

Sprayberry, Michael US Army

[00:00:16.74] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I was born in '47 in Georgia.

[00:00:20.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Whereabouts in Georgia?

[00:00:22.05] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: LaGrange.

[00:00:22.89] JOE GALLOWAY: LaGrange. Who were your family members?

[00:00:27.99] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Actually I have two families. I have my birth family. I'm adopted, so I have my adoptive family, which is both family. So it worked out very well. I was born to a 16-year-old lady, and she gave me the option of being adopted within the family, which at the time, they had no children, so it worked out very well.

[00:00:55.21] And I'm proud to say that after all those years, I got to enjoy two families and spend my summers with my birth family and go to school with my adopted family. And over those years, those two ladies never said one cross word to each other, and it was a beautiful arrangement.

[00:01:15.27] JOE GALLOWAY: That's great. What do you consider to be your hometown? Where you went to school?

[00:01:22.38] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Actually, we were raised in the country, so near Sylacauga, Alabama.

[00:01:28.47] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. You have brothers and sisters?

[00:01:32.70] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, yes. I have two sisters and two brothers in Sylacauga, and from LaGrange, I have-- well, remaining-- I've lost one brother, my younger brother. And I had two brothers and one sister in LaGrange.

[00:01:56.77] JOE GALLOWAY: How did you come to enter the military?

[00:01:59.92] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, actually, I was in school in Alabama in a junior college having too much fun. After a brief period of trying to be a pacifist, I decided that was not environmentally safe in that particularly rural part of Alabama, so I did a 180 and joined the military.

[00:02:26.35] JOE GALLOWAY: You enlisted. In the Army?

[00:02:29.03] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I enlisted. I did.

[00:02:33.74] I went to Fort Benning for basic training, and then I had signed up to be airborne. Why, I don't know. I still have a fear of heights, and that never happened. They found out I could type, so I was destined to become a company clerk or administrative type. And since I could

type, they sent me to Fort Jackson, and they set you in a room to teach you to type. I had two years of typing in high school, so you're sitting there with guys that can't find A on the typewriter. And fortunately, my application for OCS came through and I went to Fort Knox for that.

[00:03:16.31] JOE GALLOWAY: And that was Armor?

[00:03:18.02] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes.

[00:03:19.34] JOE GALLOWAY: And you did OCS there? When were you commissioned?

[00:03:23.33] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I was commissioned in 1967, in January.

[00:03:28.12] JOE GALLOWAY: And your MOS?

[00:03:30.78] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: It was a 12 03, which was a tank unit leader. And of course, I did a brief tour back at Fort Knox in an armored battalion, and then decided I was getting a little bored there. I had a bad habit of getting bored, so I decided, well, I may as well go ahead and get the Vietnam thing over with. So I opted to do that.

[00:03:59.71] JOE GALLOWAY: You volunteered.

[00:04:01.51] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah, you could call it that.

[00:04:10.44] JOE GALLOWAY: And this was what year?

[00:04:12.15] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: That was, I guess, about the middle of 1967, and by October after Jungle School, I'm in Vietnam.

[00:04:23.58] JOE GALLOWAY: And you were assigned where?

[00:04:25.70] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, actually, and I have a crutch word called "actually," I was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division. And I actually was so well trained, I went out and immediately bought a 1st Division Big Red One patch, and had it sewn on my uniform,

[00:04:48.41] JOE GALLOWAY: And reported to the 1st Cav?

[00:04:50.90] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, I did.

[00:04:52.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Were they amused?

[00:04:54.44] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Uh, slightly.

[00:04:58.44] JOE GALLOWAY: OK.

[00:04:59.81] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And that was one of my first experiences of dumb lieutenant.

[00:05:04.94] JOE GALLOWAY: What did the Cav do with you when you turned up?

[00:05:09.29] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: They pretty much immediately, after a couple of days of orientation, sent me out in the woods for my first helicopter ride, by the way, to the 5th Battalion, 7th Calvary.

[00:05:24.47] JOE GALLOWAY: 5th of the 7th, the Garryowen outfit.

[00:05:27.92] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, indeed.

[00:05:29.69] JOE GALLOWAY: And what did they have you do?

[00:05:33.26] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: After a quick hello, they sent me out to D Company. And I had this stereotypical, you know, strack-looking, older type company commander, wonderful guy, who probably thought, oh my god, they're sending children to fight this war, you know. But it worked out very well. It was a very welcoming experience. I had a bunch of NCOs and squad leaders that kind of took me under their wing.

[00:06:12.41] JOE GALLOWAY: They gave you a platoon to run?

[00:06:15.53] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: They did. They did, and actually, I had a well-running platoon that had been through several serious incidents shortly before. LZ Colt had been overrun. They'd had a particular incident, some of those which you don't even know where they are. You just refer to them by certain dates, 23rd of October and so forth. But they were a great bunch of guys and I couldn't have asked for a better luck of the draw.

[00:06:47.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Where, geographically, are you located at this time?

[00:06:52.61] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Basically in the Que Son Valley. They had just come out of the An Lo, and that's west of Da Nang.

[00:07:01.22] JOE GALLOWAY: West of Da Nang. Bad country, as I recall.

[00:07:04.82] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: You recall correctly. Yes.

[00:07:07.01] JOE GALLOWAY: A man could get killed out there.

[00:07:09.11] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Some did.

[00:07:15.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Could you describe the friendships that you developed with, and the impressions of, the troops that you worked with, both above and below your rank?

[00:07:27.59] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I've met a lot of people since, but I had the luck of meeting the most wonderful people that I would ever meet in my lifetime in Vietnam. So that is an experience that stays with you for a lifetime. I have been fortunate not to encounter-- well, not to encounter those people and incidents that-- you hear a lot of things about Vietnam, but as far as my experience goes, people-wise, I couldn't have asked for better.

[00:08:04.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Couldn't have asked for better. Did you form friendships with men from different racial and social backgrounds that you might not otherwise have ever had?

[00:08:20.59] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. And some of the most wonderful people in the world, and that is one of the-- when you hear the phrase, join the Army and see the world, it's more, join the Army and see the people.

[00:08:36.07] JOE GALLOWAY: And see the people. Now, 1967, beginning of '68, things back home are in some turmoil with antiwar demonstrations, and racial tensions, and assassinations and all of that. Does any of that come over to where you are in Vietnam?

[00:09:00.31] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: It does, but you don't have time to be concerned about it. You're concerned about the next mission and the day-to-day activities. But concerning the racial aspect at that time, of course, all that goes on, but we never had that problem. It was pretty much all for one, and once you've had your butt saved at least once by every race on the planet, you know, it's hard to imagine how those things could get out of hand. And I know they did in certain units, but I never had that experience. Race was never--

[00:09:38.02] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have a feeling that that was something more for the rear area and not for combat area?

[00:09:44.98] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Absolutely, and every time we went back to a rear area, which was a brief time, you always sensed and picked up on those problems. But fortunately, in the bush out there, you're pretty much immune from those problems, and there are several different wars going on in that one war.

[00:10:09.64] And I think what you're getting at is you had the guys out in the bush and you had the guys in the rear areas. And of course, the third war is the one you have in the large cities like Saigon and so forth. And I'm glad to say that we were the ones that were out in the bush. In fact, we didn't spend much time on, say, an LZ, and guys were already saying, gee, can we go back in the jungle?

[00:10:37.66] JOE GALLOWAY: Really?

[00:10:39.15] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: You know, because all they did was pull details for somebody back there, and actually, I enjoyed it out there myself. So you're pretty much in charge of your own world and your own self, and whether you're a point man or a company commander, it doesn't really matter. It was a small unit war, and we were glad to be away from all of that turmoil and stuff.

[00:11:11.46] I usually don't tell war stories, but I'll tell you a quick one. You know how it is when combat gets pretty intense sometimes, but we went back to pull a brief security on Evans, LZ Evans, out by Hue. And I'm sitting in the supply tent, and I hear these explosions, and I know they're grenades. So I walk outside, and here's two guys throwing-- and I hear a bunch of cussing-- two guys, a black guy and a white guy, throwing grenades at each other.

[00:11:44.80] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh God.

[00:11:46.15] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And accusing one or the other, or both, of stealing their apricots. You know, so I can understand if it was a can of peaches, but this was a can of, by God, apricots.

[00:11:57.36] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Who cares about that?

[00:11:58.90] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, and they could have shot each other easily. But you know, no, they decided to throw hand grenades at each other. So after assuring them that I would shoot both of them, you know, if that ever happened again, I dropped the apricot can down what was known as the piss tube.

[00:12:16.24] JOE GALLOWAY: Yes.

[00:12:17.06] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Excuse my language. And they shook hands and they returned to being the best friends.

[00:12:23.83] JOE GALLOWAY: I've never heard of a duel with hand grenades.

[00:12:27.28] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Over a can of apricots, the things you tried to give away and couldn't.

[00:12:34.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. That that's a war story I've not heard before.

[00:12:40.37] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, they were great guys.

[00:12:41.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Not only did they fight a duel with hand grenades, but neither one of them managed to kill anybody.

[00:12:47.65] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: But you know, I don't think they intended to. You know,

[00:13:04.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Can you describe for us the quality of the leadership in your battalion, as far as you could see?

[00:13:12.57] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I had at that time great guys, and good military minds, and so forth. But when you talk about the transition and the period, a lot of these guys were left over from World War II and Korea and so forth. And they the field-grade commanders, really, I think did not have a sense of what was changing in the field, that you do not just say, go and do this, and people just say, yes, sir, yes, sir.

[00:13:44.91] You're dealing with some pretty smart cookies even at privates and so forth, you know, that have college degrees. You have a mix of accountants and lawyers mixed in with workers from the middle class and so forth. But they don't. It was a different attitude, and they didn't quite understand that it takes a different style of leadership sometimes.

[00:14:16.19] JOE GALLOWAY: Did that change or get worse?

[00:14:18.92] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I think it changed with experience, and some of the things that-- to illustrate the difference-- we were building, or built a little firebase to protect LZ Evans, called Jack. So the battalion commander and the S3 are in there, and I'm there for whatever reason. And they're having a discussion over the meaning of some French words, and they were both of course West Point graduates.

[00:14:49.16] And then they turn to Mike when they can't agree, and say, well, what do you think, Mike? And I said, well the next NVA soldier I mention that speaks French, I'll ask him.

[00:14:58.45] JOE GALLOWAY: I'll ask him.

[00:14:59.36] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So you know, but I mean, they did not-- after you were actually assigned to a company, you rarely saw your battalion commander except for a briefing, or you rarely saw your operations officer. Fortunately, actually, we had operations officers that would actually come out and spend a day in the field with you, which was kind of unusual circumstance. But that was the type of guys they were.

[00:15:31.37] JOE GALLOWAY: You wear a particular medal around your neck there, the highest award for valor in combat and heroism that this country gives to its fighting men. What were the circumstances under which you earned that?

[00:15:48.49] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: That was April of '68, when we had just finished-- shortly following Tet of '68, of course, which I didn't get to see because I spent that in a hospital in Japan.

[00:16:03.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Wounded?

[00:16:04.93] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Argument with a punji stick, you always lose.

[00:16:07.99] JOE GALLOWAY: You lose.

[00:16:08.77] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So my medic told me, hey, LT, you got your ticket home. But I went to-- actually, when the casualties from Tet started flowing in, they keep pushing you further down the chain and talk about the volunteer again. The doc says, well, you ready to go home? And I just had that feeling that there was something I needed to finish. And I said, well, what are my options. He says, just send him back.

[00:16:42.91] And I think I returned to a little bit different feeling in the company. For one thing, there were so few people left after Tet.

[00:16:52.93] JOE GALLOWAY: This was casualties, primarily?

[00:16:54.84] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. Primarily. And very difficult to-- I mean, the people I expected to see there were not there. But I did get to watch Tet on the TV from Japan. And when people ask me, what was your worst time in Vietnam, I actually have to tell them it was Japan, because you see a lot of things there from some really messed up Soldiers that you never-- never in one place, you know. In the field, you would see them two or three, here and there, but--

[00:17:29.35] JOE GALLOWAY: There they were all concentrated under one roof.

[00:17:32.45] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, and at one point, they ask you to go over and visit some of the really bad cases and so forth and try and cheer them up, as soon as you can walk, anyway.

[00:17:45.02] JOE GALLOWAY: How long were you in the hospital?

[00:17:47.81] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: It was about a month, and so I went over and--

[00:17:51.41] JOE GALLOWAY: And your company had completely changed in that month? What kind of casualties had they taken?

[00:18:01.44] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: You know, honestly, I don't think anybody counted. I couldn't tell you on any given day, probably, how many people we lost. Maybe on the day of this I'm sure how many we lost and how many were wounded, but on a routine day, it would be difficult to say. A lot of people were wounded and healed up in the field, and you never knew about it. You might see a guy walking around with a bandage and say, what's that for. You know, that was just the way things were.

[00:18:40.66] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. All right, back to the April story.

[00:18:45.25] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: April of '68, following Khe Sanh in early April, the 19th of April, we assaulted into the A Shau, very little or no intelligence, on a road that wasn't on the map, against air defenses that we did not expect. We lost a lot of helicopters that day.

[00:19:15.00] JOE GALLOWAY: Is that the famous day when 12 or 15 Cav choppers were shot down?

[00:19:20.97] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes. We lost, I think, three Chinooks that day. I don't recall the count on the Hueys. And one gunship. And that's all in a pretty small area, so it was not a good day for anybody. My particular company's objective was to proceed west on the road that we were not told existed.

[00:19:47.66] And, oh by the way, that was the first time I got shot down on short final coming into the landing zone there, which we had originally been dropped in the wrong landing zone. And when they were putting us back in, things just didn't go right on the one that--

[00:20:07.01] JOE GALLOWAY: You were shot down in the LZ?

[00:20:09.98] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah, a short final, and it was one of those deals where you talk about training, nobody ever told me what an autorotation was.

[00:20:19.49] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a semi-controlled crash.

[00:20:22.22] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, it would have been more semi, except Mike didn't know that, and so he just saw a little soft bomb crater down there and decided he would exit the plane. And I lost my RTO to one of the antiaircraft guns. And so actually, skill of the pilots, they managed to keep the aircraft from sliding down a very steep hill, and probably saved some lives.

[00:20:51.20] JOE GALLOWAY: You jumped out of the bird, though?

[00:20:53.06] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, and stupid here, wasn't quite healed up on the punji stick wound, so all I managed to do was break that thing open. And it's not a good feeling when the aircraft is on the ground and you see that big orange--, or yellow tip of the rotor blade coming at your head when you look out of the bomb crater.

[00:21:14.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Ooh.

[00:21:15.41] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: But it was all in all an interesting experience. But don't ask me why I later decided to go to flight school. I should have known better, but maybe it was boredom at Fort Polk. But getting back to the point, we had a very difficult time securing the road because the area that the road led to was another road junction which the NVA very much wanted to hold onto. And the terrain there, it was at the base of a 300-foot stone cliff,

[00:21:56.70] very difficult to get any traction as far as moving, you know, against the enemy. Every time you rounded a bend or-- they had the advantage of terrain, and it was not exactly an easy walk. So after, on the 25th-- we went on the 19th, and by the 25th, we had reached a point that we had tried several ways to get around.

[00:22:24.18] No success on that. And the battalion commander decided that one of the platoons would scale the cliff and try and envelop and come in behind the NVA that was pretty much lodged in a classic saddle defense posture. And they did that late in the day. And the company commander, since the platoon leader was one of the Hue replacements and fairly new, decided that their command group would go with them. And on the north side of the saddle, they ran into a very well conceived ambush at close range.

[00:23:09.33] JOE GALLOWAY: This is the force that's up enveloping?

[00:23:12.63] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes. And at the time, I'm the XO, so I'm about two kilometers away and bringing supplies and ammo and stuff, seeing that that gets there. But at the time, I'm two kilometers away, and the call comes over the radio that there's been an ambush and Six, which is the company commander, has been hit. So I think that little ambush turned into-- if I'm correct-- 13 wounded and four dead, to include the new platoon leader, which-- great guy.

[00:23:49.87] JOE GALLOWAY: And that also meant that you were now the acting commander.

[00:23:54.31] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: The job falls to me to-- very long walk, two kilometers over unsecured terrain. You have a lot of conversations with yourself. And then you get there and you're having this discussion about who has the date of rank, who should be in command, and so forth. But that all went pretty well. And so it's getting dark, and we still cannot get to-- around the bend and up to the troops that have no place to go with their wounded. And--

[00:24:28.04] JOE GALLOWAY: So they're now pinned up here?

[00:24:29.79] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, they are. And actually, even after all these years, until I returned there and actually looked at the terrain, it's difficult to tell what a fix they were in. If they stuck their head up, they were dead. So I decided that I would wait until night to do that and assembled a little volunteer patrol to give me some support on that.

[00:24:55.86] And the problem they had had for several days was a machine gun located on a small cave up there that covered the bend around the small finger of land leading to the saddle, a little waterfall right beside it. And that eventually somehow got silenced. I think the machine gunner told me that it was about 200 rounds of 7.62 that did it.

[00:25:27.36] But in fact, I took him back there a couple of years ago, and it was an interesting journey back in time for both of us. And we decided to keep it small because you're-- within open sight, except for darkness, of anybody defending the saddle. But we got lucky and got almost into the saddle before somebody figured out that we were there. And--

[00:25:59.54] JOE GALLOWAY: This is going up now?

[00:26:01.42] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah, we're going, but I'm still on the road, so I didn't have to make the terrible 300-foot climb up the hill. And it was the only way really to go, and the night was the only time to do it. And when you have guys that are coming up to you and you can't assure them that anybody that goes up the road is coming back alive, but people just keep wanting to go with you.

[00:26:29.98] And that's when you learn about people that previously you might have-- every unit has its-- what's conceived as the dud. But on that particular night, one of those guys that we'd had some difficulties with, was sometimes just waiting for an opportunity to show what he can do. And he came up and said, I'm going with you. And I said, no, you're not. We've got too many people. We need to keep people back here to bail us out of trouble.

[00:27:01.86] And he says, well, sir, my friends are up there, and I'm going. What do you want me to do? I mean, that type of-- if you have that experience once in your life, that's the type of things that-- positive things about Vietnam you never forget. And actually, he was the first man up the hill.

[00:27:37.95] JOE GALLOWAY: He ran point on that operation.

[00:27:40.29] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, actually, no. I had him go around halfway between and go up to the wounded and so forth. My job was to maintain the security of the road. And so I never actually made it into the area where the casualties are. And the fact that once we withdrew early in the morning, about 3:30 or so, and they managed to get all the casualties, stretcher cases and so forth, over some pretty treacherous terrain, at that time it's nothing but blown down logs and--

[00:28:17.35] JOE GALLOWAY: You brought them down to the road?

[00:28:19.30] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Brought them down to-- a safe way behind me. We figured out that-- when I was trying to find out exactly where the enemy was there, you try and inch your way down the road, feeling your way along the bank there that's cut in the embankment, trying to identify positions. And I really didn't know where they were. They didn't report their position. So you have to guess where they are. We could not because of the lay of terrain.

[00:28:54.58] Actually, nobody from where the rest of the company was could actually get visual sight on where the ambush occurred. So we're-- another stupid mistake by dumb lieutenant. I'm on the radio to them and I say, gee, I think you're close, but why don't you whistle and I'll whistle back so we can see if that works out? And so I hear this whistle, and I whistle back. And we're on the radio, so I say, oh, OK, you're not far away. Come on down.

[00:29:29.22] So a couple minutes later, I'm standing there talking to a couple of the guys, and one of the medics has been wounded, and I-- in the foot. And I'm-- we're standing there, and here come these shadows up the road. And I think, oh, great. But the shadows walk up and start speaking Vietnamese. So I didn't catch on to that real quick. So one of our guys whips out his bayonet and dispatches one of them after his M16 has misfired point blank.

[00:30:00.36] And at that time, Stupid has left his rifle leaning against a tree, so the only thing I have is a small pearl pocket pistol, which I had been told to turn in but did not. So we managed to eliminate those guys and proceed with getting the guys off the hill and getting them medevacked. And unfortunately, we were not able to retrieve all the bodies. We asked at least two people, are you sure they're dead? And so, at that point, we had to leave three of the guys.

[00:30:44.97] We managed to get the platoon leader back, deceased. And we just were not able to get back into the saddle the next day because it was reinforced rather quickly. I thought, surely, we would be able to. But it just never happened. And so you always wonder about little things that maybe you could have done or should have done. But in retrospect, I don't think that anything that-- I think that everything that could have been done was done. So we're still dealing with the problem of recovering those three fine Soldiers from that hill.

[00:31:29.37] JOE GALLOWAY: Those three are still MIA today. You've made one or two or three trips back?

[00:31:36.09] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Seven.

[00:31:36.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Seven trips back.

[00:31:38.37] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: We got back a couple of weeks ago from the seventh trip.

[00:31:44.11] JOE GALLOWAY: Have you had any luck finding the location?

[00:31:48.42] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: It's complicated as they say these days, but I'm pretty sure I know where two of them are buried. We've been working-- well, you probably have some idea of how the game is played with working with the Department of Defense POW/MIA agency, but they did and have continued to excavate. The problem right now is that they seem to be excavating the wrong places. So I'm working up a little refinement of that.

[00:32:22.65] There's been some contamination of the area where I'm reasonably sure that at least two of them are buried. One of the guys, the RTO, was killed further up on the hill near the lieutenant, but nobody seems to know exactly where. But the advantage I have is I can talk to people that are not of record. And they can give me little bits of information and put the puzzle together.

[00:32:50.15] So it's been an interesting experience not just from the-- if you miss by an inch in that excavation, you miss by a mile. So originally, the problem in location, which I did not discover until-- oh gosh, I was sitting in my office at Fort Knox in the late '80s or the mid '80s, and the phone rings, and it's the brother of one-- or the son-in-law of one of the missing-- well, I guess it would be brother-in-law to him-- of one of the missing guys. And he wants to talk about the situation and what things are going on.

[00:33:37.78] At the time, I had no idea they were still missing. I assumed that they had been recovered and returned to their families for burial. So that began a pretty long quest of trying to track down people who were actually in the ambush area and provide information to DPAA. The original confusion was that a clerk somewhere had made a typo on the report giving the location. So when initial efforts were made to locate the areas and everything, they probably walked right over the graves of the MIAs. But the official lost location was 800 meters to the northeast.

[00:34:23.05] JOE GALLOWAY: Good God.

[00:34:24.44] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. So and I find in trying to work with other people on other cases just based on my experiences, even though the official lost location remains one of those diehard facts that's difficult to change. When we expanded our area to look for other people in the area-- for example, we had a Loach show up-- light observation Helicopter-- on the 1st of May when the weather finally broke to-- and I really didn't know what they were there for.

[00:35:02.39] We were about to move from what was called Tiger Low back to Tiger High, all formed up and everything, ready to be airlifted up there. And a Loach shows up, and I just had this feeling of what it was there for. And sure enough, it was there to go search for our guys that we had lost. And so I send the XO up to make sure to see what they're all about and to make sure that they know that there's an anti-aircraft position on the ridgeline over there running from the ambush location.

[00:35:40.96] And Dan returns, and I said, well, what did they say? He said, well, you want them back, don't you? So the Loach takes off, makes a circle over us, heads up the road, and within five minutes, it's on the ground.

[00:35:56.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Shot down.

[00:35:57.56] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, about 300 meters south of our ambush location. And still today, three fine Soldiers are still missing.

[00:36:07.71] JOE GALLOWAY: From that Loach?

[00:36:08.76] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, from the Loach.

[00:36:10.02] JOE GALLOWAY: So now you got three on the hill, three down below--

[00:36:14.37] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And several others in the area. But the interesting thing about every one of those cases is the initial and official loss location is wrong.

[00:36:25.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Is wrong.

[00:36:26.82] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So my part of that is to try and identify the right place for DPAA to do their job. And it took me years to convince them that you're looking 800 meters to the northeast simply because of a typo. So that's what the trips were about. And they're-- as you probably know, the northeast portion of the A Shau Valley is loaded with missing personnel still.

[00:36:59.67] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:37:00.18] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And--

[00:37:00.93] JOE GALLOWAY: And a lot of unexploded ordnance too.

[00:37:04.44] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes, there's quite a bit there. In fact, the excavations have turned up a couple of 500-pounders that-- you know.

[00:37:11.75] JOE GALLOWAY: That makes them dig slow.

[00:37:13.92] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, yeah. But fortunately, I did talk them into using a big old farm boy, getting a track hoe up there because the area now has been leveled to pave a road running over into Laos. It was used for a parking area for the construction workers. The advantage to us in locating the-- our missing guys is that there's an overburden that's been pushed to the east. And you're never going to get that removed unless you use mechanical equipment.

[00:37:48.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:37:49.59] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And having done a lot of excavations on the farm and everything, I understand a little bit about that. But in doing so, they proceeded to-- oh, if we can

move all this dirt, we'll just move unnecessary dirt. But I think we're going to get back on track. And the area that we're concerned with right now is probably only covered by about two feet of overburden. So-- and I didn't find that out, though, because it's dark. I really don't-- I know where I was, but I don't know in relation to what.

[00:38:27.67] Finally, at a recent reunion, one of the guys just happened to show me a photo and I thought, oh, because immediately after the Loach was shot down, we sent B Company back up the road toward the saddle to-- actually, before the Loach was shot down. The Loach flies over. Five minutes, he's on the ground. And they're trying to get to the Loach on the ground, but one of the guys had snapped a photo of the road looking to the east. And I have that photo now, and it clearly shows the area of interest that I believe that two-- at least two of the guys are buried in. So the pursuit continues, the mission continues.

[00:39:19.00] MIKE SPRASYBERRY: Worst days pretty much turn out to be lucky days sometimes. But the Japan experience was bad because you meet a lot of-- I don't think I finished that. I went back to revisit one of the guys that was really-- he was head to toe bandages almost except for one. If you recall those little devil tattoos that people liked to get there, Born to Raise Hell.

[00:39:45.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:39:45.86] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: That was the only part of his body that wasn't bandaged. JOE GALLOWAY: That wasn't bandaged. MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And I guess that's medical humor, but I didn't find it very humorous. But I went back the next day, and I walk in, and I said, well, where is-- ? I can't recall his name. And she says, well, he's expired. Expired? What do you mean expired? She said, well, he's dead. So I didn't go back and do that anymore.

[00:40:14.87] And I walked in one day, or hobbled in anyway, to what would normally be considered a day room, with pool tables and things like that, nothing else going on. And there's guys sitting around the wall, they're just sitting there. And so I walk in and rack them up and start shooting a game of pool. And this orderly comes up and says, sir, I don't think you belong in here. I said, what do you mean? And he takes me outside. And it says: Psychiatric Ward.

[00:40:50.76] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, maybe you did belong there.

[00:40:52.76] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, you know, considering I volunteered to go back, possibly. But I mean, you see things there that you don't normally see. And they're marching a bunch of them-- for some reason, they put the officers right next to the psych ward. But they marched them in uniform to lunch. And there's one of the Soldiers, sad case. People talk about shell shock. It was a bona fide case of shell shock, but this guy in his pajamas with his spit shine jump boots and his Green Beret on is double timing backwards around the formation singing songs and so forth.

[00:41:45.38] And it's raining. And one of the guys, somebody, a worker or whatever-- you know these partitions they have to separate offices, these metal partitions. They tipped one of those over while they were moving, and it makes a loud noise. And this poor guy in an instant

was on the ground, clawing it, and shaking and shivering and so forth. Not the first time I'd seen shell shock, by the way, but you don't see that many cases of it from Vietnam.

[00:42:18.20] First time, when we were in Alabama, one of the preachers came home for dinner, Sunday dinner. And white shirt, tie, and so forth. And the guys, older guys are standing around talking and whatever, and somebody decides to fire a rifle over the hill there. And all of a sudden, he's just on the ground, just shaking, shivering.

[00:42:47.53] JOE GALLOWAY: The preacher?

[00:42:48.58] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: The preacher. And I was probably 13 or so, and I thought what in the world is going on?

[00:42:58.08] JOE GALLOWAY: World War II guy.

[00:42:59.40] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. And my uncle just says, it was the war. Don't worry about it. So today, I think people tend to lump shell shock into the same box with PTSD.

[00:43:15.39] JOE GALLOWAY: PTSD.

[00:43:16.12] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: But there is a difference. There is a difference, an extreme difference.

[00:43:20.70] JOE GALLOWAY: I can remember after World War II, guys that came home who, you know, drank themselves silly and wound up in the ditch in their car. And it was all the same thing.

[00:43:36.49] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: For the uninitiated, I think it's little understood. But we can talk about it and even joke about it. It's a problem. You're talking about-- but under that continuous situation, anybody can break.

[00:43:57.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, and nowadays, where they're doing eight, ten, 12 combat tours.

[00:44:02.19] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. And I'm glad you called them tours. I'm sorry they started calling them deployments. it sounds too nice.

[00:44:09.12] JOE GALLOWAY: It does sound nice, doesn't it? It's a combat tour.

[00:44:13.68] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes.

[00:44:15.63] JOE GALLOWAY: And you can't do 12 of them and come home the same guy who went over.

[00:44:20.76] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: No, you can't. And I know technology changes, but it doesn't change that aspect of it. Too many homecomings can get to anybody. And you normally

think that's a good thing, but I think that everybody that's ever left a combat situation always has that feeling like when I left Vietnam. Everybody is in a good mood when you get on the plane, but a few minutes after takeoff, it's dead silence. And people are thinking, well, maybe I should go back or if there's something unfinished here.

[00:44:55.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Maybe, I shouldn't have left.

[00:44:58.61] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Thinking about the guys that are still there. And that's a repeated thing. And we actually, during Vietnam, we tended to grind down the NCO corps with repeated tours. I only had the one tour. Not too many officers had more than two at best. But we ground down the NCO corps, and I think we're grinding down the Army.

[00:45:24.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Today. Yeah. All of it.

[00:45:32.28] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Interesting question. No, I wouldn't say it was coming home because I never really expected to come home. I was never one of those guys that kept a short timer calendar or anything like that. I think probably the morning after, even though knowing we had people still left on the hill, was knowing that the job got done and that everybody did-- it's one of those situations where you don't have to tell anybody to do anything. They know what to do, and they do it.

[00:46:11.31] And that says a lot about-- I can't think of a single incident where people did not come through when they were needed. So I'm extremely fortunate in that. That I felt really good that next morning even though it was no sleep and you're still trying to get back into the saddle. You look at those guys in a different light. Well, I can't say any more.

[00:46:47.14] JOE GALLOWAY: Yup.

[00:46:53.06] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, letters, of course, but I spent about two hours in the MARS station one time--

[00:47:01.31] JOE GALLOWAY: Trying to get one call through.

[00:47:03.26] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Never did. But those letters from home and God bless the mail clerks for bringing them out and, you know, occasionally-- it's difficult to express what you should be telling your family. For years, all those letters home and the letters sent were just saved in a box. And I finally dug those out. I didn't think that I had a lot to say about what was going on over there. But if you read between the lines, it kind of reminds you of how you actually felt about things on a certain day.

[00:47:42.43] I mean, it's not that you lie to your family or friends, but there are a lot of things that they don't need to know. But when you go through those and you look for those things and you remember that really was a bad day, you actually end up resurrecting the memory correctly. Because when you think back on those things, it's not like a movie or a video. It's more like a deck of cards. It has snapshots, and you take that deck and if you shuffle it over the years, and it

gets all confused as to, well, where were we on that day? Where exactly? Was that before or was it after?

[00:48:29.75] So it helps you put that in the proper order. And, you know, it's an interesting experience in talking to people about it, about how the mind works and what it forgets and what it remembers. And you can put six guys around the table and talk about the same event, and every one of them has a different memory and it's good therapy. It's the best therapy you can get.

[00:49:03.98] JOE GALLOWAY: How much news did you receive about the war that you were fighting? Stars and Stripes, Armed Forces Radio?

[00:49:13.85] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: We would occasionally get a couple of used Stars and Stripes out in the field, probably a couple months old. But of course, you had Armed Forces Radio and, of course, sitting in the hospital, I'm watching this situation where the Marines are saving the Cav in Hue and I'm thinking that doesn't sound right.

[00:49:33.32] JOE GALLOWAY: That ain't quite right.

[00:49:34.52] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So anyway, you do and certain events, Martin Luther King's assassination and George Wallace's shooting and all this kind of stuff, it comes through. And of course, people get magazines and they get letters from home and so forth. And it does affect morale adversely when people know pretty much the situation and went through it and it's not getting portrayed correctly and truthfully.

[00:50:15.12] It seems to get a slant from the editorial people that even the reporters in the field, as you well know, sometimes do not intend to be the effect that they're trying to make. There's always that editorial license that has a different ending than was intended. And I think that wears on a lot of people who came out in the field to report what was going on. And I think for a long time, we thought, oh, my God, here comes another reporter and here's a guy with the camera. And the guy that preceded me with the platoon did a little short video on YouTube

[00:51:01.99] where one of the guys comes out there, he says, great to see you, but you're on your own. So reporters in those days were not exactly welcomed with open arms unless there were guys like you that went out there and lived with them and stayed with them and became known to them and trusted by them. But still, there is once you shook that off and you find out that, here, if you ever think you're underpaid and some of these guys were out there working for \$50 a segment with no medical care, by some pretty wealthy corporations, it's--

[00:51:44.88] But now, those things are like the letters from home. They are a record of what actually happened regardless of the interpretation of it. A lot of those videos have made it, and we know what happened. So it doesn't matter to us whether that's correct or not. It helps us correct our memories on who was that guy that went across the rice paddy with me or when did that happen. Little things become important all these years later.

[00:52:16.91] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:52:21.75] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Actually, I had orders to get out of the military. But I arrived in Seattle to out process in Fort Lewis and was, of course, greeted by some less than friendly people. But I actually owe them a great deal because had they not been so rude and inappropriate as far as the usual baby killer stuff and all that, I would probably have just gone back to Alabama and gotten a job and moved on with life.

[00:52:59.69] JOE GALLOWAY: They pissed you off so bad you decided to stay.

[00:53:03.19] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I stayed for another year and then it became another year and another year for about 12 years when I finally had enough of peacetime service which is sometimes more difficult than wartime service. I decided I'd take a couple of years break. And probably would have remained a civilian except for a couple of old World War I guys that were still living that said, how many years you got in, Mike? 12? You're stupid. You can hold your breath for eight years.

[00:53:34.19] So I thought, eh, might be something to it. So I called up to the VA. And after some haggling, they finally sent me some orders to report in to Fort Knox, but I really wasn't sure I was going to do that until the day I was supposed to drive up there and report in. But the two old guys, they were interesting. In World War I, one was 17, and he signed up and he talked to his cousin, 14, to lie about his age. And they both ended up in France on the front lines.

[00:54:07.84] JOE GALLOWAY: The 14-year-old, too?

[00:54:09.12] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And the 17-year-old. And they both made it through. And actually, when I drove into Fort Knox, I thought, oh, this is going to be like putting on an old shoe. But in reality, it was a long eight years.

[00:54:24.10] JOE GALLOWAY: You had left as a captain.

[00:54:26.92] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: As a major.

[00:54:27.55] JOE GALLOWAY: As a major.

[00:54:28.54] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah.

[00:54:28.87] JOE GALLOWAY: OK. They took you back as a major?

[00:54:32.02] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah.

[00:54:32.59] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:54:33.25] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And that was after, of course, that period of where-- they had pretty much passed where the military was going cannibalistic on a lot of people where through their great foresight after Vietnam-- and I remember being at Fort Rucker when we got the memo, OK, Vietnam's over and done with, throw out all your lesson plans and no more

references to it. And by the way, we're not going to need snake eaters and pilots anymore in this new program.

[00:55:02.29] JOE GALLOWAY: Get rid of all those people.

[00:55:03.73] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Get rid of all those guys. And so, when the current situations roll around, what's the first thing they need? Snake eaters and pilots.

[00:55:12.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course.

[00:55:13.39] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And a lot of those are guys, I have to say in my last assignment as-- working out of Fort Jackson or Jackson, Mississippi with all of the Reserve units in the Southeast and so forth, you have a lot of those old vets hanging out, the Vietnam vets hanging out, would live there for no pay, just waiting for an opportunity to show what they can do. And I think they did it extremely well.

[00:55:44.05] I think the Army probably, in particular, DOD-wide, misused their skills by cherry picking the skill and so forth and so on. But the great thing is, now, that a lot of those guys that the Army decided they did not need, when they needed them, they took them back, and now they are enjoying retirement some and getting benefits for that completed service. So it's kind of revenge.

[00:56:12.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, sort of.

[00:56:14.08] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: One of the warrants came in at Fort Rucker, and he said that I had served with him in Fulda. And he said, so Mike, how do you like my haircut? And he wasn't a student or anything. He just dropped by every once in a while. I said, looks OK, Steve. He said, well, that's good. I said, so why are you asking me? He said, well, I have to go over and talk to the general. And come to find out, he had been out in the O club being a typical Vietnam era pilot, and decided he would moon somebody in the club, and it turned out to be the general's wife.

[00:56:50.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my God.

[00:56:51.42] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So anyway, after that, he got his RIF notice, and there wasn't anything, of course, you could do to save those guys from the Army turning on them. And he was just one of those guys that would have been happy to fly helicopters all of his life and probably take half pay for it.

[00:57:08.58] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:57:09.54] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So all those years, what had happened was the Air Force had made a mistake in the number of helicopter pilots that they need. So two of the guys from Fulda had gotten their RIF notice, just great guys, great warrant officers. But they were gone as far as the Army was concerned, but the Air Force says, oops, we'll make you guys second lieutenants tomorrow, just show up. And then we'll make you first lieutenant.

[00:57:35.20] So several years later, the phone rings and Steve calls up and says, hey, Mike, can you come to my retirement ceremony? I said, what do you mean? He says, oh, I'm retiring as an O-6, full colonel tomorrow. I think, all right. Oh, wow.

[00:57:53.11] JOE GALLOWAY: He should have invited the general to his retirement.

[00:57:56.91] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, that's a different story. And general was-- got asked to retire.

[00:58:02.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, well he probably--

[00:58:03.34] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Never mind that. I don't want to go there.

[00:58:05.50] JOE GALLOWAY: He probably deserved it.

[00:58:07.69] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yes.

[00:58:11.99] JOE GALLOWAY: All right.

[00:58:12.56] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Deserved a little better discretion.

[00:58:14.50] JOE GALLOWAY: But your reception in the airport at Seattle was not too kind.

[00:58:19.27] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: No, it wasn't. And you talk about so many public perceptions. It would be years later and I'd turn on the TV, and there's this little Alabama Public Television thing about this panel discussing the war. And there's professor so-and-so and Dr. so-and-so and some retired guy. And the professor says, when they were discussing those events, he said, well, that never happened. And I'm thinking, oh, you know?

[00:58:50.14] JOE GALLOWAY: How wrong you are.

[00:58:51.73] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: So anyway, but I owe them a lot, actually. Otherwise, I would have come back to Alabama, become a redneck farmer again, and so I would have missed a lot of things that I've enjoyed doing and a lot of places I've enjoyed seeing.

[00:59:06.72] JOE GALLOWAY: You went back in the Army. You stayed in the Army.

[00:59:11.65] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Did my eight years.

[00:59:12.70] JOE GALLOWAY: Got your helicopter wings?

[00:59:15.67] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Actually, I was stationed in Fort Polk after that little incident in Seattle for my first tour. And at that time, Fort Polk was not the most desirable assignment in the world. But it's one of those situations when, first of all, you can't find anything but a dive to rent and pay too much for it, but you can walk out on Sunday morning and you've

got the line going into the-- well, let's say house of ill repute in those days. And then you have this other line--

[00:59:46.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Payday weekend.

[00:59:47.44] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: --this other line going to church. They cross, literally. And that's normal business then.

[00:59:55.96] JOE GALLOWAY: That's Fort Polk.

[00:59:57.01] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: But I decided I had to do something. So I put in my paperwork for flight school. And fortunately, they rescued me. But when I came back in and I was actually still of the mind that after flight school-- and I'm thinking, what am I going to do? And I'm thinking, well, you know, Vietnam I'm still going on. I think I'll just put in my paperwork to go down and get checked out as a Loach IP and go back to Vietnam.

[01:00:29.46] And fortunately, a couple of the older and wiser aviators took me aside and said, Mike, you're stupid. We know you, you won't survive this one. I did get off the orders and went to Germany to defend the Fulda Gap.

[01:00:46.39] What turned out with my aviation career is that I had always known that I really had some problems with vertigo. And that showed up even in Germany. I had the Air Cav troop, and I really enjoyed that. But it's one of those conditions that just does not improve. And the crew chiefs do not appreciate you throwing up in their nice clean chin bubbles, as in, just get out of here, sir, I'll take care of it. But anyway, even when you're just flying the border.

[01:01:22.15] But it just got worse gradually. And the military kind of looks unfavorably on their pilots passing out. So finally, I got back to Rucker and I had just finished flying. One night I went out to the O club, to the lake lodge, and I walked in and just hit the floor.

[01:01:42.43] JOE GALLOWAY: Wow. Before you had a drink.

[01:01:45.10] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. Well, actually, I had just ordered one and took one swallow. And when you're laying outside, you know everybody's saying, oh, can't handle your liquor, can you? But anyway, I thought that was not a good idea. And I can't remember when I quit drinking, or really why necessarily, even though it was not compatible with the vertigo. If you do have one of those episodes, you don't want somebody to think you-- you want to be able to-- but the problem is-- on the other hand, you don't want to have one in LAX either, returning from a trip to Vietnam. Because if they don't save you, they'll kill you.

[01:02:19.57] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:02:20.08] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Because in my particular case, I lose most all visible-- I mean, there are different ways to go about it-- signs of life. I've even been pronounced dead in the A Shau subsequently-- after-- a few years ago by people who know what dead people look like. So you don't want to have that episode in LAX, believe me.

[01:02:42.83] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, no.

[01:02:44.39] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: But anyway, that ended my flying career. So after that-- but I did get my 20 in, kept my Reserve commission. And after that, just ended up-- Dad was getting a little ill on the farm. Not something I intended to do, but just worked my way into being an old redneck farmer again.

[01:03:07.97] JOE GALLOWAY: You're back to being an old redneck farmer.

[01:03:10.31] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah, in between trips to Vietnam and things like that. But I enjoyed that life.

[01:03:23.44] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think that your Vietnam experience changed you, affected your life afterward?

[01:03:30.07] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, I don't think anybody could say otherwise. It's a pivotal point in your life. You've got the most important job that you will ever have in your lifetime and that is protecting your guys and each other and whatever. And no matter what you do after that, I don't care if you become the CEO of what or whatever, that's downhill as far as you're concerned in the importance of the things that you did.

[01:04:06.78] Because you are-- even in the middle of death, and dying you are more alive than you will ever be. What you do is more important than you will ever do. And I think, probably, the cruelest thing we ever did to the enlisted guys is that we, as officers, about the time we got to where we should be really doing our job well, we get snatched out of the field.

[01:04:36.13] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Go to a staff weenie job.

[01:04:38.55] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. And I never enjoyed that and was never a good staff person. But anyway.

[01:04:46.59] JOE GALLOWAY: And that's so unfair to the enlisted guys.

[01:04:49.71] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: It is, it is. And fortunately, we had those bulwark of the Army, that solid NCO corps, the senior NCOs that always mediated all of that or mitigated to the best of their ability. Greatest guys in the world, salt of the earth they say.

[01:05:12.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Do you think you had difficulty readjusting to life outside the combat zone?

[01:05:18.12] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: I think I tried to tell myself for a long time that I didn't, but it was, for example, even though I'd been to-- one of my last tours, I worked developments for Fort Knox for the armor community, and I had to go back and forth to DC. And I probably drove by the Wall-- of course, we have that here this week, and that's one of the reasons you're here, the Wall That Heals.

[01:05:43.17] I drove by that place dozens and dozens of times and just could not bring myself to stop the car or stop the taxi and walk over there. And that didn't happen until 2006. But as far as the adjustment goes, I think it's the background music that plays in the back of everybody's head. No matter what they're doing or where-- that's the framework for the rest of your life because of its importance. And I think family and friends and the uninitiated do not understand that, and you can't really expect them to.

[01:06:22.05] There's no way that you can recreate that. I mean, I know we all go through periods in life or we have great days and so forth and so on. But still, we're looking at it through that Vietnam perspective, and that's not bad. I try to look for the good things of it. I think the places we've been and the things we've seen-- for example, in 9/11, we understand why people run into falling and burning buildings as opposed to away from them.

[01:06:54.36] We understand a lot of things. We've seen things that we hope people never have to see, so we work to do that. And I think Vietnam, in many ways, just as when I go back to Vietnam now, I look for the things that have made it a better country because of our being there. I try to look for the things that Vietnam has made us all better people. And I think that's happened in a lot of ways. I think rather than less regard for human life, we have more regard for human life. Things like that, I look for.

[01:07:33.88] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[01:07:40.97] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Oh, I think they still live with a lot of the stereotypes and so forth. You know, it's interesting, I don't have cable where we live here. And so we only have the antenna and we get a lot of the local stations, and they run a lot of the Barney Fife and Mayberry and a lot of the old series things. When you start looking at these old '60s and '70s, even the sitcoms and whatever, every one of them has this story about the demented, you know, Vietnam veteran.

[01:08:19.46] JOE GALLOWAY: Of course.

[01:08:21.36] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Even Little House on the Prairie has one about the Civil War. Yes. Yeah, and that's the cryingest show in the world anyway. So I hate to tell them this, but there's no need to feel sorry for the Vietnam veteran, never was, because they're some of the most solid citizens this country will ever see, who understand the concept of duty to your fellow citizens or who understand the business of it's my place to do it, not yours, or I can help regardless of the risk.

[01:09:01.46] And so now, I have to say from my perspective, I actually feel a little sad for a society that does not understand and appreciate that or does not have the feelings, the good feelings, of that comradeship that I can sit down and say talk to Joe because I know Joe has been there and done that. I feel sad for them because they don't have that.

[01:09:29.96] JOE GALLOWAY: They don't have it.

[01:09:30.92] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: They don't have those reunions, that feeling of pride and accomplishment of accomplishing things that you never thought you could. But there's a lot of lessons we can learn. Going into the current-- I guess, if I can say one thing, I would have to say, you were talking about the multiple deployments. My main concern are the guys that may somehow-- because they are viewed somehow with a stereotypical image also-- may end up like some of our guys, that small percentage.

[01:10:10.88] Those are the guys that I feel the most for. But going into our latest adventure, and we never run out of wars so we never run out of a need for Soldiers, I think most of America gets it now as far as the division between disdain for the Soldier versus disdain for the war, for service for this country in them.

[01:10:37.69] I think most of them get it, a few never will. But going into the current series of adventures, we, the United States, were the world's experts on how to do that type of warfare. And still, now, we continue to not learn by our previous mistakes, not take advantage of that, and now we're running out of that expertise. So I kind of wonder where the future is going with our overseas adventures which remind me an awful lot of Vietnam. We keep repeating the same failures.

[01:11:16.07] I worry about those guys and I worry about a country that does not learn the lessons of Vietnam, good, bad, or indifferent, the way they truly are. None of this, oh, you're rewriting history stuff. I lived that. I don't need it rewritten, and I don't need to rewrite it for anybody.

[01:11:33.26] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[01:11:39.45] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Finally, in 2006, I did make that trip with some guys you know. And it really was an experience. But you know, people tell me, and I kind of didn't think about it in those terms, we'd actually had people drive. One guy drove 2,000 miles to visit the Wall. Got there, he was supposed to be at the reunion, and we finally we called him up and asked him what happened. He got there, went down to the Wall, and could not go down there. Turned around and drove home.

[01:12:14.79] JOE GALLOWAY: Drove home?

[01:12:16.10] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Yeah. So it's like a lot of anxiety as you go through related to your war experiences. Once I did that, I began to think, well, why didn't I do that before? Why? It's like the anxieties you have going into combat for the first time or returning to Vietnam. When I returned to Vietnam, it was almost as though some silent voice out there said, damn, Mike, where have you been all these years, you know?

[01:12:51.17] But people tell me-- and I'm doing this for the first time locally, we did it at one reunion and I saw the same results-- that when it comes to your hometown, these guys that came back from the war and went back to their families and did the same thing with their work and families and friends, building those perimeters around them where they felt safe and have been reluctant to step outside the wire, but when it finally comes to your front door and you can step

out and see and go through that experience, it's one of-- they call it the Wall That Heals. And I believe that is a fact where you can actually cross that barrier.

[01:13:39.00] If you stay inside that perimeter too long, you're going to get overrun. Of course, anybody can get overwhelmed, I know that. But that's a good thing. And I'm not sure where I was going with that question, but my mind is not exactly focused this morning.

[01:14:03.36] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: Well, the military, parts of it learned a lot about history. And you have from my Marine friends behind you is a framed photo of the flag raising at Iwo Jima. The Marines, for a long time, celebrated and enjoyed doing so their history. I think the Army, in particular, was a long way behind that. And somehow, through this recent episode, we have learned that, oh, gee by the way, we do have a history, and we should be proud of it. And we should be of.

[01:14:42.28] And, of course, we old Cav guys, like you and me, we've known that for a long time. But the Army has actually decided that is finally--

[01:14:52.75] JOE GALLOWAY: It's a good thing and we should celebrate it.

[01:14:56.12] MIKE SPRAYBERRY: And I have some misgivings about some of the go-through-the-motions type things, but I think it's a good thing and about time. And certainly, at this stage of life for a lot of those guys that-- I talk about some of the guys I served with. One of the guys that we thought never, ever would be proud of his service after he got out, he's out on the West Coast, had some problems and hanging out with the wrong crowd and everything. And he passed away, and one of my medics and one of my squad leaders went to his funeral-- Hispanic kid.

[01:15:41.65] And it dawned on them the first time they walked in there that that was the first time anybody had ever said, thank you for being here, thank you for-- But in his obit, this kid that we never thought would think two bits about the military, that was the most-- the one event in his life that he had the most pride in for the rest of his, unfortunately, short life.

[01:16:11.87] And they all had their little scarves on that they wore back then and everything. But the family, it just meant so much to them just to have those guys care that much about that guy for all those years to drive that distance to make that commitment to I'm going to be there you know for Steve. So you know?

[01:16:36.41] JOE GALLOWAY: Mike, thank you for coming in.