UNITED STATES ARMY DIVISION

Vietnam Veterans Oral History and Folklore Project

Welcome,

I joined the Vietnam Veteran Oral History and Folklore Project in 1992 as the Army representative to assist Lydia Fish in locating and archiving the many songs composed, performed, and recorded by army personnel in Vietnam. The mission of the project has already been explained on the page "About the project" so I won't repeat it here.

It is amazing how few people are aware this music exists. For those who were there, and heard it first-hand, these songs occupy a special place in their memories of the war. For me, the music brings back many fond memories because I was one of the guitar-playing singers. Chinch Wollerton, Scat McNatt, Jack Westlake, and I were introduced by the war and our occupation as helicopter pilots. Our interest in music resulted in the formation of a quartet we called "The High Priced Help." We were all majors at the time.

I have been collecting these songs for over fifteen years, starting with those I brought back from two Vietnam tours, the first with the 174th Assault Helicopter Company and 14th Combat Aviation Battalion at Lane Army Heliport, located 12 miles west of Qui Nhon at Phu Tai. That was in 1966 and 1967. I went back again in 1970 to command the 341st Aviation Detachment (Divisional) co-located with the 25th Infantry Division at Cu Chi and later I served with Headquarters, 165th Combat Aviation Group at Long Binh as the adjutant.

In 1997, Lydia and I gave presentations at the Popular Culture Association Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Mine was titled "Songs of Army Aviators in the Vietnam War." It provides a brief history of Army Aviation leading up to the conflict in Vietnam. It also explains how and why service members entertained themselves with music; a tradition that has its roots in the earliest known conflicts between men on the battlefield.

Marty Heuer in Vietnam, 1967

"SONGS OF ARMY AVIATORS IN THE VIETNAM WAR"

Presented at the Popular Culture Association Conference at
San Antonio, TX on 29 March 1997
LTC Martin F. Heuer, CE, USA (Retired)

Army Aviation is a relatively new element of the United States Army in spite of the fact that the Army has had aircraft since the Wright Brothers. Army pilots flew observation aircraft in World War I and then became the Army Air Corps, flying all types of aircraft, from observation to fighters to B-29s in World War II. Throughout this forty-year period, the pilots and crew members developed a rich tradition of being an elite group among their Army brethren, set apart by their skills, daring and risk taking, and, eventually, even their uniforms. A pilot – whether in the seat of a bi-plane with his white scarf streaming behind him as he dropped bombs on the enemy by hand, or in the lead B-29 in a flight of fifty on a bomb run that could devastate a whole city – was on the top of the list of elite forces. Just ask any pilot.

While all the ground forces often sang and marched to songs written by civilians, the Army Air Corps wrote their own songs and then sang them over and over in their clubs after and between missions. Writing and singing songs in the Army Air Corps was not a product of their status as an elite unit. The songs came from the idle, lonely hours in a relatively safe, secure environment, well behind the lines where the horrors, dangers and fears from the last mission were being washed away, often with the aid of some alcoholic beverage, and the certainty of the next mission, which could be their last. I should hasten to inform you that not all pilots or crew members participated in these celebrations. There were only a handful of pilots who wrote songs or even played a musical instrument, but they were the ones that provided the music and entertainment while most just observed and applauded, even though they might have heard the songs countless times before. I also want to put song writing by aviation personnel in perspective by reminding you that there were a few cowboys, during the settling of the West, who lugged a guitar wherever they went, and entertained their fellow cowboys around the camp fire at night. Same environment – same result.

The songs that were created by the early pilots have endured because they relate aviation history in a special way. A song writer, like a poet, has only two to five minutes to tell a story, whether it be sad or humorous. These songs, written by the combatants as the events occurred, present a powerful, emotional story to those who participated and more often than not, became the mortar for the blocks of morale and esprit de corps of a unit, or even the whole Army. If you really want to know how the individual warrior felt about any war – or any part of it – read or sing their songs and you will probably experience every emotion they did, good and bad.

Then in 1947, after World War II, the Army Air Corps was re-designated the United States Air Force. They even got a new blue uniform. They also took the traditions of the elite Army force they'd once been, including the songs.

