

Mukoyama, James US Army

[00:00:15.00] JAMES MUKOYAMA: I was born right here in Chicago, Illinois, on August 3, 1944. We had a very strong nuclear family. My father-- I'm Junior, so it was James Mukoyama. My mother was Mia Mukoyama. My father was an immigrant from Japan. He came here in 1918.

[00:00:38.07] My mother's family, her parents came from Japan, but she was born actually in Madison, Wisconsin. And I had a brother. I only have one sibling, an older brother. And my grandparents were living with us also. So that was the standard norm in those days.

[00:00:57.44] JOE GALLOWAY: So Chicago is your hometown.

[00:00:59.67] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, absolutely. I grew up on the northwest side of Chicago, around Logan Square.

[00:01:04.55] JOE GALLOWAY: Went to school here.

[00:01:05.31] JAMES MUKOYAMA: I went through Avondale Grammar School. I went to Carl Schurz High School. And I'm very proud of it. Got a great education, a wonderful experience. It was a lot of fun and an honor. And our church was only like two blocks away from our house.

[00:01:25.76] So, I tell people, I had a Norman Rockwell life. It sounds funny because I'm Asian, but all the paintings, all the art that you saw of Rockwell, like the Thanksgiving dinner, with the mother with the plate, that was my family. And every Sunday, we put on our Sunday best clothes and as a family, we would go to church. And--

[00:01:50.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Walked to church.

[00:01:52.52] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Absolutely, and I was in the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Boys State, all of that was centered around the church. JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, first of all, I was influenced by a couple of things. My ethnicity is Japanese-American. So in the Japanese culture, the Samurai was at the top of the culture. Unlike for example, the Chinese culture, the top of the Chinese culture was the--

[00:02:26.02] JOE GALLOWAY: The scholar.

[00:02:27.08] JAMES MUKOYAMA: The scholar, exactly. But I was Japanese, and so that had some influence. But my brother, my older brother was in the Army in Germany, in the late '50s. But when I went to high school, Chicago has the nation's largest junior ROTC system. We have over 30 high schools, and I was in it and I loved it.

[00:02:55.60] We actually had a rifle range in the high school, and I had infantry training for four years. So by the time I got to University of Illinois, I also was in the ROTC. And I was in infantry. At that time, the land-grant colleges, it was mandatory for all males to take ROTC the first two years.

[00:03:22.70] So at Champaign-Urbana-- I went to Navy Pier first by the way, for two years. Then I went down to Champaign-Urbana. We had 2,200 Army cadets in the ROTC. We had battalions. They weren't really battalion size, but we actually had branch battalions. So I was in the infantry battalion. What else would I be?

[00:03:45.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, of course.

[00:03:46.15] JAMES MUKOYAMA: But we actually had an armor squadron. Well, they had tanks. We had an artillery battalion. They actually had artillery pieces.

[00:03:56.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:03:56.98] JAMES MUKOYAMA: This was incredible. I mean, it was really something. So how I got my commission was through ROTC.

[00:04:02.90] JOE GALLOWAY: What year?

[00:04:03.84] JAMES MUKOYAMA: 1965. Well, there was no question I was going to do it.

[00:04:12.18] JOE GALLOWAY: And when you took that commission, what was your sense of what was going on in Vietnam? It was just the dawn of our major involvement.

[00:04:21.80] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I knew it was heating up. And I was an infantry guy, and I knew I was going. So I'd had to prepare myself the best I could. And when I was commissioned in '65, I got an opportunity, however, to get my master's degree. So I took a year of excess leave, so I could get my master's degree.

[00:04:47.83] It didn't cost the Army anything, because it's called excess leave. So I didn't get paid, but I was able to get my master's degree. And then in '66, I went to Benning, went through IOBC, infantry officer's basic course.

[00:05:02.31] JOE GALLOWAY: I see.

[00:05:03.00] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And then I went through airborne, and I volunteered for Ranger School. But I think you know in those days, the West Pointers all had to go to Ranger School. So--

[00:05:13.56] JOE GALLOWAY: So they had taken up all the slots.

[00:05:14.74] JAMES MUKOYAMA: They took all the quotas, so I couldn't get in. So I said, OK, I got a solution. Let me get into Pathfinder School. See, my thought process was, I go through Pathfinder. Then the West pointers would be gone from that class. I could slide into the next class.

[00:05:33.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Did it work?

[00:05:33.94] JAMES MUKOYAMA: They didn't give it to me, no.

[00:05:35.17] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't give you Pathfinder?

[00:05:36.44] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No, so then I volunteered for Vietnam, and they sent me to Korea so--

[00:05:40.61] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course, they did. We're talking about the Army here.

[00:05:43.27] JAMES MUKOYAMA: That's right.

[00:05:45.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did they send you for basic-- officer basic?

[00:05:51.61] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Fort Benning, yeah. Good old Benning School for Boys.

[00:05:54.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Absolutely,

[00:05:55.14] JAMES MUKOYAMA: But it was a piece of cake for me, Joe, because I basically had four years of high school ROTC, four years of college ROTC. When I was in college, I was in Pershing Rifles. So I was on the rifle team. If it smelled or moved like the military, I did it.

[00:06:13.70] JOE GALLOWAY: You were there.

[00:06:14.27] JAMES MUKOYAMA: I did it. So I was an honor graduate at my class at Benning. It was pretty easy for me.

[00:06:20.15] JOE GALLOWAY: You feel that you were totally prepared for what you would face in Vietnam?

[00:06:25.50] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, because I had that tour in Korea first. So I was a platoon leader on the DMZ with the 2d Division.

