got in. The very next morning we got notified we were going to Vietnam. So we flew over on a MAT's flight, landed in Hawaii.

[00:07:55.56] JOE GALLOWAY: You say MAT's flight, is that military--

[00:07:57.56] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, military air--

[00:08:01.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Transport.

[00:08:01.94] ALLEN LYNCH: --transport. But it was a civilian airplane.

[00:08:04.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah. Chartered plane.

[00:08:05.60] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah.

[00:08:07.67] JOE GALLOWAY: And you landed where?

[00:08:08.87] ALLEN LYNCH: We landed first in Hawaii. They let us off the plane to walk around a little bit. Couldn't go anywhere, there were MPs all over the place. Again, I was pretty upset because I volunteered. Then we landed at Clark Air Force Base way, way out in the jungle. I mean, it was like the farthest airstrip you could find at Clark Air Force.

[00:08:29.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, they didn't want you going over the hill.

[00:08:31.67] ALLEN LYNCH: No. And where were you going to go? In the jungle? Well, we were heading to that. And then we went into Cam Ranh Bay. It was at Cam Ranh--

[00:08:39.27] JOE GALLOWAY: What was your first impression when they opened that door?

[00:08:42.83] ALLEN LYNCH: Hot, hot. It was hotter than anything I had ever been-- and I live in Chicago where it gets crazy hot here, but it was a different kind of heat. It clung to your face. It clung to your uniform. And we were all in khakis. And I sweat through mine in seconds.

[00:09:02.10] JOE GALLOWAY: Sweated out in 30 seconds.

[00:09:02.38] ALLEN LYNCH: Oh, yeah. Well, we did sandbag detail to acclimatize to the heat, took about three days of that.

[00:09:09.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Still at Cam Ranh?

[00:09:10.99] ALLEN LYNCH: Still at Cam Ranh.

[00:09:12.13] JOE GALLOWAY: You've gone through the Repo Depot.

[00:09:14.80] ALLEN LYNCH: Got all of our stuff and gear and all of this other kind of thing.

[00:09:17.50]

[00:09:17.76] JOE GALLOWAY: And the Army is actually going to send you where you asked for.

[00:09:20.20] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah.

[00:09:20.83] JOE GALLOWAY: And did.

[00:09:21.52] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. They sent us--

[00:09:22.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you know how rare that is?

[00:09:24.49] ALLEN LYNCH: Very rare.

[00:09:32.27] ALLEN LYNCH: I was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division. D Company. I flew into An Khe. And it was my first taste of being shot at. The C-130 came in and was going to make one of their nice landings. And all of a sudden, we heard some ping-pings and some other things. And he pulled up. And he says, I'm going to have to combat land. Hold on--

[00:09:55.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Hold on.

[00:09:55.49] ALLEN LYNCH: --to something. And you've been through that so you know that it comes in like this and then just crashes into the ground. At the last minute, it pulls up. We first had to go to the 1st Cav school to learn how to be in the jungle. And that was I think about three or four days.

[00:10:10.79] We learned how to fire the-- we familiarized with the M16 and zeroed that and fired it and learned about grenades, grenade traps, Claymore, Claymore mines. The Claymore mine is-- can ruin a VC's whole day. It's got 750 double-aught buck pellets in it and explodes out. It's an aimed mine.

[00:10:32.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:10:32.69] ALLEN LYNCH: And so we learned how to do that. We learned how to rappel which was really a lot of fun.

[00:10:36.98] JOE GALLOWAY: You had to learn which way to point those things.

[00:10:39.62] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. Yeah. It says, front towards enemy.

[00:10:42.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Front toward enemy, yeah.

[00:10:44.84] ALLEN LYNCH: You don't want to ever turn it around.

[00:10:46.04] JOE GALLOWAY: No, no. But sometimes, they would.

[00:10:48.47] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. Yeah. Well, we had a trick for that-- a little grenade underneath with the pin pulled.

[00:10:54.08] JOE GALLOWAY: You eventually became a radio telegraph operator.

[00:10:58.04] ALLEN LYNCH: Right, right.

[00:10:59.66] JOE GALLOWAY: And was that from the beginning or--

[00:11:02.36] ALLEN LYNCH: No, I came in. I carried what they called the XM79 which is now the M209 grenade launcher. It's an M16 and underneath is an M79 grenade launcher.

[00:11:13.09] JOE GALLOWAY: It's got the thumper right below.

[00:11:14.36] ALLEN LYNCH: Right, yeah. I like that because I wanted as much firepower as I could so I carried 35 HE rounds, about three Willy Peters, some CS, and some double-aught buck.

[00:11:24.97] JOE GALLOWAY: OK, translate.

[00:11:27.80] ALLEN LYNCH: An M79 grenade launcher is a grenade that is launched from the M79. The thumper is what we called it then. And Willy Peter is white phosphorous.

[00:11:38.73] JOE GALLOWAY: White phosphorous.

[00:11:39.47] ALLEN LYNCH: And that was used to burn villages and to-- again, the white phosphorus gets on your skin or on your uniform, and it just keeps burning.

[00:11:48.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Ruins your day.

[00:11:49.97] ALLEN LYNCH: It just will ruin your whole day. So I carried three of those. And I carried 35 magazines of M16 ammunition. As I recall, I think it was the last-- the third to the last round was a tracer. So that you knew when you were firing that when that tracer went out, you knew to switch magazines in the middle of the firefight.

[00:12:08.72] JOE GALLOWAY: It's time to change.

[00:12:09.05] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah.

[00:12:10.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. And you said you like being an infantryman.

[00:12:14.49] ALLEN LYNCH: I like being infantry. I carried the M79 and the-- or the XM79 for a while. Then I carried the M79 grenade launcher. And then I just wanted the M16, so I switched off of that, I think, sometime in July and carried that for the rest of the time I was there.

[00:12:35.44] JOE GALLOWAY: When did they get around to handing you that prick-25 radio?

[00:12:39.97] ALLEN LYNCH: That was about the end or the middle of November. And my-- our company RTO, Borges, came over and said, how would you like to be in RTO? And I said, I carry that radio it's like a sign that says, shoot me. And he says, yeah, but you get to know everything that's going on. You get to know when we're getting hot chow, when we're moving out. He said, you're the first to know. And again, not being the sharpest guy, oh, sure, let me have it. So I took the radio.

[00:13:12.07] JOE GALLOWAY: And how did that work out?

[00:13:14.87] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, for the first little bit, it was kind of nice. We weren't in a lot of heavy contact. And I got to know what was going on. He was right. I knew when hot chow was coming in. And I didn't have to do a lot-- man the radio at night and all that, which wasn't too bad.

[00:13:29.12] JOE GALLOWAY: It's kind of heavy to tote.

[00:13:30.47] ALLEN LYNCH: Very heavy, very heavy to tote, which is why I've got back problems now that kick my butt all the time. That and jumping out of helicopters.

[00:13:45.42] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, you're basically-- you're platoon leader's shadow. Where he goes, you go. So if he runs up to the front, you run up to the front. If he runs back to the rear, you run back to the rear. Wherever he goes, you go. You take care of his maps--

[00:13:57.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Attached to him by that expandable cord.

[00:13:58.74] ALLEN LYNCH: Exactly, exactly. And you take care of his maps. You have to acetate his-- acetate is a covering for the paper maps so they don't get all nasty in the monsoon and water and all of that. You take care of all the code books and all of this other happy stuff.

[00:14:15.18] JOE GALLOWAY: You're running combat operations. Describe a typical operation. Where were you operating? You're in the highlands.

[00:14:27.12] ALLEN LYNCH: Our AO was the Bong Son Plain, which was in the Central Highlands. It was the rice bowl of Vietnam.

