Lloyd Hanks

Great Basin Indian Archive

GBIA 033

Oral History Interview by

Norm Cavanaugh
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Owyhee, NV

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H: My name is Lloyd Hanks. And I'm a member of the Shoshone-Paiute Tribe here on the Duck Valley Reservation that's located on the Nevada-Idaho border, about a hundred fifty miles south of Boise, Idaho. And I understand this project is for the SYLAP program, and my feeling is that all our youth need to know where they come from, who their ancestors are, and where our languages are from. Your language, the Uto-Aztecan Shoshonean language is a very big language group. Our group—our languages are related all the way from Central America to the California coast, to the Great Basin, into Wyoming, and into Oklahoma. So, it's important that you know what your language bases are. And if you don't know it, you can study it. Look it up on the internet, and you'll find all kinds of information on the languages. So, what I'm going to be talking about is, our Indian veterans here on the Duck Valley Reservation. And also, when I get done with that, I'll be talking about Native American veterans, and those in the military from the time our country was founded to the present time. So, I'll start by saying that my mother came from the Paradise Valley area, which is about fifty miles west of here. And my father, some of his people came from the Bruneau area, and my grandmother on my dad's side, I believe she came from around the Reese River area. But because my dad passed away when I was very young, that—I don't know a lot of the history on my father's side. But, being here—when I came back from the military— [Laughter] Oh, well, I better back up a little bit, tell you that I'm retired from the Air Force. I served about 34 years on active duty in the Air Guard and the Retired Reserve. And I was in for 34 years, and I retired as a master sergeant. And my military family side is my father, Clarence Hanks, who our American Legion Post is named after. Our Legion Post is

named Jack Hanks, and it's named after two individuals from our community who were killed in action in World War II in Europe. And one was my father, Clarence Hanks, Private First Class serving with the 29th Infantry Division, and he was killed somewhere around the Sigfried Line, in Germany. The other individual was Sidney Jack. He was with the first infantry division, and he participated in the Normandy landing. And that's where he was wounded, and died from his wounds. And he was also awarded the Bronze Star for his valor. So, that's where our name, Jack Hanks, comes from for our post. And we've had other military people from here who were killed in action. There was Gerald Whiterock, who was killed in action in Korea. David Pursley, also killed in action in Korea. In Vietnam, we lost two people from our community. Larry Parker, with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, on his, probably second or third tour to Vietnam, he was killed in action. Captain Eddie Molino. He was a green beret the first time he went to Vietnam. He came back and went to helicopter school, and then he went back to Vietnam, and he was lost in a crash, or he was shot down in Cambodia. But as a small community, we have a very large number of veterans from all services, all eras of the service. We have probably over 300 veterans on this reservation now. My own side of the family, my brother was in the Navy, he served on the U.S.S. **Cole**, which was a Destroyer. My brother Roland, he served in Fort Myer, Virginia, with a unit that's called USASCAF. It's a unit that performs services to all the Congressional people and stuff. Big wheels in the Washington, D.C. area. One of the high side of his tour over there in Fort Myer was he got to drive in one of the inaugural parades. And my nephew, Garland **Deppler**, was in the Navy, serving on the U.S.S. Ranger as an aircraft mechanic, the same as I was. So we had a lot of good talks with him. My cousin, Bernard Rose, served in the Army. I have a