[00:06:33.53] JOE GALLOWAY: Things were pretty hairy up on the DMZ.

[00:06:36.87] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yes they were. In about an 18 month span, during which I was there for 13, there were 12 guys killed and about 40 wounded on the DMZ.

[00:06:49.59] JOE GALLOWAY: And this is active combat with the North Koreans.

[00:06:52.98] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, the infiltrators, their special forces coming through. Yeah, and we had a sapper attack on one of our compounds, and three guys were killed and about 30 wounded. And they blew up a Quonset hut.

[00:07:09.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Did we ever do anything back to them?

[00:07:12.23] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Not-- only if we caught them, which we did catch some of them.

[00:07:16.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, I hope they didn't come out of it alive.

[00:07:19.12] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah no. Some did and some didn't. JAMES MUKOYAMA: April '69 to May of '70. And I had been at Fort Lewis, and I knew Hackworth then, Colonel Hackworth, David Hackworth, an infantry legend. And I had met Hack at Fort Lewis. He was an amazing judge of talent.

[00:07:50.65] And I was the secretary of the general staff at the headquarters at Fort Lewis, the training center. At that time, it was an infantry training center. I was a young captain, and we were doing 11 Bravo infantry training at Fort Lewis.

[00:08:08.82] And so I was at the general officer's-- the CG's office, and Hackworth reports to the headquarters. So I knew Hackworth. I mean, the guy was a legend. So he walks in, I stand up and I say, Colonel Hackworth, welcome to Fort Lewis. The

general will be right with you. The first words out of his mouth to me, what are you doing sitting behind a desk?

[00:08:33.73] He said, if you want a company, I'll give it to you. Now, the guy doesn't know me from Adam. I'm just sitting there. I mean, I had an EIB. They weren't handing out CIBs in Korea, but I had earned my EIB in Korea and I had my jump wings.

[00:08:49.24] And Hack said, if you want a company, I'll give it to you. But what happened was, I had already committed to another battalion commander, because I had come to the same conclusion. I didn't want to be a desk jockey.

[00:09:01.27] I wanted to be a commander. But that's how I first met Hackworth, and I got to know him. So then what happened was, he left Fort Lewis and he went to Vietnam. He took over that battalion in the 9th. He writes me a letter and he says, Muk what are you-- now, by the way, he couldn't pronounce Mukoyama. So he called me Muk.

[00:09:21.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Muk.

[00:09:22.00] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And I called him Sir. So he writes me a letter saying, what are you doing back at Fort Lewis? We got a war going on. If you want a company, it's yours. You can have it. Joe, it's like I hit the lotto. To be an infantry regular Army guy, to command an infantry company in combat under Hackworth.

[00:09:43.46] JOE GALLOWAY: So you managed to make the switch over.

[00:09:45.89] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, I went. And I called my officer personnel guy, whom I'd never spoken to in my life, and I said, hey, I'm volunteering again for Vietnam. The guy said, don't hang up. What's your phone number. Let me-- And so that's how I got to Vietnam. I got there in April of '69.

[00:10:05.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, Hack was-- by then, was he a brigade commander down in the Delta?

[00:10:10.07] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Battalion commander.

[00:10:11.01] JOE GALLOWAY: Battalion commander.

[00:10:12.12] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, because he was--

[00:10:13.05] JOE GALLOWAY: But he was down in the 9th Division.

[00:10:16.25] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yes, and it was almost an all draftee battalion. It was really in bad shape. That's why Hackworth-- the Army wanted him there to straighten it out. And so he did. By the time he left, it was one of the best in Vietnam. Because he instilled the guerilla tactics that he knew.

[00:10:38.55] JOE GALLOWAY: In his funeral, General Emerson said, the Army is at fault in keeping Hack in Vietnam for five tours. We ruined a good Soldier, a good officer.

[00:10:56.26] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, he turned down the War College, so he could have another tour. And he told me, he said, Muk, he said, I should have never married. He loved his first wife, but he said, I should have never married because it's not fair to her. My love is the Army, and that's it.

[00:11:19.69] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you get to Vietnam, and where did you land?

[00:11:22.99] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I landed at Tan Son Nhut. And everybody told me, by the way, you'll never get to the 9th Division, because I was an infantry captain. We were a dime a dozen. So when I got to the Repo Depot or whatever, they said, they're just going to forget your orders. You're just going to go wherever they need you.

[00:11:42.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Wherever they need somebody.

[00:11:42.91] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right. Wrong. Hack had all the skids greased.

[00:11:47.06] JOE GALLOWAY: He had it all greased.

[00:11:47.83] JAMES MUKOYAMA: I went immediately. I didn't stop at go, collect 200 bucks. I went right to Dong Tam and-- you know, the 9th Division headquarters. So I land there, and they used to have this five day orientation course for the newbies. And that was good, because we were learning about how to survive in the canals, and the booby traps, and all that stuff.

[00:12:13.39] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were acclimatizing to that miserable climate down there.

[00:12:17.45] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, so I was there. It's a five day course. And I was there for a day and a half, and I get pulled out of the course. And I'm put on a helicopter, and they fly me down to our fire support base. So I get off the helicopter. I'm madder than a wet hen.

[00:12:32.55] And I saw Colonel Hackworth. I said, sir, how could you take me out of that course? Because I'm a kind of a new guy in country, and they're teaching me how to keep alive. He says, Muk, I know your abilities. Don't worry about it. You don't need it, and I need you now. So, yes, sir.

[00:12:55.01] JOE GALLOWAY: You were sent immediately to command a company under Hackworth?

