

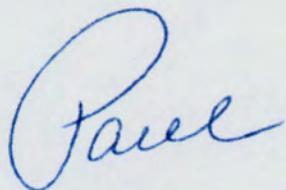
# DANE HANSEN PRODUCTIONS

5/20/95

Hi!

Please find script enclosed. Hope you like it. Look ~~forward~~ to  
hearing from you soon and thanks for all your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dane". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the "D" and "a" being particularly prominent.

## The Wild Ones: The Air Cavalry in Vietnam

### Opening bites:

**Bert Chole:** (In: 06:27:38) (Out: ) "Pound for pound, man for man, there was not a more effective unit come out of Vietnam War than Air Cav." (Or: 07:18:33.)

"Pound for pound, man for man, there was never a more effective organization in the U.S. Army than the Air Cav." (Or: 06:20:45 - :20:56: "I would say the Air Cavalry was pound for pound, man for man, the most effective combat unit that the Vietnam War produced. There's absolutely no question about it, no question about it.")

**Louis Rochat:** (In: 06:09:19) (Out: ) "They could go anywhere, at anytime and do just about anything you wanted them to do."

**James Foster:** (In: 12:20:15) (Out: ) "The Cav, there's nothing like it, there's nothing like the Cav!"

**TITLE: THE WILD ONES: THE AIR CAVALRY IN VIETNAM**

*Ruthless  
Riders*

**Narrator:**

They were wild. They were brash. They had a look and an attitude all their own. They called themselves "Flashing Sabers"..."Blue Ghosts"..."Long Knives". They were the ones who searched out and engaged the enemy from helicopters, flying at such low altitudes they could read the patches on enemy uniforms. They were the men that made the Air Cavalry one of the most effective fighting forces of the Vietnam War.

**Louis Rochat:** (In: 06:09:40) (Out: 06:10:28) "We could do resupply, we could support the Marines, we used naval gunfire, we used the airforce, we worked with.....didn't matter, whatever was needed, they could use us and we did it...involved in everything...even POW camp raids."

**Bert Chole:** (In: 06:24:06) (Out: ) "After my first day of watching combat operations with Bravo troop, 1st of the 9th Cav, I says God, this is the most professional outfit and tactics that I have ever been associated with in 13 years. I couldn't believe it. And everybody knew what they were doing. I mean it was routine."

**Charles Rayl:** (In: 10:12:28) (Out: 10:12:40) "The military got a lot of bang for the buck from us. (We had a lot of guys who were excellent pilots, that were excellent officers, excellent leaders, we had a lot of dedicated scout observers...)"

**MUSIC**

**Narrator:**

The concept of an airborne cavalry has not always been popular. Air Cavalry units have had to prove themselves to overcome scepticism and even scorn within the U.S. military.

During World War II, the army developed the tactical doctrine of vertical envelopment, where instead of encircling the enemy on the ground, airplanes would fly overhead and drop troops by parachute. After the war, the army continued work on this concept, experimenting with helicopters for the first time during the Korean War. Then in 1955 and 56, the first airborne cavalry unit, called "Sky Cav", was tested at Fort Rucker, Alabama. The Sky Cavalry Platoon was later activated as a test vehicle for the development of aerial reconnaissance concepts.

**Larry Johnson:** "In the late 1950s, visionaries within the armor community realized that the helicopter was the next logical step in the development of the cavalry concept. The mission would remain the same, but the technology would change. The first division commander of the first air cavalry division remarked he perceived the air cav concept with helicopters as freeing the cavalry from the tyranny of terrain forever."

**Narrator:**

But most people within the Army, as well as the Airforce, remained sceptical. When a group of men at the Combat Development Office at Fort Rucker started designing a three-dimensional armed helicopter strike force, they met with strong resistance from army senior commanders, who openly ridiculed the idea. And the Airforce felt threatened by what they saw as an infringement on their "turf". But Colonel Jay Vanderpool and his team, called "Vanderpool's Fools", persevered and developed a test unit that included aeroweapons, aeroscouts and airmobile infantry. After repeated impressive demonstrations with blank ammunition at Fort Rucker, the Army senior staff came to believe in the concept of a heliborne strike force.

Growing confidence led to the Army's decision in 1962 to authorize an Air Cavalry Troop in each division's Cavalry Squadron. For the first time in history, the army had a self-contained, airmobile, combined arms strike force. It was the only combat aviation unit specifically designed for aggressive, offensive tactical operations. And it would prove to be one of the most efficient fighting forces of the Vietnam War.

