

Oral Memoirs
Of
William "Bill" Reuter

An Interview Conducted by

Daniel Bradfield

March 10, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

Lone Sailor Memorial Project

University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Daniel Bradfield

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

The Community Veterans History Project, a RICHES of Central Florida Project at the University of Central Florida, includes interviews with Central Florida veterans from all branches of the United States military. Beginning in 2010, the UCF Community Veterans History Project is collecting, preserving, and making accessible to the public the experiences of Central Florida's veterans so that future generations will better understand the realities of conflict. It is a collaborative endeavor supported by multiple departments and offices at UCF. The histories, which are collected by students and faculty, are archived and made digitally available through the UCF library. The UCF Community Veterans History Project will also contribute selected veterans' histories to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with William "Bill" Reuter is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on March 10, 2014.

Abstract

Oral history interview of William "Bill" Reuter, who served in the U.S. Navy from 1979 until 2012. Reuter was born in Camden, New Jersey on April 21, 1961. He served in Libya during the Action in the Gulf of Sidra and in the fjords of Norway. Reuter achieved the rank of Captain, earned a Legion of Merit, and served as Executive Officer (XO) at the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division (NAWCTSD) at Naval Training Center (NTC) Orlando

This oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Bradfield on March 10, 2014. Interview topics include Reuter's experiences as XO at NAWCTSD, the simulation industry, Recruit Training Center (RTC) Orlando, the Lone Sailor Memorial Project, and applying to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

William “Bill” Reuter

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Daniel Bradfield
March 10, 2014
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Bradfield Today is March 10th, 2014. I am interviewing [William] “Bill” Rotto[sic] – Reuter, who served in the United States Navy from 1979 through 2010?

Reuter 2012.

Bradfield 2012. Um, they, uh – Mr. Reuter served during the Cold War and completed his service as a...

Reuter Captain.

Bradfield Captain. Um, my name is Daniel Bradfield. We are interviewing Mr. Reuter as part of the UCF [University of Central Florida] Community Veterans History Project and as research for the creation of the Lone Sailor Memorial Project. We are recording this interview at [Central Florida] Research Parkway in Orlando, Florida.

0:00:38

Background

Bradfield Mr. Reuter, can you please start us off by telling us when and where you were born?

Reuter I was born in [April 4th,] 1961 in Camden New Jersey.

Bradfield Okay. Uh, what did your parents do for a living?

Reuter My dad owned a mobile home business in, uh, Key West, Florida, which is where I grew up, and, uh, my mother, uh did all kinds of different things, including deal with us.

Bradfield Uh, what did you, uh – do you have any brothers or sisters?

Reuter I have two younger brothers and, uh – one of them in Pennsylvania and the other down in the Keys.

Bradfield Growing up, where did you go to school?

Reuter I went to school in Key West. Uh, grew up in a trailer park, because we owned trailers and trailer parks, and so, uh – but, uh – all – all throughout my life in Key West.

Bradfield Um, what did you do before entering the Navy?

Reuter Uh, basically, I was a student – I was a high school student, and received an [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] ROTC scholarship out of – out of Key West High School, and then went straight to UF [University of Florida] to, uh, start my journey in the Navy.

0:01:40 **Joining the Navy and active duty in warzones**

Bradfield Um, why did you join the Navy?

Reuter I wanted to fly airplanes. I wanted be an astronaut.

Bradfield Um, do you have any other family members in the service?

Reuter I had an uncle that was in the Air Force, uh, but that's about it.

Bradfield Uh, how did your family feel about you joining the Navy?

Reuter Very, very supportive.

Bradfield Where did you attend boot camp?

Reuter As an officer, my boot camp was really going through the Reserve Officer[sic] Training Corps program at UF. So I didn't attend a formal boot camp, like many of the enlisted sailors that you've interviewed.

Bradfield Did you ever see active duty in a warzone?

Reuter Uh, only on, uh, Line of Death in Libya, and, uh, in the Norwegian fjords, uh, against Soviet, uh, reconnaissance, uh, and bomber aircraft, but not in the current [Persian] Gulf conflict.¹

Bradfield Um, do you have any stories you'd like to share about those encounters?