[00:12:59.21] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No, for about a month, he let me be the assistant S-3. And so I was in on all the intel briefings. I flew with him in the CNC for all of our operations. So the most and the biggest really battle that I had the honor of participating in was the 22/23 May battle, where we annihilated a VC battalion.

[00:13:27.98] And this was not rocket science stuff. What Hackworth did-- we had all the intel about where this battalion was. And what we did is, we dropped in two companies the night before, And we did some fake insertions where we landed and then we took off. But we left the guys down there. We didn't take them with us. So we left two companies out. The third day, in the morning, we actually brought in our other companies.

[00:14:02.32]

[00:14:03.24] Yeah, so they were encircled basically. And then we just started dropping in artillery and airstrikes. And I'll never forget, Hackworth had this all figured out. And we got a radio call from-- and by the way, he had this knack, as you know, for hyperbole and-- so our company, our battalion for example, we were a recondo battalion. But he nicknamed us The Hardcore.

[00:14:32.34] So we were the hard-- and then what he did is, all good units as you know, have call signs and counter signs, special ones for the units. And so when an enlisted person saw an officer, they saluted and they said, hardcore recondo. Now, the response that-- and I'll say it, but you'll probably have to cut it out. The response was no fucking slack. That's what we used to say.

[00:15:02.45] And I can tell you, by the time Hackworth left the battalion, our morale and our esprit was so high. I actually saw guys who were wounded, on stretchers, and Hackworth would walk up to them and they would salute him, and say, hardcore recondo. I mean, that's just how that is.

[00:15:22.10] JOE GALLOWAY: I know how that is.

[00:15:23.16] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And so he renamed all-- by the way, the fire support base, when he got there was called Fire Support Base Dickie. And he saw that. Now, it was apparently named after a Soldier who had died, but still he saw that and he said, Dickie? No. So he renamed it, and he renamed it the Fire Support Base Danger.

[00:15:45.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Danger.

[00:15:46.15] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right? And then all of our companies, instead of the phonetic alphabet, the regular one, he renamed them, Alert, Battle, Claymore, and Dagger.

[00:16:01.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Dagger.

[00:16:01.75] JAMES MUKOYAMA: So I was the Battle Six. I commanded Battle Company. And all of our platoons, instead of first, second and third platoon, were red, white, and blue. And we violated all kinds of radio security and all that. We'd say, this is battle white or this is dagger blue, or, we just--

[00:16:27.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Ran with it.

[00:16:28.63] JAMES MUKOYAMA: We sure did. By the way, I was talking about that battle. So what happened was, we started pouring in artillery and airstrikes. And so we got a radio message from, let's say, Claymore Company. And they'd say, we just had a contact. We killed three VC. We've got one POW, and they're heading in this direction.

[00:16:54.61] So we're in the chopper and Hackworth's looking at his map. And he says, Muk, he said, in about 15 minutes, we're going to hear from Battle Company. 15 minutes later, bingo. We got a thing from battle company saying that they just had. So this went on all day. And we just kept on dropping in artillery and airstrikes. And towards the end of the day, the brigade commander was circling above us. You know how that is. Then the division commander came.

[00:17:27.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, him too.

[00:17:29.11] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, and then so Hackworth gets on the radio net, and basically says, listen, you guys. I'm fighting a battle here.

[00:17:38.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Get out of my hair.

[00:17:39.70] JAMES MUKOYAMA: That's right. Get out of the-- If you get hit, it's not my fault. But it's one of the most written about battles. It was really a turkey shoot for us. And I think the numbers vary, but we killed about 140, 150 VC.

[00:17:58.49] JOE GALLOWAY: That's pretty good down in the Delta.

[00:18:00.95] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah. Captured a ton of weapons. And we took I think three wounded the whole day.

[00:18:07.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Once you had your company, describe a typical operation for me.

[00:18:13.35] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah. All of our operations were airmobile. Hackworth was a great believer in-- he developed a leapfrog technique, where we would drop in an area. We do our thing there for a while, then we'd be picked up and we'd be put over in another area.

[00:18:34.27] In the meantime, another company would be over here. They would be doing their thing. They'd be picked up and they'd be put over there. The end result of all this is we were able to cover a very large area. And the enemy didn't know where we-- what we were doing or where we were going. Yeah.

[00:18:53.00] And so Hackworth's phrase was, we're going to out G the G. We're going to out guerilla the guerilla. So all of our operations max three days, and they didn't know what we were doing, when we were coming. And we always traveled light.

[00:19:13.56] Just our ammunition and some food. But very, very light because he wanted us to be mobile and just be able to move fast, which we did. So I had the honor of commanding some of the greatest Americans. JAMES MUKOYAMA: Joe, it was not only in Vietnam frankly, it was throughout my whole career. I had great NCOs, non-commissioned officers who made me look good.

[00:19:47.44] And I had commanders who mentored me and didn't cut my head off. But the NCOs were the key. I mean, they were where the rubber meets the road. And I remember when I was a young second lieutenant in Korea, in my first combat patrol, I had a World War II vet-- or no, Korean War vet. He was a Korean War vet.

[00:20:07.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Korean War vet, yeah.

[00:20:08.44] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And man, I mean, I listened to him, and I was his lieutenant. But he always treated me with respect, because I was the platoon

leader. And so we had our thing. And so in Vietnam, it was the same way. Great NCOs. I'll tell you about the quality of the Soldiers that I had.

[00:20:34.75] Our unit was one of the first units that President Nixon withdrew out of Vietnam, out of the Delta. And Hackworth knew it was coming. So after that battle I told you about, the Army leadership said, that's enough for you.