[00:14:33.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Down on the coast.

[00:14:34.92] ALLEN LYNCH: Flat as a billiard ball table, except for rice paddy dikes and little island villages that sat in these rice paddies or around-- the rice paddy sat around them, I should say.

[00:14:45.51] JOE GALLOWAY: From the beginning, the Bong Son was tough country.

[00:14:48.63] ALLEN LYNCH: It was.

[00:14:49.29] JOE GALLOWAY: A lot of guerrillas and a lot of NVA.

[00:14:52.02] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, and we owned it. When I got there in June, it was pretty well pacified. I mean, we had a lot of firefights and a lot of cordons where we would surround a village and then let the Ruff-- the Popular Forces, we called them Ruff Puffs-- go in.

[00:15:08.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Ruff Puffs, yeah.

[00:15:08.94] ALLEN LYNCH: And they'd go in and search the village and see if there were any VC. In the perfect world, there would be no firefights, none of that. But the world's not perfect.

[00:15:17.16] It's-- we lived in little hooches, tents made of our ponchos.

[00:15:25.53] JOE GALLOWAY: This is out in the jungle.

[00:15:26.58] ALLEN LYNCH: This is out in the jungle.

[00:15:28.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Out in the rice paddies.

[00:15:29.19] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. We usually found a place where we could bivouac for the night. Always in a circle-- circle your wagons. So let's start at night. We'd bivouac some place, dig our foxholes. Every night we dug foxholes. If you were short, sometimes you had sandbags. And you put little berms in front of your foxhole. We had two guys that if they could find any way possible, they dug a foxhole. They had--

[00:15:59.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Sandbags.

[00:16:00.27] ALLEN LYNCH: --sandbags in front. And they put an overhead cover.

[00:16:03.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, man.

[00:16:04.32] ALLEN LYNCH: Because they were short. And they were scared. And they didn't want to get hurt.

[00:16:07.20] JOE GALLOWAY: I bet they dug deep foxholes, too.

[00:16:08.49] ALLEN LYNCH: They did. They did, yes. And you always wanted to get next to them. But then we called in our-- what we called Delta Tangos, defensive targets. So the artillery would fire. We had--

[00:16:21.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Register your--

[00:16:22.53] ALLEN LYNCH: Register the rounds.

[00:16:23.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Register your rounds.

[00:16:24.27] ALLEN LYNCH: Exactly.

[00:16:24.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:16:25.50] ALLEN LYNCH: And then depending upon what you were doing that night, you could either stand the radio watch at the company CP, or you would go on an observation post, an OP, or you might go on ambush. And--

[00:16:37.61] JOE GALLOWAY: So the radio operator would go on ambush?

[00:16:40.46] ALLEN LYNCH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Everybody pulled the duty. Yep. Yep. And then if you had contact at the ambush-- well, whoever went out on ambush or observation post or whatever it happened to be, we had a thing where we did SITREP, situation reports. So if we had contact, they would say, break squelch. If you're OK, break squelch once. If not, break it twice. You never talked on ambush.

[00:17:07.07] JOE GALLOWAY: This is just clicking the button.

[00:17:08.60] ALLEN LYNCH: Just clicking the button. You just clicked the button. You never said a word. We never would talk. And so they would get our situation report. And if everything was good on observation post, then they just go sit OP1, SITREP, break squelch. OP2, SITREP, and all the way around the perimeter.

[00:17:31.47] Ambush was different. You'd go out. And you'd do a line ambush. We mostly did line ambushes. There were a lot of different ways you could do it, but we liked the line, usually along a trail. Set up Claymore mines pointed towards the trail. And then when the enemy came down, we set it off. Usually, the platoon leader would set it off and away we'd go.

[00:17:54.39] JOE GALLOWAY: With sometimes angry people following? Not many.

[00:17:59.57] ALLEN LYNCH: Not many. We usually tried to get them all in the kill zone. Sometimes it didn't work out that way, and we had to get out of there quick.

[00:18:13.32] ALLEN LYNCH: We were very, very tight because we'd talk at schools a lot. We had no real race problems in the field. It was, can you lead? Can you follow? Can you fight? Can we trust you? And it didn't matter if you were white, black, Hispanic. Nobody cared. We shared the same water bottle, canteens. If you were thirsty, you passed your canteen around. If you had a cigarette, you shared it down to the last one. We were a brotherhood. A band of brothers, to quote the oft-used phrase. We trusted each other.

[00:18:48.42] We'd sit around at night if we were in an area that was somewhat safe and smoke. And, of course, there was a whole different way of smoking. You never just held your cigarette

out because that was for a sniper. You kept it cupped between your hands and kept it down. But you'd smoke and talk a little bit and learn more about your brothers than anybody you did at home.

[00:19:15.01] In fact, you told more. You talked more. You explained more about where you came from and what you did and what your feelings were. And not in that new age kind of my feelings, but more-- here's what was like growing up. Here's where I came from. Here's how I did in school and everything. I was closer to those guys than I ever was to anybody at home.

[00:19:38.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds that you would never have had in civilian life?

[00:19:48.71] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, I was raised in a family that didn't deal with race. My family was very much, everybody is equal. And what makes you unequal is you either prove yourself or you don't. So skin color had nothing to do. So I was never raised to be racially sensitive to any of that. But over there, I made a lot of friends with men of different races.

[00:20:15.37] Our machine gunner, Heavy, he was an amazing man. I mean, one of the strongest men I've ever seen in my life. He could fire a 60-- shoulder fire his M60 machine gun. And you could almost walk along. You could lay a plumb line along the tracers that he fired because he was that steady. He could pick up two railroad ties and carry them when we were building bunkers on an LZ. And two of us would be picking them up. But yeah, we made a lot of friends. I still have some of those friends today.

[00:20:44.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Now 1967, 1968, there was a lot of turmoil at home. There were racial and social tensions and riots and things like that and assassinations. Did any of that translate to where you were?

[00:21:01.56] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, it created some tension, especially back at the LZ or at base camp.

[00:21:08.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Base camp.

[00:21:08.79] ALLEN LYNCH: You could almost see that, especially after Martin Luther King was assassinated, that there was this-- the African-Americans would kind of split off.

[00:21:18.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Self-segregation.

[00:21:19.56] ALLEN LYNCH: Self-segregation.

[00:21:23.50] JOE GALLOWAY: But not in the field.

[00:21:24.55] ALLEN LYNCH: But not in the field. In the field, we relied on each other. We had to. We were brothers out there. And what I think upsets me so much with this country is we don't really get that it doesn't matter what color we happen to be or where we happen to come from. It matters what's in your heart.

[00:21:44.29] I would trust anybody I served with, with my life. And they with mine and vice versa. It was just that crucible of combat that brings us closer together. And all of these stupid things that we focus on back here in the world, the United States, becomes non-effective. Nobody cared about it.

[00:22:06.43] I had a guy that was a real bigot. I mean, he was Deep South. And at that time, most bigots were from the Deep South, though I think the North could hold a candle to some--

[00:22:17.53] JOE GALLOWAY: They had their share.

[00:22:17.77] ALLEN LYNCH: They has their share. And he said, I put my bigotry on the shelf until I get home. Then we'll see. Just none of that made any sense to me. Of course, I wasn't raised that way.

[00:22:29.48] JOE GALLOWAY: Funny question again. If applicable, what did you do for recreation and off-duty time?

[00:22:40.06] ALLEN LYNCH: Went to church? No, well, we had a little outside of-- outside of An Khe, there was a little village. And we used to go down there if we could get down there. But they had the steam bath.

