

**Interviewee:** Kahila, Larry  
**Interviewer:** Jack Sigler  
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**Sigler:** Good morning, Mr. Kahila.

**Kahila:** Good morning.

**Sigler:** You understand that this interview is being recorded?

**Kahila:** Yes, I do.

**Sigler:** Okay, fine. We're going to talk about your experiences with the Casper Platoon. Why don't we start with you telling me what you were doing just before you got into the military, how you got in, and how you got there?

**Kahila:** Actually, I was a student, and at the time that I received my draft notice, it was a period of time where — just before that everybody that was school had a 2-S or a student deferment. And a lot of people were complaining that everybody should be drafted or none at all. So what they done is they changed the draft rules and they took everybody, which meant they had a wealth of people that were one year in college or two years in college, and I was one of them.

**Sigler:** Where were you going to college?

**Kahila:** I was attending Wisconsin State at Stephen's Point. It was a state university in Wisconsin, and I was a biology student. I got my draft notice, thinking, well, I'll just go home and get out, you know, get over and take care of that. Well, when I got there I had a big surprise because they said, "Well, there's no deferments." And we took our draft physical and I found out I was going to be drafted. So I went to the recruiters; of course, the Air Force and the Navy weren't taking anybody. The only people who were enlisting at that time was the Marines and the Army. Well, I certainly didn't want to be a Marine, and I walked into the Army recruiter and he says, "Do I have a deal for you." [laughs]

**Sigler:** You went to enlist as opposed to get yourself drafted.

**Kahila:** That's right. So I took the aviation test and the rest of the battery of tests and done real well on them, and I got my choice of going right away or having a 90 day delay plan. So I took the 90 day delay plan so I could get everything in order, and two weeks after I signed up and signed all my papers and sworn in and I was waiting to go, the MPs showed up at my house,

wondered why I didn't show up for the draft. I had to show him a copy of my orders, which was kind of unique. That early, already. And the rest was history. We took basic at Fort Polk, Louisiana. Started in February, which was probably the worst part to be starting in. And we completed basic and started down at Fort Wolters in the spring. Completed that, and by fall we were on our way to Fort Rucker. I was held over two weeks because my class was the first class that they split and started every two weeks. Before that they had had one class a month, and we had a number of students, so they started producing pilots – graduating classes every two weeks. I started out at 67-25, that was the class number, and the new class was 68-501. And away we went. The first time we had any time off was for Thanksgiving, and I had like eight days off. Came home, and I didn't really notice any change in the communities or anything about the war, or the way they felt about the war, I was treated just fine.

**Sigler:** I'm trying to remember, that was what about sixty— ?

**Kahila:** Seven.

**Sigler:** '67, yeah

**Kahila:** Well, the Tet of '67, was – well, actually, when was it? What month was that? I got to Vietnam in May of '68. And it was just after the — I mean the Tet offensive was wound down then, at that time, the Tet of '68 was very bad. So we went through flight school at Fort Rucker through the winter months, and I got married on December 30th of that year. [laughter] Well, we decided not to wait, what the heck. We were young and —. But you know, I've been married ever since. Never missed a beat with my wife, she backed me up 100%. We went through thick and thin when going through flight school and military.

So I arrived in Vietnam on May 9th of '68. Of course, the first thing you see when you fly into Cam Rahn Bay is the beautiful water and boats going around, probably guys waterskiing. But the shock of it all is when the door opened on the plane and you stepped into the oppressive heat. It was horrible. And actually it wasn't too bad there, after you got acclimatized a little bit. We spent two days in Cam Rahn Bay, and finally I was assigned to the 173rd, which I originally was assigned, but then the 1st Cav decided they wanted some pilots. And I was half an hour getting on the plane to be a 1st Cav pilot, and they took three of us back off the list and sent us to various units, and I ended up back with the 173rd. It was kind of unique, because when we took off to Cam Rahn Bay, everything was nice and there was color and people worked just wearing OD and green. But we landed in Ah Khe, the central highlands, and everything was brown and OD color. [laughs] And I noticed on the way over, everything just started getting — you could see the bomb craters, and there was no settlement, it was all jungle, and oh boy. When we landed at Ah Khe, then I realized where I was at. And we started jungle survival school, which they sent all the 173rd people through, including their officers and pilots. I could never figure that out, but we learned a little bit. The one day that I was in jungle survival school and we were out in the countryside, actually doing a patrol that infantry would do, and this helicopter lands and this captain gets out and he hollered my name, and I walked over and started to salute him, and he says, "Get your stuff and get in the aircraft, I need you now." And that's the way I started my career with the Caspers. Captain Streicher.