[00:20:51.52] We're taking you out of the field, because the last thing-- we can't have Hackworth killed in the field. And also, he knew they were going to withdraw our unit. So he wanted to stay in Vietnam. So he went up to Pleiku and became a Corps G-3 adviser.

[00:21:09.88] And so now I'm back. I'm still with the unit, and we get these orders to go back to the States. And I had a last operation. We knew we were going to go out, but then when we came back, we were all going to pack up, get on a ship and go to guess where? Schofield Barracks, Hawaii.

[00:21:32.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my, tough duty.

[00:21:34.80] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, so by the way, I turned it down. I--

[00:21:37.61] JOE GALLOWAY: You turned it down?

[00:21:38.95] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Oh, yes. No, yeah. I'd only been in the field for five months, and I was a young-- I was a lifer at that point. And so anyway, but I had my last operation. You never know how people are going to react to that, because they know-- and I was limited as to how many guys I could take, because of the number of slicks-- or those are helicopters, the number of helicopters I had for the operation.

[00:22:13.97] So I was concerned. I didn't know how my guys would react. More guys wanted to go than I could take with me, and I had one of my best machine gunners, had a broken thumb. He was a big African-American guy. I'll never forget this. And so he could have begged off, because he had a broken thumb.

[00:22:36.74] JOE GALLOWAY: He begged on.

[00:22:38.26] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Absolutely and I took him because he was my best machine gunner. I'm no dummy. And we accomplished our mission, but I didn't take any chances. I just did what I was told.

[00:22:51.71] JOE GALLOWAY: That was- the last combat op for your company.

[00:22:54.59] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right.

[00:22:56.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go.

[00:22:57.45] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I contacted Colonel Hackworth.

[00:23:00.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course, you did.

[00:23:01.31] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And I said, sir, as you know, the unit's going back, but I don't want to go back. Can you use me? Within a day, I had orders.

[00:23:11.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Where to.

[00:23:12.89] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Up to II Corps, Pleiku with him. And so I became the G-3 plans adviser for the ARVN II Corps.

[00:23:22.94] JOE GALLOWAY: OK, II Corps headquarters up at MACV.

[00:23:26.08] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yes, in Pleiku.

[00:23:27.73] JOE GALLOWAY: In Pleiku. I know it well.

[00:23:30.60] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right, you know, I couldn't believe that camp - you have to understand, I just came out of the-- well, I'll tell you another story though. When I had to give up my company, we stood down and then they got on a Navy LST. So we go on the ship. And so I'm turning over my company.

[00:23:49.36] And we go on this ship, and I'm invited down to the officer's mess. So I had just come out of the field. I'm dirty, I'm sweaty and all this. And they had an air conditioned mess. They had silverware, they had napkins.

[00:24:08.81] JOE GALLOWAY: On this boat?

[00:24:09.88] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, so I said to myself, self, maybe I should have considered some other service. But so then I go up to Pleiku. And now this is the MACV II Corps headquarters. So it's not the Pentagon, but it's fairly close. So our quarters, for the advisers, we actually had ceramic tiled showers.

[00:24:34.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:24:36.28] JAMES MUKOYAMA: I mean, they were still group showers, but there were ceramic tiles. I mean, I remember when I was in the field, I was lucky if I had a 55 gallon drum shower.

[00:24:47.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Happy to get it. Describe your friendships with and your impressions of your fellow troops.

[00:24:53.18] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I was so blessed to be in Hackworth's battalion, because Colonel Hackworth handpicked all of his officers. And if he got to a battalion and he saw guys were not competent and professional, they were gone. He got rid of them. He surrounded himself with really good people.

[00:25:22.04] And by the way, when I was in Korea, my company in Korea with the 2d Division, my company commander was actually a captain, which was unusual in those days in Korea, because all the captains were in Vietnam. But I had a company commander who was a captain, and he was a West Pointer.

[00:25:41.14] And three of the four platoon leaders, including myself, were regular Army. So good, we had some strong officers. And I told you about the NCOs. I mean, they're the guys who were really the experienced guys, who kept us straight. And so in Vietnam, once again, he handpicked everybody.

[00:26:05.24] I mean, and by the way, Joe, I'm a very strong man of faith. So you'll hear me say a lot of God things happened to me when I was in Vietnam. But you asked about fellow officers, the Claymore Company commander was my roommate in college. His name was Don Meyer. So Don and I-- he had Claymore. I had Battle Company. So we--

[00:26:37.72] JOE GALLOWAY: How did that happen?

[00:26:38.96] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, because--

[00:26:40.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Just the luck of the draw.

[00:26:41.77] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No, he had served with Hackworth in Fort Lewis also. But how cool is that to be in combat as a company commander, and you know that your sister company is commanded by your best friend from college? And both of us-- well, in any event, we would have each other's back, but this was just an additional incentive.

[00:27:06.14] JOE GALLOWAY: A little more.

[00:27:06.91] JAMES MUKOYAMA: So these were all qualified-- they were all qualified infantry guys. Hackworth did not tolerate-- Hackworth, to him, you were either a stud or you were a dud. And there was nothing in between.

[00:27:24.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Nothing in between. Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds during your time in combat?

[00:27:33.54] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Oh, yeah, of course.

[00:27:34.21] JOE GALLOWAY: That you might never have had in civilian life.

[00:27:37.99] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, yeah. Except I'm from Chicago, so I had the opportunity to meet with guys of different races and nationalities. I came from the lower middle class at best. We worked hard. I never felt poor though, because of my strong family and my faith.

[00:28:02.93] I had known guys from, like you said, different socioeconomic strata, different races through Boy Scouts, through ROTC. And in the Army. I tell people that I forgot people's races when I was in the Army. Everybody's olive drab, right?