The Army, however, was not to be denied, even though the only airplanes it had left were a few very light observation, fabric covered aircraft, and some primitive, experimental auto-gyro's called helicopters, which looked like something constructed from a Tinker Toy box. The Army started over with only a few hundred pilots, while the Air Force, with its new jet fighters, continued their proud traditions, creating commands called TAC, MAC & SAC. (Tactical Air Command, Military Airlift Command and Strategic Air Command).

The Korean War, and the further development of the helicopter, gave Army pilots a new life and mission. Helicopters were used for evacuation of wounded but there were very few aviation units on which traditions could be built. Army pilots did some singing in Korea but most songs were stolen from the old Air Corps and many of these were of World War II vintage.

In the 1950s, the fledgling aviation element of the United States Army became known as Army Aviation and the motto "Above The Best" was adopted. Army Aviation continued to grow and reorganize throughout the late 50s and early 60s, forming aviation companies that had both light, fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. Pilots began wearing flight suits, jackets, and even flight helmets. The flight uniforms all came from Air Force depots, but we wore them with pride. You should know that Army aviators felt closer to their Air Force brothers than to those in the Army, where they were resented by ground officers and commanders alike because they wore flight clothing, made more pay, and were, generally, a more boisterous bunch – following of course – the traditions of the Air Force. But Vietnam would soon change all of this.

Starting in 1961, U.S. Army Aviation companies and Special Forces units were among the first to be sent to South Vietnam. The Army Aviation companies were usually billeted in an encampment like stateside, in larger city strongholds, for the security of the aircraft and personnel, but here they were surrounded by concertina wire, trip flares, mines, sand bagged bunkers with interlocking fields of fire for their machine guns, the enemy – and loneliness. They undoubtedly thought about how nice it would have been to have a USO (United Service Organizations) show with "round eyed girls" but understood that was a remote possibility, because few Americans back in the states even knew they were in Vietnam. The environment for the creation of songs, and providing entertainment had once again developed, so those aviators who could play an instrument, usually a guitar, procured one locally and began entertaining themselves and their hootch mates. It wasn't long before these entertainers composed songs of their own. Rewording some from previous wars and conflicts, they began to sing for the amusement of larger groups in the officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted men's clubs. Every unit had one of each of these clubs because the Vietnamese bars were generally off-limits, especially after sunset.

These early Army Aviation songs were set to well-known tunes of the period like *Davy Crockett*, *Five Hundred Miles*, *Take These Chains From My Heart*, and *Red River Valley* and *Old Shep* from an earlier time. Others were reworded Oscar Brand songs like his *Fighter Pilots Lament* now renamed *Shawnee Pilots Lament* in reference to the tandem rotor helicopter that looked like a grasshopper and often referred to as the "Flying Banana." Those who flew it called it other names, which, of course, they put in the song. Another remake of Brand's *Lament* was titled *South of the Mekong*. Most of these early Vietnam Army Aviation songs were about the environment in this new war. They wrote and sang about the aircraft that were clearly not suited for the mission; the general lack of enthusiasm for the war for which they did not yet even receive combat pay; the people, culture and soldiers of South Vietnam; their leaders and – whorehouses. These songs express a certain bitterness due to the fact that the Americans were in a camp surrounded by barbed wire, and outside, the Vietnamese could not be identified as friend or foe. As a result, many of the songs are X-rated and will rarely see the light of day, especially now in our politically-correct world. But it will be difficult to deny their existence and their message.

Sergeant Barry Sadler, a Special Forces soldier who you may remember, wrote his song *Ballad of the Green Berets* during this period. It became a popular song in the United States but in Vietnam, an unidentified Army aviator grabbed it like a hot grenade, changed the words and re-titled it *Green Flight Pay* or *Green Beret* and tossed it back to the Special Forces. Needless to say, there was an explosion of resentment from Special Forces when they heard the Army Aviation version which goes like this:

Silver wings upon my chest,
I fly my chopper above the best,
I can make more dough that way,
But I can't wear no Green Beret.

