

Kevin Casey

Professor Birkner

Historical Methods

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William R. Smith Interviewed by Kevin Casey

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Kevin Casey: I am Kevin Casey, a sophomore at Gettysburg College, and I am going to speak with William R. Smith at his home at 405 Heritage Drive in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Today is November 17, 2018. We are going to discuss his early life and his years in the Vietnam War.

Let's start with your childhood, where were you born?

William Smith: I was born in Detroit, Michigan. I was born on October 8, 1941. My father was a police officer in Detroit, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom until we got older, then she went to work. Childhood was normal, I guess.

Casey: Where did your family originate from?

Smith: My mother's side of the family came from Belgium. My father's side of the family came, primarily, from Ohio. My parents met in Michigan when they were camping on the Au Sable River. My dad and my Uncle Leonard were laying the foundation for a cabin that my grandfather wanted to be built. Well, one night they went into town, and Ralph and El Vera got hooked up for the first time.

Casey: Have you heard any stories about your ancestors?

Smith: Well, my grandfather came over in '14, just prior to World War I. He really struggled here in the United States. The language barrier alone was a major burden and getting from Ellis Island to the train station he nearly almost starved, because he couldn't speak English and no one could speak Flemish! When he finally got to the train station, he got to Detroit, and he was working in the mines up in northern Michigan. My grandmother come over in the January of 1916, when the war was still on. She came over because of her husband, but she also had a son Ray. When she went to get out of Belgium, she told me, that she crawled through the fields under machine gun fire. Real close to No Man's Land. In Steerage, that was almost another 25-

day trip, and, again, she was starving. Whatever food she got, she gave it to Ray. Then she got to Detroit.

Casey: Why Detroit?

Smith: They picked Detroit, primarily because it was a large Flemish community there. Also, a lot of people recommended to go there. That's why they ended up in Detroit.

Casey: Tell me about your father.

Smith: Before my father got married, he was working in the Detroit tank arsenal which was producing tanks at the time. So, he was deferred from military service because of his occupation. In about 1944, he decided to join the Detroit Police Department. When he did that, he was forced to live within the city limits. By his occupation, that was a requirement. With Henry Ford, the Ford automobile, and mass production, Detroit was a thriving community. There were five-dollar wages. Not just immigrants, but a lot of people went there! On every street corner there was most likely a Catholic Church, but it could've been Lithuanian, it could've been Hungarian, it could've been Flemish, it could've been English, it could've been Irish. So, there were enclaves of various nationalities within the city limits themselves.

Casey: Was the police department very active in Detroit during this time?

Smith: Oh yeah, oh yeah. I mean this was the '40s so he had to go through the gangster era, which was some serious stuff. The purple gang was supposed to be the one in our area.

Casey: Did your father go to college?

Smith: No, he did not. His coach could have gotten him a scholarship to Michigan State to play football, but his father said, "No, he's going to work." So, he went to work.

Casey: How was your relationship with your father?

Smith: I always thought it was good, except when I was in trouble! [laughs] Then it wasn't so hot! [laughs].

Casey: Tell me about your mother.

Smith: Well, my mother was primarily the disciplinarian in the house. If she called in Ralph, your stuff your stuff was in the street. But, yeah, day-to-day living getting in and out of trouble, she was definitely the disciplinarian. She cooked us three meals a day, she kept us all in clothes, she paid the bills, and, yeah, she was the mainstay.

Casey: Did your mother work?

Smith: Well, no initially. You see, I had a brother, and he was younger than me. His name was Lawrence R. Smith. The "R" stood for Ramie, which was Flemish. Well, anyway, Larry grew up going to Catholic schools all the way up through college. His freshman year he went to Michigan State, but then he got selected for West Point and graduated in '67.

Casey: Tell me more about your brother.

Smith: Well, he was two and a half years younger than me. He also contributed to the war effort, and we were there together! We were very close.

Casey: What was your family dynamic like? Did you have chores to do?

Smith: Well, when I wasn't getting in trouble, yeah, I had chores to do. We always had chores to do, and it go to be that you got so much for cutting the grass, so much for washing the car, if you washed grandfather's you got another few bucks, or if you helped out grandmother you got another few bucks. You see, we were taught the value of a dollar, but we were also taught that it didn't grow on a bush either!

Casey: Did your family have any special traditions?

Smith: Well, Christmas was always pretty special, the family get-togethers, and Easter was also a pretty big deal. You know, the holidays.

Casey: Tell me about some of your other family members that you were especially close to.

Smith: There were a few cousins. On my mother's side, I had a cousin, Helen, who was nearly three years older than I was. Initially she used to beat the living shit out of me, and then finally when I was about fourteen, I was like "I'm going to clean your clock," then I was told since she was a girl I couldn't do that. [Laughs] Then, my cousins Tom and Barbara, they were on my father's sided, I was close with them.

Casey: Did they contribute to the war effort?

Smith: Well, they didn't contribute, but they had jobs.

Casey: Describe your house to me.

Smith: We lived in a bungalow. It was a small two-bedroom place; my mom and dad had one bedroom, and Larry and I had the other bedroom. It was neatly kept, and it had a one car garage. There were woods out on the other side of the alley, where I spent a bunch of time playing pirate Indian, cowboy, army, or whatever I was playing. It was a modest block, mostly all middle-income families. There wasn't much difference in homes. They were all single-family bungalows, not cookie cutter but pretty much so. My dad was pretty handy, so I remember he refinished the basement, so that was a rec room. Then he decided to build on a kitchen of the back of the house, then he got all of the top-of-the-line appliances for my mother. Then our kitchen dining room area became our dining table, period. Well, yeah that was our house. I believe I have a picture of it as well.

Casey: Were there any extracurriculars that your family was involved with? Church?

Smith: Oh, Church? Yeah. We were Catholics, so we went to Catholic school.

Casey: Was your mother or father particularly involved in the Church?

Smith: Not particularly. I was more involved in the Church later in life, joining the Knights of Columbus.

Casey: How was Catholicism practiced in your home?

Smith: Well, Sunday mornings, we followed the Doctrine, no meat on Friday, which was another pain in the tail feathers. I would get sandbagged by that every Friday, especially during Lent. On Fridays I'd get up and that was usually eggs or something, so I didn't pay any attention. Then we got to lunch, and I had a tuna fish sandwich, then I got home, and I had a fish dinner. Ugh, God, that was too much fish. On the side was a Belgian dish called "Green Potatoes." It was mashed potatoes with sorrel leaves mixed in, and then she would put an over the top. That was supper, and I hated it.

Casey: Did you parents have strong political views?

Smith: Not too strong, but they were Republicans as I recall. That was about it, but they talked about Soapy Williams who was the Democratic governor of Michigan. They were not too involved with local politics within the city because my dad kind of steered away from that because of his job.

Casey: Tell me about some of the things that you did for fun as a child?