[00:28:27.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Everybody's green.

[00:28:29.11] JAMES MUKOYAMA: That's right. That's right. Absolutely. So yeah, my first battalion commander was Dewitt Cook, African-American battalion commander, Korean War vet. Just taught me so much.

[00:28:49.23] JOE GALLOWAY: This was in Korea.

[00:28:49.71] JAMES MUKOYAMA: In Korea, yeah.

[00:28:52.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Now, back home, it's 1969 and a lot of things are coming apart. There's antiwar demonstrations, and racial riots, and social turmoil. Any of that translate to your unit?

[00:29:10.70] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No. Our esprit and our morale was so high, and all we cared about was each other. We weren't there to change the world. We were there because it was our duty, and we were there fighting for each other. And we had each other's back.

[00:29:35.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Hopefully killing the enemy.

[00:29:36.28] JAMES MUKOYAMA: We did a good job of that. People talk about body counts, about inflated body counts, but we never did that. Now, one thing we did do however, is we used to get so much BS from higher headquarters about, what's your body count for today or whatever. That if we would have an operation where

let's say we would kill ten enemy, we might report eight. And we used to fake-- Hack-

[00:30:13.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Save two for later.

[00:30:14.65] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, we used to call them, put them in the freezer. And by the way, thank you for being there, because it's really important, what you did. You were able to report what happened.

[00:30:33.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, we do our jobs the best we can. Do you have any specific memories of the popular culture at that time, particularly songs?

[00:30:46.72] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, my memories, when I would think back about the States, since I grew up in Chicago, we have a place called Lake Shore Drive. And there's a song that talks about driving down Lake Shore Drive, and that was popular at that time. And I used to dream about that. Just riding in a car down the drive.

[00:31:15.48] JOE GALLOWAY: A convertible?

[00:31:17.29] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No, well, when I came back from Korea, I bought an MG sports car and it was nice.

[00:31:27.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Which one?

[00:31:29.28] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I'm a small guy, so it was an MG Midget. But it was fire engine red, I had wire wheels. Are you ready for this? This is-- greater love has no son for his parents. When I came back, I had this sports car.

[00:31:48.32] And I was ready to go to Vietnam, so I drove my car from Seattle. I was at Lewis. I drove my car back to Chicago, and I put it in storage. And then when I came back from Vietnam-- I lived with my parents, and they did not have a car. And you know the MG Midget, there's no room for--

[00:32:17.64] JOE GALLOWAY: You can't put your folks in those.

[00:32:18.16] JAMES MUKOYAMA: So with tears in my eyes--

[00:32:21.22] JOE GALLOWAY: You sold it.

[00:32:21.90] JAMES MUKOYAMA: --I traded in my MG sports car for a Toyota Corona.

[00:32:29.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, greater love hath no man.

[00:32:32.56] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah. JAMES MUKOYAMA: It was in July of '69. I was commanding my company, and we had overrun a VC position. We had killed numerous enemy, and there were literally three dead bodies at my feet. And when I get to the end of this, you'll understand why I say it was the best day.

[00:33:04.82] And so as you know, the time a unit is most vulnerable, is right after a victory. Because it's human nature to just let your guard down, and breathe a sigh of relief. Well, I was the company commander. I'm the guy in charge. So I'm on my radio talking to my platoon leaders, kicking rear end and taking names.

[00:33:24.30] I'm telling them, listen, reorganize your units, take care of your wounded, redistribute ammunition, look for enemy avenues of approach. I'm barking out all these orders, and then suddenly I stopped. And I looked at those three bodies at my feet. Joe, I realized that something had happened to me. Something had hardened my heart.

[00:33:48.36] Only moments earlier, these were alive human beings. They were fighting for something as important to them as I was. They had emotions. They had loved ones. And I'm treating them like they're bumps on a log. And then I remembered Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where he told us to pray for our enemies.

[00:34:11.50] So in the midst of all this fog of battle stuff going on, I stopped and I said a prayer for the three Viet Cong and their families. And frankly, I knew I was praying for myself, just as much. Now, I didn't have a big ceremony, get on my hands and knees.

[00:34:28.73] This all took 45 seconds. But it's something that's always remained with me. Why is this so important to me. Why do I consider it one of the highlights of my experience in Vietnam? Because of something called moral injury. And everybody knows about post-traumatic stress disorder. Everybody knows about TBI or Traumatic Brain Injury.

[00:34:56.76] Very few people talk about moral injury as an invisible wound of war that our Soldiers come back with. And the suicide rate among veterans is epidemic. And one of the major contributing factors to that is moral injury.

[00:35:14.34] And I'm on a personal mission to educate the public about this, because I now have a non-profit called Military Outreach USA, trying to reach out at the local community level, through a national network of churches. And so when I talk about moral injury, people don't know what it is.

[00:35:36.59] So I say, OK, 30 seconds, you'll get it. From the time you're born until you're 18 years old, you develop a personal moral code, a sense of right or wrong. That could come from your family, religion, friends, community, whatever. You develop a personal moral code. Then you join the military, and you learn a warrior code.

[00:35:59.73] The warrior code is superimposed on your personal moral code. And in fact, transforms it somewhat. Then you might have to participate in operations or activities that violate your personal moral code, such as killing. You don't have to be the person that pulls the trigger. You could be a witness.

[00:36:21.30] You could feel you should have prevented it, but military operations-- we're constantly moving, right? from point A to point B to point C. You don't have time to stop and reflect on this stuff. So what do you do? You bury it, and it becomes unresolved guilt and shame. Then you come back to the States.