[00:22:58.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:22:59.08] ALLEN LYNCH: And what I loved to do is I'd go in, and I get an ice cold beer. And I'd take that steam shower. And I'd get all the goop and gunk off me. And then I'd go out and I'd get a nice massage. And these young ladies would walk on my back and crack every muscle, every bone, twist my neck in that nice little way, and so many other nice things that they did for us.

[00:23:26.77] JOE GALLOWAY: [CHUCKLES]

[00:23:27.76] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, the attitude was, we're going to die anyway so what the hell?

[00:23:31.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Die with a smile on your face.

[00:23:33.29] ALLEN LYNCH: There it is.

[00:23:33.80] JOE GALLOWAY: There it is. Do you have specific memories of the popular culture at that time, specifically songs, music?

[00:23:44.22] ALLEN LYNCH: Oh, yeah, the songs. Yeah, absolutely. "We Got to Get Out of this Place."

[00:23:48.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:23:48.72] ALLEN LYNCH: "Give Me a Ticket for an Aeroplane." Geez, "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay."

[00:23:54.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:23:56.13] ALLEN LYNCH: That was my absolute favorite. I could sing that-- yeah, yeah. I loved the songs.

[00:24:09.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Your whole tour was spent in II Corps.

[00:24:13.54] ALLEN LYNCH: Pretty much, pretty much, yeah. I think the farthest north I got was Dak To.

[00:24:19.99] JOE GALLOWAY: That's pretty far north.

[00:24:21.48] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, but that was it. We went up to Dak To.

[00:24:24.04] JOE GALLOWAY: You were not there when they went into Cambodia.

[00:24:26.80] ALLEN LYNCH: No, no, I was gone by that time. In fact, because of this medal, they pulled me out of the field sometime in the middle of January.

[00:24:35.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe the quality of leadership in your outfit?

[00:24:43.13] ALLEN LYNCH: Outstanding to-- if I may say it-- piss-poor. We had a captain. I won't use his name. He retired a general from what I understand. He came in and basically told the NCOs-- we found it out through our platoon sergeant that he said, I am here. I am going to earn the Medal of Honor. And he was a-- he was extremely unpopular. And nobody in our company-- officer alike-- liked the man. He was--

[00:25:20.00] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a dangerous place to be unpopular.

[00:25:22.33] ALLEN LYNCH: You don't want to piss off kids, 19-year-old kids, with guns.

[00:25:27.01] JOE GALLOWAY: That's true.

[00:25:28.00] ALLEN LYNCH: And he was a terrible, terrible, terrible leader. Thankfully, he was wounded on Hill 724 in Vietnam in Dak To. I always thought he got fragged, but it seems that they actually did fire a mortar round when his helicopter came in. And none of us--

[00:25:48.10] JOE GALLOWAY: So they got rid of him.

[00:25:48.37] ALLEN LYNCH: We got rid of him. And he was replaced by probably one of the best commanders that I had, Captain Orsini-- tremendous, tremendous leader. If we were wet, he was wet. If we humped with a pack, he humped with a pack. If we were in the middle of a firefight, he was in the middle of the firefight. He led by example where the other guy didn't.

[00:26:13.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you have a battalion commander circling overhead, telling you to go faster?

[00:26:18.49] ALLEN LYNCH: Occasionally. This one captain, let me call him Captain Hardcore. He almost got shot down. He was-- we were going up a hill. And it was pretty thick vegetation. And he started-- he was over in a C&C, a command and control chopper, screaming at us to move faster. And someone almost opened fired on him.

[00:26:40.39] But yeah, he was not popular. Orsini was. He was a great leader, very brave man. In fact, he got wounded trying to get to me when we were pinned down. He made sure we got taken care of, always had a way of getting us some beer and some ice cream. God, I love ice cream.

[00:27:06.25] ALLEN LYNCH: I'm going to tell you the way I remember it. The citation is a little bit different. I've had issues with it. And I have finally decided that I'm going to-- when I'm asked that question, I'm going to tell it my way. We were in what we-- I guess was known as the pre-Tet Offensive.

[00:27:24.18] There was a big buildup in Bong Son. It started about the first week of December 1967. And there had been a lot of rumblings in the intelligence community that there was a big buildup, and the 22nd-- I might get this wrong-- it's the 22nd NVA and the 9th VC had started stockpiling. And they had moved their headquarters.

[00:27:52.12] One of our scout helicopters found an antenna. And they air assaulted in part of the 9th-- the 1st of the 9th. And they immediately came into contact, got pinned down. And the whole battle of My An (2) started to build from there.

[00:28:10.71] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, where is this located?

[00:28:12.25] ALLEN LYNCH: This is located on the northern part of Bong Son. I'm using the map of my mind so it may not be so accurate. Probably a little bit off the coast of Vietnam, maybe one or two clicks, I want to say. And there had been-- and since that time, they had started-- when that 1st of the 9th first came in contact, they had a whole lot of firefights, a whole lot of ambushes, just a whole lot of things going on.

[00:28:40.15] Now, we were still in Dak To. And we got called back. And we air assaulted in right from Dak To right into the Bong Son Plain. And we did move to contact for about two weeks leading up to the 15th of December.

[00:28:58.16] And constant firefights, constant ambushes, constant things going on. We worked with the 1st of the 50th Mechanized. On the 14th, we were pulled out of the field because we have been in the field for quite a long time. And our strength was down to probably less than 100 people.

[00:29:18.39] JOE GALLOWAY: In your company?

[00:29:19.35] ALLEN LYNCH: In my company. And we're supposed to have, what, 150-plus men.

[00:29:23.04] JOE GALLOWAY: 150, 160.

[00:29:23.76] ALLEN LYNCH: So we were way below strength. So they pulled us out of the field to refit and retool. So we got back about mid-afternoon on the 14th and got a shower, serviced our weapons. We got to go downtown a little bit, came back. And we were actually-- I think we were watching a USO show.

[00:29:45.30] It was either a USO show or a movie. I think it was a-- you know what? I think this might have been 1,000 BC or something like that. Raquel Welch was in it, which was probably not the best thing to show a bunch of GIS that hadn't been home for a while.

[00:30:01.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, exactly.

[00:30:02.60] ALLEN LYNCH: But all of a sudden, our NCOs and officers were called out. And we were called out. We were told we were going to air assault the next morning at zero dark thirty into an area north of My An (2). And we did. And we air assaulted in. And we came under some contact, if I remember correctly. And then that whole part, this whole thing is like looking through a fog. I remember snippets of things.

[00:30:30.43] I had just got a brand new platoon leader, Lieutenant Sutherland. He-- in things that I read after, he did everything possible he could to get on this mission. And Captain Orsini told him to wait until the day was over then come out. Battalion commander told him that. He kept pushing. And they let him go.

[00:30:52.10] And I was his RTO. And there has to be a relationship. And we kind of clicked because that's-- by that time, I had learned how to work with officers and all of that pretty well. But I was his shadow. And so we moved together as a team. And--

[00:31:12.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, he's inexperienced.

[00:31:13.66] ALLEN LYNCH: He's inexperienced. This is his first day in country-- first day in country, in combat.

[00:31:19.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Did he seem willing to take a little advice here and there?

[00:31:23.12] ALLEN LYNCH: I didn't have to give him any. I mean, I followed him around, but he pretty much adapted to it. I mean, he was-- what I remember of him was amazing. He was a good guy. I followed him around. And we ended up having to make a-- we were going to make an assault. Not an assault, but we're going to move to contact. And we started off at a ridgeline. I want to say a road with trees along it.

[00:31:55.11] And our point men got-- started getting under fire. And he didn't hesitate. He went forward. I followed him. And we got along this-- like bushes, like you'd see in somebody's yard,

like a hedgerow of bushes, but they were bushes. And we came under intense fire. And he's on the radio, very calmly calling in things. I'm on the radio calling in things. He's telling me what to say. I'm saying it. He's looking.

