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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Dan Decker
Conducted by Steve Maxner
July 3, 2001
Transcribed by Christina Witt & Tammi Mikel Lyon

NOTE: Text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Kim Sawyer: This is Kim Sawyer conducting an oral history interview with Mr.
2 Dan Decker on July 3, 2001. It is 1:15 in the afternoon and we are in the Special
3 Collections Library at Texas Tech University. Mr. Decker, could you begin and talk a
4 little bit about your early life; when and where you were born, where you grew up, things
5 like that?

6 Dan Decker: Okay. I was born in Barbourville Kentucky in 1946. My dad was
7 Air Force so I got to move around all of everywhere. I spent the first five years of my
8 life in the Kentucky area. Kentucky, Illinois, he was stationed at Shipfield in Illinois for
9 a year and then he was sent to Del Rio at Laughlin Air Force base, Del Rio Texas. Del
10 Rio had a little bit of a reputation, if you ever got sent there, you stayed there and that's
11 what happened to him, he stayed there for thirteen years. I went all through school in one
12 school system. [I] enjoyed it as a dependent in Del Rio, was a good school system, got
13 the good education at the high school there. Went to San Angelo State University, went
14 after I graduated from high school for one year and then my dad finally got reassigned to
15 Okinawa, that was 1964. The family...I left school, I went ahead and finished up that
16 one year at San Angelo State University and joined them with the mistaken idea that I'd
17 be able to go to college there at the University of the Ryukyu Islands. And I could have
18 if I was fluent in Japanese, but I wasn't. So I did take one course with the University of
19 Maryland, an English course and the charge, they were charging something like 45

1 dollars a semester hour and in 1965 that was just outrageous. There was no kind of
2 financial aid for dependents over there. My dad went ahead and paid for the one course
3 and he said, "We just can't afford anymore." So I bummed around on the island there for
4 a while, got tired of it, bored, couldn't get a job, quarter an hour is what they paid
5 civilians there and I wouldn't work for that. I just couldn't afford it. My time was worth
6 more to me than that. So I finally went out to the base personnel office and said, "I want
7 to join up!" They went ahead and enlisted me at Naha Air Base Okinawa. Took them
8 ten months, they were enlisting me as a foreign national enlisting, they did it wrong, but
9 they went through the process, complete process. They needed a police report for every
10 place I had ever lived from the time I was born all the way up to the present and it took a
11 while to get some of the reports back, because they were having to go back to the United
12 States to get them all, it wasn't local. Ten months later they finally swore me in. I was
13 the first and only person to be enlisted at Naha Air Base. The procedure they were
14 supposed to follow was send the enlistees to Kadena Air Base fifteen miles up the island
15 and they had a system set up there, bang, bang, bang, you're in, you're going. They stick
16 on an airplane and you head back for basic training. But Naha had this little conflict
17 going and decided 'well we going to do it this time!' So I got that little distinction the
18 first time I went because, only because they closed the base down. So it's not there
19 anymore, they gave it back to the Japanese.

20 KS: Now what did your father do?

21 DD: He was in transportation, 51st transportation squadron there at Naha Air
22 base. He had some involvement in Vietnam primarily providing them with vehicles.
23 They would come to Okinawa, his outfit the transportation squadron there would prepare
24 them, make them all ready, make any kind of modifications they needed, stick them on a
25 boat and send them down to what they call the brush or the bush, down south, different
26 names for it. Nobody ever said...in 1966 they didn't mention Vietnam that much. But
27 that was what he did. So he was involved in three wars; World War II, Korea, and
28 Vietnam. Although he never did get credit for serving in Vietnam although he was vice-
29 head of heavy combat support foremen for vehicles and stuff.

30 KS: Did your father being in the military; was that a consideration for you to join
31 the Air Force as well?

1 DD: Yes it was. A family tradition not much of one because it started with my
2 dad, but he'd been in the service for, at that time, a little better then twenty years and I
3 liked it. It was one way to get back to the states for one. Got out of Okinawa, I hated the
4 place, it smelled bad. It had some other considerations, but for a young male dependent
5 who was out of school it wasn't that important so I joined up and went back. They gave
6 me an I.D. card, which is interesting, I showed up an basic training with some fairly long
7 hair and they immediately cut that into many little pieces and said, "That's not kosher,
8 you're not going to, that's not regulation. You've got to get a regulation I.D." So after
9 they cut our hair they gave us all I.D. cards with shaved heads. Flew back to the United
10 States on a commercial airline, which was quite nice, it wasn't a military charter which
11 was very different. Military charter they pack you in like sardines, something like
12 eighteen inches between seat backs. This was a straight civilian airline flying all the way
13 back to San Antonio.

14 KS: How did your parents feel about you enlisting? Did they expect it do you
15 think?

16 DD: I don't think they expected it, but they didn't object to it. I think they were
17 glad to see me leaving because I was nineteen, I turned twenty...let's see it was '66, yeah
18 I turned twenty in basic training...and I was a draw down on their family resources, I
19 wasn't providing any kind of supplement to the family because I wasn't working. I think
20 they were glad to see me go is what it amounted to.

21 KS: Did you have brothers and sisters?

22 DD: Had one brother, one sister.

23 KS: Okay. Were they in Japan with your family as well?

24 DD: Yes they were. Everybody was over there. My mom worked as a volunteer
25 at the base hospital there at Naha. My brother went to Kubiyaki High School, played on
26 the Kubiyaki Eagles football team. They only had the one high school so what they
27 would do is they had four football teams, Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps,
28 didn't have any Coast Guard.

29 KS: Who was the best?

30 DD: The Air Force was, of course! Actually I don't know, I have no idea, but he
31 played a lineman on that and he graduated from there. It turned out well because when

1 he graduated that was the end of my dad's tour and he retired and came back to the states
2 with 26 years in the Air Force. My brother went to college. They retired back to
3 Kentucky - big mistake - they lasted there about two years and said, "To heck with it
4 we're going back to Texas!" So they came back to Texas and my brother joined the Air
5 Force also. He was training as a Vietnamese interpreter initially, but he graduated in
6 May or June of 1975...the war's over. He got out of...He went to defense language
7 school at Monterey for Vietnamese. He did perform for a while in that position, but he
8 was on the C-135 type airplane flying along the coast of Vietnam, kind of like what the
9 Chinese that EP-3 with the Chinese had just had, except they were never forced down or
10 anything, they were listening to all the broadcast directly, they weren't just recording it
11 they had interpreters right there on board the airplane.

12 KS: What's your brother's name?

13 DD: William D. Decker. He stayed in until he retired too. So between my
14 father, my brother, and myself we've got 66 years of time in the Air Force, which is kind
15 of neat. But he ended up being cross-trained very shortly after that, they didn't need
16 anymore Vietnamese interpreters. So they cross-trained him into training and then cross-
17 trained him into laser medical research. He was removing the top of monkey's skulls,
18 sticking in probes and shooting laser beams into their eyes to see what effect it had. Said
19 he hated that job. Then he got into computers and when he retired he was in working with
20 the AWACS people at Tinker Air Force base Oklahoma. I think that's where he was
21 when he retired. But he is now a computer technician, he went back to school after
22 service also and he's a computer technician working in San Antonio. Okay, see I went
23 through... I enlisted on the fourth of October 1966 and they flew me back to Lackland
24 Air Force Base, half way around the world to go to basic training. We got there about
25 three o'clock in the morning. They met us at the passenger terminal in San Antonio with
26 an Air Force bus, typical blue bus and they bussed us. The first place they took us too
27 was Hells Kitchen, that's the name of the chow hall that they have there, one of them, but
28 it ended up being the one where we would pull KPs and all this. They fed us a meal of
29 SOS. I don't know the actual words that definite acronym, SOS, Same Old Stuff...Same
30 Old shit on a shingle. Its chipped beef on toast, is what it is and we swore that it was
31 laced with saltpeter. Don't know if that's true or not, probably not, because I think that

1 we were just so bloody tired during basic from running all day long that we had no
2 interest of any other kind anyway, but we thought that. Then they took us over to a
3 dormitory or barracks, World War II temporary barracks. This is 1966 and it's still
4 temporary. You could see through the walls, the cracks in the walls and stuff. It was
5 built in the 1940's for World War II and they were supposed to tear them down,
6 eventually they did, they're gone now, but they put us in one of these. "Okay, we're
7 going to let you all sleep, get all caught up because we know you had a long trip. Go on
8 and get to rest." At five o'clock they woke us up and we started our first day, five a.m.!

9 KS: Could you describe that first day or a typical day?

10 DD: Oh let's see. Typical day. You get up, you've got five minutes to get
11 dressed, use the bathroom, shave, brush your teeth, and be outside in formation with your
12 bed made perfectly, be in formation to march to breakfast. They'd march you over to
13 breakfast, you'd go through the chow line and you were at attention the whole time in the
14 chow line, when you got to your table, if you were the first at the table you would stick a
15 hand up with three fingers showing and as other...and you couldn't sit down, nobody
16 could sit down until the table was loaded, there was four people to a table, but you had to
17 hold your hand up with three fingers showing if you were the first one, somebody else
18 show up you'd drop it down and have two fingers up, and finally when you got to the
19 fourth person everybody could sit down and eat. You could eat all you wanted, go back
20 for seconds if you want too, but you had to clean your plate, had to. They didn't make us
21 do like they do at the academy where they call...they eat making corners. At the Air
22 Force Academy and I guess at the other academies too, you get a scoop of something,
23 you bring it up and straight to your mouth, back and down and it's called four square or
24 four corners or something like that, it's a ridiculous thing to do. But we go to breakfast,
25 then you would go back, they'd march you around the base for awhile, a little bit of
26 morning exercise, and then they would take you to PT, which is physical training, which
27 is basically is calisthenics; sit-ups, push-ups, jumping jacks, all that kind of stuff, pull-
28 ups, we had to do that. Then that put you into class teaching you the various things about
29 the Air Force, like the UCMJ, that's Uniform Code of Military Justice. Teaching you all
30 the ranks so that you'd recognize them, teaching you how to salute, teaching you how to
31 march...we spent a lot of time learning how to march. Then they would run you over to

1 the hospital for various examinations, they'd take you over there to get you some shots. I
2 had all my shots current and up to date when I got there and they were going to give them
3 to me again and my mom had told me, she said, "The doctor's at the clinics said don't let
4 them do it again. You've already got them, you don't need them, pitch a fit if you have
5 to." I had to pitch a fit because they were going to give them to me and they finally
6 backed off, said, "Okay fine, you've got your shot record, everything's here, you're
7 current and up to date." And so I got to wash dishes again. They'd make up for that in
8 basic training quite often.

9 KS: How hard, how difficult was the physical training?

10 DD: Boy Scout camp was tougher, it really is. Air Force basic training is a joke.
11 One of the things they're discussing now or at least is traveling around the Internet
12 among the military groups scuttlebutt-type is that some of the changes they might make
13 are to give all basic training to the Marine Corps, all the services go through the Marine
14 Corp, twelve units. Then the Marine Corps would do basic training and they'd be the
15 first strike force, on ground strike force and then Navy would do boats, and Air Force
16 would do airplanes, and the Army would be ground troops coming in after the Marines
17 beachhead type thing. Sounds feasible to me, I don't know if they can do it that way or
18 not. It has some interested aspects to it, especially for people joining up now, Marine
19 Corps basic training, boot camp. But Air Force basic training was a joke, it really was,
20 especially if you knew what was expected already. The guys in my dad's squadron had
21 told me everything that was going to happen and just like it. I had started smoking and
22 the bad thing I started smoking and I took some Japanese cigarettes to basic training.
23 Well Japanese cigarettes are god-awful! They're not those black cigarettes you can buy
24 down in Mexico. They're extremely strong, extremely nasty tasting and everything. I
25 had, also when I smoked with Marlboros, I also had these Deigos, D-e-i-g-o, made with
26 some kind of flower down in Okinawa. We went six days before they let us have a
27 smoke break so everybody dying for a cigarette...and nobody at this time had this,
28 smoking is bad for you, it will kill you, cause you lung cancer and all that...if you didn't
29 smoke you weren't a man was part of the thing of being...that's why they're suing now
30 because they encouraged it so much. But they gave us our first smoke break the TI said,
31 "Hey! Smoke them if you got them, if you don't have them borrow them!" He wanted

1 everybody to hold out, get the whole flight to smoke. Well I had these Deigos and I hope
2 you've never had the experience, but when you haven't smoked for several days and you
3 take one, it will make you numb. It is like an instant...it's like drinking a glass of
4 Everclear or something. You're numb all over and a major buzz. Two of the guys
5 passed out on those Deigos, we were laughing about that because the TIs knew what they
6 were. They're extremely strong, nasty cigarettes. I did that on purpose just to play with
7 them. It was a little bit of fun. It wasn't a whole lot of funny in basic training, but KP
8 was the worst. Now they do, they don't do KP at all anymore, military people don't have
9 to go to a chow hall and wash dishes. They have contract people to come civilian
10 contract to come in and take care of all of that.

11 KS: What was KP like for you?

12 DD: At basic training we did it five of our, five days of our six weeks, or six days
13 I'm not sure which it's been too long ago, we spent in kitchen details in the kitchen;
14 washing dishes, washing pots and pans. I got stuck with pots and pans every time.
15 Peeling potatoes, doing anything that the cooks told us to do, and cleaned the place up.
16 Eating just a day at a time it was bad. When I went to tech school they put you on KP for
17 two weeks before you started school, two solid weeks of it and they'd tell you wear your
18 checker boots or your combat boots, which ever pair you don't like, wear those and after
19 your two weeks is over with throw them away and go down to the public sell store and
20 buy another pair.

21 KS: They're dissolved.

22 DD: Yeah because they're destroyed, just totally destroyed by it. Guys would get
23 open sores in there hands from the soap, real strong soap, real high temperatures...you
24 had to make sure it's clean, they don't want any epidemics of salmonella or something
25 starting up so they'd make sure it was real clean, real hot water.

26 KS: What about weapons training in basic?

27 DD: One day in basic training, my flight was the last to use the M-1 Carbine.
28 These things jammed, just felt like hadn't been shot. You'd fire off one or two rounds
29 and it would jam and so they had extra TIs there to arrange to help you come in and clear
30 your weapon. The next guys after us go to shoot the M-16s and it was a wonderful
31 weapon as far as range work, I never had to use one in real life, but on the range fantastic.

1 You couldn't miss with it because at that time they gave you a man shaped target and any
2 hit on the target counted as a hit. You didn't have to get it in the center or anything like
3 that. They didn't have a bull's eye in there, no certain amount of points. You were
4 responsible for 60 rounds into the target and 59 was required for expert, and they had the
5 same standard for the M-1, and these M-1s were so old they'd rattle when you'd shake
6 them. They were really bad. But, one day's training was all I had.

7 KS: Is there anything else that comes to mind about basic training, any
8 memorable experiences or anything else you wanted to add?

9 DD: We enjoyed practicing saluting. We would go around whenever they gave
10 us a base pass, we would line up 60 of us in single file, ten to 15 feet between each
11 person, and go around marching like a big, long snake, marching around Lackland Air
12 Force Base looking for officers to practice on. They officers would see this and they
13 would turn and run because we were far enough apart that each one of the officers would
14 have to salute each one of us separately, so he's got to do it 60 times while each one of us
15 does it once. But, we wanted real life practice so we went looking for officers. That was
16 kind of neat. The only other memorable experience from basic that I can recall was our
17 one day downtown in San Antonio. They took us down, dropped us off in the middle of
18 downtown someplace, and everybody thought they would go to the bars and try to get a
19 beer. Well, they wouldn't sell them to them. Shaved head, no beer; period. So, all they
20 could get is near beer which is God-awful. Actually, beer is awful; I can't stand the taste
21 of the stuff. It's nasty. But, everybody down there trying to con somebody into getting a
22 beer. San Antonio knows how to separate you from your money. There's guys down
23 there taking portrait photographs and charge you \$25 bucks. This is in 1966, charge you
24 \$25 bucks for a portrait in uniform, the fancy one. My mom's still got it hanging on the
25 wall. I bought one of them. Then, they'd go out and everybody would go out to
26 Breckenridge Park which is a nice place in San Antonio and we'd wander around out
27 there for a while. We didn't have much money. The GI's have never been paid well and
28 they were paid even less in basic. Then we would go back to the base, catch the bus
29 downtown, catch the bus back out to Lackland and go back out to the base. But, one day
30 is all you got to go downtown.

31 KS: How long was basic training?

1 DD: Basic training was six weeks and you didn't get to go downtown until your
2 last week, somewhere in that time period, depending on your TI. It was up to him if he
3 let you have a town pass at all. Of course there were some other experiences; I don't
4 remember if it actually happened to me or if it was something that I heard, so I won't
5 relate it.

6 KS: I'm curious, this was 1966?

7 DD: 1966.

8 KS: How close were you following developments in Vietnam, Southeast Asia?

9 DD: Zero, zero. I knew about it because my dad was shipping trucks and jeeps
10 down to the bush, but they didn't talk about it in basic. We did talk about it when we got
11 to our next base, Keesler to technical school. I don't recall me hearing anything about
12 Vietnam until '67 at least or '68, actually probably '68.