Smith: Well, one of the big things was that my grandfather had a set of cabins, there was the main house then two of sub-cabins. They were just north of Rose City [Michigan] and just below Mile, Michigan on M33. His plan at this time was to rent these cabins out and live happily ever after, but one week somebody left, and nobody came back in and the bills still had to be paid, so eventually he had to move out and go back to work. But the cabins were still there. My father was a part of that deal, so was my Uncle Leonard, and my grandfather. My Uncle Leonard and

my father were working in the tank arsenal at the time, and when this went down my grandfather asked for some money because they needed to share this burden. They split it up three ways, my dad and Uncle Leonard paid.

Casey: What did you like to do up at the cabin?

Smith: Oh, we had hunting, fishing, we were on island lake. There are more than 10,000 lakes in Michigan! I was always outside, then the TV came out.

Casey: Tell me about when the TV came out.

Smith: 1950, I think it was. I can remember Howdy Doody. I think we were one of the first families on the block to have a TV.

Casey: Did you work during the summer? Did you work during high school?

Smith: When I was in high school, I got a job in Wrigley's Grocery Store. I started out as a bagger and that was at 70 cents an hour plus tips. Believe me, there were no tips. If there were, I would have made a load of money. Then I got asked if I wanted to go to the dairy department, so I went to the dairy department. Then I wanted to play football, so I quit that and went and played football for the school. I always had a job. At fourteen, I got work papers. I also did caddying, and I hated it. It was at this club called Lockmore and the people thought they were better than me, and they treated us like garbage, human garbage.

Casey: Did you contribute to your family's income?

Smith: No. I did make much anyways, so what the hell. [Laughs]

Casey: Would you consider yourself independent as a teenager?

Smith: Oh yeah, I was very independent. Well, I mean, I lived at home, I ate at the table, my feet were under the table at every meal, but, yeah, my only real job according to my parents was school.

Casey: Tell me about some of you friends when you were young.

Smith: There was six of that hung together. All boys. Well, Albert, his dad was a sales manager for Ford mobile, and they had the first TV on the block. Every Thursday night, we went over to his house and watched *The Lone Ranger*, and his mother made popcorn. For that half-hour we would stay up and watch *The Lone Ranger* then go home. Two doors down the other way was Bobby Hill, I think his dad was a fireman, I can't remember what he did, but Bobby became a fireman. He was younger, but he was a hell of a good pitcher and that I remember. Down the block a way was Lloyd Hart. Lloyd was always a part of us, we called him G.I. Joe, and we always played army together, we did lots of things together, and he got to Vietnam. He's in the book. The three of us, Larry, Joe, and I were the only of us that went to serve.

Casey: Who would you consider to be one of the most influential people in your early life?

Smith: I always had great respect for my grandfathers, and my dad. [Pause]

Casey: When you were young, what did you aspire to be when you were older?

Smith: [Laughs] Well, actually I didn't have any real plan. My life kind of evolved. I was always interested in the military, and I loved all the military movies, and I was a John Wayne fan from the get go. So, I went to a two-year college and got all "D's" and I said. "I'm done with this." So, I went to the police department and became a police cadet. I was about 18 or 19 around now, and I didn't want to be a policeman and my dad didn't want me to be a policeman.

Casey: Why was that?

Smith: Because he didn't like what he did. He was in the Identification Bureau and he was highly specialized in identifying fingerprints. So, I decided to go to college. There were five colleges, Northern, Eastern, Western, Central, and somebody else, state schools [in Michigan]. Michigan State, that was probably the other one. I applied to all five, and I got accepted to one.

So, I went to Central Michigan University, and at that time, and now actually, it is a land grant college. All land grant colleges said that there is a war on, and if you were a man you were standing in that line over there and getting a uniform.

Casey: Interesting. Did you play any sports?

Smith: I played football in high school, but that stopped once I got to college. I followed the State football games though. When Central was playing, I was usually working because I was a meat cutter up in Central Michigan. Let me tell you, I was in the top ten hourly wage earners in the city of Mount Pleasant. All the other guys were getting a dollar an hour, and that's what everyone started with, but I was making \$4.25 an hour as a meat cutter. I was part-time.

Casey: Did you attend the public school in your town?

Smith: I attended five years of Catholic school, then went to public school. That's another story, I came home from my second year at Notre Dame, and my dad said to me, "I'm not paying for 'D's,' you're paying next year's tuition. I marched right down to Denvey and went to public school. He never said anything. He said, "That was your decision."

Casey: How was your relationships with your teachers?

Smith: I always had mellow relationships with my teachers. Well, one nut in the eight-grade decked me one time, but other than that we got along just fine.

Casey: Did your relationship change with your parents as you became a teenager and older?

Smith: Yeah, I went through some tough times with it. You know, my first years in college, I could have been better. I could have been a lot better, but that was then, and this is now.

Casey: Could you give me a rough estimate about how many students from your high school attended college?

Smith: Beats me. All I know is that my high school had more students than my college. My high school had 5,000 students. I was the 550th to get his diploma. When I got my diploma, my dad said, "Give me that diploma," because I was taking off in a week and caught blue flu. [Laughs] I mean booze, booze, booze.

Casey: Did you always want to go to college?

Smith: No, but I knew I had to. It was between that and blue collar, and I didn't want to work in a factory. That was pretty common too. I mean, most of the guys that I hung around with in high school, I have no idea where they are. No idea. Well, I do know that one is dead. He was put in prison, then he was killed in prison.

Casey: Tell me about your college application process.

Smith: Like I said, I applied to all five colleges and got accepted by one. They were state schools. They started out as Teachers Normal [colleges], then they became [full service] colleges, and then they became universities. I am not going to lie to you, I think that I was matriculated into the college, but I turned over into a university, and I was automatically matriculated into that. I graduated from Central Michigan University.

Casey: Did you participate in any extracurriculars at Central Michigan?

Smith: Not really, my only real extracurricular was ROTC, and then I was working. Strictly working though, mostly. ROTC was mandatory. For the first two years at Central, you were in the program, and you were in a brigade. So, they had a big brigade.

Casey: Did you know that before going there?

Smith: Hell no! I didn't know squat! Like you were saying about my whole goal in life and stuff, was my dream of being an aviator back when I was 10? No. I just kept meandering. Flight school was first offered at Central Michigan University, and it was the first of the land grant

colleges to get it. It was an elective, a two-hour elective. You got 40 hours of flight time, 40 hours of ground school, and a private flier's license if you passed. I mean I was going to go into the military, and aviation seemed like a smart call. I mean, who wants to be on the ground? Who wants to be a grunt?

Casey: What year did flight school start? Freshman?

Smith: No, no. That was junior year.

Casey: Do you remember what it felt like when you went into to freshman year and you were forced into ROTC?

Smith: Well, I didn't feel much. It was something I just had to do. It wasn't a popularity contest, it was simply mandatory. If you matriculated, you matriculated, you know? It was the rules. Not much PT. I was simply Private Snuffy Smith, and we didn't do too much other than on Friday for a drill. I didn't get too involved because I was always looking for a job, or I had a job. One of the two.

Casey: So where did you work when you were in college?

