

Tom Marshall

Born July 1949

joined Army as a WO2

10-3 - 105

Served 2 months after graduation as
Asst. XO, Airfield Co Ft Rucker.

Had OH58A transition in July 1970

In Country Aug. 18 1970 Flow Hqtrs Co 1st Bde
Ankhe 4th Inf.

C Co. 158th Camp Evans 163rd Jan 21 1971
Instructor in OH58A Ft. Rucker til ETS April 1973

Graduated Long State Univ. 1973

Commercial property appraiser over
state

ROBIN HOODS WERE


173RD AVN CO

223RD AVN BN

TELEPHONE (LZ HOPE) WAS 6 MAR 71

Untitled attachment 00028

Deborah Kidwell

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Tom Marshall

From: Deborah Kidwell [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, November 20, 2013 10:15 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Lam Son
Attachments: Lam Son questionnaire.docx; Untitled attachment 00028.txt

Hi Mr. Marshall,

I'm so pleased to make your (virtual) acquaintance. I enjoyed your book a great deal. The title was very descriptive, and I learned quite a lot from the book. Thanks for agreeing to talk with me. Please let me know when it would be convenient to call.

Below is my standard introduction, so you know a little about me. I'm interested in learning about Lam Son and do research to tell the story of Lam Son, basically at the tactical level, with an eye towards the personal experience of those who fought. I've attached my standard interview list of questions for your consideration. Please let me know when it would be convenient to call. I have a day job as an Air Force historian, so that slows me down a little bit, but I'm committed to the project and will find the time.

As Bob Sander has graciously explained, I'm a historian very interested in working on a book about veterans and their experiences with the Lam Son operation as a theme or backdrop. In a nutshell, I'd like to write about Lam Son veterans--who they were, where they came from, what their training was like, what they experienced during Lam Son, and what happened to them--how did the experience shape their lives? I will leave the operational accounts to Bob and other historians, but I would like to write about the personal side of Lam Son from the Veterans' perspective. The scope of the project is fairly open at this time as I'm just beginning the research.

I earned a PhD from the University of Kansas in 2006 and worked as a (military history) professor at the Army Command and Staff school for five years before becoming an Air Force historian. I was assigned to Edwards AFB in California and the Historical Studies office at the Pentagon, before transferring to work in my current AF position at Quantico. Before that I was a Mom, ran an environmental lab, and was an extension agent, so history is more or less a second career for me. I still teach some courses online for American Public University, and currently live in the Washington DC area, although I grew up in Oklahoma and Kansas.

The first question I have for you is this: What websites can you suggest that will best familiarize me with the Veterans Organizations, unit histories, and the community of Veterans that may be willing to provide information?

I am grateful for your assistance with the project and look forward to talking with you soon. Please let me know when you will be available and I can give you a call to get your ideas on how to proceed or we can do an interview. I have done several interviews in conjunction with my "day job" and have found that it is best to begin with a list of questions, even if you don't get to them all and the interview takes a different turn. I've attached the current list of questions I plan to use for this project. Please take a look and let me know what you think.

Bob also mentioned that you maintained contact with several other crew members. If you wouldn't mind asking them if they would be willing to talk with me, I'd greatly appreciate you passing along their contact information. Any photos, letters, or other material that anyone would like to share with me, would be treated with the utmost care and returned after reading.

Sincerely,

Deb

Name: William Thomas Marshall, Jr. (Tom)

Unit assigned: August 19, 1970 to November 17, 1970, Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, An Khe, Central Highlands, South Vietnam.

November 19, 1970 to January 20, 1971, C Company, Assault Helicopter, 158th Aviation Btn., 101st Airborne Division (Air Mobile), Camp Evans, I Corps, South Vietnam.

January 21, 1971 to August 18, 1971, 163rd Aviation Company, (General Support), 101st Airborne Division, Camp Eagle, I Corps, Phu Bai, South Vietnam.

Aircraft: OH 58-A September 1, November 17, 1970,

UH-1H, November 19, 1970 to January 20, 1971.

OH- 6A, January 28 to August 17, 1971

Rank: Warrant Officer 1, April, 1970 until April 1971, promoted to Chief Warrant Officer, Grade 2. I ended time in service in April, 1973.

I had finished a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, at Troy State University, on Ft. Rucker. I used army tuition assistance to pay for it. I also attained a commercial multiengine land, instrument pilot rating, using VA benefits. My Army training also qualified me as an instrument rated helicopter pilot.