**Sigler:** He just came looking for you.

**Kahila:** That's right. They were shorthanded, they had had a couple pilots wounded and then one left early, you know, left Vietnam to go home. The replacements never arrived, and I was one of the replacements. So they dug me right out of there and put me straight to work. [laughter] I took an in country check ride; that was in the afternoon that day. I took my in country check ride on the way to the unit. He said, "Climb in the right seat," and I flew orientation of where we were at and how the procedures worked with the radio calling, artillery and et cetera. And on the way over, we practiced a couple of power off landings at this abandoned air strip, and I done one hydraulic off approach, and that was check ride for in country. When I got the unit, I went right down and got all my issue of flight gear, and the next morning I was flying missions.

**Sigler:** No kidding?

**Kahila:** Right off the bat.

**Sigler:** They must have been very short at that point.

**Kahila:** They were.

**Sigler:** I've talked to other pilots who have talked about, you know, several months of flying number two, just to familiarize themselves.

**Kahila:** My first day, we flew 10 hours. And that was just the things to come, because when we reached 100 hours, we quit logging — after 120 hours, I guess it was. After 120 hours, the flight surgeon would say, "That's too many combat hours, so you have to set down." Well, you can't set down if they need you, so you just don't log the time. That's the way that works. But I ended up with over 1,000 hours combat time, which was a lot from what I find out now. There's a lot of people only had 500-600-700 hours. And the people that came after me — we recently just had a unit reunion in Nashville which was an annual affair now. And it was beautiful, we had a big time. Savannah will be really wonderful, yeah. So anyway, we flew — I guess I thought my job was to do whatever mission came out, that's what we flew. Like one morning we would fly a combat assault with the company at our same base there that sometimes they'd be short of aircraft, so they'd call us and we'd send a couple of crews and aircraft over to fly combat assaults. And that might last a couple of hours in the morning. Well, when we got back we'd refuel, and they'd say, "Hey, we got a mission for you. You need to take supplies out to a company." So we'd do that. And maybe on the way back we'd get Mayday or a call that somebody needed to be evacuated from the field, they were wounded and they couldn't get a medevac to them right away, so we'd drop in, pick the guy up, take him to the hospital, whatever, you know? And we just thought that all these different missions were our job. Well, come to find out now that after talking with several people, we done all the missions, but then the other companies just done single missions. They just did combat assault and that's what they did.

**Sigler:** Oh yeah. That's what makes the Casper Platoon such a unique unit in the history of, you know, Army aviation. And they really are.

**Kahila:** Anyway, I guess they told us that when we went to the 101st at Fort Campbell on our reunion, there were some aviation people that went through the records to see what missions were pulled by what units, and our name always came up. Because we done, you know, several different missions. But I always thought that was everybody's job. But I guess it apparently wasn't. They changed their tactics after that because of what some of those things we did. Well, one crew could do all of them; they didn't need specialized crews. I mean, we were doing all this stuff, and we figured that's just the way it is. We thought everybody did it. And then when we start finding out later on after the war and stuff that they didn't do that kind of stuff. That's just what we did. But it was exciting.

**Sigler:** Do you know if the same kind of unit still exists? I guess the 173rd is still an independent airborne brigade.

**Kahila:** It is. But I don't know what their air —. We tried to find that out, because 101st had — I mean, I guess that's where they were based at before they got sent to Italy. And we're really not sure how that works now. I know they're a quick reactionary just like they were before. And one of the things that — the aviation units are different sizes. I mean, what we called a company is — a company of Apaches is only like 10 aircraft or 12 aircraft, I guess. Well, an assault company or a gun company had 23 or 24, if I remember right. But, you know, I wondered about that.

**Sigler:** Well, I think what you are seeing throughout the US military is a downsizing of the relative units. For whatever reasons.