[00:32:25.83] Well, one of our guys, Wilhelm, comes running back-- one of our point men-- and got shot about half way out. So I went out and I got him. A medic came out. And we got him back. And he said that Sergeant Casares had been hit in both shins, and I should go out and get him. So I asked the LT if I could go get him.

[00:32:50.86] I dropped my radio thinking I'd just go, I'll pick him up, and come back. Well, I got out there, and the next thing I know, the intensity of the fire picks up. I did some first aid on his legs. And I was trying to figure out how to get him, the M16 back, and my stuff back. And Joe Esparza comes running out and gets shot. So I go out and I get him. And I get him back into the trench. So there's three of us in the trench now.

[00:33:17.77] JOE GALLOWAY: This is a trench away from--

[00:33:20.05] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, we're about 50-- maybe 50 meters ahead. It seems such a short distance, but they went back out and they measured it. And it's like, I didn't know I could run that fast and that quickly. And Joe was wounded, I want to say, in his leg. And we're laying there. And then he gets shot in the arm. And we're trying to fire up the enemy. And we're-- literally, there's our trench. And then there's a hedgerow, bamboo hedgerow.

[00:33:49.54] So we could hear the enemy talking. And we'd stick our 16s through it, and we'd waste them, and pull our 16s back. And a little while later, they'd come up again. So we were killing a whole lot of them. And they tried to get to us. And they couldn't. Every time they tried to move, the intensity of the fire would get-- well, unbeknownst to me, my platoon had to pull back. And so they pulled way back. And they called in artillery.

[00:34:26.82] JOE GALLOWAY: And they had no way of letting you know they were gone.

[00:34:29.71] ALLEN LYNCH: No, they just-- they-- no. So we're doing the best we can to survive. So they called artillery on our positions. And the stuff hit pretty good and close to us. Then they came back. And the way Orsini puts it was he and three other people, including Lieutenant Sutherland, came up to try to get to us. And as they were trying to do that, they came under a heavy fire. Lieutenant Southerland got killed. He got shot in the head.

[00:35:01.52] JOE GALLOWAY: One day in--

[00:35:02.28] ALLEN LYNCH: One day in, and he's gone. One day in, and he's gone trying to get to us. A couple other people get killed. They yell for me to leave them. We'd get them later and come back. I told them what they could do with that. You don't leave your wounded. That's the one thing-- and I wanted to go so bad. I didn't want to be there, but I couldn't. I just couldn't. You just can't. So I figured, what the hell? I'm going to die anyway. So I might as well die with my friends. And so I stayed there. I didn't even know these guys.

[00:35:39.42] JOE GALLOWAY: How is your ammo situation?

[00:35:40.80] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, we had gotten resupplied.

[00:35:42.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh.

[00:35:43.35] ALLEN LYNCH: So I had-- we had plenty of ammo. I even had a bandolier of cigarettes.

[00:35:49.56] JOE GALLOWAY: And a fat lot of good that'll do.

[00:35:51.39] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, cigarettes and I had those nice C-ration matches. Well, Esparza or Casares bled on them. And they wouldn't light. Now, you don't think-- things get goofy. And all I could think of was, you're not supposed to die until you've had your last cigarette.

[00:36:13.13] JOE GALLOWAY: And you've got no matches that worked.

[00:36:15.07] ALLEN LYNCH: I got no matches that work.

[00:36:18.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Too bad you didn't have one of those Willie Peter grenades.

[00:36:21.64] ALLEN LYNCH: I could've used that. Well, then they came at us again. They tried to back an APC, armored personnel carrier, up to us. They literally had the thing right by us. I mean, we could see it. They lowered the ramp. The back end has a ramp that comes down. And they were backing up. And they got hit with an RPG. Wounded my company commander Captain Orsini, a few other guys.

[00:36:47.50] They withdrew. Then they called in airstrikes and artillery. And then they tried again. And then it was just not working, we can't do it. We just can't waste any more lives trying to get to these guys. So then they called in artillery and airstrikes again on us and napalm and all kinds of things. This jet--

[00:37:07.15] JOE GALLOWAY: You had no radio contact.

[00:37:08.84] ALLEN LYNCH: No radio contact, didn't know what was going on.

[00:37:10.67] JOE GALLOWAY: So you can't adjust fire on any of this stuff.

[00:37:11.89] ALLEN LYNCH: Nope, can't do nothing. See? Because again, not being the sharpest pencil in the pack, I left the radio with my LT.

[00:37:18.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow, but you didn't know.

[00:37:20.29] ALLEN LYNCH: I didn't know. I thought I was going to be right back. And so then they called in the airstrikes. Well, this jet comes right over us. I mean, he is-- we're here, he's here, treetop level. And he lets go of the napalm. And we figured, goodbye.

[00:37:35.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Adios.

[00:37:36.41] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, height and speed equals that it doesn't fall straight down. It falls at an angle. So about 100 meters, 200 meters away, it hit off. And then everything got real quiet. So I moved Casares and Esparza out to an area that was safe. And I went around the area and checked it out and made sure there was nobody that could do any damage.

[00:37:58.73] And then I thought, well, I know that we're this way. So I started walking like these half circles trying to figure out where they could have went. And then my plan was to go back and then move them until I found friendlies. Well, I went maybe 100 meters-- maybe 100 meters-- and someone started screaming at me. And they were our guys from our company. And then we went back as I understand it. After that, all I remember is getting on the helicopter. Supposedly, I went back and got them in. I don't remember that part. We got on the helicopter.

[00:38:33.23] JOE GALLOWAY: The citation says you went back and forth across there five times?

[00:38:38.27] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, I don't-- I'm just-- like I said--

[00:38:41.24] JOE GALLOWAY: You got a blank there.

[00:38:42.44] ALLEN LYNCH: I have no idea. I just remember what I remember. And for years, I tried every way in the world to get through it. I had-- when I was in therapy for PTSD, they tried this EMDR where they move your fingers, a rapid eye movement, something like that. Tried to remember it that way. I tried every way in the world. And finally, I just got to a point-- I went through some real bad times. I had some real bad memories. I couldn't remember it the way it was written.

[00:39:14.47] I read the people that wrote it up, that were all there, that all saw it, but I couldn't remember it that way. So I bought-- that, by the way, along with my best friend being killed over there and all of that. So I was in therapy for a while. I saw Betsy Tolstedt up at the Evanston Vet Center. And we worked it through. And I finally came to a point where I thought, the hell with it.

[00:39:39.16] JOE GALLOWAY: I'll just tell it my way.

[00:39:40.36] ALLEN LYNCH: I'm going to tell it my way. And to me, that's the truth. And that's what I'm going to tell. I don't think that I deserve this medal, but I have it. Until they take it away from me, I'm going to wear it to the best of my ability. And I've tried to do that. Because my lieutenant died, my company commander was wounded, another guy died. I can't remember his name offhand, which drives me insane. So two people died trying to get to us. We had a lot of casualties. And I don't carry this for me. I carry this for them.

[00:40:14.82] JOE GALLOWAY: When was the medal hung around your neck? What date?

[00:40:19.63] ALLEN LYNCH: It was Armed Forces Day 1970.

[00:40:24.58] JOE GALLOWAY: And the president was Nixon?

[00:40:27.04] ALLEN LYNCH: Richard Nixon.

[00:40:28.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Richard Nixon. White House ceremony?

[00:40:31.66] ALLEN LYNCH: White House ceremony. I never flew first class before. And it was nice. And I've become addicted to first class. [LAUGH]

[00:40:45.95] ALLEN LYNCH: Other than going home?