My business education and training after graduation are available on my web page at marshallappraisals.com. There is also a short promotional video.

Dates in Lam Son 719:

Flew as a UH1-H copilot on Special Operations Group support, Combat Control North from Quang Tri, December 4, 1970 to January 15, 1971, extracting Green Berets from areas along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, tri-border area in North Vietnam and Laos. These were in preparation for the invasion.

Flew as a UH-1H copilot on the opening days of the Dewey Canyon II. (One week) It was the reopening of road QL 9 to Khe Sanh. We flew the Heavy Lift Battalion Commander. The command and control mission was observing the progress of CH-47 and CH-54's in support of combat engineers, reconstructing the road and water crossings, creeks and rivers).

Transitioned into an OH-6A, in I believe 3 days, with Capt. Bill Gordy of Pottstown, PA, my instructor.

Then flew every other day on convoy escort between Dong Ha and Firebase Vandergrift. On other days flew in support of units along the A Shau Valley ridges and firebases west and south of Camp Eagle. We also flew couriers and VIP's.

Convoy Escort was the most fun. Unrestricted low level flying with a machine gunner in the back. We had a USAF Forward Air Controller in contact, above us at 3,500 feet. They were in O-2 aircraft. He could call in jet fighter bombers as needed.

The last three months, I was the pilot on-call for Lt. Col. Baird, G-3, 101st.

Background

Please tell me about your background and family—where did you grow up, where did you go to school/join the Army?

I was born in Martinsville, VA, some 60 miles south of Roanoke, on July 28, 1949. My Mom and Dad were the first generation to work off of the family farm in Horsepasture Community, southwest of Martinsville.

Two of my uncles were WWII Navy veterans. My Dad was an engine room mechanic in the Merchant Marines, 1945.

My Mom left the family home at 14 and was accepted into a residency Nursing Program where she lived and worked in the Martinsville hospital. She did some babysitting for the Doctors. She quickly learned the value of a college education from that experience. She indoctrinated me and my brother. We were going to get college degrees. We both did.

My Dad was hired away from the DuPont Nylon factory in a monopoly break up case involving DuPont and other would be nylon manufacturers in 1954. Chemstrand (later Monsanto) hired him as a foreman, where he worked until the 1980's and retired.

My Dad raised me and my younger brother Steve, fishing, hunting and boating. I was an avid SCUBA diver and spear fisherman. We spent 2 weeks in August at the family farm in Virginia, every year, until I left for college.

The Blue Angels Annual Air Show at Pensacola NAS was an annual event for us.

I attended public schools, graduating Pensacola High School in 1967. I played the flute in the band my 10th grade. In the spring, I tried out and made the football team. I played two years as a defensive middle guard.

Please tell me about your family, and a brief overview of your career (assignments and civilian positions).

I returned to my requested duty station, Fort Rucker, Alabama, where I flew as an OH-58A instructor pilot. I trained Army, Air Force and foreign students that were fixed wing rated, in the Department of Graduate Flight Training.

I finished my business degree and went into the real estate appraisal field after leaving the Army. In 1973. I had married my high school sweetheart while I was in Basic Training.

We have two sons, Andrew, born in 1976. He is in management at Microsoft in Redmond, WA. Patrick was born in 1978. He is a Presbyterian Minister at St. John's Presbyterian Church, in Devon, outside Philadelphia.

My wife and I divorced in 1987.

When/why did you decide to join the Army?

Before I went to college, my Mom and Dad insisted I become a Dentist. I entered FSU in Tallahassee in September, 1967. I made average grades in liberal arts. However, I was totally unprepared in Math and Sciences. I lasted 4 quarters.

My grade point average fell below a C Average. I was dismissed for academic reasons. That made me instantly eligible for the draft. I was determined not to return to my parents' house and go to a local junior college. I had seen a Warrant Officer Candidate recruiting poster in downtown Tallahassee.

Since I could become a pilot, I immediately wanted to join. I had already taken the Naval Aviation pre enlistment exam for Aviation Officer Candidates and easily passed it.

I enlisted in Pensacola. I was interviewed at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, AL. I was inducted and sent to Fort Polk, LA in April, 1969

What was your basic training experience like?

Training was no big deal. I was raised, shooting, camping and very athletic. However, my weight was a big deal. I lost from 198 pounds to 182. I passed my flight school medical exam. Weight would be a life long concern for me. My blood pressure was a high average at 138/88. 140/90 was the cut off for a pilot's medical exam. I have been on various blood pressure medications since 1989.