grandson, Kendrick Owyhee. He's been in the Army since 2000, May of 2000. And he volunteered to be a cavalry scout. And what they do is, they operate Humvees and Bradleys, and they go out and scout in front of the troops before they move in. And he took his training at Fort Knox. Kentucky. And then after his training, he was assigned to the Third Armored Cavalry in Fort Carson, Colorado. And then, after the 9/11, he went to Iraq with the Third Armored Cavalry. And then he came back for a short break, and then went back again. Back to Iraq with the same unit. And then he was selected to be an instructor at the U.S. Army armor school at Ft. Knox, Kentucky. And after he finished there, he went to the Thirteenth Armored Cavalry Regiment at Ft. Bliss, Texas. And he went back to Iraq again. And then, after he got back from Iraq, he got assigned to the 4th Infantry Division in Fort Carson, Colorado. And with the 61st Cavalry. And then he went back to, went to Afghanistan. And then he came back, he was back about a year. And just this past March, he went back to Afghanistan with the 61st Cavalry, 4th Infantry. So he's over there now in Afghanistan. So he had five tours, so that's equivalent to five years in a combat zone. But I'm proud of what he did, and also proud of all our young men and women who are serving on active duty now. A lot of them are staying in and not coming back because of the way our economy is presently. But we had a lot of people during World War II. Almost all our male people were in the military. And this was a real hardship to the families that were left behind. Because back then, everything was rationed. And if your family member was in the military, you were issued ration cards. And you used these cards to buy sugar, leather goods, tires if you owned a car, gasoline, things like that. Because during the war years, everything was restricted. You couldn't just go out and buy them. And so, our people were all over in Europe, and the

China/Burma area, in the Pacific, in all branches of service. And after they all came back, some of them went on to school, and learned some trades. Others came back and started ranching, and doing other things. And raising families. And a lot of them chose to be our tribal leaders with our tribal government. And then Korea came about, and a lot of our young men, some volunteered to go into the military. Others were drafted. And about, probably 40-50 people from our little reservation here ended up in Korea. And Korea was a bad place to be because of the real cold weathers they had there, where people couldn't fight good because everything was freezing. Their guns would freeze up. And plasma that they tried to give to wounded troops would freeze. And things like that. But lot of them came back, and like I said, we lost two people over there. And then, during Vietnam, a lot of our young men also went to Vietnam. And some were wounded pretty bad. Two were killed. And lot of them ran into each other at the different hospitals, like in Washington, and in California. So, they all got together, and enjoyed their company. And then, after that, Desert Storm, the first Gulf War came about, and some of our young men ended up over there, also. And then, after 9/11, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq came about, and a lot of our young men and women volunteered for the services, and ended up in Iraq and Afghanistan, and other areas in the Middle East. And like I said, some of them are choosing to remain in the military, and others came back, used their military training to get jobs, like with the Border Patrol, working with the military, and teaching other military personnel from the skills they learned in the military. So that's pretty much what our people have done with their service. And myself, I joined right out of high school, because at that time, jobs were scarce if you didn't have training. And back in them days, there weren't scholarships like there are now. So, the only option for me was to join the

Air Force. So I joined the Air Force in 1957 when I was 18. I took my basic training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and then they give you all kinds of qualification tests in the military. And I qualified to get into aircraft maintenance. So, they sent me to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas, and I didn't know yet what I was going to get into. Until I got there. And then after I got there, they found out what squadron I was going to, and they said, "That's where you go for jet engine training." So I started my technical training as a jet engine mechanic. After I completed there, I got assigned to Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri as a jet engine mechanic, working on jet engines on B-47 bombers. So I did that for about 2 years, and then I cross-trained over into jet aircraft maintenance, where I worked on J-33 single engine jet trainers. And I was responsible for everything on the plane, the engines, landing gears, and everything. And wherever that plane went, I went. [Laughter] If it went into inspection docks where we had to tear it all down and everything, and inspect everything, I had to be there and take care of all the writeups, clear them. Some of the items we had to send to specialty shops like the jet engine shops, electrical shops. And then when they all come back, we had to put them all back together, and then get the plane back on the line, and the pilots would do a test hop on it. And if everything worked, then I ended up back on the flight line with my plane. So one of the highlights of my tour as an aircraft mechanic was, I was selected to be a crew chief. Crew chief is the name of the person that's responsible for the whole airplane. And I was selected to be a crew chief for the general's plane. So, the first general I worked for was a one-star general, a brigadier general. And he left, and the other general that came in was a two-star general. And then, while I was there, I was up at personnel one day—well, let me back up just a little bit. No, that's all right. I went up to personnel to do