Smith: Oh, I had a bunch of jobs. I was a Student Assistant, or a Resident Assistant, or whatever you call it. I assume you have them in your dorms as well, but I was called the student assistant. I had a block on the third floor of Merrill Hall. For that I got something, I'm not sure what I got, not room and board, but I got something. In that day, it wasn't really big money, but it was something. I carried that over, when I got married, to "Married Housing" where I was the RA for three buildings. They were all married people. I had to go over change the lights, take out the garbage, and for that I got my housing, my apartment. I got about 40 bucks a month, or 30 bucks a month. Oh, and I got my telephone. That's what it was.

Casey: Did you go to school in pursuit of a particular major?

Smith: I thought that I was going to be in to business. So, I was primarily looking for business administration. I followed that program but ended up with my degrees in sociology, with a minor in business.

Casey: Was there a certain career line that you wished to pursue with a sociology major?

Smith: Not really. Even then, I had no plan. Since I was in the ROTC program, I knew there was only one place to go, and that was to where the war was. I mean, I had that reality already in my mind.

Casey: Were there any accolades or accomplishments that you are proud of? Were you a good student?

Smith: No, I was not a good student. I think I had a point average of 2.23, but I made it!

[Laughs] Well, the jobs as the student assistant and the married housing coordinator, those were pretty big accomplishments. Oh yeah! In ROTC I was acknowledged as a Distinguished Military Student. I think I got that for surviving summer camp.

Casey: Summer camp?

Smith: In the summers of my junior and senior years, I was at Fort Reilly Kansas. A real garden spot, [Laughs] oh yeah, a real garden spot. It was really just the pits, and not only that. I came down with a case of poison ivy, and that sucked. Especially considering that if you fell out, you were out.

Casey: When you were in college, how were the civil movements regarding race, women, and gay rights visible?

Smith: Well, the Women's movement was way past my college [days]. I mean it was like in the '70s. But the student unrest was nothing at my school because the guys were in ROTC or they

had been in ROTC. Even if you didn't pursue ROTC, you were still mandated to have two years of it. By then, it was engrained in you!

Casey: At your school, was there a large African-American presence?

Smith: No, no. There were a few but not many.

Casey: What about in your neighborhood?

Smith: Again, it was a cloistered deal. The white people lived out in the suburbs and the black people loved to live downtown. That was how it worked. There were not many black people in our neighborhood.

Casey: What about in your high school?

Smith: So, I went to Denvey High School, which is a Navy school. We played Persian, which is a Army school, and that was black and white. You know, it didn't make any difference. We hit them just as hard as we hit anybody else.

Casey: So, there was no particular presence of the Civil Rights Movement?

Smith: No, no, no, no, no.

Casey: What year did you graduate from college?

Smith: 1965.

Casey: You mentioned that you got married in college, tell me about that. Tell me about your wife.

Smith: Well, in 1964, I married Joyce Loise Koss. We had two children, Ralph and Christine.

Casey: How are they doing?

Smith: Very well. Ralph is a systems engineer for NASA right in downtown D.C. Chris is a federal policewoman at the gold depository at Fort Knox, Kentucky. I am proud of them. They are standing on their own two feet. Ralph got an appointment to the Merchant Marine Academy,

so his whole education cost me about \$4,000. Chris went into the army and when she got out, she went to Frostburg [State University]. She got a Pell Grant, I think that's what that was, so she did okay. They both graduated.

Casey: Tell me about your wife.

Smith: Well, Joyce is still living. She put together this book. Joyce and I parted company in 1984. I went to Korea, and when I got back she said, "I'm done." So, she left, and me and the two kids kept on plowing. Like I said, they both got college educations, so I think I did pretty well.

Casey: Did Joyce go to Central as well?

Smith: When she first got there, she got herself a job and then within seven or eight months, she was pregnant. So that didn't last long, but she pitched in.

Casey: Where did she work?

Smith: She worked as an administrative aid or as a secretary, something like that.

Casey: When you were in ROTC, why did you choose helicopters?

Smith: [Laughs] I didn't even know what a helicopter was! When I was in flight school, which was a part of our ROTC program, it was a part of the course. It was basically an introduction to flight. You learned the principles of aerial flight and tried not to kill yourself. It was all a function of training, going around and going around, then the guy would say to you, "You're going to go around by yourself now."

Casey: I assume that you started with airplanes?

Smith: Yes, we started with airplanes. They were Piper Colts. It was a tripod deal; you would land on the back two wheels and come down onto the front one. So, you did that, you did cross-countries, you took your test then you moved on. When I got to the army, I was like "No way

they put me in helicopters, because why would they have wasted all that money for airplane training?" I got there, and they were like, "Boy, you're going to helicopter school." [Laughs]

Casey: You had no idea prior to arrival at camp that you would be flying helicopters?

Smith: Not a clue. So, you get commissioned. Then you get reported to Fort Knox, Kentucky, because I was an armor officer. That was my branch selection. So, I got down there and they put me through armor school, and I was told nothing about helicopters. So, after I graduated from that, I was sent to Fort Walters, Kentucky for flight school, and that's where it all began. That school was eight months.

Casey: Tell me a little about your time at these schools.

Smith: So, at Fort Knox, Kentucky, that was a ten week course which was learning all about armor, small unit tactics, various pieces of equipment, camo equipment, guns.

Casey: Were you trained to use a gun at Fort Knox?

Smith: Well, I was trained to use a tank at Fort Knox. My rifle training, as I recall, came in Fort Reilly where I was taking my summer basic course. Remember my grandson from University of Maryland I was telling you about? He was there too. According to what I understand now, there is a first summer course, and a second summer course. When I did it, it was only one summer course. I did it between my junior and senior year. He went at the end of his sophomore year, and he's going to go at the end of his junior year, which is this year.

Casey: Do you remember when you first heard about the Vietnam War?

Smith: Oh, I heard about the war back in the early '60s.

Casey: What was your family's attitude toward the war?

Smith: My family really didn't have an attitude towards it. I mean, in the early '60s, all we saw were little glimpses of the war on the television. I was just something that was going on; it really

didn't affect us. I think the first time it really affected us was after I was married; I was married in '64. Joyce's brother, Billy, was in the army, went to Vietnam, was in the infantry, and he was wounded. Leg wound. He got evacuated. He was sent back to Valley Forge. When he got out of there, he came home. That was the first time that we were really involved.

Casey: Did this make you want to go to Vietnam more?

Smith: No, this did not make me want to go "more." I'll tell you this: my brother, Larry, went to Vietnam in August of '68. I went in October of '68. I didn't have to go because my brother was there.

Casey: Explain to me why that was.

Smith: There was a rule that you could only have I family member in Vietnam at a time, but I knew the minute that he came home that I was going to be sent over. So, I said, "Baloney. I'll go anyway." So, I did, and I think I was fortunate, because the way things worked out, the way I ended up, and the fact that I made it through everything. I was fine.

Casey: Sounds like you two were very close.

