

Veteran: HARTLEIB, E. H. "Skip"
Service Branch: NAVY
Interviewer: Ferguson, Kirby
Date of Interview: April 9, 2003
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Transcriptionist: Terry Moore
Highlights of Service: Vietnam; Gunner's Mate Technician; USS *Bonhomme Richard*; Gulf of Tonkin; Certified to work on nuclear weapons

Interviewer: I am interviewing Skip Hartleib on April 9, 2003. We're at Missouri Street Church of Christ for the interview. Are you aware that our conversation will be recorded, and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College Library? Do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Certainly.

Interviewer: When did you start your career in the military?

Veteran: I joined the United States Navy on the 12th day of March, 1968.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Veteran: I enlisted.

Interviewer: Did you have any idea that you would get into this kind of situation?

Veteran: Certainly. I was looking forward to it.

Interviewer: When did the Vietnam War start?

Veteran: Advisors first went in '55, and they trained the South Vietnamese troops early in '65, but the first actual combat troops and combat deaths were in the early '60s. I graduated from high school in '66. I was very aware of what was going on, unlike a whole lot of my classmates. I didn't go into the military until '68.

Interviewer: When you first heard the news that you were going to Vietnam, how did you feel about going?

Veteran: I was excited about going and possibly saving the world from the evil communists.

Interviewer: What was it like there?

Veteran: I was in different parts. When I was in-country, I was in the northern parts around Danang, and it was just like a city. It was a big base, and most of my time in combat in-country was around Danang, but most of my time was spent aboard ship. I was aboard an aircraft carrier in the Gulf of Tonkin, which is the gulf just to the east of North Vietnam, and we were bombing the heck out of 'em.

Interviewer: Did you ever get hurt while you were there?

Veteran: Yeah, I got hurt, but not from enemy fire. Being aboard ship is pretty dangerous, and I got a few scars here and there from accidents and/or injuries, but it wasn't from enemy action.

Interviewer: Did you ever come in contact with any chemical warfare?

Veteran: I was in the area where Agent Orange was sprayed in the south a couple of times. As far as I know, I never came in contact with it, and I hope that I didn't.

Interviewer: Was nerve gas used over there?

Veteran: They used some tear gas to flush the enemy out of tunnels, but it was just more like traditional tear gas-type of stuff. They called it CS-gas, and as far as I know not any nerve gases were used. That was against the Geneva Convention, and we followed it most of the time.

Interviewer: How long were you there?

Veteran: I made three crews in Vietnam, and I served in-country one year, eleven months, and twenty-two days.

Interviewer: When did you finally get to come home?

Veteran: My ship came home every once in awhile to resupply in the United States and then go back, but I got out of the service in 1971, and I was in active reserves until 11-March-74, and then I got my honorable discharge.

Interviewer: When you got to come home, did you get to see your family?

Veteran: If I had leave on the books, I could take leave and fly back to Texas, and I did several times.

Interviewer: Do you think the Vietnam War was necessary?

Veteran: Yes, I think it was. It's important to stop evil, and communism is evil. I was just very saddened that we were not allowed to fight it in a manner where we could win.

Interviewer: Where and how did you train?

Veteran: I went through boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois. After I graduated from boot camp I went through very special schools. One of them was in Great Lakes, Illinois, and the other, at the time, was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I had a top secret clearance, and was certified for nuclear weapons and special weapons. I have certificates to verify that training. I'm sure the weapons I trained on are probably now obsolete, but it was a very specialized nuclear training.

Interviewer: Where in Vietnam were you stationed?

Veteran: When I was aboard ship, I was on an aircraft carrier called the CV-8-31 USS *Bonhomme Richard*. It was an attack aircraft carrier; carried three squadrons of jets. We would cruise up and down the North Vietnamese coast bombing selected targets in North and South Vietnam. When I was in-country, I was in a big United States Marine Corps and Navy base that was on the edge of Danang, which is north section of Vietnam.

Interviewer: What was your primary job in the military?

Veteran: I was a gunner's mate technician. There were three gunner's mate rates. One of them was gunner's mate guns, one was gunner's mate missiles, and the other was gunner's mate technician, and I was gunner's mate technician. I had top secret clearance, and I was certified to work on regular ordinance, on missiles, and nuclear weapons.

Interviewer: What were the living conditions like?

Veteran: The aircraft carrier I was on was one of the World War II class aircraft carriers, so it was pretty cramped and small. It was the last wooden flight deck aircraft carrier the Navy had at that time. It had been decommissioned after World War II, brought back for Korea service, decommissioned and brought back for Vietnam. So, it was pretty cramped, pretty hot, but you adjusted and did your job.

Interviewer: I think that's all Mr. Hartleib, and I appreciate your time.

Veteran: You're welcome. It was my pleasure.

{END OF INTERVIEW}