**Kahila:** Better equipment, first of all.

**Sigler:** Better equipment, better communications.

**Kahila:** Right.

[conversation about Sigler's personal experiences not transcribed]

**Sigler:** But to get back to the Casper Platoon for a bit. You mentioned you'd go and fly combat missions. There was also an assault battalion assigned to the 173rd, wasn't there?

**Kahila:** Right. The primary companies were the 61st and the 335th. And wherever the battalions were located — they were spread out — in that locale, in the Pleiku area it would have probably been the 52nd Aviation Battalion, which would have been 189th or 119th or — 57th, I think, flew out of Pleiku. And they supported the brigade quite a bit. But the primary guys were the 335th Cowboys and the 61st Lucky Stars.

**Sigler:** And you would fly with them on specific missions?

**Kahila:** Oh, yeah. What would happen, they would be short of aircraft for maintenance or whatever, and they couldn't get any. They'd call and see how many we could put up. Normally we'd get eight or nine depending on what we could get up. We'd fly with them.

**Sigler:** Now you were flying basically the Hueys, primarily.

**Kahila:** Yeah, all Hueys. Yeah, they had the OH-6. I had a little bit of time in them, but my primary job was Hueys.

**Sigler:** So you flew all different kinds of missions?

**Kahila:** Oh, yeah. We flew LLRP insertions, haul C- rations, to haul chaplains, even moving civilians.

**Sigler:** Moving civilians?

**Kahila:** Yeah, from village — they would take a village and move it, and we would go in and pick up all the people and all their stuff and then take them to a different village location.

**Sigler:** That must have been an interesting exercise.

**Kahila:** Oh, yeah. They liked to haul their pigs and chickens, and you know what chickens and pigs smell like.

**Sigler:** Yes. [laughs]

**Kahila:** And they always left all their stuff in the aircraft. [laughter] Oh, that wasn't too good. We started swing loading all the pigs, just to keep them out of the aircraft.

**Sigler:** How did the people take this kind of a move?

**Kahila:** You know, there was — some people didn't want to leave, the older ones. The other ones — and I'm certain we probably hauled VC along with them, and not even knowing it. Some of them would put up a little row about it, but most of them just went along with the flow of things.

**Sigler:** Who were the interpreters for that kind of an operation?

**Kahila:** They had Vietnamese assigned to the 173rd. I don't know who they were but they were pretty fluent in English. But they were probably captains or majors in their rank.

**Sigler:** Yeah, and they were just assigned as translators and liaison officers

**Kahila:** Yeah. I don't remember anybody from the 173rd, American, that was really fluent in Vietnamese. There might have been, but I don't remember any of them.

**Sigler:** Of all the different kinds of missions you flew, what was the most interesting, exciting, or just plain scary?

**Kahila:** Well, if you had to deal with the long- range reconnaissance patrol, they were four and five-man teams and they were usually trying to be real secretive about their missions. So when you put them in, you'd make two or three fake insertions, and then drop them off. And they always whispered on their radio when they communicated. That was kinda funny. Except that you knew if you had to go get them out, they were being chased. So that was a fact of life there. Sometimes we pulled them out on ropes because the jungle was too thick. And they'd hook on and we'd jerk them straight up and out, and gone.

**Sigler:** Did they have a harness?

**Kahila:** Yeah, they always word a special harness. There was a name for it, but — it was like a parachute harness, except it was incorporated right in their web gear. And it had a ring and a snap on it, so they could just snap on the rope and away we'd go.

**Sigler:** Oh, somebody was thinking about that one.

**Kahila:** We used to do a mission that was a sniffer [??] mission, where we had a machine in the back, with sort of like a vacuum hose sticking out, attached to the skids, and it would monitor the air. As you were flying a certain route, it would pick — they claimed it would pick up the human scent of nitrogen or whatever was given off by the human body, and they could tell where there was a large group of troops. And usually you'd fly over they enemy, and if there's a large amount and they were moving somewhere, they would stay hid, they wouldn't even shoot at you or let you know that they were there. And you'd fly these missions at 100 feet and 40 knots, which was no-man's land for helicopters in Vietnam. So that was an interesting mission.