Smith: Yes, we were. I think the stress was worse for my mom and dad because they had both of us over there. Well, that's another story. I got into country, I was an officer, a first lieutenant. I was told to go to my bunk, stay at my bunk, and that someone would come and get me. They did, and I went and saw this major. The major said, "We're going to put you up in the first cav[alry]." I said, "I don't want to go in the first cav." He said, "What do you mean you don't want to go in the first cav?" I said, "My brother's already there." He sent me back to my bunk, and two days later he called me back and said, "How about the third or seventeenth cav?" I said, "Anywhere but the first, sir." Just not the first cav! [Laughs]

Casey: What was the first cav's role?

Smith: It was airmobile. It was where they would take the infantry and fly them to battle.

Casey: What was your brother's role in Vietnam?

Smith: He was a single-corps officer in division headquarters, primarily in communications.

Casey: Did he see any combat?

Smith: Yeah, well he was going to a site in a place called Nui Ba Din, Nui Ba Din was called the "Black Virgin Mountain." It was by Tay Ninh. Anyway, the U.S. Army secured the top of it and the base of it, but the middle of it was all VC.

Casey: Was VC the vernacular?

Smith: Well, the VC's were the local guys, they were the Vietcong. The NVA was the Northern Vietnamese army. I had the pleasure of meeting them all.

Casey: Were you stationed with your brother over there?

Smith: No, he was stationed up north near the DMZ¹, where the area of operations for the first cav was. My area of operations, when I first got in country was under the 25th Division, I got there in October. Then in November, we were relocated down to the 9th Infantry Division and reassigned to them as an air camp troop.

Casey: Where were you before your departure for Vietnam?

Smith: Well, I graduated from Fort Rucker, Alabama, and that was the advanced helicopter school, in August.

Casey: First, can you tell me a little more about your training there?

Smith: Well, training was about eight months for the normal guy to go through flight school, but I was sent back twice. I just couldn't figure out the pedals in the helicopter. I had a problem with it. So, I did get through and I graduated, I believe, in the end of August. After that, IO was put on

¹ Demilitarized Zone

a thirty-day leave. So, I went home, played with my kids, went on a vacation, but primarily I was with the family.

Casey: Awhile back you mentioned Korea. Did you fight there?

Smith: I was in Korea, but that was in '81 or '82 and had nothing to do with the war.

Casey: When did someone tell you that you were going to be flying helicopters, not planes?

Smith: It didn't happen that way, it happened when I went through college and picked up a fixed-wing orientation towards flying, then I was sent immediately to the helicopter school, and that was it. You know, the light goes on, and "Oh helicopters!" [Laughs]

Casey: What were your assignments as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam?

Smith: When I first got to Vietnam I was assigned to the lift platoon. We had a rifle platoon assigned to our troop. The lift platoon was about five helicopters, led by a platoon leader, who lifted these guys and put them wherever they were wanted or needed. I was kicking around, not doing too much, when a scruffy little war officer came up to me and said, "How would you like to fly scouts?" I said, "What's that?" Then he said, "Oh, that's fun." I was intrigued, so I was like, "Yeah, I'll try it." So, I started to fly scout missions. You got to understand, we fly in groups of two helicopters. The low helicopter was an 086 Alfa or a Cayuse.

Casey: What were those helicopters used for?

Smith: They were used for hunting. I was a hunter. The other helicopter was an AH-1G, it was a covert aircraft. This was a weapons platform. It carried rockets, mini-guns, and a 40-milimeter canon. It was a team, and this guy was the team leader.

Casey: What do you mean that you were a hunter?

Smith: I was flying low by the trees, hunting. Come over here, we will stretch our legs.

[Casey and Smith walk into other room with tape recorder]

Smith: That picture up there was a picture of Charlie troop, a sister troop to B troop. I was in B troop. That is a picture of an 086. This cockpit configuration was made up of three men. One behind the pilot with an M16, and next to the pilot was an observer. In my aircraft, we didn't have that guy with an M16 in the back, I had a tray of minigun ammunition, and I had a minigun hanging off the other side of the aircraft. So, I was armed with a minigun, and you, my observer, were armed with a CAR15, which is a short M16. You threw grenades, you did whatever I told you to do.

Casey: So, you flew the helicopter while shooting a minigun?

Smith: Oh yeah! Yeah, yeah, Yeah. You see that right there? That's a bloodshit. If I ever were to get shot down, that says in about forty different languages that I am an American, and that the Americans will pay for my return. [Points at picture of different badges on the wall] There is army aviation in Vietnam. All the way to the left is first cav, and right above the "N" that's first brigade, first aviation brigade.

Casey: So, you were the leader in the air. How did you communicate with the others in the air?

Smith: Constant radio communications were exchanged between the covert aircraft and mine. The worst thing that could happen to the covert aircraft was if you lost that low bird. They have nightmares over that.

Casey: It was only you and one other person in the helicopter. Tell me about that.

Smith: It was always me and another person, a sergeant. This enlisted man was usually around nineteen years old.

Casey: How old were you at this point?

Smith: Not going to lie to you, I was older. I was about 26 or 27. I was born in '41, so '68. Yeah, 27.

Casey: Was it common that the same person would accompany you?

Smith: No, no. There's actually a sad story there. Me and this guy here started flying together all the time, and I started a battle out in a place called "The Plain of Reeds." We got relieved on station at about 11 o'clock by another team. We flew back to a refuel and rearm point at Tay Ninh, and I flew with him. We went to go to help rearm his aircraft because he only had two guys doing that, but he was ordered to go back and dump a load on the bad guys and I was told to head for the barn. Before I landed back on the ground, he was dead. They shot his tail rotor off, then he lost his main rotor, and then he went in.

Casey: Tell me about the stress when you were flying.

Smith: It was stressful when you were getting shot at and stuff started flipping around. [Laughs] We weren't stupid though. I never tried to slow the aircraft down. I never let my aircraft go any slower than 40 knots.

Casey: How fast is 40 knots?

Smith: 40 knots is like 30 miles per hour. I was always moving, I would never fly in a straight path, that's for sure. Primarily, I was flying in circles.

Casey: Were there a lot of other people who did your job?

Smith: Oh yeah, I think there was a total of twenty to twenty-five thousand aviators made.

Casey: Where were you stationed in Vietnam?

Smith: The unit was called B troop, 3rd and the 17th air cav. Where we lived when I first got there was called Di An. That was where our main operation came out of.

Casey: Is that north or south?

Smith: Oh, that's south. It was right near Saigon.² Then we had a forward position where we lived on an airstrip by Tay Ninh. That was just the combat pilots. That was not the ground crew, or anything like that, but when we needed maintenance they needed to come up for it.

Casey: When you first got to Vietnam, what did you see? What did you feel?

Smith: The first thing that hits you is a blast of heat and humidity. It's just like a great big sauna hitting you right in the face.

Casey: What season was it when you arrived?

Smith: October, so it was fall. I can't remember, but I think it was planting season or something like that. I'm not really sure.

Casey: What were you flying before you flew Scout?

