



South Dakota State Archives

Transcript of Interview with David H. Hansen

David H. Hansen grew up in South Dakota. He was sent to Vietnam in 1969 where he served with the 101st Airborne Division based in Phu Bai and LZ Sally. He flew Huey helicopters. He held the Bronze Star, Air Medal, Army Commendation Medal, and Purple Heart among other campaign and service medals. He returned to the United States in 1970. This is an excerpt of an interview with Hansen conducted by Thomas Magedanz on behalf of the Vietnam Era Veterans Association, Inc.

Transcript of Interview Excerpt

David H. Hansen: [Wake up call times] varied from anywhere from, up at 3:00 in the morning so you could do your pre-flights, get your mission. Anywhere from 3:00 to 5:00. Generally, it wasn't much later than that unless you had a real slack day or you had the day off. The first thing you'd do is get out of bed and shave; they wouldn't let you get by without doing that. From there you'd grab your gear and you'd go out to the aircraft to pre-flight it. Usually that was done in the dark. Rain or shine we pre-flighted the aircraft, because it was a necessary item. That was back before they had dust particle separators on the intake of the engine so you'd have to take the filters out and clean them. That's just part of the pre-flight, but it was kind of a time-consuming process.

Thomas Magedanz: Did you know you were gonna have a mission the night before?

Hansen: Yeah, generally they'd get the missions in by 8, 9, 10 o'clock in the evening, and you just checked the board. You could see the aircraft number, who you were flying with, what outfit you're gonna be working for. Or maybe there was a combat assault set on, and at that point in time you'd have a briefing that night: where and who and all the particulars. Kind of the scenarios of what they wanted to do. That would have been, usually, done in the company area.

Magedanz: How many missions would you have in a day? Or did it vary a lot?

Hansen: It varied a lot. I think my longest day--now this is flying time--was a little over 13 hours.

Magedanz: In one day?

Hansen: Yeah and that was just flying time. That's not counting the time you sit taking on gas, or sitting down to eat chow someplace if you had the time, you know. That was flying. That was from sunup to sundown. It would vary a lot. Sometimes you'd finish a mission working for an outfit and you'd go home and you'd get another one laid on you.

Magedanz: You didn't expect it?

Hansen: No. Something would come up and you'd go handle it. A lot of your resupply was--you was out there by yourself, single ship. Didn't have any gun cover. If you got shot down, they'd call somebody and try and get you out, but [there was] a lot of working by yourself. That was probably just as risky as combat assaults. A lot of times, that's when you'd get hit too, you know. I know my first mission--that was that day in the bad weather--we were working for an outfit and we were resupplying them at that point. We ended up looking for some NVA they thought they had shot. So the slick pilot over there, what we called the slicks....

Magedanz: The "slick" was a nickname for troop carrying ship, basically.

Hansen: Yeah. We called resupplying "ash and trash". But it was such a changing thing, you know. In one day you could haul ammunition, food. You could haul dynamite, blow LZ's and stuff, equipment. Haul people back out of the field to the base camp. We hauled dead people. We hauled wounded people. When I talk equipment, it was just all sorts. You know kind of what I'm referring to.

Magedanz: Uh huh. Mostly for infantry or artillery people...

Hansen: Yeah. You know, if it was an infantry outfit, it was basically infantry gear. We hauled mail. [laughs] Anything the troops would need to get, we'd haul. The food would be C-rations to hot chow. Ice cream--you had to be pretty quick with that! Fresh fruit, [we] hauled quite a bit of that, especially on holidays. You'd work, basically until they released you or until you were done resupplying.

Magedanz: Did you ever have any free time that you knew was gonna be free time? I'm not talking about R&R or something...but during your normal days?

Hansen: You wouldn't really know until the night before when your name didn't appear on the board.

Questions

After listening to the interview, what questions does this raise in your mind about life for the United States soldier in Vietnam?

Describe a typical day for David.

What were some of the items that were hauled in the Hueys?

As a tool for communicating a past event, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of oral histories?