**James Foster:** (In: 12:19:18) (Out: ) "The Cav is the one that will always stand out and I think it was because the way they operated, the mission they had, you depended on each other and you had everything within your troop that you needed: the scouts, guns and ground troops."

**Narrator:**

The Air Cavalry in Vietnam served to extend the eyes and ears of the Ground Cavalry Squadron. It would locate the enemy deep in their territory and then engage in offensive, defensive or delaying actions to seize and hold the terrain. Because of its relatively light ground combat assets, it was not expected to hold terrain for extended periods, though this often happened in the heat of battle.

**Larry Johnson:** "Probably the greatest problem faced by the ground units in Vietnam was to locate the enemy and the North Vietnamese and the VC were superb at hiding. The Air Cav concept was a natural. You were able to operate in teams, cover large areas."

**Narrator:**

Three elements made up these so-called "hunter-killer" teams: the scout platoon, the aerorifle platoon and the aeroweapons platoon. The job of the scout platoon, called the "reds", was to locate the enemy, flying OH13s and later in the war the OH-6s. Overhead, the aeroweapons platoon, or "whites", provided gun cover for the scouts. They flew UH1Bs and later the Charlie model Hughes ("Huey") gunship, and finally, ~~in the closing years of the war~~ <sup>from 1968 on</sup>, the AH1G Cobra gunship. The aerorifle platoon, called "blues" or "ARPs", carried infantry in "D" and "H" model ~~Hughes~~ (Hueys). They would usually drop ground troops into the battle area, coming in on the tail of the aeroweapons platoon. Typically, one team consisted of 2 scout helicopters, 2 gunships and about 5 aeroweapons <sup>Huey</sup> helicopters, carrying around <sup>24</sup> ~~30~~ ground troops. Operating in hostile terrain, away from other Army units, <sup>and even artillery</sup> Air Cav crew members came to rely on one another one hundred percent.

an air cav troop would take two ~~two~~ <sup>scout</sup> ~~one~~ gun teams plus. Each team consisted of

**Larry Brown:** (In: 04:25:\_\_ ) (Out: ) "Normally we operated very deep. We were away from everybody else so the only one that was going to help you was one of the other guys in the troop. And it was an understood thing. If somebody was down they're going to commit the whole troop to come and get you."

**James Foster:** (In: 12:19:50) (Out: ) "We knew that if a ship went down, which it does very very frequently, that small platoon, I don't care what the odds, they would get to the ship and they would get to the crew and knowing this, I think, allowed you to perform to the extent that you did, and that doesn't exist in many units."

**Louis Rochat:** \*(In: 06:07:00) (Out:06:07:23) "You got a Cav guy down on the ground, or a Cav troop, ground troop in trouble, then that whole division would respond. And I've seen 2 or 3 helicopters go down, trying to get to one crew, to get them out. And I mean it's just like feeding gas to a fire, we'd keep going in until we got everybody out."

**Dan Gelish:** (In: 15:14:20) (Out: ) "It seemed like some of the men there would throw their life away in a second to rescue their friend and that's one thing that really impressed me about the Cav."

**Narrator:**

A symbol of this strong team spirit was the Stetson hat Air Cav members wore. Lieutenant Colonel John B. Stockton started the tradition at Fort Benning, Georgia after rounding up a bunch of troublemakers from other units to be in the Cav. He told them either to join the Cav or risk getting kicked out of the army. To increase esprit de corps, he introduced the black Stetson hat and it didn't take long for the fashion to spread throughout the Air Cav, despite the fact that people in other Army units weren't too happy about it.

**Larry Brown:** (In: 05:03:\_\_\_\_) (Out: ) "The black hats were something to set you apart so you could be different, be recognized. Kind of another ego thing. You know, my guys are going, you know, to be great, they can look different. If you're doing good jobs, people will let you get away with stuff."

**Narrator:**

There was a certain bravado that went along with wearing the hat. And most troops added their own individual touch to the western look: spurs, scarves, or the addition of a beaded band and feather to the hat. Members of D troop of the 3rd of the 5th Cav, for example, were allowed to don a yellow scarf only after they got a confirmed kill. And they were the only ones to wear grey Stetson hats, modeled after General Robert E. Lee's grey hat during the Civil War.

