

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Gary Sigler

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember-Vietnam Oral History project

Interview # VRV-A-L-2018-027

Gary Sigler, a Vietnam War era Air Force pilot and navigator who spent six years as a prisoner in the Hanoi Hilton, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember-Vietnam* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: May 30, Jun 7 & 14, Jul 18, 2018

Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:50 + 1:32 + 2:32 + 2:09 / 1.83 + 1.53 + 2.53 + 2.15 = 8.04 hrs.

Session 1: Early life, college years and flight training in an RF-4 Phantom

Session 2: Combat missions as navigator on an RF-4 recon aircraft over N. Vietnam

Session 3: Capture over North Vietnam and experiences as a POW at Hanoi Hilton

Session 4: More POW stories, release and life after the Air Force

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on August 21, 2018.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

Abstract

Gary Sigler, *Veterans Remember-Vietnam*, VRV-A-L-2018-027

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Gary Sigler was born on July 14, 1942 in Bloomington, Illinois, but the family moved frequently during Gary's earliest years. He came of age in Golden, Colorado, graduating from Golden High School in 1960. He then attended Colorado State University, starting majoring in engineering, then changing to psychology. While there he joined the school's Air Force ROTC program, which is where he learned to fly. Following graduation and commissioning as a second lieutenant in the Air Force in December 1964 he married Pam Harris, then began his initial flight training at Reese Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas. He received survival training at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada and training on the RF-4 Phantom at Sumpter, South Carolina, where his daughter Becky was born. Following his first post-training assignment at Mountain Home Air Force Base in Idaho, Lieutenant Sigler was sent to the Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base in northern Thailand in November 1966.

Sigler served as a co-pilot and navigator on an RF-4 Phantom, which was equipped with various photographic equipment to perform reconnaissance missions. The pilot was Major Mark Stephenson. Over the next five months he flew ninety-one missions over North Vietnam, mostly night missions where they flew solo. On his ninety-second mission on April 29, 1967, their aircraft flew a recon mission over Hanoi. After MAJ Stephenson took evasive maneuvers to avoid a surface-to-air missile, the aircraft clipped the top of a tree. The aircraft caught fire and Sigler was forced to eject, but the plane, with MAJ Stephenson, crashed. Sigler, who had severe burns and a broken back (unknown to him), evaded the enemy for a couple of days but was eventually captured. He spent the next six years in prison, mostly at the infamous Hanoi Hilton. For the first year he spent most of his time in solitary confinement but was periodically interrogated and tortured. Sigler spoke extensively about his POW experiences, about how he coped with captivity and torture, and shared stories about many of the other prisoners with which he was imprisoned. He discussed the North Vietnamese's attempts to break down their resistance, including showing them films of anti-war protesters and visits from many who were opposed to the war, including Jane Fonda.

Sigler was released on March 4, 1973 and after spending a short time in the Philippines where the prisoners were given physicals, he was reunited with his family at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, where he was debriefed and given more medical care. He eventually decided to leave the Air Force and farm where Pam and Becky were living in rural Table Grove, Illinois. He later became a life insurance salesman before moving to the company's home office. After observing an accident in 2000, Gary experienced serious post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, with which he eventually learned to cope. He has spoken about his experiences many times since his release, feeling that it is his obligation to do so.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Vietnam War POW; Hanoi Hilton; flying reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam; F-4R Phantom; Pam (Harris) Sigler; Udorn, Thailand air force base; interrogations and torture of Vietnam War era POWs; Major Mark Stephenson; post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); air force survival training in the 1960s; 11th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron; Jane Fonda; Ramsey Clark;

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