

HOW ARE YOU DOING IN VIETNAM?

Transcript of tapes recorded by Capt. William B. Graves and His Family during the Vietnam War –May-June, 1967

MUSIC UP: Vietnamese percussion

CASTANEDA: Reel-to-Reel audiotapes sent back and forth from a soldier to his family during the Vietnam War land in a box and are stored in a shed for over 40 years. They were given to the Wyoming State Archives to preserve the story of one Wyoming soldier. The tapes are a living history-- not only of the turbulence of the era, but also tell the tale of a family trying to stay connected ...even as they are separated by war.

GRAVES CHILDREN: Can we sing “My Country Tis of Thee?” Ok...(singing)

CASTANEDA: In 1967, Captain William Boyd Graves of Douglas, Wyoming, headed for Vietnam to serve a tour of duty as a reconnaissance pilot in the U.S. Army. He bought a tape recorder and sent tapes back to his family -- his wife Ruthie of nearly ten years and his kids..daughters Shawn and Rhonda and his son Billie. In return, they recorded themselves and sent tapes back to him.

RUTHIE: (to kids) I think you all are little stinkpots and I think you should be ashamed. But maybe Daddy would enjoy a little family squabble.

CASTANEDA: Linda Fabian, who lives in Wheatland, Wyoming, was Capt. Graves little sister. The youngest of the Graves children, she remembers her big brother.

FABIAN: I have the typical memories of a little sister and a big brother – he used to tease me all the time and called me “four eyes.” He was very good to me and I was always so proud of him. He was very popular in high school. His nickname in high school was “Pogo.” I can see him lying on our couch and his friends tattooing the word “pogo” into his arm. And I can still remember as a member of the Guard, he would go up to Fort Laramie every summer – Laramie Peak would catch on fire and he would go and I can still remember the smell when he came home (crying.) I called him “Bubby” because I couldn’t say Bill and I can still remember jumping into his arms...I was just so happy he was home. After I got out of high school, I moved to Washington D.C. By then he was gone already and had the three kids ...I can remember when he called me and told me he was going to Vietnam.

CASTANEDA: Another of Capt. Graves sisters, Georgia Moore, or rather “Georgie” was just 14 months younger than her brother Bill. He was captain of the football team in high school and she was a cheerleader.

MOORE: We were very, very close growing up. We spent all of our time together. From the time I can remember, I was always included with his friends, and as a matter of fact, I graduated a year early so that I could graduate high school with him. Actually, he was my hero, my protector.

CASTANEDA: Graves' military career began very early.

FABIAN: He lied about his age to get into the National Guard. We know that he was about 16 or 17 when he did that. We were a very patriotic family so I think that's where he got the desire to do that and obviously to fly. He went to officer's candidate school in Fort Rucker and flew the OV 1-C Mohawks which, as we have learned in our research recently, was one of the premier reconnaissance planes –had all kinds of electronic equipment.

MOORE: Well, Bill volunteered for Vietnam and the second time he volunteered was when they selected him to go. He just felt like this was his duty – to help people.

CASTANEDA: Graves borrowed a tape recorder from a buddy and made his first tape on the way over to Vietnam.

GRAVES: Well, now what your Daddy will do when I'm in Vietnam, kids, is we are going to fly Mohawks. The Mohawks we've been flying out here....we're going to fly around and help the South Vietnamese people by flying our airplanes. And, we have a lot of work to do with our planes and stuff. And while I'm there, I'll probably get to see Captain Hodges-- I'm sure he'll be there. And, Uncle Merle Sloan, he's right there pretty close to where Daddy's going. When I get a hold of them and everything, we will make a tape and send back to my kids. All right? All right. Oh, let's see. It's now three o'clock in the afternoon so in a few hours Daddy will be going over to the Company and then we're going to take a bus and go over to McCord Air Force Base. And, over at the Air Force Base, we're going to get on a C-141. That's that great big jet aircraft that you see coming in..looks like it's going to land here at the air field. It's a real nice big jet airplane. We'll all get on it and we'll fly overseas in it and we'll probably take about 20 hours to fly. And I think we will probably land in Japan. We'll land in Japan and just stop long enough to get some fuel so for the airplane so I can keep going. But I don't think Daddy or anybody will have time to get off of the airplane. And from there, then we'll going on down someplace in Vietnam.

CASTANEDA: And his belief in his mission was unparalleled.