**John Fowler:** (In: 15:22:45) (Out: ) "When you see the Cav hats, the spurs, the scarves, you're looking at the spirit of the Cavalry and the Air Cav had the highest morale of any flying unit and possibly any unit in Vietnam in my personal opinion because you were always in a situation where you were just a heartbeat away from being shot down, captured and everything that goes with that."

**Narrator:**

Most of the men in the Air Cavalry were in their late teens or early twenties, fresh out of flight school and never having experienced combat nor a foreign environment. Some had volunteered. Some had been drafted.

**Wesley Walker ("Frank"):** (In: 10:09\_\_\_\_) (Out: \_\_\_\_\_)

"It's unreal to me that people were able to assemble the kids that we were - and that's what we were was kids - to fight a war the way we did with the guts that it took."

**James Foster:** (In: 12:23:20) (Out: \_\_\_\_\_) "I was there because it was my job to be there. These guys were there and they did one hell of a job and that wasn't their job, that wasn't their decision, that wasn't their choice, but they came through, they came through." (Paste on V.O.: 12:14:15 "Their motivation was excellent, their performance was outstanding").

**Narrator:**

Fighting in the Air Cavalry was intense; teams made five to six insertions into the jungle a day, seven days a week, literally looking for trouble. It was one of the most dangerous jobs in the army, especially if you were a pilot. One out of every nine helicopter pilots died, compared with one out of every 43 men who went to the Southeast Asia theatre. And scout pilots and crews ran the highest risk of all. Bert Chole heard some startling statistics when he arrived for duty in Vietnam and learned he had been assigned the role of scout platoon leader.

**Bert Chole:** \*(In: 06:19:50) (Out:06:20:05) "I said 'I don't want to fly scouts, I want to fly guns. He says 'no, well, we've gone through 13 scout platoon leaders in the last 10 months, you're number 14'. (laughter) I just cracked up and I said 'No, no! I don't want to fly scouts, I want to fly guns!'"

**Narrator:**

In some units, commanders believed the scouts, or "reds", should maintain strictly a reconnaissance role. Scouts in these units were lightly armed, well enough to be able to extricate themselves from hairy situations. They were not expected to engage the enemy. In other units, scouts were more heavily armed and were expected to help in offensive operations. Resembling a flying fortress, these scouts were armed with a minigun, an observer with an M60 machine gun, fragmentation grenades and homemade bombs. In both kinds of units, scout crew casualties were higher than in other platoons.

The life of the aeroweapons platoon crews, or "whites" was no less stressful than that of the scouts. They often considered themselves to be the big brothers of the scouts, as they were constantly pulling their little brothers out of scrapes. The scout helicopters,

LOTHs or Light Observation Helicopters

dubbed "loaches", and the gunships were such a cohesive team that these reds and whites operating together came to be called the "Pink" team.

**Louis Rochat** (In: 06:02:02) (Out:06:02:49) "The loach was an expendable piece of equipment and crew, hung out there on a string and on the other end of the string was that Cobra. That was, and I'm speaking now from the scout standpoint, that was our linkup with the rest of the world if anything happened to us. They had the radios, they were there to take care of us if we had any problems. On the other hand, flying the Cobra, it was a massive responsibility. No Cobra pilot ever wanted to lose their loach, their low bird. (Add V.O.: 06:04:29 - 06:04:40: That was the one thing you had nightmares about: blinking your eye and that loach was in a ball of flames or fire down there because he got hit.")

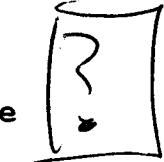
**Narrator:**

The gunships' job was to orbit the battle area at altitude, watching the scouts below and awaiting action. Once contact with the enemy had been established, the gunship was immediately available to provide suppressive fire. Targets often were marked by colored smoke grenades. Although the gunships' primary

*or white phosphorus grenades*

role was to support its own troops, it was sometimes pulled away temporarily to help a beleaguered ground unit until other fire support could arrive.

The aerorifle platoon, or "blues", was a light infantry strike force. Its job was to bounce ground troops into an area following a shower of suppressive fire from the "whites".



*weak  
military*

**Larry Johnson:** (In:                   )(Out:                   ) "It was not uncommon in many units for the aerorifle platoon to be on the ground before the North Vietnamese Army even realized they were there. They often caught the enemy cooking dinner, sleeping...a very, very effective team."