I think one of the most interesting — there were a couple of them interesting, anyway — was I landed on the battleship New Jersey. They were going to do a fire mission with their 16 inch guns, so we took our artillery liaison out to meet with their guy and coordinate the mission. And I couldn't believe — that was quite a sight. I went below deck — got seasick. [laughter] And not only that, but they had a ship's store, and in the ship's store they had all the goodies that we couldn't get, you know, in Vietnam. So I started loading up the grocery cart; I was going to take a bunch of this stuff back. And I went to pay for it with the pay currency. They would not take it. They wanted their American money, and that's it. Well, that didn't work out.

**Sigler:** Many, many years later I was aboard the New Jersey, when it was in the Persian Gulf during the first war. Got aboard it. So I know the helicopter pad, at least. How did you feel about landing aboard a ship for a change?

**Kahila:** Well, first of all, the guy with the paddle might as well have put them away, because I never used them. I mean, he was giving me signals I didn't recognize. I had about three approaches to get to the landing. And finally the guy that was communicating the weather and the wind and all that and the direction of the ship stated that we had a 44 knot crosswind with the way the ship was traveling and the way the wind was blowing across the deck. So when we touched down, we were doing 45 knots. As soon as we made contact, we were still doing 45 knots. [laughs] But the ship was — it was an awesome sight, with all that firepower.

**Sigler:** They really are, the battleships. But landing on a helicopter — [laughs] That would frighten me, I think, a little bit.

**Kahila:** Well, when I got the mission sheet, they gave the coordinates and I plotted them out, and it was out there in the ocean, and I thought, "What the heck is that? We gotta land on that battleship." So away we went.

**Sigler:** But, like you say, coming down at a 45 mile cross wind —

**Kahila:** That was all computed with the way the ship was — the direction of the ship and how fast it was traveling, and then the relative wind. That was interesting.

**Sigler:** So you became a naval pilot as well.

**Kahila:** [laughs] Automatically. I guess we had a couple of our members land on a destroyer with the OH-6. And that would have been a feat.

**Sigler:** Yeah, I guess they have a helicopter pad on those destroyers now.

**Kahila:** At that time in Vietnam the destroyers had these remote control helicopters for anti-submarine whatever. And so they did have a little rotary wing out there.

**Sigler:** [laughs] Okay, well — now, lets see, long rang missions — wasn't that an awful big helicopter to be delivering your forward observer in? Why didn't they use one of the smaller ones?

**Kahila:** Oh, you mean for the — out to the ship?

**Sigler:** Yeah.

**Kahila:** Well, actually there were three people we took out there.

**Sigler:** Oh, I see.

**Kahila:** Yeah, and — oh, I don't know. You know, I never wondered about that. I just figured it was part of the deal and —

**Sigler:** Well, they obviously wanted to get three people over there, so —

**Kahila:** Yeah. Well, it's not every day you get to land on a big battleship like that, so I guess they were going to take pictures of all the, you know —

**Sigler:** [laughs] Yeah. Did you ever end up flying any of the commanders?

**Kahila:** Yes, we did a lot of command and control. And one of the guys I flew was Anthony B. Herbert, 2nd Battalion. He wrote a book called *Soldier*. I flew him a lot, I flew his predecessor a lot. Because they were stationed right at Bong Son, LZ English? So then we would go on different missions with those guys, we'd be going from company to company. Maybe we'd haul the guys out that were wounded, or maybe we'd haul supplies in at the same time. It was a varied mission. Every day was different. Basically we'd haul supplies and everything, but every day it was a different location, a different challenge, you know?

**Sigler:** And you weren't assigned to any specific battalion?

**Kahila:** No, I was not. I mean, because I was at English, I flew those guys a bunch. We had a couple crews that were stationed at — like one that was at Tuy Hoa, one was An Khe, and one of them would fly for the 1st Battalion and then the other one would fly for the 4th Battalion, and they were mostly command and control.

**Sigler:** Yeah. And they were pretty much in direct support of that battalion.

**Kahila:** Yeah. I guess I was lucky because I stayed at LZ English most of the time and so my missions varied from command and control all the way to combat assault, whatever, you know? And some of the other guys were just flying command and control. And so their experiences were a whole lot different. And we shared the workload. After a while when we started getting all the pilots that we needed, then it was not too bad, you'd get a day off now and then. But those first three months I flew a lot of hours.