13 KS: There was no mention of it in basic?

14 DD: There was no mention of it, and again, nobody talked about it much. Then,
15 the guys started coming back who had been stationed there and it was an automatic. If
16 you went to Vietnam at that time, you came back, they gave you an Air Force
17 Commendation Medal, which is a fairly high medal to get and they would present it at
18 commander's call. The only bases they ever mentioned were the ones in Vietnam;
19 Danang, Tan Son Nhut, Cam Ranh Bay, the Air Force bases in Vietnam itself. If they
20 didn't mention the bases, at that time, again, I had no idea that there was anybody over
21 there in Thailand. We had five or six bases in Thailand and at that time it was secret
22 because Thailand did not want the communists to know that they were giving support to
23 the United States by letting them have bases; afraid they would attack them too. So, we
24 didn't acknowledge it, and we still haven't acknowledged being in Laos. We had a lot of
25 stuff going. If you get a chance, get on the internet and look up LS-85.

26 KS: Is that Lima Site?

27 DD: Lima Site 85. It's a mountaintop in Laos. It's a mountaintop in Laos and it
28 was destroyed, overrun by the North Vietnamese Army Regulars. It was right on the
29 border between Laos and Vietnam, North Vietnam, and you couldn't do it visually
30 because there's too much smog in the air I believe, but radar wise you could look right
31 into downtown Hanoi from that site and they could control the airplanes coming in to

1 bomb real well. So, the North Vietnamese had to destroy it, and we didn't get our people
2 out. They were killed and captured, 15 or 20 of them up on top of the mountain. Vang
3 Pao and all those guys were involved in all that. There's a Ron Hayden has an
4 outstanding location on the internet. If you see his name linked with LS 85, it's a good
5 site, real good site for information about that particular one.

6 KS: Directly after basic you went to technical school?

7 DD: Tech school.

8 KS: At Keesler?

9 DD: Keesler Technical Training Center. The guys back in my dad's outfit said,
10 "Look, the career field you want to go into is communication electronics. That's where
11 the rank is going to be. Guys get into that they make rank, bang, bang, bang." Well,
12 their idea of communication electronics and my idea was two different things. My idea
13 was operating the radios and the scopes, being a radar operator, that kind of thing. That
14 would be cool, I might do that, and it turned out to be maintenance; repairing these
15 things. But, they were right about the rank. In ten months in tech school they start you
16 off with basic electronics, and I had no electronics training at all. I knew you didn't stick
17 your finger in a socket and that was about it, but zero electronics training. So, as soon as
18 you'd finish basic you'd go to tech school and they would start a class up on a regular
19 interval and I hit a long interval between classes. So, they put us into math training; six
20 hours electronics, especially the repair, involves a lot of math. So, we spent six hours a
21 day studying mathematics.

22 KS: Were you a strong math student to begin with?

23 DD: I could do it, but I hated it. The neat thing about it...I'd had it in high
24 school, I took a college prep thing in high school, elementary analysis, algebra 1, algebra
25 II, geometry, then elementary analysis in high school. Algebra 1 and plain geometry I
26 made D -, and my junior year it's like somebody clicked a switch on; all of a sudden I
27 understood everything they were talking about. I wish I could figure out what turned it
28 on, I could probably get rich! All of a sudden I just could do everything, but I didn't like
29 it. But, the neat thing about the Air Force training was they taught you all the short cuts,
30 and there are a lot of short cuts in math. They do that for, oh, what is that, UIL,
31 University Interscholastic League Math Sense they call it, and they would teach you that

1 stuff to use everyday type thing at this training at Keesler. I spent six weeks in that, six
2 hours a day. Then, two weeks of KP. That was the standard. Before you started classes,
3 two weeks solid of KP, and then when you'd go to classes, start classes at Keesler, they
4 had four shifts. Then, actually they did start talking about Vietnam then because they had
5 jacked up the training. I just remembered that. They'd increased the training load,
6 increased the number of classes coming through because they were increasing manning
7 for all [?] and they needed guys to repair the airplanes. The equipment back then had a
8 very low MTBF, that's mean time between failures. The system I ended up working on
9 had an MTBF of 30 to 40 hours of operation and then it would break and you had to fix
10 it. But, I had four shifts running A, B, C, and D, six hours a day so school was a 24-hour
11 thing. A lot of instructors were there. Your classes would run six hours a day. You
12 would march to class under the supervision of fellow students. We called those guys
13 ropes; they were given ropes depending on their level of responsibility. Green was the
14 lowest and I believe then you went red and then you went gold. Gold was the highest.
15 He was the one in charge of all the other ropes, it was kind of cool. We would sing –
16 they call it singing, it's cadence – we would sing marching to and from school. We
17 would march in review every day. Some squadron commander would be at this...they
18 would have this location where each got a reviewing stand and he would sit there or stand
19 there, whatever, and watch all the troops march by and everybody had to do eyes right
20 and so the whole thing is as they went by en masse, they call it en masse formation which
21 would be two squadrons or more I believe, and rain or shine, it didn't matter, you
22 marched to school. Then, you marched back home. If you got hurt or if you were sick,
23 you could get a straggler pass. You didn't have to march in other words, you were
24 straggling.

25 KS: Straggler pass?

26 DD: Straggler pass from the hospital, which was a valued thing. We hated
27 marching, we hated it! The singing was kind of neat, all these different cadences they'd
28 come up with. Some were just flat weird, but very specific to the schools you were going
29 to. For example, one was, "X sub C and X sub L, Ally Hall can go to hell!" Ally Hall
30 was the name of the hall we were going to school in. X sub C is the value of the
31 resistance of the capacitance, and X sub L is the value of the resistance of induction, and

1 that was all used in mathematics for your electronics training. Anywhere else, they'd go,
2 "Huh? What's that about?" Then there was duck cadence. Instead of counting, you'd
3 quack. We did that in the rain all the time. It's still a bit of a protest about having to
4 march in the rain and that kind of thing. Actually, it was pretty much fun. You got to go
5 six hours a day to tech school, to the school itself, and then the afternoons, four to five
6 hours of details. The student squadrons had a hard enough time thinking up enough
7 details to keep everybody busy because we were overflowing at the seams with students
8 everywhere; a lot of people going through school. The Air Force had it easy. There was
9 an Army outfit there for clerk typist school. They were coming to learn how to type.
10 They would earn demerits and then they'd have to march them off in their area and we
11 could go by there every now and then and see these guys inside their little quadrangle of
12 barracks with a gun on their shoulder marching in a square, singly, walking off their
13 demerits, an hour per demerit or something like that. So, we thought we had it pretty
14 easy in the Air Force. This was at Keesler, was in Biloxi, Mississippi. We didn't get hit
15 with a hurricane or anything while we were there; shortly after that, yes, and they made
16 use of all the GI's there at the base to help clean up and stuff and to rescue and guard
17 property and that type of thing. The town and the base didn't get along well. Now, the
18 fathers in the town, the government and the businesses, they loved it. They thought it
19 was wonderful. But, it was the young guys in town because we were competition for
20 their girls. There were quite a few fights between...because here's 25,000 young males
21 and a few hundred downtown and the uniforms always had an attraction for the girls. So,
22 they didn't care for it too much. I made a couple of friends down there. I had my first
23 Cajun meal because they had some Cajuns living in the area; quite hot stuff. I went
24 floundering for the first time. They gig them. They take a spear and you walk along the
25 water and that part of the Gulf of Mexico is real shallow for a long way out and you walk
26 along and you see the shape. You do it at night. You've got a lamp and you've got a gig
27 and you walk along and you look for the shape and you see the shape and you stab it with
28 a spear. Well, the first one, "Is there it?" and I sort of poked at it, and [makes running
29 noise], it jus took off and startled me a little bit. I almost dropped the light. It was that
30 big of a stir because it took real violent [?], a pile of sand stirred up. I had a little part
31 time job sailing boats from New Orleans back to Biloxi.

1 KS: While you were at tech school?

2 DD: While I was there, on weekends. You had to be in sets. There was two
3 sections of school; basic electronics development and then sets. Basic electronics was
4 just like I said, just basic resistance, real basic stuff, and sets was the actual equipment
5 you were going to be working on. The stuff they taught me, I was an inertial navigation
6 systems technician and the stuff they taught us in tech school was the ASN...the
7 AN/ASN 46-A Navigation Computer, the AN/ASN 48 Inertial Navigation System, and
8 the AN/ASN 35 Navigation Computer and the AN/APN 147 Doppler Radar System. We
9 just had four sets that they put us through.

10 KS: Any specific navigation computer? For example, what was that used with?

11 DD: The ASN 46 was used in the F-4. The ASN 35 was used on a C-130. The
12 ASN 48 was F-4 and the AN/APN 147 was the C-130. They didn't teach us...well,
13 maybe they did...no, they didn't. They didn't teach us the Doppler system on the
14 tankers, on the C-135 types. There's a whole bunch of different models of that airplane.
15 But, that system was the AN/APN 81. They didn't teach us the system on the B-52s
16 which was the AN/APN 89, real similar. Basically they were great big huge black
17 trashcans. The Doppler systems for those two airplanes, the 135s and the bombers, the
18 B-52s were very large, but didn't learn those until I got assigned to SAC. They didn't
19 teach it in tech school. Those other systems, the 35, 46, 48, and 147 were what they
20 taught us. I forget how long we spent in sets. I believe it was six months in basic
21 electronics and then four months, we spent a month on each system in sets. I think that's
22 about the way it went. When you graduated you were a bonafide, honest to God 3-level
23 which means you couldn't do anything. Let's see, tech school, if anything else stick out;
24 turning 21 and in Mississippi they didn't card you very much. If you looked old enough,
25 they'd say...well, we went out partying one time to the bars. I had an after six dinner tux
26 and a friend of mine had a suit and he had a car, which is unusual. Not very many
27 students there had cars. So, we went out partying one weekend. The last week of tech
28 school we discovered that there were women stationed there at Keesler. We sort of knew
29 about it but we never saw them. They were permanent party, they were mostly clerks and
30 medical technicians and that kind of thing and they lived in the women's Air Force
31 squadron, the WAF Squadron. The last week we were there, we called them up and got a

1 date for four guys over the telephone, "We need four girls," just like ordering up a pizza
2 or something. The one I got, don't remember her name, we went out to a place called
3 Trader John's, it's on the coast there between Biloxi and New Orleans, home of the
4 Hurricane, the drink. You got to keep the glass and everything. Well, this was two days
5 before payday and my date drank four Hurricanes at three and a half bucks apiece. I
6 figured she had a hollow leg because she was still walking, talking, everything. It was an
7 interesting evening, and then they all got upset and everything because we were leaving.
8 We didn't know y'all were here! But, they would march the daily thing too, the younger
9 ones, the lower ranking ones would march in that daily parade we had to go through. It
10 was funny. I ran into a group down there, a rock and roll band, can't remember their
11 name, but they were just starting to get good and well known. The guy I went out
12 partying with used to be into grass roots before they made it. He was a bass player, and
13 he got tired of whatever it was, of not making it, and went ahead and joined the Air
14 Force, and two months later is when they came out with their first big hit. He was sick!
15 He was just heartsick over that. I can't remember the name of that group though because
16 the friends I made, the Cajun friends I made, he was a photographer. His father was the
17 Cajun cook; fantastic hush puppies!

18 KS: Was this someone who was in the Air Force or just a friend off base?

19 DD: He was a friend off base. He was a photographer off base. I met him
20 through another guy that was stationed there too. He was taking pictures of this rock band
21 and they were starting to get pretty well known along the Gulf Coast, make friends [?]
22 but I can't remember who they were. I know they never had an album out. But, back to
23 that part time job. It was returning boats. There was a place called Walet Yacht Sales
24 and Rentals in Biloxi, W-A-L-E-T was the name. They would rent sailboats, and they
25 had some gorgeous boats. They had a 60 footer, called "The Countess", this thing in
26 1967 and this boat was selling for 1,000 bucks a foot. It was a 60 footer and it was nice.
27 I never did get to go on that one; I wanted to, but didn't get to go on that one. But, I met
28 this guy and he got me and another guy and put together a crew and so we got a job with
29 these guys. They would drive us down to New Orleans, give us a weekend's worth of
30 food and liquid beverage, and then we would sail one of the boats back that somebody
31 had dropped off in New Orleans. Oh, my second or third trip, I forget which it was, we

1 were sailing back a converted whaleboat. It was like you see in Moby Dick or
2 something, that kind of a whaleboat and it had been converted to power and sail; pretty
3 nice little boat. But, it was very large, very heavy, very sluggish, and we were backing it
4 out of the slip there at New Orleans and it didn't have any steerage backwards. The guy
5 that was our captain, I can't remember his name either, but it won't go anywhere. We're
6 moving the tiller back and forth and it's not making any change at all on the boat. So, he
7 disengaged the transmission but we still had this underway thing and we ended up
8 backing into all the way across this section of water into another boat. It didn't damage
9 any one of them, but I was going to be smart and get out there and stick my foot out and
10 stop us from hitting another boat. Well, the tiller sticks out further than my foot did, the
11 rudder did, and the rudder hit that other boat and swung the tiller around and knocked me
12 overboard. This is in January and I ended up catching pneumonia from it. I almost
13 washed out of tech school because of it. They let me catch up and stay in my class, but I
14 spent two weeks in the hospital with pneumonia. It was interesting. I didn't have a
15 change of clothes with me. The first night we set anchor at the mouth of Lake
16 Ponchatrain and I started running a temperature. The other guys got scared and we didn't
17 have a radio or anything. So they went ahead and pulled the anchor. I was getting
18 delirious. My temperature was getting up to the point where I was getting delirious from
19 it and so they cranked it up and like three, four o'clock in the morning we headed off for
20 Biloxi to get me back to the base, and we were probably doing max hull speed. Every
21 boat has a maximum hull speed. It can not go any faster than that without breaking it and
22 we were probably hitting max hull speed all the way. I don't remember anything until
23 they told me about that part of it. That was my last trip. It was a fun job while it lasted.

24 KS: Was that usual for students to have part time jobs?

25 DD: To have part time jobs? No. I'm not quite sure how we managed it. I know
26 towards the end of sets they started lightening up on you as far as details and weekend
27 duty. You could get a weekend pass to go to New Orleans because it was 90 miles away.
28 The thing I hated most about getting pneumonia, that was the weekend of Mardi Gras, or
29 the week of Mardi Gras. I missed it because I was in the hospital. The guys will say it's
30 just like any other holiday down there. You don't have to buy a drink. You just have an
31 empty glass and somebody will pour something in it. New Orleans is the only place I've

1 ever been where you can drink on the streets. It was a lot of fun. Everybody was soused.
2 You don't go where you want to go, you go where the crowd goes because you can't go
3 anywhere else. You're boxed in and the crowd's going here, okay, you go there.
4 Interesting places, Papa Joe's, the original Poppa Joe's, the Intellectual was the name of
5 another one, "Shoes required, clothing optional," was the sign outside. Al Hurst's place
6 was there, just had opened it. He was a trumpet player, big time. I can't remember any
7 other famous bands, it was kind of fun.

8 KS: Well I was curious, you mentioned that during this time at Keesler there was
9 more talk about Vietnam?

10 DD: There was more talk about Vietnam.

11 KS: Do you remember what was said?

12 DD: Just that they're increasing the size of the Air Force because they're sending
13 so many people now over to Vietnam. None of the guys went directly to Vietnam.
14 That's one of the things that's one of the myths about Vietnam is that they sent these
15 fresh, brand new recruits over there. They didn't do that. A fresh, brand new recruit
16 doesn't know how to do anything. Somebody has to train this kid. So, they didn't put
17 you through boot camp when they put you on a boat or an airplane to send you into the
18 bush. You could have been killed easily. So, we would go out, Air Force type, when we
19 graduated from tech school we'd go to a base in the states somewhere. I was sent to
20 Seymour Johnson Air Force base, the 4th TAC Fighter Wing.

21 KS: Where is that?

22 DD: Goulsboro, North Carolina. You would be trained when you got there or
23 when you came fresh out of tech school you were a three level, which means literally
24 you can't do anything without direct, immediate supervision. Out in the field, when you
25 went to your line base, they would teach you or train you to the point, using OJT
26 techniques, on the job training, to be able to work by yourself. You'd have to go through
27 all the training, get signed off on your training folders and stuff, and all the jobs were
28 broken down into little bitty tiny specific tasks, and when you got those all signed off you
29 were allowed to take what is called a five level test, a written test, and if you pass that, you
30 were awarded your five level meaning you could now work on the airplane by yourself.
31 You didn't have to have somebody else there training you, working with you at the time.

1 Minimum time in five level training is six months. So, I got out of tech school in August
2 of '67, went to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, so I'm in training for my five level,
3 let's see, September, October, November, December, four months, two months to go, and
4 the North Koreans stole the Pueblo. I never did figure this out. They sent the Air Force
5 to get it. It had been like a dog chasing the car. If we had caught it, we wouldn't have
6 known how to drive it. This was a boat. We were airplane people. They were sending
7 us to get back the boat; this being real facetious. We ended up staying over there, we
8 were on 30 day orders.