something, and I heard people talking that were saying that, "We need three volunteers from the aircraft field to go into Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Program." So, I went back to the flight line and told two of my friends. So, we went back and we volunteered. And my unit were saying, "We can't afford to let you go, because we're going to be short of people, because people are getting out and they're getting transferred to different places in the Air Force." And finally, we got orders that came down by name, rank, serial number, and Air Force project. So then, we knew they couldn't keep us from going. So then I was reassigned to Forbes Air Force Base in Kansas. I didn't know what kind of missile I was going to be assigned to until I got there. After I got there, we found out that we were going to be on the Atlas E [SM-65E] missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles. That's all we knew, we didn't know what our jobs were going to be. So then, after we were there for a couple of months, they sent us back to Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas. And then put us in school, and I found out that I was going to be a missile maintenance technician. And my job was going to be all the ground support equipment that supports that intercontinental ballistic missile to be launched. And also, I had to know everything about the missile itself. So it was a tough school, and I had to struggle in some areas to make it. But I made it. And then we went back to our base in Kansas. I knew I was a missile maintenance technician, but yet I didn't know exactly what I was going to do. Well, after I got back, they started picking missile launch crews—or, they called them, "Missile Combat Crews." They had, there was going to be: two officers; a missiles combat crew commander; a deputy missile combat crew commander, which is probably a captain or a first lieutenant; a ballistic missile analyst technician, who is an expert in electronics, and he was responsible for all the electronics, ground support

equipment, and electronics aboard the missile; and the missile maintenance technician, which was me, and I was responsible for all the mechanical portions of the site and the missile; and an engine power production specialist. Our missile sites were self-contained. We produced our own electric power. Our own heating and cooling, air conditioning. Everything that was on the site was produced right there. And the site was built so that we were 25 feet underground, and then our missile was located about a hundred feet away from us through a long tunnel. And the missile laid horizontally, and then, when we got ready to launch, it would raise up, and then we would fill it up with rocket propellant and liquid oxygen, helium, liquid nitrogen, and everything, 'til it got to the launch point. So we all had to be at our assigned positions during launch. And do whatever we were assigned to do. And a lot of those things, we had to know right off of the top of our heads, because if something went wrong, we didn't have the luxury of calling in people from the base. If we were in a launch condition, we had to correct the problem and get the missile off the ground and on its way. And this is one thing a lot of people didn't know: that in 1962, we came very close to a nuclear war with Russia. This was what was called the "Cuban Missile Crisis," where the Russians were building missiles on the island of Cuba, and these missiles were capable of hitting every major city in the United States, with the exception of a very small portion, probably, up on the northeast part of the state of Washington. And these were all nuclear weapons, which would have just wiped out everything they hit. And our missiles carried nuclear weapons also. We didn't know where our targets were. That's one thing that they never told us, we had a selection of Target A or B. We didn't know where they were. We didn't know if they were groundburst or airburst. So we didn't know if they were going to, the warheads were

going to burst before they hit the ground, or burst when they hit the ground. You know, you've all seen what atomic bombs did to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombs, atomic bombs, that were dropped there were seven kilotons. This means they were about seven thousand tons of TNT, or equivalent to that. And the one that was dropped on Nagasaki was about 12 kilotons, or 12,000 tons, of TNT. Our warheads were rated at about 8 megatons. This is 8 million tons of TNT. And when they exploded on the ground from point zero, which is the center of where the bomb hit, probably 25 miles out from that point is going to be nothing. And from there on out, the destruction will be less and less. But once the bomb explodes, then all that air that the bomb pushes out is going to go out. Then it's going to cause a vacuum. And then, that vacuum, all that air that got pushed out's got to go somewhere. So all that air's going to come back in, causing more destruction, and go on up. So. So it's, it was very destructive. But we didn't know exactly how close we came to a nuclear war. Normally, on the site, we have one crew per site, of five people on the launch crew and four security guards. During the Cuban crisis, they doubled that. We had two crews, which is ten people, and eight security people, and they doubled our length of tours, so we were on the site for 48 hours at a time. Both the missile crews and the security guards. So, it got pretty crowded down in the missile sites. But, if our President Kennedy wasn't as strong as he was, there is no telling where we would have ended. So, be proud of your relatives who served in the military. Thank them. Because they, all of them, we owe our gratitude, our freedom, our way of life. To be here, to practice our native ways, to practice our languages. So. And that's, I want you guys to be sure that you respect your people. Have respect for your elders. Respect your language. Respect your Tribe. Know who you are, know where you came from. Know