**Sigler:** How many pilots were normally assigned to the platoon, just a round figure?

**Kahila:** There was probably 30 at the most. I don't think I ever seen more than 22 or 20 to 22. Because the guys that flew the slicks, they would also sometimes fly Scouts. In the '70s I guess they had a good crew, they had a lot of people. When I was there in '68 to May of '69, until about the last two months we were short handed just about all the time.

**Sigler:** What was that, just not enough people had been trained as —

**Kahila:** Well, there were other units. Now the 1st Cav, believe it or not, had one of the highest casualty rates in Vietnam. So consequently most of the aviation assets — pilots and aircraft and parts all went to the Cav. They had first priority because they were a division. And then second came the 101st. They were losing —

**Sigler:** And both of those were air assault divisions.

**Kahila:** Yeah. Air mobile divisions. Then the 1st Infantry Division, they had their own assets. But I wasn't too familiar with them – the Big Red One. I don't know too much about them. And there was a 9th Infantry Division; I think they were supported by just an aviation battalion. But the Cav had their own, and I think the 101st, they finally ended up with all their own battalion. That was unique.

**Sigler:** So of the pilots, what was about a third of them were commissioned officers and the remainder warrant officers?

**Kahila:** Yeah. And when I first started it was just about all warrant officers and there was only a few commissioned officers. And then we started getting replacements, we started getting more commissioned officers.

**Sigler:** What made the difference? I mean, obviously there was no difference in either the flying skills or the assignments of —

**Kahila:** Well, they had their own branch school. They weren't just aviation.

**Sigler:** Oh, okay. So they were also assigned to a specific —

**Kahila:** Yeah, like artillery or infantry, yeah. Now, us warrant officers, we were aviation all the way. I mean, that was the only thing we trained for. And I guess they still have an aviation — they got an aviation branch now for even commissioned officers. Well, that was only right, too, because they didn't have enough in there. I know they didn't have enough commission officers. I mean, they'd have a major running a — or a major and a captain and underneath them was 40 warrants or something, you know?

**Sigler:** [unable to understand comments]

**Kahila:** I flew with the National Guard here in Michigan for, oh, probably eight years. At that time the National Guard unit was made up of people that weren't combat, hadn't been to combat, hadn't flown hardly anything other than in their own state. That surprised me, especially here in Michigan, anyway. We had a company that — well, when I signed up there were several other Vietnam vets starting to come in, and our commander was a 1st Cav veteran. So he whipped us into shape pretty quick, you know? We were a very large company sized unit. I bet we had 45 or 50 Hueys. And they were — after the war they just had to have a place to put them. So all these guard units received all these aircraft. And when I went up to take a check ride, I first signed up, I walked out to the aircraft, and shoot, it was one from our old unit.

**Sigler:** You knew the aircraft. [laughs]

**Kahila:** Yeah. We left it LZ – got shot up and we left it in the LZ, and it got sent back and

they rebuild it all, and here it was. And the check pilot said, “Well, you’ll probably remember this aircraft.” And I looked at it, I looked at the tail number, and I thought, “Well, I’ll be darned.”

**Sigler:** So you did one tour in Vietnam?

**Kahila:** Right, right. One tour. And it was the time when they offered direct commissions to 1st lieutenant with six months in grade for warrant – CW-2s. At Fort Rucker, I was a ground school instructor. I \_\_\_\_\_[??] to flight line for instructor pilots, but I taught all the ground school for various aircraft transitions – the Chinook, the Skycrane — whatever they had at Rucker, we taught all the transition courses. So they came along and said, “Hey, we’ll give you this.” But then I’d have had to go back for another tour. And I was trying to get into the career course set up so I could finish college. There was a lot of people — that would have been fun.

**Sigler:** Yeah, but at that point in your life, trying to get back to college seems pretty important, too.

**Kahila:** But anyway, it was an experience. I think of Vietnam – it’s not once a day, or something will come up and I’ll think, “Well, I remember that.” Oh, you know, first of all, you remember this last shoot out, the last Gulf War (well, we’re still there, but —), there was an Apache crew that got shot down, and they were escape and evading, and nobody went to get these guys. And I’m wondering, what the heck is this all about? We never left anybody on the ground. I don’t care if you had to call in B-52 bombers, you never left nobody on the ground. And I could not believe this. And these guys were 1st Cav guys. I says, “What?” They let those guys be captured. That would have never happened in Vietnam.