GRAVES: And I don't when we'll really get started working there. But, we'll work real hard and we'll help the South Vietnamese people and we'll do everything for them we can because they want to be free like we are in America. And you know kids, a long, long time ago, the American people, when they first came to this country, they fought wars too because they wanted to free—they wanted to be democratic. And so, they had wars with England and different people and they established a real nice government --- that's what we have now. And, people are free to do things – they can walk down the street, they can go buy things, they can vote on who they want to be their leaders and all these kinds of stuff. They can go to what church they want to go to, they have freedom of the press – that means to write things and stuff like this. This is what real freedom is. But the South Vietnamese people don't have this kind of freedom and that's what we're

trying to help them get. So, we'll fight their war and we'll help them all we can and one of these days, the people there will probably be able to vote for whoever they want to vote for. They'll set up their own government and then they won't have to be afraid of the Communist people and they'll be driven clear back into North Vietnam and everything. Well, kids, Dad can't think of too much else to say right now but I will send you another tape very soon and I will write you a letter just as soon as Daddy gets across the ocean and tell you what my new address is.

Silence:

GRAVES: Well, hello Tiger. Well, it's now about Father's Day, by golly. I received all your cards yesterday and I was very happy with them. Thank you kids for the cards and also for the one from Mitzi. I cut a tape this morning – you're going to be real proud of me, I know. I just bought myself a new Father's Day present – guess what it is. Yep, I bought myself the tape recorder I wanted. They got a bunch of them in the PX the other day. As a matter of fact, yesterday morning they came in. I went over and picked one of them up. They had the AKAI in there that I've been looking for, you know the one I was talking about before I left. But I ended up getting a Sony – a Sony 530 – one of their new models. And boy, it sure does sound good Sweetie. A real nice stereophonic and the speakers for it are in the machine itself..also has two that come in the lid. We got it set up last night playing it and it's really beautiful. We set up last night quite late with this thing—sit here playing with it. I bought two taped albums yesterday – I got one Peter, Paul and Mary one and another one Petula Clark. So, we kind of ran those things into the ground, but they sound pretty good. We've got to finish up the room here...Wayne and I got one section of the ceiling in yesterday using some green nylon mesh stuff for the ceilings. Put one section of it in yesterday morning and we're going to try to get the rest of it today and when we get the room all done, I'm going to try to set up this machine. Got to go to work at noon. Everybody took this morning off and boy, I'll tell ya, we've really been humping out here. I've just about got all the ? all built for the airplanes out there. And, we've been blowing barrels and hauling and all this kind of crap. And, effective today, I've just taken over, in charge of all the construction projects in the company...how I ended up with that job...which ought to be a real bag of giggles out there...(laughs) I'll tell you what. A lot of things going on and my god, I don't know what else. They're still working on the runway...not working on the runway itself, they're working on the taxi ways around it. Oh, back to the tapes lover.....

MUSIC UP AND UNDER

CASTANEDA: Captain Graves made sure to talk to and encourage each one of his children on the tapes.

GRAVES: (sound of breath) Daddy had to brush a bug off of him..we have a lot of bugs over here. It's worse than Fort Rucker is and Daddy stands around here half the time with his spray can spraying bugs but the Army spray isn't too good. I think I'll have to..one of these days if it doesn't work better in the ceiling stop everything and I'll write back there and Shawn, you and Billy and Rhonda go down and you can get Daddy a can

of Black Flag bug spray and send that to me one of these times. Kids, the weather is awfully hot here. The temperature has been running between 90 and 100 degrees right now. And the relative humidity, which is the water in the air, is running about 70-90 percent which is real, real high. It's even worse....about the same I guess it was at Fort Rucker except it's a lot hotter here. So you kind of walk around and you sure do sweat a lot in this part of the world.

SHAWN: This is Shawn. The other day Mother went and got me ..um..my stuff for camp. Tomorrow I'm going to ..um...go to Girl Scout Camp. I got a haircut just like Mommie's. I got a new nightgown. I miss you very, very much. I wish you were here to see me in my uniform. Well, I'll sing some more songs later. Now Billy and Rhonda have to talk.

GRAVES: Hey, guess what I did with those Father's Day cards I got from you guys? Well, today's Father's Day so I took out my stapler I have here and I hung all five of those cards up on the wall. There's one that says Shawn, one that says Bill, one that says "Jones" and one that says Mitzi. I don't think Mitzi really wrote that letter, or that card..I think somebody helped Mitzi. And then I got one from Momma – stretch it out here and it says "Happy Father's Day, Tiger..from Your Kitten." I got it stuck right up there and stapled on the wall and all the fellas think that's really funny. They think that's really funny because they know good and well that Momma's the tiger of our house and not Daddy.

BILL: Hi Dad, this is Bill. How are you doing up there? I haven't seen you in a long time. I can hardly wait for you to get home so you can help me with my tent. I got one – mother bought it for me...it's got some spikes to it. to it. Mitzi's doing fine up here. There's some cats up here and Mitzi likes to run and chase after them. You know what? Shawny's going into Junior Scouts now.