your language. You may not know it fluently, but learn it from elders. Be curious. *Always* be willing to learn. So that's some of what I've encountered. And the main thing I want to emphasize on you is, stay in school. Because if you do plan to go in the military, there are a lot of very good careers now. But you need a lot of schooling to get into them. Like, there's a lot of computer fields that are open to you, that, if you go through it, finish it in the military, there's lot of jobs on the civilian side that'll be open to you, that you can qualify for. There's a lot of jobs in the military that you can qualify for. Good jobs in the civilian world. Or they'll prepare you to be, be ahead when you do come back and decide to go to, go on to college or whatever you want to do. But the main thing is, develop your interests now, and look at what courses are going to help you through your high school years. And take those courses. And if I didn't take Physics—I think that helped me the most—I wouldn't have got in to all the technical skills that I was able to get into. So think about it. Think about it, about what you want to do. Now, and while you're in school. And think ahead, five or ten years down the road. So, let's kind of move on to what our Native Americans contributed to our country. And our Native Americans have always been active in our military. For over 200 years, when our country was first being developed, they sided with our frontiersmen against the British, and the French. And the frontiersmen learned a lot of skills from our native people. How to fight. And lot of those skills were passed on to the non-Indians, like the Rogers' Rangers from the wars, early wars. They used those skills of the Rogers' Rangers, they handed them down to what's now our Special Forces, our Green Berets, our Marine Recon, our SEALs. Those skills they learned were skills that were taught to them by the Native Americans. So, our Native Americans played a big part in what our military is now. And our Native Americans have

the highest enlistment rate of any ethnic group in our country. We have more Indians per capita in the military than all the other ethnic groups, like the Hispanics, the blacks, the whites. And our leaders appreciate that. And that's because of our, the warrior traditions, from all of our elders, and our different tribes, that were passed down to us. And what that tradition said was that the warriors are to protect our people, our homelands, our property, our way of life, our religion, and our game, and everything that Native Americans survived on before the Europeans came. So those were things that they learned, and those were passed down by our ancestors, down to us. And out of those warrior traditions, to qualify to be in the military, you had to be brave, you had to be dedicated, you had to have strength. You had to have pride—pride in yourself, pride in your country. And that's what our native people bring to us. The other thing that, other thing that's different with the Native Americans in the military is that, before they go in, they go through ceremonies to bless them. And a lot of times, they are given things to take with them to go to war. Little medicine bags to carry with them that may have different things in them, or eagle feathers that has been blessed and given to them. Like my grandson, he carried an eagle feather all the way through his deployments, that was blessed by two combat veterans. And one time, he was telling me that him and another guy, that they were on this Bradley, which is like a small tank, and an enemy fired a rocket-propelled grenade at them. And there was just a small opening, there was no way that two of them could get through that small opening, so they just stood there and watched that rocket-propelled grenade coming at them. And before it got there, the grenade disintegrated. And another time, his Bradley ran over a mine, a big mine, and it didn't detonate. So, he said that was probably because of what he carried with him. The