**Sigler:** Why do you think that is?

**Kahila:** I don’t know. You know, I try to think maybe they didn’t want to risk all the assets, but we never worried about that. That was never an option, you know? And I just thought to myself, well, boy, times have changed, because I wonder what they think of their buddies now. I mean, even if we were ordered not to go, we’d still go. That’s not an option. We’d went to get those guys out if they were down.

**Sigler:** And everybody I’ve talked to has always made that point, about —

**Kahila:** We never left anybody down there. If it was at all possible —. I mean, there’s times when — I remember one aircraft went in and it burned on impact. We were assuming by the way it looked that there were no survivors. Well, shoot, I got back to flight school and two of the guys survived that and spent eight days in the jungle, but didn’t have no way to let us know, you know? I mean, I flew over there the next day and it was nothing but ashes so, I thought to myself, “Hey, wait a minute—.” But these guys walked out – in eight days they walked out. Well, see this is what I’m talking about. If we’d have just known that, you know? We’d have —

**Sigler:** Committed everything you had to get those guys back.

**Kahila:** Bat 21 [??].

**Sigler:** Yeah, everybody I've talked to who served in the Casper Platoon has always made big point of that they never left anybody behind.

**Kahila:** I was on the deal with Casper 721, which is on the website. And Walt Henderson was the pilot of that, Cliff White was copilot. I knew where they were going because Walt took my mission that day. The guy he was flying, the Colonel, didn't like me. He wanted to do this and he wanted to do that, and there were certain things I would not do that endangered everybody's lives so —. Anyway, he didn't want me to fly him. So Walt had to take him — he was on his day off, so he had to fly him. And I took another mission. And lo and behold, when they got a Mayday call out and they were crashing, I knew exactly where they were going to be at, pretty much. I didn't take me but the time to get out to the area. I was making radio calls but when I got there, I found them. They were upside down and we sat there and hovered and waited on help. There was a lot of enemy in that area, and it was a pretty awesome time, that day was. But they got them out. And the fireman that came from the Air Force base that actually went down and cut him out with one of those rotary metal saws, cut the nose front of the aircraft off so he could get him out, he was at our reunion. He comes to our reunion every year. And he got the Silver Star for that. At the time when they were doing all this, there wasn't many troops. You know, we didn't get many troops in there at all. Just a squad, I guess. When I was sitting there hovering before anybody got there, they were shooting at us from about five different directions. And you could see them. [laughter] We were going to stay until we got some firepower out there. Finally we got some people and some other aircraft out there and I left. The ironic thing is, I was talking with the first Air Force para rescue helicopter, and they came from a nearby airbase to drop in there and get them out, that's what their job was. And I talked to the pilot and I told him, you know, which direction to come in, because they were shooting from this ridge line. And he flew right over the ridge line, and of course the aircraft got shot up and of course they had to abort the mission and go back to the base. Well, I didn't know it until just last week at the reunion that that pilot died right after he landed.

**Sigler:** He'd been hit?

**Kahila:** Yeah. He'd been hit over at the target, and he landed — he flew it all they way back, I don't know 28 miles, 38 miles something like that. Made it back, and as soon as he got on the ground, he passed away. But I could never figure out why the guy never listened. I mean, I'm talking to the guy and he just kept coming, you know? And that's the way it is.

**Sigler:** And what'd they do, they brought in another —

**Kahila:** Oh, they brought— yeah, they brought two or three in. But that one was shot up pretty good. And then the other one took a lot of hits but they made it out. And they finally got that guy out there, the sergeant, he was a fireman, they cut him out. But his legs were pinned

right into the bulkhead. I mean, they had to cut everything away to get him out. Otherwise you'd have had to cut his legs off. That was probably one of the tougher missions I flew, right there.

**Sigler:** Now, you had a couple of guns aboard your aircraft, didn't you? Machine guns.

**Kahila:** Oh, yeah. M-60 machine guns.

**Sigler:** Yeah. And so you were able to do a little bit of suppressive fire.

**Kahila:** Right. And we did. And most of the gunners, I would say all the ones that I happened to fly with, were really good. I mean, they could put the bullets where you needed them. So yeah, it was exciting.

