

White, Lyman US Army

[00:00:18.05] LYMAN WHITE: Joe, I was born in New York City, but it was kind of on the fly. I don't remember anything about it. My parents met there, got married, and were working there. I really claim Panama City, Florida, which is right down the road, as my home.

[00:00:29.99] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. You consider that your hometown?

[00:00:33.14] LYMAN WHITE: That's my hometown. That's where I've spent most of-- in and out most of my life.

[00:00:38.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Who were your family members?

[00:00:40.73] LYMAN WHITE: Well, I have-- of course, my mother and father. I have one brother and two sisters. They're all still alive. I'm the oldest of four.

[00:00:49.94] JOE GALLOWAY: What did your dad do?

[00:00:51.48] LYMAN WHITE: My father was an engineer for MGM, in New York, back-- and he got called up early for World War II. And to make a long story short, he, of course, went throughout the war. I lived in Panama City. He came back, he got out, he was frustrated. Like many, many vets, he wound up being asked back in as a major.

[00:01:14.06] We went to Germany for five years because we got extended, due to the Korean conflict. And so we came back. I finished up high school out of Killeen High School in Fort Hood, Texas. But all that time, my base, my family, family base, was always Panama City. That's where we lived during the war and so forth. So that's-- he was an unplanned career Soldier.

[00:01:41.85] JOE GALLOWAY: Now you received your commission in the Army from West Point in 1961. Can you describe how you got your appointment to the Academy and share with us any memorable stories from your time there?

[00:01:57.45] LYMAN WHITE: Well, in those days, my appointment was from Bob Sykes, who was the congressman of this district. And if you did anything in Washington, you went through Bob Sykes. And while I took the examinations and all that, it was very much political. And I can remember, I worked in a gas station every summer, and the big moment of my life was Bob Sykes pulled up in a Lincoln Town Car, which I had never seen. Of course, I'm sweating and nasty.

[00:02:26.34] And he gets out in a white linen suit and a white hat and says, young man, I understand you want to go to West Point. And I'm standing there, wiping oil and gas off my hands. And that's the only time I saw him. But a lot of people in Panama City, a lot of-- my grandparents, were very instrumental in me getting the appointment. And so I was appointed by Bob Sykes. Entered West Point in '57.

[00:02:52.50] And I thought about this question. I could bore you to tears with stories about West Point, but the biggest thing out of West Point is the continuing affection and relationship I have with my classmates. We-- it grows more important every year we get older. I just stay in touch, see a lot of them. Email has helped.

[00:03:15.66] And to just put it in perspective, when I was reading these questions, is there were really two anchors in my life, my adult life-- one is West Point, and the other was my wife. And I think that kind of sums up the role. West Point's played a huge role in my life.

[00:03:36.45] LYMAN WHITE: In '61 I didn't even know what Vietnam was. I was commissioned infantry. I went to Fort Benning and went through the normal courses. I went through Airborne, I went through Ranger, I went through the basic course. I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg, initially as a platoon leader. And then I wound up-- very fortunately, I wound up commanding a company there, which was unusual for a first lieutenant. So I was the last member of my class to leave the 82nd, and in most cases, went to Vietnam from there.

[00:04:09.37] JOE GALLOWAY: So you were at Fort Bragg the whole time?

[00:04:11.43] LYMAN WHITE: Fort Bragg, yes, sir.

[00:04:14.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Did the training you got prepare you for what you faced once you landed in Vietnam?

[00:04:20.43] LYMAN WHITE: Well, I feel that-- the 82nd, yes. Tactically, it was a good outfit. I was in a good outfit with good commanders, good NCOs. It was good. We were a good Army in those days. But I also went to, at Fort Bragg, six weeks of MATA, if you recall that name--

[00:04:40.74] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:04:41.97] LYMAN WHITE: --where we got a lot of the culture. And, you know, Bernard Fall was the guru of Vietnam in those days, and we all read his book. But we learned a lot of things about Vietnam because it was all new to me. And then I went for three months in Monterey, the Presidio of Monterey, for language, which gave me a smattering of knowledge with the language.

[00:05:05.73] Now the second part of the question is, did it prepare me for Vietnam? Not really. Culturally, perhaps, but I wasn't-- as a first lieutenant, I didn't get exposed to a lot of culture, and so, no. For what I was thrust into, I don't think you could be prepared for.

[00:05:26.22] JOE GALLOWAY: They don't train for killing and dying.

[00:05:29.79] LYMAN WHITE: Well, not down at that level, either. I was a Ranger battalion adviser-- actually, an assistant battalion adviser, as a first lieutenant. And you're thrust into these 400 guys, and in those days, there was no superstructure for the Rangers. So I was up in Tay

Ninh province, northwest of Saigon, along the Cambodian border, and we were just kind of bastard children for III Corps.

[00:05:56.37] They put us wherever they wanted to, so I-- the Rangers haul their families with them whenever we moved. We lived with them. We lived in province houses, too, when we pulled into different towns.

[00:06:15.02] LYMAN WHITE: Oh, I landed in July of '64, and I landed at Tan Son Nhut.

[00:06:18.86] JOE GALLOWAY: That's early.

[00:06:19.85] LYMAN WHITE: Uh-huh. It was early for-- I was among the-- they were starting to pump up the advisory role then, and that was my-- I spent my first night in the Majestic Hotel on Tu Do Street-- never saw it again in two years. And then was issued-- well, while we're talking about this, Joe, I went and got issued World War II equipment-- M2 carbine, old PRC-10 radios, just junk, and then was, about two days later, put on a helicopter up to Tay Ninh, where I linked up with my senior adviser captain, and the team in the battalion, the 33rd Rangers.

[00:07:09.09] JOE GALLOWAY: Now when you arrived, you had orders to become an adviser to the Rangers?

[00:07:14.40] LYMAN WHITE: No, I went hoping to go to the Airborne Brigade. But because I was late leaving Bragg among my peer groups, I was-- the brigade was filled. That's where everybody from the 82nd wanted to be, in the Airborne Brigade, there in Saigon. So the second-- I guess the second best thing was they assigned me to a Ranger battalion.

[00:07:35.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, they were not too shabby.

[00:07:44.02] LYMAN WHITE: At the time I joined it, they were in Tay Ninh. And we spent a good bit of time in Tay Ninh because they had a large province advisory compound, which gave us a place to retreat to when we weren't on operations. But most of the time, we worked north of Tay Ninh. Well, they had the big mountain there, the Nui Ba Den, and the big black mountain. Most of the time, we worked north of that, along the Cambodian border.

[00:08:12.91] And we just-- we were just always engaged in a running gun battle, Joe. It was just-- we were always outgunned, we were always meeting engagements. I don't think there was ever any plans. We were just told to go somewhere, and sure enough, we found something. And we were usually--

[00:08:32.69] JOE GALLOWAY: Were you in the rubber country at all?