Reuter Well, I mean, it's always fun seeing people that, you know, think differently from you, and back in the [19]80s, certainly, we saw the Soviet Union as, uh – as sort of an enigma. It was very, very mysterious, because they were in this whole different, you know, behind the – Steel Curtain, you know? And so, uh, we had a lot of curiosity, and – and, uh, we'd look back at each other in airplanes, and here we are up in the middle of nowhere, and we just con – continue to have that kind of curiosity. Most of my stories having to do with, uh, stress and overcoming stress in the service have more to do with landing aircraft – landing aircraft on

¹ Iraq War.

aircraft carriers at night. Those sorts of things. Because those are often, uh, scarier than most other things that an aviator would encounter.

Bradfield Do you have any stories about any close calls while trying to land on an aircraft carrier?

Reuter Certainly. Uh, well, I can tell you that, uh, at one point, I was—I had had a, uh, problem—what we call a “bleed air fuel leak,” which can create a fire, and so I had lights in the cockpit that were saying that there was excessive heat in the engine compartment. Uh, and it was—it’s what they call “one step short of a fire.” And a fire out on the aircraft carrier, when there’s really nowhere else to go, and, In this case, the aircraft carrier was so far off of any coast, that we were doing what you call “blue water op[erations].” “Blue water ops” meaning you’re going nowhere but back to the carrier, or the aircraft is going in the ocean. So we had to think real quick[sic]. We had just launched off catapult, so we were still very heavy, and we couldn’t land on the carrier right away. Carrier read—wasn’t even ready to catch us right away. So, uh—so we had to do, uh, some—real, uh, quick emergency things. Cockpit was getting very, very hot. Uh, they estimated it was around 130 degrees, uh, in the cockpit, and, um, we had to, uh—had to bring it back aboard the carrier, and—and, uh, did that, and got out of the airplane, and went down, and had me a cheeseburger. Because, uh, that’s one of the ways that we aviators deals[sic] with—deal with stress.

Bradfield Did you receive any special commendations or medals?

Reuter Uh, lots in the Navy, certainly. A couple of Legions of Merit medals, uh, which I am very, very grateful for. Uh, most of my accolades though, I can tell you—like most other sailors, I believe, would say—and that is: it’s not only due to them personally. None of these awards, uh—though you wear them as a personal decoration—a decoration, most of the time, they are as a result of the team you were on and the people you served with. Uh, But I was very fortunate to get a—a good number of accolades, uh, in the Navy, including two commands. Uh, my—my biggest role, before this role down here at NAWCTSD [Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division], uh, was—it’s Commanding Officer and Chief Test Pilot of the squadron up at [Naval Air Station] Patuxent River, Maryland, Where I flew as an [McDonnell Douglas] F/[A]-18 [Hornet]² test pilot.

0:05:20 **Executive Officer at Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division**

Bradfield Uh, when were you assigned to NAWCTSD?

Reuter I got here in, uh, January of 2008. So—and as I—as I moved into the role as Executive Officer, which is the second-in-command.

Bradfield Did you know the—did you know about the region, militarily or other, before coming to NAWCTSD Orlando?

² Now manufactured the Boeing Company as the Boeing F/A-18 Hornet.

Reuter All I knew about Orlando, uh, other than knowing a little bit of what NAWCTSD did and the – the – I did not know or appreciate the whole modeling and simulation cluster we had here. I knew there was a base,³ when there was a boot camp,⁴ and everything like that, and the nuke school,⁵ But I did not know a lot about what NAWCTSD did, other than produce the aviation simulators that I was fortunate enough to fly.

Bradfield What were your first impressions of the base?⁶ Or – or the surrounding area?

Reuter Well, I was very impressed with the – the – the – the proximity of everything. I was impressed that we were really close to the Army and we were really close to the Air Force and Marine Corps, and I was astounded with the intimacy of the relationship with the University of Central Florida, uh, and – and continued to enjoy that relationship throughout my tenure at NAWCTSD.