GRAVES: Hey, I sent you a picture the other day, Bill...or, I sent a picture to Momma...one of when we were moving into these buildings. And if you'll look at 'em you 'll see that there are sandbags all around these buildings and that's in case that somebody starts shooting, they can't shoot inside the houses because they've got sandbags all over the place. And, around the airplanes we've built these things to help them out in case somebody decides to shoot at them. And, they're big 55-gallon drums like they put oil and stuff in and we've got them filled full of sand and stacked way high so they help protect our airplanes.

RHONDA: Hi Daddy, this is Rhonda. How are you doing in Vietnam? We sure do miss you. Um...I've been making lots of sandwiches...mostly peanut butter and jelly. The Beal kids came to play...we had a good time.

GRAVES: Rhonda, I wonder if your hair is still as long as it was. You still have that big ponytail? Huh? Yeah, ok. You'd really be a prize over here, young lady cuz all the people over in this part of the world have very dark, black hair. And I'll bet you if I

brought you over here with your blond hair and that long ponytail, I bet I could sell you for....Oh, I'll bet I could get at least five or ten dollars for you. What do you think about that?

SHAWN: Hi Daddy, this is Shawn again...thought I'd talk some more. Mrs. Woods, across the street, um...gave me a sleeping bag for camp and she gave me the mess kit and everything's in it. I'm real exciting about going! Mom got me a memory book too. It's to put all my friends' name and special things that happen there.

GRAVES: Bill, I hope you've found some friends there that you can play baseball with. You keep working on that baseball of yours and when I get home we'll play some catch there and you'll probably be big enough to hit some baseballs to me now.

BILL: Bobby came to see me today. I'm going to go over to his house one of these days. And, maybe tomorrow I'll get to spend the night in my tent.

GRAVES: Shawn, you work hard on your swimming, darling. Just keep trying and you'll do real, real well at it....Daddy knows!

RHONDA: I've been trying to be good but I said naughty words.....I'm trying not to say 'em anymore.

GRAVES: And Rhonda Jo, I don't know what to say to you...you're kind of a little nut anyway. But, I want you to help your mother around the house, Jones, ok? And you..don't forget how to make sandwiches...I sure do miss those sandwiches for lunch, I'll tell you what. So, you kids all be real good there. Have a nice summer vacation and everybody help out mother. Ok? Ok. And Daddy loves you all very, very much!

CASTANEDA: As well, Captain Graves and his wife Ruthie recorded tapes to each other.

GRAVES: Well, good evening Tiger. It's about six or seven o'clock at night here. Not too much is going on..we're still doing a lot of building. We went down today and finished putting one wall in each room of the BOQ. Run out of all the electrical stuff and still can't get anyway. Anyway, we got all our airplanes in today so we got all 12 of them parked over at the Air Force Base – they're finishing up our runway for us and we should be moving them back into the area before too long.

RUTHIE: Well, hi again Love. I just looked at the clock and it's after midnight already. Finally have Shawny all packed for camp though. She really is excited! I don't know ...it seem like our little girl is growing up a bit. Makes me feel just a wee bit older...for some reason. Uh...Roxie's going to meet us at camp. Jane and I are going to drive her up...take all the kids with us, of course. And, Roxie and them are going to meet us there uh..tomorrow afternoon. So, tomorrow's going to be a real busy day. I'm going to bowl in the morning.

GRAVES: Oh well, here I am back again, Babe. It's about 10:30 right now. I didn't do too much. Let's see...what was I doing when I cut the letter off? Oh yeah, I went to play crib, that's what it was. Oh yeah, Kent and I played a couple of games. He won part of his money back. He took the first game which brought it back to forty some cents and then I took the second game so now he still owes me about seventy-five cents. (laughs) Then, I had to take off and go discuss some stuff. Tomorrow morning...I'm going to have to hit the bed here pretty quick...Major Ellis and I are going to take a convoy down to Camron Bay and bring another load of supplies in so we're going to be cutting out of here about uh, seven in the morning, seven-fifteen, something like that. Drive down to Camron and then we'll probably spend the day there...it's about a four and a half hour drive by convoy going down so we'll probably spend tomorrow night there rather than drive the convoy back over that road at night.

RUTHIE: Hired a boy today to keep the yard done. I'm going to pay him ten dollars a month. He's been doing a pretty job of it for me. Anyway, I've been paying him a dollar and a half or a couple of dollars every time he did something. And um, today he edged the sidewalk and things like this. I'm just real pleased with him. He is such a good little worker. Just real good. Watches out for the kids and the windows with the lawnmower and everything.