[00:40:47.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, we'll do that in a minute.

[00:40:51.82] ALLEN LYNCH: It was after the Battle of My An (2) of Tam Quan, actually. Our battle was Tam Quan. And we got back to LZ English. And we got steaks and beer and ice cream and pop. And we got pretty lit. And that was--

[00:41:16.94] JOE GALLOWAY: You'd been out in the field how long at that point?

[00:41:18.95] ALLEN LYNCH: Oh, by that time, we had-- except for that one little few hours, we had been out in the field for probably three or four weeks. And--

[00:41:26.51] JOE GALLOWAY: It's hard on you.

[00:41:27.59] ALLEN LYNCH: It is. It is. But getting back there was just-- it was just [SIGH]. And then there was one other. We were on LZ Apache. LZ Apache-- landings on Apache overlook the South China Sea. And it was right on the South China Sea. And we had just come off a three-day mission. Three or four-day mission, we were out of food. We were hungry as hell. And we come on the South China Sea-- beautiful beach. And before we went up to the LZ, we got to go skinny-dipping. And so we went out. And we body surfed. And we played in the ocean. We had security, but we played in the ocean.

[00:42:06.42] And funny thing about body surfing when you're not wearing any bathing suit, your body comes in. And it hits the sand. And you don't notice it for a while. But then, there's a lot of parts of you that start to burn after a while. Yeah, I don't body surf much anymore.

[00:42:36.98] ALLEN LYNCH: I just did.

[00:42:37.72] JOE GALLOWAY: I think you've already done that.

[00:42:39.34] ALLEN LYNCH: That and the day my buddy Gerry Brines was killed. He was killed by friendly fire. We were on a mission in Kon Tum. And we had just had lunch. Gerry was

from a place called Shullsburg, Wisconsin. And we had lunch. We were talking about fishing and stuff up there. I'm from Illinois. He's from Wisconsin so Illinois people go to Wisconsin to fish.

[00:43:06.79] And we were talking about that. And we started down the trail. And our point man yelled, signaled that he had contact. And so we got into a fighting position, hasty fighting position because we didn't know. Our lieutenant runs up. I wasn't an RTO at that time. I was just a grunt. Our lieutenant runs up. And we find out that there's CIDG-- civilian indigenous personnel, Montagnards-- working with Special Forces.

[00:43:37.43] And my lieutenant, the lieutenant yells, cease fire, cease fire, cease fire, they're friendly, which is what you do on a range. And Gerry stood up. And this guy, our machine gunner, who was the assistant machine gunner-- machine gunner was on leave, Gandy was on leave. Our guy stood up. The machine gunner stood up and shot him right in the chest.

[00:44:02.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Your machine gunner shot your buddy.

[00:44:04.42] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, right in the chest.

[00:44:06.67] JOE GALLOWAY: How did that happen?

[00:44:08.20] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, he had his head up his ass. He had an attitude. And so we immediately did our first aid-- stop the bleeding, protect the wound, treat for shock the whole nine yards. And we had to blow an LZ for him. We had to take C4 and blow an LZ. At this time, medevac is coming in. So we carry Gerry over.

[00:44:33.24] Well, Gerry had been kicked by a horse and almost died when he was a kid. He was a farmer. He was almost struck by lightning driving a tractor. And he always used to tell this story to make us laugh because of the way he told it. And he always used to end it with, well, three strikes and you're out. Well, he kept saying, it's my third strike. I'm done.

[00:44:57.79] And medevac came. We kept-- elevated his feet so he wouldn't go into shock. We kept telling him, no, you're not going to die. This is an easy wound. No big deal. It was a bad deal. He got shot pretty good. It was a 7.62 which comes out of the M60 machine gun. And--

[00:45:17.89] JOE GALLOWAY: One or more?

[00:45:18.82] ALLEN LYNCH: One.

[00:45:19.60] JOE GALLOWAY: One.

[00:45:20.11] ALLEN LYNCH: The gun jammed because it was filthy, which created another issue. So Gerry was medevacked. And I found the guy that shot him. We all did. And I told him, I was going to kill him the next firefight. I never had many friends when I was growing up. I had three friends in high school. That was it. But Gerry was a friend that you could only have in a combat situation. You know that type.

[00:45:53.16] I was probably more his friend than he was mine, but he was a phenomenal guy. He was one of those guys that if he was down to his last C-rat can, he'd share it with you. He shared his last cigarette. You couldn't do your guard duty because you were exhausted, he'd take it for you. He's one of those guys-- very, very rare. We all liked him.

[00:46:16.00] Well, then we found out the machine gun jammed because it was dirty. And all along, for several days-- I think about three or four days, I can't remember exactly-- I was told that Gerry is doing fine. Gerry landed. Gerry's in operation. Gerry's being medevacked. Gerry's all this and a bag of chips.

[00:46:38.07] JOE GALLOWAY: And they were lying.

[00:46:38.85] ALLEN LYNCH: They were lying. And we had to do-- we had to move from there through this jungle, forest-like jungle. I like to remember that as these bloody leeches. And I get even with them for fishing. But then we get to where this helicopter had crashed. We do a perimeter. And it's funny. One of the guys came back on one of our log flights-- logistics flight-- to bring in hot chow and stuff. And I said, did you get to see Gerry before you went on R&R? He said, well, I identified his body. He died on the helicopter.

[00:47:19.95] Well, all during this time, different people came up to me and were talking to me about what a great guy Gerry was, and what a good guy he was, and good memories of Gerry, and all of that, which I never-- I'm not the sharpest pencil in the pack. I never thought-- because they were telling me that he lived. But when I found out he died, I had an issue. I smoked back then. Who didn't? And it's surprising how alone you can be on an LZ with 100 guys.

[00:48:00.79] I went and I had a cigarette. And I was sitting there. And one of my buddies came up, either that or a sergeant. I don't remember exactly who it was. I wish I did because I'd thank him. And he said, what are you going to do? I said, I don't know. He says, he said he ruined one family. He's going to have to carry this with him the rest of his life. And if you do anything, you're going to go to jail because we know what'll happen. But what really hit me was he's going to have to live with the fact that he killed one of our own the rest of his life.

[00:48:40.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. But if he's a shit bird, does he care?

[00:48:43.66] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, actually, he did. He cleaned up his act. When I left, he was a squad leader. He had to go through hell to get there. It wasn't easy for him to come back in. He killed one of our own. And had it been the enemy, we wouldn't have had a heavy weapon. We wouldn't have had a machine gun. We could have all died because of him.

[00:49:13.54] So he cleaned up his act, he made sergeant. He made-- when I left, I believe he was a sergeant E-5 squad leader. I want to think-- I want to believe, which is why I won't use his name. And I really don't know if I ever want to see him because I want to believe that he lived a life that Gerry could never live. I want to believe that he paid it back by living a good life. And it scares the hell out of me that he didn't.

[00:49:44.32] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, at the dedication of the Wall, I got drunk with an Aussie because they're professionals.

[00:49:49.52] JOE GALLOWAY: They are professionals.

[00:49:50.85] ALLEN LYNCH: Dear lord.

[00:49:51.58] JOE GALLOWAY: They'll get drunk. But in Vietnam--

[00:49:55.32] ALLEN LYNCH: In Vietnam, no contact.

[00:49:56.46] JOE GALLOWAY: None at all.

[00:49:57.69] ALLEN LYNCH: I saw the Koreans. I saw them. I saw them doing their taekwondo when I was back in the rear driving a jeep. And I saw them train. And I thought, boy, how do-- you don't want to mess with these guys.

[00:50:11.31] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd stand out there, two of them, just beating each other--

[00:50:14.34] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah.

