

# Remembering US Fighter Pilots of the Vietnam War

Annotated Bibliography for 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

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Beidler, Philip. *Re-Writing America: Vietnam Authors in Their Generation*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

In *Re-Writing America*, Beidler examines the works of authors who have attempted to “re-write” the American experience in Vietnam in an effort to generate new myth. He finds that the “single distinguishing feature” of much of the fiction about Vietnam published in the United States is concerned with “the attempt to forge myriad forms of new and creative alliance between literature and the work of cultural revision: (xiii). Beidler addresses the work of Walt McDonald in “Poets After Our War.”

Bjorkman, Eileen. Have Gun, Will Dogfight. *Air and Space Magazine*, October 2015.  
Retrieved from [http://www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/11\\_on2015-f8-crusader-at-60-180956611/?no-ist](http://www.airspacemag.com/history-of-flight/11_on2015-f8-crusader-at-60-180956611/?no-ist)

This article, written to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the F-8 Crusader, provides an overview of the plane’s history and explains why the F-8 was retired so soon after the development and launch of the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom. The article includes pieces from interviews with former F-8 pilots as well as men who served in air crews. It includes eleven photos of the F-8 and its pilots, including Rear Admiral Bob Shumaker, who was shot down over Chan Hoa in 1965 and subsequently held as a POW for eight years.

Gilchrist, Paul. *Crusader!* Atglen, Pennsylvania: Schiffer Publishing, 2004.

This nonfiction book is an oral history of sixteen F-8 Crusader pilots who became aces in the Vietnam War. The author’s account of his time spent in the F-8 is also included. The foreword is by John Glenn.

Hudgins, Andrew, and Janice Whittington, eds. *The Waltz He Was Born For: An Introduction to the Writing of Walt McDonald*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2002.

This book is a collection of 16 essays on Walt McDonald’s poetry and prose. It includes an interview with McDonald conducted in 2000 by Phillis Bridges. Of particular interest is the extensive bibliography of criticism written about McDonald’s work, which is included at the end of the book.

Lowery, John. (2013). *Life in the Wild Blue Yonder: Jetfighter pilot stories from the Cold War*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

This non-fiction work includes selected stories from the author’s time spent in jet training, Korea, and Vietnam. It includes a chapter on the fate of MIA pilots, which he believes were moved to the Soviet Union and China, where they were placed in prison camps. He argues that the U.S. government knew of the plight of these pilots but chose not to pursue attempts to bring them back home, even after the way.

McDonald, Walt. *Band of Brothers: Stories of Vietnam*. Lubbock, Texas. Texas Tech University Press, 1989.

Walt McDonald, Air Force veteran, pilot, poet, and Professor Emeritus at Texas Tech University, is best known for his poetry, but this collection of short stories should not be overlooked, especially by those wishing to learn more about the pilot’s experience in Vietnam. *Band of Brothers* is a collection of inter-related short stories. All but one, “Why Randy Wayne Crashed,” is told in first person by Lieutenant

"Little Moose" Mosley, who has been assigned to one of the last fighter bases in Vietnam to write a series of mission reports, called SNOW reports, (Successfully Numbered Observations on War) for Air Force Colonel Jack Tyding. These reports are to record the valiant efforts of the installation's F-4 pilots as they fly a variety of dangerous missions to keep the NVA and VC from overrunning the nearby Special Forces camp, the village near their own base, and from moving supplies down the Ho Chi Minh trail. The characters, dialogue, and situations are reminiscent of both *Catch-22* and *M.A.S.H.* Little Moose's descriptions of flight and the maneuvers the pilots make while flying are clear and reflect a literary bent. Throughout the book, McDonald makes literary allusions to Melville's *Moby Dick*; it is clear that things will not end well for the men and the woman he comes to know and care deeply about during his short time in country.

----. *Caliban in Blue*. Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University Press, 1976.

Walt McDonald has published 18 collections of poetry; *Caliban in Blue* was his first. While Miller Williams notes in the Preface, "there are good poems here about a war the poet went to, and the planes he flew. But to call him a war poet, or an academic poet, or a tribal poet and leave it at that, would be to misread the book" (vii-viii), the collection is of interest and importance to those who study the literature produced about the Vietnam War, especially those who focus on the pilot's experience.

Santoli, Al. *Everything We Had*. New York: Random House, 1981.

Santoli offers the oral histories of 33 Vietnam War veterans, including his own memories, in this nonfiction book. Only two of the veterans interviewed were pilots in the war. One, Kit Lavelle, flew close in air support in OV-10s; the other, Admiral William Lawrence, was shot down while flying an F-4 Phantom over Haiphong on June 28, 1967. He was subsequently held as a POW in the "Hanoi Hilton" for six years, until the peace treaty was signed in January, 1973.