**Sigler:** [laughs] Yeah, but I'm not entirely sure you want to do it again.

**Kahila:** No, but I wouldn't give up the experiences, either. Well, you know, you have to understand, we were young and probably a little braver, or I'm not sure how you'd explain it.

**Sigler:** I think a little dumber, in my case at least.

**Kahila:** Yeah. Yep.

**Sigler:** You don't quite realize all the things that can go wrong. While you were there, did you ever get any time off, on leave back in Saigon or anywhere?

**Kahila:** Not really in country. I got to fly to Hawaii, met my wife on R&R, we spent a pretty good week there, had a lot of fun. And everything was a different perspective after I went back to Vietnam; I only had three months to go. I mean, I didn't turn down missions or anything but I flew them a little bit different. [laughter] When I got ready to leave — of course, we had to fly by helicopter — they took us down to Cam Rahn Bay and dropped us off — or I think that's where we went. Yeah, we did. Went all the way to Cam Rahn Bay. Anyway, they had smoke flares or smoke grenades that they popped off and we made a low flyover, trailing smoke, and it was sort of a tradition when somebody left to go home. And I guess they got that on video somewhere, I'm not sure. I've seen pictures of it. But anyway, it was a different trip home. We were really, really happy. We fly from Cam Rahn to some place in Japan to refuel. And then from Japan we dropped off a few people then we went back to Seattle. But we had a layover there for an hour or two, and we walked in the terminal — they wouldn't let us leave the terminal. They had TVs that were broadcasting programs. One of the funniest things I've ever seen is "Gunsmoke" being shown in Japanese. Oh, my word, there's a bunch of GIs just laughing their fool heads off. Yeah, that was pretty ironic.

And then when I got to Seattle, Tacoma, we got off the plane and there was protestors. A lot of protestors. And we had a little scuffle as we were — we were going — this captain that was Special Forces — he was returning home, but we were both going to Chicago, so we got our

baggage checked out and we headed for the plane to Chicago. And these protestors were inside the airport. And we had a little scuffle with them. The police had to break it up, and we got escorted to our plane. And when I got to Chicago, they had bands playing. Yeah, they knew what planes had Vietnam vets and they had military bands and people cheering, the whole works. Turnaround, you know? And then, of course, my wife and family were there. My wife and my father.

**Sigler:** This would have been what, '71, then?

**Kahila:** That was 19 — man, 1970. Yeah, it was still going pretty strong over there. Political scene. But, yeah, it was a welcome sight to be home. You know, it was unbelievable.

**Sigler:** A more general question, something that's interested me. In Vietnam, people pretty much rotated in and out on their own time. One year in and out. The Army today is rotating whole units, as opposed to individuals. I've talked to people and heard arguments both ways, you know, unit cohesion as opposed to new guys coming in — different issues like this. What would be your opinion on it?

**Kahila:** Well, it would be easier to train one person or have him get accustomed to combat than it would be a whole unit. Now if I was an area commander and I had an assault helicopter air company coming in for the first time, how would you operate with these guys, you know? Now, if you had a unit there that was just — yeah, we got two replacements the other day, well, that's up to the unit. You take care of your guys and it was easier to control it on like the local level. I can't see how they're taking whole units and moving them. The experience level is — I mean, when you pull a unit out and put another one in and they haven't been there, well, where is your experience level? Unless these guys have been there two or three tours and know what's going on, it's still different. Because you still have people that don't know.

**Sigler:** So you generally feel that if you replace individuals you get a stronger unit.

**Kahila:** Right. If they have a big unit — let's say it's a division, like the 101st. And they have units of the 101st over there. I think 101st ought to send the 101st people to their units. But that wasn't always possible in Vietnam because like the 1st Air Cav, you'd get a lot of whatever they drafted or whatever was available. But if they had the 1st Cav back in the United States, they could have trained them and then said, "Okay you're going to the 1st Cav in wherever it's located." That might have been a little different.

**Sigler:** No, that's an interesting idea.

**Kahila:** I mean, you can't take a guard unit from Indiana and send them over to take some regular Army unit. I mean, I guess you can, but I wonder how effective that is.

[discussion about current military procedures not transcribed]

End Side A

[conversation about recent family travels not transcribed]

**Kahila:** It doesn't seem that long ago, but it is – I mean, from the time we were in Vietnam, all our experiences. I mean, I can remember stuff plain as day. And certainly when we get around other people that have done the same thing, like at our reunion.

**Sigler:** Yeah. You were at the reunion, you said?

**Kahila:** Yes. So do you want anything else? I don't know of anything else I can add really, as far as — I'm trying to think. Well, you know, the people that we served with, I'm friends with several. I mean, this is a friendship that you don't ever lose. And I imagine it's true with just about all the military people. And I guess what I really didn't realize that the mission capability of what we were doing, because we really — I mean, for what we had for had, the amount of aircraft and personnel, we contributed to the whole mission in that area tremendously. And I can remember, we had taken off every morning and we'd fly past the 61st and all the aircraft be sitting on the ground. What the heck? You know, I thought, "Boys, those guys get to sleep in!"

**Sigler:** That was the air assault battalion?

**Kahila:** Right. And that's what they did, they were air assault. Well, big deal, we used to do air assault with them. And they'd go home and we'd have to go do other stuff. But you see, that's the way it should be. I mean, we'd done all thinking in the air craft. I mean, they'd give us a mission, we'd go do the mission. And whatever it takes to do the mission. Well, in air assault, I would imagine you must have had a flight lead, and somebody said, "Okay, we're going here" and "this is where we're going." And you just go there and that was it. But we would get called — we'd get mission changes on the radio. Okay, we'll go ahead and do that, and then we'll do the other mission after we get done. I mean, this was a daily occurrence. So eight hours in the aircraft was nothing.

**Sigler:** When you were at Fort Campbell last month, \_\_\_\_\_[??]

**Kahila:** Oh yeah. In fact we went to the 101st Airborne — the 101st Airborne has a large museum. And it covers from way back in the beginning to right now. And there is this place in there for the 173rd Airborne. And this retired colonel, he's the director of the museum and management of the whole thing, he was saying that after Vietnam, they decided to sit down and say, "Well, what worked and what didn't work?" So they started compiling flight records from different units and this and that, and he said, "You know what? We found out that your unit came up most all the time. Here you were doing this." And I don't know how they arrived at this, because when we logged, it was either direct combat report or the other – what was it? I can't remember how we logged that now. But it was direct combat support, anything we did. And after mission accounts, you know, we filled out a mission sheet afterwards, like "What did you

do from seven o'clock to nine o'clock?" and we just chronologically listed it all. It's all somewhere, I don't know where the archives would be. But anyway, these people must have had access to it because they brought up stuff that I forgot about. For example, one pilot, or one crew, flew two assaults in the morning, they flew four medevacs shortly afterwards, and then they delivered equipment and supplies to three different companies, and then had lunch. [laughter] And then after that they went on a LRRP extraction at 1:30, at 2:30 they changed aircrafts because first one was shot, and then they went on emergency resupply of ammunition from four till six. And that was their day. But in an assault company, that would never happen. You'd have maybe one crew or two crews dedicated to — and they were the ones that couldn't fly formation or do formation landings or takeoffs or any of that stuff. And they were put on these other missions, see? And I didn't know that, either. So that was enlightening. And he said, because of your actions, the Army had changed the way they thought about aviation and the way they made up future aviation units. And I thought to myself, "Well, that's cool." I'd hate to see eight Casper units out there, [laughter] but I guess it would work, you know?

Well, I can tell you my opinion of the military now — we have some of the brightest kids going. They're dedicated, these kids are really — I mean the ones I talked to at the 101st — and these were just guys that were walking down the street, we went to mess hall and sat with the 160th Aviation — and by the way, that was the best mess that I've had in the Army. But anyway, when you talked to them and asked them different questions, you know — one of the questions I wanted to know, I said, "How do you feel about having to be deployed so many different times?" And the one guy said, "That's my job. You guys are paying me to do that job. And I'm military." He said, "I'm staying in the military; this is my job and I'm going to do my job the best I can." I mean, these are really young fellows. And girls, too. I mean, they're just dedicated right up to the, you know? Yeah, I'm really happy that we have these people — I don't think the rest of the country really knows what we have.

End of Transcription