Smith: I was flying Hueys. Do you remember that army ammunition picture? Those were Hueys in the middle. Those were known as UH1s, and they were also known as an Iroquois.

Casey: Were you nervous right when you got there?

Smith: I was more dumb than nervous. I have an interesting story for you. So, I finally get picked up for the seventeenth and brought back to Di An. I go through assignment headquarters, and I was assigned to B troop. So, someone from B troop picks me up and brings me over to the B troop area. I was finally in the B troop area, and they said that we were going to stop here and load me up with my equipment, primarily your helmet, steel plaque, helmet liner, basically all of the grunt stuff. They also gave us bedding. I can remember getting bedding. It was late in the day, around dusk, and the guy said, "Well, we're going to have to take care of the rest of this stuff tomorrow. You're going to sleep over here." He brought me over to an eight-room building. Four on one side, four on the other, and I was in the third one, I believe. I got in there, and he told me

² Now known as Ho Chi Minh City.

that I was staying here for the night. There was a bed, a mattress, but there was no light. The lightbulb was broken.

Casey: Tell me a little more about the sleeping quarters. Were there other people in your room?

Smith: No, I was the only one. Well, that was because I was enlisted. You see there were a bunch of standards. For officers there was one standard, for war officers you had another standard, and for enlisted you had another standard. So, that was the order.

Casey: Did you make any friends over there that have stayed with you?

Smith: Yeah, I had friends from my troop. Are you asking about friends now?

Casey: Tell me about your friends back then. Any particular person stick out in your mind?

Smith: Well, I was close with the scout platoon. The guys in the platoon did the same job that I did. Some of them were war officers, some of them were warrant officers, it didn't make a damn of a difference what you were. If you did what I did, you were me. So, I didn't have any glorious plan of being first lieutenant. [Laughs] The first lieutenants and the war officers were typically the ones who did the fighting.

Casey: I assume that there was no small talk between you and your observer when you were in the air?

Smith: No, strictly business up there.

Casey: Where there any other jobs that you did over there other than fly helicopters?

Smith: Aviators always had another job. My job was that I was in charge of the mess hall. I was the mess officer.

Casey: What did that job entail?

Smith: I was in charge of feeding all of the people. When you are talking about an aircraft troop, you are talking about 300 some odd men, some officers. Then we had a direct service

maintenance company attached to us, which probably had another 150 men. I don't really know what they did all night. They had big, metal buildings, and if you needed maintenance, that is where you would go. We had planes in the morning would go out and come back, and we had night missions that would go and come back. I didn't do night missions. It was suicide down there when you are low, and you are trying to find someone in the dark? That doesn't work. But, yeah, we had to feed all of those people.

Casey: Tell me about the food. Any good?

Smith: The food wasn't bad. I even gained weight when I was there, which was uncommon because most guys lose weight in Vietnam.

Casey: Were there ample supplies?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Definitely. Every once in a while, I'd go down and raid the navy depot. I came out of there with lobsters one time. So, we had lobsters once, we had steak every now and again. Usually, it was regular meals. Breakfast was breakfast. Steak and eggs or whatever, actually, usually not steak and eggs, but bacon and eggs, sausage and eggs. You knew you were in the military when you'd get an S.O.S. or "Shit on a single." [Laughs] It was two biscuits with gravy poured over it, with sausage and other goodies in it. It was usually served with cream of mushroom soup or something. Lunch was determined by where you were at. At base camp you got a regular, old lunch, like a sandwich or whatever. When you were out in the field, you got C rations, and C rations were in a box.

Casey: How were those rations delivered? Helicopter?

Smith: Oh yeah. That was how that was done.

Casey: Where there any moments in particular that were particularly frightening?

Smith: Well, the first time I got shot down. The first time I got shot down, they shot me in the engine. After they shot my engine out, that's when the helicopter gets real quiet. There is no noise. I was with another guy.

Casey: Do you remember who this man was?

Smith: Walt Tosh, he was my platoon leader. I was going out for a check ride. I was not released as a scout until this guy released me as a scout. Well, anyways engine got shot out, and I started to go through what they call a nipple line. I was trying to get as far away as I could from where I got shot at to where I was going in. I was trying to put distance between them and me. Anyway, when I got towards this field, I started to go through what they call a nipple line. A nipple line is the line of trees next to a river, or some sort of water. When I went through there, I tore off my tail rotor. Then I was like, "Oh shit." So, when I got to just about three to four feet above the ground, I rolled it over. Well, the principle is that you bury all the blades behind you, so they don't come through the cockpit. Then I was on the ground, I was in the muck. There were no doors. No doors on my helicopter.

Casey: What did the helicopter above you do once you had been shot down?

Smith: He knew what the hell was going on. We'll get to him. Anyway, I punched my way out through the plexiglass, right after I did my mental check. Hands, arms, legs, feet, nothing hurt, nothing broke, and then my hand went right through that glass. At this point, the good guys were coming, but they were on the other side of a creek or something. Anyway, I stand up on of the helicopter and pull Walt out because he was hanging there in his straps!

Casey: Was Walt alright?

Smith: He was fine. Once I dropped him, he hit the ground, and he stood up in the helicopter, and this guy is like 6'4", so his head was sticking out of the helicopter. [Laughs] So, we grabbed

some stuff and the Cobra was coming in. Cobra was the helicopter that flew above us, the one that carried the heavy artillery. Okay, he came in and landed about forty feet from us. We ran over to the Cobra and open up the ammo bay doors. There is ammo in the center and on the bay doors there is nothing. I lay on one, Walt lays on the other, and he picks us up and puts us behind the American lines. Once we got off of that, it was just waiting for a ride home. So, yeah that was a pretty memorable moment.

Casey: It's amazing to me that you were able to land a helicopter with no injuries.

Smith: [Laughs] It was the most forgiving aircraft that I ever flew. My reasoning being that behind the pilot's and observer's seats were metal straps that made the shape of an "A." Those held everything together tight, we didn't get hurt. The aircraft took a pretty good beating though; I have a picture of that in there as well.

Casey: Who shot you down? A Vietcong or a soldier in the Northern Vietnamese Army?

Smith: These weren't army guys, no, they came down in uniforms and all that. Vietcong were just running with AK47s. If you saw someone with an AK47, you knew you had a bad guy.

Casey: Where were those guns supplied from?

Smith: The north, Communist China and Communist Russia.

Casey: Were you ever face-to-face with someone?

Smith: You mean a bad guy? No. Well, not that I knew of. Maybe when I was out running around, but not in the woods.

Casey: What did you do for entertainment when you were in Vietnam?

Smith: Let's see here, I went swimming at least twice, there was a lot of drinking. There was one kind of Philippine beer, but we mostly got American beer. We had Millers, we had

Budweiser, any type of booze you wanted, it was there. You could buy a bottle of a heavy Scotch for two bucks. I wasn't too into drinking though.

Casey: How did you stay in touch with your family when you were over there?