Bradfield How did that compare to other bases you have been stationed at?

Reuter There's absolutely nothing like this area right here. There – there are no – no entities, within the [U.S.] DOD [Department of Defense], that duplicate what we have here. What we have here is a clear synergistic effect, not only based on proximity. You can put anybody in a building next to another entity and not gain the kind of synergies we get here from the partnerships and the relationships that we have across academia, and industry, and now these DOD activities.

Bradfield What were your first days at NAWS – NAWCTSD like?

Reuter I came in with – wearing civilian clothes, 'Cause I was actually a, uh – in a – in a class. So this class had you wearing civilian clothes. So people didn't know that I was the guy that was gonna come in and eventually be in charge. So it was actually very cool, 'cause I could have this sort of *Brubaker* approach to it, Where [Henry] Brubaker was the guy that[sic] went into the prison as the warden and he went in as an inmate. So I kinda went in in that underground kind of incognito way, and it was great, 'cause I got to hear the conversations. I got to understand a little bit more about the culture/ but it is the most unique place that I have ever served in the Navy.

Bradfield What were your primary responsibilities while you were at NAWCTSD?

Reuter Well, I was the Executive Officer, who is the second-in-command, so responsible for pretty much everything that happens, uh, at NAWCTSD, and the other thing that a lot people don't rec – recognize is that when you're the commanding officer, or the Executive Officer, of NAWCTSD, You are also the Executive Officer, Commanding Officer of NSA Orlando – the Naval Support Activity

³ Naval Training Center (NTC) Orlando.

⁴ Recruit Training Center (RTC) Orlando.

⁵ Nuclear Power School.

⁶ Naval Support Activity (NSA) Orlando.

Orlando, which is the base. So all of the stuff that deals with the gates, and the guards, and any of the sort of anti-terrorism measures, or any of that kind of stuff when it comes to protection, You deal with in capacity as CO or the XO, so— Commanding Officer or Executive Officer —of NSA Orlando. So you really had two hats and two jobs.

Bradfield So, eh, what was a typical day like, um, when you were, uh, Executive Officer?

Reuter Well, a typical day as Executive Officer, uh, had a lot to do with, uh, a series of meeting, most of which were people that[sic] wanted a decision about one thing or another. Some of them were informational, but we tried to keep those to a minimum. Most of the time, I was given direction and —and providing guidance to people that were trying to, uh, make decisions. Uh, I—I tried to give them enough context to how I would decide, so that they could make decisions on their own and have my full faith, trust, and confidence, as they did so. So a lot of different things go on as you can imagine. Running, uh, a warfare center and a base, and so, there's, uh, everything from acquisition stuff that has to be decided, to what, uh—to—to where we're gonna—to what color carpet we're gonna pick out. There's just a lot of different things [*laughs*] that—you[?] pro—and anything in between that spectrum.

0:09:35

Simulation industry

Bradfield Um, can you tell us about the types of projects you worked on and what they aimed to accomplish?

Reuter The things that I'm most proud of, and the thing that people need to understand is that: simulation—we talk about it, kind of, trying to create an environment that is the real thing, and, in this environ—in this world today—in the way that we train our airmen, our sailors, our soldiers, and our Marines, We have to create some really, really immersive environments, in order to generate the kind of suspension of disbelief. For people to go in there and actually get proficiency from these environments. I mean, there's[sic] so many people playing video games and they're dealing with such cool graphics and immersive effects that you really, really need to wow them, in order to create that environment, and in the aviation community, it becomes even harder, because you're dealing with very dynamic technology and it's not as easy to do that.

So what we decided to do in the Navy was really, really take hold of this whole idea of increasing the fidelity of our simulations. Whether it be better visuals, better motions, better all kinds of different things that you can do to generate, uh—to—to give them an environment where they could actually be trained, and so, we were—I was—I was fortunate enough to be there, from '08 to '12—from 2008 to 2012—where we made huge investments that we still continue to make, but it was really the—the tip of the iceberg, for the money that's going into simulation and that is being taken out of a lot of the live exercises that we used to do that cost a lot of money and that required a lot of infrastructure, and you had

to sustain that infrastructure. So that's a—a cost that is per—you know, in perpetuity. So we've have really changed our mindset on simulation. That's been the most important thing that I was a part of—of being able to do that in, uh, aviation, surface, subsurface, and other communities.

