

[OH2135.Swokowski_file1_access_clip2.mp3]
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Swokowski.: The other significant memory I have of the Wisconsin Military Academy was class nineteen—and I think they're up in the mid-fifties by now—was the graduation exercise, where it's a three-day field training exercise where you're inserted, and you exercise the leadership things that you learned over the year in different tactical environments.

So they brought in helicopters, Hueys, to fly us from Camp Douglas over to Fort McCoy. I had a crew-served weapon that I was responsible for in addition to my M-16. And the crew-served weapon was a 90-mm shoulder-mounted recoilless rifle [M67 recoilless rifle]. That really dates me, because I don't think they've been around for quite a while. And this thing is a tube. It's probably six, seven, eight inches, circular, and it's probably about three-and-a-half, maybe four feet long, and it's a anti-tank weapon, not that we were expecting any tanks, but it was—you were going to simulate, so it has sight on it and everything. They load us into the helicopters, and so I'm sitting on the door, and the doors are open of course. And so my worst nightmare is that this thing—I'm going to drop this recoilless rifle, this 90-mm, out the door.

And I think my fears were well-founded, because when they took us up from Camp Douglas over to Fort McCoy, which is only about twenty miles by road, shorter by helicopter, and we had, you know, some of the best Vietnam helicopter pilots flying us in the formation. And it was the first and I think probably the only time I had what is termed a nap-of-the-earth ride. So a nap-of-the-earth ride in a Huey helicopter with an open door and trying to hang on to a 90-mm recoilless rifle, a nap-of-the-earth ride is just what it sounds like. It's a high-speed, treetop, rolling, banking, diving down, coming up—you know, it was an eye-opener for, I think, everybody that was on those birds. It went on for—I mean, they probably did twenty, thirty minutes of that around Fort McCoy property before they landed and inserted us, so that was a pretty significant introduction, real-world certainly, to what these guys had gone through in Vietnam.

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In retrospect, you marvel at their abilities, skimming the treetops and some of the places they got into, and the high speeds, it was—let's just say I enjoyed it more afterwards than during the ride.

So they inserted us, and I guess the only other thing that I really remember about that, our three-day exercise, was—I think it was the first night after we got set up in a defensive posture, and we were expecting an attack during the night or the early morning hours, and there was a violent thunderstorm came through, and it was raining cats and dogs, and you're trying to keep your equipment dry, so it would function. And yeah, you've got buddies on each side of you in their fox

holes. And the lightning got so bad the TACs came out to the line, went up and down the line, and told us to take our steel pots off, because they didn't want it to attract the lightning that was occurring.

Halaska: Steel pots?

Swokowski: Steel pots are the old headwear, combat headwear that soldiers wore back in the mid-seventies, heavy, round, nothing like they have today [...]