**Narrator:**

The "blues", many of whom were handpicked from available infantry units, came to be known for their ferocious and highly successful operations. They were dropped deep in enemy territory with a bare minimum of water, ammunition and grenades, <sup>enough</sup> *for one good fire fight*, heavily relying on the <sup>red</sup> *teams* and <sup>white</sup> *teams* for fire support. A team of <sup>red</sup> *blues*, <sup>white</sup> *blues* operating together was called a "Purple".

Dramatic combat stories made their way back to new recruits training in the states, and some of the men didn't believe what they heard until they got to Vietnam and saw some action for themselves.

**Wesley Walker ("Frank"):** \* (In: 10:08:49) (Out: 10:09:12)

"When people told me what scouts did, I said, no sane people wouldn't do that, real people don't do that, that's a war story. And after I got there, we were doing it, we were doing exactly what people think you wouldn't do: You <sup>f#</sup> wouldn't hover to draw fire, you <sup>SH</sup> wouldn't recon to get them to shoot back, but in fact that's what I did, that's what everybody did."

**Narrator:**

Men handled the shock of their first combat mission in different ways. For Peter Harlan, it wasn't so easy. As assistant platoon sergeant, he was in charge of helicopter maintenance back at base camp. But one of his friends who flew a scout helicopter wanted to give him a taste of the action out in the jungle, and got clearance to take him along on a mission one day.

**Peter Harlan:** (In: 14:25:58) (Out: 14:26:44) "In the middle of that I started throwing up out the left side of the OH6 at a fairly high rate of speed as we're

moving through the trees, in a state of complete nervousness and shock at what these guys actually went through everyday. And just as I'm doing that the pilot starts to try to talk to me and ask me to do something and all I could do was mumble with a mouthful of sputum...and he finally figured out that I hadn't been shot up or something like that and looked over and by then the left side of the helicopter was a real mess and I had very good friends flying in a Cobra above us keeping an eye on us and they started getting on the radio and having a lot of fun at my expense about how the very experienced new guy was barfing outside of the helicopter."

**Narrator:**

After the first few missions, many soldiers, especially in the Scout platoon, started getting hooked on the rush they got from all the intensity. Some would even push the envelope by challenging one another to games.

**Larry Brown:** "Sometimes we'd be out in some areas and, especially up north when we had the heavy stuff shooting at us, you know, 27 mike, the 37's, the 20's and you'd have radar control stuff that they would shoot at you. And then you'd get somebody shoot at you with an 8K, and you say where is he? I'm going to go

*Something  
missing*

back and get that guy, piss me off, you know. Little gun like that, who does he think he is, you know. So we used to do, and then you do dumb things. You know, we'd get out there, and we used to play a game like we'd find a 50 pit somewhere. And you'd get the gun to hang off a ~~hundred~~ 80 degrees out from you at altitude and he'd lob some rockets and he'd tell you when the last pair's on the way. And you knew it would be coming a 180 out on the deck run at it. And watching that last pair come down and just as it hit hard the trick was to be right over the top of the gun right after it hit. You can do a tight pedal turn right over the top of it and let the <sup>gunner</sup> work out in the pit. You know, you get rid of them. That was kind of, always one of those, hey here's one, let's go get it. I remember one day we worked outside on Evans ~~house~~ during Tet and we were chasing a 50 that way coming across. For some reason I'm barreling down on this guy and I just had one of those feelings, I ought to make a turn, just, something's not right here. And I laid over hard left to break away and go back around and for some reason, just make a hard bank left and go back.

And just as they did a 30 been covering this guy opened up on us. I swear if he had a bayonet, he'd got us. If there'd been a bayonet on there instead of, but he just couldn't traverse fast enough, we broke on the wrong

time on him. And he waited too long, and we beat him. So we wound up getting a 30 and the 50 on that one. But that's about the last time I tried that."

**Narrator:**

What came out of such intense combat was a strong bonding among the men, which led to a high level of cooperation, versatility and efficiency. Soldiers were ready and willing to perform duties different than those assigned to them if the need arose - anything it took to maintain a cohesive team.

**Donald Armstrong:** (In: 08:25:37) (Out: ) "When I was in the unit, everyone worked with everyone. If a mission was warming up in the morning, the pilots would already be out there, the crew chiefs would already have their ship warmed up for them... the guys were working everything, everyone was covering everyone."