eagle feather. That was to protect him. So, that’s how we are different from the non-Indians. Some of the other things that you have probably seen, is like the flag raising on Iwo Jima. The marines raising the flag. And this was, the picture that was taken shows the marines raising the flag. And that picture was taken by Joseph Rosenthal. That picture was the second flag-raising. There was a first flag-raising of a smaller flag. And there was a Native American marine that took part in that. And his name was Louis Charlo. He was from the Salish tribe, of the Flathead Reservation in Montana. The second flag-raising also had a Native American. And this was Corporal Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from the Gila River Indian Reservation in Arizona. Of the five people that raised the second flag, only three of them survived. Ira Hayes survived, John Bradley, a pharmacist from the Navy—he was a corpsman—and René Gagnon, a Marine private. And after that flag-raising, they were ordered to return to the United States, and they were put on a tour to help sell war bonds. And that’s what they did. And Ira Hayes told the people wherever he went, he said, “I’m not a hero. My heroes didn’t come home.” And that was his thought, and that was the way he thought about his military. And that’s the way a lot of our people who come back are. They don’t claim to be anything, they keep it within themselves. So, I thought that was interesting that there was two Native Americans with the flag-raising. The other contribution that came about was our code-talkers. In World War II, the Choctaw were code-talkers, and they served in Europe. There was 12,000 American Indians that served in World War I, although they were not citizens yet. Yet they served. And one of those, you’ve probably seen the movie about—oh, what’s his name, he’s—anyway, a guy from World War I who was a conscientious objector. He was from the Southern states, a white guy. They made a movie about him, and he won the

Congressional Medal of Honor, for capturing Germans. But one thing that was never brought about or made known was, one of the Choctaw code-talkers, by the name of Joe Oklahombi, also captured 171 German prisoners, and killed 79 Germans. But he wasn't awarded the Medal of Honor, he was given the Silver Star. And that was a fallacy of a lot of not only Indians, but the Japanese, the blacks, and the Hispanics that did great deeds of bravery, lot of them weren't recognized like the non-Indians. 'Til recently. But the code-talkers, the best-known was the Navajos. They—let me back up to the code-talkers in World War I. There were code-talkers from the Cherokee tribes, the Cheyenne tribes, the Choctaw, the Comanche, Osage, and the Yankton Sioux. Then I mentioned about one of them who did a great deed. In World War II, there were Assiniboines, Cherokee, Chippewa, Oneida, Choctaw, Comanche, Hopi, Kiowa, Menominee, Muskogee Creek and Seminole, Navajo, Pawnee, Sac and Fox, Meskwaki, Sioux—Lakota and Dakota dialect. And the most well-known was the Navajo code-talkers who served in the Marine Corps. They originally recruited twenty-nine Navajos to develop a code to be used, because the other codes that the U.S. used were being broken by the Japanese. So, these 29 original code-talkers developed codes, and they taught these to the other code-talkers that came after them, in their own language. And they used their own language, alphabet, different things that they talked to. Like for an ant, letter for ant was A, or for the Navajo was wol-la-chee, and different things like that. And they had to develop words for things that weren't common to the Navajo language, like fighter planes. So they had to develop something for them, so they called a fighter planes "hummingbirds." And different things like that, that they didn't have words for. And they were assigned to every unit that went to war in the Pacific. And not only that, they assigned Marines to watch out for them, to

protect them. And not mainly to protect them from being captured; to protect them so that there was no way that they could, to give out the code that they had developed. So if they ever got captured, these people that were there to protect them, they had orders to shoot and kill these Navajo code-talkers. My son went to a conference when he was going to SIPI in Socorro, New Mexico. And a code-talker came in and talked to them. And he told them, “We weren’t code-talkers by choice.” The marines told them that, “If you don’t volunteer to be a code-talker, we know where your families live.” So a lot of them who didn’t volunteer were *made* to be code-talkers. The other code-talkers that served in Europe was the Comanches. They served with the 4th Infantry Division in Europe. And they did the same thing. They used their own language, Comanche language, which is related to the language that you guys are going to be studying while you guys are over there. And they used the same languages to talk to each other. And they also developed words that they could use in their own language. Like, for Hitler, they called him a “crazy white man” in the Comanche language. It was, “*Posa Taibo*.” That’s what they called him. Crazy White Man. But they had to develop words for things that weren’t common to the Comanche language. And other tribes served in different places all over the world. The Hopi people served in Europe with the Army Air Force, and they also did that, used their language to talk about the missions and things like that. So, it’s been said that the war would have lasted longer had it not been for the code-talkers. So, by shortening the war, many lives were lost. Because if the Japanese didn’t surrender, the U.S. was going to attack Japan itself, with great losses. So… So our people saved a lot of lives. And other things that happened is that many Indians were decorated for their bravery during the war. And the United States has a medal that’s called a Congressional Medal of Honor.

This medal was established by George Washington, when he was the first president. And awarded for bravery in all conflicts since then. And the criteria for winning this award is very strict. Only 36,000 medals have been awarded, from all the conflicts from when George Washington fought to our present conflicts. Prior to World War I, like during the Indian campaigns, nine Indian scouts were awarded the Medal of Honor. In World War II, seven American Indians were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. In Korea, three were awarded the Medal of Honor. And three were awarded Medal of Honor in Vietnam. And there again, some of these were late in coming. Like the award to a Sioux warrior from the community of Sisseton, South Dakota. He fought in Korea and World War II. And he was awarded, his actions for his valor in Korea. But there was no follow-through on the recommendations, or the recommendations were lost, and different things like that, until some Congressional people and tribal people pushed it. And so, just recently, they awarded him his Medal of Honor, but he had already died, so he didn't live to see that. In our little community here, we have veterans from all branches of service, all eras. And when I came back from the service, I thought about, how can we honor our people? They deserve some kind of recognition. So, I started working on a database, to try to list all our people from here that served in the military in all branches of service. And later on, after I developed it and other people saw it, I got more help, and we developed more, and we even included people who have relatives that live here but served in the military from different reservations. And we added them to our database, and we keep track of all our people who are currently on active duty, where they're on active duty. And if new people join, the families let us know, and we add them. And we also include employees from our organizations that serve our tribe, like the Bureau of

Indian Affairs, Law Department, our schools, and all our different people that come here to work with our tribe. So we add them to our database also. So, right now it's pretty complete. So we have a total of about 312 veterans living here in Duck Valley, and I think I already covered how we got to name the Legion Post, and our casualties from here. Every November, we have a Veteran's Day Powwow. And the Veterans lead the Grand Entry. And we have a eagle staff that we carry. And on that eagle staff, we have, on the medicine wheel, two eagle feathers for the two people killed in World War II, and two eagle feathers on the medicine wheel for the two that were killed in Korea. On the staff itself are seven eagle feathers for the seven Native Americans from the state of Nevada who were killed in action in Vietnam. And those are, those names on the staff are read off as the Grand Entry comes in. So that is one thing that we make sure that we do, every year. And another thing that we make sure that we do is that, we honor our veterans who are deceased, while they are being buried. We always have a veterans' group there with firing squad, play the taps, and present the flag to the next of kin. We also plant flags on all our graves on our five cemeteries. And that is an ongoing things that we always want to carry on. So, that's pretty much my presentation on how we honor our veterans, both from here and all over America and other tribes. And I appreciate the opportunity to talk to you people. And should you ever be in our area, or have questions, don't be afraid to ask me. And if you see a veteran or somebody in uniform, go shake their hands and thank them. And they'll appreciate it. In closing, I would like to say I appreciate Norman Cavanaugh's interest in working with the SYLAP program in developing things to be presented to all the participants there at SYLAP, and I want to thank him for his efforts in promoting culture here with our tribe. And while he was

working for the Great Basin College. And I had the pleasure of working with Norman Cavanaugh when I was working with the Indian Health Service, so I have known Norman for quite a while, and I always appreciate talking to him. And I learn a lot of things by talking to him. So he's always pleasant to be around. And if you see him, you know what I mean. So if you see him, if he happens to be there, just tell him thank you, and tell him you appreciate his efforts. Thanks.

[End of recording]