Shooting on the ranges was the most fun I had.

Kitchen patrol duty at 3 am and cleaning the latrines were the worst parts.

What was your first assignment?

Fort Wolters, TX, primary helicopter, TH55-A (I believe 75 hours) and basic ground school for flying and link trainer introduction to instrument flight.

Military training

Where did you conduct advanced pilot training?

At Fort Rucker, AL I flew instruments in the Bell H-13. (I believe 50 hours). I trained in the UH1- A, B and D models. I believe 75 hours. After initial entry in the UH-1H, I trained in the gunnery systems and tactics for the UH-1B and C. 25 Hours.

The OH58-A class after graduation, was in July, 1970. 25 Hours.

What characterized advanced training? (Curriculum, flight hours, daily schedule, etc.)

Instrument flying in the H-13 was very demanding. I think nearly everyone in the Warrant Office Candidate class got the flu, in January, 1970. Everyone kept flying because they didn't want to get "set back" to a following class or ejected from flight school.

In the UH-1 syllabus, we typically would arrive at the Company grounds at 6:30 or so and take a bus to the flight line. The instructor would have one student fly the syllabus lesson and the second student observing in a seat behind the center console. After a refueling break, the lesson would be repeated by the second student.

Afternoons were class room times. I was married and lived off post, with my wife, in a rented trailer in Enterprise, AL.

What lessons in your military training prepared you best for military operations?

Emergency procedures and Instrument flight. Virtually all emergency procedures were used by me or my aircraft commanders during the 12 months. We did heavy instrument flying at night in the 101st Airborne at Camp Evans. We used ground controlled radar approaches, in zero visibility at night, due to frequent fog and monsoon rain conditions.

What was your best/worst day of training?

Both are described in the Price Of Exit.

The Inverter failure check ride with a retired Major, near the end of my UH-1H training, was described in the book was the best day. I could have been set back or shipped to the Infantry if I hadn't passed it.

He told me "I'll tell you what I told my son (also a Warrant Officer Candidate, ahead of me), don't get yourself killed over there!"

The worst day was when a Warrant Officer chopped the throttle on me in a Huey at 3,500 feet. I screwed it up badly. That was the single most important lesson I learned from another young pilot.

How long had you been in Vietnam before Lam Son, or did you go directly to the operation from flight school?

I graduated flight school in mid April, 1970. I was cleared for flight in June 1970. I went in country on August 18, 1970 at Long Binh.

Lam Son 719 operations

When did you get orders to go to Vietnam?

When I applied to enlist for Warrant Officer Candidate School, I had to sign a statement that I knew in advance, that I would be serving in Vietnam. It was destined, by choosing to enlist in the Warrant Officer Candidate program.

When I passed flight school, I was put on a medical hold, for marginally high blood pressure.

I was assigned as the Assistant Executive officer of the Airfield Company at Fort Rucker. Captain David Anderson and Lt. Gary Moffat were my superiors. I did all the unwanted officer chores, Payroll Officer, barracks inspections and just about anything they needed an officer for, such as Fire Marshall, etc.

I worked out daily, running at the Officers Fitness facility and passed my flight physical in May. Cpt. Anderson convinced me to accept an OH58-A transition and become voluntary indefinite (a 20 year "lifer" or career officer).

When you arrived in Vietnam, what additional training did you receive before participating in operations?

In the 4th Infantry division, I spent 4 days reading classified materials on operations, procedures and risks. I got a couple of hours on the pistol range. I had a UH-1H check ride. That was it.

I then spent a week flying a UH-1H, as copilot for the Brigade Commander, then started flying the OH58-A when it arrived.

In the 101st, I had a UH-1H check ride and an Instrument check ride, then started flying.

Dewey Canyon II was ramping up as I left the Phoenix and went to the 163rd Avn. Co.

In the 163rd Avn. Co., I flew as copilot for about a week. Then I had a two or three day transition into the OH6-A and started flying missions immediately.

What experiences or observations characterized daily operations during the time you participated?

It varied dramatically from one unit to the next.

In the 4th Infantry Division we had troops in the field some 35 to 50 miles out. They were slowly being brought much closer in, for the Division stand-down in November, 1970. We flew courier, rotated officers, supplied light equipment, provided aerial searches for missing men, directed artillery fire, and served as command and control for troop moves.

In the Phoenix, C Co., 158th Avn. Btn., we supported the infantry anywhere north of Da Nang. We supported Special Forces (Green Berets) in the tri border area of Laos, North Vietnam and South Vietnam, as well as deep into Laos, southeast of Tchepone.

