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Philadelphia Native Serves as Military Intelligence Advisor to Forces in Vietnam

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)



Photo of fatigue jacket.

Captain Joel Weisberg wore this fatigue jacket while serving in Vietnam. Raised in South Philadelphia, Weisberg (b. 1941) attended the University of Pennsylvania. In an oral history interview conducted in 2006, Weisberg recalled growing up during World War II and the Korean War and developing a patriotic and heroic view of military service. During college, he signed up for the Army Reserve Officer Training Program and when he graduated, he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant. Weisberg got a deferment to finish law school at the University of Pennsylvania and clerk for a year. He went on active duty with the Army in 1967,

completing basic training at Fort Benning, Georgia and furthering his training at the Military Intelligence School at Fort Huachuca, Arizona.

Weisberg began his active duty career teaching Constitutional Law at the Military Intelligence School. In July 1968, Weisberg received notification that he was being sent to Vietnam. He was stationed in Hue, the former imperial capital of Vietnam. Captain Weisberg recalls having arrived in Hue just a few months after the Battle of Hue City, a month-long engagement of the Tet Offensive in which American and South Vietnamese forces struggled to regain control of the city. The battle, one of the longest and bloodiest of the war, negatively impacted Americans' perceptions of the conflict.

In Hue, Weisberg was assigned to U.S. Army Military Assistance Command (MACV) as an Order of Battle Advisor to the 1st Division of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). His fatigue jacket, worn while working on base, bears the blue shield shaped patch of the 1st Division on the left pocket.

As an Order of Battle Advisor, Captain Weisberg's work focused on reviewing intelligence reports to assess enemy strength and position and providing that information to ARVN and U.S. military combat units. Weisberg also traveled throughout South Vietnam to gather intelligence information. He recalls traveling by helicopter into Laos airspace, looking for evidence of enemy infiltration. The North Vietnamese Army (NVA) used a network of roads and paths that cut through the heavy jungle of Laos and Cambodia known as the Ho Chi Minh Trail to enter South Vietnam and attack ARVN and American forces.

Captain Weisberg remained in Vietnam until June 1969. On the day he left to travel to Saigon for out processing, his plane failed to arrive at the airport in Phu Bai and he was forced to return to base. On the way back, the group he was traveling with came under rocket fire. He tried the next day to travel to Da Nang to catch his flight but was still unable to do so. Hoping to arrive in the United States in time for a family wedding, Weisberg managed to hitchhike home on a series of C-140 cargo planes.

Following his time in Vietnam, Weisberg practiced law in Harrisburg and over twenty-five years held a variety of roles as a public servant with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.