Smith: Letters. I was very busy, so I didn't write, write, write, but I would write my folks, and I would write my wife. I was very busy though, I was in charge of the mess hall, so I was also in charge of the kitchen. The guy that ran the operations inside the kitchen was a sergeant, he had a total of three specs, spec fours. Those guys did it all.

Casey: You told me about the first time you crashed while flying, tell me about the second time.

Smith: Oh, the second time, I hit what they call a loach trap. So, when our artillery put out flares at night, the flares were hooked to a metal base by a cable. So, the cable would run this way, into a parachute. As the flare went down, the metal base would extinguish. The purpose of these flares was to see at night. Anyway, what the bad guys would do was that they would take two cables and tie them together, with the two metal canisters on the end of them. What they would do, is that they would stick this on the end of a bamboo stick, thirty feet in the air. So, I ran into one. I ran into one with my helicopter. So, what happened was that the metal dented the blades, and I went right in. I just went right in. Right as I hit it, I knew I was going in.

Casey: Do you remember who the man next to you was?

Smith: Oh yeah! I do! A red-headed kid, Larry. Anyway, we went in and we landed. We checked ourselves, got out of the helicopter and looked around. Spider hole here, spider hole here, spider hole here. [Touches the table alluding to close proximity]

Casey: Spider hole?

Smith: Vietnamese one-man fighting positions, but nobody was home. The guys back at the base camp thought, "He's dead."

Casey: What did spider holes look like?

Smith: It was simply a hole in the ground with a cover over it. It was usually made out of thatch, but whatever it was made out of, it was obvious. I think I was the only one that got nailed by one of those.

Casey: Were you especially close with any of the other pilots?

Smith: I was definitely very close with that one Cobra pilot.

Casey: The one that you crashed with the first time?

Smith: No, the one that died. The first crash I had, I was with my platoon leader.

Casey: Tell me about the leadership over there.

Smith: Well, our troop was commanded by a major. He was a weak individual; he was not a good leader. He was not good because he tolerated a lot of stuff, and he didn't do much. He didn't fly much believe me. He didn't lead by example at all. His executive office was nothing but an outright drunk. I mean, I used to see that guy at 7:30 in the morning still sloshing around in the booze. I didn't like him at all, I mean, I hated the guy. He was just a drunk. This guy was the number-two leader. The commander was the weak leader, but this guy was the number-two guy. He was the executive officer. They rotated up.

Casey: Was there anyone under you?

Smith: Well, kind of. Supposedly there were a couple warrants that were under me, but it didn't matter. We were there together. I wasn't there to do that; I didn't have time.

Casey: Were there any other note-worthy people that you were particularly close with, other than you friend that was killed?

Smith: I was close with the guys in the scout platoon, even the non-enlisted guys. I wasn't supposed to, but even sometimes I'd go have a beer with them.

Casey: Were any of them killed or wounded?

Smith: Killed? No. Wounded? Yeah. This guy Larry that I told you about earlier, he got hurt. He got shot up by a bad guy, and he was at Vung Tau at a hospital. So, I grabbed a helicopter, well I told someone that I was going, and I took off.

Casey: How did that work? Did you need clearance?

Smith: I told them that I was going to visit Larry, well, I told my platoon leader. Operations knew what the hell I was doing, so I took the helicopter and I went over to Bung Tao. It was not too far. It was like going from here, Gettysburg, down to the University of Maryland. For me, it was like a walk in the park! When I got down here, then Larry saw me, and he said, "God, I've got to get out of here." I said, "But Larry you're about to go home," then he said, "I don't want to go home. I don't want to go home. I want to stay." He was hurt! But he told me that he was fine. Whatever he did to convince me, it worked. I told him to grab his shit because we were leaving. I was carrying a pistol, and he was carrying whatever he had, CAR15, I'm not even sure that he still had it, but he jumped all of his stuff and he jumped in our helicopter and we went back, and he disappeared into the troop. He didn't tell the first sergeant.

Casey: The people like Larry, the observers in your helicopter, did they have experience in the bush?

Smith: The observers were primarily aircraft personnel. That being said, some of them had experience as an infantry person. Whether it was in B troop, or another infantry, I don't know. Most of these guys stayed on for at least three tours, which two years maybe even three. They wanted to stay. I mean, there were even some pilots that wanted to stay; I even wanted to stay, but I was married so I had to get out of there.

Casey: Did you have any superstitions or "good luck" rituals that you did before flying?

Smith: Not really, but when I first got in country, I told God that we would make a pact. I went to mass the first Sunday in country and the last Sunday in country. In the time in between, I was killing and that didn't comply with my religion. However, that first Sunday, they gave me a rosary. I carried that rosary wherever I went. Remember that bloodshit? That came with me wherever I went too.

Casey: Tell me a little bit more about this pact.

Smith: I told the "Man Upstairs" that what I had to do was not what I was trained to do. So, I got to go do what I got to do, then I'll be back.

Casey: Was that first mass emotional?

Smith: No, not really. It was a one, two, three, and out you go kind of mass.

Casey: Where did your brother fit into the war? Did you see him?

Smith: Well, Larry was up north, and he was stationed in Fu Vin. He was stationed up towards the DMZ.

[Smith pulls out scrapbook from his time in Vietnam]

Smith: This was me when I had just got back from a mission.

Casey: Nice mustache!

Smith: Thank you, it was the trend back then. [Laughs] This was a PIO deal, a public relations deal. I didn't have a camera, and I couldn't afford anything because most of my money went to the house. I mean, I probably only had seventy bucks. I had to pay for my meals, I had to do this, and I had to do that. I didn't have a lot of money over there, so I started making money by gambling, because I am quite good at poker. Over there, we always had a game. We were always playing. [Shows picture of helicopter] This was the gun platform, and this is a minigun. I would be the one that would shoot the minigun.

Casey: Were you able to see the bad guys on the ground?

Smith: We tried. Then we would with shoot, or we would mark it for the Cobra. We would throw grenades, but me would mark it with colored smoke. Whatever was going on, the Cobra always needed to know what was going on. If I said I was taking fire, he was on top of me.

[Shows a picture of the helicopter after the first crash] Here is Walt Tosh, the guy I crashed with the first time. This was our aircraft, or what is left of it at least.

Casey: How large was your helicopter?

Smith: I'd say it was no larger than seven feet across, and we were big men. [Points at a picture] this was the scrawny guy that got me into scouts, and this operation here was up at Tay Ninh. It was a forward fight. This was the Cobra, the helicopter that flew above us, and this was my buddy.

Casey: The one that passed away?

Smith: Yeah.

Casey: Tell me about what happened after he was killed. Do you remember when you were told that he was dead?

Smith: So, my aircraft went back to go refuel and rearm. We went back to the troop area, and he went back to the fighting area. I was relieved of my duty, and I was done for the day. Before I landed, he was dead. When I landed, I grabbed one of the kids that was carrying an M16 on one of the air-rifle platoons, I grabbed him and said, "I'm taking your rifle and your helmet." The air-rifle platoon was the first platoon to the scene, and I was the first person to the scene. [Pause] All it was, was a hole. Off to the left there was a brain bucket, with half of his brain still in it. There were organs of someone cooking off of him. Then, I turned around and left.