[00:36:44.61] Let's say you leave the military or you might be a National Guardsman or a Reservist, and you come back to Chicago or Green Bay or San Diego, to a community that doesn't understand military culture, what you've been through. And it bubbles up to the surface.

[00:37:03.14] And unless you have a strong coping mechanism for that or a strong support group, bad stuff happens, depression, suicide. And the position of Military Outreach USA is that the main approach for moral injury, is not a medical doctor with prescription drugs. It's the forgiveness and grace of a moral authority, a loving God, a community of support.

[00:37:32.74] And that's where we're at. Now, I mentioned this all too. You going now back to my experience, I was one in a million that was able to address my moral injury when it happened. And I realized that. So that's why-- I've often asked myself, why haven't I had flashbacks or nightmares? Because I saw a lot of bad stuff, and I participated in a lot of bad stuff.

[00:37:59.90] So why is that? And that's my answer. I mean, I've also had a very wonderful wife. I've had a very strong, supportive church. When I was in Vietnam, I got packages and letters from my church members. In fact, one of the things I cherished the most, being Asian, from my packages, they sent me packets of soy sauce.

[00:38:25.54] And the other thing, Joe, is they were praying for me and I knew that. And I don't care what anybody says, if you know people are praying for you when you're going through some bad stuff, it helps. JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, this was-

- I was now in Pleiku and I was an adviser, but I was at corps level, so it wasn't dangerous.

[00:38:57.61] I didn't have to go out in the field, unless I wanted to. And I really didn't want to too much. But we had an inspection tour of the Special Forces camps, with the Montagnards and the Vietnamese Rangers. Really fine.

[00:39:13.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Plei Mi, Dak To, Plei Djereng.

[00:39:16.45] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Plei Djereng, Dak To, Ben Het. OK.

[00:39:17.78] JOE GALLOWAY: All of those wonderful places.

[00:39:19.93] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah. Well, now the inspection team, it was the senior corps adviser. He was the full colonel. And there was the sergeant major, the senior enlisted corps adviser. And I was the young captain carrying everybody's bags.

[00:39:41.84] JOE GALLOWAY: Carrying the bags.

[00:39:42.34] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah. So we land at Ben Het, and we get attacked. Sergeant major is killed, and he was maybe 20 meters from me. It's another God thing. I mean, it could have been me instead of him. But the backstory to this, Joe, is that he was scheduled to go on R&R, rest and recuperation leave the next day to Hawaii to meet his waiting wife--

[00:40:17.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Wife--

[00:40:18.12] JAMES MUKOYAMA: --to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. Now, just think of the moral injury that I sustained at that time, because I was a captain, granted. But I could have ordered that guy, don't get on this helicopter. You're going on R&R tomorrow. I didn't do that. So that was--

[00:40:43.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Maybe the colonel could have ordered the sergeant major not to get on that bird, but you couldn't. Not any sergeant major I knew.

[00:40:51.45] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, well, I--

[00:40:54.69] JOE GALLOWAY: I give you a pass on that one, General.

[00:41:04.32] JAMES MUKOYAMA: OK. JAMES MUKOYAMA: My time with the battalion was very short. I mean, I got there in April, and by August they were gone. But we had a lot to do with the Aussies, who were really good, because that was

part of Hackworth's plan. When he turned the battalion around, we had an exchange program with the Aussies, where some of our guys could go with them. And that helped a great deal.

[00:41:31.62] JOE GALLOWAY: It would.

[00:41:32.40] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And then when I was an adviser at II Corps-- Well, II Corps is where the ROKs were at. So we did a lot of coordination with the ROKs. And because I had served in Korea, on the DMZ, we had ROK soldiers in our units.

[00:41:53.76] So that's another story, but I could have been elected mayor of the local village there. I'd done so much work for helping the Korean people. But having said that, I had known the ROKs and I knew that there were really good soldiers. And they weren't there to win the hearts and minds of the people.

[00:42:11.92] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, they were hard asses.

[00:42:13.87] JAMES MUKOYAMA: They were there to win the war. And if anybody fired on them, that was it. Yeah, that's right. It was just-- and so the ROKs were really good, but they knew we had a lot of leaks in our headquarters. Because the ARVNs-- and so they wouldn't tell us a lot. I mean, they weren't stupid--

[00:42:35.80] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[00:42:36.35] JAMES MUKOYAMA: --like us. But anyway, but they were good soldiers, the ROKs were. And they lost a lot of their guys there. They had a field army and two divisions. And by the way, my wife is Korean.

[00:42:53.01] I met her after I came back from Vietnam. I met her in California. But she's told me that when Korean guys got orders for Vietnam, the families all did almost like a funeral preparation because they lost so many guys.

[00:43:14.78] JOE GALLOWAY: They lost a lot. Boy, their kill ratio was incredible.

[00:43:19.46] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, and you know, I tell Korean War veterans, if they hadn't gone back to Korea, they should go back and they should see what their sacrifice resulted in.

[00:43:31.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Absolutely.

[00:43:31.98] JAMES MUKOYAMA: It's a democracy. It's a strong economy. It's one of our strongest allies. What more could we want?

[00:43:41.98] JOE GALLOWAY: How much, if any, contact did you have with ARVN, South Vietnamese military?

[00:43:47.47] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I was an adviser there, so they were--

[00:43:49.41] JOE GALLOWAY: You were an adviser?

[00:43:50.26] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, so that's who I worked with.

[00:43:51.60] JOE GALLOWAY: OK, tell me what you think of them as soldiers.