Shay, Jonathan. *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Scribner, 1995.

Shay, a psychiatrist, has worked with veterans at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Boston for over 40 years. In this book, he compares the experiences of the veterans he teaches with the descriptions of the combat and loss of the Trojan War as described in Homer's *The Iliad*: "My claim throughout this book," he writes, "is that *The Iliad* can be read as a text concerning the human experience of combat" (97). Specifically, Shay focuses on what he calls the "berserk state," (an overwhelming rage that Achilles experiences after the death of Patroklos, Achilles's second-in-command, and the resulting slaughter, which ensues.

----. *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*. New York: Scribner, 2002.

Building on the work he started in *Achilles in Vietnam*, Shay uses Homer's *Odyssey* to examine the parallels between Odysseus's homecoming and the homecomings of American veterans of the Vietnam War.

"The F-8 Crusader Fighter Jet New Documentary." National Geographic.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhHjDqbpUw8>.

*The F-8 Crusader: the Last Gunfighter*. 2008. New York City: New York. A&E Television NVHS.

This documentary, part of the "Sea Wings" franchise, is narrated by Ronald Lee Earmey, best known for his role as the drill sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket*. Earmey served in the Marine Corps from 1961 to 1972. During that time, he was assigned to various posts, including a fourteen month tour in Vietnam with Marine Wing Support Group 17 (MWSG-17). The documentary provides a comprehensive history of the Vought F-8 Crusader, from its initial launch in 1955 to its retirement. A number of clips of the F-8 in combat are included. Major General P. Dax Williams, who flew the F-8 Crusader out of a squadron based in Danang from 1965-1968, talks about his experience flying the bird. He also explains the various design elements that made the F-8 Crusader a success in Vietnam.

*F-8 Crusader Documentary - The Last Gun Fighter*. History Channel HD.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=runS2ytx18w>

This documentary provides animated recreations of two missions of F-8 Crusader pilots in Vietnam which ended in dogfights with MiG-17s. The first is of a mission flown by then Commander Paul Speer and Lieutenant Phil "Rat" Wood. The second is of the longest recorded dogfight on record, the ten minutes during which Lt. Commander Richard Shaffert battled with an enemy MiG-17. All three of the pilots, now retired, are interviewed. The first part of the video recreates the dogfight that ensued following the F-8's pilots escort of two A-4 bombers which were mounting the Vietnam War's first strike on downtown Hanoi. The documentary explains that the 12 F-8 Crusader pilots were met in the skies over Hanoi by 17 MiG-17s. Two of the pilots on the mission, then Commander Paul Speer and Lieutenant Phil "Rat" Wood recount their story. Detailed diagrams illustrate the various flight maneuvers undertaken, including barrel rolls and vertically rolling scissors. The second half of the documentary recreates the dogfight between F-8 Crusaders flown by Lieutenant Commander Dick Shaffert and Lieutenant Chuck Nelson and four MiG-17s. The dogfight lasted ten minutes, the longest dogfight ever recorded. The tactics used are still taught at the Top Gun school in Miramar, California today.

The animated portions of the documentary are broken up with interviews with Barrett Tillman, author and historian, and RAdm. Paul Gilchrist, USN (Ret.), who discuss the plane's attributes.

Trotti, John. *Phantom Over Vietnam*. New York: Berkley Books, 1984.

"Aviation is clannish," writes Trotti in his preface, "with so many wives [sic] tales and the like that it would be impossible to sort them out – and not worth it" (x). Therefore, he explains, he has "tried to tell the stories from the perspectives I had at the time, not today." In this non fiction account, Trotti shares his experiences flying the F-4 Phantom during his two tours in Vietnam. Trotti's squadron was one of the first into Vietnam, arriving in Danang on January 3, 1966. He returned to Vietnam in 1968 and was assigned to the base at Chu Lai. Two chapters are devoted to the time between tours that he spent as a flight instructor at the Advanced Training Command in Kingsville, Texas.

Trotti provides the reader with well-paced descriptions of his experiences both in Vietnam and in Texas. When describing missions, he can seem a bit pedantic, but he does not assume that his reader will know all of the military jargon and explains the terminology as he goes along; in addition, the book includes an extensive Glossary at the end. This book is neither a thriller or a dry analysis of aviation history. It provides a clear and steady picture of what one fighter pilot saw and experienced during his tours in Vietnam.

Wallace, Terry. *Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War*. New York: Random House, 1984.

This highly regarded nonfiction work is one of the few works in the field of war literature and veterans studies which focuses primarily on the experiences of African American soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War. He also includes interviews with journalists.