9 KS: The 4th Tac Wing went?

10 DD: 4th Tac Fighter Wing.

11 KS: Was that to South Korea?

12 DD: Yeah, South Korea, sent the entire wing; everybody, cooks, SPs, the entire
13 base. Well, not the entire base, but the entire wing went to Korea, Kunsan Air Base,
14 Korea. They rang the buzzer on us I believe on the 28th of January. They stole the
15 Pueblo I believe it was the 28th of January and on the 31st of January we were in Korea
16 with the entire wing. Now, I'm not positive about the dates, but that's real close;
17 definitely January of '68, end of the month, January of '68. We got there, the base had
18 facilities for 900 people. Almost over night it jumped up to around 6,000. we didn't
19 have places to park the airplanes. We had to park them on the sides of the runway, sides
20 of the taxiway because there was no place to put them, three squadrons of F-4 Ds. That's
21 about 75 airplanes. The idiot crews, and keep the idiot because they were bored crossing
22 the big water. We're on the east coast, and we cross the United States and cross the
23 Pacific to go to Korea. Why didn't they send somebody from California? That didn't
24 make any sense to me.

25 KS: Did you fly?

26 DD: They put us in 141s, C-141s, the lucky ones. Some of them ended up their
27 last leg flying on a C-124 which is nicknamed Old Shaky; parts fall off it like rain as it's
28 flying along. It was interesting airplanes. But, we were in 141s the whole way. We flew
29 from Seymour Johnson, the first stop was Norton, California, then Hawaii, then across
30 the long way instead of going up to Alaska. That would have been the short way. They
31 weren't telling us where we were going except until we were airborne, "Okay guys, we're

1 heading for Norton.” “Okay.” But all of our equipment, test equipment, tools, parts,
2 everything, we loaded them all up on airplanes and took off. Got to Norton, and then all
3 they did was refuel and change the Porto-potty type thing in there and give us some more
4 food and took off again, “Okay, we’re going to Hawaii.” “Yeah, Hawaii!” We got to
5 Hawaii, same thing; refueled, change Porto-potty, more food, take off again. “Okay,
6 we’re going to the Philippines.” “Huh?”

7 KS: So you had no idea?

8 DD: We had no idea where we were headed. They didn’t tell us.

9 KS: What were your thoughts?

10 DD: I didn’t know. We hadn’t heard anything about the Pueblo yet.

11 KS: There was no briefing about the Pueblo incident?

12 DD: Nothing until we hit Korea; actually, until we took off from Okinawa. We
13 flew to the Philippines and then we flew to Kadena. My parents were still there so they
14 had to fix our airplane. We’d been flying a while now. They had to fix it so I got on the
15 phone and called the folks. “You guys hurry up and get up here, you can see me before I
16 take off for somewhere!” We were on the way though. So, they came up and my mom’s
17 all crying and everything because they know about the Pueblo, and by now we did, too.

18 KS: Did they tell you?

19 DD: I was a cargo carrier which means I was carrying an M-16 and wearing a
20 parka because this is January. A parka is a little bit much for Okinawa but I was wearing
21 a parka. We had on these, in my squadron, white vinyl hats. They were God awful. The
22 first shirt did that to us. We had 4th TFS on the front of it, they looked like little clouds
23 sitting on top of your head. They were awful. And, I was carrying an M-16. My mom
24 started crying and my sisters and my brother said, “What is that?” “It’s a gun, duh”. But,
25 dad said, “You guys are headed for Korea.” “Oh, what’s there?” He said, “Not much.”
26 But, we were on the ground for about four or five hours. They were having to do
27 something to the bird. Then, we loaded back up again and took off and then they told us,
28 “Okay, we’re going to Kusan Air Base, Korea.” It’s on the west coast of Korea, South
29 Korea. We get there, the temperature is about 20 below zero. There’s a 35 mile an hour
30 wind blowing and there’s no place for us to go; no building, nothing. I slept the first
31 night in the base theater along with two or three hundred other guys. They put us in these

1 big buildings, the gym, the base theater, the NCO club, the airman's club, the hangers.
2 The second night they gave us sleeping bags and all this stuff and I slept on the floor in
3 what was going to be our shop. The third night, the third day our shop chief had
4 scrounged up a 30 man tent. Actually, we thought he was fantastic for doing that, but it
5 turns out they gave one to all the shops. They told us where to put it and we went out and
6 we had to put up our own tent. The ground's frozen for about two feet. See how that
7 finger's crooked? That's because I was holding the pegs instead of swinging the
8 hammer. A guy came down, and he didn't break it, but he sure did twist it real good. The
9 third night I slept on a broken down cardboard box with a sleeping bag on top of that on
10 frozen ground. Then, later they came in and put up wooden walls, plywood walls, and a
11 framework to really hold the tent up good. It didn't look kind of sad the way we put it
12 up.

13 KS: Did you have any heat?

14 DD: There were two kerosene heaters that went along with the tent. Have you
15 seen a five gallon Jerry can they call them? They're sort of rectangular with one end
16 sloped like this across the top and then this end is sloped down, holds five gallons of
17 liquid. We'd fill those with kerosene and this heater was a space heater. You could just
18 set it on there and plug it up and the fuel, the kerosene would run into the burners and you
19 could make that puppy red hot which would run you out of the tent. But, no matter what
20 you did, it would run out of fuel about three or four o'clock in the morning. The
21 temperature's now approaching what it is outside real quickly, and take the can and go
22 fill it up. We had two of these in there, and you'd go fill it up at the fueling station
23 wherever it was and come back and hook it up and relight the heater and I think I only
24 got caught on that a couple of times, mainly because I worked the night shift. That was a
25 big mess. Our shop chief found us and scrounged us a table and chairs from somewhere.
26 He was a scrounger. We called him Pappy. He had to be in his '50s which in the
27 military is old. He's bald headed, white fringe around the top of his head, pot belly,
28 loved his beer, and he was a scrounge. He found us a case, or not a case, but a pallet,
29 cargo pallet full of C-rations and he knew a buddy who worked over in the aid shop and
30 so he went over, borrowed a fork lift, came in, scooped up that pallet of C-rations, took
31 them back to the tent, pulled us out of that thing, okay, ran in there, put it down. He stole

1 them is what he did, he stole the stuff! The table, when he stole that, it had a marble
2 chess set that was sitting on top of that and he took that from the security police, from
3 their dispatch shack. They came hunting for that. They had to give that back to them. It
4 was funny. Korea, cold, miserable. Later when the spring thaw came, we were there,
5 like I said, on 30 day orders and the orders kept being extended another 30 days. We got
6 there in January, we left on the 4th of July. We were relieved by an Air National guard
7 unit from Florida. They were flying the F-100s which is a much older type of airplane.
8 It's called Super Saber. They were used early in Vietnam, the F-100s were.

9 KS: What was your work schedule like when you were in Korea?

10 DD: 12 hour shifts, six days a week. They had a real heavy flying schedule. We
11 were there as a show of force. We lost one airplane; don't know how, they never told us.
12 Just they took off one day, and didn't come back. Never heard about the crew, don't
13 know if they were killed or not. I'm not able to find anything out since, which is
14 interesting because with this internet thing we've got now we can find out almost
15 anything, the GI's can, and nothing; we lost a bird. We were just a few minutes from the
16 DMZ which is North Korea. Tension was real high because of this. The [Pueblo's] a spy
17 ship. There's a book out by some admiral that is the best telling of the whole affair that
18 I've seen. I've got a copy of it at home. It claims that the ship was taken without a shot,
19 and they were armed. They had weapons aboard including a deck mounted .50 caliber
20 machine gun. So, he's depositing that they allowed it to be taken because they wanted to
21 build up American forces in South Korea because it could have been...they were taking it
22 in the open sea well after Korea and they could have gotten their planes there from
23 aircraft carriers that were within 300 miles. They could have stopped it and they didn't
24 move. They let it be taken. Then, a year later, we get the crew back, Captain Buker. It
25 was in December, December that they were brought back. Captain Buker ended up being
26 court martialed. They let him keep his rank, but he was done. He basically got to hang is
27 what it amounted to.

28 KS: You mentioned of course tensions were high.

29 DD: Tensions were high.

30 KS: Being close to the DMZ, can you describe that? Were you on heightened
31 security?

1 DD: The base was closed. The guys that were there, permanent party, hated it
2 because they had been living downtown with girlfriends. They call them Yobos. That's
3 a Class B dependent meaning it's not legal, but basically it's a live in girlfriend. In the
4 mid 1960s this was not too well thought of. But, in Thailand they called them Tiloks,
5 same thing. Some of them, the Tiloks got lucky, and the same thing with the Yobos and
6 they married their GI and came back to the states. That was a big goal that a lot of them
7 had. The United States was heaven to them; still is. Have you seen the movie stars
8 Tommy Lee Jones, Heaven and Earth?

9 KS: Sounds familiar.

10 DD: He's in the Marine Corps, marries a Vietnamese girl, brings her back to the
11 United States, and she cannot believe what she sees; heaven. Grocery stores over there
12 are about the size of this room. You've been there now, that's right. Do they still have
13 that, the little, bitty, tiny grocery stores?

14 KS: Lots of open markets.

15 DD: Lots of open markets, flies covering everything. It was like that throughout
16 the orient and they come to the states and they see a supermarket and they just fall over,
17 "Oh my God, all this food! No wonder you're fat!" Tommy Lee Jones was in that. We
18 are heaven to the rest of the world, we really are, and try to tell it to our kids here. Yeah
19 right. When you get out of high school get out of college, go overseas and see. Go look
20 for yourself and you'll realize just how good you've got it here. But, the base was closed,
21 perimeter guards, the whole bit, dogs, a no man's zone, I don't know how far out that
22 went. But, it was a free fire zone around the base except along the one road going to
23 Kunsan City. Kunsan City was a fairly large place. It had two bars in it that GI's could
24 go to, The Venus Club and the Roman Club. I think they were probably owned by the
25 same people. So, they would allow something like 100 airmen a day to go to town; this is
26 after you've been there for three months. The rest of the time it was closed and nobody
27 could leave. Kind of funny, before we got there, the summer before they'd built a brand
28 new road from the base to town about ten miles, a brand new blacktop highway. Well
29 come spring thaw the road was gone because the Korean farmers and peasants had
30 chopped this up and taken it home and burned it in their stoves and stuff at home. Gravel
31 was the only thing left because it was just tar and gravel. But, they'd burn it for fuel. It

1 was funny. Great stuff, yeah, and free; go out there and just help yourself, and the road
2 was gone. I don't know what ever became of that but they thought it was great because
3 they'd take the gravel and use that to make little sidewalks and things outside their house
4 and burned the tar and get heat from it. Let's see, they requalified everybody on base
5 with the M-16. The Air Force you have to qualify once a year, at that time you did
6 because of money they start slacking off. Kunsan was right on the coast so there was a
7 constant patrol. They had several guard shack things along the coast and the base there.
8 They had Navy ships out there making sure that no boats approached it.

9 KS: How secure did you feel on base?

10 DD: Very. We weren't bothered by them. We knew the stuff that was going on.
11 Later some of the guys were able to go to Seoul and even to go Panmunson. That's the
12 little village thing in the middle of the DMZ and they said it was kind of scary there
13 because they had binoculars and stuff and you could look across into North Korea and
14 you would see somebody looking back at you through a rifle scope. All they had to do
15 was [makes trigger pulling sound] and you're gone. But, nobody did. I learned how to
16 play golf while I was there, sort of. I still don't know how to play golf. That's the first
17 time I ever played it was there in Kunsan. But, tent cities. The first night there was kind
18 of cruel because it shows the hierarchy in the military. First night there, an airman in the
19 airman's club threw a can of beer across the...in the NCO club they had a brawl, chairs
20 and stuff, a typical bar brawl. In the officer's club, the officer's were carrying .38 pistols.
21 They were shooting at each other; didn't hit anybody, but they were shooting. The
22 corrective action, they closed the airman's club. They closed the airman's club. I
23 thought that was interesting.

24 KS: Did that solve any problems?

25 DD: Not really. But, they blamed everything on the airmen; it was their fault.
26 Boy, we got to control those airmen. While I was there, I completed my training. But,
27 Korea didn't have testing facilities. In order to be upgraded to a 5-level, you had to take
28 the 5-level test. Well, they didn't have testing facilities. So, they went ahead and
29 upgraded us because they needed us as 5-levels without taking the test, it was special
30 order type thing, and as soon as we got back to Seymour we were supposed to take the
31 test, which I did. Personally, what really effected me about Korea was that in May, I was

1 supposed to get married. Between tech school and Seymour Johnson I met my first wife,
2 and we started this writing campaign and telephoning campaign and at Christmas time I
3 took her an engagement ring. That was the second time I saw her. The first time was
4 half an hour on the side of the road. A cousin and I, a girl cousin and I, pulled over and
5 were talking to them, and telephone and letters and everything. At Christmas I took her
6 an engagement ring and we were going to get married when she graduated. She was still
7 in high school, and we were going to get married when she graduated. Well, when she
8 graduated I was in Korea, and they kept extending the orders. So, I said, "Well, we'll try it
9 next month." They finally sent us home on July 4th. The best thing that our squadron
10 commander ever did for us was he got us a military charter airplane to come home on, not
11 a C-141. We had a 707, World Airways 707. The trip home was just absolutely
12 awesome because with a civilian crew, they were experienced, they had worked military
13 charters before. It was still a military pack; we were packed on there like crazy. But, the
14 minute we were airborne, a big cheer went, "Hey, we're out of Korea!" The crew came
15 on and said, "Guys, we know what we're doing here, we wish we could make this a
16 champagne flight for you but it's a military charter flight, they won't let us do that, but if
17 you have any, help yourself. Go ahead!" So, we had us a party basically going back.
18 We got to the point...we hadn't seen any American women for six months, not a single
19 one. All of them were Korean women. Korean women are short. They have long, black
20 hair or short black hair, straight, no curls. They have the oriental slanted eyes, and they
21 look like they'd been hit in the face with a shovel. Their face is real flat and their heads
22 are too big for their bodies. Koreans are real easy to spot if you've been around them any
23 just from their physical features. You can tell the difference between a Korean and a
24 Japanese. This is the only one we'd seen for six months, and they were gorgeous; the
25 crew, the stewardess crew on this airplane was absolutely gorgeous. They were having a
26 good time. This one stewardess had 16 or 17 of us in the tail of the airplane. She was an
27 instigator, she was a trouble maker, because she got us all jumping up and down in
28 unison. When you jump up, that weight leaves the airplane. So, the tail of the plane does
29 this number, and then when you come back down, the weight's back there and it does
30 this. So, here's the tail and the plane's doing one of these numbers like this and after
31 about ten minutes of this one of the flight crew came back and said, "Okay guys, knock it

1 off. We can't keep trim!" They got a little wheel up there that they turn to maintain trim
2 to make it fly straight and level. She said, "Hey, the crew's up front sleeping. We've got
3 to wake them up." So, we started just jumping up and down in the back. It was hilarious.
4 I'm surprised we didn't break the tail off. We landed, first place we landed was in the
5 states at Minneapolis, St. Paul, and it was the hub, the home hub for World Airways. I
6 believe we were aboard Airways, and that's where they did all their training and stuff,
7 and the stewardess crew came on, and they said, "Okay, guys, this is our home field here.
8 We're going to be leaving you. You're going to be getting a brand new cherry crew of
9 stewardesses. They've never flown anything, let alone a military charter. We want you
10 guys to break them in right." They came in at the front of the plane and I believe we had
11 180 some odd guys on the plane. Their gear storage was back in the back of the plane.
12 They had to basically run a gauntlet all the way to the back. Some of them did great.
13 The last one broke and ran. It was hilarious. That turned into a good flight, too, the last
14 leg into Seymour Johnson. After we landed at Seymour, as we were taxing over to our
15 hangars and stuff, our commander was on the plane, too, he said, "Okay people, listen up.
16 Everybody, you're on two weeks leave right now as soon as you walk out this door.
17 We'll straighten out the paperwork when you get back,". So, first place, barracks, drop
18 off your bags and stuff. Well, the jeweler still had the wedding rings, wedding bands.
19 This is the 4th of July, they're closed. The place is the Jewel Box in Gouldsboro, North
20 Carolina. So, I can't wait! 300 miles from Kentucky. That's where she was at was in
21 Kentucky. It was a 24 hour bus ride anyhow. I didn't have a car. A friend of mine had a
22 friend who was dating a girl who worked at the Jewel Box. So, we got this
23 communication chain going and the whole town, "Our guys are back! Our guys are back!
24 Yeah!" So we got a hold of the guy that owned the place. He came down, opened up the
25 store for me, gave me my rings. I went down, got on the bus, and headed off to
26 Kentucky. On the 8th of July, I got married because we had to wait three more days
27 because she didn't have her blood test yet. That was my first marriage. One of the things
28 I think is possibly tied to the Vietnam War is the number of failed marriages. I've been
29 married now four times, and I don't know if that has anything to do with it or not, but it
30 seems that people who were in service had a really high divorce rate, really high. I don't
31 know if they've ever done any studies on it or not. But, the guys I know were divorced

1 more than once. We got back to...after we came back from...I took the 5-level test and
2 then I started training somebody else, new people coming in. The following, this was
3 July, the following...I got orders in 1969 to go to Thailand, but the order didn't say
4 Thailand. It just said classified. It was still secret I guess as far as orders. A bunch of the
5 guys on the net have been comparing that and some said or gave an APO number, APO
6 San Francisco, [?] and those that just gave some kind of a code number, you had to go to
7 the personnel office and they would tell you what base you were going to. I was going to
8 Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base, one year tour, separated from the family. I didn't
9 have a clue about what was going on in Thailand. We'd started hearing some stories of
10 guys coming back and we'd heard about sapper attacks in Thailand and tigers and snakes.
11 They didn't tell us about the bugs; they should have. The bugs were awful. I got my
12 orders and I had been making rank really, really fast. I'd been in service for three years
13 and one month and I'm a staff sergeant already, an E5. I'm in second level training. So,
14 I go to Thailand and I'd been in service...I went over January '70 so I'd been in service
15 for three years and four months. But, I'd already reenlisted. This is an example of how
16 they don't send fresh, untrained troops over there. I'd been in for almost four years and
17 was staff sergeant already [?].