**Narrator:**

Back at base camp, some Air Cav troops lived in relative luxury, with good food and plenty of facilities. But they left that world for 10 to 12 hours a day in their quest to find the enemy. A typical day started at base camp, getting up before dawn and meeting for briefings. The crew was assembled, the crew

chief got the aircraft ready and teams took off at first light. The teams operated all day until last light, then returned to base camp for debriefing, rearming and refueling. Men worked so closely together, so many hours a day, seven days a week, that after a while many felt they could read one another's minds.

**Gary Winsett:** (In: 11:23:25) (Out: ) "We worked up a bond with these things and guys knew what guys were going to do, we were predictable, we knew the inflection in your voice, you could even tell by the way the guy flew the aircraft, what he was thinking or where he was going to go and that's what made it so neat."

**Narrator:**

As soon as the enemy was located, the entire team swung into action, with each member knowing exactly what to do. Charlie Rayal remembers a successful attack that started with a scout spotting enemy soldiers, engaging them and taking a few rounds in his aircraft.

**Charles Rayl:** (In: 10:15:05) (Out: 10:16:44) "He flew back in and landed at Doctau to refuel....killing zone."

*Doc TO*

*lots  
miss*

**Narrator:**

The men learned not only to be in tune with one another, but also with the enemy, as they got to know their tactics and their surprises. Most Air Cav soldiers had never seen the jungle before, and there were no handbooks to teach them how to fight in this foreign environment. So they learned as they went along, picking up tips from the more experienced troops.

**Donald Armstrong:** (In: 08:26:37) (Out: 08:26:49) "You had to develop a sixth sense. Your eyes had to be trained to find things that maybe other people wouldn't notice...that..."

**Barry Speare:** (In: 02:24:53) (Out: 02:25:24) "When you're talking about the jungle, for example, you're talking about a tremendous amount of natural wildlife...monkeys..."

**Narrator:**

Another sign the enemy was nearby was smoke that smelled of soy sauce, lingering in the trees after the enemy had cooked up rice over a campfire. Early in the morning, Air Cav troops could smell and see it miles away. And soldiers learned that banana leaves were

often used as camouflage. Larry Brown remembers flying into an area and trying to grasp what it was that was out of place.

**Larry Brown:** (In: 04:17:\_\_\_\_) (Out: \_\_\_\_\_) What it was, was the goons had moved in out of the mountains, they're still using banana leaves for camouflage and there were very few banana trees in this village. And all around this village were all these banana leaves laying around. You know. That was the obvious. It was so obvious we weren't picking it up right away.

**Narrator:**

The Cav also learned to detect traps such as wires strung between trees and hilltops to catch helicopters. Sometimes the enemy went out of its way to lure the Cav into pre-planned kill zones by using dummies dressed as VC. These zones were ringed with interlocking air defense positions that were often armed with the dreaded .51 caliber heavy machine gun.

During the period leading up to the Tet Offensive in 1968, Air Cav troops started noticing new roads and construction in the jungle, but nobody they reported to wanted to believe anything out of the ordinary was going on. Charlie Rayal recalls some of the action

during the Tet Offensive.

**Charles Rayl:** (In: 10:17:24) (Out: 10:20:50) "We had gathered up some montagnards....(cut out part about the dogs)....nobody wanted to believe it, but Tet happened."

**Narrator:**

Engaging the enemy so frequently, Air Cav crews learned to live close to death. They endured the loss of fellow team members on a regular basis, despite their all-out efforts to protect or rescue them. It was during the heat of battle when Air Cav soldiers learned just how dedicated they were to one another. Larry Brown remembers when his bird had been shot down and there were casualties all around. He felt someone tugging on his harness to get him out of the seat, thinking it was one of the crew members that hadn't been hurt. But it turned out to be (his co-pilot), who had been badly wounded.

**Larry Brown:** (In: 04:29:\_\_\_\_) (Out: \_\_\_\_\_) "And I looked around, it was Buchanan. He's got out of his seat, he's already been shot in the head. He's lost his right eye. And he's up out of the seat, coming around to get me out of the airplane. You know, that's

the kind of camaraderie, the kind of things guys did. We had an understanding that the bird goes down, you didn't leave the guy in the bird. Dead or not. I'm going to get you out."

Air Cav helicopters got shot up frequently, and if a bird caught on fire, chances were the entire crew would be consumed in flames. But some guys got lucky. John Fowler vividly remembers seeing a scout helicopter below him get shot down.