And ends with:

And when my little boy is old,
His silver wings all lined with gold,
He then will wear a Green Beret,
In the big parade on St. Patrick's Day.

I suppose you could say that Army Aviation resented the elite Special Forces, who were getting all the glory in Vietnam at the time and chose this opportunity to bring them down a notch or two. I personally know of an officer who prohibited the singing of this song in his club in Saigon. He was *not* an Army aviator.

The war escalated and Army Aviation grew rapidly. In late 1965, the 1st Cavalry Division left Fort. Benning, Georgia and sailed to Vietnam with hundreds of helicopters and thousands of soldiers, ready to test the new airmobile concept. At the same time, aviators and crew members were gathered from all over

the world and brought to Fort Benning to form helicopter companies. These aviation companies were not "ordinary" in any sense. They were now flying the Huey, the first jet powered helicopter, loved by all who flew them. The aviators were older and many had thousands of hours of flight time. There were 28 majors in the 174th Aviation Company (Airmobile) (Light), the unit to which I was assigned, when only one – the commanding officer – was supposed to be there. Nothing at the time was normal.

What would possess an Army aviator to take a guitar to combat? At best, he could expect to live in a small tent, and move frequently. Love of music and a desire to combat loneliness are the only reasons I could come up with – and I was one who took a hand-made Peruvian guitar with me. When we assembled in the late evening for departure from Fort Benning to Oakland, California I discovered that Jack Westlake, another aviator in the unit also had his guitar with him and a friendship began.

In the early years, Army Aviation units went to Vietnam by ship. The 174th and 175th boarded the USNS *UPSHUR* and sailed from Oakland in late February 1966. The voyage was typical – twenty-one days in cramped quarters with nothing to do. I was happy to have my guitar. Jack Westlake and I spent hours playing and singing and were joined by Scat McNatt, Jack's boss. With three-part harmony set to Peter, Paul and Mary songs and some calypso music then popular, the days passed more quickly. Our trio was asked to provide musical entertainment for the initiation ceremonies on crossing the International Dateline and we sang at breakfast in the ship's mess as well as for the enlisted men in their severely cramped quarters below deck. We called ourselves "The High Priced Help." Scat and I were majors and Jack was a captain.

Arriving at Qui Nhon, we disembarked by climbing down the side of the ship on rope ladders to the bobbing landing craft waiting below, just like in those World War II movies. I haven't stopped thinking about how abnormal this all was. Here I was, going into the combat zone with a camera slung around my neck, a .45 caliber pistol in a shoulder holster without a single round of ammunition – and a guitar.

The 48th Assault Helicopter Company's third platoon who called themselves "Guts & Guns" wrote a song they called *The 48th* about their formation at Fort. Benning and early days in Vietnam. The words expressed pride and esprit de corps in the accomplishments of the company even though the unit had picked up, lock, stock, and helicopter and moved six times.

In the early months of 1966, General George P. Seneff was selected to form the 1st Aviation Brigade in Saigon. It was probably the largest single brigade the Army has ever assembled.

Each month, all unit commanders of the brigade, from battalion level and above met with the brigade commander at various locations throughout the southern half of Vietnam.

Musical talents, as one of the notable attributes of Army Aviation personnel of all ranks, became apparent during the early stages of the brigade formation. The word got around about the singing and entertaining that had already begun in the aviation units in the field. To enhance morale, General Seneff and his staff decided to recognize the musicians at his commander's conferences by creating a song/ballad contest. At the end of the one day meeting, usually a Saturday, a song contest was held in the dining facility, or in the host units' officers club following the evening meal. The first contest was held at the Red Bull Inn, the 1st Aviation Brigade officers club, in Saigon in June 1966.

General Seneff encouraged the unit commanders to challenge the musically talented soldiers in their units to enter the monthly contest. There were many individuals and groups who were already providing entertainment in their units, so the contest became the catalyst for the creation of original songs and provided the forum for them to be heard and recorded.