The 163rd I already covered.

What were some of the turning points of the operation?

In the 101st Airborne Division After Action Report, you can read the summary statistics of UH1-H aircraft taking hits and destroyed. It is depicted on a vertical bar graph chart. Those were the most difficult and important days.

The USAF CHECO Report gives the Air Force perspective of the operation.

As a pilot, the days men were lost, are generally remembered as the worst. Especially by those who served with them.

The initial assaults were not as costly as the later resupply and extraction efforts.

The assault would continue from February 8 until Tchepone was reached on March 6. The withdrawal began a couple of days later. But it would be staged in small moves, harassed by the enemy, and complicated with very poor visibility due to the smoke and dust of constant fires, B-52 strikes, as well as artillery on both sides.

Initially planned to be a 60 day operation, the plan was the first casualty. It quickly became obvious that it was more costly, against a larger, better equipped ground force, than estimated. The beginning of the end was the February 20 loss of Ranger North. It was followed by Hill 31. That was only 12 days after the start. Operations would end in Laos by March 26. There would be other, smaller assaults, running into April.

Doug Womack, a retired CW4, in Maryland, can tell you in detail, how an Air Force AC-130 Specter, prevented the enemy from taking Hill 31, until it left. An Air Force F-4 had been shot down and it left to assist the recovery effort. Then the NVA easily took the position.

Jim Fulbrook, a retired CW5 and PhD. in History, wrote a paper on Lam Son 719 for the Army Aviation history publication. He also lives in the Washington area and is close friend of Womack.

Mike Sloniker, a retired Lt. Col., and a friend of Bob Sander, is the VHPA Historian Emeritus. He knows more about the operation and individuals involved than anyone else. He lives in Oklahoma City.

How did operations change over time?

The loss of Army aircraft was so great, they started transferring additional units from other southern areas of South Vietnam to support the operation. Some came up for only one to two weeks of the eight week operation.

There were problems with South Vietnamese troops mobbing the Hueys to get out of Laos. That began on February 20 and got even worse in March.

After the 44 aircraft lost at Landing Zone Lolo, in one morning, the Army Generals and Colonels began to take the USAF recommendations for bombing, prior to assaulting a Landing Zone. Doug Womack was in the middle of that one.

Who do you remember the most from that operation and why?

The immensity of the operation was awe inspiring. I was at Khe Sanh one morning, with nearly 500 aircraft there.

We pretty much controlled the land inside South Vietnam. Only the tri border area northwest of Khe Sanh, was hotly contested. The 3/5 Air Cavalry took horrible losses there.

The number of aircraft being sling loaded back to Phu Bai, after having been shot down, was almost a non-stop daily occurrence.

I've read the 101st Operations Group log and came away with three observations: 1) the survivability of helicopter crashes; 2) the intensity of conflict and loss of aircraft; and 3) the rapidly changing intensity of conflict. Are these fair assessments and can you add other overall observations?

Army Aviation was a mature force, incredibly well organized by 1971. The technology had evolved to a level that worked for that era and environment.

The Warrant Officer rank for pilots was effective, even with approximately 60% draftees, who later volunteered for Warrant Officer Candidacy, serving in the rank.

What information did you receive regarding how the operation was being reported/perceived in the news media?

I am mailing you a documentary movie I am working on. I will also send you a copy of a National Archives film, **The Pentagon Evening News Summary**, for mid **March, 1971**. It was a lot more accurate than we wanted to believe.

What worried you the most?

Performing my job well and not get killed.

Being shot down in flames and becoming a "crispy critter", a burn victim, was a great concern to all.

Who were some of the most effective leaders you worked with, and what characteristics contributed to their effectiveness?

Captain David Anderson, my Company Commander at the Airfield Company, after I graduated flight school was a major positive influence in my life. He was the son of a Sergeant Major. He gave me excellent career advice.

My Platoon Leader at Camp Evans, Captain David Nelson, was an excellent leader, who had been a first tour warrant Officer. He was highly competent, a skilled pilot. He was calm, intensely focused, and honest about the risks.

Both were dead before I finished my tour of duty.

How did you assist/mentor other soldiers during operations?

There was frequent, frank discussion, among pilots, regarding auto-rotations, as well as discussion of personal experiences, surviving emergencies and enemy fire. Safety Meetings could be announced at the moment an accident or incident occurred. They were frequent and mandatory attendance was required.

What was your best/worst day during Lam Son?