[00:50:14.61] JOE GALLOWAY: --to a pulp.

[00:50:15.45] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah.

[00:50:16.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, those guys.

[00:50:18.54] ALLEN LYNCH: And then whoever was the commander would knock him down. He'd get back up. Knock him down, he'd get back up. I'm thinking, if they ever did that in the United States, there'd be jail time.

[00:50:34.89] ALLEN LYNCH: Very little. We saw them come in, search a village. They looked good in their tiger stripe camos and their little carbines and their funny little hats. And we didn't have a lot of respect for them. I know there were some really good units, but we did a bridge detail with one of them-- with a platoon, our platoon, their platoon. And their OP went out. And they came back running, boo-coo VC, boo-coo VC. And they hightailed it. And we were set-- we had a Duster, the Twin 20s.

[00:51:07.46] JOE GALLOWAY: The Twin 20s.

[00:51:08.42] ALLEN LYNCH: So we could handle pretty good. And they ran away. And so we had to do the whole bridge. And we never had any contact. We sent out our OPs-- nothing, no problem. So I never had that much contact with them except for that one time.

[00:51:25.61] JOE GALLOWAY: How much, if any, contact with your average Vietnamese villager-- the farmers and their families?

[00:51:33.41] ALLEN LYNCH: They were dehumanized. I think it's a necessity of war to dehumanize your enemy. That's why we call the Germans "Krauts" and the Japanese "Japs" and the Vietnamese "Gooks" because it's hard to kill someone who's like you. And so we didn't do much with them. They were there for our entertainment in one sense if we went down to Sin City. They were there to deal with.

[00:52:06.08] I mean, we sometimes reflected on what would you feel like if someone came into your house and kicked open a door and threw in a frag and walked around? I mean, but we didn't think that they were like us, feeling-wise, which is why this Ken Burns thing is a nice-- is good. I mean, I like it because I don't like thinking of my former enemies as not human in that sense.

[00:52:38.47] ALLEN LYNCH: Letters.

[00:52:39.28] JOE GALLOWAY: That was it?

[00:52:39.88] ALLEN LYNCH: That was it. Postcards, write on the back of a C-ration thing and send--

[00:52:44.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you write often?

[00:52:44.71] ALLEN LYNCH: --it off. I wasn't a good writer. I wasn't a good writer when I was in Germany. I damn sure wasn't a good writer in combat, but I tried to get a letter off once a week or so.

[00:52:56.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you tell them what was happening?

[00:52:57.94] ALLEN LYNCH: Very little. In fact, my dad was quite ill when I was over. And they had got a letter from the Department of the Army that-- keep all the bad news away from them. So I get home and find out that my dad had spent six months off work and ill and at home and all of this. And I said, why didn't you go to the Red Cross? I could have got out of there. I probably would have had to go back, but-- they said, well, we were told not to give you any bad news. Yeah.

[00:53:32.51] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm assuming you didn't see Stars and Stripes very often or get to listen to Armed Forces Radio much.

[00:53:39.08] ALLEN LYNCH: Very little.

[00:53:41.63] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you have access to about this war that you were fighting and the war that was going on at home?

[00:53:51.08] ALLEN LYNCH: Not much. We got the Stars and Stripes newspaper occasionally. Even when I was back in the rear, it just-- it wasn't-- we knew about it. I knew about it, but it wasn't until I got home that all of this got me.

[00:54:11.96] JOE GALLOWAY: One of those--

[00:54:12.32] ALLEN LYNCH: I was scared to death.

[00:54:13.25] JOE GALLOWAY: --good days.

[00:54:14.18] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, it was and it wasn't. There was a lot of urban legend about the plane taking off at Cam Ranh Bay and getting shot down, about landing in the States and having some deranged mother or father who lost someone overseas kill you because you came home and her kid didn't, getting home in the middle of the night and walking into your house and getting shot by your father.

[00:54:43.53] So it was a really happy day. I mean, when that plane got in international waters, there was a cheer. And it was happy time. When we landed at Fort Ord, it was amazing. We got a steak dinner and got our leave papers. And I left and got on the plane and headed home. I was in uniform.

[00:55:04.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go to get on a plane? San Francisco?

[00:55:07.50] ALLEN LYNCH: San Francisco. Yeah, Oakland. I got on the plane at Oakland.

[00:55:11.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Did anybody give you a hard time?

[00:55:14.46] ALLEN LYNCH: No, no. I wouldn't have put up with it.

[00:55:16.62] JOE GALLOWAY: In uniform?

[00:55:17.04] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, no. No, I was-- I never had an issue. I don't think, to be honest, that that would have come out well for the person. I really think that god said, you may not want to mess with this guy on the way home. I got home to O'Hare Airport. I got my duffel bag.

[00:55:40.42] I was waiting for my mom and dad. I was at a window. I don't know where it was in the airport. And my mom and dad came in. And my dad screamed, there he is! And I was taken home. And there was a big party, beer, cold beer and steak. And I enjoyed that immensely.

[00:55:57.25] And my mom-- so all my life, I loved cookies and milk. And before I went to bed, I'd have cookies and milk. My mom made chocolate chip cookies and ice cold milk from the refrigerator. So when everybody left, mom brings me out this beautiful glass of ice cold milk and chocolate chip cookies. And I ate the chocolate chip cookies. And I drank two glasses of milk. Do you know what happens if you haven't drank milk in a very long time?

[00:56:28.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:56:29.05] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. Well, my mother's nice, clean bathroom got decorated--

[00:56:33.06] [LAUGH]

[00:56:34.75] --with that.

[00:56:36.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, when you get home, you still owe the Army some time or are you out?

[00:56:40.48] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. No, I owed some time. In fact, I got a car. And I really needed to get back to the Army. I didn't fit in. I didn't fit in with my family. I didn't fit in with my friends. I just-- my dad took me up north fishing for a weekend. We left Friday morning and came back late Sunday. That was quality time with him, but that was about it. I just didn't fit in anymore.

[00:57:19.11] I couldn't deal with some of the stuff that my friends-- one of my best friend's mother who I had spent time in their house and had dinner at their house, the first thing she said was, how many people did you kill? And her son jumped all over her. But it was like, really? Is that the question you want to ask me? You haven't seen me in all this time.

[00:57:42.78] And I just-- I remember what the key was. I was sitting. We were at a bar, listening to a band play. People were dancing. And all I could think about was, my friends were over there dying. For what? And I didn't know any of the politics like I do now, which makes me even more upset. And all I could do was, I want to go. I want to go home. I want to go back to the Army.

[00:58:08.41] JOE GALLOWAY: And the Army was home.

[00:58:10.03] ALLEN LYNCH: The Army was home. I didn't fit in anywhere.

[00:58:12.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did they assign you?

[00:58:14.14] ALLEN LYNCH: I went down to Fort Hood, Texas.

[00:58:16.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:58:16.90] ALLEN LYNCH: And we were all Vietnam returnees except for some of our officers. And--

[00:58:22.25] JOE GALLOWAY: I bet you were a stroppy bunch.

[00:58:25.12] ALLEN LYNCH: We had fun. We were in a mechanized infantry unit finally. And we'd go out to the field. And we'd go out and load up our coolers. We'd do our missions. And it's like, really, really? You want us to do this? Come on. So we'd go out. And it was my first taste of armadillo. We killed an armadillo and ate him, and roasted him over an open fire and had a few drinks.

[00:58:53.02] JOE GALLOWAY: So you're at Fort Hood. How long do you have to hang out there?

[00:58:56.26] ALLEN LYNCH: I got there in July. And I stayed there till April 25, 1969. I left Fort Hood, Texas. Actually, I was a career counselor from January all the way through April.