18 KS: Did you expect to be going to Southeast Asia at some point during...

19 DD: At some point, but then it got to the point where everybody thought, well,
20 we were going to go sooner or later. Somebody will send us over there. For some of us,
21 we didn't have a clue about anything going on. Even after being in Thailand for a year, I
22 didn't have a clue what we were doing there. I found out what we were doing three
23 years ago and that was supporting the Royal Lao Government in Laos, the Ravens and
24 Vang Pao and all those soldiers up there and all those sites. Now LS 85 is a hint as far as
25 how many bases we had in Laos. They may not be big, but there was a bunch of them.
26 Then we were going against the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Daily we were flying missions
27 against the trail.

28 KS: Now what unit was this?

29 DD: I was in the 432nd AMS, the 432nd Tac Fighter Wing. This was a composite
30 wing. It had two squadrons of F-4Ds, two squadrons of RF-4Cs and reconnaissance
31 birds. We were the only recce outfit there in Southeast Asia, and a squadron of C-130s,

1 the airborne commandos type, AB triple C, Airborne Command Control and
2 Communications. Those were the planes that were assigned there, and then everyday
3 going to our shop at Udorn, you have the base where they have the barracks and the chow
4 halls and the chapels and the BX and the NCO club and all that kind of stuff. Then you
5 have the maintenance side which is on the other side of the flight line. You have to cross
6 the flight line, except we didn't cross, we went around it because the flight line was too
7 busy to cross. On the other side, we had maintenance people and the maintenance
8 location and the operations section as well. I had shuttle bus service that ran 24-7 because
9 it was a 24-7 operation. We would ride in a shuttle bus around the end of the runway and
10 go to our shops. Some of the stuff y'all will be getting is a real nice aerial photograph of
11 Udorn, Thailand, the base, and it's a computer file I believe. It's two files, total about 12
12 megabytes. It's a very detailed and it blows up huge.

13 KS: Was this base in Udorn, was that the Royal Thai Air Base?

14 DD: Royal Thai Air Force Base. We didn't have any US Air Force bases. They
15 were all Royal Thai Air Force Bases. There was Udorn that was 37 miles South of
16 Vientiane, Laos. We should have had a clue from that but we didn't know anything was
17 going on in Laos. They didn't tell us anything about that.

18 KS: Did you assume that you were supporting the things that were going on in
19 Vietnam?

20 DD: We were supporting what was going on in Vietnam as far as we knew. We
21 knew about the trail, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but we didn't know anything about Laos;
22 nothing. We didn't know that basically there was another war going on up there, a
23 different one. We didn't know it until, like I said, three or four years ago when we
24 started talking to guys that were stationed up there and they never talked about it when
25 they came back. It was classified and when you'd leave the service they'd give you this
26 big briefing. The classified stuff stays classified or we'll come and get you, which is
27 rather interesting. Ho Chi Minh Trail, Laos, we had the Udorn Royal Thai Air Force
28 Base that was 37 miles South of Vientiane, Ubon which is over east and South of Udorn,
29 NKP, what everybody calls it rather than saying Nakhon Phanom. Did you get to any of
30 the bases while you were there, or just Bangkok?

31 KS: Just Bangkok.

1 DD: That's too bad. It has changed a ton. The area where Udorn is at now has a
2 million and a half people up there. It has just stacked up. Okay, Udorn, Ubon, NKP,
3 Takhli, Khorat, U Taphao, and Don Muang. Don Muang is right there in Bangkok.
4 That's [?] International Airport. That's part of Don Muang Royal Thai Air Force Base.
5 They were all Royal Thai Air Force Base. U Taphao had the SAC outfit, the B-52s and
6 the KC-135s.

7 KS: That's Strategic Air Command?

8 DD: Strategic Air Command. We don't have that anymore. They changed the
9 name to Air Combat Command or something. U Taphao had the tankers and the B-52s.
10 they were must closer to North Vietnam than Guam was. Everybody hears about
11 Anderson Air Force Base in Guam that was being bombed from. That was a ridiculous
12 thing anyhow, it really was, having to station them that far off. People in Okinawa
13 objected to it and the people in the Philippines objected to it. But they let us bring in B-
14 52s at U Taphao. The Rolling Thunder Operation, that was mostly fighter-bombers
15 doing the bombing in North Vietnam, and then the B-52s were Linebackers and Arc
16 Lights. Arc light bombing was just absolutely awesome. I mentioned that book to you
17 the last time, The Ravens. There's another one out. A lady that works here at Texas
18 Tech, her husband wrote it. He was an OV-10 FAC in Vietnam. They talk about what
19 it's like to be anywhere near an arc light mission, either here on the ground or flying
20 another airplane somewhere around because here comes the bombs. A B-52 could carry
21 108 bombs, one could, and have an internal load of 70 some odd 500 pounders and then
22 they'd put 750 pounders out on the wings, another 24 on the wings. There's a location on
23 the net, the TLC-Brotherhood.org. There's a photograph of Khe Sanh. They were about
24 to be overrun, the city was, and they called in a B-52 strike and this black and white
25 photograph, and it shows the location of Khe Sanh and then I believe it's taken from
26 space. I don't know where it was taken from but it's taken from high up. This looks like
27 the landscape of the moon afterwards. Go and explore that sight. Look under
28 photographs or something and there's a link for photographs, and it's one of the
29 prominent ones. It will show you a photograph of what it looks like after a bomber
30 strike. It's just unbelievable. Everything's gone, everything. We could have easily won
31 that war if they'd have let the bombers loose; they didn't have to use nukes, no. Regular

1 bombs would take care of it. As a matter of fact, the 13 day bombing just before they
2 finally signed the peace talks is why they signed the peace treaty to end it because we were
3 bombing them back into the stone age. It was a 24-7 continuous bombing operation for
4 13 days, which is I can't even imagine how many bombs they dropped. But, it got them
5 back to talking, [?] follow through with. Okay, the bases in Thailand. My base had the
6 432nd TAC fighter wing. Ubon had the 8th TAC fighter wing. That was Colonel Robin
7 Olds. That was the source of Operation Bolo, I don't know if you heard about the
8 fantastic thing that Olds came up with. I met Olds last summer. He came to our reunion
9 in Colorado Springs last summer; very, very interesting man, huge. He would put on an
10 F-4 like putting on his clothes. He filled that cockpit, and so did Chappy James. They
11 were in the same outfit. But, when Robin Olds got over there with the 8th TAC fighter
12 wing, they didn't use the F-4s at first. Olds came up with this idea. We'd been using the
13 F-105s, the Thunder Chiefs, the Thuds. We called them Thuds because that's the sound
14 it makes when it hits the ground, thud, and they were falling out of the sky like rain, they
15 were being shot down a lot. The MiGs could ride pretty much even basis with an F-105
16 and Olds came up with this idea to not use the 4s yet, the F-4s. Get a whole bunch of
17 them there first, and then the first time we use them, send them all, and have them use F-
18 105 call signs. They didn't scramble things then. If you had a radio on a proper
19 frequency you could listen to the guys talking. So, we knew that the North was doing
20 this. So, talk to each other like you're F-105s and so they're talking about it as they
21 approach the north and the MiGs come up the take on these 105s they think, figure
22 there's going to be some kind of a turkey shoot, and instead of 105s they've got F-4s
23 staring at them. The 8th TAC Fighter Wing took down three of them that day, no, seven
24 that day I think it was. Yeah, seven and Olds got three is the way it went. Robin Olds
25 shot down three of them himself and the whole outfit shot down seven. But, you can just
26 imagine the looks on those North Vietnamese pilots, or possibly even the Russian pilots.
27 We don't know if that's the case or not. We don't know if the Russians were flying in
28 North Vietnam, or at least I haven't heard anybody that's talked about that. Don't know
29 if they got close enough to see or not. It would be interesting to ask those guys, "Hey,
30 did you see any white faces in those cockpits?"

31 KS: So how effective were the F-4s compared to the 105s?

1 DD: The F-4 was a beautiful airplane, gorgeous bird. First of all, the crews loved
2 it because it brought them home. We had an F-4 that pulled either 12 or 13 Gs getting
3 away from a SAM and the guy flew it home. The crew did. There's two people in an F-4
4 and only one most F-105s, the 105 Wild Weasels, the F-105 Gs, they have two people.
5 But, this bird, I forget which base it landed at, which one it flew back to, but it never flew
6 again, but it got him home, brought him home. You've got a picture on the wall in there
7 of two F-4s, Pardo's Push. They did that on TV, on the JAG show. Have you ever
8 watched Jag?

9 KS: I know what it is. I haven't watched that.

10 DD: They did that with F-14s, the same idea, and they gave credit for the idea to
11 Pardo. I thought they were just awesome. They were the ones that came up with it. It
12 worked. But, it would get you home and it would fly circles around the MiGs. It was a
13 very effective airplane. Now, it's used mostly for bombing, specific targets. They could
14 pick off one or two bombs at a time, but it was also a good air to air bird, too, and all the
15 Aces from the Vietnam War flew F-4s, DeBellview and a few of the others. I should be
16 able to remember them, and I can't. They were all F-4 crews. One of them is now being
17 flown around the United States, the only privately owned F-4 in the world. They painted
18 it up into colors for the guy that's flying it, and I'll think of his name in a minute, and he
19 made general and he goes around putting on air shows with his F-4. It's owned by a
20 company and they pay to keep this painted up. Its' got all the 5 red stars on the ramp,
21 that's what they call it, the ramp moves in and out like this and the plane's on this side to
22 control air flow coming into the engine, and they got five red stars painted on the side
23 after he got his five kills on it. It's painted up like that bird; it's not that bird. That
24 particular airplane that he got his five kills in is at the Air Force academy. It's a static
25 display, no engines on it, the canopies are painted from the inside so that you can't see
26 anything inside because there's nothing in there. But this plane, they've got it painted up
27 like that one, the camouflage paint job, the tail number, all that, and he flies it all over the
28 United States. But, it was a good airplane, and for its' time, it would just absolutely
29 awesome. It is still a good airplane. It really hurt some of us that worked on them so long
30 to see them now being used as drones, target drones. You take them off and they shoot at
31 them, blow them away. "No, don't do that! That's a good airplane!" It held the air

1 speed record until the SR-71 came along. It held the time to altitude climb rate record
2 until the SR came along; extremely fast, very maneuverable, very forgiving, and
3 extremely capable. Of course now for the technology at the time, the systems didn't last
4 very long, that MTBF, mean time between failure, part of that effected the things in
5 Korea. When our guys were crossing the water they got so bored. There's nothing worse
6 that flying straight and level to a fighter pilot for hours and hours. There's absolutely
7 nothing worse because you can't move, although we've got pictures of guys mooning
8 each other from the cockpit of an F-4, which is you've got to do some wriggling around.
9 It's pretty tight in there. We've got photographs. It's on the internet. Some locations
10 show that photograph. But, these guys are something to do, they've got their radars on,
11 flying across the Pacific Ocean, seeing who can count the most ships. Well those radars
12 are only supposed to be run for a maximum of a couple of hours a flight, and here they're
13 running them at six or eight hours at a rack and it burnt their RTs up, their receiver
14 transmitters up. 75 airplanes landed at Kunsan Air Base without an operational radar
15 system, and that's' what they use for everything; weapons delivery, everything that you
16 use radar for, and 75 planes had burnt out RTs. We didn't have that many parts. So,
17 they're scrambling Pacific wide looking for fire control radar systems, RT units. I would
18 love to have been in one of the briefings when they were talking to the crews about what
19 they had done, because that's kind of like halftime for a losing football team. I'd love to
20 be there to listen to what was said because it had to be the same kind of deal; 74 or 75
21 were burnt up, and our guys, the maintenance people are out there in 25 degrees below
22 zero weather fixing these planes. We had 24 hours to get them up and ready to go, and
23 they were bringing in parts from all over the Pacific. Some of them even came out of
24 Vietnam. They brought parts from Vietnam up there to help us get our wing back in
25 shape.

26 KS: Did you ever have a problem like that in Thailand, getting parts?

27 DD: Parts were no problem at all in Thailand. I was there in 1970, from January
28 to December of 1970. I got out a few days early. I don't remember what day I went over
29 there. It was in January is all I can remember, which is strange. But, no problems getting
30 parts. As a matter of fact, they didn't even holler at us for making a short chain the day
31 we got there. You had a day to go when you got there; 365 days you had to be in

1 country. They had various ways to keep track of the number of days. They had the
2 calendars. Have you ever seen any of them?

3 KS: Short timers?

4 DD: Short timers. There's a pink calendar that the tailor shops all put out. It
5 showed a girl usually and she's divided up into 365 pieces and you would color her in as
6 you got down to one, and let your imagination work it out. But, we also had other things,
7 short time ribbons, short time chains. The chain, in one of the radio sets, you've seen a
8 dog tag chain, right? There's a chain inside one of these old radio sets that uses...it's like
9 a dog tag chain except the balls are much bigger. They're, oh, a little over an eighth of an
10 inch in diameter, each one, and this chain is used to turn the drive inside to tune the radio,
11 automatically tune it. You just set the frequency from the control box and it would send a
12 signal to a server in the radio and the RT unit and that would tune it to that frequency,
13 and these tuning chains were pretty long. They would have 30-40 balls on there. Well,
14 we would take those chains out of bench stock. Bench stock is the ready supply of small
15 parts. We'd take them out of bench stock, cut them, fasten them together with safety
16 wire, and make one 365 balls long, every day you cut off a ball, and nobody ever said a
17 word to anybody. Parts were in plentiful supply except for special parts. While I was
18 there I was sent TDY in Okinawa in support of what was called the SEAOR-105
19 modification. That's S-E-A-O-R-105. It was a modification on the forward looking
20 radar on our F-4C to change it from linear polarity to circular polarity. This allowed it to
21 see in the rain. This linear or straight polarity, rain shows up on a screen on your radar
22 scope. Circle polarity doesn't do it. It looks right through it. While I was there in
23 Okinawa, it was a 40 day TDY, they cycled the guys through the...each guy would get to
24 go one time. While I was there they had some kind of a special mission to be flown and
25 we had a bird sitting on the runway ready to go, had a bad antenna and that was the part
26 being in. So, they radioed up to us and we stuck one of the antennas that had already
27 been modified into the back seat of the F-4, flew with just one guy in it, and they flew
28 that antenna down to I don't remember the base, it was in Vietnam where they were
29 flying the mission. It belonged to Udorn, but it was flying a mission from somewhere in
30 Saigon. It was sitting on the runway, ready to go, waiting on that antenna. So, we got
31 that in on time and we flew, took it's pictures, and we went. Well, let's see, at Udorn the

1 squadrons were the 11th and 14th TAC Recon Squadrons. The fighter squadrons, they
2 were the RF-4Cs, the fighter squadrons were the 13th and Triple Nickel TAC Fighter
3 Squadrons. The 13th was called the Panther Pack, and the Triple Nickel was just Triple
4 Nickel, 555th which is a neat number for them. They were in competition for MiG kills
5 and in 1970 the MiGs weren't flying. Robin Olds had already caused this with Operation
6 Bolo. The MiGs stopped flying because they stopped using the F-105s. Instead they just
7 used SAMs, and it doesn't count as a kill if you shoot down a SAM; they probably
8 wouldn't be able to shoot one down anyhow because they're four times the speed of
9 sound, kind of hard to hit going that fast. So, they were doing strange things to try to get
10 the MiGs to come up in the air. If you shot them on the ground, it didn't count as a kill.
11 The ground doesn't count for an Ace and these two squadrons were tied and they were
12 trying to break the tie and the MiGs weren't cooperating. They weren't flying. So, they
13 were doing neat things – now this is probably all BS because I don't really know if it's
14 true and Robin Olds says it's BS but it sounds like something that he would have done –
15 they would go in and shoot touch and go landings on MiG runways. Touch and go, you
16 would come down, and you'd lower your landing gear, come in, and your wheels touch
17 the ground and instead of stopping you just accelerate and take back off again. They
18 would go and shoot touch and gos on MiG runways. They would modify the airplane a
19 little bit, illegal modification, they'd run a raw fuel line back to the afterburner and it
20 would spray in oil and fuel because after the combustion chamber creates huge, gigantic
21 clouds of smoke and an F-4 can fly really, really slow if they want to. They can just like
22 wallow, nose up like this, and just wallowing in the air while still standing there and
23 emitting giant clouds of smoke and they would fly across a big base like this. It makes it
24 look like there's something bad wrong with the airplane, and the same thing counted for
25 them. If you wanted to get a kill on an F-4, it had to be while it was in the air; on the
26 ground, no. Here's one that's hurt! Ha! Quick! And, there'd be another F-4 sitting off
27 in the clouds watching on his radar, and as soon as that one came up, here he'd come.
28 But, it never happened. Never did happen. They tried hard, though. They wanted to
29 break that tie. As far as I know, they did not break it while I was there.