**John Fowler:** (In: 15:24:58 - 15:25:53) "We were at.....I couldn't believe they had survived."

**Narrator:**

A high level of dedication applied to all situations, including attempts to rescue fellow soldiers from POW camps. Although the overall number of captured ~~Army soldiers~~ was not high, a ~~good~~ percentage of them were from the Air Cav. And once a soldier was caught, he could expect the worst. The enemy had plenty of built-up anger and hatred to pour out on him.

*THIS  
ISN'T  
THE  
RIGHT  
PHILOSOPHY?*

**John Fowler:** (In: 15:23:59) (Out:15:24:15) "They were not too happy when we were shot down and we knew that. They had some bounties on some units because we had

dealt them so much misery. I mean, that sounds like 'Apocalypse Now' but I tell you it's very very true."

**Louis Rochat:** (In: 06:11:27) (Out:06:12:06) "The first thing they told you was if you get hit and you go in, you're on your own to get out. Well, we knew better than that. Because we kept track of each other. If we had a team out somewhere going across the border, blacked out and all that stuff or into a specific special mission like a POW camp raid, everybody was waiting, back at the rear, or, I shouldn't say the rear, back at wherever it was we were staying at the time, and until everybody was back in the unit, nobody got undressed, nobody got far from the aircraft until all the guys got back."

**Narrator:**

Each team had its own way to ease some of the stress of intense day-to-day operations. Back at camp, the men would watch movies and some would even play poker, just like in the days of the old western cavalry. Original songs and practical jokes were common. In fact, the jokes were so common that it was hard to tell sometimes whether someone was serious or not. Gary Winsett remembers a day back at base camp when he asked for permission to take photos of an awards ceremony so he

could get out of having to stand in formation. He got up on the water tower for a good vantage point and when he glanced down into the tower, he saw something that nobody believed he actually saw.

**Gary Winsett:** (In: 11:14:17) (Out:11:14:37) "I know we have rats here in the United States that are pretty good sized rats. But over there, they had big rats; these things would take on a coyote. It was a rat, a couple of decomposing rats about this big in our shower water. I mean these rats were floating in the water and you could see the grease sort of coming off of them. I don't know how long they had been in there. And it made me sick because we used to brush our teeth while we took a shower..."

**Narrator:**

Some teams found ways to keep the stress down even during regular operations. Jeff Rider remembers a dog that would follow members of his crew around everywhere, and would even fly missions with them, serving as a constant reminder of the world outside of combat.

**Jeffrey Rider:** \*(In: 13:28:45) (Out:13:29:12) "We were doing some low-level flying and the dog was with us and he was underneath my seat and just out of nowhere we took a few rounds, somebody started shooting, and the pilot, he made a real hard right and the dog just got up and he jumped up on the console between the 2 pilots and it was like, they were trying to fight this dog off from getting up there with them and the helicopter's going at a real hard right."

**Narrator:**

Although the men found ways to reduce stress, nothing much helped ease the pain of losing a fellow crew member, especially after an all-out effort to protect or rescue him, or as a result of malfunctioning aircraft or equipment. Crews often took losses when they were tired out and unable to function at the peak of their ability. Barry Speare remembers a fateful mission he flew after having flown 138 hours in 23 days.

**Barry Speare:** (In: 02:28:50) (Out: 03:03:38) "We were at about 15 feet...flight to the medical facility."

**Narrator:**

Though almost every Air Cav soldier remembers losing a crew mate, many also remember the thrill of saving somebody's life. Larry Brown remembers the words of thanks he got from a soldier, who told him he had lost many of his fellow crew mates.

**Larry Brown:** (In: 05:09:\_\_\_\_) (Out: \_\_\_\_\_) "And this kid says, I'm going home tomorrow. And I take it that the reason I'm going home is what you did that day. And I guarantee it. The 3 silver stars, the 4 distinguished flying crosses, and everything else I got, that kid's handshake meant more to me, means more to me now."

**Narrator:**

Most people in the Army agreed that morale was exceptionally high in the Air Cav, although it did vary to some degree depending on the team and the commander. The level of comraderie and trust was not always as strong, however, between crew members and higher-ups.

**James Foster:** (In: 12:22:47) (Out: 12:23:17) "These kids are totally out of their element, and percentage-wise you're going to have the goof ups and stuff, but percentage-wise they did an outstanding job. And what

really hurt me was that I don't think they really had the leadership and the protection, either there or when they came back to the States, that they deserved."