Casey: That must have been devastating.

Smith: It was, but here is a bright spot: Christmas of '68. Bob Hope Show had Anne Margaret. You don't know who that is, do you? You poor kid! [Laughs] She was the most beautiful women in the world! I mean she was just beautiful. So, she was an entertainer, and she was on the Bob Hope Show. She sang, she danced, she jiggled, and all that kind of stuff.

Casey: How was Christmas?

Smith: Well, it wasn't fun, but it was something I saw. I did enjoy the Bob Hope Show. Bob Hope, he was a hell of a man. He did a lot for entertainment. He did a lot in World War II; he did a lot in Korea; he did a lot in the Navy; and he did a lot in Vietnam. I can't quite remember when his last show was, but they got a building downtown in D.C. for Bob Hope.

Casey: Who put this book together? [referencing the scrapbook]

Smith: My first wife put most of this together.

Casey: Did you ever get remarried?

Smith: Oh yeah. Here is an interesting picture. This was our scout platoon, minus a couple of guys who were out flying. These were all of our trophies.

Casey: Tell me about these trophies, what were they?

Smith: Well, you didn't get a trophy unless a grunt gave it to you. They were all of these flags, and guns. All the stuff that the bad guys left behind.

Casey: Who were you mainly firing at when you were flying, mostly Vietcong or NVA?

Smith: All bad guys, but mostly Vietcong. Some NVA.

Casey: What was it like battling two fronts like that?

Smith: Well, it wasn't really battling two fronts, it was where you were at. The front was wherever you were at. I was primarily on the front, but when the grunts were on the front, they were on the ground. When I was around them, they were super protected. If I saw anything, it

died. One time there was a patrol, and they called for help. As I got on station, they were crossing a river. The bad guys were crossing a river. So, I started shooting. When it was all said and done, and the good guys had caught up with them, they captured them. Now in this group of people, most of them were shot up, there was one woman. She was shot in both shoulders. The look that she gave me was that she would have killed me if she could have. Yeah, I mean, it was that intense. So, she was shot in both shoulders. There was another woman in the group, who was killed. She got cut in half.

Casey: So, it was common for both men and women to be fighting?

Smith: Oh yeah. So, there was a third woman, was pregnant. Not a scratch, now that was an act of God. I mean, that was a real act of God. I knew he was around. The grunts came back, and they said, "Why'd you shoot these other guys?" I said, "I went out and I marked where they were in the river." They went into the river and dug them out. They were looking for all of the information to identify these individuals. Then they told me to come on in, then they gave me an AK47 and a flag. Well, that flag was NVA. That was the only way you got any trophies, only if a grunt gave it to you.

Casey: Did you know any of the grunts personally?

Smith: No, they were separate. They had a life to live, and that was tough. If I could ever I help them, I would. They had a very tough job. See that there? Remember how I told you about that flare with the wire and all that jazz? That is what was left of my tail rotor. This other picture shows other trophies that were given to us by our infantry. Here is a pistol, and all other sorts of jazz. Here is a picture of a good friend of mine, Mark Fruran. This was a cartoon of the first brigade infantry commander. He was a full Colonel, and I think he was mentally ill. Sick in the head. I forget his name. But, remember that weak leader that I was talking about earlier? This

guy in the picture started slapping that weak leader while in a briefing. So, I started falling back with my hand on my pistol, and people started looking at me! “Hey! What are you doing! Get him out of here!” Covert guy came over, and out you go! [Laughs] It was so surprising though, I had never seen a full Colonel beat up a Major! People referred to him as “Mal Hombre.” [Bad man in Spanish]

Casey: For the record, we are looking at this picture that is titled “Mal Hombre.” It is a cartoon of a man with a knife in his hand. How else does this picture describe him?

Smith: All he cared about was that you would give him your “dicks,” and what I mean by “dicks” was our body count. That’s what he called them, and that’s all that he cared about. [Points at a picture of two bandaged men] These two men threw a white phosphorous grenade the wrong way, and I trained them both. They tried to throw it, but it bounced back in the helicopter and went off.

Casey: So, you trained people when you were there?

Smith: Oh yeah. I trained as many scouts as I could because I was a good one. I was very successful. [Points to a picture of Vietnamese village] See this here, they were all bad guys. Again, I got that from the grunts. They took films, they took pictures. This is a North Vietnamese stamp, and this is some kind of North Vietnamese identification card. This here was a card that Ho Chi Min sent out to the guys serving in the South. We had what we called a Choi Hoi program, the United States and a bunch of other countries in Vietnam had it too. A Choi Hoi program stated that me, as a Vietcong, if I turned in my rifle and I had one of these passes, I was given safety. It allowed me to come in without being killed. So, if I gave up my pistol, and I had this, I couldn’t be captured or whatever. I never believed that. This here is a drawing of President

Johnson hiding in a cave from the victorious armies of the Vietnamese.³ This is a piece of Vietnamese propaganda. So much propaganda. Here is my buddy Larry. This is me and my brother in front of a monument.

Casey: Who was portrayed in the monument?

Smith: I forget his name, but the leader of South Vietnam.

Casey: Was your brother ever on the front?

Smith: Well, he was never in the bush. That being said, there was no real safe place. Even at our base camp, a building that I lived in was destroyed by a rocket. That was very common. [Shows a picture of the building] I lived on the other side of the building. This was done by a 120-millimeter rocket. It was just like a great big bomb had gone off.

Casey: When you and your brother were apart, how did you stay in contact.

Smith: We didn't write each other all the time, but we sent a letter or two. He sent me a Christmas card once.

Casey: Did you save those letters?

Smith: Oh yeah! I got them right in here.

Casey: How did you stay up to date with news and media?

Smith: So, this guy that I told you about who died? We went into the bar business together. We got a building from that guy who was a drunk. The building was funky because the foundation had sunk. This kid was a warrant officer, but he had exceptional skills in construction. He got the building straightened up. Remember how I was the mess officer? So, I came over with a cooler box. The thing didn't work as a freezer, but the box did. So, I put that in, and we built a bar. I knew where all of the mess tables were, and I knew where all the extra mess chairs were. So,

³ Lyndon B. Johnson, 36th U.S. President, and president during part of the Vietnam War.

from the mess hall, all the chairs and tables we didn't use we put in the club. He and I took our money, and we bought a TV set. We put the TV set in there. It was based on the honor system. If you wanted a soda, you paid twenty cents. If you wanted a beer, you paid twenty-five cents. If you wanted something else, you just brought it in yourself. My buddy's name was Willard Spencer Lund. The business was very profitable, but when he died, I never went back into it. I didn't touch it; I didn't want anything to do with it. He was my friend. Every time that I'd look back, I'd see something that we did. It was tough enough to just stick around.

Casey: Tell me about the first time that you met.