GRAVES: I sure have enjoyed getting' your letters, especially the ones from the kids. And, Tiger, one thing I'd really like if you can get it for me, uh, I'd like a picture of you. Of course, I'd like a picture of the kids too, but I've got a few of those. But one thing I really don't have is a picture of my girl. And, the one that we got when you was nineteen years old..well, you know, it's ok, but I think you're a little bit better looking now than you were then. ...so how about seeing if you can get a color portrait made for me if you would and send it over here. I'll even put it out in plain sight where anyone can see it when they walk into the room. All right Sweetheart.

RUTHIE: I do believe your son lives a charmed life. We have a patio door over here with glass sliding doors...and he walked through it last night. He, uh, wasn't hurt at all ...really broke a lot easier than it should have. Oh, he was so lucky. He got some glass on him but it didn't even cut him. Just don't know how he does it sometimes. But, I called today and they came out and replaced it very quickly.

GRAVES: I don't know if you can hear the background noise over here or not, honey, but they're working twenty-four hours a day on our runway out here and they still got all the heavy machinery going and everything. We're not very happy with it – it's all steel planking and not very wide..it's about 60 feet wide and 3500 feet long so we've been griping about it – I don't know if that's going to help or not. We're going to have to use it anyway, I'm afraid. There's always a pretty hairy crosswind up here and we're just very, very displeased with the whole situation as far as the runway and everything goes. We're supposed to get us some non-slip compound to put over it to help hold you on the runway a little bit when it's wet because that stuff gets pretty slick.

RUTHIE: Rhonda's really been practicing making her sandwiches. She's waiting so anxiously. I guess to her it's already been a year. It's so hard to explain time to her. Well, to all of them for that matter, but she's actually the worst. The other two have more of an idea. It's awfully hard for her to understand. But, you just keep writing to them, -- that makes them feel good. And, she's just so proud of her Daddy's letters. My goodness, she gets so excited when they get a letter.

GRAVES: I suppose by now you should have gotten all my letters and everything. And, you realize that I've been running all the way from the DMZ up by North Vietnam clear down to the Delta. And, it's kind of good to be back. I guess I've been back about four days now...something like that. And, in a way, it's good to get back and get settled and have your own bed and a little bit of a closet to hang your clothes and stuff in.

RUTHIE: I hope I'm using this tape recorder right and that everything's working right for you. Sometimes I don't seem to talk loud enough into it and I don't know, my voice is so strange. I didn't realize I sounded so much like Lois until I got to listening to myself on this. I guess we probably we all sound alike and I just hadn't realized it but I thought I sounded more like Evelyn. I listen to this and it sounds like Lois talking to the kids there, you know. Just exactly like her. Don't suppose she'd like that....do you?

GRAVES: You know Baby, it's kind of funny -- I've only been gone from you for about a month now and I swear it's been a year! It's going to be an awfully long time over here, I'm afraid. And, I know it's about the same for you.

RUTHIE: Makes me feel pretty good to hear your voice. I don't like making tapes but I sure like playing yours. That's really nice. Quite an invention. And, of course your letters -- I just think you're doing so well writing as often as you do and I just hope you keep it up because, gee -- we wait for the mailman. And, if we have to go someplace, we can hardly wait to get home. The mail comes here in the morning --usually about 10:30 or 11:00 and we're pretty excited.

GRAVES: Keep the bed warm and Daddy will be home one of these first days. (laughs) All right, how's that? And us, maybe when we go to Hawaii, I'll show you that little trick I learned over here in the Orient -- how's that?

RUTHIE: We're still going to church on post. I had a lady yesterday come by and ..Presbyterian church...she's from Wyoming -- Cheyenne. She knew some people in Douglas -- the bishop and some of the others.

GRAVES: And, we'll be taking off here again one of these days. I don't know when -- probably August. I'll be going to the Philippines for a few days to the jungle survival course they've got there.

RUTHIE: Oh by the way...I'm just madder than...well, I'm just so mad I could chew up nails and spit out tacks! I'll get it right here, pretty quick. What do you mean teaching some girl to shine your boots? I'm the only one that's supposed to get to shine those

besides you. I don't know if I like that or not. Now maybe the ironing...that I don't care for. But those are my boots...fella. You just be careful there or I'll getcha!