[00:08:35.00] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah, the Michelin Rubber Plantation entered into that--

[00:08:38.48] JOE GALLOWAY: You could get into a lot of trouble in those places.

[00:08:40.58] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. And we just didn't have anything. Rangers were armed with-- little Rangers were armed with Thompson submachine guns, and they carried that heavy .45-caliber ammunition. So to cut down on the weight, they'd cut the stocks off these things. So the first round may be at you, but then it went straight up, you know, until they learned to fire them.

[00:09:06.35] The-- can I digress and tell a little interesting story? I had all this lousy equipment that I told you about, as did the other team members, and we pulled into a Special Forces camp by the name of Suoi Da up on the Cambodian border, north of Tay Ninh. And the camp commander was a guy I'm sure you've talked to, Bo Gritz.

[00:09:28.49] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, yeah.

[00:09:29.45] LYMAN WHITE: And Bo, he called me aside and he says, you really have some lousy equipment. He says, come here. So he took me into a tent-- this is the Special Forces in the early part of the war. And he had a tent full of the latest everything. And I walked out of there with an M16-- or an AR-15 in those days-- an M79, a new PRC-25 radio, which was new.

[00:09:51.68] And I was loaded down, and so were two or three of the Vietnamese that followed me around, with all the latest equipment. And I never carried anything but that AR-15 the rest of my time, and I left that M2 carbine up there. And I'm always indebted to Bo for that.

[00:10:16.82] LYMAN WHITE: Well, initially, I tried sleeping in one of those Vietnamese hammocks until I realized that when they shot at you at night, that's about the level that they shot. So we went down. We tended to stay in-- the Tay Ninh province house's province senior adviser was very good to us. He carved out-- there were only three of us-- a little place there that we could come back to. So we probably stayed there-- as long as we were in that general area, we'd come back and stay there.

[00:10:50.33] It was a myth about staying with the battalion and training and everything when we were out of the field. They were with their families, and you didn't have any control over any of that. So we-- that's where we--

[00:11:02.85] JOE GALLOWAY: So it was time off--

[00:11:04.62] LYMAN WHITE: That's right.

[00:11:05.13] JOE GALLOWAY: --when you were back in the rear.

[00:11:06.88] LYMAN WHITE: That's exactly right.

[00:11:08.68] JOE GALLOWAY: Describe the atmosphere in Vietnam in '64, '65.

[00:11:16.95] LYMAN WHITE: You mean the military, from-- well, first of all, everybody over there was a volunteer, the US Army-types. And so you had some pretty first-class people. And

I've got to hasten to add, I had a wonderful captain, senior adviser, who was on his second tour. He'd had a Special Forces tour.

[00:11:40.75] He really kind of kept me alive. He kept me-- he taught me everything he knew. He knew how to interface with the Vietnamese. He just had good field sense and good tactical sense, and was a real pleasure to-- and I owe him a lot. He's since deceased, but he was a great Soldier and I was lucky to have him for my first few months.

[00:12:08.38] If you're talking about Vietnam the country, with the smells, and the sounds, and the religion, Tay Ninh was-- I believe the religion was called Cao Dai up there. The temples, the-- but by and large, in '64, Joe, the Vietnamese were curious about us. And it was a-- the relationship with the soldiers was good, and I never worried about my personal safety with the Vietnamese Rangers, other than the fact that they might fire one off accidentally since they never knew what a safety was on their weapon.

[00:12:50.13] But it was not the 82nd Airborne, but considering where we were, I thought the Vietnamese were, at that time, very friendly. Tay Ninh was a pretty city, had not been badly destroyed. We thought-- most everybody thought we were doing something noble, something good, for not only ourselves, but for the-- South Vietnam. And so it was-- I'd say the atmosphere was pretty good, pretty positive.

[00:13:24.54] We just weren't ready to take them on, tactically, because we just weren't gunned up enough. Most of my time with that battalion, there were only three of us-- a sergeant, lieutenant-- me-- and our captain, a guy by the name of John Ramsey.

[00:13:42.45] The first three or four months, I stayed-- I shadowed Ramsey. And that's where he taught me what I needed to be taught, which was everything. As we got more accustomed to working with each other, I would go with the lead company and take the sergeant with me, but only under certain circumstances because once we got engaged, there's only so much you could do as an adviser.

[00:14:07.03] So I became more a radio operator with artillery and air and armed helicopters-- particularly armed helicopters-- and very little of an-- especially as a first lieutenant, whatever advising went on, he did. There wasn't much of that. They were fighting. And so we were-- and we tended to band together, the three of us, in close proximity, just watching each other's backs while we were doing our job.

[00:14:37.05] At night, we would come back together and sleep close together. And one of us would stay on a radio watch during the night, just so we had-- we weren't going to get caught by any surprises. But we felt comfortable with the Rangers. They were solid. They weren't afraid to fight, and they weren't going to turn on us-- or I didn't think.

[00:15:06.94] LYMAN WHITE: I didn't participate in any major battles, where you got a lot of headlines. We fought a lot of, as I said earlier, running gun battles where we would lose five, ten guys, and we'd kill five, ten of them, normally north, northeast of Tay Ninh. So we got--

[00:15:24.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Your main enemy is main force VC?

[00:15:28.24] LYMAN WHITE: We ran into mostly NVA up in that area. Very little-- we ran into VC back towards the Tay Ninh city, but in our case, we were mostly employed north of the city, up in that area. And that was all NVA.

[00:15:42.25] JOE GALLOWAY: That was all NVA.

[00:15:43.03] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. Those were soldiers that were professional soldiers.

[00:15:50.06] JOE GALLOWAY: They're damn good.

[00:15:51.41] LYMAN WHITE: They were good. And they, as I said a couple of times, they had us outgunned in most cases. So we fought a lot of-- and we were busy. We were engaged all the time, but never in any major battles, which was probably good for us.

[00:16:08.03] JOE GALLOWAY: You were covering infiltration routes and things like that?

[00:16:10.82] LYMAN WHITE: We were, as they came in into Vietnam from Cambodia. And we coordinated a lot with the Special Forces camps that were along the border. And then-- but I got promoted to captain in December, and I got pulled out of the battalion. And the very next week, they got committed, by air assault, all the way across-- well, I know you're familiar with III Corps-- to Phuoc Tuy province, where they were thrown into a mish-mash against an NVA regiment. And they got cut up and took 50% casualties.

[00:16:44.88] The sergeant was killed, the radio operator, who we had just gotten, was captured but released, which was unusual for the Vietnamese; and the captain who had replaced Ramsey at this point, he survived. But I had just been promoted and just pulled out of the battalion, or I would have been on that operation with the lead company.

