

Mullan, John US Marine Corps

[00:00:16.86] JOE GALLOWAY: When and where were you born?

[00:00:19.31] JOHN MULLAN: Detroit, Michigan. First generation American-- my mother from Scotland, my dad from Ireland. And--

[00:00:30.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Born when?

[00:00:31.44] JOHN MULLAN: June 13, 1940.

[00:00:35.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:37.17] JOHN MULLAN: I had-- my father was Jerry Mullan, Jeremiah Mullan. My mother was Kathleen Dunlop Mullan. I had a brother and a sister-- Jim-- James-- and Helena. H-E-L-E-N-A.

[00:00:54.42] JOE GALLOWAY: And you grew up in Detroit?

[00:00:56.81] JOHN MULLAN: In Detroit.

[00:00:57.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Went to school there?

[00:00:58.51] JOHN MULLAN: Went to school there.

[00:00:59.81] JOE GALLOWAY: That's your hometown then.

[00:01:00.99] JOHN MULLAN: That's hometown. Right.

[00:01:02.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:01:03.38] JOHN MULLAN: It's all gone now.

[00:01:04.92]

[00:01:10.87] JOHN MULLAN: I was in Civil Air Patrol as a kid and I won a flight scholarship in Civil Air Patrol. But when they told me I couldn't fly in combat because I wore glasses, I joined the Marine Corps the day I turned 17.

[00:01:28.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my.

[00:01:29.35] JOHN MULLAN: Uh-huh.

[00:01:30.22] JOE GALLOWAY: You got your dad to sign for you.

[00:01:32.71] JOHN MULLAN: I got-- yeah, he didn't want to. But he was in the IRA, so--

[00:01:36.94] JOE GALLOWAY: [LAUGHS]

[00:01:39.11] JOHN MULLAN: --I got him to sign for me.

[00:01:47.47] JOHN MULLAN: Parris Island.

[00:01:48.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Parris Island.

[00:01:48.70] JOHN MULLAN: South Carolina.

[00:01:49.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:01:50.38] JOHN MULLAN: Right after the drowning at Ribbon Creek.

[00:01:53.32] Well, I was with the 8th Marines, infantry, 2nd Marines at ITR at Lejeune. And I got out, and reenlisted, and got married, and got sent to California-- Camp Pendleton-- weapons instructor, junior weapons instructor, and weapons instructors at Camp Pendleton.

[00:02:25.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Now this is between when and when? Sixty-- ?

[00:02:29.76] JOHN MULLAN: '62 to '63. And then they sent me to seagoing school. I was a corporal. And I spent 18 months on a light cruiser-- a Marine detachment. And I couldn't stand being on there watching Marines land and here I am on a boat.

[00:02:53.93] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:02:54.76] JOHN MULLAN: I kept asking the Sailors-- how do you drive this boat? And they said no, you sail a ship. And I got orders and I put in, and my wife and son lived in California-- San Clemente. And no transfer of anything for the government to pay for moving. And they sent me to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

[00:03:20.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course.

[00:03:21.72] JOHN MULLAN: And I was there seven days and on my way to the Dominican Republic. And six weeks there in the Dominican Republic.

[00:03:35.98] JOE GALLOWAY: This is late '64.

[00:03:37.89] JOHN MULLAN: '65.

[00:03:39.28] JOE GALLOWAY: '65, yeah.

[00:03:41.31] JOHN MULLAN: I come back from the Dominican Republic. They sent me to Mountain Leadership School in Bridgeport, California. I come back from there and they sent me advance party down to Cuba. And I spent five months in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and took out

two reconnaissance patrols in Cuba. And I come back-- if they'd have let me out in December of '65 I'd have jumped.

[00:04:17.05] I got recruiting duty in my home-- I was with the 2nd Marines, and I got orders for recruiting duty and went to Recruiters School. I come out number 10 in my class of 90. And I picked my hometown, Detroit, and my wife's hometown. We had another child. And I supposed to be there from June of '66 to June of '69 with the option to extend a year. I was there one year and got orders back to Vietnam. On June 22nd I got the orders, report first orders replacement draft to Nam. I left right during the riots-- had to leave my wife and two kids in Detroit during the riots in Detroit. And I left a combat zone to go to a combat zone.