30 KS: I was curious, did you have any contact with Thai Air Force personnel or
31 [were the Americans separate?] How were they set up in that manner?

1 DD: There was the Thai section and they were down at the South end of the
2 runway. As you came around in the shuttle bus and cross klawng, a klawng is a big ditch
3 filled with water, that's where they get the word from, and as you cross this klawng you
4 went off to a taxiway to the left where the Thais were at. They didn't have very much.
5 They didn't participate in flying. The planes they had were F-86s, old stuff. The old
6 helicopters, the ones that look like grasshoppers, I believe it's an H-43 but I'm just
7 guessing, H-34. Then, most of the stuff there, the Thai pilots at Udorn didn't do any
8 flying in the war. The Thai base, the biggest thing they did there was apply security and
9 they were heavily augmented by their own security forces as well. The Thai base
10 commander, part of his income was a kickback from allowing certain restaurants and
11 other businesses to operate on the base itself. It had two restaurants there at Udorn, the
12 Golden Bell and the Redwood Inn when I was there. The Bell was just inside the main
13 gate and Redwood Inn was on the other side of the flight line, over where the
14 maintenance people were located.

15 KS: What kind of food?

16 DD: Thai food.

17 KS: Thai food?

18 DD: Did you eat some while you were there?

19 KS: Oh yes.

20 DD: Did you get the hot stuff?

21 KS: I like hot!

22 DD: You like hot stuff? Did you get the hot-hot, the [mach-mach]?]

23 KS: Probably not as hot as you're talking about. Did you enjoy while you were
24 there the Thai food and the Thai culture?

25 DD: I loved it. [?] was probably my favorite meal. The American food was
26 pitiful. They really fell down bad as far as providing food to eat. They had a chow hall,
27 but the cooks were horrible, the food was horrible. You couldn't even get milk; some
28 kind of set up where they wouldn't allow – Thailand wouldn't allowed – somebody said,
29 and I'm not sure about this, they wouldn't allow fresh milk to be brought in. Thais don't
30 like milk anyway. Reconstituted milk isn't milk anymore. The closest description I
31 could think of to the taste is like condensed milk out of a can or powdered milk perhaps.

1 Once they separated it and put it back together, it's not the same. Milk was terrible.
2 When fruit came in, they would use the fruit to pay for prostitutes downtown. Apple,
3 they don't have apples in Thailand. None of the Americans would eat the apples. That's
4 wasting supplies or resources! But, the food was just pitiful. So, after the first two or
5 three times you try the chow hall, you quit eating there if you could afford to buy it
6 elsewhere. Thai food in Thailand at that time was really inexpensive. A Thai could eat
7 all day long for one Boht, and in Thailand at that time was a nickel; three meals, one
8 Boht. Now Americans could not; they would charge the Americans more money. A
9 plate of [?], three Boht; that's 15 cents.

10 KS: Did you spend much time off base, out in the surrounding city or village?

11 DD: Not as much as some of the other guys. We were working six days a week,
12 12 hours a day. I was working nights almost exclusively. They would fly them during
13 the daytime and at night we'd fix them. If the plane was able to fly, they would go fly
14 this mission, come back, refuel, reload, and fly again. They could get in three, four,
15 maybe five missions a day doing that on one bird, after the days flying was done. We
16 didn't really have good night flying capability. We didn't have at that time; later, yes,
17 but not then. So, we used the nights mostly to fix them. Any daytime maintenance being
18 performed were on the ones that were broken so badly you couldn't fly any of them.
19 They sort of bent the regulations a bit in order to do that. They would fly a plane until it
20 was almost ready to fall apart sometimes.

21 KS: I'm curious, on the F-4s, did you have a specific maintenance schedule? I
22 mean, the equipment that you worked on, the inertial navigation systems?

23 DD: Well, my equipment was the inertial navigation systems, and on the F-4s it
24 also included the forward-looking radar. I don't remember, the APQ-99 I think, I'm not
25 positive about the designation the way I am about the INS stuff all the time. The FLR, I
26 try to stay away from that. That's magic the way that system works. I'd turn it on and
27 play with it when I'm out there working on the INS, watching thunderstorms and stuff
28 like that. We're not supposed to do that, but we did, just like you're not supposed to turn
29 on the HF radio and down tune it into the CB range, which it will do on a B-52. We
30 would do that. Evidentially it was a 1,000-watt transmitter and a CB has a four-watt
31 transmitter and we would get on the radio and bombers at Ellsworth in South Dakota,

1 about half a mile from the interstate, and cut up on Channel 19 with 1,000 watts and blow
2 those trucks right off the highway! They'd say, "Whoa, what have you got there?"
3 They'd get upset at us for doing that but you're not supposed to run those systems, those
4 radar systems, on the ground because they'll only work for so long and then they break.
5 Nowadays they have much greater reliability, but back then...it would effect the mission
6 and stuff, but we'd all still do it because we'd get bored sitting in the airplane, too. Some
7 of the tests that you would have to perform would take quite a bit of time. A [?] test, for
8 example, is basically a navigation run on the INS and you're using a test set and you
9 hook it up to the airplane and you sit there in the cockpit and you're sitting there. You're
10 operating the INS but it takes time for it to...it's like you're flying along at something
11 like 500 knots and you're looking, at a certain length of time it's supposed to go to a
12 certain point. It's a test of the system to see if it's working right. We had what is called a
13 tweaking program. The INS system uses a gyroscope to create a stabilized platform.
14 This platform, in relation to the center of the earth, does not move. It stays in that same
15 orientation. Have you ever had a gyro, a toy gyro?

16 KS: No. A gyroscope?

17 DD: Gyroscope, and you get it cranked up and you can't turn it. You cannot
18 physically take that and turn it over. It won't do it, not if it's going fast enough. Now
19 toys, it's hard to do but you can do it. These things were spinning at 25,000 plus RPM.
20 You couldn't budge them, it just wouldn't go. You would turn the airplane first, which
21 it's hooked to. On this platform inside the INS, inside that particular box, they mounted
22 three accelerometers. Accelerometer measures acceleration and they would have one
23 mounted here for North-South, one mounted this direction for East-West, and one
24 mounted vertical. So, it would measure acceleration in all three axis', three-dimensional
25 space. You integrate acceleration with time, and that gives you speed. You integrate
26 speed with time and that gives you distance. You know what direction it's in because the
27 gyro, if the gyro's turned this direction or if the plane was in this direction in relation to
28 the gyros, you're going at 360 degrees or 45 or whatever. So, you know how far you're
29 going and what direction, and by that you're able to tell where you are. Now the
30 accuracy on this system is two to three nautical miles per hour. The gyros had a built in
31 error rate that they couldn't...now we could get it down to the point where it was almost

1 zero sometimes, but the tolerance was two to three nautical miles per hour. Nautical
2 miles per hour, you take a three hour mission, that could be off nine miles when you
3 come back, but you're close enough to see where you're supposed to go. The pilots
4 thought it was fantastic; it was magic, and it almost was. The systems today are accurate
5 within a tenth of a nautical mile. Tenth of a mile, that's what, 528 feet? Then, the thing
6 about INS, inertial navigation systems, they don't transmit and they don't receive. It's
7 totally self-contained. A transmitter can be jammed, a receiver can be jammed, but you
8 can't jam the INS. In a hostile environment there's nothing they can do to stop you from
9 being able to navigate [?]. Ours, two or three nautical miles. We could tweak it. Gyros
10 had what is called gyro bias to keep them as error free as possible. They'd put a certain
11 small amount of [?] in certain direction and it would help keep it oriented right. Well, the
12 systems tended to degrade in a linear fashion. After so much time, it would be off one
13 mile, so much more time it would be off two miles, and it would be off in a certain
14 direction each time. You go out and tweak the gyro bias to eliminate that, and we were
15 getting systems...we put in for a record, I don't know if we ever got it or not, 420
16 missions without breaking. Now there was regular, routine maintenance that we
17 performed on the systems, too, as well as go out and fix it type maintenance. Our routine
18 part of the maintenance was to move the equipment so as they could get at something. A
19 fighter is jammed in. I mean, it's full, a fighter airplane. If you're sitting in the cockpit,
20 the systems I worked on, there'd be two boxes to your right and behind you. There'd be
21 a console right here and a console over here. There'd be two control boxes here in this
22 console. There'd be an amplifier down by your left foot behind the kick panel, metal
23 panel, kind of like a door, and that's what's inside. Then underneath the console on this
24 side is a computer. Now this is not a digital computer, it's analog. It would be
25 underneath the console on the floor. Whenever we'd have to work on it, you'd have to
26 pull the peso out. The peso is the ejection seat. We didn't do that. We'd call up the
27 [egress] personnel. Have you ever heard the story about Barnum and Bailey, "There's a
28 sucker born every minute, and one example of that was they would sell...you would
29 ticket to go see the [egress]. You'd go into this little passageway, pay your ten cents,
30 and, "This way to the [egress]!" They'd take you off through a maze or something, "This
31 way to the [egress]," and, "Through this door for the [egress]," and you open the door

1 and you're outside. [Egress] means out, the exit. So, we called the [egress] shop. The
2 seat is supposed to get you out of the airplane; worked real well, too. They'd come out
3 and pull the bucket out; that's the rocket motors and the explosive charges in the seat
4 itself. They'd take that out so now you've got room to move around here a little bit. I
5 couldn't do it anymore, I wouldn't fit I don't think. But, you'd have to get underneath a
6 computer. When it goes bad, you've got to yank it out of there, and everything is by feel.
7 You can't get down there to see it. So you've got this computer that's about this long and
8 about that wide and about so high and it's got five plugs in one end and one plug on the
9 other, a common plug they call it. They have to be inserted into it on to it and screwed
10 on, tons and tons of pins, God help you if you bend one of the pins because something
11 will blow up, guaranteed. I did that a couple of times. Wires, insulated wiring would
12 break. That's the worst thing that could happen to you was a wiring problem because
13 usually it would be intermittent, meaning sometimes it works, sometimes it wont
14 depending on where the stress is on the cable. But, everything is jammed in tight, real
15 tight. Then you've got a stick here to fly the airplane with. You've got a scope right here
16 with controls like that in the back seat and you've got a panel of gauges and stuff up here,
17 and you've got the [?] gear, which is ECM gear, located right here, and then there's two
18 mirrors, rearview mirrors. Let's see, then there's a whiskey compass dead center, and
19 everything is just jammed in. It was very efficient as far as space goes, very efficient.
20 The F4 has a ton of systems on it, so every little inch of it is used. One of the locations
21 for stuff for us was you had to get out of the cockpit, go behind the rear cockpit and
22 there's what's called the turtle deck and you had a bunch of fasteners. You unscrew the
23 fasteners and lift this door up and there was one unit you had to basically stand on your
24 head in this hole going down in there to disconnect it and then somehow wiggle out and
25 then pull this out with you.

26 KS: Sounds very complicated.

27 DD: It was! It was very complicated. F-4s, this is called the Phantom, P-H-A-N-
28 T-O-M, and Phantoms have phangs, P-H-A-N-G-S and the phangs bite you. Phantom
29 Phangs we called them. The bottom of the airplane has antennas sticking off all over it,
30 little doors, and other stuff that open up and hang down that you can bang your head on.
31 I think I bled on every airplane I ever worked on because everything has to be safety

1 wired to make sure it doesn't come loose. It's a mess, but the plane brought them home
2 and they loved it because of it. That one airplane I was mentioning to you, the 12 Gs or
3 13 Gs, whatever it was, it bent the spine of the airplane. The spine is kind of like the keel
4 of it, if you're familiar with boats. It bent the spine, it popped rivets all over it, it burnt
5 up my system. It couldn't handle 12 Gs of acceleration. It literally melted it. It just
6 burnt it up inside that box; generator falling offline, fuel cables breaking, snapping apart,
7 but it brought him home. It never flew again, but it brought him home. They just threw
8 the plane away. It's gone for good.

9 KS: What about were you ever briefed on the pilot's specific missions? I know
10 you mentioned earlier that you found out some things after the fact about flying.

11 DD: At the time, no. In debriefing, my last three months I was there I worked in
12 debriefing, made us debrief, and part of the data that we would collect would be weapons
13 delivery, how many would you drop – but, they never would tell us where. That was for
14 intelligence debriefing, what did you drop, how many, did everything come off alright,
15 because a hung bomb, sometimes a bomb would come off and so they'd have to fly it
16 back. They'd be doing all kinds of wiggling and jiggling trying to get it to fall off
17 because they didn't want to land with it hanging there. It may just be barely hanging
18 there and if it drops off while they're taxing, it blows the airplane up, which gets exciting.
19 But, they never did really tells us. You would hear them talking to each other and we
20 would pick up stuff like that. Trucks, great target trucks, especially when they had ammo
21 because you get secondaries, that's a secondary explosion. There was this one place,
22 they hit a bomb dump; they dropped one bomb, one 500-pound bomb into this, a mark 82
23 bomb, and it was hidden in the jungle. They were told to bomb this location so they
24 bombed it, dropped this one bomb that he had left or something and they had secondary
25 explosions for three days! The guy said it was great! He flew back over the next two
26 days, "Hey, it's still going!" But, we heard there were some types of talk about things
27 they'd shot up because they had a gun on board. They would shoot elephants.
28 Everybody would, "Awww!" but the elephants were a method of transportation. They
29 hauled some heavy stuff and it was a bonafide target to take out elephants. Boats,
30 sampans in the Mekong River or in the ocean, they would take those out. FACs would
31 give them a target wherever. They carried all kinds of stuff. They never, ever carried

1 nerve gas. I don't know if you heard about the Operation Tailwind thing that CNN put on
2 a couple years ago where they said that we were dropping nerve gas on our own people?
3 Did you hear about that?

4 KS: I remember that.

5 DD: I couldn't believe they would put out something that just totally defies logic.
6 We dropped nerve gas on them so that we could rescue them; that was what CNN was
7 trying to say. It's like shooting somebody so you can save them from drowning. "Well,
8 he didn't drown." "Right, you shot him to death." I was involved in helping blow that
9 up for them.

10 KS: What about politics during this time period? If you back up a couple of
11 years, what did you think about Johnson's decision not to run for reelection?

12 DD: Oh, not to run for reelection? I wasn't in Thailand.

13 KS: I know you weren't in Thailand but as far as being in the service?

14 DD: In service, we thought it was super because he was micromanaging the war,
15 picking out individual targets, saying, "You can bomb this, but don't bomb that." The
16 stuff they were telling us not to bomb was ridiculous. It was stupid. SAM sights, you
17 can't bomb it unless it shoots at you. That's ignorant. Blow it up before they can shoot
18 at you, while they're building it; that makes sense. But, they weren't allowed to shoot at
19 them. They weren't allowed to destroy it until it was fired on and then once they fired on
20 them, then they could take it out. Meanwhile, you've got this telephone pole with 500
21 pounds of explosives on one end headed your way. That's just about how big a SAM
22 was, a telephone pole. Pilots hated them because they were very difficult to get away
23 from. Luckily they weren't all that maneuverable or we would have been in much worse
24 shape than we were. Politics, we were glad to see Johnson leave because everybody was
25 frustrated. You could feel that because of the things we weren't allowed to do. This
26 thing had been dragging on and dragging on for ten years of actual heavy involvement
27 and much longer for the preliminary stuff. We could have finished it like we finished up
28 Desert Storm. What they were afraid of was China and Russia getting involved, and once
29 we were over there with 500,000 troops on the ground, I say bring it on! If you want to
30 come down here and fight our guys, we're there. We're ready. I don't think they would
31 have done it. They weren't that interested in North Vietnam but that wasn't my call.

1 KS: What about while you were in Thailand? What was your evaluation of the
2 American military leadership?

3 DD: The military leadership was fine. We were getting a little tired of the
4 inflated body count stuff that we were hearing. Now in Thailand we didn't have any
5 ground combat, not while I was there. My base was hit a couple of years after I left and
6 it was hit the year before I got there, but not while I was there. The military leadership
7 was fine. Now there were some people that we wanted out of Thailand in our wing. We
8 wanted them gone. The flight surgeon, for example, the man was totally incompetent
9 when it came to flying an airplane, and to be a flight surgeon he got the job because he
10 was a doctor and because he had been through the altitude chamber. That's a
11 requirement before you could fly, you have to go through the altitude chamber and he
12 was the only one on base that was a doctor that had done this. He was a psychiatrist but
13 he was a doctor, and he'd been through the altitude chamber. To be a flight surgeon you
14 have to go and fly at least once a month. Sad thing was, this guy loved to fly, he loved it.
15 It tickled him to death, little short, fat guy; little short, stubby, fat fingers, and somebody
16 would have to go out and turn on everything for him. He didn't know how to turn stuff
17 on. He had a checklist but he didn't...okay, ASM 46A set to so and so latitude, and he's
18 looking for it, right, and in order to get the airplane airborne we'd go out and turn
19 everything on for him. They usually put him in an RF-4 because the RF-4 is not going to
20 be shooting anything or dropping anything, just taking pictures. And, if it has to, it's
21 much faster than a loaded down D-model, much faster. Take off and go. So, they'd put
22 him in that but he has to operate the FLR for the pilot, the forward-looking radar. Well,
23 this guy was scared of being shot. The seat would go up and down for you, this electric
24 seat. He would run his seat all the way down to the bottom so if you were right alongside
25 the airplane and he's there, you see from about here of his helmet up. Because he did
26 that, that changes the perspective of view at the radarscope. It causes everything to
27 appear higher than it actually is. So he would come back and he would write up the FLR,
28 glide slope 150 feet too high. Duh! Raise your head up and it would be right along! So,
29 we'd have to...it had two little bitty tiny screws on the scope that you could adjust, there
30 was a line on the scope, so when he was going to fly we'd know about it. We'd go out
31 and adjust that line. "Okay, run the seat down to the bottom," because we knew where he

1 was at, and we'd, "Is that right yet? A little more, a little more. Okay, got it." It was
2 ridiculous. He got sent home. We actually made a formal request to take him off flight
3 status or else send him to some retraining because he couldn't do his job as a pilot or as a
4 back seater, and they never would do it. Nobody else wanted to be the flight surgeon.
5 So, he finally got sent home and got replaced because they were coming in for a landing
6 and he dropped his pencil, and in an F-4 there's two ways to eject yourself. You can
7 reach up and grab these two handles that are right here, pull them down. You've got a
8 shield that comes down and covers your head. That's the preferred way. The other way,
9 there's a D ring right here that you lift up on. Well he leaned over to pick up his pencil.
10 His harness, parachute harness got caught in the D ring. When he straightened up he
11 punched himself out of the airplane. In an ejection seat...this is right over the overrun,
12 that's the end of the runway were there's 500 feet left, they're coming in for a landing,
13 and he punches himself out in front of God and everybody there at the base. It was
14 fantastically funny. It messed his back up but it was fantastically funny because
15 everybody hated him. When the seat goes off, the first thing it does, it's got these straps
16 attached to your arms and your feet. You put your feet in up off the pedals, and whack,
17 up under the edge of the seat. It nails your hands down by your sides. It pulls you back
18 in the seat, just like that, and he was bent way over. So, when it pulled him back it
19 strained his back or did something to it. Then the canopy blows off and you go rising on
20 a majestic column of flame out of the backseat of the airplane. He was gone! I wrote
21 that up as a story. I never have sent it anywhere to be published for anybody to see it. It
22 was hilarious, it was great. That was a true story. I don't remember the guy's name, but
23 it was hilarious. He's gone. They put him on an airplane, sent him to the Philippines,
24 and he never came back because he did something to his back or his neck. It was
25 amazing. The worst thing that happened while I was there was an RF-4C coming back
26 in from a mission took some ground fire, 37 millimeter, punched some holes through the
27 wings, and cut the hydraulic lines so it was losing hydraulic fluid. Hydraulics is how
28 they operate all the flight control surfaces, the [?], the elevators, the rudders, all that stuff,
29 and he's losing all his fluid. There's two systems on board and it hit both of them and it's
30 losing the fluid. They talked to the SOF, the safety and flight officer on duty that day on
31 the radio, and he said, "Go ahead and try to bring it back." He says, "Do you have

1 control?" "Yes." "Try and make it home." Full load of fuel on board. He's flying
2 home and on a long, low, straight in at the runway the fluid runs out. Basically he's just
3 about ready to touch down and fluid runs out and he can't control the airplane anymore.
4 No input will do anything. The sticks have become floppy, either that or it won't move, I
5 forgot which. So, the SOF tells him to hit AB and punch out because he's on the base
6 now. Hit AB and punch out; AB is after burner. The plane, before he hit AB, started
7 this, going over on the side because he can't put...there's nothing he can do to it. He
8 can't stop it. Hit AB and punch out, so he slams it into AB and that jerks the airplane
9 back up straight. Then, when he punched out, it keels it back over again. The plane went
10 in on base, hit the AFRTS station, Armed Forces Radio Television Service Station at shift
11 change and killed nine people. I don't know which one, one of them broke his ankle.
12 The other guy landed in the base swimming pool. One landed on top of the base theater,
13 he's the one that broke his ankle, and the other one landed in the base pool. He had a
14 swimming pool. I know the names of the crew. I've been trying to get enough
15 information to turn this into a dissertation. The crew's not cooperating, which I could
16 understand. It's been 30 years and I've talked to both of them by email and they're still
17 haunted by it. It's kind of strange. One lives on the west coast and the other one lives on
18 the east coast; it's like they're trying to get as far away from everybody as possible. The
19 VFW at Udorn Thailand is a memorial VFW named after the guys that were killed at the
20 station. I've got photographs of it. Y'all will be getting all that. All the stuff I've got,
21 everything is going to come up here about that crash. That's the worst thing that I ran
22 into while I was there. The fireball from it was horrendous. The wing cut through a
23 couple of the officer's trailers as it's coming in, and hit the station. They had to ration
24 water for several weeks afterwards because it was during the dry season. That was the
25 worst thing that happened. The most awe-inspiring thing that happened was the Son Tay
26 Raid, Son Tay POW camp. It was launched from our base and we didn't know anything
27 about it. I know something because I was in debriefing, this is in November, and I'm in
28 debriefing and the supervisor of night shift debriefing.

29 KS: November of 1970?

30 DD: November 1970, and the crews come in and they were just pumped, big
31 time, when they came through debriefing because of what they were doing. Our fighter

1 crews were up there providing cover and diversionary attacks and everything. This is at
2 night, so this is real exciting for them because the F-4 at that time was not really a night
3 fighter. They're talking about secondaries and explosions and all the SAMs and
4 everything going off, and the prisoners weren't there. They had an F-105, Wild Weasel.
5 These guys hunted SAM sites; that was their mission. If a SAM site activates it's radar, a
6 Wild Weasel will pick that up and will know what direction a SAM sites in and he would
7 turn into the signal and follow the signal back and hit it with a missile or a bomb and
8 blow it up. They had a thing on History Channel a couple of nights ago about the Wild
9 Weasels; very, very high casualty rate, just unbelievably high because when you think
10 about it, you're going to go in and you're going to fly around ten times longer in the area
11 than anybody else so you're exposed to ground fire that much longer, and this guy's
12 going to turn on his radar and you're going to try to shoot him before he shoots you. It
13 was very high casualty rate job, big time. One of the Medal of Honor winners, Leo
14 Thorsness, winner is the wrong-term recipient, but one of the Medal of Honor people was
15 Leo Thorsness. He was a Wild Weasel and he ended up being shot down and captured.
16 He spent either five and a half or six and a half years in a POW camp.

17 KS: Do you know how to spell his last name?

18 DD: T-H-O-R-S-N-E-S-S. I've talked to him on the Internet. That's what is so
19 cool about the Internet. I've talked to these people. That's just fantastic, because these
20 guys are my heroes and stuff and I'm able to talk to him, and am able to find out just tons
21 of stuff. But this 105, these Wild Weasels were taxing in, the base debriefing shack was
22 right on the parking ramp. So, they would put their cool in, stop the airplane, get out,
23 walk maybe 50 feet into the building where I'm at. This is a wooden shack type thing.
24 We kept hearing this engine, this jet engine getting louder and louder and louder, louder
25 than normal, and I opened the door and looked out and here's this 105 heading straight
26 for us. He's moving real slow, but he's coming right at us. The crew chief is down
27 there. The crew chiefs martial the airplanes. They guide them where they want them to
28 go. This is at night so he's got the flashlights with the yellow thing on the end of it all lit
29 up. So, he's doing every signal he can think of to tell this 105 to stop, and the problem is
30 the pilot is dead. The backseater is flying the airplane and he's in shock. His mission, his
31 flight, there were four of them. His lead got shot down. The next lead got shot down.

1 Don't know where the fourth one went but he was number three in the flight, and they
2 took ground fire and killed the pilot. They went ahead and fired off the missiles as they
3 were taking the ground fire and when missile fired it made it look like his left wing was
4 on fire. The man had gone into shock. He was just frozen in position. Somehow he
5 stopped the airplane, or maybe he just coasted to a stop, I don't know which. They
6 picked him up in a sitting position and carried him over to meat wagon and they took him
7 away. They said all he kept saying over and over again, "My left wing's on fire, my left
8 wing's on fire," but somehow he brought that airplane back. Just awesome, something
9 like that.

10 KS: This is CD number two with Dan Decker. Is there anything else that we
11 didn't cover about your time in Thailand?

12 DD: Something that people don't mention much is the indigenous things,
13 animals, bugs, the weather, all these things were extremely important. Thailand has a
14 monsoon season and during the monsoon season it rains every day, all day, by the bucket
15 loads. I've got some photographs that's on our internet site showing an F-4 in the rain,
16 it's parked in a revetment in the rain, and you could barely see it because the rain's
17 coming down so hard. It was just unbelievable rain. Here in Texas we'll never see it like
18 that!

19 KS: Especially in Lubbock!

20 DD: Especially in Lubbock, you'll never see rain like that. We're talking about
21 three or four inches per hour.

22 KS: How did the rain effect the missions?

23 DD: It would stop them, bring them to a halt because the pilots couldn't see
24 where they were going. Weather was a very important factor, especially over Laos. Laos
25 is very mountainous. Thailand is pretty flat, but over Laos they'd have these Karst
26 Mountains. Karst is a geological formation. Were you able to get into Laos on your trip?

27 KS: No, next time!

28 DD: Next time! Karst is a geologic type formation.

29 KS: It's a limestone?

30 DD: Limestone stuff and it's very, very mountainous in Laos, very mountainous,
31 and quite often the ceiling, the cloud layer would be down below the tops of mountains

1 and that makes it a little dicey when you're flying, especially in a fighter-bomber or
2 something like that that's real fast. You hit the ground at 600 miles per hour, there's not
3 a whole lot left. Weather was a very important factor. It kept us from doing a lot of
4 things. That's when the North Vietnamese Army, the regulars, would be at their very
5 worst was when weather was bad because we owned the sky. I forget at what point the
6 sky became the property of the United States, but it was ours, the North Vietnamese were
7 not in competition. We provided total air coverage. When the weather shut down to
8 where we couldn't fly, that's when the ground troops in North Vietnam, they would start
9 their attacks and all this other stuff. So, we would try things like bombing through the
10 clouds. Hopefully they'd be on target, but you couldn't really tell. B-52s flying at 35 or
11 40,000 feet above the clouds, dropping through the clouds. I think we probably turned a
12 lot of trees into matchsticks and killed a bunch of monkeys at times if they were off. But
13 take a look at that photo I told you about, TLC site, you'll see about destroying the
14 jungle. That used to be a triple canopy jungle around Khe Sanh and it turned into
15 moonscape, just craters, the whole thing. Now they've got a bunch of lakes.

16 KS: What about you mentioned bugs? Do you want to talk a little bit about that
17 in Thailand?

18 DD: Bugs? Thailand is a jungle nation. It's tropical. It never gets cold enough
19 to kill the insects. I don't know what the life expectancy is of bugs. But, there were a
20 couple of types we need to mention that you may not have ever heard about before. First
21 of all is a Baht bug. It's a rice beetle. Rice beetles eat rice and they store their grains of
22 rice in their abdomen. They swallow them down and they process them slowly. They eat
23 it when it's available and then they live off what's in their abdomen for periods when it's
24 not available. Rice beetles are very large, five and six inches long and maybe an inch
25 wide, and the Thais loved them! They would pay a day's worth of food, one Baht, for a
26 Baht bug. That's why we called them Baht bugs. We'd catch them. Working at night on
27 the flight line, the lights would attract the bugs, and here they'd come and they'd fly into
28 the lights, knock themselves cold. You just pick them up and put them in a bucket. You
29 got them. Now one of them, there's male and female, the Thais, then they got it they
30 would squeeze the tail end of it and one of them would smell different from the others,
31 male or female, I don't know which one. I never got that close to them. But, they would

1 eat the other. Whichever one smelled wrong, they would eat the other. The way they
2 would eat them was rather cool. They would cook them, squeeze or pop the heads off
3 like shooting a marble, hold the bug lengthwise in their hand and then like shooting a
4 marble they'd pop the head of it off, and they would either squeeze the contents of the
5 abdomen into a frying pan or they would just simply suck the contents of the abdomen
6 out and eat it like that, straight. I was never drunk enough to try that!

7 KS: That was my next question!

8 DD: I never tried it, and I never did get that drunk over there. There was quite a
9 few times I got pretty wasted. Drugs weren't a problem in my outfit. Alcohol was, but
10 drugs, we just didn't do it. I never saw it. The first time in my life I ever smelled
11 marijuana was at the incoming briefing when I first got there. OSI, that's the office of
12 special investigations for the Air Force, came to the briefing and they burnt a pound of
13 marijuana inside the base theater. "This is what it smells like," and they burnt it, and I
14 never smelt it again in Thailand, and the stuff grew wild. Marijuana grew wild over
15 there, everywhere. You may have heard that song, "Acres a plenty?" They use that
16 sometimes, I believe it's in hair too, the term, and they're talking about fields and fields
17 of raw, wild, marijuana growing. But, the guys, we didn't do it. It was a situation of you
18 had to be able to trust everybody and somebody who's a druggie, you can't trust them.
19 So, if anybody did, you took care of the problem yourselves and it didn't happen very
20 often and I never knew anybody that did drugs over there, but alcohol, all the time. They
21 poured me on the airplane when I left Thailand. I became conscious somewhere over
22 Hawaii.

23 KS: Would you get American beer or local beer?

24 DD: I didn't drink beer at all, I hated beer. But, the beer over there, my base, we
25 had PBR which is Pabst Blue Ribbon and they had Old Olympia and another one that was
26 disgusting too, Ham's, they had Ham's. The good beers, if you're a beer person, the
27 good beers like Budweiser and Miller and all that kind of thing never got as far as us.
28 Somebody took it off the plane before it ever got as far as me. But, I drank mixed drinks
29 when I drank. Beer just isn't tasty. But anyway, back to insects, bugs by the billions
30 because they don't die. It doesn't get cold enough to. One of my jobs I had, one of the
31 last jobs I had before I went into debriefing was to perform a modification on RF-4Cs.

1 They modified one squadron, two squadrons. They modified one on the 14th. The 11th
2 was sent home. The 11th got to go back to Shaw Air Force Base sometime in the fall of
3 1970. I don't remember the exact date of that. But, the planes in the 14th, we modified
4 them, put a ground speed indicator in the front cockpit. One of the things that my system
5 did, mine could cruise with ground speed, how fast you're going across the ground below
6 you. Somebody finally figured out that that might be a good piece of information for the
7 pilot to have, not just the guy in the backseat. That's where the ground speed indicator
8 was. So, they came up with this idea to slave another ground speed indicator off of the
9 rear indicator to the front cockpit. So, they gave me the job of doing the very first one.
10 Staff sergeant, five level, working for seven levels, you got your modification is basically
11 just like a recipe. They give you a set of directions and a pile of parts and they say,
12 "Here, put this change, modify this airplane." So, went out there and several different
13 shops were involved. They had to remove the canopies, they had to remove the two
14 pesos, both ejection seats, and a bunch of gear in different places all had to be taken out
15 and then the machine shop had to come in and drill some holes because they had to
16 mount a bracket where it was going to connect to the cable going into the rear indicator.
17 So, what they were doing is basically where the cable going to the rear indicator was
18 connected into a wide cable and wound up and connected to the wiring job, primarily
19 what I was doing. So, we put the first one in exactly by the directions. The sheet metal
20 shop drilled the holes and everything, put the brackets and all this, and came out and
21 installed the canopies, shut the canopies and smashed the plug because they put it in
22 wrong. The direction told them to put it in the wrong place. So, they fired of a TWX,
23 TWX Teletype message back to wherever and said, "Hey! Wrong place for the plug!
24 We just smashed this one!" But, this was the first, the test mod, so that's the one that
25 they find the problems on. So, they fixed the mod. They changed the TCT. TCT is time
26 composite tech order. You have so many days to comply with this tech order, which is
27 the directions. So, they came back and they gave it to me again. "Oh boy, thanks!" and
28 the reason I said that, "Thanks a lot, appreciate that," is because the job is being
29 performed as what is called a hard nosed duck. The plane is towed up into this kind of
30 like a garage with both ends of it open. You could drive through it. They towed the
31 airplane up so that the cockpit area is under cover and it's got a roof over it now and it's

1 got these two incandescent lights, or three incandescent, real bright ones, high wattage
2 light bulbs, and this is being done at night. The lights attract the bugs, all kinds of bugs,
3 bugs I've never seen before, and underneath the lights at night would be a solid cone of
4 bugs in that light and one of the lights was positioned directly over the cockpits. So, here
5 I am in there installing this thing. It would take about six to eight hours to do the job and
6 for that entire time, bugs are everywhere. It's not that they were biting, it's just they were
7 so friendly, crawl in your ears and your nose. If you opened your mouth they'd crawl in
8 your mouth, into your eyes, down your shirt, everywhere. I thought I was going to go
9 nuts from it, bugs crawling everywhere. The other one about the Baht bugs, some of the
10 guys made their beer money by catching Baht bugs and selling them to the Thais.

11 KS: Would they sell them to Thais that worked on base, or would they go out...

12 DD: Take them downtown and sell them downtown. They'd get a bucket full of
13 them. At least I don't think I ever ate any of them. I ate Thai food, so I may have ate
14 some Baht bugs in there, too, I don't know. They had to modify the tugs, the tow, it's a
15 little tug driving tow, kind of like a little cart or something with a little motor on it that
16 had to tow the airplane. They had to modify it because we were out there one night and
17 one of the crew chiefs is towing an F-4 somewhere and a Baht bug, this is a large
18 beetle...

19 KS: How big were they?

20 DD: Five to six inches long and as wide, maybe an inch, inch and a half wide.
21 They flew. They didn't crawl around; these guys flew. They were stupid. They'd fly
22 into walls, and in this case it flew into the side of his head, into his temple, and knocked
23 him out. He fell out of the tug and here goes this tug now towing an eight million dollar
24 airplane down between these other eight million dollar airplanes and there's nobody in
25 control of it anymore because he's laying on the ground out cold. Somebody saw it, ran
26 to the plane, jumped on the tug and tried to stop it. The very next day they modified all
27 the tugs and they put a heavy wire screen shield around the area where the guy sits so that
28 you have to duck and get under it to be able to drive it. That was so funny; knocked him
29 colder [?].

30 KS: From a bug?

31 DD: From a bug.

1 KS: Amazing!

2 DD: A huge, huge beetle, and they didn't bite. Well, I guess they didn't bite.
3 They never bit me. Mosquitoes were unbelievable. My first night in Udorn they issued
4 us mosquito nets to put over our beds, bunk beds, and it was a double bunk bed but
5 nobody slept in the top. I guess they used that to hang a mosquito net over or something.
6 But, my first night I didn't get my mosquito net and the bugs started buzzing and this is
7 January. It's kind of cool, but not really cold. It's only a few degrees North of the
8 equator, so I ended up going under the sheets completely to get away from the
9 mosquitoes because they were fierce. Sometime during the night my left arm got out
10 from under the sheet and the next morning it was just one big welt; completely covered
11 with bites from mosquitoes. The very first thing I did that day was go get my mosquito
12 net and then buy some – well, they issued it, too – flying insect killer. The procedure was
13 when you're ready to go to bed you put the net down and you spray though the net to kill
14 all the insects that are still inside, and then when you get ready, you real quick jump
15 under it and slam it and you listen for a while and see if anybody came in with you and
16 kill them and then you go to sleep. The briefings were interesting. One of the first ones
17 you got was about snakes. I hate snakes. It doesn't matter if they're venomous or not, I
18 hate snakes. They tell you that Thailand has well over 100 types of snakes and
19 something like 85 of them are poisonous. They have various vipers, they have the Krait
20 there, K-R-A-I-T, several different kinds of cobras including the king cobra. Kings get to
21 be pretty big, 15 feet long; fangs on the king cobra would be two inches long. They can
22 kill an elephant, a king cobra can. They killed several cobras while I was there. I never
23 saw any other kind of snake in Thailand except cobras. You have to appreciate the
24 humor in this. We had house girls. They kept our hooches clean. We didn't call them
25 barracks, they were hooches because they had a roof over it and the sides were pretty
26 much just screens. Mine was a two-story hooch and the house girls would shine our
27 shoes, wash our clothes, keep the barracks clean, keep the hooch clean. They would also
28 kill snakes. The broom they use in Thailand is about three feet long and it's a one-
29 handed type thing. It works real well. They also use that to beat snakes to death. They
30 beat a cobra to death that was up on the second floor in my hooch. I'm in there asleep. I
31 slept right through it. But, they're chasing a snake up and down. It's a huge open bay,

1 one big open room, and they're chasing a snake up and down between the beds and
2 lockers and stuff and beating on it with this broom. I didn't know they could climb stairs.
3 The other one I saw was down in the latrines. Latrines were our bathrooms and we had
4 something like ten hooches, two story hooches, and then two one story latrines between
5 the two rows of hooches. In the latrine you have the commodes and urinals and showers
6 and all that, sinks and mirrors to shave and all that stuff. Well snakes are cold blooded
7 and when it gets real hot they want to cool off. They'll wrap around a commode. If
8 you've ever been really, really sick at your stomach, throwing up like when you get really
9 bad drunk or something and you're puking all over everywhere, there's nothing that feels
10 better than to lay your cheek on the side of the porcelain commode and, "Oh!" Bill
11 Cosby talks about it. It feels wonderful. These snakes like that too, apparently, because
12 they would wrap around and curl around the commodes to cool off. This upset the house
13 girls big time. They don't want cobras in their latrines. They have to go in there all the
14 time. Plus, it might bite one of their GI's and their GI's pay them money, and some of
15 the best-paid jobs in Thailand were the house girls. They got paid real well compared to
16 other jobs downtown. House girls were amazing. I had the best house girl on base
17 because she was ugly. If you look at a dictionary alongside the word ugly, it's got her
18 picture! But, nobody messed with her. The good-looking house girls, guys were always
19 hitting on her continually and they never got anything done. But mine, nobody messed
20 with her so my hooch was always clean, my shoes were always shined. When I first got
21 there I bought a 35 millimeter camera and I took over one of those little Browne
22 Instamatics and I gave that to her. You'd have thought I'd given her the crown jewels!
23 From that point on, if I got out of bed, when I came back to it, it was made. I mean, if I
24 was getting out to go to the bathroom, when I came back my bed was made. She kept
25 bringing me her daughters, [?] daughter because these young females, "Look, sergeant,
26 you marry her and take her back to the States!" "No, no! I already have a wife! I have a
27 [Thai word for wife]." But, she kept bringing them out to me. She would bring me food
28 and stuff. My shoes, you could shave in them. The clothes always smelled sour. There
29 was nothing. The washing machine was a tub of water with soap in it and a scrub board,
30 and your clothes, because of the humidity, they never really dried out so they always
31 smelled sour. You always smelled bad. They were as clean as she could get the, forever

1 and ever. She was a great house girl. But, killing those snakes was hilarious. It's a real
2 shock the first time you...house girls, when they finish work, they would go down to the
3 latrines, they would take showers and everything, and the guys would come on in. It's a
4 real shock, taking a shower and a house girl comes in and climbs into this big, huge
5 shower with you. Now she never gets naked to take a bath. They have dresses that they
6 wear. I don't know what they call it, it's not a dress, but it's like a pillowcase except both
7 ends are open, not just one end, and it's quite large. They get in it and they fold this thing
8 around and if they normally wear it around their waist, it drags on the ground. But, when
9 they're taking a bath they put it around up higher, up above their breasts, and now it's
10 only down to their knees. But, they get in, they take a bath, and they wash your clothes at
11 the same time. It's very efficient that way. But, still a bit of a shock because the guys
12 don't wear the dresses, and, "What are you doing in here?" The girls, the names we gave
13 them, their names were this long. I don't know if you've ever seen those or not,
14 Chulongkorn type thing, that's the name of the King of Siam, big long name. So, GI's
15 had a way of shortening that. We called them 'Wec' or 'Nit' or 'Noy' or 'Nit Noy', all of
16 those mean little because they're small people.

17 KS: Did you pick up any Thai? Did you speak Thai while you were there?

18 DD: Yeah, enough to get into real bad trouble. Yeah, enough to get into real bad
19 trouble! But, [? Thai], that means I speak Thai a little bit. The language is musical. It's
20 on an actual musical tonal level or scale. The same word can mean up to five different
21 things.

22 KS: You must be careful!

23 DD: Depending on your tone of voice, and tone, not like anger, but tone like
24 musical. The word Ma means 'Mother,' it means the verb 'To come,' it means 'Dog,' and
25 it means 'Horse.' I don't know what the other one is. But, Mother in there, one of the
26 Ma's is Mother. You've got to be real careful. You might call your mother a dog or a
27 horse and she might be upset about that, so tone is very important, "Ma [?], come here!"
28 "[?]," "I don't have any money!" That's something you had to have because when you
29 left the base and went downtown, here they come, all the vendors.

30 KS: What kinds of things would they be selling?

1 DD: Food, nasty pictures, clothes, a lot of tailor shops over there. We got
2 clothes. We were told by our sponsors, at least in the Air Force, when they had sponsors,
3 if you're going overseas or to another base, they had sponsors appointed to help you get
4 adjusted, which is a real nice program, to let you know the things you should do to be
5 settled in quickly. It worked real well. My sponsor said, "Don't bring any clothes that
6 you like because first of all the water here is very heavily chlorinated, fantastically." It
7 smells like bleach. Did you notice that over there? Did you drink bottled water all the
8 time, I hope?

9 KS: Pretty much, yes, of course!

10 DD: Otherwise you might have some problems! The water on base was real
11 heavily chlorinated. It smelled like bleach from the chlorine and it fades your clothes out
12 real bad. Plus, like I said, everything smells sour because it never did get really dry from
13 the soap and water and stuff. Mostly food, we had girls that would come around to the
14 shops on the maintenance side. We called them Coke girls because they usually had
15 Cokes and they had slices of watermelon and duck eggs, boiled duck eggs. Try that
16 sometime, eat a boiled duck egg! It's kind of ugly! They had regular chicken eggs that
17 were boiled, other kinds of fruit, mangos in season, a lot of mangos, bananas, and the
18 words they had for us that they talked with us all the time like, '[Dah Ling].' Sounds like
19 you're saying 'Darling' right? But, 'Dah' means 'Ass' and 'Ling' means 'Monkey.' So,
20 the Thais loved puns; loved them! '[Fa Long Dong]' means 'White Pickle' and they
21 would call us '[Fa Long Dong]' or 'Dah Ling.' The new guys didn't catch onto that and
22 they would intentionally hide the R or whatever instead of saying 'Darling,' 'Dah Ling,'
23 monkey's ass! I don't know if the words are still there or not because we don't have the
24 bases there now, but the only military influence or military presence we have other there
25 now is at Patia Beach, Satahip where the Navy comes in. So, I don't know what kind of
26 influence we have there. The Thais loved the puns, they thought it was hilarious, and
27 after we caught onto it...one of the girls that worked at the NCO club, in the snack bar,
28 the casual bar area, she helped me learn Thai. On my nights off I would spend most of
29 my time at the NCO club. She would help me speak Thai because it got real quiet. I'd
30 go there most of the time to eat because I couldn't stand the chow hall. I'd get egg
31 burgers. It's a hamburger with fried egg on it, and you eat it like a hamburger; it's great!

1 They thought cheese was disgusting. “That’s sour milk! What are you talking about?
2 Ick!” They wouldn’t touch it. But, they’d make pizzas if you insisted. At some point
3 there were slot machines in the NCO club. I don't remember if they were there when I
4 was or not. There was a big scandal about the slot machines over in the Far East.
5 Somebody was skimming, and a lot of people ended up being fired for that or court
6 martialled, whatever. The nice girls, generally American GI’s never met them. They
7 were kept distant from the bases. The closest we came to nice girls were our house girls.
8 One of the house girls that worked in the orderly room had two real young girls, they
9 were 15-16 years old. They didn’t have a whole lot to do, so they’re fooling around with
10 the guys; not sexually, but joking. This one girl was really, really cute, and all the guys
11 kept trying to take her out to go on dates. “No, I can’t do that, my father will kill me!”
12 She didn’t speak English very well at all, so they had this Pidgin English going back and
13 forth. But basically if she had ever gone out with a GI, her father would kill her because
14 of the reputation that the girls that hang around the bases get. They had massage parlors,
15 they had houses of prostitution, they had bars all over everywhere.

16 KS: Was that in proximity to the base?

17 DD: That was very close, and it was in town, too, all over town, because at
18 Udorn a lot of the guys lived off base, a lot of them until we had this Colonel Melnick,
19 Milner, something like that, began with an M, came in and he was after his star. He was
20 a full bird colonel, had an eagle on his shoulder, and he wanted his star. He put in his
21 program...he was there when that plane crashed and he felt that there was a problem with
22 disaster response because nobody was on base to [?] that, but this happened in the
23 daytime, full competent people that work in daytime. So, his line of reasoning was
24 faulty. But, he put in this program called odd and even. You could only go off base
25 depending on your social security number, what it ended in. If it was an even number,
26 you could go on even numbered day. 2nd of July, if you end in an even number, your
27 social security number, you could go downtown; odd numbers, the same thing –
28 otherwise, you couldn’t. A lot of the guys were living with girls off downtown. A lot of
29 the guys were single, and there were a bunch of married people who were playing
30 around, too. A year’s a long time. This upset a ton of people, a ton of people were upset
31 over this. But, he got his star. When he left the base he left in a fighter going back

1 somewhere, going out of there. His wheels cleared the runway and the announcement
2 went out over the FM radio by the new base commander, "Odd and even is cancelled!"

3 KS: Were there cheers?

4 DD: Oh, you could hear it go up! I wonder if he heard that in his airplane,
5 probably not. We weren't allowed to broadcast our AFTN radio station. It went out on
6 the wires, the electrical wires on base, and you didn't [?] as long as you're near some
7 electrical wires, and so very short distance they were broadcasting, but they weren't
8 allowed to do antenna type stuff, [?]. TV, we had it, but the shows were five and six year
9 old reruns from the states, stuff that they gave to the military after they'd had their prime
10 run back in the states so we never saw anything. At that time, I don't recall getting
11 anything like the Super Bowl or something like that because there was a 13-hour time
12 difference.

13 KS: What about USO shows? Did you see any?

14 DD: USO shows, Bob Hope never did come to us. He wanted to, but that
15 colonel...no, it's a different colonel, one of them, anyway, the colonel in charge at that
16 time wouldn't let him film the show because it was going to be filmed at one end of the
17 flight line and the colonel wouldn't let him film it so he said, "No, I'm not going to put
18 my show on there." But, he'd been there before, but he didn't come when I was there.
19 Other shows, I saw two famous people that came through, Dewayne Eddie, you've
20 probably never heard of him. Dewayne Eddie is a guitar player. Have you ever heard the
21 song, "Rebel Rouser," or the term, "30 Miles of Bad Road?"

22 KS: I can't say that I have.

23 DD: Can't say that you have? Okay, we've got to work on that. In the '60s and
24 '70s, instrumentals were big and Dewayne Eddie was a guitar player. He did
25 instrumental type songs and he came through; fantastic show he put on. Edwin Star came
26 through. Edwin Star did the song, "War," "War, huh, what is it good for? Absolutely
27 nothing!" He came in, and neither one of these were USO. They were on tour, and they
28 did a tour for the GI's. When Edwin Star...Dewayne Eddie was fantastically well
29 received. Edwin Star opened his show, his one and only big hit and received a zero
30 ovation; nothing. I mean, we sat there and looked at him, and it was downhill from there.
31 He was not well received at all. One of the things...there was something that happened.

1 Looking at it, it was terrible, but at the time it felt good. It felt real good. I want to say
2 April, but I couldn't be wrong, the Kent State Massacre. When we got the news of it,
3 heard about it, I was at the NCO club. We stood up and cheered, "Kill them all! Good!
4 Yeah! Way to go, Guard!" We stood up and cheered. Somebody had struck back for us.
5 When we came back, we were not well received. I got my first welcome home from a
6 female. Her name was Christina Sharik. She's on the internet as Army mom and she
7 gave me my first welcome home from Vietnam, the Vietnam War, two years ago. I sat
8 there and bawled like a baby over the internet. I just fell apart. She was the first one to
9 say, "Welcome home." Not even my wife said, "Welcome home." Not in those words.
10 She said it in another way, but she never said those words. Look up 'Army Mom.'
11 You'll love her poetry. Have a Kleenex handy because she has a way of reaching the
12 veterans, she really does. I don't know if it has an effect on a lot of veterans or not but
13 she has a way of reaching veterans big time. My wife's a counselor and she uses her
14 poetry to help reach incommunicable veterans. She uses it as a break through and it does
15 real well. She's got some good stuff. She's fixing to put out her first book. But, her
16 name is 'Army Mom,' all one word, and her actual name is Christina Sharik, S-H-A-R-I-
17 K. Good stuff, real good stuff.

18 KS: Was there anything else you wanted to add about [?] before we talk about
19 after, how you were received when you came home?

20 DD: I'm trying to call it, 12 hour shifts six days a week, bugs, snakes. I heard
21 stories about tigers, but I never saw one.

22 KS: You never saw one?

23 DD: Never saw any tigers. Dogs were everywhere. The Thais are Buddhists.
24 They believe in reincarnation and they believe that every animal out there is a person
25 who did not do well in life and is being punished by being lower order. That's the way
26 they think about it. So, they wont even kill a rabid dog. So, they have packs of them
27 running throughout town, mad dogs, everywhere, and all the GI's and Americans could
28 do is just get out of their way. The Thais wouldn't do anything at all about it. That's the
29 way they were about all the animals and stuff. Let's see, what else?