Smith: [Laughs] Oh, it was pretty funny. So, I told you about how there was a caste system. There were officers, warrant officers, and enlisted guys. Well, the warrant officers called us "R.L.O.'s": "real live officers." This name was not honorific; it was derogatory. We always teased each other. We would call them the "Warrant Officer Detective Association," and stuff. It was comradery, it was not antagonistic at all. Anyway, he [Willard] came up to me, because I was the mess officer, and said, "How about going into business with me? The executive officer said that I could buy this building, and if you want to we could go into business together." It took me awhile to realize that I had no choice, I thought he was just being friendly. [Laughs] So, he straightened up the building, and in the meantime, I got this cooler. Once we got the building figured out, we put a bar on top of the cooler. We also put out a cigar box for money, sold drinks, and made some money.

Casey: I never imagine so much exchange going on in country.

Smith: Do you want to see some money? Oh, I'll show you money. [Points to a piece of currency] This was five cents.

Casey: There was a fully different type of currency?

Smith: Oh yeah. There was a fully different type of currency. You didn't have any dimes, nickels, quarters, and a dollar. This is what you had. I think that is Lady Liberty or someone on that five-cent bill. This is ten cents, and that was a picture of a sub, I guess. This here, was bad-guy money.

Casey: How did you get supplies there?

Smith: Once again, I was the mess officer. There were a certain number of tables and chairs in the mess hall for us, for the troops. I had excess equipment, so I took that and put that in the bar. Well, we weren't dumb. That TV set that I mentioned? I was watching that TV set when the men landed on the moon.

Casey: Interesting. Tell me about that moment.

Smith: July 1969. I was thinking, "What the hell am I doing here? We are shooting people with twenty-twos, and we don't go anywhere. Now two people are on the moon. Are you kidding me? To me, it was just profound. I just couldn't get over it. All of our news was controlled.

[Brief break]

Smith: Get the information of the top of that book.

Casey: *Winged Sabers: The Air Cavalry in Vietnam.*

Smith: You are talking to a tiny, little microcosm. My story is just a microcosm of Vietnam. Out of 2,500,000 men, and women I guess, I was one.

Casey: A story still worth being told. Tell me about this book.

Smith: This book is a good reference if you can get a copy of it. It has the history of the Winged Sabers, which was an air cavalry branch. The symbol that represented the Winged Sabers was two crossed swords over wings, because we flew.

Casey: Did you ever meet up with the Lund family after returning to the U.S.? Tell me about that.

Smith: Not for years. I couldn't face it. His mother passed away, and all that good stuff. We became so close to each other in such a little amount of time. Well, it was between life and death. I had a newswoman come to my house, within the last five years, to write a piece on Willard. I met his brother. I went to a ceremony where he was honored. It was in a small town on Long Island, New York. Actually, some guys knew that I knew him. So, I was a part of a very large organization called the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots' Association. There are a lot of guys that knew me because of this book.

Casey: Were you given any awards, or were you honored in any way?

Smith: I got three Distinguished Flying Crosses. That's an award for valor. I got one bronze star for achievement. I got twenty-three medals for achievement. Many of these medals were because of what I did in the mess hall. I kept everyone going and I improved it; I improved morale. Remember all of the souvenirs that I showed you that we received from the grunts? One day, I was in the mess hall which was bland. There was nothing on the walls, I mean nothing. So, one day I took an AK47 and I hung it up on the wall. Then, I got my dad to send me a puzzle. Then, me and the guys in the mess hall put that thing together. It was a beautiful, fall picture of Aspen, Colorado. It had birches, and a big lake on it. What we did was we glued that to a board, trimmed it, and then hung that in the mess hall. That was the start of something good. Remember that weak leader? He had a symbol on the front of his jeep which said, "Bravo 317." When he left, it was on his jeep, and guess what? It "appeared" in the mess hall. I don't know how it got there. [Laughs] The morale was very important for the guys, especially the guys that worked all day

and all night. Then a couple other guys started bringing in junk, and we started hanging that on the wall. They took pride in the fact that they were in the outfit. The B troop outfit.

Casey: Do you recall the day your service ended?

Smith: Remember when I told you about when I got into country? That was called the 90th replacement depo. In other words, that is where everyone went to be assigned to where they were going to go. Going out, it was similar. To leave, you'd go to the 90th and they would get you on a plane to take you home. Again, I was sent to bunk one, two, three, I'm now Captain Smith, and I'm headed home. You were put on a manifest, then put on a plane. They would take a bus load of you to the airport, and you were gone. I left in '69.

Casey: What did it feel like when you were headed back?

Smith: [Laughs] I was fine; I was very happy. I was finally going home.

Casey: Where were you stationed when your service ended?

Smith: I was at Xi'an.

Casey: What was the first thing you did upon arrival home?

Smith: Hugged my wife and kids and kissed my mom and dad. Before I left Vietnam, I had to go to Saigon to register a pistol, because I wanted to take my pistol home. When I was in Saigon, I ran into this kid from down the block that I mentioned earlier, G.I. Joe. Yeah, so, I had to go to this building to register these weapons, and I ran into him! I think it was called the Massachusetts Bay Company or something like that. After I ran into him, we went to a place called "La Cay." It was a French restaurant in Saigon. I had French Fries and steak. Growing up, we had French Fries and steak every Thursday, and I loved it.

Casey: Did you run into any classmates while overseas?

Smith: No, I didn't even run into classmates. Oh wait, I did see some classmates! One guy, I think his name was Robertson, he was in the 7th and the 1st Cavalry. He was living in the building next to me in Xi'an when I first got in country. We didn't hang much though.

Casey: What did you do when you came back?

Smith: I went to flight school. I didn't go to flight school to fly; I went to flight school to train. That's what I did. I was in a function of assignments. B troop was an assignment, and flight school was an assignment. I made some friends there, and even my brother-in-law got stationed there, when I was there too. We served in the same academics' branch.

Casey: Can you tell me about your life after Vietnam? When did you move to Pennsylvania?

Smith: I moved here in 1999, but from Fort Walters, I decided to stay in the Army. I called the Army branch and told them that I wanted to stay, and they told me to go to the career course. After Fort Walters, I went to the advanced course at Fort Knox in 1972. They told me that I wasn't needed in Vietnam, so I wanted to go to Fort Carson [Colorado]. So, I went to Fort Carson. That was my next assignment. I served in a ground cavalry regiment. I was in the 1st and the 10th regiment there. From there, I was picked up for recruiting duty. I was one of the first Captains to be placed on recruiting duty. My area went from the Golden gate Bridge to the Oregon Border, along the coast. I had seven recruiting stations, and about twelve to fifteen sergeants. From there, I went to Fort Hood [Texas]. There, I went from 1st cav to the 6th cav, and from there I went to recruiting duty in Baltimore. I was the Executive Officer for the Baltimore/Washington District Recruiting command. From there, I went to Korea, '81-'82. I came back, and I was assigned to First Army Headquarters and remained there until I retired.

Casey: When did you get remarried?

Smith: 1987. I got married to Jane Francis Sheehan.

Casey: That is wonderful.