

HEROISM PRESERVED



County women keep the stories of Frederick vets alive

By SYLVIA CARIGNAN and NANCY LAVIN

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Pati Redmond knew bits and pieces from the war story of her husband, Robert, a lieutenant colonel with the U.S. Army Special Forces who served in Vietnam. But she'd never heard the full account until 2007, after close to 35 years of marriage. He promised he'd share his memories with her eventually.

"He kept putting me off because it was difficult for him to talk about," Redmond said.

But after the effects of his cancer — diagnosed as the result of exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam — worsened, he agreed.

Redmond, who lives in Frederick County near Middletown, recalled sitting beside him in the hospital in the final months before he died, in 2007, recording their conversation on her cassette tape player, as she always did.

He couldn't tell her everything because of his involvement in classified, special operations. But the parts he could share resonated.

"He was my special veteran," she said, clutching his green beret in her hands. "I miss him a lot. He was my soul mate."

Robert Redmond's recollections were preserved in his wife's heart, as well as with the Library of Congress through its Veterans History Project, to which his wife submitted their interview.

More than 400 Library of Congress Veterans History Project donors are from Maryland, including families and organizations such as the Frederick County Veterans History Project and Daughters of the American Revolution's Frederick chapter.

Priscilla Rall, a Rocky Ridge resident, is director of the Frederick County Veterans History Project.

According to Megan Harris, a reference specialist for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, about 269 collections have come from the county project and 118 have come from the DAR's Frederick chapter.

Redmond has contributed the majority of the collections submitted through the DAR's Frederick chapter. A longtime member of the DAR, she saw it as her civic duty to help collect the stories of the county's veterans.

One interview became two, two became 10. Eleven years after she signed on, she's collected and submitted the stories of 106 area veterans, including, of

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Staff photo by Bill Green

Pati Redmond, who lives near Middletown, has helped collect the stories of Frederick County's veterans. Among the most "enthraling" interviews she has done are those with the subjects of the 1945 Life magazine "kissing sailor" photo — the iconic image of a sailor and nurse kissing in Times Square at the end of World War II. The man and woman in the photo were identified years after the photo was taken as U.S. Navy veteran George Mendonsa, of Rhode Island, and former Frederick resident Greta Zimmer Friedman. Redmond is shown with a print of the photograph and items from her husband's service in the Special Forces.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This is the second in a six-part series about the stories and sacrifices of local men and women during the Vietnam War. The series complements a Maryland Public Television initiative coming this summer honoring veterans of the war.

Vets

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course, her late husband's. "I got hooked," Redmond, 74, said.

She smiles as she leafs through a printed list with the names and dates of each of the veterans she interviewed, remembering their stories — of Army nurses and tunnel rats, four-star generals and some of the last living World War I vets.

"They may not have remembered what they had for breakfast but they remembered the stories," she said of the centenarian WWI subjects.

Among the most "enthralling" interviews were with the subjects of the 1945 Life magazine "kissing sailor" photo — the iconic image of a sailor and nurse kissing in Times Square at the end of World War II.

The man and woman in the photo were identified years after the photo was taken as U.S. Navy veteran George Mendonsa, of Rhode Island, and Maryland resident Greta Zimmer Friedman.

"He gave me a kiss on the cheek," Redmond said when she met Mendonsa. "I told him he's not as feisty as he was."

The two have stayed in touch since the interview, through letters and occasional in-person meetings. Among the many keepsakes she has collected from her interviews is a large, framed copy of the kissing sailor photo bearing his signature.

To Redmond, all of the stories are important, all of the veterans equally worthy of being honored.

"Everybody has a very special, personal story," she said. "They're all heroes, but they're all so humble."

As a volunteer, like Redmond, Rall has spent years interviewing veterans and collecting their stories for the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.

Rall's own interviews have focused on veterans of World War I, World War II and the Korean War.

"For many of these Korea and World War II veterans, it's only within the last decades of their lives that they're taking the time to talk about these experiences," Rall said. "For Korean War veterans, as well, they're wanting to make it so it's not the forgotten war."

She has had challenges interviewing Vietnam veterans.

"I think [they] have a lot of residual anger about the way the country received them," she said.

Redmond noted the differences between Vietnam veterans and those of other wars. Vietnam vets found it particularly difficult to share those experiences with her, she said.

In moments of difficulty, she doesn't push them. She's learned to talk less and listen more. Most interviews span an hour or two, about the life of one cassette tape, although she noted one interview lasted six hours.

She transcribes the en-



Photo courtesy of Pati Redmond

Robert Redmond, who died in 2007, served as a lieutenant colonel with the U.S. Air Force during the Vietnam War. His recollections are among those from Frederick County veterans recorded as part of the Library of Congress's Veterans History Project.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert Albert Redmond

Branch: U.S. Army

Rank: Lieutenant colonel

Service dates: June 6, 1962, to August 31, 1982

Commendations: Parachutist Badge, National Defense Service Medal, Army Commendation Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal, Air Medal, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star, Bronze Star Medal, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Meritorious Service Medal, Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross Unit Citation with Palm, Army Service Ribbon, two Overseas Service Bars, Overseas Service Ribbon, Legion of Merit.

Maryland Public Television Salutes Vietnam Veterans

Maryland Public Television's salute to Maryland service members of the Vietnam era has been three years in the making. The salute is a thank-you to those who worked and fought in an unpopular war. It will culminate with a two-day event called "Landing Zone Maryland." Tens of thousands of people are expected to attend.

Landing Zone Maryland

- June 18, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- June 19, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Maryland State Fairgrounds 2200 York Road, Lutherville-Timonium

• There will be a tribute ceremony, a memorial chair ceremony, a motorcycle honor ride, family activities, vendors, Vietnam-era military vehicles, entertainers and an art gallery. For more information, visit <http://vietnam.mpt.org/lzmaryland>.

Maryland Vietnam War Stories

Three-part documentary film

- Airing May 24, 25 and 26 on Maryland Public Television

Maryland Public Television Salutes Vietnam Veterans Traveling Exhibit

• Features artifacts, current-day and wartime images of men and women along with their memories of the war. To request that the traveling exhibit stop in your town, contact Maryland Public Television at 410-581-4182.

tirety of each interview on her computer, submitting a copy of the audio and transcript to the Library of Congress. She also sends a copy to the families of each of her subjects, some of whom hadn't heard the wartime memories.

"When [the veterans] start talking, they really kind of open up," Redmond ex-

plained.

She has found purpose in sharing otherwise untold memories, in memorializing the veteran experience in a meaningful, enduring way. And she's far from done.

"I thought, 'I'll stop when I get to 100,'" she said. "But then I just kept going. The veterans are still out there."