

VIETNAM COMBAT PHOTOGRAPHER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

COPH OHP_044



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Descriptive Summary

Title

Vietnam Combat Photographer Oral History Project [OHP 44]

Date(s)

2020

Creator

Erin Perkins

Extent

Nine (9) oral histories. Nine (9) narrators.

Collateral:

Photographs

Repository

Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History
California State University, Fullerton

Project Abstract

The purpose of this project was to uncover the historical significance of military combat photographers during the Vietnam War. These men put themselves in danger to document the war for tactical and training purposes yet most of their work remains unrecognized and their roles have been largely underrepresented in academia. This research was needed because veterans of the Vietnam War have been misrepresented in the eyes of the American public largely due to the fact that the war has historically been seen as a failure. By conducting thorough oral histories with narrators that are Vietnam veterans and have first-hand experience in this conflict, I hope I demonstrated that military combat photographers and correspondents took the same risks as their civilian counterparts but were limited by the censorship imposed on them by the military, and therefore not widely recognized for their sacrifices. – Erin Perkins

Narrators:

Dan Bisher

Rj Del Vecchio

Dale Dye

Dennis Fisher

Doug Gillert

David Hugel

Tom Judge

Herb "Larry" Shaw

Gene Smith

Vietnam Combat Photographer Oral History Project

OH # 6235

Narrator: DALE DYE
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: September 22, 2020
Location: Virtually in Long Beach, California
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format(s): Digital
Length: 01:00:53
Transcript: Final; 21 pp
Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history with Dale Dye, a Marine combat correspondent during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents during the Vietnam War. Specifically, this interview covers Mr. Dye's early life growing up in Missouri, his education at the Missouri Military Academy in Mexico, Missouri, his enlistment into the Marines and basic training, how he became a combat correspondent after originally being assigned as an infantry mortarman, missions he undertook in Vietnam and the types of stories he wrote, general comments on the war and his opinion of it, and personal experiences of being injured. Finally, he discusses his subsequent twenty-one year career with the US Marine Corps as a public affairs officer, and how the position of combat correspondent has evolved over time, and briefly discusses his consulting business in the movie and television industry after retiring from the military.

OH # 6236

Narrator: DAVID HUGEL
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: September 25, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in San Pedro, California and Edgewater, Maryland
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 01:35:41
Transcript: Final; 20 pp
Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history interview with David Hugel, a Marine combat photographer during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents and photographers during the Vietnam War. Specifically this interview covers Mr. Hugel's childhood in Baltimore, Maryland, joining the Marines and being one of the only new recruits selected to not only be trained as a photographer but sent to Vietnam, his photography training at Navy technical school, what the Marine operation looked like in the early stages of the war in Vietnam, his duties in the photo lab and his experience shooting aerial photographs in planes and helicopters and how he and pilots coordinated dropping off film and developing film and prints quickly, technicalities of operating a photo lab in a tropical climate, his opinion on the war itself, his life post-Marines as a newspaper cameraman/reporter and later an Assistant State's Attorney in Baltimore County, Maryland.

OH # 6237

Narrator: TOM JUDGE
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: September 25, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in Long Beach, California and Chicago, Illinois
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 00:55:14
Transcript: Final; 19 pp
Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history with Tom Judge, a Marine combat correspondent during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents during the Vietnam War. Specifically, this interview covers Mr. Judge's early life in Chicago and coming of age in the early 1960s, joining the Marine Corps and his duties in public affairs at Quantico, Virginia prior to his tour in Vietnam, his experiences in Vietnam accompanying combat units, the dangerous situations he faced and how they affected him, comments on the war and civilian press coverage of it, his time aboard the USS *Okinawa* and the differences between living on a Navy ship and Marine bases of Da Nang and Camp Carroll, and reflections on his life after the Marines with trade publications, mostly in the railroad industry.

OH # 6238

Narrator: DENNIS FISHER

Interviewer: Erin Perkins

Date: September 29, 2020

Location: Conducted virtually in San Pedro, California and Battle Ground,
Washington

Language: English

Project: VCP

Audio Format: Digital

Length: 02:12:14

Transcript: Final; 23 pp

Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history interview with Dennis Fisher, a Marine combat photographer during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents and photographers during the Vietnam War. Specifically this interview covers Mr. Fisher's childhood moving around the country and his family's military history, how he became interested in photography, the unusual way he became a military combat photographer after originally being assigned an infantry military operational specialty, the photography equipment he used and his method for taking pictures in the field, select operations he covered including Operation Zippo in which he was wounded, overall morale of Marines while in Vietnam, his thoughts about anti-war protesters and the civilian press, and his career as a science and technology photographer after the war, working in the aerospace industry, both military and civilian, including photographing rocket launches and the Red Bull Stratos project.