[00:59:10.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Persuading guys to re-enlist?

[00:59:12.46] ALLEN LYNCH: Yup.

[00:59:13.21] JOE GALLOWAY: How did that work?

[00:59:14.38] ALLEN LYNCH: I was honest. I actually had-- from my battalion, I had the top-- or my regiment, I guess. I was the top recruiter. I was the top guy. I told them the truth. I never lied. I never--

[00:59:30.88] JOE GALLOWAY: The Army's home.

[00:59:32.20] ALLEN LYNCH: I-- for me, I was going to stay in. In fact, I was going to reenlist in April to get my three-day pass again. And then I was going to get a nice school for myself because I knew how to do some of the stuff. I called home. And my mom said, I hope you don't re-enlist. I said, I want to make the Army a career. My mom said, your dad's been really sick. You need to come home.

[01:00:00.22] And so I went home. And my dad lived till he was 70. And he wasn't sick. He had some other issues. And I was not happy. I really wanted-- well, I spent 21 years in the Reserves, in the National Guard program. I really wanted to make the Army a career. It's one of the big regrets of my life.

[01:00:22.32] But the funny thing is, had I not got out of the Army, April 25, 1970, I would never have married my wife Susan April 25, 1970-- one year to the day after I got out of the Army. In fact, I was notified I was going to get the Medal of Honor the 24th of April, 1970.

[01:00:44.39] JOE GALLOWAY: And you got married the next day.

[01:00:46.13] ALLEN LYNCH: I got married the next day. I came home. I tried to get my old job back at Libby. And not being too smart, they turned me down. So I got a job with UPS. I worked there for about a month. I-- it was too stressful, so I quit. I tried to get back to Libby's again, got denied. I went back a third time. And my wife was the personnel secretary.

[01:01:12.08] And I filled out the application. This time, I took my DD-214. I saw this guy Mr. Galla. And he hired me. I started meeting my wife in the cooler where we kept the meat and the sausages and all that. And we started dating. And we got married. So in one sense, it really turned out well for me. I met the love of my life.

[01:01:33.32] JOE GALLOWAY: There you go.

[01:01:35.26] ALLEN LYNCH: Fate has a way. God works things out.

[01:01:39.42] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were notified the day before the wedding--

[01:01:43.58] ALLEN LYNCH: Right.

[01:01:44.13] JOE GALLOWAY: --that you were getting the medal. And it was actually given to you, presented to you at the White House on what date?

[01:01:52.83] ALLEN LYNCH: Armed Forces Day.

[01:01:53.73] JOE GALLOWAY: Armed Forces Day.

[01:01:54.76] ALLEN LYNCH: What was it? Yeah, I think it was Armed Forces Day in May.

[01:01:58.20] JOE GALLOWAY: May of that year, '70?

[01:02:00.81] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. So I'm thinking now it was Flag Day.

[01:02:03.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[01:02:04.89] ALLEN LYNCH: Boy, I'll tell you what, don't get old.

[01:02:06.48] JOE GALLOWAY: We'll figure it out.

[01:02:07.14] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. figure it out.

[01:02:07.77] JOE GALLOWAY: We'll figure it out.

[01:02:09.20] ALLEN LYNCH: But yeah, then I went to work with the VA.

[01:02:14.05] JOE GALLOWAY: At that point?

[01:02:14.95] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. They didn't--

[01:02:15.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Here in Chicago?

[01:02:16.81] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, I worked at the Chicago regional office. I worked with the VA. Then I went to Great Lakes Naval Base and worked with Vietnam returnees until about '72. And then I was the hospital's veterans benefits counselor and then chief ambulatory care. I left the VA in 1983.

[01:02:35.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have difficulty readjusting to life after combat?

[01:02:40.05] ALLEN LYNCH: I had a-- yeah, I had a lot of problems, a lot of depression, a lot of suicidal ideation. I worked in the VA. I saw a friend of mine who was a social worker quite a long time. I have some issues. I got fired Christmas Eve one year. I didn't get fired. I actually quit. I came probably literally that close to hitting my boss right in the face. If he had not smiled,

I'd have hit him. He smiled. I just said some words the French use and packed up my stuff, walked down to personnel, quit.

[01:03:18.02] Thankfully, a few days later, I got called by the chief of medical administration, my boss's boss. And he told me to come back and apologize. I had three kids. I came back and apologized. And then I-- he actually-- Mr. Sally became a very good friend.

[01:03:36.18] JOE GALLOWAY: You had difficulty readjusting to life after the war. Can you describe that?

[01:03:43.11] ALLEN LYNCH: I-- it all started with a thunderstorm. I used to ride the bus to and from North Chicago. I lived in Waukegan, on Sunset in Waukegan. And I used to ride the bus to and from North Chicago, VA hospital. It was called Downey then. And I got off the bus after work. And I started walking home. It was summer. It was hot. And it started to rain. And it started to get real humid.

[01:04:11.88] And I got home. And I literally took off my wet clothes and threw them in the basement and went upstairs and changed-- or went upstairs and got dressed and came back down. And we're sitting, eating. And there was a flash of lightning and a crack of thunder. And I was on the floor. And my little boy started crying. My little boy was less than a year old. He started crying.

[01:04:37.11] What happened to me? Suzy said, well, you got this weird look on your face. And you were on the floor. And I had-- and have-- a startle reaction since then that comes and goes when I least expect it.

[01:04:51.31] I was at an event one time with my mom and dad and my sister. And somebody fired a Civil War cannon. And I was supposed to speak. I'm in a suit. And I ended up in the mud, of course. But that was the start of it. Then came the depression and memories and not so much nightmares. Sleep has always been a safe place for me.

[01:05:15.17] But nightmares, I don't know how to explain it. I had dreams-- vivid dreams. But they never woke me up. I never had the sweats, but I had vivid dreams. And I had them on and off for years, but they never-- the dreams never really bothered me. And I've never been able to explain why. Of course, I'd never walk down the same trail as everybody else either.

[01:05:43.82] JOE GALLOWAY: Don't complain.

[01:05:44.72] ALLEN LYNCH: No, I'm not. No, I'm happy with that. Then--

[01:05:47.59] JOE GALLOWAY: That's pretty good.

[01:05:48.59] ALLEN LYNCH: Sometime, I would say in the '80s, I learned to change the outcome of my dreams and go, I don't like this. I want something different.

[01:05:58.80] JOE GALLOWAY: You got to rewrite the scenario.

[01:06:00.81] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, I guess. Yeah. And I thought I was nuts until I talked to a shrink. And I guess there's--

[01:06:06.66] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a good coping--

[01:06:07.11] ALLEN LYNCH: --a technique to do that. Yeah.

[01:06:08.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Good coping mechanism.

[01:06:09.39] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. But I still was very sensitive to smell, to humidity, like different triggers.

[01:06:19.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:06:21.25] ALLEN LYNCH: So I went into therapy in the '90s. I saw my social worker-- social work friend of mine for, I want to say, two or three years when I worked for the VA and a little bit after I left and went to the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program. But then I started having more issues. I started drinking too heavy. I started going to that dark place again.

[01:06:44.51] And so I went to therapy for about 2 and 1/2, 3 years. I saw Betsy Tolstedt at the Evanston Vet Center in Chicago and worked it through. And she gave me some tools. They wanted to put me on medication. And I refused. I worked in a VA hospital. And I know what medication can do. It's not for everybody. It is for some people.

[01:07:04.31] What turned the corner for me is one of my homework things was on December 15. It was 1994. I got up very early in the morning. And I went to Shullsburg, Wisconsin to find Gerry's grave. I bought a camera, a movie camera. I filmed the whole thing. I came back. And I explained to my wife, Susie and my kids-- Eric, Carolyn, and Brian-- what I was doing that day. I showed them my movie. I showed them Gerry's grave.