[00:43:56.12] JAMES MUKOYAMA: It varied. Some of the senior officers weren't worth the salt. They were not good. They were mostly politicians or they just weren't-- They weren't commanders, yeah. But the young guys, the lower level guys were just like us. I mean, there were some really good guys there who had been in the field. My counterpart was Tu Ta De. Tu Ta was a major in the Vietnamese Army, and Major-- De.

[00:44:30.95] And he was really sharp. He was a dedicated, good planner. He had been in the field. He had fought. JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I saw some of the people in Pleiku. I didn't have any dealings with them in the field.

[00:44:54.43] JOE GALLOWAY: No villagers or anything in the field.

[00:44:55.90] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No, not really. Basically, the only time we had contact was when we were fighting, not that much with the local villagers. JAMES MUKOYAMA: My parents were very supportive.

[00:45:23.28] They had a map at home of Vietnam, and they followed where I was going. I'd send them letters. I wasn't that good of a letter writer, but I didn't want my otherwise-- I had to send some, otherwise my mom would just be crazy. But I--

[00:45:40.59] JOE GALLOWAY: And they were shipping you packages and letters from the church and all that stuff.

[00:45:45.72] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, so I had good contact with home. I never got any bad news about what was going on at home.

[00:45:53.64] JOE GALLOWAY: You didn't give them any bad news either, did you?

[00:45:55.70] JAMES MUKOYAMA: No, no. Absolutely not.

[00:45:59.21] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news were you getting in the field about the war you were fighting, about the war that was going on back home?

[00:46:09.62] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Not a lot.

[00:46:10.25] JOE GALLOWAY: Not a lot. The Stars and Stripes once in a while?

[00:46:13.10] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, Stars and Stripes would be about it. But frankly, I never once worried about my personal safety because of my faith. I knew if God was going to take me, I'd be in a better place.

[00:46:29.30] I wasn't worried about that. What kept me awake at night, Joe, was planning for operations. Because I was entrusted with our nation's highest treasure, and that is the Soldiers that I had the honor of commanding. And so I was always worried about the intelligence, where we were at. How many helicopters I'd have, or who I was going to take, or whatever.

[00:47:01.70] That's what kept me awake. JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, coming home was-- commercial flight. We were all in the plane together. I think it was the TWA. And when the wheels lifted off, we were all cheering. And we landed in California. I get out and I kiss the ground. I mean, I--

[00:47:33.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you land, Oakland?

[00:47:34.94] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, I think it was. Yeah, and so I came back to Chicago. And I couldn't believe it when I was told, don't wear your uniform in public. And I said, screw that. I'm wearing my-- I'm an officer in the United States Army.

[00:47:50.44] JOE GALLOWAY: I'm proud of this.

[00:47:51.60] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, and I just came back from Vietnam. So I'm, what are they going to do?

[00:47:55.23] JOE GALLOWAY: What, are they going to send me to Vietnam?

[00:47:56.51] JAMES MUKOYAMA: That's exactly right. And so I wore my uniform. But remember I told you my church was so supportive, and my family was so-- I mean, when I came back, my church treated me like I was a hero, because we had a lot of World War II veterans in our church. And I went to a Japanese-American

church. So we had a lot of World War II infantry guys who were in the 100th Battalion, 442nd Regiment.

[00:48:23.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, the 4-4-Deuce.

[00:48:25.32] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right. And those guys, as you know, were-- I mean, they were my heroes, which by the way, was another influence about why I joined the military, because of them. They set a pretty high bar.

[00:48:38.68] JOE GALLOWAY: They really did.

[00:48:40.28] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And they did a lot for-- this was a Japanese-American regimental combat team in World War II, because our units were segregated at the time, but they were the most highly decorated infantry unit of its size and time of service than any other unit. You know how--

[00:49:01.37] JOE GALLOWAY: And some of them were serving our country when our country had put their parents in the barbed wire camps.

[00:49:08.69] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Not only their parents, them, put them in camp. Just imagine you're 18 years old, and you get a knock on your door Friday night and it's the local FBI agent, who says, I want you to pack up.

[00:49:22.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Pack up.

[00:49:23.01] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Be at the corner of State and Madison on Monday morning. And they don't tell you where you're going, how long you're going to be gone. And--

[00:49:31.60] JOE GALLOWAY: One suitcase each.

[00:49:33.03] JAMES MUKOYAMA: They put you on a train, and you're in a concentration camp for three years basically. And then you're 18 years old or 19 years old. And the local Army recruiter comes and says, I want you to go die for your country. And these guys did it.

[00:49:49.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Did it.

[00:49:50.98] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, and so they were awarded-- regimental combat teams like a brigade, that's maybe 3,500 soldiers or so, they were awarded, Joe, over 9,000 Purple Hearts and 21 Congressional Medals of Honor and eight Presidential Unit Citations. Unheard of.

[00:50:17.97] JOE GALLOWAY: Unheard of. Incredible men.

[00:50:20.78] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, so I was honored. So when I came back, my welcome home was not like the majority of our guys got. But here's the other thing though, Joe, and that is, I joined the Reserves when I came back. So unlike a lot of my comrades, I was able to maintain my sense of purpose.

[00:50:44.31] JOE GALLOWAY: You stayed inside the perimeter.

[00:50:46.45] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right. Right. I had unit cohesion. I had purpose. And the reason I joined the Reserves, Joe, is that at that time, as you know, the Guard and Reserve didn't have a lot of combat experienced officers. And I felt that I had something to contribute.

[00:51:04.43] So that's what I did. And I served in an infantry training division for 18 years. We were mobilized for Desert Storm I. And I took my division to Fort Benning, and we took over the training of the infantry soldiers at Fort Benning. But the war ended so quick.