[00:17:08.43] And it was typical thing. They snatched the 33rd Rangers and just threw them in someplace with no briefing, no tactical instruction, no concept of what we were doing. That just seemed to be--

[00:17:22.17] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did they send you?

[00:17:23.73] LYMAN WHITE: I went down to Chi Lang National Training Center in the Delta to be the S-3 adviser. It's down by the Seven Mountains area, about as remote as you can get. And it was-- the idea there was to train one-unit training type of thing, where we turned out battalions. So they'd pick up their adviser along the way, and then we'd graduate them as battalions. And that's what I spent the second half of my tour doing.

[00:17:51.27] And it was interesting because for a graduation exercise, you go out the front gate. There was something called a Cambodian Communist Battalion in the Seven Mountains. We were always under fire. We graduated-- machine gun fire, what kind of training is this? We're

just as bad as where I just came from. So I was at Chi Lang until it was time to come home to my DEROS.

[00:18:22.10] LYMAN WHITE: I was so damn happy to come home and see my wife and kids that I didn't really see-- I didn't sense or feel any-- there was a lot of interest in what was going on in Vietnam, and a lot of lack of knowledge on people's part. People would want to talk to you. There was none of this that came later.

[00:18:39.92] JOE GALLOWAY: None of the stuff that did come later.

[00:18:42.41] LYMAN WHITE: No. And I was well received, and my little hometown paper wanted to interview. And again, it was curiosity over, just what have you been doing over there? There was a lot of lack of knowledge in '65 in what was going on.

[00:18:59.33] JOE GALLOWAY: The war had changed drastically.

[00:19:02.82] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah, dramatically. I had a teaching assignment at West Point in-between. That's why I was-- that four-year interval between-- Yeah, I landed at Long Binh, and my first impression was I saw nothing but a lot of ragbag troops sitting around-- or in my view, ragbag troops-- that I didn't know we had in the Army. This massive headquarters, you know, rear area and all that.

[00:19:30.59] And I was-- once again, I was supposed to go the 101st Airborne. The division commander had been my first battalion commander, so you know, I was a major. I was dumb enough to think I really had this thing wired, and then I got a call from somebody there at Long Binh saying, you're going to the Americal Division--

[00:19:50.03] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my god.

[00:19:51.77] LYMAN WHITE: --which did not have a very good reputation at the time. So I called the 101st, they said, we can't get you out of it. There have been some losses down in the Americal. So I got on the 130 and flew up, got off the plane at Chu Lai, and reported to the 198th-- or reported to the division, and then I was assigned the 198th Brigade. The Americal kept their old brigade designations.

[00:20:21.62] And I got to tell you, Joe, I served with some of the finest Soldiers in the Army. But this is a year and a half after My Lai. And I served with some-- really, some fine officers and Soldiers. It was a different Army. And we had-- I went down the 1st of the 52nd Battalion, where I was the S-3, and sometimes the XO, depending on-- and one time, for three weeks, a battalion commander because the battalion commander got relieved.

[00:20:55.90] And so I took over formal command of the battalion for three weeks, and ran a few little operations. And then the next battalion commander came in and he said he was his own S-3, so I kind of assumed the XO duties. The Soldiers in the Americal Division, the ones that were in the bush, were good kids.

[00:21:20.31] The thing that bothered me was the vast majority of them came-- the white ones came from the Midwest. Their father had been in World War II, or the South, and they were very patriotic and they answered the draft. Most of them were draftees at this point.

[00:21:38.73] The black kids were out of the inner city. They weren't sure what the heck had happened to them, but they were there. And they didn't want to be there. None of them wanted to be there. But by and large, in the battalion I was in, they performed well. And we had a lot of Shake 'n Bake NCOs. Remember that term?

[00:21:58.28] JOE GALLOWAY: Yep. 90-day wonders.

[00:22:00.02] LYMAN WHITE: All of a sudden, you didn't know what an E-6 squad leader or an E-7 platoon sergeant was. Where are those guys? You had these young kids just made E-5, and they're pushing squads or even platoons. And in my experience, they did a great job. So in the field, I thought, these kids are really-- they're doing well. And out of the field, back when I was doing some XO duties, it was-- I thought it was awful.

[00:22:29.06] I thought the rear area of the 23rd Division was just-- nobody wanted to go back there, you know what I mean?

[00:22:37.94] JOE GALLOWAY: I'd rather stay in the bush.

[00:22:39.17] LYMAN WHITE: You were better off in the bush, so it's-- yeah, I'm glad to hear that. Anyway, we had a 24,000-man division. And I don't think we put any more people into the bush operationally than any other division, even though we had an enormous division. But the rear area was, my infrequent times back, left me with a really bad impression.

[00:23:06.14] My second half of my tour, I was a brigade S-3-- same brigade. I just moved up a notch to the brigade, and, of course, moved from living on a firebase, which I had with a battalion, to living on a much nicer firebase. A little more--

[00:23:30.11] JOE GALLOWAY: A little more amenities.

[00:23:31.04] LYMAN WHITE: A little more amenities, like a bed to sleep on and, you know--

[00:23:34.31] JOE GALLOWAY: A hot shower.

[00:23:34.97] LYMAN WHITE: Occasionally, a hot shower. At least a shower. And that sort of thing. And that was where I spent the second half of my tour, was as a brigade S-3. And that was a great job. I worked for some two great brigade commanders-- very different in style, very different in technique, but both very effective commanders.

[00:24:01.23] The battalion I came out of had a very interesting battalion commander. He's probably one of the most decorated commanders in Vietnam. He was a master at small unit tactics, and he was a fearless individual. But he didn't give-- he didn't care about his other guys,

and we lost a lot of company commanders. And you know, in preparing for this interview, I realized that looking back 50 years, I'm back down in the battalion now, OK?

[00:24:33.84] I had gotten pretty close to the company commanders. They were kind of-- I was their sounding board. They were my guys. And we lost quite a few of those, and that always troubled me with his-- I thought he was a very callous battalion commander, but he was a very, very efficient infantryman.

[00:24:51.96] JOE GALLOWAY: By name?

[00:24:53.07] LYMAN WHITE: Charlie Getz. Charlie just died recently.

[00:24:57.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:24:57.57] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. And I don't want to malign Charlie's reputation because he was as brave a man as I ever knew. But he was looking out for Charlie. And every time we had an award ceremony, impact awards, Charlie got an award, along with Private Joe and so forth.

[00:25:15.58] So I was kind of glad. I was glad to get out of battalion and go to brigade.

[00:25:21.18] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Could you describe for us the role of a battalion S-3?

[00:25:29.69] LYMAN WHITE: Well, it was--

[00:25:30.38] JOE GALLOWAY: In a normal battalion. Not under this guy.

