

## **Sapp, Charles US Navy**

[00:00:16.26] CHARLES SAPP: I was born in Concord, North Carolina in Cabarrus Hospital in 1931, August 18. My mother grew up in Kannapolis, North Carolina. My father was one of 13 in Concord. And I have one sister-- that's the only sibling-- that's a year older.

[00:00:39.89] JOE GALLOWAY: What did your dad do?

[00:00:42.82] CHARLES SAPP: He was an entrepreneur in a huge way. He was-- he loved automobiles to start with. But he really-- he made very good money in the dry cleaning business. But didn't want to be in the dry cleaning business. He wanted to be in the automobile business. So he was selling used cars. And when I was a teenager, I was helping him with it. And it was quite an experience.

[00:01:14.72] CHARLES SAPP: I was base-- base pay entrance date is sometime in October 1952. And went into Navy flight training in February of '53. I went through flight training in fixed wing. Got my wings in Hutchinson, Kansas, of all places for the Navy, flying the P-2V. And got commissioned at the same time, I was a Navy aviation-- Naval aviation cadet. And then got wings and commissioned the same day.

[00:01:49.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Same day.

[00:01:50.64] CHARLES SAPP: And then after that, this will date me, I went into blimps.

[00:01:57.47] JOE GALLOWAY: Blimps. Coming back.

[00:02:00.90] CHARLES SAPP: I hope so because I thought they were great. But at that time, the Navy had blimp squadrons all up and down the East Coast. And the training was in Georgia at Brunswick. And I went to a squadron in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. And then I went to an airship, we call them, airship wing staff in Lakehurst, New Jersey. From there, I went to the Navy postgraduate school in Monterey. And in 1961, the Navy got rid of airships or blimps.

[00:02:39.20] JOE GALLOWAY: So you're flying blimps. And now, you've got to pick something else out.

[00:02:43.31] CHARLES SAPP: Well, that's right. And I went to Monterey to get-- I didn't have a degree when I went into the Navy. So they sent me to Monterey to the postgraduate school to get a bachelor's degree, which I did in 1961. And by the way, that's a great place to go to school.

[00:02:59.99] JOE GALLOWAY: I bet.

[00:03:01.76] CHARLES SAPP: But anyway, from there, I went to Pensacola and the naval pre-flight school and taught math and physics. And from there, I went to helicopter training at the local base there in Pensacola.

[00:03:18.74] JOE GALLOWAY: And you're learning to fly what kind of chopper?

[00:03:21.95] CHARLES SAPP: Well, we started out with the small Bell, the little-- and then went from that to-- in the squadron, we were flying-- you've probably never heard of Kaman Aircraft, K-A-M-A-N, out of Connecticut. And we were flying the H-2, which was a small, very good, very easy to handle helicopter.

[00:03:50.90] JOE GALLOWAY: Glass top jobbies?

[00:03:52.31] CHARLES SAPP: No, it looks regular. Single engine at that time. And very, very good helicopter. And I went on a Med cruise with that. And then in 1965 was on the Independence. And we went to the WestPac to support the attacks on North Vietnam in the ROLLING THUNDER operation.

[00:04:31.72] And at that time, they decided that with ROLLING THUNDER going, that they needed Navy helicopters to fly over the North to rescue downed pilots. And the concept is great. But we had no experience in that kind of operation at all. But they put me, and co-pilot, and four or five crewmen on board the USS Richmond K Turner, which is a DLG missile frigate.

[00:05:04.32] They had room for one helicopter. And we went on there. And they said, OK, you're going to be called if a plane goes down. And you're to listen to the Air Force. And they'll guide you in. So the first time we were called in was two Navy planes had gone down beyond Hanoi, actually. And so we launched an Air Force A-1, call sign Sandy.

[00:05:37.47] CHARLES SAPP: It was interesting, the Sandies, the A-1s, would guide us in. But they wouldn't cross the beach unless we were at 10,000 feet. And usually, we didn't go above 500 feet. So going to 10,000 feet was quite an experience.

[00:05:50.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, I bet.

[00:05:52.63] CHARLES SAPP: But we did. And then we went in beyond Hanoi on that particular mission. And we couldn't find the downed planes. And we were warned that a lot of times, the North Vietnamese would be put on the flight suits and pretend they were the downed pilots. So we couldn't find anything.

[00:06:12.50] So after we were running low on fuel, and I mean really low, running low on fuel, we came-- we were starting back. And the A-1, the Sandy, says, Angel, you're going to have to change your direction because you're entering Chinese territory. And I said, well, I'm sorry, but I can't do anything about that because I'm going to be out of fuel if I don't maintain this heading.

[00:06:39.19] And interestingly, the commanding officer of the ship, Alpine McLean, I'll never forget him, he brought that ship into a good half a mile of the shore because we were running so low on fuel.

[00:06:53.84] JOE GALLOWAY: You were running so low on fuel.

[00:06:56.37] CHARLES SAPP: And so that was the first mission. And another mission was we went into-- there was a downed helicopter on a 5,000 foot mountain. And we went In-- and we

were at 10,000 feet again. And while we were doing that, we heard a mayday from a Air Force Jolly Green said, we're hit, we're hit, we're bailing out.

[00:07:20.59] And my co-pilot and I looked at each other and said, bailing out? We didn't have any parachutes aboard. And we were at 10,000 feet. But that was just one of the interesting things.

[00:07:32.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you get parachutes after that?

[00:07:33.49] CHARLES SAPP: No, no, in fact, we were on there for three months. So later on, they did. And they also put another engine in this helicopter, which it needed badly. And that's why we couldn't pick up all the people that were down on that mountain. We got one. And then the second one, we literally had to drag the hoist--

[00:07:52.42] JOE GALLOWAY: With him on it?

[00:07:53.47] CHARLES SAPP: With him catching it as it comes by. But anyway, we got those guys back. And the only other rescue we made in that operation was a Navy-- a Navy A-4 went down in the Tonkin Gulf. And so we picked him up at night, which was quite harrowing.

[00:08:15.02] But it was interesting. Any aircraft that made the beach, they were rescued. We didn't lose anybody that made the water. So that was interesting. And that was the end of that tour. And I guess I'm up to the second tour now.

[00:08:33.99] JOE GALLOWAY: What'd you do in between? You went--

[00:08:36.12] CHARLES SAPP: Oh I went back to-- I went to Key West for a year, in charge of the heliport there. And flying interesting missions. I was also the hurricane officer, which was another story. And there for a year, and then I heard about this they were developing a squadron-- of gunship squadron in the Delta in support-- Navy gunship squadron in the Delta in support of the-- in support of the PBR, or the river patrol boats.

[00:09:12.54] JOE GALLOWAY: Brownwater Navy?

[00:09:13.65] CHARLES SAPP: Yes, and in other action as called on. They'd already had a detachment over there of Navy people flying that mission. And I'd like to give credit to them because they were the absolute best as far as getting in there first. And there was a guy named Rocky Rall who headed that operation. And another man, Al Banford, Banford was the other one. And they did a super job before we arrived as a squadron.

[00:09:48.42] So went through Benning to fly-- learn to fly the Huey, because the Navy had no Hueys. They didn't have any gunships. And so we were there in early '67. And it was a great experience being at Benning. Bob Hope was there at the time filming The Green Berets.

[00:10:12.48] So that's how we learned how to fly the Huey. And then we were sent to Vietnam. And we got there, and come to find out, the Navy didn't have enough Hueys. So they sent us to Soc Trang down in the Delta to fly with the Army for a month. And that was quite an experience.

[00:10:32.73] That was a great experience, really, because they were flying slicks, which is troop carriers, ten plane formations, which I was never used to. And I'd like to say this too, the Army had warrant officers as young pilots at that time. I mean, there were-- I was in my 30s when I got over there because I was career Navy. And these guys were 19, 20. And technically, they were the best pilots I've ever seen flying a helicopter. They didn't know anything about being an officer. But they were great--

[00:11:11.47] JOE GALLOWAY: They didn't have to command anything. All they had to do was fly that bird.

[00:11:15.36] CHARLES SAPP: And they were really good at it. They were really good at it. So that was quite an experience. And then I went-- then we had to develop the squadrons-- detachments.

[00:11:26.77] JOE GALLOWAY: And you finally got a Huey.

[00:11:28.01] CHARLES SAPP: Finally got a Huey. And the squadron's home base was at Vung Tau, which was a-- the French called it the-- JOE GALLOWAY: Hard duty. CHARLES SAPP: Yeah. The French called it the-- what's the beach in France?

[00:11:44.35] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, Cap-Saint-Jacques it's what they called the town.

[00:11:49.06] CHARLES SAPP: Well, it was-- the beaches were great. But anyway, that was our home base. Yes, Riviera of the East. But anyway, they sent us-- we were broken up into detachments, seven detachments around the delta. And I was sent to one in Binh Thuy which is right next to Can Tho on the Mekong River. And we flew on a daily basis, really.

[00:12:14.74] JOE GALLOWAY: You're flying cover over the PBRs?

[00:12:17.53] CHARLES SAPP: For the PBRs and other things as called on. Just as an example, one of the most memorable flights, and one of the saddest flights, was we were coming back from a standard mission. And we were told by 1st Corps that there was an outpost being attacked by the Viet Cong and about to be overrun, would we help?

[00:12:46.36] And we said yes. So we went in and we put a strike in on the Viet Cong that were close to the outpost. And then we landed in the outpost. And it's-- why, I don't know, but the South Vietnamese Army carried their families with them to war. And so they had families, and kids, and women in the outpost.

[00:13:09.30] So we landed there and started taking on kids and women. We'd get 10 or 12, and then we'd fly out, and come back. And we'd rearm, and come back, put in a strike, and--

[00:13:21.81] JOE GALLOWAY: Pick up another load.

[00:13:22.77] CHARLES SAPP: Pick up another load. But as I kept watching this woman, this Vietnamese woman, and she seemed a little larger than normal Vietnamese woman. But that's neither here nor there. And her left foot was half blown off. And she was telling which kids or women were to come and get on with us.

[00:13:44.63] And the second time in, I said to my crewman, or my gunner, I said, go get that woman and bring her, and we'll take her out. So he went over there. And they did the arms things. And she said, no. And the gunner came back and says, Commander, she won't come. I said, OK. So we went out again with a load of kids and women. Came back a third time and she was still there, still there, bravest person I ever saw.

[00:14:12.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Directing traffic.

[00:14:13.97] CHARLES SAPP: Yes. And so went in another time, we came out, and the next time we went in, the Viet Cong had overrun the outpost. And we ended up just putting strike ins on them. But that was one of the-- that is a mission that I still think about almost on a daily basis, that woman.

[00:14:40.01] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your living conditions like?

[00:14:42.38] CHARLES SAPP: Being an aviator and being in a squadron, they were pretty good, really. We had barracks. And we would come in from a mission. And we'd have-- the dining room, and Vietnamese women were taking care of the places. And it was pretty good. We had a bar.

[00:15:02.06] So the living conditions weren't bad until Tet of '68. And then everything sort of came apart. We had been going into Can Tho, which was a very nice town. I've got pictures of the marketplace in Can Tho and with kids and everything. It was fun. During Tet, we were putting strikes in where we were eating lunch last week.

[00:15:26.43] JOE GALLOWAY: The week before. Wow.

[00:15:28.31] CHARLES SAPP: So that all changed. But our living conditions were still pretty good.

[00:15:37.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe Tet for me. What did it do for your mission?

[00:15:43.03] CHARLES SAPP: As I said, it changed our mission in the sense that we were concerned about where we were living. And there were in-- Vinh Long, which was just north of where we were, that I later had a detachment in, there were Viet Cong that were on the base. And some of the squadron mates were actually in firefights with the Viet Cong.

[00:16:09.46] So it changed a lot. Because before, it was sort of easy when you're back on base because you were out of danger, so to speak. Tet changed that. Now on the other hand, no matter what Walter Cronkite said, Tet was not a success for the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong.

[00:16:31.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Militarily.

[00:16:32.02] CHARLES SAPP: Militarily, yes. Very good point, very good point. You're absolutely right. Propaganda, it was a huge success. But they got-- JOE GALLOWAY: they got whacked. CHARLES SAPP: They really did. Yeah.

[00:16:46.24] JOE GALLOWAY: And there are some who postulated that maybe the North intended that. Wipe out the Viet Cong so that after victory, they wouldn't have to deal with them.

[00:16:57.10] CHARLES SAPP: I would not doubt that because I have some theories and I write to the letter to the editor once in a while about-- when they talk about this is the 40th anniversary of the end of the war for America in Vietnam. And I say you're off for a couple of years because the U.S. had been out of the war in 1972. And then the Peace Accords in '73. Nobody remembers that.

[00:17:23.37] And yet they say that they want to see the helicopters taking people off the embassy. But we didn't have anybody there except some Marines that were in there to help the embassy get away. I just wrote a letter to the editor about that, actually. Anyway.

[00:17:48.16] CHARLES SAPP: I had nothing but good things to say about the Vietnamese people. The women in particular are-- they were the hardest working people and the strongest of the group. The men-- we had one sergeant that was our adviser who was with us all the time. And he was just-- Sergeant Tong, I never knew whether he got out or didn't. And I always worry about that.

[00:18:15.97] But the women were just unbelievable, like the woman I was talking about. But the women that we met at our base and the ones we saw in the village. Back up, early on, the commander of our detachment was a magician. And we would go into villages and put on magic shows.

[00:18:41.28] And he was good. And I was his buffoon in a long tie and everything. The kids were just wonderful, just absolutely wonderful. And obviously, that makes the mothers wonderful too. The men, when I was flying-- back to Soc Trang, and flying in those slicks, we'd take these Vietnamese troops in at about eight in the morning and pick them up at four in the afternoon.

[00:19:06.93] And they had chickens, and little pigs, and everything-- bring them back. I said, where have they been all day? The pilot says, I don't know.

[00:19:15.60] JOE GALLOWAY: Looting villages.

[00:19:17.07] CHARLES SAPP: I don't know. But I had good things to say about the Vietnamese people. Yeah.

[00:19:28.67] CHARLES SAPP: Superior. Super. They were-- I really cannot think of a bad thing to say. And we were so supportive of each other. It's just unbelievable. My wingman, who's Alan Bacanskas, and that's Lithuanian, and he's a story in itself. Sometime, you got to look him up because he came out of Lithuania with his father when he was six years old and went to-- because the Russians were coming back in World War II.

[00:20:04.83] And he went to school in Berlin, or in Germany. His daddy had brought him out on bicycles, he and his sister. And he says he can remember standing, holding his sister's hand as Dresden burned. And he's unbelievable, the man.

[00:20:25.68] But anyway, he was my wingman. And he's another brave one. I was shot down. And Alan was on my wing. And he just got through saying-- we were covering a SEAL insertion. And the SEALs are another subject. But anyway, we were very, very low. And he had just-- he had just finished saying, 7-5, I think we were a little bit low.

[00:20:54.89] And all of a sudden, we got stitched with fire on the underbelly that severed a big gas fuel transfer line. And so I pulled up and mayday'd, of course. And Alan says, just what you want to hear, 7-5, you're on fire.

[00:21:18.98] And luckily, it was just the fuel streaming aft. Looked like smoke to him. But long story short, we got it on the ground. And everything was fine. But he was-- he's the coolest guy I ever saw. And he's still a friend to this day. We see each other every year.

[00:21:35.93] JOE GALLOWAY: He landed and pulled you out?

[00:21:37.61] CHARLES SAPP: Oh no. No, no. He stayed covered. We had made it to a pretty safe area. We carried enough armament, weapons on that-- that we could hold off a regiment. Because we had two M60s--

[00:21:53.66] JOE GALLOWAY: What were your armaments? you armed on?

[00:21:54.56] CHARLES SAPP: We had seven-point-- whatever-- rockets, eight of them. And then we had two-- we had four fixed-- not fixed, but trainable machine guns, M60s.

[00:22:14.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Controlled from the--

[00:22:14.86] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah, right. Right. and then we had gunners with handheld M60s who were just unbelievably good.

[00:22:24.70] JOE GALLOWAY: You could lay some fire on them.

[00:22:26.20] CHARLES SAPP: Oh yes, yes. And I had a rule, though, and I'm sort of glad I did, that they didn't shoot unless I told them to, unless we were receiving fire. So we had enough

arms to hold off a lot of people. But Alan circled. And then they brought another bigger helicopter in to pick us up.

[00:22:46.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Pull y'all out.

[00:22:49.93] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation, off duty activities, if you had off duty time?

[00:22:57.13] CHARLES SAPP: I could say that we were just nice guys and playing chess, but--

[00:23:02.79] JOE GALLOWAY: That wouldn't be quite right.

[00:23:04.99] CHARLES SAPP: In effect, I drank. But that's another story. But it's an important one in my life. But we did. We had a bar. And we hit the bar. And we also played a lot of volleyball. And I have pictures of us building the new volleyball court by the O club. And some people that were very good.

[00:23:32.21] JOE GALLOWAY: It's pretty hot and sweaty.

[00:23:34.15] CHARLES SAPP: Yes. Yes, it was. But we were young and virile.

[00:23:42.58] JOE GALLOWAY: You have any specific memories of the popular culture of the day, music, film, books, you know, what soundtrack plays in your head when you're thinking about those days?

[00:23:56.67] CHARLES SAPP: I wish I had my grandson to answer that one. But no, I was more of a Sinatra fan. So that was my kind of music. So beyond that--

[00:24:09.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Rock 'n Roll didn't do it for you.

[00:24:10.74] CHARLES SAPP: No. On the other hand, I was a huge fan of-- Matilda? Matilda? What is his name? But anyway, music was not a big thing with me. But books were. I was-- it's an interesting thing, and maybe I'm telling my politics more than anything else. But I was a huge fan of Ayn Rand.

[00:24:44.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh yieah.

[00:24:45.39] CHARLES SAPP: Atlas Shrugged. I read Atlas Shrugged in 1963 on a Med cruise. And it was interesting, when we were flying over the North, we had to have a envelope with the operation officer on the ship that in the event we were captured, we would have a code word. JOE GALLOWAY: Verification code word? CHARLES SAPP: Yes, mine was Atlas Shrugged.

[00:25:15.39] JOE GALLOWAY: Now you'd have had a time stomping that out in a rice paddy in Laos.



[00:25:21.09] CHARLES SAPP: Yes, yes I would have. You're right. JOE GALLOWAY: You'd have been better off with five numbers. CHARLES SAPP: That's probably right. Good point, I didn't think of that.

[00:25:36.30] CHARLES SAPP: The first tour, the most vivid memory was getting those two guys off the mountain. And in the tour in the delta, without question, it was the woman and the kids.

[00:26:01.34] CHARLES SAPP: Probably the best day was, again, the rescues. Without question. Because I felt like that we really did, if not save some lives, I saved some years. And down south was-- it's interesting, this is a mission that I got no medal for. But we were up on a mission with-- a fire team is two helicopters.

[00:26:33.23] And the Air Force called us and said they had a plane down. And that the Air Force wouldn't-- no, it was the Army had a fixed wing down. And the Air Force wouldn't send in a rescue helicopter unless they had gunship support. And they wanted to know if we would do it. And I said, yeah.

[00:26:53.15] This was at night. And so we went in and covered the Air Force. And we got a great letter from the commanding officer telling us how wonderful it was for us to be there. Because without us, they could not have gone in and gotten-- JOE GALLOWAY: They wouldn't have gone in and gotten them. CHARLES SAPP: Yeah. They only got one, but nevertheless, that was-- it was better than any medal I ever got.