The only rule of the contest was that the words to the song be original and if the music was original also, it was okay, but not absolutely necessary. Many of the contest songs were melodies you'd recognize immediately, but the words were changed to tell a story about an individual, a unit, an aircraft, a combat assault, the enemy, or just about anything in Vietnam. Some songs were a combination of all of these. The talents of these ordinary, everyday soldiers were truly amazing. The contests produced some great songs about Army Aviation in combat in Vietnam and many of them were new, not merely word changes to songs sung in previous wars, although some of those remained. And, because of the availability of reel to reel audio recorders, the contests were recorded live. We have found the tapes for six contests but are still searching for at least six more.

The participants were soloists, duos, trios, quartets, quintets, and sextets. The instruments used included guitars of many varieties, mandolins, banjos, violins, ukuleles, bongo, and snare drums, and in one case, a complete drum set. Many of these, usually the string instruments, were brought to Vietnam by their owners. The others were ordered from Thailand and Japan but some guitars were purchased in Vietnam, and those who used them complained constantly that they could not be tuned nor would they stay in tune.

The names of the groups were usually a take-off on the unit call sign. The 173rd call sign was Robin Hood, so the group called themselves The Merry Men. The 48th was Blue Star, and the singers were The Blue Stars. The 117th were The Beach Bums and the 170th were The Buccaneers. The 282nd trio was The Black Cats or Alley Cats and sometimes the Hep Cats. Our trio in the 174th grew to a quartet when Captain Chinch Wollerton joined the unit. Jack had been promoted to major so, with three majors and a captain we called ourselves Three Majors and a Minor. Chinch was promoted to major shortly thereafter and we reverted to our original name of The High Priced Help. The 179th Assault Support Helicopter Company quartet called themselves the Nads. Although you may not understand, every time they got on stage to sing, their audience could cheer them on by yelling, "Go Nads, Go Nads!" Other examples are a complete band, including the commanding officer of the 57th Aviation Company, and the 162nd AHC featuring a fine ukulele player backed up by bongo drums and electric bass guitar, who called themselves Pineapple Joe and his Lakanukies. Some of you may not understand that one either, which is just as well.

The songs covered a wide spectrum of daily events in the life of Army Aviation personnel, and the majority was in a humorous "tongue in cheek" vain. I have chosen some examples from the many which are representative of some of the subjects.

One titled *Aviation Medicine* was written by Warrant Officer One Leonard Eugene "Gene" Easely of the 282nd Assault Helicopter Company Black Cats who flew out of Da Nang in northern Vietnam. Gene's song, to the tune *I've Had It*, is a spoof about the trials and tribulations of a flight surgeon treating aviation personnel of all ranks for an unnamed social disease. The Doc treats a specialist fourth class, a lieutenant, a major, and finally a general, who of course was General Seneff, the brigade commander. The last verse goes like this:

Well, General Seneff, if you're willin',
Let's bomb this place with penicillin,
Or we'll get it, yeah, yeah, we'll get it.

And naturally, some did.

***Six Days In The Jungle* tells the story of a typical four-man helicopter crew being shot down and surviving for six days. Major Austin of the 222nd Combat Aviation Battalion wrote the song to the tune *Six Days On The Road*. The song provides the details of the crash and the crew's encounter with Viet Cong troops, all of this in surreal exaggerated terms. The last verse finds the crew still in the jungle with nothing but hope. This is how it ends:**

Well, the crew chief and the gunner, they have eaten up all of my Cs,
And the AC keeps a-mumblin' and a-crawling around on his knees.
I don't think things are going my way, I had a booking made on blue ball today.
Six days in the jungle and they gotta pick me up tonight.

The reference to blue ball was to the charter aircraft that was one of those that took the troops on Rest & Recreation (R&R) leaves of five-day duration in spots like Japan, Hong Kong, Kuala Lampeur, Australia, Thailand, the Philippines, and Hawaii.

The 174th's The High Priced Help wrote a song to the tune *The M.T.A.* about their battalion commander. His name was Samuel P. Kalagian and he was of Armenian descent with a dark swarthy look

which resulted in the nickname "Black Sam." The 14th Combat Aviation Battalion was given the call sign "Arab" in his honor. He had thousands of flight hours and had been a P-51 fighter pilot in World War II. The song, titled *Black Sam* is a story of Colonel Black Sam Kalagian as he led the yet-untested units of his battalion in their first combat assault under his command. The writers, of course, took great liberty with Black Sam's performance and the confusion that ensued, but this humorous song was mostly the truth about a new unit's introduction to combat. This song was introduced at the song contest held in Vung Tau on 24 September 1966 and was the winner.