[00:51:27.56] We were only there 60 days, and we came back home. But it's like I died and went to heaven. Freddie Franks was-- when I retired, I was the deputy commanding general at TRADOC. And Freddie Franks was the TRADOC commander. TRADOC was training and doctrine command by the way.

[00:51:48.34] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Wonderful Soldier.

[00:51:50.28] JAMES MUKOYAMA: He was. He was.

[00:51:51.75] JOE GALLOWAY: He is.

[00:51:52.50] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And my career came to a halt, because I testified before Congress, about things that the Army did that was not in the best interest of our country. And I was the deputy commanding general at TRADOC. And Freddie Franks was my commander. And he could have really done a job on me, but he maxed my OER. But basically, I was blackballed.

[00:52:26.14] And a year later, I was history. I was gone. But Joe, if I could do it again, I'd-- and Hackworth wrote about it, by the way, in his books. He talks about it. He tried to protect me. But I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

[00:52:49.65] JAMES MUKOYAMA: It changed me in a positive way. It made me understand the goodness of our people, of our-- you know, what country develops

people like our Soldiers that we had, that would fight so loyally and hard? And it strengthened me for future battles, both in and out of the military. Because as you know, once you're in combat, what are going to do, send you to Vietnam?

[00:53:28.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Exactly.

[00:53:30.69] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And I realized how blessed I was, and how blessed I am. And so that I have an opportunity to pay back. And that's what I'm trying to do.

[00:53:40.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after the war?

[00:53:48.08] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Not really, because of the support I had, the real strong support. Now, did I have personal problems? Sure, anger management, but I'm a kind of a positive guy, and I've been so blessed, Joe. Just an example, five years ago, I had a heart attack.

[00:54:13.10] My kidneys failed. I went on dialysis. I've got diabetes. All this is Agent Orange, but here's the God thing that I told you about before. My kidneys failed, so I went on dialysis. And I got a donor. And the donor was our daughter, but our daughter's not our biological daughter. We adopted her 35 years ago, and yet she was a match.

[00:54:42.15] JOE GALLOWAY: A match. Incredible.

[00:54:44.32] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Right. So I'm so blessed in life, Joe. I've had a wonderful wife who's put up with me for 46 years. And so my standard mantra is every day is a great day. I have my faith, my family. We live in the finest country in the world. And I tell people, that comes from my experience from Vietnam as a young guy in combat.

[00:55:09.00] There are times you don't know if you're going to be alive the next moment, much less see the next sunrise. Well, when that happens, what's important in life becomes real focused, and that's faith, family, living in this country.

[00:55:23.79] I swore to myself, when our comrades were treated the way they were, when they came back from Vietnam-- when we came back, I said to myself, this ain't going to happen in the future with future vets.

[00:55:38.26] And as you know, I think almost every Vietnam vet took that same oath. Because we wanted to make sure when these vets came back from Iraq and

Afghanistan, that they would have yellow ribbon events. They would have welcome home things.

[00:55:56.28] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on?

[00:56:01.36] JAMES MUKOYAMA: I would say that our country is basically inherently good, but that we have to be very careful in questioning our leadership. The series now that it's going on with Ken Burns, but we are an inherently good nation.

[00:56:35.16] The world is better off because of the United States of America. There's no question. And it will continue to be better, as long as we take a leadership position and not let other countries run rampant.

[00:56:56.18] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Yeah, it's funny. That's a funny story. I avoided it like the plague for many years. And when I became a general, my wife and I were invited to DC, to the charm school. It's a week orientation-- t call it the general officers' orientation course. We called it the charm school.

[00:57:15.67] JOE GALLOWAY: The charm school.

[00:57:16.31] JAMES MUKOYAMA: OK, so what they did is, every evening, they had some event for us scheduled, dinners, whatever. Well, one night, they had us scheduled to go to the Vietnam Wall. Well, I couldn't beg out of that. I had to go. So we go there, and it's at night time.

[00:57:35.73] So we go there, and there was actually a helicopter that was flying above with a spotlight kind of shining down on the Wall. We said, wow, this is kind of cool. There were about 30 or 40 of us in a bus, in a nice tour bus and we came. So we thought, gee, this is pretty nice. They're doing all this for us.

[00:57:57.57] What happened was, some guy had robbed a 7-Eleven, and it was a police helicopter. Now, having said that, it was really a very moving experience for me. I looked up the names of the guys that-- I was very blessed, I only-- I lost one guy under my command. And I had others wounded, but I lost one guy.

[00:58:24.63] My roommate from Fort Lewis was killed; that sergeant major that I told you about. And I had a guy who was with me at the University of Illinois, who was killed also. We were all infantry officers. We were all 11 Bravo guys. JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, I think it's good in the sense that the schools aren't teaching this.

[00:58:58.61] And so this brings it up to people's attention. I don't think the guys are looking for it that much. I mean, it's a nice gesture, but I think the most important thing, is that our schools learn about what it was. And this Ken Burns thing is controversial. And so I viewed the first three episodes, and then I stopped because I had a conflict, but I bought the whole series.

[00:59:34.45] So I have it, so I can look at it at my leisure. I'm keeping an open mind, Joe, because all I care about-- and I met Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. I met them a couple of weeks ago here in Chicago. I'm hoping that it will be balanced, that's all I care about. I have certain things that I'm going to be watching for.

[00:59:59.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Thank you, sir.

[01:00:00.65] JAMES MUKOYAMA: Well, Thank you, Joe. It's an honor meeting you.

[01:00:04.72] JOE GALLOWAY: It's my honor.

[01:00:05.86] JAMES MUKOYAMA: And welcome home.

[01:00:06.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, you too.