[00:05:17.50] JOE GALLOWAY: There you are. This is '67?

[00:05:21.08] JOHN MULLAN: '67. And went through staging, and ready to go to Nam, and they kept me back for three weeks and sent me to Naval Gunfire Air Control and Artillery Control School. And then left in the first part of September.

[00:05:47.56] JOHN MULLAN: Landed in Okinawa-- California to Hawaii, Hawaii to Okinawa, Okinawa to Nam. And within 18 hours in Vietnam I was in my first firefight.

[00:06:04.75] JOE GALLOWAY: You landed in Da Nang?

[00:06:06.73] JOHN MULLAN: Landed in Da Nang and spent the night--

[00:06:09.60] JOE GALLOWAY: --they send you immediately to--?

[00:06:10.68] JOHN MULLAN: I had orders-- there were 12 of us staff, and I had orders directly to 5th Marines-- 1st Battalion 5th Marines. The other 11 just had orders to division. I could not figure that out.

[00:06:24.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:06:25.68] JOHN MULLAN: And when I--

[00:06:26.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Somebody loved you up there.

[00:06:29.10] JOHN MULLAN: When I got there, the first sergeant-- that I knew as a gunnery sergeant at Delta Company/1/2-- saw me and walked up to the sergeant major and says, that's my man. And I got the 1st Platoon/Charlie/1/5. Lieutenant Higgins was back in Da Nang. He had bad knees. And I took the platoon out to rescue another platoon that was being ambushed, and-- first firefight.

[00:07:07.05] JOE GALLOWAY: In 12 hours.

[00:07:08.57] JOHN MULLAN: Well, yeah. Well, 18 hours from the time I landed to the time--

[00:07:12.68] JOE GALLOWAY: --time you were in your first firefight.

[00:07:15.06] JOHN MULLAN: --first firefight. And the men didn't know me and I didn't know them.

[00:07:17.88] JOE GALLOWAY: But you were running the platoon.

[00:07:19.47] JOHN MULLAN: I was running the platoon.

[00:07:20.67] JOE GALLOWAY: You were-- at this stage, you were what? A three stripe sergeant?

[00:07:24.12] JOHN MULLAN: No, I was a staff.

[00:07:25.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Staff.

[00:07:25.78] JOHN MULLAN: E-6. Yeah.

[00:07:27.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:07:28.25] JOHN MULLAN: And then--

[00:07:29.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Put you to work in a hurry.

[00:07:31.45] JOHN MULLAN: Right. I think Tom Stanford did that-- he knew me, he worked with me in 2nd Marines. He had Delta Company. I was in Charlie. He had gunny and I was a weapon's platoon commander.

[00:07:47.82] And then we left 0-51. We went to regiment. They flew to the wrong place. And one of my men had TB, and they kept us back in regiment for a week or so-- check if any of us had TB, any of the other men. None had it. He went down to 84 pounds. He was the only buck sergeant I had.

[00:08:18.87] And then we went back to Hoi An-- and more firefights in Hoi An. And I left Hoi An main side. I lost two men in Hoi An-- wounded. We went to Hoi An too and I lost-- we went out on a three-day patrol. I lost seven men-- wounded.

[00:08:47.94] JOE GALLOWAY: Booby traps?

[00:08:48.62] JOHN MULLAN: Mortared by the South Vietnamese. And all wounded. And we went back in and they questioned me on what happened. And we go back on patrol, and I took the patrol out a different way and ran into a minefield. I lost four more men. One killed and I was hit. And the one that was killed was my corpsman who was one of the bravest men I've ever seen in my life under fire. 18-year-old kid. And then come back, went to sick bay. I come back to Hoi An, patrols, and then I send another two squads out. And Nick Warr came in and took over the

platoon, but it was still my platoon. And they walked into a booby trap-- two 105 rounds daisy-chained.

[00:09:55.41] Only three men walked out of 15 men, three killed, and the rest wounded. And we stayed at Hoi An. The rest of the outfit, 5th Marines, were pulled out. And we stayed to train the Korean marines that came in to show them where the minefields were.

[00:10:16.23] And then we left, went up to Phu Loc 6. And that wasn't a nice place to be. And from there, we went to Hai Van Pass, sweeping the road, mountains keeping-- trying to keep the mountain's road open. I lost two more men, killed. And then the 101st relieved us. And we went right by our base at Phu Loc and went into Phu Bai. And the next morning, we went into Hue, the 12th.