[00:25:36.05] LYMAN WHITE: You know, he's the operations officer. He plans the operations, he coordinates the operations, he kind of goes where the battalion commander doesn't go to ensure that the operations are working as planned. Oftentimes, he's with the commander, depending on the commander's style. And some commanders stayed on the firebase. We had a couple of those in our brigade. And others, the one I worked for, want to be right out in the middle of it.

[00:26:05.12] So where I was was dependent upon where he wanted to be. So most often, and when we were in a contact or something, I was in the air, in a little bird, and he would want to be down on the ground, which was commendable. But I'd plan the fire. You know, the last thing I'd do at night was I'd plan all the fires to be fired during the night and walk the wire one last time around the firebase, make sure that the troops were alert, knew what they were supposed to do, which was always entertaining, what you ran into.

[00:26:42.81] And I can tell you a story. We got time for little stories?

[00:26:46.98] JOE GALLOWAY: Sure. We got time for little stories.

[00:26:49.05] LYMAN WHITE: We set Claymores up every night. We'd set them out around the berm, in the defense just short of the wire. And we had on these firebases, we had these huge rats. You saw them, Joe. You know what they're like over there-- great big, old, black rats.

[00:27:04.35] Well, I was walking one night, making my last rounds, and I heard this-- the firing of the--

[00:27:14.84] JOE GALLOWAY: The clicker on the--

[00:27:15.89] LYMAN WHITE: Well, the clicker going, and then the little-- that you insert down in the Claymore.

[00:27:20.64] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, the fuse.

[00:27:22.53] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. The-- Chuck, what is that thing? The round--

[00:27:25.22] JOE GALLOWAY: The igniter.

[00:27:26.06] LYMAN WHITE: The igniter. So what they had done-- so I went back to see what's going on. These guys, only an American GI, they set the blasting caps on the berm, taken them out of the Claymore-- so the Claymore is no longer armed-- and set them there and see if they could blow up the rats. And they had a bet going. And I didn't know whether to-- I didn't know whether to control my laughing or, of course, chew their butt because the Claymore was not--

[00:27:53.40] JOE GALLOWAY: Not going to work.

[00:27:54.32] LYMAN WHITE: Not going to work defensively. They were-- but I went that night to my hooch thinking, only an American GI is going to do something like that.

[00:28:03.71] JOE GALLOWAY: They're going to blow up rats.

[00:28:04.43] LYMAN WHITE: They were blowing rats up and they were keeping score.

[00:28:09.05] JOE GALLOWAY: During this '70, '71 tour, are there memorable operations that you either planned or participated in?

[00:28:22.40] LYMAN WHITE: Once again, there was no big, named operation. We did have one. It had no name, to my knowledge, but the battalion commander won the Distinguished Service Cross in it. We killed about 50 VC, NVA. I was involved in the planning. I was in the air. I was not on the ground, in the action, until after the conclusion of the battle. He went down and got out of the helicopter and was in the action.

[00:28:52.46] And that was the most successful battle at that time, in the Americal, during that time frame. And so he received-- I think General Abrams wanted to give the Americal a boost or

something. And so he-- Charlie got the DFC, and I have no problems with that. He was certainly brave enough. And he was a master at small unit tactics. So he was very good at that.

[00:29:26.34] LYMAN WHITE: In the battalion, when I was in the battalion--

[00:29:30.45] JOE GALLOWAY: And up in the brigade.

[00:29:33.04] LYMAN WHITE: Two very different experiences. Let me-- the battalion, as I said, I became, in my experience-- and I became too close-- I mentioned this before-- to the company commanders. Because of the personalities involved, company commanders often came to me, talked about different things. Didn't like this, and why were we out there, and how long, blah, blah, blah, you know? And why can't I get this, and that, and so forth.

[00:29:58.95] And I'd listen to them, and I talked to them and I'd try and explain operations to them, and I would patronize them because they were the guys fighting the war at that time. We weren't having any big time battalion skirmishes. It was company commanders' war, and platoon leader. So when they were killed or wounded, I was always a little more affected than I probably should have been. But that's just the way it was.

[00:30:26.07] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you lose a lot of company commanders?

[00:30:28.18] LYMAN WHITE: We did. We lost a bunch of company commanders. We had a bunch killed. We had one, that I can remember, that was blinded in both eyes. And we had one that was shot through the spine and was paralyzed from the neck down. And so it was-- well, actually, he was a scout platoon leader. But he was like a company commander because we used the scouts-- oftentimes, a scout platoon, because it was theoretically your best platoon-- we'd use it almost as an additional company in covering terrain or in missions and so forth.

[00:31:02.92] So yeah, we lost quite a few guys for the-- and we had quite a bit of turnover in company command.

[00:31:09.72] JOE GALLOWAY: And yet this is supposed to be a time when the Americans are starting to pull back?

[00:31:16.10] LYMAN WHITE: Well, we weren't pulling back. The 1st Division was, down south of us. But the-- we had a lot of emphasis up in the-- I'm up in I Corps now, with the Americal, with 101st and us, and the Marines. And there was still a lot of emphasis on offensive operations. When the weather was good-- and you know how the season was up there. It either really rained or it was-- we went west. We moved into the mountains out west and really did aggressively try and seek out and destroy the NVA coming down.

[00:31:49.16] When the weather got bad, and our visibility, we pulled back towards the coastal plain, which is where we had most of our problems because that's where your VC and your other discipline matters come into play. But we were still very much in the offensive operation mode, and we were very much in the body count business. So that hadn't gone away, even though south of us, in III Corps, 1st Division was rolling up and a couple other divisions were getting ready to.

[00:32:22.63] JOE GALLOWAY: Now during this particular year, there were racial tensions, social tensions, back home. The American public was turning against the war you're fighting. Did any of that come over to where you were?

[00:32:44.73] LYMAN WHITE: For me, personally, very little. My wife, with whom we-- there was no FaceTime, remember, and all that. We corresponded by letter and by those little cassettes, back and forth, about every other week. And she, of course, tried not to talk about that sort of thing. Talked about the family, the kids.

[00:33:04.03] And I was-- I had jobs as a battalion three, brigade three, you're just into the job. I was very much into what I was doing. I think the GIs had the right word for it, when they said "back in the world," and that as far as I was concerned, I was in a different world, where all this other stuff was happening.

[00:33:24.86] So was I aware that it was going on? Yes. Was it a factor in my day to day life? No. I didn't have time for that. I was too busy doing what we were doing.

[00:33:36.88] JOE GALLOWAY: What did you do for recreation off-duty time?

[00:33:41.73] LYMAN WHITE: I don't remember any off duty time.

[00:33:43.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah, right.

[00:33:45.47] LYMAN WHITE: I was-- I really don't. It was a seven-day-- you know? I just don't remember. There was nothing. At the brigade, we had a stand down area, where we rotated - periodically, each battalion got a rotation of a company to stand down, which was on the beach, back on the South China Sea, which was R&R for that company. Three days, they would go back, they would go swimming.

[00:34:14.75] JOE GALLOWAY: Three days, we'll barbecue steaks on the beach.

[00:34:17.35] LYMAN WHITE: Drugs, whatever else they could get into. It was-- yeah, but it was good. It got them out of the rotation. But for me, as the S-3, I didn't have bosses that were taking any time off, and so neither was I. And I worked for-- my first brigade commander was Bill Richardson, who went on to make four-stars, command TRADOC, was really a brilliant man and very, very perceptive in how he wanted the brigade to react and do, complete the mission.

[00:34:59.08] Second brigade commander was-- and Richardson's still alive and I'm still in communication with him-- was a guy named Rufus Smith, who has passed away, who was just as good a brigade commander, but a completely different personality. He'd go out and talk with troops and slap them on the back and ask them how they were doing, and things like that.

[00:35:20.08] But the modus operandi was, for better or for worse-- I was a high-paid RTO. Every day, particularly with General Richardson, I would get on a helicopter with him, command and control, with all my map boards and everything, and I'd jump on a bird and we'd go visit all the battalions. And we had anywhere from three to five, depending on what was going on. And

we'd go to the battalion LZ, where he would get briefed. And I'd talk with the S-3 and all the other guys at that time.

[00:35:56.41] And then we'd come back, and we'd get back late in the afternoon. And brigade had a briefing for the brigade commander, just like every other level did. And I had to go huddle with all my captains in the S-3 shop to-- tell me what's happened, what's going on. And, of course, if we had a major contact or something like that, then we got over the top of it and that's where I was maneuvering troops and coordinating fires and Air Force and so forth.

[00:36:27.26] And I got pretty good at that. But my days in were spent at night, back at the TOC, was where I really had to catch up and do work and plan the next day and do-- so there just wasn't a lot of time to do anything else.

[00:36:46.22] JOE GALLOWAY: Are there memorable leadership lessons that you recall that you might like to pass along?

[00:36:57.82] LYMAN WHITE: Beyond the obvious of personal bravery and things of that, which I just-- my hero, Joe, in life has been and always will be that 18, 19-year-old kid that goes forward when somebody's shooting at him-- not because he wants to, but because he's trained and he's disciplined and he does it. They've done it in every war, and they did it in this war too. And just as well, I think, as they've done in other wars.

[00:37:29.83] I saw every type of leadership you could possibly imagine, as an S-3. And the good, bad, and indifferent. I saw battalion commanders-- when I was a brigade three, I really watched battalion commanders carefully to see how they were doing things. And I saw guys that never left the firebase, but they were masterful briefers, one of which got promoted to four stars. I saw battalion commanders that were never at the firebase, always out in the field-- which I thought was far more effective-- that didn't go nearly as far in the Army but were far better combat commanders, in my opinion.

[00:38:09.52] And I never quite understood how they were being seen from above. I saw-- I think one of the traits of leadership that I really admired in some of the people I worked for was the ability to listen to the junior officers and Soldiers that were out there in the bush-- I mean, really listen. Not just be quiet while getting ready for your next order, but to listen to what they had to say and what they were experiencing, and factor that into what they were thinking. And that sounds simple, but it's not. And I think only the best one, General Richardson, comes to mind.

[00:38:51.64] He was exceptional at that. He could listen, and would listen, whether you were a lieutenant, a sergeant, or a lieutenant colonel, and he would let you-- he would be listening to you and he would absorb what you said and he would factor that into his thinking process of what he wanted to do next. And that was an amazing trait. That's not battlefield valor and all that, but that's a mark, I think, of a good leader.

[00:39:24.34] LYMAN WHITE: Not really. We were-- there was a lot of stuff going on that we would react to that was maybe out of SOG or out of some other outfit, out of Saigon and so forth.

But where I was, we were pretty conventional infantry in terms of shooting them with weapons-- artillery, Air Force, the Navy. We did get some naval gunfire, but because of where we were located it was-- no, I can't say--

[00:40:00.74] but what we did do, Joe, was we got very, very proficient at things that-- I think we had a very good Army at things like air assaults-- and you certainly saw enough of them in your time-- where we could go in, we could prep the LZ, where we could shift but not lift fires, which the Air Force always wanted. We could shift them and they'd come in, and then we could shift them right back. And then the armed helicopters come in, and then we could insert troops, and we could do that on the fly and do it very well and very successfully most of the time, if we had the assets available.

[00:40:37.20] So I think we became very tactically proficient. Now remember the level I'm at, so I never got high in brigade. So as far as any cutting-edge, there was always something out there that they were planting in a valley floor, or they were-- some guy with a team came in from Saigon and he wanted to do something, and we'd send a company out. But none of that ever materialized anything that I saw that had any real effect on what we were doing.

[00:41:15.62] LYMAN WHITE: Well, the worst day I had was-- I was actually the battalion XO. As I said, I flopped between those jobs. And I was back in Chu Lai when our Bravo Company-- the VC had hung a 155 round in a tree. Bravo Company, they had to be tired or something, called-- the company commander, who was a wonderful guy, called all his leaders up, a little cleared out area, which would be an obvious place to put your maps down and to include his fire support officer and everything. And one of them triggered that 155. It killed 13 of them.

[00:41:58.95] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, my god.

[00:41:59.77] LYMAN WHITE: All of them, wiped out.

[00:42:00.51] JOE GALLOWAY: The whole command group.

[00:42:01.02] LYMAN WHITE: The whole command group. I was asked to go to the hospital and identify the bodies as they were coming in because they were really in bad shape. I was back at Chu Lai. So I went to the hospital, and the first guy-- you know, they came in and they dumped the bodies and I'm going through them with the nurse. And the first guy was our battalion chaplain, the very first person. And he had-- every one of them had been killed, 13 of them.

[00:42:28.38] And that's the company commander, the FSO, the lead platoon leader, the battalion chaplain, the first sergeant.

[00:42:35.79] JOE GALLOWAY: The battalion sergeant major.

[00:42:37.05] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. Oh, not the battalion sergeant major, but the first sergeant of the company. And it was just-- that was a bad night for me because-- well, it was for

our battalion. It just wiped out the leadership of an entire company. And it was a damn booby trap set by the VC, and it was-- there was nobody you could shoot back at.

[00:42:58.65] JOE GALLOWAY: Right, right.

[00:42:59.64] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. Mines and booby traps were always-- it's always a constant fear. The Soldiers fear that, as you know, much more than they feared contact. When they made contact with the enemy, we knew what to do. We knew how to maneuver and fire and do the right things. But when you have something like that happen, it just it takes the wind out of you.

[00:43:20.88] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah.

[00:43:21.60] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah.

[00:43:27.35] LYMAN WHITE: I don't know that I had a best day.

[00:43:29.12] JOE GALLOWAY: Getting on a plane.

[00:43:30.44] LYMAN WHITE: Well, yeah, that, of course, coming home. But operationally, the best day, of course, is we had two or three times where we really racked up some body count, which for that time frame-- of about 50 or 60 NVA-- was big numbers in the 1970, '71. And that was good.

[00:43:51.35] I mean, I don't-- I'm not explaining to you. I'm explaining for the-- you know how you get caught up in what you're doing. You're really in another world. And I think that was the case in Vietnam for most of us. We were so immersed in what we were doing that that's all that's important, is what lies in front of you.

[00:44:15.21] So body count was important. Regardless of your opinion, it was important up the chain of command. And when you kill 50, 60 guys in there, you know you've had a good day. And now that's not a very pleasant subject to talk about, but those were good days when we could do that and not lose very many people. So that's-- again, I was in the S-3 business.

[00:44:45.49] LYMAN WHITE: I worked briefly with the Koreans up in I Corps when I was a brigade three-- the Tiger Division-- very, very briefly. Tough, merciless. My only--

[00:44:58.60] JOE GALLOWAY: All of those things.

[00:44:59.62] LYMAN WHITE: They were-- and I later served in Korea, so I got to get to know them a little bit better. But as an adviser, going back to the first tour, I did have some contact with the Aussies, who were wonderful. Great in the field, and even better when they weren't in the field. They weren't going to let a war stop a party, you know? But that's kind of the limit. I didn't have any contact with any of the other allies besides that.

[00:45:32.31] LYMAN WHITE: I liked the Vietnamese. I still like the Vietnamese. I thought, my first tour, that-- again, limited to the 33rd Rangers-- that they were good fighters, they were brave, and they weren't going to back up to anybody. They were misused. They weren't always well-led, but that wasn't always because of the battalion commander. That's because of higher up-- at least so I thought. And I like the people. The people were, at that time, not quite as victimized as they were later in the war as on the second tour, of course.

[00:46:11.07] By now, they're-- all anybody wants to do is just stay alive and survive. Dealt a lot with ARVN as a brigade three because we interfaced with sister regiments. And the province senior adviser, we constantly had a meeting-- not every week, but every couple of weeks-- with the province people and where we were operating, and the ARVN commanders. Because I had had a really good experience as a young officer at a lower level, I went into it with a little bit more positive attitude towards the Vietnamese than most of my peers.

[00:46:55.54] I didn't see quite the same quality the second time around. They were-- politics had entered in. But that's not just true of the Vietnamese-- same thing of the senior advisers, the Americans that were over there. It looked to me like we had a lot of the second team, or they weren't on the same team. I'm not sure which is the right thing to say. But all in all, my assessment of the Vietnamese is good.

[00:47:23.65] Like most of us, I was crushed when Vietnam fell in '75 because I know that the units I served with, they didn't give up. So they fought.

[00:47:34.72] JOE GALLOWAY: They fought and died.

[00:47:36.34] LYMAN WHITE: Fought and died, and those that survived spent a long time in those retraining camps.

[00:47:45.50] LYMAN WHITE: First tour, I didn't see my family for a year, so the contact was strictly letters and tapes. Second tour, I did go on R&R, saw my wife, and that was mixed. It was wonderful being with her, seeing her, and so forth. And then I'd turn around and go back. And when you get back, the boss says, where you've been? You know, I was about to replace you. And it's only in years since that I realized, as I was talking to Chuck earlier, what a tough role the wives had in those days. They were by themselves, raising families, not really well-supported because we didn't have support mechanisms.

[00:48:30.75] And for us in uniform, it was all about us. We were all-- we were just thinking about us and surviving and seeing the family, and didn't really think about the role that the wife played, which I think is understood today but wasn't understood back then. I was very lucky that my wife went back to our hometown and had a good support group with both sets of families. But that was about it.

[00:49:00.02] Towards the end of my second tour, my replacement was in-country. We'd had a lot of turmoil in the Americal. The division commander had been relieved, a guy by the name of Baldwin. You probably remember that case. A lot had to do with a firebase named Mary Ann,

which was in the adjacent brigade, so I was up all night on the radio listening to that and monitoring that.

[00:49:30.29] They had a very fine brigade commander, but that battalion just-- that thing just went bad. It was badly done, badly reported.

[00:49:37.87] JOE GALLOWAY: Firebase was overrun.

[00:49:39.14] LYMAN WHITE: Overrun. It was a mixed ARVN-US firebase. Always got to be careful about that. It was-- they weren't-- the security wasn't good. Then afterwards, some things were done that desecrated the bodies and so forth. And then I don't know what happened at division level, wasn't reporting all that.

[00:50:04.28] JOE GALLOWAY: They fired the division--

[00:50:05.27] LYMAN WHITE: They fired the division commander. And then-- again, I'm going to digress and tell you a story, if I may. So we get a new division commander in, a guy named Kroesen, who--

[00:50:16.52] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, Fritz Kroesen.

[00:50:17.97] LYMAN WHITE: Fritz Kroesen. And my brigade commander's going on R&R because he didn't know that we were going to have our division commanders be relieved. And so he's on R&R with his wife and family, and so in comes Major General Kroesen for an operational briefing of our AO. He spent the day with us.

[00:50:38.50] And I took him around in the helicopter and took him to every battalion. And I spent 12 hours with General Kroesen, going around. And he asked-- you know, he was a quiet man and when he asked you a question, you better listen and try and answer it as best as you can. And it wasn't until we finished that I found out he had commanded a brigade in the exact same area of operations. He actually knew it better than I did. But he never said a word as I'm briefing him on all this.

[00:51:09.82] And I just-- he went on to be a good division commander and I later saw him at Bragg commanding the 82nd. So first thing I read when I open our magazine, is his article. It's amazing at his age that he can write so lucidly and be so perceptive. But he was-- it was an interesting-- I always laugh. I'm running my mouth, telling him all about this brigade area and everything, and he'd spent a year there as a brigade commander.

[00:51:45.15] LYMAN WHITE: And I don't remember how or why this happened-- I came back out of Cam Ranh Bay. Like most people, my number came up. I got to back up a minute. I went over there with a whole planeload of majors, most of whom had taught with me up at West Point. We were overdue for our second assignment, so we went over. And all of them wanted to get to the field and all of them wanted to be S-3s and XO's, and only a handful of us actually went. Most of them were at field force, this or that, and so forth.

[00:52:14.53] So when the aircraft came around on DEROS day, or near the DEROS, the only guys that got picked up that hadn't been wounded or killed were the guys that were at battalion and brigade level, like me. All the guys at higher headquarters had gotten a drop and they'd already gone home.

[00:52:35.11] JOE GALLOWAY: They'd already gone.

[00:52:35.98] LYMAN WHITE: Their jobs were so important back in the States that they'd gotten a drop and they were home. These are the same guys who, going over, had to be in the jobs that we were in. So the handful of us went down to Cam Ranh and said, where are all those other guys that we came over with? They're home.

[00:52:52.51] When I got back, I got in-- we went in to Seattle for some reason. I don't know why we went into SeaTac, but I ran into very little-- I was in uniform. I flew the next day. I don't recall anybody-- didn't go through any of that spitting, or maybe they wouldn't have been very smart to try it with me. But I wasn't, and I arrived home certainly not to any brass band. It was kind of like '65. I arrived home to my family and friends and loved ones, which was good enough for me. And that's-- so I didn't experience a lot of these stories that you hear people talk about.

[00:53:32.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Well, you were staying in the Army.

[00:53:34.60] LYMAN WHITE: I was.

[00:53:35.35] JOE GALLOWAY: You're inside the perimeter. And outside doesn't get in very easily.

[00:53:42.59] LYMAN WHITE: That's true.

[00:53:44.32] JOE GALLOWAY: Where did you go after Vietnam?

[00:53:48.11] LYMAN WHITE: I went back to Fort Bragg, where I was-- I went back to the 82nd, only I wound up being the corps commander's aide. I go back to Bragg, from whence I had come the first-- and it was a mess. As you know, first time I'd seen FTA and all those things, and the discipline, and they had a race riot down in the division and all that. And I said, I don't believe this.

[00:54:14.68] And that was probably-- I was giving serious consideration to getting out of the Army. At the time I was a major. I was, what, 30 years old, 31 years old, 32. And so I got interviewed to be called up to be the corps commander's aide. And so-- a guy by the name of John Hay, who had commanded the 1st Division. And he called me in to the interview, and I told him, thank you very much, but my time had kind of passed. The window had kind of closed on me for being an aide.

[00:54:48.55] I had been a brigade three, I had a short stint as a battalion commander in combat, and I felt that it was time for me to move on to other things, but I appreciated the opportunity and everything. You know what happened.

[00:55:00.70] JOE GALLOWAY: He said you're it.

[00:55:01.75] LYMAN WHITE: You're it. So I wound up leaving the division going up and being his aide, which probably kept me in the Army. I was then exposed to the people that were rebuilding the Army to include General DePuy, General Abrams, and all those. He made a point of making sure I was in the room.

[00:55:24.28] I didn't get to say anything, but I was in the room when these type of informal chats went on. And I really changed my attitude of--

[00:55:35.83] JOE GALLOWAY: You decided to stay and help rebuild it.

[00:55:38.53] LYMAN WHITE: That's right. I said the leadership's there, we've just-- we, at the lower levels, have got to stick around and help them do what they know needs to be done. And I think-- and so he had, obviously, a huge impact on me. But because I was very definitely turned off by a lot of reasons, coming out of Vietnam, just the lack of-- it just wasn't the same Army I'd been in as a young officer.

[00:56:09.15] JOE GALLOWAY: Did you have any difficulty readjusting to life after two tours in combat?

[00:56:16.21] LYMAN WHITE: I say no, but my wife said yes. And I think so. I had a little drinking problem for a while. I don't know why it happened, but I did. But we overcame that. And she said there are other indicators that I was affected, but in my mind, I wasn't. I was-- I'd gone, I'd done my duty, and I was back.

[00:56:47.38] JOE GALLOWAY: Life goes on.

[00:56:48.16] LYMAN WHITE: Life goes on. But I'm sure I was-- she's a lot more perceptive than I.

[00:56:55.22] JOE GALLOWAY: How much contact have you had with fellow veterans of the units you served with since the war?

[00:57:06.29] LYMAN WHITE: Well, disappointingly little, Joe. I've stayed in touch with some, but most of those relationships have just drifted. I never was a battalion commander or even a company commander, and I was always the three, and so you had a little bit different relationship.

[00:57:27.89] I've stayed in touch with a few-- a couple of my bosses, like I mentioned, a couple of the young captains that worked for me, but very few. And I've always regretted that I didn't

belong to an organization like the battalion I was in, that is more active in the reunion business and so forth. But they aren't.

[00:57:54.92] JOE GALLOWAY: They just don't do it.

[00:57:55.98] LYMAN WHITE: They just don't do it. And I was in the 1st of the 52nd Infantry, which was a good infantry battalion, and it had a lot of good people pass through it. And when I was there, you always say Americal, you got to make sure you understand. It was loaded with good people by the time I got there after My Lai and the Peers investigation.

[00:58:18.77] And we had first class battalion-- Schwartzkopf was one of our battalion commanders. A guy named Mark Brown, who went to be vice chief of staff of the Army was one of our battalion commanders. We really had quality people up and down the line, at least among the officers. And then, of course, the Soldiers were-- we've talked about that. But it's never-- there's never-- I've just never belonged to a reunion group that was-- there's just a few members that I get together with-- time, periodically.

[00:58:54.62] JOE GALLOWAY: But you do go to the West Point reunions?

[00:58:57.47] LYMAN WHITE: Oh, I'm very close with all my classmates.

[00:59:05.49] JOE GALLOWAY: What do you think that war meant to you and your generation, our generation?

[00:59:13.66] LYMAN WHITE: You know, it's interesting that you ask a question, I mean in this interview, because in the last couple of months, Roger Donlon was here. A classmate of mine, Mike Island, was his best friend, and they stayed with us. So we got included. I knew Roger, but only casually. But we got included as family, so we went through that whole Medal of Honor dedication out here with the 7th Special Forces group, with the Donlon family, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

[00:59:45.50] And Mike Island, this classmate of mine, was the go between. He had spent a lot of time in Special Forces. And I don't know what he does now. I think he still does CIA or something. But on the heels of that, I read Max Hastings' book, the history of Vietnam. It's an "epic tragedy" or "epic failure." I forget which one he calls. So it's a-- I don't have good feelings about Vietnam. I thought, my first tour, we're doing the right thing, we were doing good things, these are good people, this is right.

[01:00:27.21] Second tour, I was more wrapped up in mission accomplishment and I didn't like what I saw around the periphery, so I just stayed immersed in the operations of it. In retrospect, now at this age, I think we wasted the lives of a lot of good men. And then when I read what went on at levels higher than-- again, my little world was so far down the pike, but when you read things like McMaster's book and this recent book by Max Hastings, who says very, very little kind about anybody at any level, and I think it was-- we wasted a lot of--

[01:01:13.07] We were there too long, as always, like we are now. And we-- I just don't feel that-- I don't feel any great sense of accomplishment. We had, at an operational level-- see, I can't talk to anything other than where I was, which was at the far end of the barrel. But every time I went-- I had to go to a court martial one time down at Long Binh. Jeez, the rear area, the size of the rear area, the number of officers, combat arms people, the NCOs that are floating around doing-- what are they doing? What are their jobs, you know? Why aren't they up in the divisions, where we're short captains and sergeants?

[01:02:00.41] And I think we just-- in my humble opinion, Joe, I think we kind of lost our way as an Army.

[01:02:09.33] JOE GALLOWAY: Tail to tooth got kind of 11 to 1 or something?

[01:02:13.53] LYMAN WHITE: That, and I think the fact that we just kind of lost our way as to what we were supposed to be doing. I wasn't sure I knew every morning when I got up, except what I was told, and we would go out and do that, which is-- we got so heavy into the body count because we didn't have anything else to-- there were no--

[01:02:33.21] JOE GALLOWAY: No other measurements.

[01:02:33.87] LYMAN WHITE: That's right. There was nothing-- we would have liked-- and of course, Soldiers don't-- they just want to stay alive. They want to take care of each other as buddies and survive it. That doesn't change. They-- they're not interested in any noble objectives.

[01:02:48.87] JOE GALLOWAY: My second tour was '71, for the invasion of Laos.

[01:02:53.01] LYMAN WHITE: Well, I was there. We supported that. Lam Son 719?

[01:02:56.51] JOE GALLOWAY: Yep.

[01:02:57.09] LYMAN WHITE: That was a tough, tough nut.

[01:02:59.76] JOE GALLOWAY: What a clusterfuck.

[01:03:00.33] LYMAN WHITE: It was. We lost our Cav squadron commander, who went up to just help, Air Cav squadron commander, and he was lost at--

[01:03:10.49] JOE GALLOWAY: 1st Cav lost 15 helicopters in one afternoon.

[01:03:15.09] LYMAN WHITE: Oh, they just-- it was-- they just blew them out of the sky up there. That was-- every division up was lending helicopters. And the Americal had a full aviation brigade, so we had a lot of helicopters, and we didn't get many back from that--

[01:03:33.15] JOE GALLOWAY: No.

[01:03:34.28] LYMAN WHITE: The pilots that I know that served-- that I had known, that went up there in support of it said they would lure you into a killing zone of helicopters. You know, they'd fire some small arms and then you go down there and they'd have Quad 40s or they'd have some high powered--

[01:03:52.23] JOE GALLOWAY: Quad 40s, radar control.

[01:03:53.19] LYMAN WHITE: Yeah. And you just had-- it was just a killing field.

[01:03:56.16] JOE GALLOWAY: Yeah. Lost a lot friends up there.

[01:03:59.56] LYMAN WHITE: It was just a bad news operation, one that I never-- again, at my level, nobody had to explain to me-- I said, why are we doing that? What point are we making in Laos, of all places? I guess it-- however, they flunked.

[01:04:20.79] It was kind of a sad commentary because, I think, ARVN, much of ARVN, was better than they showed there. Not all of it, but much of it.

[01:04:31.77] JOE GALLOWAY: How do you think the Vietnam War is remembered in our society today?

[01:04:39.64] LYMAN WHITE: I don't think it is remembered. I think, today's young people, it's only a footnote. And I just came back from eight days in Normandy. I went over with the World War II museum tour, went the week before the actual D-day.

[01:04:57.05] And you know, it's-- and it was a wonderful tour and all that, and the point I'm making is we have something to remember there that was a crusade which accomplished a great, if not the greatest, thing in the 20th century. And I just think Vietnam is just a footnote on history that was-- I don't like to agree with Max Hastings on anything, but he may be right when he says it was just a tragic mistake.

[01:05:25.85] I just, from a personal point of view-- and I look back and I look and I think of the guys we lost, and how we lost them, and so on and so forth, I don't think it was worth it. Just wasn't worth it to-- now that's an old man talking, and I didn't feel that way when I was there. I saw enough just putting them in-- loading them up on a Huey, dead, putting the bodies up there, and that type of thing.

[01:05:54.35] So, you know, again, my view, maybe it was worth it at the beginning, but it wasn't worth it for the 10 years that we spent, and the blood and treasure we spent on it.

[01:06:09.51] LYMAN WHITE: I resisted going up there for a long time. I didn't like it. I thought it was too dark. When you compare it with a Korean squad or a platoon going through the field, that, to me, was a memorial. And I just really-- and when I went up for the first time, Joe, I cried. And I'm still tearing up now. It just brings back nothing good for me.

[01:06:37.84] I do go to the Wall. I do go visit friends. I do-- you know, I support the Wall. I think it's come a long way, and it's amazing that it's the number one attraction in Washington. But it's always been a place of sorrow for me.

[01:07:01.19] LYMAN WHITE: I think it's wonderful. I think Vietnam, the veterans that served there, and the price they paid and so forth, I think we can't overemphasize that. I think it's long overdue. I think it's well-- an effort worthy of our attention and effort.

[01:07:18.89] I don't want to leave you with the thoughts that I'm not proud of my service in Vietnam. I am. But I'm-- but Vietnam as a whole, I'm not sure that was worth it. I applaud our Soldiers. Our Soldiers fought hard, and they fought well, and they didn't want to be there, like they don't want to be in most wars. What Soldier wants to be in a war? So they-- I don't want to leave you with the impression that I didn't think our Soldiers fought well, because they did.

[01:07:48.74] And as I alluded to earlier, Joe, I resent the fact-- and I don't think there's anything we can do about it-- that we had a war, when I got back there in '70, that the have-nots were fighting. The kids I talked about, the white kids from the middle class families in the Midwest and the South.

[01:08:07.50] JOE GALLOWAY: Farmers, Southerners.

[01:08:09.49] LYMAN WHITE: Father had been in a war, and the black kids from the inner city that had no way of avoiding the draft or anything.

[01:08:16.03] JOE GALLOWAY: McNamara's 100,000.

[01:08:18.07] LYMAN WHITE: Exactly. We needed-- I always said, if we go back to war, we need everybody to be involved. And of course, what are we doing now? We've got 1% of our society actually serves. And so when people come up and say thank you for your service, I'm appreciative of that. But I wonder if they really know what they're talking about, what that service is that they're thanking me for.

[01:08:42.55] And the chances are, no, they don't. And so that's not applicable to just Vietnam. That's the way it is today in our country.

[01:08:53.86] JOE GALLOWAY: Colonel, thank you for coming in, sharing your stories.

[01:08:56.83] LYMAN WHITE: Well, my pleasure. I hope I added something to the narrative.

[01:08:59.62] JOE GALLOWAY: Oh, you did.