THPH at the Officer's Club-Lane AHP

THPH at 14th CAB Organization Day

THPH at 17th CAG Organization Day-Nha Trang

THPH at Enlisted Men's Club-Lane AHP

(All photos, L to R: Marty, Chinch, Scat and Jack)

The 173rd's The Merry Men in their Kingston Trio style, sang a great version of *Green Beret* mentioned earlier. They also wrote a song about the young ladies of Saigon to the tune *New York Girls*, which they titled *Saigon Girls* but it was also known as *Chu Yen*. It is a story about an older army pilot who goes to Saigon for a three-day R&R and found out that Miss Chu Yen could do a lot of things but couldn't dance the polka. After having his pocket picked, Chu Yen gone, and waking with an aching head under a picture of Ho Chi Minh in Chu Yen's house, he decides that going to Saigon will test your morals and recommends the Red Cross recreation center where the "Doughnut Dollies" pass out cookies and Kool Aid and, of course, can dance the polka. The Merry Men introduced this song at the contest at Nha Trang on 13 August 1966 and won.

One song that was usually met with jeers and hisses as soon as the title was announced was written by Rick Kelly, a West Point captain from a family of West Pointers. He was one of the Nads, remember them, of the 179th and later the 180th Assault Support Helicopter Company. The title was simply *The Letter* and the tune was an original by Rick. The song takes the form of a letter from a pilot to his wife who has been unfaithful during the year they have been separated. The pilot interrupts his letter to go fly a final mission which turns out to be his last on earth, but just before he dies, he tells his friend he forgives his wife. His friend finishes his letter for him with the pilot's final words. This was another way the constant threat of the time honored "Dear John" letter was handled. A new perspective, so to speak. Rick also wrote a song titled *Song Contest* – all about a pilot who finally got to the contest but his song was so bad it finished last and quote – "He was forever banned from the song contest." Rick's song, however, was good enough to win the Soc Trang contest on 15 April 1967.

The UH-1 Huey was the subject of many songs and the one I selected to represent all of them was written by Captain Britt A. Knox of the 117th Assault Helicopter Company and introduced at the commander's conference song contest at Soc Trang on 15 April 1967. The title was *Old Zero Six Nine* and the tune was *The Strawberry Roan*. Captain Knox changed the original story of a cowboy and a horse to an over-confident Army aviator who believed he could fly an old Huey that was known to have broken many good pilots. Needless to say, the chopper got the best of him, threw him out, and, by itself, landed back on the pad from where the ill-fated flight began. This song, like most, had a message for all "hot rock" pilots.

The next song was one of a kind. It was written by then Captain Donald R. "Don" Kelsey and members of the 48th Assault Helicopter Company Blue Stars. I haven't yet figured out if the tune was original or not but the title was *An American Fighting Man*. The song was another message; a message of the courage each crew member knew they would be asked to muster should they be shot down and captured. All military personnel of the U.S. Armed Forces are bound by a code of conduct that spells out very clearly how each individual must conduct themselves once in the hands of the enemy. Personally, I am amazed this song was written as it is not the kind of subject easily adapted to music. The code of conduct begins with the words "I am an American fighting man." The song cannot be defined or described, you must hear it to derive the deep commitment the writers felt to the code and to their fellow soldiers. This is a couple of lines from what they wrote:

I'll not surrender of my own free will,
I will stay and fight until,
The last breath leaves my body cold still.

This song is a clear example of the pride in unit and country that existed among all the units in Vietnam in the 1966 to 1967 period. Everyone thought we were there to win. As time passed and the war ground on, that whole basic concept as they say, went to hell in a hand basket.

