

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Captain Nathan Reed

COLLECTION: 4700.0979

IDENTIFICATION: Vietnam veteran

INTERVIEWER: William Hardy Patrick III

SERIES: Americans in Vietnam

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/29/75

FOCUS DATES: Apr. 17, 1961-present; Jan. 1966-July 1967; Mar. 1969-Feb. 1970

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1428, Side A

Entered Army in 1961; boyhood ambition to fly; enlisted with goal of attending flight school; military service in his family; from Centerville, Mississippi; enlisted so he could select training field, rather than be drafted; basic training at Fort Hood, Texas; assigned to 2nd armor division; you can make of the army what you want to make of it; basic infantry training; aircraft maintenance training at Fort Rutger, Arkansas; trained on single engine observation airplanes; assigned to army garrison at Fort Leavenworth, KS, as aircraft mechanic; applied for flight training, was accepted at Fort Walter, Texas; met and married wife at Fort Leavenworth, couldn't take dependents to Fort Walter; back to Fort Rutger for advanced flight training; flight training was a very disciplined program; only about half his class finished the 8 month program; promoted, became helicopter pilot after graduation; assigned to 25th infantry division, Hawaii; grew to love the military, began looking at career in military; warrant officer rank seemed like a dead end street, applied for direct commission to lieutenant in 1964, was refused; applied for officer candidate school; in 1965 began OCS at Fort Sill, OK; subjects learned in OCS; worked his way up from private to lieutenant in four years; January, 1966, left for first tour of Vietnam; reported to replacement company in Saigon, first unit was attack helicopter company at Saigon; moved to Ben Hoa two months later; operated out of a Vietnamese airport; not many attack helicopter units in Vietnam at this time, early in the build up; flew all day, returned at night; wife stayed in US, dependents weren't authorized; some dependents came to Vietnam at their own expense; limited contact with Vietnamese civilians; businessmen exploited the war; Vietnamese charged Americans much more for goods than Vietnamese paid; getting cigarettes on black market; goods were stolen off the docks; goods people could buy on black market; had to use Vietnamese currency; female Viet Cong assassin nicknamed "Honda Hannah" who operated from back of motorbike, killed US soldiers; soldiers stuck together at night, dangerous to go out alone; heard that VC had \$1,000 price on the heads of pilots; describes day in life of helicopter attack pilot; working with advisers, ground troops; got up before 5 AM, had mission briefing; usually arrived back home before 8 PM; made intelligence reports in the evening, documented shots they fired; had to report how much ordnance expended; debriefing, aircraft maintenance, in

evenings after missions; sometimes drank at night, but there was a self-imposed curfew for people flying the next day; unit had a lot of pride, a good reputation; all pilots are officers, crewmen were enlisted personnel; relations between enlisted men and officers, cooperated well; kept friction minimal in his unit; got shot down by VC on his 3rd day in Vietnam; never got shot down again, but helicopter was hit; Reed shot in 1966 while on mission to pick up crew of downed jet; extended his tour in Vietnam, stayed 18 months on his first tour; worked as aircraft maintenance officer for last six months; flew re-supply and other support missions; had tremendous management responsibilities; worked long hours fixing aircraft; missed attack flying; anyone who's not afraid on missions is either a psychopath or stupid; on second tour, led a reconnaissance platoon of 20 men; son was born while Reed on first tour, didn't see him until he was 8 months old.

Tape 1428, Side B

Orders to go to Fort Stuart, GA, became helicopter flight instructor; stayed at Fort Stuart for about a year; effectiveness of US military effort in Vietnam; newspaper painted bleak picture of Vietnam situation, Tet Offensive; majority of American civilians thought little about Vietnam unless a family member involved; public opinion shifted after Tet of 1968; sent back for second tour, didn't volunteer; went to Camp Evans, north of Hue, was in part of I Corps in 1969; second tour lasted one year; friendships formed in Vietnam; bought liquor from PX; is a combat arms officer as well as pilot, primary job is to lead combat troops; put in command of reconnaissance platoon of the air cavalry troop; challenge of switching from air to ground, quickly gained knowledge and experience; commanded ground platoon of 36 men and five helicopters; mostly worked on short missions, leave in morning, return at night; longest mission was 10 days in field; coordinating air and ground forces; primary job was to find enemy, tell everyone where they were; Reconnaissance is only lightly armed, seldom engages in battles; had to be saved by ground troops once; had little contact with indigenous people during second tour; had more contact during first tour, worked with Vietnamese soldiers; quality of Vietnamese units varied; quality of any country's units vary; has seen entire spectrum of efficiency and effectiveness; few Americans understood functioning of Oriental mind; cultural differences affected efficacy of American advisors; Vietnamese had different motivations, desires; Vietnamese political structure is totally different from US; Oriental countries place little value on human lives; concept of saving face; very limited contact with civilians; laundries as fronts for whorehouses; barber shops as fronts for whorehouses; prevalence of prostitution; price of prostitutes; fear of VD; returned to US in February, 1970; what US has learned from Vietnam.

TAPES: 1 (T1428)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 30 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

RESTRICTIONS: None