OH # 6239

Narrator: RJ DEL VECCHIO
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: October 2, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in San Pedro, California and Asheville, N. Carolina
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 01:20:45
Transcript: Final; 21 pp
Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history interview with RJ Del Vecchio, a Marine combat photographer during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents and photographers during the Vietnam War. Specifically this interview covers Mr. Del Vecchio's early life in Connecticut in the 1950s, memories of family members, political figures and academic pursuits that led him to want to join the Marines and fight in Vietnam, how his chemistry background gave him the opportunity to become a combat photographer, how he performed his job in the field, the major differences between still and motion picture camera operation and technical skills, his feelings about the biased representation of Vietnam veterans in the media and movies, life after leaving the Marines and his readjustment after Vietnam.

OH # 6240

Narrator: DAN BISHER
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: October 03, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in San Pedro, California and Wisconsin
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 01:18:49
Transcript: Final; 21 pp
Ephemera: Photographs (2)

Abstract:

An oral history interview with Dan Bisher, a Marine combat correspondent during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents and photographers during the Vietnam War. Specifically this interview covers Mr. Bisher's childhood in Wisconsin, how he ended up enlisting in the Marines, what it was like during the very early months of the Vietnam War, anecdotes of his time in Vietnam including when he accidentally stepped on General Westmoreland's boot and working with Paul Kelley who would eventually become the Commandant of the Marine Corps, his interaction with civilian journalists and how he learned from them, his overall opinion of the war and how his job, civilian journalists, and anti-war protests affected his moral and that of his fellow Marines, spending the rest of his enlistment after Vietnam at the Barstow supply station, how his career as a journalist started after leaving the Marines, his time as a student at Cerritos College and Cal State Fullerton in the 1970s and the atmosphere on both campuses regarding opinions of the war and Vietnam Veterans, and personal anecdotes of knowing Gary Gabelich, who set the ground speed record, and his wife Rae, who was a councilwoman in Long Beach.

OH # 6241

Narrator: GENE SMITH
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: November 3, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in San Pedro, California and Oscee, Florida
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 01:01:15
Transcript: Final; 18 pp
Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history interview with Gene Smith, a Marine combat correspondent during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents and photographers during the Vietnam War. Specifically this interview covers Mr. Smith's childhood as a self-proclaimed "Army brat" moving around the country and abroad until landing in the Orlando, Florida area at age fifteen, how he ended up joining the Marine Corps in March 1968, just after the Tet Offensive, and how he felt about serving his country in its time of need, his training to be a correspondent, his first impressions of Vietnam and the war, writing his first "war story" and his decision to focus on human interest and civic action rather than battles and enemy kills in his writing from that point on, how he approached writing and interviewing in the field, observations on how numbers of enemy killed were inflated as the information went up the chain of command and what words were off limits in their reporting, the contact he had with the civilian press and his opinion of how their reporting turned the public against the war and those fighting it, his life after the war as a golf professional in Florida, how he and his wife fell in love writing letters while he was in Vietnam.

OH # 6242

Narrator: DOUGLAS GILLERT
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: October 7, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in Long Beach and Ventura, California
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 01:17:17
Transcript: Final; 18 pp
Ephemera: Photograph

Abstract:

An oral history interview with Douglas Gillert, a Marine combat correspondent during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents during the Vietnam War. Specifically, this interview covers Mr. Gillert's childhood and growing up in Michigan. He discusses why and how he joined the Marines, his jobs at Camp Pendleton, his own anti-war leanings and why he volunteered for his tour in Vietnam, operations he covered, personal anecdotes and his interactions with civilian journalists and celebrities in Vietnam, and his experience living with PTSD. He also discusses his later nineteen-year career in the Air Force as a public information officer.

OH # 6243

Narrator: HERBERT 'LARRY' SHAW
Interviewer: Erin Perkins
Date: October 26, 2020
Location: Conducted virtually in San Pedro and Oceanside, California
Language: English
Project: VCP
Audio Format: Digital
Length: 01:00:53
Transcript: Final; 14 pp
Ephemera: None

Abstract:

An oral history interview with Herbert "Larry" Shaw, a Marine combat photographer during the Vietnam War. This interview was conducted for the Military Combat Photographers and Correspondents Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to better understand the experiences of combat correspondents and photographers during the Vietnam War. Specifically this interview covers the beginning of Mr. Shaw's career with the Marine Corps, joining before the Vietnam War started, his transfer to the photo lab and subsequent training with both still and motion picture cameras at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey photo school, details of filming in the field and rear operations in the photo lab, his experiences working in the field and with civilian journalists, his recollections of working with and the death of Corporal William T. Perkins, Jr., Marine combat photographer and Medal of Honor recipient, his life after returning from Vietnam, and his career as a photographer in the Marine Corps, where he retired after twenty-five years of service.