[00:10:49.88] JOE GALLOWAY: This is January?

[00:10:52.15] JOHN MULLAN: Sixty-- February '68. We were up at the Hai Van Pass the whole month.

[00:11:04.12] JOE GALLOWAY: And you just headed into Hue City in the middle of Tet '68.

[00:11:09.10] JOHN MULLAN: 2/5 had taken-- and 1/1, a couple of companies from 1/1 had taken the city. We crossed the Perfume River. And they said it was just a little resistance. We went in with only about 600 to 700. Delta Company stayed on the other side of the river. And we went in.

[00:11:30.79] JOE GALLOWAY: The enemy had 2,000 or 3,000?

[00:11:33.39] JOHN MULLAN: 2,000, over 2,000.

[00:11:35.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:11:35.98] JOHN MULLAN: If they would have attacked us, they would have wiped us out to the man. Tanks couldn't fire the cannon. They didn't want to destroy the buildings. We couldn't call in artillery or couldn't call in air. All we had, Joe, was eight blocks.

[00:11:54.21] JOE GALLOWAY: You had the Ontos?

[00:11:55.78] JOHN MULLAN: We had the Ontos and mortars. We could fire those, but no tanks or air.

[00:12:06.89] JOE GALLOWAY: That's insane.

[00:12:07.63] JOHN MULLAN: Right.

[00:12:09.60] JOE GALLOWAY: And you're losing people by the yard.

[00:12:13.45] JOHN MULLAN: We were ready to cross the first street, and three of my men got hit. I went out and got them, under fire, pulled them in, made sure the corpsman was working on them, checked the other men in the team, and passed the word, when I blow the whistle, we're going to cross the street.

[00:12:31.77] JOE GALLOWAY: John Chang your medic by now?

[00:12:34.09] JOHN MULLAN: John-- he's here.

[00:12:36.72] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I know he is. We just interviewed him. Was he--

[00:12:40.15] JOHN MULLAN: Yes.

[00:12:40.65] JOE GALLOWAY: --with you in Hue City?

[00:12:41.41] JOHN MULLAN: He's the one that saved my life.

[00:12:43.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:12:43.87] JOHN MULLAN: Everyone said I was dead. And the kid that pulled me in out of the street I pulled off a mine three months earlier. He was standing on a 105 booby trap and couldn't move. And I pulled him off. And it didn't go off.

[00:13:05.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Whoa.

[00:13:06.85] JOHN MULLAN: I told him, on three, I'm going to throw you off. Get ready. One-- and I threw him off. And you're going to count to three? No. I was shaking, and so was he. And it didn't go off.

[00:13:18.82] JOE GALLOWAY: And if it went off, you're both dead.

[00:13:21.34] JOHN MULLAN: We wouldn't have got any shrapnel. We would've got concussion, because it was a small hill. And explosions go up. So we wouldn't have got shrapnel. But someone had to do it.

[00:13:34.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Concussion would've probably--

[00:13:35.38] JOHN MULLAN: Someone-- yeah, someone had to do it. And he was a young kid. And this young kid--

[00:13:42.37] JOE GALLOWAY: So three months later, he pays you back.

[00:13:44.00] JOHN MULLAN: He pulled me out of the street.

[00:13:46.20] JOE GALLOWAY: You were hit where?

[00:13:48.19] JOHN MULLAN: I got blown out of the building with an RPG. Come right through the door where I was standing, clipped the back of my helmet, blew me out in the street. And when I lay out in the street, I got it with an AK-47, right down the head. And the back of my flak jacket stopped a couple.

[00:14:07.12] And I was brought back to the aid station. Everyone didn't think I was going to make it. Doc Loudermilk didn't think I was going to make it. And he put the ear back on. He doesn't know why. Ear was hanging, and he put it back. And this was all gone, here and back. It was all-- you could see clean into the brain and the mouth.

[00:14:33.31] And he took me back to the doctor. And he checked me out and put me over to the side, no way to get me back to the rear.

[00:14:45.37] JOE GALLOWAY: So he's triaging you?

