

# John Kissell's Operation Taps/Empire Statesmen 2009 Scholarship Essay

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Interview of Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Boyer Peth (Ret.)

6/26/2009

I interviewed my Great Uncle, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Boyer Peth (Ret.). He shared opinions on what he wants the next generation to know about Honor, Courage, Sacrifice, and Duty. He also shared with me some of the awards and decorations he received.

Lt. Col. Peth served in the United States Army and fought in the Vietnam War. He served our country for 26 years from 1967 to 1992. Upon his retirement in 1992, he had accumulated 3600 hours of flight time. In his first tour of duty he was a Dust Off pilot. During this time Peth flew over 922 hours of combat and combat support during his first eleven months in the 159<sup>th</sup> Medical Detachment. During his first tour Peth was awarded the Silver Star, two Distinguished Flying Crosses, an Air Medal for Valor, the Purple Heart, 28 awards of the Air Medal for combat missions, and various other U.S. and South Vietnam Service Medals.

Near the end of Peth's first tour his aircraft took 39 hits. One round went threw his right arm and another went threw his boot. Peth returned to Vietnam in 1972 for a second tour as a 1LT and was a Captain and a platoon leader. He spent all of '72 performing missions from combat assaults to cross border insertion and extractions with Special Forces. At the conclusion of Peth's second tour he had built up over 1500 hours of combat flight time, and received 42 awards of the Air Medal.

When I asked him what he wanted the next generation to know about Honor, Courage, Sacrifice, and Duty he said they are very important lessons for the next generation to learn. His comments on Honor are that honor is doing the right thing even when you are under pressure. When he says always do the right thing he adds and always make it right. When asked about Courage he said it is similar to what Honor is except it is when you are fearful of something. He says you should still get over your fear and do the right thing. He says courage is something you need to resist peer pressure. I asked him what he wanted the next generation to know about Sacrifice. He said the next generation should know that you are making a sacrifice by serving in the military. When he says, you are making a sacrifice by serving in the military he means that it is a good kind of sacrifice. Finally, Duty, Peth says duty is something you are obligated to do by living in this country. Also you have a duty to support service men and women, and you have duties you have to do in the community in which you live.

When I asked him if there were any other additional lessons he would want the next generation to learn he said there are many but he wants the next generation to learn Perseverance. He said the thing he hates to see is young people giving up, this is because they don't know how to persevere. "You need to persevere to succeed in, Education, Life, your Job, Military, and Drum Corps" Peth adds.

His most satisfying assignment was being a medical evacuation pilot (Dust Off pilot) in Vietnam. Being a Dust Off pilot was a notable assignment for Peth because he knew he could save so many lives. Once over a four-day period he saved at least 252 lives. On some occasions he flew twenty-four plus hours at a time. When flying out for wounded soldiers he was shot at many times, but usually not hit. After eleven months in Vietnam, he took a hit to his arm and leg while flying a mission. Using helicopters in Vietnam was a big change in warfare because you could save lives safely and quickly.

While still enlisted in the Army, from 1990-1992, he was the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization system Element Manager for the Ground-based Surveillance and Tracking System programs. Here he accomplished another notable assignment by developing the “Family of X-Band Radars” (President Reagan’s Star Wars Program). In 1994, he was hired by Raytheon Company to serve their Washington Office, here he held the position of Director for the Air and Missile Defense Program.

A lot can be learned from our servicemen and women. The sacrifice they made to make our country what it is today and the courage to handle what might come our way. Peth mentioned that he believes the skills learned in the military are similar to those learned in Drum Corps, such as: team work, discipline, and relying on those people around you.