[01:07:37.28] See, I never had a good Christmas since coming back. I always was Pagliacci-- laughing on the outside, crying on the inside. I just hated Christmas. I hated everything about December. I hated, hated Thanksgiving. I hated, hated Christmas. I hated the holidays. But you have kids so you smile and you clap. I did that December 15. I haven't had a bad Christmas or Thanksgiving since. In fact, I look forward to it.

[01:08:08.41] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years?

[01:08:14.20] ALLEN LYNCH: I've had some good contact. Some of the guys I served with, Pops and Rose down in South Carolina and Terry Pohl who lives down in Florida.

[01:08:25.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Where is Heavy?

[01:08:27.16] ALLEN LYNCH: Heavy is gone. He died of Agent Orange.

[01:08:29.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Ah.

[01:08:30.59] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. I only saw pictures of him. We didn't start getting together until the mid, late '90s. And I think because a lot of us started retiring and we were past our kids.

[01:08:42.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Kids are grown.

[01:08:43.14] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah. And so we started getting together a little bit. I go to reunions and hook up with them. Don Oakley, who was an infantry guy, ended up being a chopper pilot. Joe Esparza, one of the guys that I was with on December 15, we talk every now and again via email or LinkedIn. But that's it. We're still pretty close. I'd still trust them all with my life.

[01:09:15.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[01:09:21.90] ALLEN LYNCH: My whole life since Vietnam has been dedicated to veterans. I left the VA. I went to be the executive director of the Illinois Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program. I left there to become the chief of the Veterans Rights Bureau with the Illinois Attorney General's Office under Neil Hartigan. They allowed me to do appeals. Before the Board of Veteran Appeals, I had about a 15-year practice, 20-year practice with them.

[01:09:51.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Do they have a veterans court system here?

[01:09:54.30] ALLEN LYNCH: Not here-- yeah, they have a veterans court system here. But I worked appeals for-- well, until I retired from the Attorney General's office in 2005. And it was one of the things in life that I really did well. I did really, really good at that. And I took-- I didn't cherry-pick easy cases. I like the harder, the better.

[01:10:13.08] After I left the Attorney General's office, John Schwan, a business guy here, also a 1st Cav vet; Bruce Peterson, 1st Cav vet, a helicopter pilot; and Paul Brian, a Vietnam era vet; we formed the Allen Lynch Medal of Honor Veterans Foundation to help veterans. And we've helped hundreds of veterans coming back from the war on terror. We do everything from-- we do whatever falls through the cracks. So be it rent-- it's not a handout. It's a hand up. We don't believe in handouts.

[01:10:47.58] So we're only helping those veterans that actually really want to get their life together. We help everybody-- World War II on up. And it's something we do. Now, we're a part of Operation Support Our Troops America. We're a program under them. And it allows us access to a little bit more funds.

[01:11:06.25] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation?

[01:11:11.13] ALLEN LYNCH: It destroyed the country. It took away the blessed naivete that we had back in the early '60s and the, quote unquote, "happy days." It made us realize that our politicians, for the most part, will do anything to get elected, will do anything to stay elected. They will lie, cheat, steal. They're not to be trusted. They should be voted out of office after one or two terms at the most. The political class is a class that we, the people of the United States, made. And we need to unmake it. And we need to do that quickly before we lose this country of ours.

[01:11:54.31] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think that war is remembered in our society today?

[01:11:59.47] ALLEN LYNCH: [SIGH] You know what's funny? And I watched-- I'm watching Ken Burns' Vietnam. And I post on Facebook a little bit my thoughts and feelings about it. It's therapy for me. Some of my friends come back. And-- boy, they didn't tell this part of the story. And they didn't tell that. And they didn't do it this way. And why didn't they talk about that? Well, it's history.

[01:12:22.16] I think his work-- and I haven't seen it all, but what I've seen so far is very fair. It's very dispassionate. He lets everybody, including our enemy, speak for themselves. I think there were lessons to be learned that we didn't learn. I think we have continued to put people in office that don't deserve to be there. I think we have continued to listen to our politicians when we should have listened to other people who knew better. Our politicians tell us what we want to hear, not what we need to hear.

[01:12:57.78] The war divided our country, yet racism in the field died only to be resurrected when we got home. We didn't learn that lesson. We didn't learn that lesson. And we've allowed people to divide us since Vietnam. Do we learn? The war, we learned it in the Gulf War, the first Gulf War. We have not learned it in the war on terror.

[01:13:24.74] We treat our veterans a whole hell of a lot better, though. And we, Vietnam veterans, when those kids came home, we said, never again will one generation of veterans desert another. And we were behind those welcome home parades. And we were behind a lot of those care packages going over. And we've done the same all the way through. And you look at Honor Flight, there's a lot of Vietnam veterans involved in that. You can look at a lot of the organizations helping these young kids, these kids coming home now-- and I can say kids because they're all under 70.

[01:13:55.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:13:58.09] ALLEN LYNCH: There's Vietnam veterans there. Even in our 70s, we're still giving back to this country. We have a lot to be proud of.

[01:14:04.70] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on?

[01:14:09.83] ALLEN LYNCH: Just never quit. Never forget who you are. And if you go to combat, don't do anything that will dishonor you personally. Don't do it. You'll live with it the rest of your life. Be honorable in combat. Be honorable in your life.

[01:14:29.92] ALLEN LYNCH: I love it. I love it because it is the only memorial that tells graphically the cost of war. You can put a guy on a horse with a sword. You can put a guy in a tank. You can do all of this stuff. But until you put the names of each individual person that died, war becomes glorified. But when you see those names, you know that, yeah, you may have to fight a war. You may have to go. But here's the cost right here. This is the cost.

[01:15:03.98] Hey, officers, when you go to West Point or OCS, you should walk by that memorial and see that every decision you make is going to put a name on that Wall maybe. And the politicians need to walk down there and take a good look at it.

[01:15:25.85] JOE GALLOWAY: You've heard about the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War Commemoration.

[01:15:29.84] ALLEN LYNCH: Oh, yeah.

[01:15:30.26] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think of that?

[01:15:32.43] ALLEN LYNCH: I'm mixed. I spent a lot of years trying to put it all behind me. But I think it's good. I think maybe we can pull now those lessons we should have learned out and use them. I think it's important that we recognize and dispassionately look at Vietnam and all the things that we could learn from it. And I went-- what was the last week? I think it was Saturday. We had a 50th Vietnam War deal. And I spoke there. And then I got the pin with that-- what-ya-jigger--

[01:16:13.40] JOE GALLOWAY: I've got that pin. I was going to give you one.

[01:16:15.33] ALLEN LYNCH: Well, I take one from you. That would be an honor for me.

[01:16:20.49] JOE GALLOWAY: All right, we'll do that.

[01:16:24.21] I love what it says on the back.

[01:16:26.16] ALLEN LYNCH: Yeah, yeah.

[01:16:30.86] JOE GALLOWAY: A grateful nation thanks and honors you.

[01:16:34.48] ALLEN LYNCH: Thank you.

[01:16:39.15] JOE GALLOWAY: My dad and my uncles all came back from World War II wearing the Ruptured Duck. This is the Vietnam Veterans Ruptured Duck.

[01:16:49.22] ALLEN LYNCH: Thanks a lot.

[01:16:49.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, sir.

[01:16:50.43] ALLEN LYNCH: I appreciate it.

[01:16:50.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you for coming in.

[01:16:52.39] ALLEN LYNCH: My pleasure. Good to see you again.

[01:16:54.21] JOE GALLOWAY: It's good to see you.