GRAVES: (sighs) But I sure wish I could be there with you, darling. I'd like to take you in my arms and give you a great big ole' kiss and tell you how much I love you. Well, lover, I can't think of too much else to say. So, sweetheart, take care of yourself and if you need anything at all, don't hesitate to write. Everything's going real well with me and you really don't have to worry about a thing. And, I'm not near as worried about you as I was the first couple, three weeks I was over here. Matter of fact, well -- I'm starting to get worried the other way -- you're getting so darn good at doing things by yourself you won't want me to come back. I'd just kind of come back and spoil everything you're doing so well.

RUTHIE: I'm just about to run out of tape here I guess so I guess I just should get ready to say good night and take care of yourself and all that kind of stuff. And, I wish ...uh...I could just talk to you. Maybe if you go to the Philippines you can call me because I sure would love to hear your voice over the telephone. I like the tapes but well, they're second hand I guess. I look at your picture and play the tape and kind of dream, I guess. And uh, but...maybe it'll get better. It's making them that bothers me. Anyway, darling, I guess I'd better get to bed if I'm going to bowl so you take care and write as often as you can. I know you're going to be busy...and tell everybody hi for me. I hope you've received your package by now..I sent it airmail but I don't know, ...goodnight, darling.

GRAVES: So, take care, my love. Write often to me and do make me a tape -- I want to hear the kids sing a song. I love you very, very much Ruthie and you're the dearest thing in the world to me! So, I'm going to hit the sack now, sweetheart...Gee, I can't think of anything else to say except that I love you so darn much I can't stand it. So, goodnight baby.

CASTANEDA: On July 21st, 1967...only two months after arriving in Vietnam, Captain William Boyd Graves records the last tape.

GRAVES: Today's the 21st. The time right now is about 10 o'clock in the morning. Just went down to the mailroom and picked up a couple of letters from you. One's dated the 15th and one on the 16th. Took a little longer to get these two. Sounds like you had a real fine time on the picnic. I'll bet the kids really enjoyed themselves up in the mountains. They haven't had a chance to get away for a while. Tell that son of mine that I'll be real glad to get back and do things with him too. I don't know why, I miss all the kids, but I sure as hell miss that boy! He's kind of a funny little fella...kind of gets to me. I told him in that last tape that I always carry that little "wishnik" that he gave me ...and I do. I never fly any place without it, sweetheart. I sure do like it. I carry it in my pocket anytime we fly and take off around the area...that little thing from Bill. He kind of got to me that night he gave it to me, I guess. I probably never will forget that. Honey, as far as the tapes go, don't worry so much about buying them. Take one of these tapes that I've sent to you and erase it and tape over the top of it. I don't see any big problem with why you should have to save the tapes. It's kind of wild but that's just the way it happens. So

now...a helicopter just went over I guess. Well, things are running real slow around here today. We were kind of on alert last night. We were expecting some trouble so we had to double all the guards and have the airplanes ready to move out and all that kind of junk. So, I was up rather late – all the guards were out, they had them doubled up so most of those people were sleeping this morning. Got a letter from Mom two or three days ago and she mentioned that she had talked to you on the phone. And, she said something about going out to where Virginia was when she had the baby. But she wasn't sure-- but she said that if she did go out, she'd probably cut north and come up to Tacoma and see you all. Well, I guess I'd better close this thing up. I only used about half this side of the tape but I'll see if I can get it into the afternoon mail to you. I sure do miss you an awfully lot. I go to bed and there's not much there. Every time I reach over to grab a hold of my wife, I run my hand into the wall. I've just about broken myself of the habit....not of reaching for my wife but of running my hand into the wall. (laughs) So, hang on until about October lover. Boy, I'm picking up all kinds of tricks over here in the Orient. Well, sweetheart, I'd better get back out and check a couple of the projects. I'll try to keep on trying to write to you as often as I can. I'll get this thing mailed to you this afternoon. So take care yourself, sweetheart. I love you very, very much and I miss you...gobs! And, I think I probably love you more than you love me. Good afternoon, sweetheart!

MUSIC UP AND DOWN

FABIAN: They don't to this day know what happened. They don't know if they got shot down or if they crashed. It was very dense jungle...lots of hills. It took them three days to find them. And the co-pilot they couldn't find for a long time – Heinz Tapio --and they found him, he was under one of the engines.

CASTANEDA: A note from the Virtual Wall. Two men from the 225th Aviation Company died, when their OV 1C Mohawk, tail number 60-3755 crashed. Killed in apparent non-hostile action was the pilot – 27-year-old Captain William B. Graves of Douglas, Wyoming along with 20-year-old Sgt. Heinz Tapio of Sun Valley, California. Today, Ruthie has remarried and lives in Arkansas. The children are scattered in Wyoming and Colorado. Together, they have seven children of their own and nine great-grandchildren.. Produced by Sue Castaneda, Wyoming State Archives, the Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources.