

**The Soldier's Side: Vietnam from the  
Perspective of a Journalist Who  
Fought Alongside**

An Interview with Joseph Galloway

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## **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this oral history is to understand what it was like to be a soldier in the Vietnam War, through an interview with Joseph Galloway. Joseph Galloway was the only reporter in the Ia Drang Valley, which was the first major battle where American lives were lost. He was a non-combatant, but he was forced to pick up a weapon and fight to protect himself and the American soldiers by his side. The Vietnam War is told through two different perspectives, that of bureaucrats and politicians, and that of ordinary soldiers. Through this interview, Joseph Galloway tells what it was like to be a soldier in Vietnam, and then to come home from Vietnam.

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## **Biography of Joseph Galloway**

Joseph Galloway was born in Bryant, Texas on November 13, 1941, two weeks before Pearl Harbor. His extended family was very large and a total of 10 of his uncles had enlisted to fight in World War II. His family didn't have a lot of money and he and his mother and siblings would live with different family members until they had outstayed their welcome.

There has always been a journalistic mind in Joseph Galloway. As a kid, he started a small newspaper in the neighborhood and would sell it to the neighbors, using a small toy printing press. He officially became a journalist at the age of 17. He worked in various cities, including Houston, Kansas City, Topeka, and Tokyo. He had always told himself that if there were a war in his generation, he was going to cover it, and he did.

He started covering the War in Vietnam in 1965, where he first covered the marines and then was sent to the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry, commanded by Col. Hal Moore. The first battalion was put under harm's way in the Ia Drang Valley, where they lost over 80 soldiers. Joseph Galloway was the only reporter in the battle and, at times, the American lines were so overrun that he had to pick up a gun and perform the same duties as a soldier. Years after the battle, Joseph Galloway and Col. Hal Moore wrote a book together about the brave men who had fought in the battle, explaining what had actually happened. This book was turned into a major motion picture titled *We Were Soldiers*. Joe Galloway is still a journalist to this day and still covers major events; currently he has been stationed in Iraq, covering that war.

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## **Historical Contextualization**

### **The Vietnam War; the Causes and Affects of America's most Controversial War**

In the 1960's the testing of a new kind of weapon was in progress in the United States Military. This new warfare was based on the evolution of helicopters as modern cavalry, which could transport troops great distances in a short amount of time and could carry medical supplies, ammunition, and rations. As it exited the testing stage and became a reality, this helicopter unit was named the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. Ironically the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was the same cavalry unit that George Armstrong Custer led into battle at Little Big Horn, resulting in its massacre. The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry entered the Vietnam War in November 1965 where they fought the first major battle pitting American troops against the North Vietnamese. Like George Armstrong Custer, these troops were very close to being overrun and massacred themselves, when they came upon almost 3 battalions of North Vietnamese Soldiers, totalling 1,500 men compared to the cavalry's 600 ( Moore). The battle that resulted was known as Ia Drang. It added to the growing unpopularity of the War back home. The whole Vietnam War was the most controversial in American history because the general public felt it was not America's job to protect South Vietnam. This meant that each night's news brought the horrors of war in American homes. The public soon revolted. The Vietnam War spanned many years, numerous Presidents, and countless lives were lost.

The political roots of the Vietnam War were laid in WWII when the Japanese took control of many colonies in Asia and the South Pacific that European countries had

previously held, including Vietnam which had been ruled by the French in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, the Japanese and native Vietnamese lived and controlled a region of Southeast Asia called Vietnam. After World War II, the French were given back their former colonies. The French decided that they were going to rule the colonies again and gain resources, much like they did in past eras. The French then invaded with troops. There were many battles, and after a long span of years, the French were pushed out of the area.

The modern Vietnam conflict begins in 1945, when Ho Chi Minh declared independence from France. The French had colonized much of South East Asia, including Cambodia, Laos, and the three Vietnamese colonies, which had been named French Indochina. Independence for these colonies would not be easy, because the French wanted to maintain their control in French Indochina. “The French were determined to regain the empire they had ruled for more than half a century.” (Herring, 6) With the French determined to keep control of French Indochina, and the Vietnamese wanting independence, this led to conflict even before the American Vietnam War. The French-Indochina conflict is considered to span the years of 1945-1954.

The roots of this conflict are usually blamed on differences in foreign policy issues between the French and the Vietnamese. Herring states, “French colonial policy had always stressed assimilation, full French citizenship, rather than independence or dominion status, and France hedged on Vietminh’s demand for immediate self-government and eventual independence.” (Herring, 7) The French policy was flawed in that they tried to make everyone French, instead of granting some independence from France. Contrary to the French ideals, the Vietnamese people had a dream of retaining

their separate identity and eventually a unified country, separate from France. “For the Vietminh, unification of their country not only represented fulfillment of the centuries-old dream of Vietnamese nationalists but also was an economic necessity, since the south produced the food surplus necessary to sustain the overpopulated, industrial north,” explains Herring (Herring, 7). Because of these two completely different goals of assimilation and nationalism, the first Indochina War took place.

After WWII, the tension between the French and the Vietnamese centered around the idea of reconciliation. In 1945, the French expressed their opinion to, in essence, retake their colony in Southeast Asia. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States at the time, did not want the French to invade Vietnam for two major reasons. First, he feared that it could start a long and bloody war that would cost those on both sides many lives. Second, he was concerned that the area that the French were invading was economically important to the U.S.A and the world because of its oil and other major resources. If this area were to become imbalanced or disputed, it could hurt the whole world economically. For these reasons, Roosevelt was against sending troops or aiding the French in reclaiming their territory. Since this conflict could not be settled politically, France went to war with Vietnam to regain its control.

The Cold War transformed the Vietnam conflict from one of colonization to one of communism and America joined the fight, “By 1954, seeing the Indochina war as a struggle against global communism, the United States had spent 2.5 billion to finance the futile French military effort... (Karnow 137).” Since America had been allies with France, they decided to support them economically to inhibit the growth of Communism. America believed in the Domino Theory, which stated that, if Chinese communist leader

Mao Zedong and his forces captured any more land in Asia, then even more territory would fall, and then the whole continent would fall to Communist. (Karnow 169) U.S. leaders worried that this could lead to WWII, or at least to larger battles than those required to preserve French colonies in Asia. The Americans started spending more money on Vietnam and finally put troops in the year 1964.

Anyone who wants to understand Vietnam must understand two important political and military parties: the Vietminh and the Vietcong. The Vietminh were anticommunists who wanted to set up a democracy in Vietnam, while the Vietcong wanted to install communism. The Vietminh were located in the south, while the Vietcong were in the North. This conflict between North and South forced the United States a political reason to enter Vietnam. When the United States entered the war, they claimed to protect the Vietminh from the Vietcong. Under President Johnson, the U.S. became more involved in Vietnam:

South Vietnam's survival appeared more in doubt than ever in early 1965, however, and over the next six months Johnson made his fateful decisions, authorizing a sustained offensive against North Vietnam and dispatching ground forces to stem the tide in the south. By July 1965, The United States was engaged in a major war on the Asian mainland. (Herring 121)

Edged on by France's pull out in the First Indochina war, the Americans were now involved in a conflict to stop communism from spreading. While Johnson's action was in 1965, nearly a decade after the pull out of the French in 1954, the early years of the war consisted primarily of defensive movements by the United States.

There were not enough troops to pledge full support to a campaign at first, and. All of the President's who had dealt with this conflict were wary of sending troops abroad, "Despite his (President Johnson) concern for Vietnam, the President was not prepared to employ American military power on a large scale in early 1964. Like Kennedy and Eisenhower before him, he had no enthusiasm for a massive engagement of American forces on the Asia mainland," (Herring 130). These three Presidents were cautious, and concerned about public opinion, and reluctant to commit fully until they felt it to be absolutely necessary. That turning point occurred when the U.S. government became convinced that communism was overrunning the anti-communists in Vietnam.

At the brink of war in 1965, Johnson realized he needed to tell the American people why soldiers were being sent into Vietnam, and how he was going to handle the situation. In many Speeches, "President Johnson described his determination to safeguard the existence of South Vietnam. The address was noteworthy because in it Johnson offered incentives which he hoped would bring North Vietnam to the bargaining table. Negotiation became the theme of most of the President's speeches for the rest of his term in office." (Cohen, 108). It was obvious to many that Johnson did not want the war to continue, and he did not want to have to pledge American lives to the conflict. But negotiation was not an attractive option to the North Vietnamese, who kept on fighting their war.

The spark that ignited troop implementation was the Gulf of Tonkin. The U.S.S. Maddox had been stationed in the Gulf during much of 1964. During that time, the Vietminh and Vietcong were waging sea battles in the Gulf. On the afternoon of August 2, the Maddox was stationed near the South Vietnamese fleet. In a battle, the North and

South came to a minor sea conflict. In the midst of this conflict, the Maddox sent a message home that it was under attack. Using the chaos and confusion of this conflict, President Johnson attempted to get the American people behind him. Walter Rostow, the head of the State Department's policy planning staff said, "We don't know what happened, but it had the desired result." (Karnow 376). The Maddox had not yet sent definite confirmation that it had been attacked, just a radar confirmation that it was possible that an attack had occurred. Johnson seized this opportunity as the reason for the first implementation of troops in the Vietnam War. He used this "attack" as a catalyst for his campaign in Vietnam. Once enough troops were put into the Vietnam area, the military campaign turned to offensive tactics.

In the fall of 1965, one of the first major land battles was fought. This battle was named the Ia Drang valley conflict. In this battle, troops were moved by helicopter into the valley where they came up against a whole battalion of North Vietnamese troops. They positioned themselves strategically throughout the valley until they were found out by a North Vietnamese scout, who relayed their position to waiting command. The North Vietnamese sent everything they had after the Americans, but the Americans held their ground against an overwhelming number of troops. They were almost overrun numerous times, and it was a miracle that the troops were able to survive against the North Vietnamese. Over 80 soldiers were killed, and this was one of the first battles where there were severe American casualties.

During the next four years the Americans went on numerous air and ground offences. An air campaign was started in 1965, with operation Rolling Thunder. These bombing campaigns continued for the rest of the war. In 1967, the Americans launched

operation Cedar Falls to destroy all North Vietnamese ground troops near Saigon. The real shock in the War came in 1968 when the North Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive. This was shocking because the North Vietnamese took back a large amount of territory that it had lost. The North Vietnamese launched a series of attacks in a matter of weeks to take back many cities and provinces. The Americans were caught off guard but later took back most of the territory that was seized. Between 1964 and 1968, numerous American lives were lost. Public “patience” with the war was all but exhausted.

The realization of the hopelessness of Vietnam occurred in the Johnson and Nixon eras. Johnson realized that the United States could not control this conflict alone, and he turned to other supporters to mount the War. The French, as well as other countries, encouraged Americans to get out of Vietnam. The North Vietnamese even told Johnson that his strategy was hindering negotiations between the two countries. Johnson encouraged other countries to send troops but he also encouraged the North Vietnamese to negotiate by halting bombing of the country numerous times. He started part of the negotiation policy that the next president, Richard Nixon extended. Nixon’s main goal was to decrease the troops from Vietnam and, eventually pull out fully from the Vietnam War. In 1969, there were 540,000 troops in Vietnam; by 1970, there were only 280,000 left (Karnow, 685). Nixon wanted American involvement in the War ended and wanted it fast.

President Nixon addressed the country on April 30, 1970, announcing that he was going to pull out troops from Southeast Asia. “I have concluded that the actions of the enemy in the last ten days clearly endanger the lives of Americans who are in Vietnam now and would constitute an unacceptable risk to those who will be there after our

withdrawal of 150,000 troops, (Cohen, 280)” It was more important to the government that all the United States troops be taken out then than keep on fighting and lose more lives in the conflict. Later in his speech, Nixon goes on to say that if North Vietnamese come after the troops exiting Vietnam, the United States would have to take more action. Nixon wanted to leave, but he did not want public humiliation.

This turning point had started with Henry Kissinger, who was Nixon’s corresponding diplomat in the issue. Kissinger was sent to North Vietnam to try to get peace talks underway to prevent the devastating loss of life that was occurring daily. When the North Vietnamese would break down in talks and walk out, President Nixon would order bombing of the North Vietnam capital of Hanoi. After the bombing, the North Vietnamese would often walk back into talks and attempt to make agreements. An actual cease fire agreement was agreed to on January 23, 1973, and signed on January 27<sup>th</sup> of that year. The Last American troops left Vietnam in March 29, 1973.

Throughout the course of the war, the media played an important role. For example, the day the U.S.S Maddox was attacked, the New York Times headline read: “Red PT Boats Fire at U.S. Destroyer on Vietnam Duty: Maddox and Four Aircraft Shoot Back After Assault 30 Miles Off Coast.” The headline portrays one important bias that, if addressed, might have helped the government when it began the North Vietnam initiative. The headline suggests that Americans had been attacked, and that this war was now a defense of American lives. Because the news portrayed the attack in this way, it caused the American people to believe that we were attacked first, while in reality the first conflict was caused by American leadership in Vietnam years earlier. This was not “propaganda” but nevertheless this article, as well as others that portrayed Americans as

victims, helped rally the population behind the mounting cause and the actions of government.

Besides the major newspapers, there were other papers and journals that covered American involvement in the Vietnam War. One of these journals was I.F. Stone's Weekly, an anti-war newspaper. Because of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, many antiwar movements sprang up, reinforced by specialized papers. In many of Stone's articles, he criticized government officials and military personnel leading the War. "Last week's 5-day battle for Hill 875 flooded the U.S. and world press with pictures of grimy, exhausted American wounded clambering down the slopes for aid, and with stories which showed that the enemy, despite all Westmoreland's optimistic reports, had been able to inflict on American troops – crack seasoned paratroopers, at that- the heaviest casualties of the war (Stone)." Stone criticized the preparedness of Americans for this War, and asserted that the American military was too optimistic in this endeavor. He also attacked American media's honesty in conveying information to the public. By using the gruesome pictures of war, he tried to rally people to stop this War from continuing.

As the War photographs streamed in, many people took a stand for or against the war, and voiced their opinions. Historian Howard Zinn criticized the Vietnam War, saying it was a disaster. He goes on to say in a 1998 article that our reasons for invading Vietnam were not justified. "None of the reasons given to explain what we did – stopping the spread of communism, defending an ally, fulfilling our 'treaty obligations' – could stand up under examination. And even if any element of that explanation had been true, would it have justified the mass slaughter of Asian peasants and the deaths of 58,000

Americans, to say nothing of all those left blind, maimed and paralyzed on both sides? (Zinn)” None of the reasons that our government stated justified the death, pain, and suffering that happened during this war, Zinn says. He believes that the loss of life was a great mistake and that the Vietnam War was a travesty of American history.

Thomas McCormick, argued that if Communism was allowed to spread through the whole region, then it would have posed economic and political peril for the United States. If communism had spread, “neighboring countries of Thailand and Burma could be expected to fall under Communist domination if Indochina were controlled by a communist-dominated government. The balance of Southeast Asia would then be in grave hazard.” (Sevy, 23) McCormick does not go so far as to say that the Vietnam War was justified, but he does say that there was sufficient evidence for the government to believe that communism could topple the governments of Southeast Asia. Because of the Cold War tendencies and the American Red Scare, the government feared communist power. If the communist were to take over Asia, it would be a substantial loss to America (Sevy, 23). This rationale drove public policy as much as the media’s horror shows drove public opinion.

The Vietnam War is an important part of American history, because it is one of the most controversial wars in which the United States took part. The American people started out supporting the War, and then turned to oppose it after the media showed the gruesome side of War. Politicians believed in the symbolic importance of Vietnam as a stand against communism, but abandoned this position when casualties mounted and public opinion turned hostile. It is important to understand the opposition to

the war as well as the reasons for it. If this information gets lost to history, then the United States could be doomed to repeat the pattern.

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Interview of Mr. Joseph Galloway

Interviewee/Narrator: Joseph Galloway

Interviewer: Andy Goldstein

Location: The Nation Press Building Bar on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the National press building

Date: 12-20-03

This Interview was reviewed and edited by Andy Goldstein

**Andy Goldstein:** This is Andy Goldstein interviewing Joe Galloway in the national press building in Washington D.C. The date is December 20<sup>th</sup> 2003.

**AG:** This is Andy Goldstein and I am here with Joe Galloway on the 13<sup>th</sup> floor of the national press building. I'd like to start with the question of where were you born?

**Joseph Galloway:** I was born in Bryant, Texas. The home of Texas A&M university, and I was born about two weeks before Pearl Harbor, November 13, 1941.

**AG:** What was your childhood like in Texas?

**JG:** Well, I grew up in the worst war in history. My father and six of his brothers were in service during world war two, and four of my mother's brothers. They had just married and didn't have any money, and so later when my mother died, I was going through papers, and I found the allotment check that she got ever month, and it was 17 dollars and 50 cents. My father's pay was 21 dollars so he only kept 3 dollars and half for himself per month for pocket money and sent the rest of it to us. That meant that we lived part of the

time with my mother's mother, and part of the time with my father's mother. They lived in little towns in central Texas that were about 25 miles apart. We would stay in one place until we wore out our welcome and then we would go to the other one, and all these other wives and kids, my cousins and aunts, were doing much the same thing, so I like to say as a child I grew up in houses full of frightened women, who looked out the window every day afraid to see a telegram boy coming on a bicycle.

**AG:** And where did you go to college?

**JG:** Actually I went to college for Six weeks.

**AG:** Really?

**JG:** Yeah, to a community college in Victoria, Texas. I was driven out by an 8 A.M. class in the German language. It was Taught by a portly lady with ill fitting denatures. She would come in the morning and say guenten tag, and spray the first three rows with spittle. I couldn't take it anymore and besides which it seemed to me to be boring and I had things to do. I decided I was going to join the army. I was only 17, so I had to take my mother to sign the papers, and she was not very willing at all but I browbeat her into it. She was driving me to the recruiting station in Victoria, when we passed the daily newspaper, the Advocate. During my time on campus I had been their stringer for college things, and my mother in this last gasp attempt to stop me said, "And what about your journalism?" and I said, "Good call," and mom stopped the car. She stopped the car,

slammed on the brakes, and walked in and I walked up to the editor and said “you wouldn’t happen to have a job for a reporter?” and he said “actually I would, and he hired me on the spot for 35 dollars and saved me from the army.”

**AG:** wow, so is that how your journalism career began?

**JG:** I think I was born one. I started a newspaper in my neighborhood. I lived in an oil camp with about 30 or 40 houses; it was out on the prairie on a ranch. It was 10 miles from the great metropolis from Refuro, Texas population about 3,000. I started a little newspaper and sold it to the neighbors and published it every week, and it was quite successful. Kids would get these toy printing presses and they would start up a competing newspaper, and they found it onerous work, so they would buy me out. But I had the money, and they paid me more, and they had to produce all these papers that people had paid in advance for, I made them subscribe. So they would last a week or two and I would pick it back up in a week or two, and start for free again. I read a lot for a kid. I cleaned out the school library, you can go there today to that school high school, and there are books on the shelf that I am the last guy who checked them out, 45 years ago. I learned to write by reading, I learned what good writing was. I took journalism and English classes, those were the two things I was good at, math and I did not get along. I worked on the school paper, won some awards, and the summer I graduated I helped start a weekly newspaper in my home town, and eventually it put the established weekly out of business and it is still there today. I was their unpaid reporter the only one they had, I

spent my summer doing that and then went to college. I think the bug had really hit me by then. So that's kind of how I got into it, but I think the bug was always there.

(Andy Goldstein checks the tape to make sure everything is going alright)

**JG:** You got to watch tape recorders. I once did a 2 hour interview with the premier of Pakistan, Zulfa Carli Buto, who was a lawyer and an intellectual and he talked a mile a minute. I had my tape recorder running and I was taking notes, and when the interview was over, and by the way my boss, the vice president of UPI was sitting there and was going to share the byline. When I walked out of there and tried the tape, it had not taped anything. I had to sit down and create this story out of my mind, and out of my mind which was what I really was, and I have never trusted a tape recorder since then.

**AG:** That's funny, I don't even trust this one. So once you went to get the job and you didn't go to the army, what was the first thing they sent you to do?

**JG:** It is interesting, they sent me my first assignment out of the billing, for a while they just had me on the desk, just writing the least important headlines, and sort of proofing the stories for punctuation, and maybe a weekend of that the boss needed someone to cover a story and there was no one but me, and he would say you, go out with the photographer, there is a historic meeting of the ladies garden club and the ladies flower club. We needed a short story, and these people have never gotten along and now they are getting together for a joint meeting. I go out, and I come back, and write my story, and hand it in, and they put it in the paper. When I walk in the next morning, the editor is

looking at me like I was dirt, and he said, “my telephone has been ringing off the hook all morning, with outraged ladies, you have identified in the story the president of the garden club as the president of the flower club, and vice versa.” My heart sank, I thought my first story for money and I screwed it up, my career is over. He made me write the correction and call both of these ladies and apologize profusely, for my grievous error, and I never forgot that. You learn more from your mistakes than your successes just as you learn more from your enemies than your friends. Boy for a first lesson that was a real killer.

**AG:** That’s a great story. How did you get put in or how did you get into the Vietnam War?

**JG:** I went from Victoria, Texas working on a 30,000 circulation newspaper did that for two years, and I heard there was a job opening in Houston for UPI, United Press International, and I went up and applied for it. I had really itchy feet. I knew that Victoria Texas was not where I wanted to spend my career. A couple of weeks later I got a call from the UPI boss in Dallas, and he said well, “We are hiring you to go to work in Kansas City.” I said, “What about Houston?” he said, “we have someone up north who is going to take that job.” I loaded my belongings in my 55 T-Bird convertible. All of them, my belongings just filled up the spare seat and the trunk, and drove to Kansas City Missouri and went to work for UPI. I worked there for 9 months, this was 1961. I went to work for the Victoria Advocate in November of 1959. In 1961 I went to work for UPI, in the exact bureau where Walter Cronkite started his career. I worked there for 9 months, and I was made the statehouse bureau chief in Topeka, Kansas. I was the youngest bureau

chief they had ever had. I had just turned 19, and so I went and covered the Statehouse, the Legislature, the Supreme Court, and the Attorney General. (Bells ring in the bar from a grandfather clock right next to desk) You might as well turn that thing off.

**AG:** I think its part of the scene. It sets up where we are nice.

**JG:** And they had wonderful murder cases in the flatlands of Kansas, I worked on the appeals of Richard Hickock and Perry Smith, who were the in cold blood murders. Killed a farm family in western Kansas. Truman Capote wrote his book which was turned into a movie. The name of it was *In Cold Blood*. I covered some of that and another big murder trail, a couple of GI's gone AWOL and killed 12 or 13 people, and made the mistake of killing an old railroad worker in Kansas. Their MO was they would stop and raise their hood out in the middle of nowhere like it was broken and wait for a good Samaritan to stop and kill him for whatever was in his pocket. They killed this old man for 16 dollars in change. Did that, then in 1963 I started reading stories form a place called Saigon. I had read the collective works of Ernie Pyle, about his generations War, World War 2. I said if my generation ever has a war I want to cover it, and I want to cover it like he did. I began to think there is going to be a war, in this place called Vietnam. And it's going to be an American war, and it's going to be my generation's war, and by God I'm going. I started writing a letter a week to my bosses in New York, begging, pleading, cajoling, taking it for granted that they were going to say yes, and going out to the military base and getting all the shots. God help me, I had to go out there 3 times I think you got 26 shots if you were in the military if you were to go to Vietnam in those years. I was sick

for days. My arm swelled up. I covered the 1964 Presidential election, interestingly covered Lyndon Johnson standing on the steps of the Kansas Statehouse, and among the things he said was, "I will never send American boys to do what Asian boys ought to do what they should be doing for themselves, defending their country." Well, Lyndon Johnson was a Texas politician, and I grew up in Texas and I knew about Texas politicians, they are liars. Stone cold liars, and I looked at that man and I knew he was lying. Right after that election, I went home to Texas, to take a vacation, and I was sitting at my momma's dinning room table and the phone rang and it was my boss in Dallas, and he said, "do you have a trench coat?" and I said "huh?" he said, "well you better go out and buy one you have been assigned to Tokyo." Incredible I had been transferred from Topeka, Kansas to Tokyo, Japan. That never happened before, so I was off and running. I went to Asia. Asia headquarters were Tokyo, and I worked on the desk there. Soon as I got there, I told the boss, I want to go to Saigon. He said, "Yeah right we have 2 guys down there, good guys, and I can't see anything happening down there that would need for more than 2 people down there. We went for years with only 1." Well March of 1965 the first battalion 9th Marines landed at Da Nang. The first American combat troops to land on the Asian mainland since the Korean War. And I was on my way two weeks later to cover the war.

**AG:** So what did you do once you got there?

**JG:** Well the first thing you had to do was go around to the press office, of the US military assistants command in Vietnam. We called it MACV. You filled out a form,

handed in your pictures, you signed a one page 5 or 6 rules; I promise not to reveal troop movements while underway, I promise not to reveal the number of American casualties while a battle is still underway, these kind of very simple rules. You then got a press card. A US government department of defense press card. With this you could go anywhere in the country, you could ride any military transport, air force planes, army jeeps, navy ships, it was your ticket to ride. There was no censorship, no prior censorship, no after the fact censorship. It was the most open war in the history of our country. Boy, I was in on the ground floor.

**AG:** After you got your press card, where were you led?

**JG:** I was in Saigon only about 2 days and then I was sent straight to Da Nang to cover the marines.

**AG:** What did you cover about the marines? And how was that experience? What did you do? And how did you live?

**JG:** I went on every combat operation that they had. You know eventually you would outfit yourself with military fatigues, boots, and packs, and everything else. Because you didn't want to look very different. If you look different the sniper might only have 1 bullet left, and so he will figure you're more important than everyone else and he will kill you, so you like to look very much like everybody else, and that's what I tried to do. We went on all kinds of operations, some by helicopter, but with the marines they didn't have

very many helicopters, so we would be trucked out to somewhere and get in the middle of a rice paddy, and start walking. We might walk for 12 hours. Hot, wet, there were only two seasons up there, hot and wet, and hot and dry. And you lost a lot of weight; you got malaria, things like that. Then you got your stories, and then you got your pictures. It was getting them out that was always the hard part.

**AG:** How were you transferred or when were you transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> platoon 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry?

**JG:** Well, I had been called back to Saigon, and I forget why but I went back to Saigon. Once a month they would send me a bag full of Vietnamese money and a bag worth of my personal mail and they would ship it up to Da Nang, where I lived in the Marine Press Center. I got called back, and I spent a few days in Saigon and I was on my way back, and the plane that you took stopped in 4 or 5 places, and it stopped in Pleiku in the central highlands. It was one of these old air force transport planes and they lowered the tail like this. I looked out and I saw them heaving the bodies of South Vietnamese soldiers off of a helicopter. They had a big pile of dead people. And I thought, man something is going on and I grabbed my pack and jumped off. Sure enough, there was a big fight going on. I went out, did some coverage shot pictures. I made the acquaintance of a brand new army major by the name of Norman Schwarzkopf, who was leading an advisor of a battalion of South Vietnamese paratroopers. I just had a feeling that things were really about to pop up there. I went up to Da Nang, but I told my boss I want to go back there, there is a lot of stuff starting to happen. That was August, and by the beginning of October I had gone

back there. Very different country then down on the coast, where the marines were fighting. This was up on mountain plateau. Some cooler especially at night, different kind of weather. I liked it up there. I worked out of the town of Pleiku, lived in the advisor compound there. I covered a pretty big fight. I managed to get in a Special Forces camp that was under siege by a regiment of North Vietnamese. Was there for several days and nights, the cavalry moved up, that's what I really came for because here was this whole division of army. Experimental division with 435 helicopters in their inventory. God the marines didn't have 40 helicopters in their inventory. So I thought, ill hook up with these cavalry guys, and I won't have to walk to work anymore, ill ride. About the 10<sup>th</sup> of November I had gone out with several cavalry units and covered a couple of battles. A new brigade came in, the 3<sup>rd</sup> brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> cavalry, which included the first battalion of the 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry. I went on an operation with them. A long hot walk in the sun. I stayed with them overnight. The coldest night of my life. We had forded a mountain stream right before dark, just sat there wet and shivering all night long. Then, the next morning I made the acquaintance of Col. Hal Moore, and his sergeant major Basil Plumbly. I had been cold all night so I boiled up a cup of water for coffee. It was just about to boil, and suddenly I look up and here is the colonel and here is the sergeant major and colonel looks down at my canteen cup of water and looks down on me and he said. "You know in my outfit son, everybody shaves, including the press." There went my cup of hot coffee. I had to shave with it. But he remembered me, so that would put me in very good stead two days later going into the Ia Drang Valley.

**AG:** Can you tell about the Ia Drang Valley, and how you were put in the situation to be there?

**JG:** Oh, I put myself in it. I knew they were going in there, and I tried to get on the helicopters, and they didn't have enough helicopters. I was told by the brigade commander that it was probably going to be another long hot walk in the sun, but if anything happens I will fly out there and you can ride with me. I said, "Okay sir." Well, things happened. A couple of hours later a bid damn fight, and the colonel came roaring out heading for his helicopter and I went with him. We flew out over this battlefield, hard up against a high mountain. The smoke already was rising about 2 or 3,000 feet into the air. We circled overhead, while the colonel talked to Lieutenant colonel Moore. He said, "I'm coming in." Moore said, "No, don't do it. The landing zone is hot, hot, hot. And you have all those antenna on the command helicopter. If you land there the will shoot your helicopter to pieces and you will be stuck here." While he was talking and we were circling. An air force A-1E sky raider fighter plane was shot out of the sky right below us. We saw it streak across there with a hundred yards of fire streaking behind it. It went into the jungle, and I watched it all the way. They were yelling on the radio, "Anybody sees a chute? Did the pilot get out?" and I just keyed the mike and said, "No parachute, he went in with it." That was Captain Paul. T. McClellan Junior out of Idaho I believe Idaho or Utah. His remains are still there in the jungle. So, obviously we weren't going to land, so the colonel dropped me at the artillery fire base about 5 miles away. I got there, in the next hour, here came 5 or 6 other reporters, including Peter Arnett, my nemesis of the associated press. We were all trying to get in there and we couldn't make it. We couldn't get a ride. I recognized Col. Moore's operations officer Capt. Greg Dillon. We

called him Matt, obviously. I said, "Matt I got to get in there." He said, "Well I'm going to go in there soon as its dark and take two helicopters full of ammunition and some water." I said, "I want a ride." He said, "I can't give you permission, it's got to be the old man Col. Moore." I said, "Get him on the radio." And he did. I stood there and listened to him and he said, "I'm coming in after dark and I'm bringing two hueys in full of ammo of water and oh by the way, that reporter Galloway wants to come along." The reply from Col. Moore was, "If he is crazy enough to want to come in here, and you have room, bring him." I would say a very good wise decision on his part, everybody needs a writer, a balladeer to singer of the songs of battle, and tell the stories. I was to be it. So then all I had to do was to hide from my colleagues until after dark. They all got helicopters and went back to Pleiku. Then I came out of hiding and got on the Helicopter with Capt. Dillon and flew into the pages of history.

**AG:** When you landed can you tell what happened?

**JG:** It was dead dark. We threw all the boxes of ammo and hand grenades and stuff off of the chopper. Along with the bags full of water they were plastic 5 gallon bags. We fell down in this tall grass, and lay there until the helicopters were gone. 20 seconds, 30 seconds at the most. Then it was quiet, and dark. A voice came out of the dark, "follow me, and I'll take you to the Colonel. Watch where you step there are a lot of bodies around here, and they are all American." It stood the hair up on the back of my neck, and it was Sergeant Major Plumbly. He took us to the Colonel. He gave me a little briefing. He said, "We have been pushed hard all afternoon and we have taken a lot of casualties,

but we are hanging on.” He welcomed me and then went about business. I sat down with my back against a little tree with my cameras besides me and my rifle in my lap. I thought to myself I was the luckiest reporter in the world. I had an exclusive front row seat at the biggest battle of the War. I was still thinking that at about 7:15 the next morning, when literally all hell broke loose. Two battalions of the enemy attacked one side of the perimeter defended by about a 100 of our guys. About 1000 of them against 100 of us. They started overrunning our platoons. They overran two of the platoons out of three. The company commander was wounded, lots of guys were killed. I was lying down on the ground now, flat. A lot of bullets flying through, and B40 rockets Things like that. It was all coming through about that high (motions to about knee level). So I’m flat wishing I could get flatter, and then I feel a thump in my ribs. I very carefully tilt my head to see what it is, and it was a combat boot on the foot of sergeant major Plumbly. He bent over the waist. Battle is a horrendous den. You can’t hear yourself think, explosions everywhere, bullets flying, hand grenades going off, people screaming, dust, and smoke. And in the middle of this den, the Sergeant Major leaned over at the waist, and shouted down at me, “Can’t take pictures lying there on the ground sonny.” And I thought, “He is right, I can’t.” Furthermore, I think we may all die here today, it was not lost on me this was the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry, that I was locked in a life or death battle with. That would be Colonel George Armstrong Custer’s Cavalry, so they had a history. I thought, we may die here today, and if I am going to die I would rather take mine standing up alongside a man like the Sergeant Major, so like a fool I got up and started doing my business, and sometimes I did my business and sometimes I did a soldiers business. I will never be able to explain to anyone, because there must have been a half a million bullets fired at me,

and not one of them touched, not a scratch. People were shot in the head standing beside me, I had their brains in my face. Nothing touched me. I thought I was immortal, and acted liked it, which is foolish as hell. God, or whoever runs things, must have had something in mind for me, because I was spared. In a place where 80 men died, 124 were wounded, some of them horribly.

**AG:** There is one scene in your book where you were taking pictures behind a tree, and a soldier comes up, scatters on the ground to get over to you, and says, “Joe, is that you?” Can you give more details about that?

**JG:** Sure, I was indeed standing actually kneeling on one knee behind a little scrub brush, and I was right on the edge of a clearing, which is not a good place to be. There was a lot of fighting going on. I was trying to figure out if I could get a picture of something good. Out of the corner of my eye I saw this guy jump up out of some mortar pits over there. Foxholes with a mortar in it. Each mortar had a crew had 3 guys. One of these guys jumps out of this mortar pit, and he zigzags across that corner of the clearing. It was Hollywood stuff, you could see bullets nipping around his feet, and dust flying. He ran more or less to me, and he skidded down under that bush, and all I could see was two big white eyes under the lip of his helmet. He said, “Joe Galloway, Joe Galloway don’t you know me man? This is Vince Cantu from Rofurio, Texas.” This was a kid who I went to school with for 12 years; we graduated together in the class of 1959, which was a total of 55 human beings. In the middle of the worst day of my life, and the biggest battle of the Vietnam War, a day I wasn’t sure I was going to make it, who turns up but Vince Cantu,

a guitar player in a band he called the Rocking Dominoes. He said, you got to get down and stay down man, its dangerous out here, they're killing people everywhere. He said I don't want anybody getting hurt from home. He told me if he came out of there alive in one week he would be leaving to go back to the states and discharged from the army. He was drafted and put into the army right after John Kennedy was assonated in Dallas. His term was up. I said, "Well, if you get out of here and go home to Roferio go and see my mom and dad." He did, I have a picture somewhere in my files of Vince Cantu with his little daughter on his knee, and he is wearing a black satin jacket, one of those if I die I go to heaven because I already served my time in hell Vietnam 1965. Vince made it, and went to see my mom and daddy, and he and I are still best friends.

**AG:** Can you describe after that what happened in the battle?

**JG:** The next major event came when a pair of F-100 Supersaber jets mistook the direction they were suppose to be attacking in, and they came like this, one behind the other, and the first one punched the button, and two cans of napalm, they really are about 12 feet long and yea big around. This things go end over end and I heard this, by then we are all sitting with our backs to this big termite hill, hard as rock, big as a Volkswagen, pretty good to keep you from getting shot as long as they are all shooting from the other side, its not to good if they are shooting from over there. I heard this shouting, it was Col. Moore, and he never shouted. He was shouting at Charlie Hastings, Air Force Lt. Charlie Hastings, who was the forward air controller, he was in charge of all the planes up there that were coming in and rescuing us. The old man was shouting, "Get that SOB of off us

Charlie! Call him off!" I looked up and you could see those two cans of napalm just coming directly at us. The other guy, this guy had just peeled off, and this guy was about to punch the button on his. If the first two don't hit us, the second two for sure are going to take out the command post, the aid station, our ammo supply. Right in the heart of our position, and the battle would have been lost. They would have killed everybody. At the last possible minute, this guy goes shhhhhh, and he didn't drop them. Then we only had to deal with the two, and they came just right over our heads. They burst on the ground no more than 20 yards from us. But the force of it was going away, and that was good for us, but there were three army engineer type who had been brought in to blow down trees, and cut trees, and do things like that. They had dug these little foxholes and they were sitting there in the grass and suddenly they were in the middle of a firestorm. I feel the heat on my face and I turn and I see them, and I see them dancing in the fire. They are screaming but you can't hear it because of the noise of the burning of the napalm. But you can see them, and the fire is slowly burning down, and they fall. As soon as the fire burned down to a reasonable level, I jumped up and ran toward them. Over here a medic named Tommy Burlile got up and ran. We were both converging on the same disaster. He was shot through the head by a sniper and killed. I went on into the fire, and I happened to pick up a young man, who was burned horribly. The meat was coming off his ankles, and he was charred. It was a terrible sight, and he was screaming. We carried him into the aid station. Then I went back out into the clearing because I knew where some of the water jugs were that we had thrown of the helicopter the night before. Out in the middle of the clearing, and I just said to hell with it, maybe I get killed, but the wounded need water. We were all dry mouth, but we were giving what water we had to the wounded. I

ran out into the tall grass, and I found two of these jugs of water and I carried them back. We sat there for maybe four hours, listening to this man and his two buddies scream. They had sucked the napalm fire into their lungs, they were horribly burned, and the doc was shooting morphine into them as fast as he could and there wasn't enough morphine in the world to kill that pain. The man I carried was named Jim Nakayama. He was an Asian American man from Rigby, Idaho. Years later when we started the research on the book, I discovered that his wife, he was married unusual for a drafted soldier at that time; his wife had given birth to a baby girl a few days before he died, and he didn't even know it. I also learned that his Sergeant had put him in for officer candidate school and when the sergeant got back to the base camp a letter was waiting on his desk ordering Jim Nakimiyama back to Fort Benning, Georgia to go through the school and become a Lieutenant, only that wasn't going to happen. Of all of the things I have seen in my life, I think that one has stayed with me longer than all of the others, it's my private nightmare.

**AG:** What was the next major event to happen in the valley?

**JG:** Well, the fighting was very steady, and there were times when it seemed like we were going to be overrun. At such times I would pick up my gun and use it instead of my camera. Probably the last big event was when it suddenly went quiet. After all this noise, and battle for so long, and on the third morning, it went quiet. Colonel Moore ordered all his men to fix bayonets on their rifles, and then he ordered them to push out from their present positions at least 300 yards. We killed the last 40 or so that were snipers that were tied up in the trees, and guys hidden behind anthills, and termite hills, and we killed all

those guys, and they were the rear guard. When they were gone it was quiet. Except for all the artillery coming. When we got out 300 yards Col. Moore ordered every man to drop to his hands and knees and crawl back through that tall grass, searching for the two men who were missing, and we found them and brought them home. I always believed that that should have been the real ending to the movie, because it was to me, first of all it was the truth, and second of all it was more dramatic than that bogus Hollywood charge at the end there. Set my teeth on edge. The Colonel would have never done that.

**AG:** I was going to ask about that, because reading your book and watching the movie that was a major discrepancy between the two.

**JG:** Indeed it was.

**AG:** That never happened?

**JG:** The other major discrepancy between the book and the movie, and reality and the movie, is that you see the women back home. Guess what, Sergeant's wives, and Colonel's Wives live next door to each other in these lovely two story houses. Lieutenant's wives didn't work that way. In point of fact, 30 days after their husbands left for Vietnam, all of the women and children were ordered to vacate their houses on post and go live somewhere else, and then the houses sat empty for months. Someone said, "Why would they do that?" No reason, just policy. No explanation for it. The other thing that Colonel Moore, Mrs. Moore and I fought very hard over this, when they first cast for

the movie everyone in it was white. The general says, hey you know, 25% of my soldiers were black, and we had some Indians and Native Americans. You got all these white people. The producer hums and haws, and they finally get one black wife, Willie Godbolt, 2 other black guys, and a Mexican or two, and that's it. When the telegrams came they came to those large two story houses on Fort Benning in officers row, and the truth is that most of those telegrams went to grieving black widows and Hispanic widows, and white widows living in trailer houses, in Columbus Georgia, cause that's all the housing that they could afford. These are the things off the top of my head that are wrong, in the movie. Yet, I would tell you that the movie is 85% reality based on the book and 15% Hollywood exaggeration. That my friend is the reverse of normal of those guys. So we have to be pleased, and we are. Mr. Randal Wallace, the writer director on this thing, he loved the story. He loved our book, and that's the story he wanted to make, and pretty much did. Though he got overwhelmed from time to time with a little Hollywood. But for the most part, we worked with him for 8 years on that project 4 years on the screenplay alone. There were many times the General and I were sure that it was never going to happen. But, Randal Wallace always believed that it was going to happen, and it did.

**AG:** One of the major parts of the book and the movie is Lt. Herrick's lost platoon, could you briefly explain that?

**JG:** This was a bravo company, captain John Herrin's company. A company has 3 platoons in it. Each one of them has a machine gun, a gunner, an assistant gunner, and

about 30 guys. It is a pretty basic unit for infantry combat. Lt. Herrick was a red headed guy from California, and he was a very gung ho individual. He liked to say from time to time, that he intended and hoped to earn a medal of honor however it might be. Sergeant Major Plumbly didn't like him. He thought he was going to get a lot of boys killed. When the battle was just beginning, when the enemy first attacked Colonel Moore knew that he had to keep control of the clearing, so that the helicopters could land. If that enemy got on the clearing, the helicopters would stop coming and we would die. He said the best defense is a good offense, and he ordered them to attack up the hill. Into the teeth of the enemy attack, and push them back. Herrick was leading the way, and they were jogging up the hill. Herrick saw a couple of North Vietnamese scouts they took off running, he took up running after them, and the platoon took off running after him. His orders were to move up and hook up with the rest of the company so they had a line, instead of that he veered off and ran his platoon through the jungle 200 yards away by themselves, and that's when they ran into this firestorm of the enemy. Probably one of the first shots fired, mortally wounded Herrick. He was shot if I remember right through here and it passed through. (Points to the side of his stomach.) Doc Los the medic was trying desperately to save him by bandaging him, and he just died. The first sergeant took over the radio, and two minutes later he was shot and killed. There was a mortar observer sergeant who was closest to the radio and he said "I'll take charge." He said lets get out of here and he stood up and he was killed, at which point command devolved to a 21-year old buc sergeant named Ernie Savage, out of Birmingham Alabama. Colonel Moore had always believed in training your men so that they can command or take control so they can do a job that is two levels above their job. If you are a platoon Sergeant, you ought to be able to

command that platoon. If you are a company sergeant you ought to be able to command the company if necessary. It happened in the Ia Drang. So, Savage took control of them, I think 9 guys were dead and 12 were wounded out of 30, so you do the math. About 8 or 9 guys were left in 1 piece. Doc Los was crawling around plugging the wounds. He ran out of all his bandages and started using toilet paper to plug all the holes. Savage collected up the weapons and the ammunition of the dead and distributed it to everyone, and commanded. He got the radio and called artillery down. Hey, that's good, it's not doctrine, but he knew how to do it. He saved their lives. The enemy attacked 3 or four times over 27-hours. Most of the times they drove them off. These guys now were so buried in the earth, not by digging holes (END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE: BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE). They had just become one with the earth, and sometimes the enemy would attack and just run right over top of them, and never see them. They would just shoot them in the back. As they went out the other side of this desperate little perimeter of top a knoll. It was just a slight rise really. They were ringed around that thing fighting for their lives, and 27 hours after the attack began, we rescued them. We couldn't even find them, the lead element, the scouts were yelling, and Savage raised a hand. That was the only way we knew where they were, they were that covered in dirt, leaves and grass. At that point Savage had the same 8 or 9 guys alive, he didn't lose a man. The 12 wounded were also still alive. Doc Los hadn't lost a single man. Although Doc himself had been shot 3 times. That's the story of Henry Herrick and the lost platoon. Absolutely a great feat of arms. Years later we went to North Vietnam, and we sat down with Colonel An, who by then like General Moore, was a general. Among the many questions we asked him, we asked him about the lost platoon. By sheer accident

they had landed right in the middle of a trail that would have led the enemy into our rear. The first day, Colonel Moore didn't have enough troops so the rear was open. The perimeter was facing the mountain, like a half circle. If they had come from the rear there would have been no one to stop them, only the Sergeant Major and me. The lost platoon, Herrick though he made a terrible mistake and cost a lot of guys there lives. In the end, he landed in just the right place, and stopped the enemy from killing us all.

**AG:** One of the most powerful scenes in the book is when the reporters are brought in by helicopter, and they come there to interview, and they say, "Joe what's going on?" You refused to talk to them, can you elaborate?

**JG:** Well, that's a little bit of Hollywood. There was such a flight of reporters in, but they weren't wearing Hawaiian shirts. We didn't do that. I was reluctant to talk to them, because I hadn't gotten my story out. I wasn't going to give them anything. I had earned every damn word of my story. But, I did talk to one or two guys who were close friends of mine. One of them was a legendary war correspondent named Charlie Black, who worked for the Columbus Georgia Legerend Inquirer. He was an old WW2 marine. He was crusty, bearded, didn't shave often. He quoted me in one of his columns, and he talked about how I told them that these were the finest soldiers that I had ever scene, and they had fought like tigers and they died bravely. And I said, "Look, look at that sight." Over in a shattered tree, there was a little American flag stuck into the shattered wood flying in the breeze, and I was crying. Not for the last time.

**AG:** The other most powerful scene, I believe, when reading the book, is when you talk with Moore at the end, could you describe that?

**JG:** We were done, we were leaving, and I went to him. I said, "I don't know how to write this story." I was a wire service guy; you know the wires believed that the second coming of Christ is worth maybe a 1000 words. I knew this story couldn't be told in 1000 words or 1200 words or 10000 words. I said, "I don't know how to write this story." He said, "You've got to, you have to go tell America what my boys did. How they died for each other." He gave me that charge, and I guess here we are 38 years plus later, and I am still telling that story.

**AG:** How would you want the Ia Drang valley and Vietnam War taught in textbooks?

**JG:** It's taught so poorly and at such brevity. It is a controversial subject, and textbooks hate controversy. It was a time that divided America. Though these boys were sent to fight were mostly draftees, they didn't ask for this. While they were fighting the war, the American public turned against that war, and they turned against those boys that they had sent to fight it. The anti-war people met the planes in Oakland airport and I swear every Vietnam veteran thinks they were spit on. There can't have been that many hippies in the whole country to spit on 3 million men. But figuratively, they were disrespected, the press were full of stories of demented Vietnam vet holds up post office, and kills 3 people. Those stories were bogus, the guy wasn't a Vietnam vet at all. People thought, I don't want those guys working for me, they are trouble. They lost their war. I want them

to be remembered for what they were, and what they did. Ronald Regan once said the Vietnam War was a noble war, well he was wrong. The war was nothing like noble. The war was awful, but the soldiers were noble, they were mostly young boys, average age 19. They were right out of high school, and they were of a social class, the underclass. Because if your mom and dad had money, and they could get you into a college you didn't have to go to Vietnam. You were sage, you were home free. Your professors were all liberals and they would never give you a failing grade, because that meant you would be drafted, and they didn't want that on whatever conscience they had. So, you had a free ride. You didn't have to go to school, you didn't have to go to class, and you still got a C. There were no free rides for the boys who couldn't go to college. They had a one way ticket to ride to Vietnam, and a lot of them died. A lot of them died. 58,235 names on the wall here in Washington D.C. 350,000 wounded many of them terribly. They don't ask much. They kind of gave up on hoping that anyone in America would understand what they had done. There is a scene in the movie where they are getting ready to go and the Colonel is talking to them and he says, "We are going, the only thing we will have is each other, and in the end with a war of that nature that's who you fought for. You fought for the buddy on your left and the buddy on your right. You didn't care about politics, you weren't fighting for Lyndon Johnson, or apple pie, or mom. You fought for each other. They weren't baby killers, village burners, or all of the things that things that the movies, the books, and the papers say they all of them were. Very few of them in fact did anything like that. So, what do I want to be taught? I want the truth to be taught. I want the younger generation of Americans to know these young men like I know them, and see them through my eyes, that is all.

**AG:** You talked that the about the Vietnam memorial, do you believe that the memorial is a just tribute to the men who served in Vietnam?

**JG:** The Vietnam Veteran's memorial is the most moving piece of art that I have ever scene, and it is a wonderful tribute to the men whose named are carved on that black granite. It took me several years to get up the courage to go there. It took me awhile. I would sit up in the trees, and look down on it, and I couldn't go near it. Your Momma is standing down there in the cold.

**AG:** We still have some more time left, do you have anything else that you would like to say about the battle at X-ray?

**JG:** I think we covered it pretty good. None of us would have survived without the leadership that Lt. Colonel Hal Moore provided. He was a superb, instinctive battlefield commander. I've been to, I don't even know 6,8,10 wars or revolutions. He stands head and shoulders above all of them as a battlefield commander. He moved soldiers at the exact right place with just minutes to spare, and the enemy would attack. I meant to tell you about General An, and the lost platoon and got sidetracked. We asked him about the lost platoon, and he said "I ordered my commanders to wipe of that pocket of men, but it seems that their will to live was stronger then our will to kill them." Now I forget where I was, I don't know how you're going to hook that back to where it ought to be, but you will figure it out.

**AG:** Do you have anything else to say about general An? I know in a lot of different things I've read including research and your book that there have been a lot of different meetings that you and Colonel Moore have had with General An.

**JG:** We have had 2. We have had two sit down meetings, and then we went back to the Ia Drang valley with him, including a delegation of 4 of his Colonels, who had been Lieutenants at the time of the battle. We spent a lot of time with him on the bus.

Interestingly he and Colonel Moore, now General Moore, became good friends. Colonel Moore gave him a watch, and he gave Colonel Moore his pith helmet with a red star on it. The helmet hangs in Colonel Moore's office in his home in Auburn, Alabama. In 1998 we went back to Hanoi, and Colonel An had died 2 or 3 years before. We asked for permission to call on his widow and children, and we did. It was granted and we went to their home. He had a son and a daughter, his daughter interestingly was a major in the North Vietnamese army, an engineer. His son was a computer expert. His widow was there, and we sat in their living room, and the whole place had been turned into a shrine for Colonel An. There were glass cases like store cases that lined half the room. In them were his uniforms, his medals. He was a photographer, he took pictures, and those pictures were in there in albums. There were pictures of him, and at one end of the case there were two things. There was a copy of the book we had sent him, and there that watch that general Moore had given him. Above this was a big portrait of General An, and some Buddhist things. Where you could burn incense and place offerings of fruit, and we brought incense and fruit to put on that alter. And we felt good about it. We had tried very hard to kill each other, but in the end we came to realize that our hearts were the same. I have to go back downstairs.

**AG:** I really appreciate your time, I know you are a very busy man, and I appreciate you telling your story with me.

**JG:** Well I hope you have something there to work with.

**AG:** I think I have more than something, I have a lot to work with.

**JG:** It will take you about 8 hours to transcribe it all.

**AG:** Thank you again.

**JG:** Oh you bet.

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### **Interview Analysis**

President Ronald Reagan once said, “The Vietnam War was a noble war.” In response, journalist Joseph Galloway who witnessed the Vietnam War commented, “Well, he was wrong. The war was nothing like noble. The war was awful, but the soldiers were noble.” (Goldstein 23). The Vietnam War had two different stories. There is the political story read in politicians speeches and history books, and there is the soldier’s perspective. Politicians make decisions in the White House, but the decisions they make

are carried out by the soldiers who have to do their duty on the fields of foreign lands. There are many perspectives to any historical event. Children are taught one aspect of history through textbooks, while the news and media might portray a slightly different aspect. Oral History offers yet another aspect of an event, differing from the views of historians and media. It is a personal account of what happened. It makes history more personal than formal. For a student to actually comprehend an historical event or period, he or she must realize the vast range of historical perspectives. A soldier's perspective on the Vietnam War may be completely at odds with a politician's. A student must comprehend the biases of each account, try to find the plain facts, and then draw conclusions from these various sources. Conventional wisdom says Vietnam Vets were patriots. This interview tells that story. When soldiers were sent to Vietnam, they were put there with other soldiers and, in the heat of battle, they did not fight for America so much as they fought for the brothers on their left and right. This interview with Joe Galloway shows a soldier's perspective on the Vietnam War, and how the soldiers learned to fight for each other.

Joe Galloway started his life in a little town in Texas. He was about to enlist in the army when he changed his mind and became a journalist at age 17. His travels lead him to Vietnam where he reported on the War. He was the only reporter at the Ia Drang Valley Battle. This was one of the first battles where American troops suffered severe casualties. The American lines were almost overrun numerous times and Mr. Galloway was forced to lay down his camera and pick up a gun to fight alongside the soldiers.

There were many parts of the Battle that showed great heroism by all combatants, including the North Vietnamese. Years later, Joe Galloway and Col. Moore, the leader of

the American troops in the Battle, met with General An of the North Vietnamese forces. They all agreed that every soldier had fought with bravery and honor, even though the two sides were enemies. The soldiers were heroic in that both sides fought for their countries, and many gave their lives. One of the major points that Joe Galloway made concerned the heroism of the soldiers. They gave their lives for the men sitting in the foxhole next to them. They sacrificed so that others could live, and to protect the men around them.

Mr. Galloway recounted the Ia Drang Valley conflict. He explained how the soldiers had landed in Landing Zone X-ray, and how they had tried to push up the hill to protect the helicopter landing zone. The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion had been flown into the area by helicopter, a new technique that the army was trying. During the Battle, the helicopters would land and give ammo and water, and take on wounded. At the beginning of the Battle, a platoon was lost; they had held out for more than 24 hours trying to survive while the enemy was trying to find and kill them. At another point during the battle, napalm was dropped on American troops by accident, and the air coordinator stood back in horror at what he had done. Col. Moore yelled at him that he needed to keep going because the aircraft were the only thing keeping the North Vietnamese troops at bay.

Besides the personal account of the Battle, Mr. Galloway also talked about the political aspect of the War. The American troops had been sent to Vietnam to do their duty. While there, the American public changed their opinion of the War. The once brave men who had gone to war were now villains in the public's mind. The soldiers felt disrespected by all of America. When they came home, they weren't greeted as heroes;

they were spit on. They fought because they were told to do so. The soldiers didn't have a choice to be there, but because they were just following orders, the American public hated them, or so it seemed.

Before the soldiers went off to Vietnam, Colonel Moore gave a speech saying, "We are going, the only thing we will have is each other." Mr. Galloway commented, "With a war of that nature, that's who you fought for. You fought for the buddy on your left and the buddy on your right. You didn't care about politics, you weren't fighting for Lyndon Johnson, or apple pie, or mom. You fought for each other," (Goldstein 24). The Vietnam War was about soldiers doing their duty at a time when they were not wanted. They did not have anything to hang on to in a foreign land, all they had was each other and to make matters worse, they were not even wanted by the country that they belonged to.

There was great controversy over sending troops into Vietnam. Historian Howard Zinn has stated that there was no good reason for the United States to enter the Vietnam War. The politicians told the soldiers to go, but they didn't have any good reasons for them to give their lives. (Zinn) The war was rationalized by the Domino Theory. Politicians feared that, if Vietnam fell to communism, then the rest of East Asia would fall as well. That is the reason why many argue that the Vietnam War happened, to stop the spread of communism.

No matter if it was a just cause or not, soldiers were still sent over to Vietnam, and Mr. Galloway saw them fight bravely and die without questioning the decisions that others made. They were brave men, but they were not remembered as that. "The anti-war people met the planes in Oakland Airport and I swear every Vietnam veteran thinks they

were spit on. There can't have been that many hippies in the whole country to spit on 3 million men." (Goldstein 23). The public took out its frustration on the soldiers as well as on the politicians. Even though the politicians may have been wrong about going to war, and extending it over so many years and lives, the blame was not placed on them. Blame was placed on the soldiers who went to war because they were the most visible symbols of the war. Because we went to war and were wrong, the soldiers were blamed for it, and not the faceless bureaucrats who actually made the decisions.

There are two stories of Vietnam. One is a story of colonial mistakes and miscalculations as told by politicians. This Vietnam story is about errors of judgment, but no apology is required. The other Vietnam story is that of the soldiers who fought the War. This story is about blood and bravery and brotherhood. You only get this story from the people who served. That is why oral history is so important, as a correction to the official story. According to this second story, if not an apology, then at least a thank you is owed to the three million who fought our war, even if the goal was not grand or achievable. They should at least win our respect. Viewed through the eyes of Joe Galloway, Vietnam Vets are heroes, even if Vietnam may not have been a justifiable war.

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