Bradfield In what ways have the simulation projects at NAWCTSD impacted other branches of the military?

Reuter So the Air Force, uh, is very, very big on simulation, as well. They're—we do a lot of collaboration through—not only of the acquisitions that we do, you know? We—we go out and we buy a simulator, and we go to some of these industry partners that are in this area and around the country, and, in fact, the world, and we buy, you know, an aircraft simulator or we buy a ship simulator, or something like that, but what's really cool is the collaboration that goes into the technical side of this, before we ever ask industry to give us a simulator. We inform each other, through symposia and the like, to understand better the science of learning, to understand better where the technology is going, So we can be leaning forward as a DOD—and not only as a DOD, but as other agencies around here. We still work with the [U.S.] Department of Homeland Security and with other agencies that have benefit from this technology training their workforce—whatever it might be. So that collaborative energy, and the fact that we have papers, and we have symposia that sort of continue to nurture that collective understanding of the technology and its merit in the science of learning. That's what moves this needle forward for all of us. So that NAWC—it's not only NAWCTSD, or PEO STRI [Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation], or any of those entities. It is all those entities and their collective, uh, IP—intellectual property—to get together that gets moved forward.

Bradfield What do you think the future holds for simulation training in Central Florida?

Reuter Si—there is—there's really no limit to what we can do with simulation and training in Central Florida. The fact that we have grown it, based on DODs demand, is very fortunate, but it is certainly not the limit to the application of this technology into other fields. We talk about transportation, we talk—modeling and simulating transportation, In order to understand where chokepoints are, to, uh, train people in dealing with different crises, to train emergency first responders, to train medical professionals. We're already doing that at the VA [Veterans Health Administration] Sim[ulation] Learning[, Education and Research Network National Simulation] Center down here at Lake Nona, where [Lake Nona] Medical City is. We talk about construction simulation, So that we avoid, uh, costs of engineering changes and things like that, once we have gone into the construction phase, through just So many—education. There is so many applications of this simulation technology in—in moving forward. All of these industries.

Bradfield What do you think are the most important achievements or contributions of the simulation projects to technology and to the future of technology?

Reuter I think that the—the most important contribution was to give some other technologies an application that actually could affect an end-product. So if you think about digital media and graphics, alright? and some of the, um, some of the, uh—the stuff we're doing with, uh—with extensive graphics—much—much higher definition graphics—There's are a lot of different applications for those types of technologies. What we did was bring those technologies into, uh, a simulation, into creating a virtual environment, Such that we could add proficiency to people. We can do that in so many different ways, not only across DOD, but others, as well.

0:15:05

Post-Navy career and lessons learned from naval experience

Bradfield When did you leave the Navy, and what did you do after you left?

Reuter So I left the Navy in September of 2012, um, just—Not even two years ago now—And started my own consulting practice. I've also continued to work in the simulation industry and work with both companies in—in the simulation industry, as well as with folks like the [Metro Orlando] Economic Development Commission, and—and the Mayor's office, and people that are moving forward this understanding of how simulation can grow and affect our economy. I was fortunate enough, in the very beginning of, uh—right after I retired, to assist in writing the strategic plan for modeling and simulation for Central Florida, and I can tell ya, more than anything we have a center of excellence. We need to grow and nurture it, even beyond the DOD, such that DOD just wants to be around it, because they recognize the kind of ecosystem we have here.

Bradfield What values or characteristics of the Navy do you believe made an impression on your life?