[00:27:25.71] CHARLES SAPP: I've got to go back to-- the worst day was when we were bringing out the kids and women in that outpost. And the last trip in, they had been run over. And the woman that was still the bravest person I ever saw.

[00:27:40.54] JOE GALLOWAY: She had disappeared.

[00:27:41.55] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah, that was the worst day I've ever had.

[00:27:49.08] CHARLES SAPP: Known contact, Aussies in the bars. And seriously, that is about the only one. Now, there's been-- there were times when I did not know what nationality someone might be. Like we were called in one night, south toward the coast, and this sounded-- strange voice, but it was an Army control plane. And he wanted us to put a strike in on a sampan.

[00:28:20.55] And I said, well, how do I know there's not women and kids on that sampan? He says, trust me. I said, what do you mean, trust you? He said, just trust me. Put a rocket in and watch. So we put a rocket in. And it just-- tremendous secondary explosion you've ever seen.

[00:28:36.21] JOE GALLOWAY: Fireworks.

[00:28:37.26] CHARLES SAPP: Yes, so I guess to tell the truth, I had very little contact with--

[00:28:43.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Any of those guys.

[00:28:45.06] CHARLES SAPP: Except the ARVN.

[00:28:46.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Except the ARVN.

[00:28:53.59] CHARLES SAPP: Very little mail. Yeah, we did go on R&R, one trip to Hawaii during the tour down in the delta. And met my wife there. And that was it.

[00:29:08.94] JOE GALLOWAY: That was it. JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war?

[00:29:18.93] CHARLES SAPP: We were over there when Martin Luther King died, was assassinated. And we got all kinds of news, of course, about what was going on back here concerning the war. And it was interesting from my standpoint as a career officer, it didn't hit me as much as it would maybe some people that were younger.

[00:29:45.42] But I think the news was slanted to a great extent. And I will always believe that it was to the detriment of the troops that were there. This is just my own deep feeling that the conduct back here in the States cost lives. I really do. Because I think it gave impetus to the North Vietnamese, the Viet Cong. And of course, I have no way of knowing whether that's true or not. But that's just a feeling I have.

[00:30:34.53] CHARLES SAPP: It was exciting in a sense. But it was sort of a non-event. It was nice to see the kids and be back in the States. We landed at an Air Force base in San Francisco, Travis, yeah, Travis. And didn't see any demonstrators there. And as I said, as a career military, I would-- unfortunately, have bad things to say to demonstrators if they were in my face. So no, I don't remember any.

[00:31:09.01] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans over the years, people you flew with?

[00:31:16.31] CHARLES SAPP: A lot. My co-pilot, this is sort of interesting, my co-pilot flying over the North rescue, a guy named Tim Thomassy. And he was an Academy graduate. And he was a JG, Lieutenant JG at that time. Went on to go into fixed wing and flew jets over Vietnam in later years. And then became the commanding officer of the USS Forrestal as a captain.

[00:31:49.07] And he's remained a friend all these years. And one of the nicest things he ever said to me, he says, Chuck, you're the reason I stayed in the Navy. And that makes me feel very, very good. As commanding officer of the Forrestal-- I shouldn't tell this-- but I asked him one time, I said, Tim, you should have made flag. Why weren't you an admiral?

[00:32:17.17] And he said, well, I had this admiral aboard that I told to get off the bridge one time. And that ended his career. But anyway, and then my wingman that I mentioned, Alan Bacanskas, the Lithuanian, stay in contact with him all the time. And then a guy named Banford that I mentioned, that was one of the first ones over there, he's still-- I still-- contact with him. And just recently had a couple of crewmen that visited in Temple.

[00:32:55.27] JOE GALLOWAY: Came looking for you.

[00:32:56.98] CHARLES SAPP: And that was very, very nice.

[00:33:00.40] JOE GALLOWAY: They were flight crew or-- ?

[00:33:01.93] CHARLES SAPP: Yes, they were flight crew.

[00:33:04.24] JOE GALLOWAY: That's cool.

[00:33:04.78] CHARLES SAPP: And so I stayed in touch with a lot of people.

[00:33:08.89] JOE GALLOWAY: Was it difficult readjusting to life after the war?

[00:33:13.81] CHARLES SAPP: Joseph, that applies to me in spades. I came back and I thought I was just great, wonderful. My first job coming back was as director of the aviation officer candidate school in Pensacola. And it was a great opportunity. And I was having problems, though.

[00:33:41.17] I was drinking more and thinking more about Vietnam and the particular woman and the kids. It's amazing how that affected me. And at that time, PTSD didn't exist. There was no such thing. I guess it was shell shock in World War I or something.

[00:34:07.90] I had a Marine major working for me who was head of the military portion of the aviation officer-- his name was Stephen Pless. Stephen Pless had received the Medal of Honor flying Marine helicopters in Vietnam, rescuing four Army people that were being overrun, going to be slaughtered. And he got them out.

[00:34:30.61] And he got a Medal of Honor for that. And he worked for me. And I still-- I can still see him. And when he's talking to you, he wouldn't be looking me in the eye, he'd be looking at my chest to see what ribbons there were. And he told me one time, he says, Commander, I'm going back and get another one. I said, Steve, maybe you've done your part.

[00:34:54.49] But long story short, one night, I'd left that job and gone to be executive officer of the training helicopter squadron. I got a call at two o'clock in the morning said, Major Pless has gone off of the interstate drawbridge from Pensacola Beach to the mainland. And I said, OK, let's launch some helicopters to try to find him. But we didn't have a chance until daybreak. Did find the body. Don't know to this day whether he was trying to jump that drawbridge or he didn't know it was open.

[00:35:32.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Was he on a motorcycle?

[00:35:33.81] CHARLES SAPP: Yes. And he was-- and I still think to this day-- I think he was trying to jump it. Others said, well, he probably didn't see it open. And it doesn't matter.

[00:35:45.34] JOE GALLOWAY: It doesn't matter.

[00:35:46.33] CHARLES SAPP: But the point is that there was no question in my mind that if it was today's military and coming back from war, that somebody would have at least taken some steps to help him. And maybe even to help me. Because my career-- see, I always thought that I was going to be at least O-6 and maybe even a flag, but when I went as executive officer of the helicopter training squadron, which is an avenue to command, by the way, the senior exec, and then you become command.

[00:36:26.64] Unfortunately, I had two drunk driving arrests within a ten-day period. And it wouldn't have been so bad, except after the first one, the legal officer came in and says, Commander, we've got a report here of your drunk driving arrest. What do you want me to do with it? I said, just stamp the CO's name on it, and send it back.

[00:36:51.26] So the next time the shore patrol officer called the commanding officer and says, Commander Sapp's been arrested again for drunk driving. And the commanding officer says, what do you mean again? So that was the end of that part of my career. That was the end of any chance of promotion.

[00:37:12.50] And obviously, I was relieved for cause and sent to California, to-- But again, not one person during the investigation ever mentioned Vietnam. Nobody said, hey, what happened? What happened to you? Because I had never had a bad fitness report in my life. Never. So that's just an input as far as what did not happen for Vietnam vets that are happening today. And I think given-- and this is probably one story of a million of veterans that came back that didn't get the care that they get today.

[00:37:59.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Did your experience in Vietnam affect the way you think about veterans coming home from combat today?

[00:38:05.44] CHARLES SAPP: Absolutely, absolutely. And I'm-- I smile every time I see them. I probably-- they probably get tired of me saying, we're glad you're here. We're glad you're doing what you're doing.

[00:38:20.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Welcome home. Yeah.

[00:38:21.21] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah, yeah.

[00:38:27.47] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[00:38:33.26] CHARLES SAPP: If it's remembered at all, and I'm not convinced that it is other than the media trying to hype it some, I think it's remembered as-- I saw the word quagmire the other day.