**David Fesmire:** (In: 13:15:40) (Out: ) "It was hard to trust somebody that you didn't feel like you had their full support and sometimes it felt like they didn't care one way or another who was in charge."

**Narrator:**

*don't think this  
isn't  
it's  
afford  
afford*  
Despite some disappointments with leadership, and suspicions about corruption at all levels, the strong bonding among Air Cav soldiers kept their morale high. Even politics and war protests back home never held them back from putting their all into their missions.

**Richard Crawley:** (In: 16:05:23) (Out: ) "And at a time when the war was unpopular, being such a small-knit group, we kept each other going and we had our own little war and it wasn't our own little dirty war, it was our own little war, so we didn't get involved in the politics, we just got involved in 'here we are; let's see if we can get everyone home safe'."

**John Fowler:** (In: 15:27:28) (Out: ) "Maybe politically we made some mistakes and maybe it was the wrong war at the wrong time, for the wrong reasons, its may have been. But a guy in war doesn't look at that; he looks at his unit, he looks at the guys with him, he tries to protect them, they try to protect him. It's a very personal-type thing."

**Louis Rochat:** (In: 06:07:42) (Out: 06:07:53) "All we had, we learned real quick over in Vietnam, all we had was each other. The politicians didn't care, the American public didn't care. All we had was ourselves."

**Narrator:**

And you're not likely to find an Air Cav veteran who feels any remorse about fighting in Vietnam. Most Air Cav veterans believe that, overall, the crews took pains to fight in an ethical way.

**James Foster:** \*(In: 12:15:04) (Out:12:15:28) "None of the personnel that served in that troop are having flashbacks of 'God, I shouldn't have done that' or 'we shot the wrong guy' or, I mean, I can't think of one person in the troop that really was put in that situation. They did what they did, when they had to do it and verified what the heck they were shooting at."

**Richard Crawley:** \*(In: 16:04:44) (Out: ) "We fought a clean war. We did not run into the villages that you see in your mind or on the front cover of magazines. We went to where there was nobody, and if there was, they'd shoot at us, so we didn't have that moral problem of 'did we pick on the wrong person?'...they simply were the bad guys."

**Charles Rayl:** \*(In: 10:28:00) (Out: 10:28:32) "I think that's the thing about the Air Cav: It's built on honesty, ethics and trust and kind of a "go to hell" attitude, you know, 'we're gonna win this thing' and we're going to do the right thing and be ethical about it. I don't recall a single instance in the unit I was in where somebody went out and intentionally shot up somebody. We went out of our way to make sure it was a combatant, an enemy before we'd engage. And that was just the way we felt about it."

**Narrator:**

What impressed and often amazed people outside of the units was the high level of effectiveness of the Air Cav teams. After all, the Vietnam War was the first real testing ground for helicopter strike forces. Throughout the war, even as the combat stories and enemy body counts came pouring into the bases, people

had a hard time believing their ears.

**Bert Chole:** (In: 07:17:55) (Out:07:18:27) "They didn't believe our body counts, how many people we killed, they just wouldn't believe that helicopters and helicopter pilots could accomplish all the damned destruction and devastation that we brought on the enemy. They could not and did not want to believe it. And there's an attitude that goes with this Cav hat (laughter) and if you weren't there, you'll never be able to understand it, never be able to understand it."

**John Fowler:** (In: 15:27:53) (Out: ) "There were no other flying units like the air cav in Vietnam. It's the 'Old West' all over again and it still is if you'll check with active duty units all over the world, the esprit de corps is there."

**Narrator:**

Although the Air Cav proved it's effectiveness, it did pay a price in human casualties. And among those who lived so close to death, day after day, and survived... and who endured the loss of their crew mates, many left the war with a different outlook on their lives.

**Tom Johnson:** (In: 16:11:55) (Out: ) "The thing they brought back with them, moreso than anything else, was the love of life, we were glad to see the sunrise."

**Narrator:**

They also brought back memories that would remain just as vivid as if they had happened yesterday. Feeling the hair stand up your neck after detecting a sign the enemy was near...the thrill of raining fire on the enemy and getting the entire team out unharmed...the agony of seeing a helicopter go down in flames...and all the crazy behavior back at base camp...

And to those on the outside, witnessing the Air Cav's unique blend of comraderie, bravado, dedication and "go to hell" attitude, the Air Cav will always be remembered as... "The Wild Ones".

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