Reuter Well, the standard answer, of course, would be: honor, courage, and commitment, and they, uh—and those are our watchwords in the Navy, and the—the caliber of people that I have met—that I have lifelong friends, uh, that[sic] I've been 28 years in the Navy. You've met people in so many different stages of your career, and you continue to be in touch with them, and so, that sort of, uh—that's sort of such a nurturing environment, and the fact that we were off and off of the aircraft carrier, and test flying up in Patuxent River, Maryland, Launching into some pretty hairy situations, uh, and—and came through it, and shared a beer at the end, uh, Just continues to nurture those relationships, and we've seen kids grow up together, and we've had a lot of fun, and so that's been the most valuable piece for me.

0:16:55

Naval Training Center Orlando and the Lone Sailor Memorial Project

Bradfield How has the NTC Orlando base or Central Florida region changed since the time you spent there?

Reuter In my case, of course, that would be a little NA [not applicable], But I can tell you that I've, uh – because I didn't spend the time at NTC – But I can tell you that, um, you know, what has been done at [Lake] Baldwin Park is phenomenal. No question about it, it has definitely one of the better repurposing of a base environment that, uh, has taken place in our entire country, when it comes to BRACs, and how people have responded to Base Realignment and Closure. Uh, I think what's unfortunate – and what was unfortunate for me and my family – was when we came here and saw that there was really no evidence that the Navy had been there, and so hence, the rationale and the driver behind the Lone Sailor Navy Memorial Project.

Bradfield What do you think former naval personnel would like to see or be reminded of when they revisit – when they revisit the site of the base and the LS[M]P memorial?

Reuter I think, more than anything, they want to imagine – re – reimagine, especially ones that were stationed there, what that Grinder was like, to recognize that that is hallowed ground, and to be able to tell their descendants about the time that they spent here and the pride that they took in getting through that. Whether it had been the nuke school or whether it was RTC [Recruit Training Center Orlando] – you know, because there were a lot of Navy entities here, at that time, and so, they – people need to understand what the Navy meant to Orlando during those days. It was a big Navy town. People started and – and made businesses grow, as a result of the Navy being here during those times, and so, to have – and we've got such a tremendous amount of support from people way out of town, That have roots here in Orlando based on their time here at RTC, and so somehow, we have got to – got to memorialize that, and give them a chance to re-experience that and pass that on down the generations.

0:19:07

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Bradfield Is there anything else you would like to share about your Navy experience?

Reuter Well, I tell ya, I'm just – I was very blessed from the word go. Um, you know, you're talking to a kid that – that grew up running on coral in Key West, And – often barefoot – had a dream to be an astronaut. Ended up going through the whole program, into Test Pilot School, finalist for NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], ended up coming here into a place that I had no idea how special it was, and I – I'm grateful for the relationships that we have built, and I have built personally, as a Navy guy, with the folks at UCF with president [John C.] Hitt and a lot of others in this community, uh, that truly, truly are a partnership community, and, uh, it was the best way to – to leave the Navy. Understanding, that one, my command was in my good hands and the Navy was in good hands but also to come out into this tremendous community that[?],

um, I've learned more in the last four years being in the Navy, than, uh, arguably then I learned in the la – in the ten prior, Uh, for sure.

Bradfield When did you start your astronaut training?

Reuter Uh, you – basically, what you do is you – as you – when you become a test pilot and you go through Test Pilot School, You are then, uh, afforded the opportunity to apply to NASA, and the thing – fortunately or unfortunately – when I was through that training and was applying for NASA, We had – had encountered a couple of really tough things. The [Space Shuttle] *Challenger* disaster, uh, certainly setback some – in 1986 – se – or 1985⁷ – setback some things pretty big, and then the [Space Shuttle] *Columbia* disaster was really the one that was tough. I mean, I had two buddies on the *Columbia* that day: uh, [William] “Willie” [Cameron] McCool and Dr. David [McDowell] Brown, uh, and that really slowed the manifest of space shuttle launches. So – so it was harder to get through the eye of the needle there, when it came to NASA. They weren't taking as many people – all that kinda stuff. So I was a finalist three times. I – I'm very grateful for that, But at the end of the day, uh, somebody had other plans, and I have no problem with that, and I am very, very grateful that I got to come here.

Bradfield Alright. Well, thank you very much.

Reuter Absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity.

End of Interview

⁷ Correction: January 28, 1986.