The worst day was after flying Special Forces out of Laos, in late December, 1970. Those missions were apparently in preparation for LS 719. That night I learned that last Warrant Officer killed was the son of the retired Major, who gave me the Standards check ride for an inverter failure. We had just had an inverter that day. Coincidences can really mess with your mind.

The best day was when we found an enemy Regimental Command and Control position, with a hilltop fighting position. I was in contact with a USAF Forward Air Controller overhead. The jets he called in, really nailed them.

Family

How did your family stay in touch while you were in Vietnam?

My wife and I wrote nearly daily. It took 11 or 12 days to exchange thoughts on a topic, via mail.

When we were in Honolulu in March on R&R, I called my family once.

Did you keep a diary or other notes (letters)?

I still have the letters I wrote my wife. She saved them. They served as my guide to remembering events, while writing The Price Of Exit.

How did your family cope with your deployment and the stress of knowing you were in danger?

Not well. It was stressful. They were in church every Sunday, praying.

Homecoming and later assignments/career

My wife and I rented a beach cottage on Pensacola Beach for a week when I returned home. We had a week of family events. Cookouts, water skiing, fishing, boating.

When/how did you leave Vietnam?

I caught a C-130 at Phu Bai to Qui Nhon. I came home on American Airlines, via Seattle. I met my wife at New Orleans.

Can you describe the family support you experienced when you came home?

Pretty much normal. Their lives had not changed. My brother was in college at the University of West Florida and graduated in 1972.

What was your next assignment or civilian job?

I returned to my requested duty station, Fort Rucker, Alabama, where I flew as an OH-58A instructor pilot. I trained Army, Air Force and foreign students that were fixed wing rated, in the Department of Graduate Flight Training. I finished college at night

I finished my business degree and went into the real estate appraisal field after leaving the Army. In 1973. I had married my high school sweetheart while I was in Basic Training.

We have two sons, Andrew, born in 1976. He is in management at Microsoft in Redmond, WA. Patrick was born in 1978. He is a Presbyterian Minister at St. John's Presbyterian Church, in Devon, outside Philadelphia, PA.

How did you assess Lam Son 719 as an operation?

A Pyrrhic Victory.

It demonstrated the differences in strategy of a political, General William Westmoreland and a Warrior General, General Creighton Abrams. Gen. Abrams had to buy time and space for the draw-down of U.S. forces.

Westmoreland had said, I believe as early as 1967, that he needed to go to Tchepone. However, he also said "I don't have the ticket."

In warfare, you want to destroy the enemy's strengths, as effectively as possible. Gen. George Patton, said in WWII, "Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams is the only man in Europe, who is a better Tank Battalion Commander than me."

Lam Son 719 exposed the deficiencies of the South Vietnamese ally.

It exposed the unwillingness of Congress to continue supporting our ally.

What did you learn from your experience that impacted you the most personally and/or professionally?

I'd rather be Lucky than right. I've heard that from several combat veterans, including enlisted Infantry in RVN.

Prepare and Plan effectively. Airspeed, Altitude and Fuel are three critical flight components, you can't get, when you need them most.

I never lost my respect for the Army and US Military as American Institutions.

In 1990 at Arlington National Cemetery, I found a renewed appreciation of our service, in the context of a broader view of history.

In the 1991 Gulf War, it was apparent, lessons were learned from our experiences.

How have your feelings/assessments regarding Lam Son changed over time?

Personal feelings and emotions were resolved in 1990 and 1991. The Lam Son 719 After Action Report spurred me to write short stories for publication. The responses to those stories encouraged me to study history and read everything I could.

In 1995 Lt. Col. (ret.) Mike Sloniker encouraged me to write a book. He brought a suitcase of reading materials, small unit histories and books to Orlando. He encouraged me to read Lt. Gen. Phillip Davidson's book, *Vietnam at War*. Gen. Davidson's book helped me put the historical puzzle pieces together. Psychologically, I am an INTP Myers Briggs Personality Type. A problem solver. Mike was my military editor while I wrote the book. It would have never happened, without his assistance.

Lam Son 719 was not discussed much publicly, due to the losses and sensitivity of the conclusions regarding successes.

It probably had to be repressed, to allow the evolution of Army Aviation as a combat arm.

The Vietnam Veterans I know, take great pride in their service experiences. They know they participated in American History. They are Patriots who served during a very difficult era, of our Nation's History.

Army Aviation's accomplishments since then, could not have been imagined or dreamed of, in 1971.