The pace of the war and the one-year limit on the tour length without a voluntary extension, which most people were loath to do, caused the Army to vastly increase the number of pilots to man the thousands

of helicopters now in Vietnam. New pilots arrived as individual replacements with only 100 hours of flight time, enough to make them dangerous, and they were dubbed "Peter Pilots." They were called that until they were qualified to become an aircraft commander. Ultimately, almost all of them became ACs as the rotation progressed. A song was written about a typical Peter Pilot by Captain Emmit Conrow of the 170th Assault Helicopter Company and was introduced at the song contest at Nha Trang on 13 August 1966. The tune is not yet identified, it may be original, and the title is *Peter Pilot.* The song starts out with Peter Pilot, fresh out of flight school all trim and neat who the ladies call pilot Pete, getting his orders for Vietnam. Much fun is made of Peter Pilot as he arrives in Vietnam and quickly screws up everything he's asked to do, including his first combat assault. The song is not a malicious attack on new pilots but sends the message that those without experience should heed the advice of more experienced pilots. The High Priced Help adopted this song and sang it nearly every time they performed.

Another great song was written by a, yet unidentified, pilot of A Company, of the 501st Combat Aviation Battalion later re-designated the 71st Assault Helicopter Company. Their call sign was Rattlers and were based at Bien Hoa and called the Snake Pit. This 14-verse song tells in a humorous way how a poorly planned and executed early evening company flight mission went awry. The company commander's aircraft had not been refueled. Can you imagine that? Forty miles northeast of the Snake Pit, his aircraft ran out of fuel and lands without damage in the darkness. A rather questionable fete but that is what they wrote. The unit's pilots and aircraft spent all night looking for their commander. The story continues with the commander stealing a Viet Cong bicycle and pedaling his way back to the Snake Pit. Certainly, there is some truth in this song but also some fiction. It was common to use a mistake or, more accurately, a dumb, stupid inexcusable error or omission as the subject for a song. Again, it sent a message and every member of the unit loved to hear it over and over, including the person who made the mistake. However, a mistake that resulted in someone's death was never, to my knowledge, put to music.

The last of these example songs is one that helped make The Merry Men of the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company famous. The origin of this song is in dispute. Some say it was written originally by Major John Tobias of A Company of the 501st. The Merry Men say they wrote at least some of it and we will eventually find the answer. The tune used was *Olcana.* The Merry Men performed this song virtually every time they got up to sing at Lai Khe, their home base, or anywhere else they performed. The song was titled *Army Aviation.* It is a rousing rendition and touches on all the missions Army Aviation performed in Vietnam. All pilots and crew members identified themselves with the song immediately, with those who knew the words usually singing along with The Merry Men. If you were an Army Aviation crew member in Vietnam, this was your song. It certainly was The Merry Men's, who always introduced it with these spoken words: "We, The Merry Men of the 173rd Assault Helicopter Company dedicate this song to all the aviators who have gone before us, and to those who will follow us into this conflict here in Vietnam." These are the words of the first verse.

Fly the jungle, fly the mountains,
Fly the whole of Vietnam.
Carry cargo, carry troopers,
Carry anything we can.

The song ended with a crescendo of the words – Army Aviation. It was a winner and a crowd-pleaser every time it was sung. Some even lobbied for the adoption of this song as the official song of Army Aviation but it was too specific, including too many references to the Vietnam War. For Army Aviation crew members who are veterans of this conflict, most remember this song.

There are well over 100 songs known positively to have been written and sung by Army Aviation pilots and crew members in Vietnam. Several more were written in other places, like Germany and the U.S. but were later sung in Vietnam. Kris Kristofferson, yes, *the* Kris Kristofferson you know as an actor, songwriter and singer, was an Army aviator who served in aviation units in the states and Germany, but never served in Vietnam, wrote two or three songs that were sung frequently.

The titles, the subjects, the emotions, the writers, and the singers of all these songs are as individual as a finger print. The songs written by the Air Force and other services are exactly the same. The person or persons who wrote the song are the only ones who really knew what the words meant. They knew what action, event or thought inspired the subject matter; the emotions they were trying to express. The listener, then and now, can only imagine what the writer or writers experienced and then put in words and song. It helps a great deal to have had similar experiences, with similar emotions but even that is not always enough.