[00:38:49.53] JOE GALLOWAY: That comes up every now and then.

[00:38:51.40] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah. And you see, given my experience there, I think we had something that it was good to be there and that we did some good. I really do think we did some

good. And I think about what happened at the Paris Peace Accords, where the North Vietnamese were told, according to those Accords, not to cross the DMZ.

[00:39:17.71] And several months later, they crossed the DMZ. The South Vietnamese asked the U.S. for help. We said no. And I'm convinced to this day that the reason we said no, our troops had already been gone for two years. And I just could not believe that the U.S. would-- look at the Korean War. We put in 20,000 troops to maintain the DMZ. If we'd done that with Vietnam, there'd still be a North and South Vietnamese. Now, was that good or bad, I don't know.

[00:39:50.29] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd still be sniping at us.

[00:39:51.97] CHARLES SAPP: Probably, probably, yeah. As they are in Korea. So I don't know. I just have mixed emotions. But I do think that it was good that we were there, that we did some good. And one interesting thing, Joe, is like World War II, as far as I can read, when you talk about World War II, what war are you talking about? Are you talking about the European war, or the war in the Pacific?

[00:40:23.20] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a whole thing.

[00:40:23.93] CHARLES SAPP: It's all different is the point. And in Vietnam, it was all different. It was different where you were in Ia Drang than anything we were doing down in the delta. And so wherever you were, it was a different war.

[00:40:38.28] JOE GALLOWAY: And every year was different.

[00:40:40.45] CHARLES SAPP: That's exactly right, too.

[00:40:42.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Didn't fight one ten-year war. We fought ten one-year wars.

[00:40:46.13] CHARLES SAPP: Exactly, very well stated.

[00:40:48.11] JOE GALLOWAY: And because it was a draftee Army, that meant everything that was happening on the streets was translated within three months to the war.

[00:40:59.04] CHARLES SAPP: That's right. Absolutely. And that's another good point, too. The draft at that time, and as far as I can remember, that's the last time it was a draft. So different today.

[00:41:11.40] JOE GALLOWAY: We were taking 30,000 boys a month.

[00:41:15.33] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah, yeah. And whether they were getting trained properly, I have no idea.

[00:41:20.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Some were, and some weren't. JOE GALLOWAY: Did you take away from Vietnam more that was positive and useful than you invested in blood, sweat, and tears?

[00:41:31.19] CHARLES SAPP: Yes, without a doubt from my standpoint because as I said, I was-- I think I did some good. I was glad I was there. I met some people that I will always remember, not only American, but Vietnamese.

[00:41:47.73] JOE GALLOWAY: In the end, what did that war mean to you and your generation?

[00:41:55.51] CHARLES SAPP: Again, mine was a military generation. So it's so much different than what it might have meant if I'd come back to a civilian life. So to me, it meant that we tried. And Churchill, never quit, never quit.

[00:42:26.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington?

[00:42:30.50] CHARLES SAPP: Yes. Yes, several times.

[00:42:32.42] JOE GALLOWAY: What are your impressions when you go there?

[00:42:36.31] CHARLES SAPP: It is so interesting that my impression is not the Wall. It's the people hanging around. There are veterans still there that get so much out of that. It's unbelievable to me. And the number of civilians, too, that are going to the Wall.

[00:42:55.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Most visited memorial in Washington, D.C.

[00:42:58.33] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah. And that's the impression to me. As I said, I couldn't tell you much about the Wall itself.

[00:43:05.38] JOE GALLOWAY: You were watching people.

[00:43:07.09] CHARLES SAPP: Yeah. Exactly. And particularly the vets. Yeah.

[00:43:15.77] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think of that?

[00:43:16.83] CHARLES SAPP: I think it's great. I think it's a super positive thing that should have been done at the 20th year.

[00:43:27.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Well, thank you, Mr. Sapp.

[00:43:29.60] CHARLES SAPP: Thank you.