[00:14:46.99] JOHN MULLAN: Yes, but he had to put me over to the side because of all the other guys coming in wounded. And a CIA helicopter, Air America helicopter, come out of nowhere. And he called it in. And he took five out, five or six, with me. And they flew us to Phu Bai. And they got off. They were all my men. And they got off, and they left me on the helicopter. So they all thought I was dead.

[00:15:17.32] They took them for treatment, and they flew me out to the hospital ship Sanctuary. And the neurosurgeon operated on me within an hour after I was hit. And I didn't wake up for about 10 days. And when I woke up, I didn't know where-- I thought I was in heaven. Everything was white. Everyone was wearing white.

[00:15:40.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah?

[00:15:41.23] JOHN MULLAN: And I was on a mattress, a thick mattress.

[00:15:44.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:15:45.61] JOHN MULLAN: And I couldn't talk. I couldn't say words. And they saw me move and come. And how I know all this information is the doctor that did the original triage on me, after he served his time on the Sanctuary, was sent to Philadelphia Naval Hospital, where I was sent. I spent 15 days on the Sanctuary. And it took them 15 days to fly me from Da Nang to Philadelphia. They had to stop me in the Philippines for a couple days, Guam a couple days, overnight in Hawaii, overnight in California, overnight in Wyoming, a couple of days in Illinois, up to DC.

[00:16:32.74] I don't remember much about DC except it was cold. And the stretcher-- put me on a bus, on a stretcher near the top of the bus. I could hear rain hitting the top of the bus. And I was out. I didn't wake up until I was going back to the plane. And they flew me there to New Jersey and then bussed me from Jersey into Philadelphia. And the infection was cleared.

[00:17:00.91] So they postponed operations on me. And I spent 13 months in Philadelphia Naval Hospital, seven major surgeries. And I got my arm and leg back, full use of it. Still my vocabulary was-- I knew the word, but I couldn't say it. I could point to it. It took-- after they retired me-- I didn't want out. I wanted to stay in. I figured I could train.

[00:17:31.60] JOE GALLOWAY: They medically retired you.

[00:17:33.37] JOHN MULLAN: Right. I could train these men on house to house fighting. They didn't. And so I went back to Detroit. And I got hired in to a job. I worked behind, in the back, so no one could see me. I felt too disfigured.

[00:17:52.33] And then we moved to Arizona. Couldn't take the cold weather. I couldn't tell temperatures because of the brain damage. Kept catching pneumonia. So we moved to Arizona. No one would hire me in Arizona-- too disabled, too disabled. VA, go back to school.

[00:18:13.42] And I went back to school. I got an AA degree in business and a BA in education in four years. And I went out, taught school. And then when my boys went off to college, I went to the post office, worked for the post office for 20 years, retired from there, and went back to teaching. And in 2008, I retired. And now I chase golf balls.

[00:18:43.90] And I volunteer at Banner Baywood Hospital for stroke victims, diabetic amputees. I know what they're going through.

[00:19:00.21] JOHN MULLAN: The closest men I've ever had in my life, 24/7. I'm not with my wife that long, 24/7. Of course I've only been married 57 years.

[00:19:10.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Only 57 years?

[00:19:11.73] JOHN MULLAN: Yeah, she married me young. I was young. I was 22. She was-- just turned 18.

[00:19:18.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Now you went in there in '67 and '68?

[00:19:24.36] JOHN MULLAN: In Nam, yeah.

[00:19:25.47] JOE GALLOWAY: And--

[00:19:26.84] JOHN MULLAN: They retired me in '69.

[00:19:27.75] JOE GALLOWAY: --that was a time of some turmoil back in the States.

[00:19:31.00] JOHN MULLAN: Right. Yes, I had to leave my wife and--

[00:19:34.35] JOE GALLOWAY: In the middle of a riot.

[00:19:35.79] JOHN MULLAN: --two boys right during the riots. Tanks were running up and down my mother-in-law's street. And that was right near my recruiting office.

[00:19:44.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:19:44.94] JOHN MULLAN: And it lasted about two weeks.

[00:19:48.30] JOE GALLOWAY: Now did any of that come over to Vietnam while you were there?

[00:19:53.73] JOHN MULLAN: We had some-- just starting some racial problems, not out in the field. But when we'd get back, one group went to themselves, and then the other group-- but out in the field, they were great.

[00:20:10.41] JOE GALLOWAY: No room for that.

[00:20:12.03] JOHN MULLAN: No room for that. Wasn't too much-- there was--

[00:20:17.79] JOE GALLOWAY: What did your guys do for off-duty time, recreation?

[00:20:22.17] JOHN MULLAN: We had no off-duty time.

[00:20:23.16] JOE GALLOWAY: None?

[00:20:24.09] JOHN MULLAN: No. And they nicknamed me-- I had a nickname of Mother.

[00:20:28.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Mother.

[00:20:29.46] JOHN MULLAN: It was used two different ways--

[00:20:31.06] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:31.71] JOHN MULLAN: --your mother and then mother. Because anytime you found a mine or something, I'd go and disarm it or take care of it, and made sure these men were trained, and held-- each man I lost, my heart dropped.

[00:20:49.08] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:20:49.59] JOHN MULLAN: And my PTSD is not me, it's thinking of these men. Why didn't-- why did I send them this way? Why didn't I send them another way?

[00:21:05.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe for us the quality of the leadership in your outfit at company, battalion, or above, regimental.

[00:21:14.61] JOHN MULLAN: We worked mainly just platoon. We were back in battalion areas with different companies, but they all had their own duties. We had ours. And it was mostly a platoon.

[00:21:30.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:21:32.13] JOHN MULLAN: We had about 60--

[00:21:32.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, how many lieutenants did you go through?

[00:21:36.06] JOHN MULLAN: Two.

[00:21:36.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Two.

[00:21:37.65] JOHN MULLAN: Lieutenant Higgins went-- Lieutenant Higgins went back. He had football knees. And he had to go back for surgery. And then Nick Warr came in in late November of '67. And I became his platoon sergeant. And he states in his book, it was Sergeant Mullan's platoon up until he got hit. And I had to take it over-- a great man in the Corps. And I had all great men in squad leaders.

[00:22:14.16] I had lance corporals as squad leaders. And I had buck sergeants as runners. Because they were on Marine barracks or no combat. And I couldn't put a man in charge, brand-new guy in charge of--

[00:22:34.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Of a squad.

[00:22:35.02] JOHN MULLAN: --a squad. You had to know-- it usually took three months to get the smell for the enemy, to see the bent grass, and how they used to tie the grass in a knot in minefields. We mark our minefields. They did the same. But stones, three stones on top of each other-- and you have to learn this. You see it.

[00:23:04.32] And things that doesn't grow, you know it doesn't grow there. Why is it there?

[00:23:09.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Why is it there?

[00:23:09.99] JOHN MULLAN: You smell it. You feel it. You know it's not there. And these were my point men, my squad leaders.

[00:23:21.64] JOE GALLOWAY: They had to know that.

[00:23:22.86] JOHN MULLAN: They had to know that. They had to experience death, which is hard to do for any man. And I lost 16 men that were under me, killed, and over 60 wounded--

[00:23:45.17] JOE GALLOWAY: That's out of a--

[00:23:45.68] JOHN MULLAN: --in the six months--

[00:23:46.67] JOE GALLOWAY: --30-man platoon?

[00:23:47.54] JOHN MULLAN: No, we had a bigger platoon. We had a machine gun squad attached to us. So every man has to learn something. And my three squad leaders-- I wouldn't and let Larson go into Hue. He only had a few weeks left in Nam. And so I took over his squad when we went into Hue with one of his team leaders, helping the team leader lead the squad. I was leaving that day to get my-- or meet my wife in Hawaii.

[00:24:27.84] JOHN MULLAN: Having the squads come back in off night ambushes with no guys released, eating a hot meal, which we didn't have very often, C-rations. And on Thanksgiving, we-- I was coming back in off a three-day patrol on a Thanksgiving Day. And they kept turkey, and potatoes, and gravy for us. And it was cold, but it was delicious.

[00:25:10.06] And then we'd take some of that 33 Tiger beer. We couldn't get the regular beer most of the time. Hoi An main side we could. But otherwise, we'd drink Vietnamese beer. We called it another name beside Tiger.

[00:25:28.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:25:29.75] JOHN MULLAN: Yeah.

[00:25:30.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Biere Larue.

[00:25:31.30] JOHN MULLAN: Yeah, right.

[00:25:32.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:25:34.33] JOHN MULLAN: And it had a tiger engraved on the bottle.

[00:25:38.38] JOE GALLOWAY: That's right.

[00:25:39.49] JOHN MULLAN: And so whatever we could-- and marijuana-- I put the command out, don't let me catch you smoking it, or don't smoke any of it 24 hours before we go out, or when we're out. And we were on a 3-3-3-- three days as security of the company area, three days of night ambushes and day patrols, and one three-day patrol further out.

[00:26:16.80] JOE GALLOWAY: And then you recycle.

[00:26:18.24] JOHN MULLAN: Recycle. I got written up in Da Nang. When we were on bridge security, lieutenant came, and he took over the platoon. I'm going to see what I can't scrounge in Da Nang. I gathered up about \$17 from my men and went into Da Nang. And the XO of the 1st Marine Division and sergeant major of the 1st Marine Division saw me going up the steps, stopped me. And he said, why are you carrying a loaded weapon?

[00:26:53.55] I said, sir, I'm in Vietnam. No, you don't carry a loaded weapon here. I had a .45 and an M-16, no rounds in the chamber. Of course, he didn't see the grenades I had or the C-4 I

carried. And I was in uniform. And they said, what are you here for? And I said, I'm-- to get something for my men. Go back to your unit.

[00:27:14.07] Well, they left. And I said, what are they going to do, send me to Vietnam? And I went and see what I couldn't scrounge. And here comes this buck sergeant running at me. Sergeant Mullan, Sergeant Mullan-- I'm trying to figure out who he was. Come to find out he was a man that I sent to the brig in Cuba. I caught him sleeping on post in Cuba.

[00:27:35.94] And he said, I never slept again and wouldn't let any of my men. And he was serving-- he already served his 13 months, and he was serving an extension of six months. And he says, I owe you my life. And that made me feel good. And he got me a whole Jeep load of stuff free.

[00:27:54.66] JOE GALLOWAY: The scrounge worked.

[00:27:55.68] JOHN MULLAN: The scrounge worked, just knowing people in the Corps. And you've got to be a good scrounge to get anything in the Marine Corps. The worst day was when a Navy lieutenant, convenient to the government, he retired. And no, I want to stay in. That's-- why'd they keep me in the hospital so long? All these other kids were in worse shape than me, and they were getting out.

[00:28:28.66] And they retired me. And that was the end of my life, I thought. That was it. My wife and two kids is what kept me alive. I had two more kids afterwards, spread out a little, 18 years between my youngest and oldest. He was just leaving for college when she was born.

[00:28:52.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh my.

[00:28:53.99] JOHN MULLAN: And so I've got 12 grandkids and one great-grandkid now.

[00:29:01.96] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, it wasn't the end of your life.

[00:29:03.52] JOHN MULLAN: It wasn't. Started all new. I volunteer in a civilian hospital, St Vincent de Paul. I started that society in our new church, a new club. And I kept busy.

[00:29:26.71] JOHN MULLAN: The military, as long as we had a fire team go out with them on a night patrol or night ambush, if we had a fire team go out, they would stay to the last man in a firefight. If not, they'd be back within two hours and looting villages of things. It's hard to trust any of the Vietnamese. I'd always check their fingernails. And if they were black, OK. If they were clean, we expected they were VC.

[00:30:07.21] Education-wise, you could-- the way they were speaking, you'd pick it up. You pick up the people, their eyes, their movements. It becomes second thought to you. You already know this. But getting these people-- to farmers, all they wanted was their land. They knew nothing. 10 miles in radius of their farm is all they knew in their whole life.

[00:30:36.85] JOE GALLOWAY: And all they wanted to know.

[00:30:37.90] JOHN MULLAN: And all they wanted. They didn't want-- they'd tell you anything you wanted to know. And they'd tell the VC the same thing.

[00:30:44.56] JOE GALLOWAY: Yep. All they wanted was to survive.

[00:30:49.30] JOHN MULLAN: Right. And what the United States did was brought in new methods for rice. Instead of growing rice two crops a year, they could grow it four and produce rice. This was what North Vietnamese wanted was the rice production of the South Vietnamese. And one of the reasons we went into Nam is, if we went to war with China, we had no ports on the Pacific coast to land ships.

[00:31:28.78] When we went into Laos, we had taken them all by air. Supply-- you can't supply troops by air for very long. So the two natural harbors were Haiphong Harbor and Da Nang. I knew a couple Navy SEALs that were in Haiphong Harbor mapping out the complete harbor. I ran into them when I was going through mountain leadership school in Bridgeport.

[00:31:58.88] So I'd pick up-- anything I can pick up, I kept in my mind. And I have what they call a picturesque memory. When I remember something, I just don't remember the one thing, but everything that goes with it. I'm losing most of it now. And the short-term memory, I'm losing, because of brain damage. But long-term, I have-- and I've just written a book. I just sent it to the publisher. And it's due out the end of this month.

[00:32:32.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Great.

[00:32:33.88] JOHN MULLAN: The Loner-- that's what a platoon sergeant has to be, a loner.

[00:32:43.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You have difficulty readjusting after the Marine Corps?

[00:32:49.42] JOHN MULLAN: Yes, I didn't want to be seen by the public. I felt too disfigured. I wanted to hide. And my wife is what got me going, got me out bowling, got me out to church. And then I couldn't see my own face. So it started healing more. They had to take nerves out of my tongue and transplant them into the face to lift the face up. The whole face was collapsed like people that have Bell's palsy. And--

[00:33:25.54] JOE GALLOWAY: You look good to me.

[00:33:27.13] JOHN MULLAN: --nerves-- they sewed your ear back on. You can't tell. But there's nothing in there but skin. The bullet took jawbone out. And the temporal bone was shattered. So-- but I'm an Irishman. You can always hit an Irishman in the head. You're not going to hurt him. Anywhere else you might.

[00:33:55.01] JOE GALLOWAY: How long before you got in touch with people you had served with?

[00:34:01.84] JOHN MULLAN: I was-- started coming to the 1st Marine Division reunions looking for them. And I couldn't find them. No Vietnam veterans were coming in. And a couple-

- Wally Markowsky was one, lived down the street from my mother. I enlisted him. And who did I run into over in Nam in Charlie Company, second platoon? I had first platoon. And he kept volunteering for everything. And no, no, I'm not going to tell your mother.

[00:34:44.53] So he came home. I knew him. And then finally, we got it started. Nick Warr wrote his first book, Phase Line Green. And we held a reunion of 1/5, Charlie Company, in Texas for Estes. Estes was killed in Hue after I got hit doing the same thing, going after the wounded and pulling them in. And he almost had them in when they cut loose and killed him.

[00:35:24.13] He got the Silver Star. He was written up for the Silver Star, and he got the Bronze Star. I didn't want anything. He was the one that-- the men were the ones that-- I just had to do my job.

[00:35:39.04] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:35:39.52] JOHN MULLAN: These were my men. And I got to know every one of them, who I had to press, who I had to just tell a word.

[00:35:51.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Have a lot of them come back in now?

[00:35:54.10] JOHN MULLAN: Yes, we have a lot. Right here, there's about eight of them from my platoon.

[00:35:58.95] JOE GALLOWAY: From your platoon?

[00:36:00.14] JOHN MULLAN: Right. And they call me Mother. And sometimes--

[00:36:05.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Both kinds of mother still?

[00:36:07.42] JOHN MULLAN: Yeah, but all good men. And I thought they hated me. Because I never yelled at them, you know, screamed. I never chewed out a man in front of any other. You do that, you lose that man and others. You never chew out a man in front of others. You have to be conscious of each man, how far you could push him, know him, to be a good platoon leader.

[00:36:46.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Discipline in private and praise in public.

[00:36:50.98] JOHN MULLAN: Right, all the time.

[00:36:52.12] JOE GALLOWAY: All the time.

[00:36:54.31] JOHN MULLAN: And praise them-- the more praise you can give them, the better job they're going to do next time they're out. So I guess I learned fast. School was the same way.

[00:37:12.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:37:12.92] JOHN MULLAN: I never had trouble with boys. Girls, I just-- out. Off you go, out to the principal, you know? Boys I can just grab, you know?

[00:37:28.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your time in combat in Vietnam affect the way you think about our troops coming back from combat today.

[00:37:36.05] JOHN MULLAN: No. The PTSD, sometimes it irks me. It's just so hard. Some of these cooks or guys in the rear in the Air Force claiming PTSD, I don't know what that really is truthfully. I have it because of the men I lost. I think of them. What could I have done?

[00:38:12.29] I sometimes-- loner-- become a loner. The responsibility of a man's life, you know, when you have--

[00:38:24.38] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a big burden.

[00:38:25.64] JOHN MULLAN: It's a big burden. And you've got to watch for it. But a lot of these-- they're not the same combat that we were in. Now infantry, I'm not knocking them at all. They have a job to do over in Nam. They got artilleried or mortared. The infantry, the grunt, they're the men that are out in the jungle going three or four days without any food, eating a piece of buffalo, water buffalo, or trying to-- rice-- cooking rice in their helmet, never complaining.

[00:39:11.96] You could tell a grunt. I lost over 60 pounds in the six months I was there. And my first leave home, they couldn't find a pair of trousers thin enough for me. But the difference between a grunt-- the eyes back in the head, the cheek bones sticking out-- grunts that know death--

[00:39:43.13] JOE GALLOWAY: They're worn thin.

[00:39:44.96] JOHN MULLAN: Worn real thin. But they're strong. They come out of it. They know next time it's not going to happen again on my watch.

[00:40:00.75] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation?

[00:40:05.31] JOHN MULLAN: To me, I thought it was, again, for a place for our ships to land to fight China if we had to fight China. And I think we did so much for the Vietnamese people. We taught them how to bring water uphill. We taught them how to plant the rice differently. We taught them how to groom.

[00:40:36.18] They'll never be the same. It's like the Tasaday tribe in the Philippines. National Geographic went in to see them. And they were cavemen type. And once they left, the people were no longer the same people. Because now each one had two machetes.

[00:41:03.18] And they saw white people. And they saw cameras. And Philippine government now has put it off limits for anyone to go in to the Tasaday area. This is in National Geographic in the '70s.

[00:41:21.99] And it's just like Vietnam. We taught them more and educated them. Look at the Vietnamese that are college degrees and intelligent, working for more intelligent. This is what the Americans have to do. Always strive for a new outcome.

[00:41:52.56] JOE GALLOWAY: What lessons did you take from Vietnam that you would like to pass on?

[00:41:58.44] JOHN MULLAN: Keep your head down. Look for the future. Look what we have now, where we can see the enemy with airplanes, unpiloted airplanes. Or we can send little machines into the area to find them.

[00:42:25.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Little bitty ones too.

[00:42:26.91] JOHN MULLAN: Right, and to find them. All this is by education, by school. Learn. There's nothing you can't do. Look, the men landing on the moon, going up in space-- to me, when I was a young man, only one that lived on the moon was Mighty Mouse. And he lived right on the corner of the moon. And look what we've learned on television.

[00:42:57.45] But we've got to take the human side of the education too, the human body, the human mind. What can we think? What can we stop from happening? The old seem to know what's happening. The young are still wild. I know I was wild as a young man. But now older, you think. You stop. OK, let him go by. You did that when you were young, you know? But we got to teach them respect.

[00:43:55.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in DC?

[00:43:58.74] JOHN MULLAN: Yes. Yes.

[00:44:00.45] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your thoughts when you go there?

[00:44:03.15] JOHN MULLAN: Strong, because of the men. On the back of my shirt has the Wall of the 5th Marines that served in Vietnam. Over 2,000 were killed in Nam. So from '65 to '60-- or '71-- 2,000. That's a whole--

[00:44:30.99] JOE GALLOWAY: That's a long line.

[00:44:31.94] JOHN MULLAN: Yeah, a lot of men, a lot of kids. You know, I was the old man over in Nam, nine years older than Doc Loudermilk. And everyone thought I was in my late 30s because I had gray hair. And I said, that's from having kids.

[00:44:53.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, that'll do it.

[00:44:54.99] JOHN MULLAN: Yeah.

[00:45:00.65] JOHN MULLAN: I thought it was finally coming to us. I know when I first came home from the hospital, they wouldn't let me wear a uniform. There was-- having demonstrations at the hospital in Philadelphia, antiwar demonstrations. And I told them, I'm going to wear my uniform coming back. And I did.

[00:45:25.45] JOE GALLOWAY: And did.

[00:45:26.42] JOHN MULLAN: And did. You might disgrace me, but you don't disgrace my uniform.