30 KS: I was going to ask you something. You mentioned...

1 DD: Transportation, the sandmars, did you see any sandmars? Do they still have
2 those?

3 KS: What are they?

4 DD: Bicycles?

5 KS: Cyclo is what they call them in Vietnam, the taxis?

6 DD: Yeah, they're little taxis but they call them sandmars in Thailand. They're
7 three wheeled bicycles. You or the passenger sat on the back end and these guys had legs
8 that looked like professional football players, but they're only four and a half feet tall;
9 huge thighs! We'd go downtown partying and get the sandmars to come back to the base
10 and the typical fare would be two Baht. One of the things you had to do was determine a
11 price before you got onto a sandmar because once he's delivered you, "Five Baht!" In
12 Thailand, life is cheap, real cheap. We would, "Three Baht, first place! Four Baht, first
13 place, back to the base!" and they would bust their guts for that nickel. One of the things
14 that happened while I was there, two, two or one, one GI came back to the base in a taxi,
15 regular car, and the fare was normally two or three Baht and the guy wanted four, and the
16 guy was drunk and he hadn't set the price. "Four Baht!" "What are you talking about?"
17 and it ended up the taxi driver pulled out a gun and shot him over a nickel. This is about
18 100 yards of road that the two towns, about 100 yards down another little street from the
19 main gate. You go out the gate and 100 yards out the main gate, straight up the main gate
20 is the main highway and an intersection going through there. He shot him down; never
21 caught him, never did anything to him. Thai Air Force, you mentioned a question about
22 them, an incident happened with that, Thai came in on a motorcycle. They rode
23 motorcycles a lot, these little small engine motorcycles and an officer came driving
24 through the Thai...there was two gates that I knew about. There were others I found out
25 since, but the main gate and then the Thai gate. An officer on a motorcycle came through
26 the Thai gate and the guard there, the Thai guard, didn't salute him. The guy stopped,
27 turned around, came back, pulled out a .45 and shot him. Nobody ever did a thing about
28 that, either. He wasn't doing his job, bang! You could put a contract on somebody for
29 ten Baht. That's .50 cents, and it happened quite a bit. The wing commanders, base
30 commanders, squadron commanders, they didn't go downtown because they figured that
31 one of their guys has a contract on him. For .50 cents, you bet!

1 KS: The Americans?

2 DD: Yeah. They'd pay a sandmar driver or somebody .50 cents to kill
3 somebody, and they would do it. They would do it. Let's press on, because I can't think
4 of anything else right now, but if it comes up [?].

5 KS: Sure, we can continue if we need to.

6 DD: Jump back and forth.

7 KS: You talked about, when you returned to the United States, was it 1970?
8 What month again?

9 DD: December, December 1970.

10 KS: And how were you received? I know you talked a little bit about that. Did
11 your friends ask any questions about your service?

12 DD: Nobody wanted to talk about it at all, not a word, not even my own family.
13 They were glad I was home, but they didn't want to hear about what went on for the past
14 year, which was strange I felt. I tried to talk about it, and tried to talk about it to other
15 people, too, and they made it very clear that they didn't want to talk about this. So,
16 eventually what happened to almost all the vets that came back, we just shut up. We
17 stopped talking. Okay, fine, and do something else. We were told when we came back
18 quite often, these are signs around the base and stuff, don't go downtown in Udorn
19 because they'd have people be attacked because they were wearing uniforms.

20 KS: What was your next assignment after Thailand?

21 DD: From Thailand I went to Bergstrom, Austin, Bergstrom Air Force Base, the
22 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing.

23 KS: Do you recall any anti-war protests in Austin or any other?

24 DD: They had them, but it was mostly down around the university on Guadalupe
25 I think is the main drag by the university, and it was nothing real loud or anything. I
26 think while I was there was when they had the guy up in the tower shooting people.
27 That's where I got divorced the first time was in Austin, and got remarried within a
28 couple of months after that. Austin was a good-sized town. It was about the size of a
29 little over 100,000 and it had everything you wanted. You could get to it in 20 minutes.
30 Now, it's just too big, and it's got construction everywhere, but construction everywhere.
31 While I was there they got mixed drinks in bars, they finally passed that. [?] closed the

1 chicken ranch and promptly didn't get reelected for it, I think. It was pretty much
2 business as usual; everybody just quit talking about it. Now, I wish I had volunteered to
3 go back because I enjoyed my year over there. I had a good time. I was doing a job that
4 I was trained to do in the most adverse conditions possible, and doing it well. That was
5 very good for my self-esteem type thing, loved the way I felt about myself. I was still
6 doing a job but it turned back into an eight-hour day, five day a week back in the states.

7 KS: How do you feel about your service back in Southeast Asia?

8 DD: Real proud of it, thanks to a lady by the name of [Yin Crawl]. She has a
9 book out, something about a thousand tears falling, former citizen of South Vietnam, and
10 I got an email from her saying, "Because you served, I am free," and I sat and bawled
11 over that for a while.

12 KS: How did she get in touch with you, or do you know?

13 DD: She picked up something you ought to try yourself; get on the internet, do a
14 yahoo search on your name and see how many places your name is mentioned on the
15 internet. It'll surprise you I bet you. Have you done anything at all on the internet?

16 KS: My name is listed through my job here.

17 DD: [Yin Crawl], she's talked at the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial and all
18 this. She says that it wasn't just to me, but she sent it out to...somehow she got a list of
19 hundreds, or maybe even thousands of Vietnam veterans and sent out the same message,
20 "Thank you. Because you fought for my country, my country had 19 years of freedom
21 and democracy," and all this, "And I'm free now because you guys were there. You
22 served, and because of that I'm free," and that really reaches guys, too, because I feel,
23 and most of the guys feel the same thing, that what we did was right. We were helping a
24 country become free. South Vietnam was fighting against North Vietnam, China, and
25 Russia and nobody was helping South Vietnam except us. We did a very dishonorable
26 thing at the end of it. When we pulled out in '73, pulling out was fine. They were doing
27 most of the fighting from 1972 on anyhow. When we started to pull out, even back in '69
28 I think we started pulling out, but they were doing fine, the South Vietnamese were, their
29 military was. And when we finally left in '73 we promised that we'd keep them supplied
30 with weapons and supplies and ammunition and all this stuff. As soon as our people
31 were out, congress cut off the money and it still took two years for North Vietnam to take

1 over. If we'd kept them supplied, perhaps it would have had a different result. One of
2 the things that really bugs me, you're talking about things that have happened since, the
3 Tet Offensive of '68, Walter Cronkite reported to the United States that, "We can't win
4 this war. We're losing." The Tet Offensive, they came out and they kicked out butts –
5 that's not the way it went. We turned the Viet Cong into a nonviable force in the Tet
6 offensive. We killed 30 plus thousand, somewhere between 30 and 50,000 Viet Cong
7 killed and they were never, from then on, any kind of force to be reckoned with. But,
8 Cronkite told America, "We can't win. We're losing it." So, we got surprised. That
9 happens. But, we were able to overcome it. Giap, General Giap from North Vietnam, his
10 book, he says that after Tet, they were ready to throw it in. "We can't beat them. Look
11 here. Our best attack, 106 locations at the same time, our very best attack we can come
12 up with," and they killed 50,000, whatever the numbers were, and they were ready to
13 throw it in, pack it in and go home, [?]. Then, they found out what was being reported
14 back in the United States about the Tet Offensive and they said, "Hey, maybe we can win
15 after all." At that time, there were 10 to 15,000 American dead total at that time,
16 depending on what time of the year you're talking about. But, the other 40,000 names on
17 the Wall happened after that and I lay that right at the feet of Walter Cronkite. When he
18 came back, when the media came back and told, "We're getting our butt kicked over
19 here," and that wasn't happening. But they were ready to give it up, throw it in. They
20 say, "Well, if we're willing to put up with the attrition rate, we can win this thing," and
21 then Jane Fonda jumps over there. I feel really good about a couple of things that's
22 happened to Jane Fonda. She was supposed to receive an award from the American Bar
23 Association a couple of years ago. The veterans found out about it and pitched a fit.
24 We'd just finished off defeating Operation Tailwind by CNN and we had feeling pretty
25 good about ourselves and stuff, we've got some power here, and we started a campaign,
26 we found out through time, to stop her from getting that award. It was supposed to be the
27 Speaking Out for Freedom Award from the American Bar Association. We stopped that,
28 the veterans did. We tried to stop her from getting the one from the AAUW, which we
29 didn't find out until the week before hand. That was the first one, and then CBS put her
30 on the list of 100 women of the year type thing, and we pitched a fit over that. But the
31 internet and veterans are starting to become a potent force and we're finding that out.

1 KS: What groups are you involved in today, veteran's groups and organizations?

2 DD: There's a thing called the Grassroots Coalition. It's pretty much being
3 ramrodded by a retired Air Force General by the name of Robert Clements. We're
4 pushing for a return of the promise for free medical care for retirees. We were promised
5 that if we stayed in 20 years, free medical care for life.

6 KS: How long were you in?

7 DD: I was in for 20 years; 20 years and 27 days! If you retired, that was one of
8 the things they offered you. "Hey, stay for 20, free medical care for you and your
9 immediate family the rest of your life." And they were telling us in the '80s because we
10 were starting to complain about how little our pay was. There was a huge disparity
11 between pay between civilians and military. They said, "Well, count this promise of free
12 medical care as part of your delayed pay," and then we don't have this free medical care.
13 It's not there. Then, the concurrent pay with a person who is disabled, a military person.
14 If he's a military retiree, he's paying his own pension. Example, 100% disability and
15 you're retired Air Force, you get a check once a month for \$2,000 dollars or whatever it
16 is. Well, the VA, if you're disabled, military veteran disabled and it's tied to your time in
17 service, they give you a pension for that and they reduce your retirement pay dollar for
18 dollar, so you're paying your own disability or your own pension, and that's the only
19 people they do that to is retired military. They don't do it to any other federal employees;
20 they get both, and that's not fair. It's not fair at all. There's quite a bit of internet
21 organizations fighting that. They're lobbying congress. We have their email addresses.
22 Phil Gramm's getting tired of hearing from me. He's been voting against this stuff, and I
23 think he's getting tired of hearing from me because we do it. We call. As soon as we
24 find out an 800 number to call, it goes out over the net and everybody calls. It's
25 becoming a potent force because we weren't able to communicate before.
26 Communication wasn't there, and we're taking advantage of it. We're using it. But, I'm
27 in the Grassroots Coalition. I'm in the...what's the name of that one, Coalition of
28 Retired...CORMV, Coalition of Retired Military Veterans, that's the one I'm still in for
29 free medical care. I'd be in CAG, which is a class action group out of Florida, but it's
30 run by Colonel Day, Colonel Buff Day. He's a Medal of Honor recipient, and they're
31 suing the government for the free medical care, taking them to court for it and so is

1 CORMV, but they're doing it for two different groups. CAG is doing it for those who
2 joined prior to 1956 and CORMV is doing it for everybody, all retirees because it was
3 promised us. Then, the TLCB. TLCB, as an organization, doesn't have any political
4 beliefs because of their tax benefits, tax-free organization. What's the term for that?

5 KS: Tax exempt?

6 DD: Tax-exempt organization, 301C3, 501(C)(3), that's it, 501(C)(3), and you're
7 not supposed to engage in politics. So, as an organization we don't. But, individually
8 you can have at it. We've got a bunch of guys that participate in that. Then, AFVN is an
9 e-group, AFVN@egroups.com, those are the ones I'm involved in right now. I also
10 talked with the Special Forces Organization. I worked with them quite a bit on Operation
11 Tailwind, getting the truth out there after CNN came out with that story they spit out.
12 That was unbelievable. The biggest benefit of this TLCB thing and the internet to me
13 right now, the other stuff is all in the works, but the biggest benefit to me is the increase
14 in knowledge, finding out...because these guys were doing it. Jim Roper was one of the
15 Raven FACs in Laos. He's a member of the group. Steve Long, a POW, is a member of
16 the group. We have several FACs, Colonel Jimmy Butler, our president right now Bill
17 Toten, all these guys were FACs at NKP. We have Ken Griswalt, he was an intelligence
18 officer working in Laos at LS28 and at...I can't remember the town now, the secret one
19 that's not on the map, where Vang Pao lived and all those guys there in Laos, the tie in
20 with all different guys, a bunch of them who worked in Laos. Now, they called it sheep
21 dipped. What they did was they gave them paperwork that said they were discharged
22 from the Air Force, but they still would receive their pay and their benefits just like they
23 were active duty, but to cover the Air Force or cover the United States, they had this
24 paper, "Oh, he's not in the Air Force anymore. He's discharged, see. This piece of paper
25 right here will show you." But, they reassigned them to Laos. Actually, it's supposed to
26 be pronounced Lao, the S is silent, but everybody says Laos. But, they called it being
27 sheep dipped. I don't understand the analogy that well, but they still received the
28 benefits. Fred Platt, he was a FAC, he's now the adjunct of the China Post #1, American
29 Legion China Post 1 in [?]. They operate out of Houston right now. They called him
30 magnet ass. He was shot down 11 times. He attracted the bullets, I guess, but the last
31 time he got almost his entire skeletal system filled with these little micro-breaks, micro-

1 cracks, so he's in an intense amount of pain because of it because it's a pretty hard
2 landing. But you look at the planes these guys were flying, the 0-1s and 0-2s. The 0-1 is
3 an L-19, a little Piper Cub or the same thing as. The 0-2 is a twin-engine job, one in
4 front, one in back. It looks funny, push and pull.

5 KS: Push and pull, yeah.

6 DD: It's called a...there's a civilian version of it, a Cessna. I can't remember the
7 name of the thing. Then, the OV-10 which is also twin engine but they're both facing
8 front, and it had weapons. It could shoot back. But, 0-1 and 0-2 didn't, they were
9 unarmed. I'm sure they've got a book up here by Jimmy Butler called A Certain
10 Brotherhood. I think I gave Steve a copy, but I'm not sure. I might not have. If he
11 doesn't have, find out if he doesn't have one, and if he doesn't I've got a signed copy at
12 home that I can give him. It's a novel about the FACs, the first ones, the ones at NKP
13 and those little, bitty, tiny airplanes. But, all that stuff, at the time, we didn't know they
14 were there. Fred Platt spent several months while I was there in the hospital at Udorn
15 where he was banged up in one of his crashes. Ten or 11 times he was shot down. Air
16 America, we have several members who were Air America. You may have talked with
17 Lee Hotocek.

18 KS: I know Steve has.

19 DD: Nice lady. At our last reunion, she brought her son. Her husband was still
20 in service so she brought her son, and he was just in absolute awe at the names that were
21 there at that reunion, especially General Olds. He was our main speaker at the banquet.
22 He was just walking around with his jaw hanging open! I was with some of the guys, the
23 Raven FACs. Read that book, and it will tell you about that, the Ravens. They were the
24 ones that could explain the sheep dipped a little better, too, I think. Some of the stuff
25 they had to do...have you seen the movie "Apocalypse Now?"

26 KS: A long time ago, but yes.

27 DD: "Apocalypse Now" is probably based on the life of Tony Poe. Tony Poe
28 was in Laos and his job was to organize the tribesmen there to be a fighting force against
29 the Vietnamese and that's how he operated his operation over there was like Marlon
30 Brando did in "Apocalypse Now." They were just that strange, it was just that strange
31 over there. The guys talk about it now, it's amazing the stuff coming out. In my systems

1 that I worked on, there was a method of delivering a bomb called dive toss. The idea was
2 you fly along, you reach a certain point, you go into a dive, and you pull out and release
3 the bomb here and you're pulling out of the dive. As you're pulling up, the bomb is
4 actually thrown up into the air and you could track that. Mathematically, you could track
5 the ballistic path that that bomb should take accurately enough that you should be able to
6 bomb a very small target with it. Now, the systems we had back then, the theory was
7 good, but the systems weren't accurate. There was one ammo dump that we were task
8 from our base to destroy and it was built into a mountain. It had a ten-foot diameter
9 opening that they drove into and the only way we could figure they blew that mountain,
10 they probably took 700 feet off the top of it dropping bombs on this thing, but they hadn't
11 got to a dump inside. So, they were trying to dive toss a bomb through that opening,
12 through a ten foot opening, and they had not succeeded. They kept missing all around;
13 close, but never dead center in that ten-foot circle. They finally brought over one of the
14 smart bombs, laser guided job or something, and they dropped one through the hole of
15 that, and that mountain's gone. It's completely blown. But, dive toss, interesting
16 concept. There's a poem out that goes, "There will always be wars, there will always be
17 fighters, there will always be fighter pilots, there'll always be fighter pilots in bars, there
18 will always be fighter pilot bars, and dive toss does work." Strange little poem.

19 KS: Is there anything else you'd like to add today?

20 DD: Not that I can think of. I'm just about talked out. If I think of anything, I'll
21 holler.

22 KS: Sure. Well why don't we go ahead and end the interview? This concludes
23 the interview with Dan Decker. Thank you very much.