The song contests were the major reason why so many songs were written and recorded by Army Aviation personnel, most of them by pilots. Some of the song writers have said they were ordered to write a song for the contest by their commanders, who knew they had the talent but needed some gentle prodding to get it done. There would have been casual song fests in the hootches, clubs, and fire bases, but most would never have been recorded, even on paper, although a few units did publish song books and disseminated them by use of a stencil and now outmoded mimeograph machines. Army Aviation should be forever grateful to General Seneff, who recognized the value of this organized morale enhancing entertainment and the efforts of those talented enough to accomplish the task. We should be thankful that Colonel John Marr, commanding officer of the 17th Combat Aviation Group, preserved his copies of the reel-to-reel tapes for six of the contests and another tape with songs from other contests. Without these, much of the information about the songs would have been lost forever.

The song contests ended with the last one in September of 1967 when General Seneff departed. The next brigade commander canceled all further contests and the creation of new or recorded songs by Army aviators and crew members declined dramatically. There may have been individuals and groups that continued to write and sing songs but no record of such activity has yet been found. There is another reason – the introduction of paid entertainers in the form of rock bands made up of Pilipino, Vietnamese, and other nationalities who now provided the much-needed diversion and entertainment.

None of the 2.6 million troops of all services who served in Vietnam went there to sing. Army flight crew members went to fly helicopters in combat, day and night, in good and bad weather. Of all the aviator singers who participated in the song contests, only Warrant Officer One Gene Easely of the 282nd died as a result of combat. He was shot in the neck while flying a gunship in northern South Vietnam two months before he was due to return to the states. When General Seneff heard the news, he issued an order that all contest participants should not be permitted to fly combat missions as they were too valuable to unit morale. Needless to say, it was an order issued out of frustration and sorrow, so it was never really implemented. As a participant and now a collector of the songs of Army Aviation in Vietnam, it is clear there was a need for the relaxation and therapy provided by the music. I must point out again, there were a few pilots and crew members who, for their own personal reasons, did not participate in sing-a-longs or other entertainment but the vast majority did. Many who couldn't carry a tune sang along anyway. Since returning from two tours in Vietnam I have spoken to hundreds of aviation personnel of all services. All of them recall the music with fond memories and are quick to add that without the singing and the good times, their tours would have seemed endless. Music can soothe the soul.

I salute all of the officers and enlisted men who gave so much of their own free time to create the songs way back then and who have contributed so much to the history and traditions of Army Aviation. It was an honor to have served with them. Thank you.

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Martin F. Heuer

NOW WE NEED <u>YOUR</u> HELP!

If you were one of those who participated in the singing, wrote songs while in Vietnam, or know someone who did, please contact me. Although this appears to be focused on Army Aviation, it definitely is not. We want to include and give credit and recognition to everyone. We are looking for song books; photos of singers, whether they were just sitting around in a tent or hootch, or in a more formal Vietnam

setting; tape recordings of songs or of individuals entertaining themselves; or anything else related to the songs of Vietnam. I can assure you we will handle these possessions with the tender loving care they deserve.

We can understand your reluctance to part with an original photo, song book, or tape. We would only need them for the time it takes to scan them, or in the case of a reel-to-reel audio tape, the time to transfer it to either digital tape or CD. After all these years, we have that down to a science, and we haven't lost a single item. All of it will be archived in the United States Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

I can be contacted a number of ways. My email address is martyheuer@aol.com. I am also a member of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association and the Florida chapter at www.VHPAF.org or you can mail to 10215 Thurston Groves Blvd., Seminole, FL 33778-3824.

Your assistance in compiling this part of the Vietnam history will be much appreciated. All we can do is make this appeal and hope you will go to your old footlockers, closets, attics, garages, storage facilities, or wherever you have the items listed above. We want everyone that participated to be included.

Thanks – and I hope to hear from you soon.

Marty Heuer

FYI: An earlier version of this presentation was published and available on the Vietnam Veterans Oral History and Folklore Project website at the link below. While there, you can view the efforts of the project.

http://www.buffalostate.edu/~fishlm/folksongs/marty.htm