

Interview with Ronnie Lee Houston
Session 1 of 2
January 22, 2004

1 LC: Okay, can you tell me about the relationship between the two squadrons?

2 RLH: We were friends, but we were sort of friendly rivals.

3 LC: Yup.

4 RLH: I don't know what we had to be rivals about because we were all there doing the
5 same thing, but it was sort of, 'We're better than you.' We used to do little nasty things to one
6 another.

7 LC: Do you remember any of those?

8 RLH: Oh yeah.

9 LC: Can you talk about any of them?

10 RLH: Well, we managed to steal their squadron commander's jeep and paint our
11 squadron color kelly green.

12 LC: Okay, that probably didn't go over very well with them.

13 RLH: Well they retaliated. They painted one of our buildings red. And you know, little
14 things like that.

15 LC: Sure.

16 RLH: We would get together and drink.

17 LC: Sure.

18 RLH: But it was a friendly rivalry.

19 LC: Now, I was going to ask you about the different facilities that you were describing, the
20 tennis courts and all, did you use the pool?

21 RLH: We used the pool; I played tennis a few times. We had a basketball court just in the
22 parking lot out there, that we played a lot of basketball. We one time started flag football teams
23 and they made us quit because we kept getting hurt.

24 LC: Yeah. How long did you actually get to play football before somebody put the...?

25 RLH: Not very long, probably three weeks at the outside.

26 LC: Really?

27 RLH: I mean, we hurt somebody pretty bad.

28 LC: Oh did you?

1 RLH: Tore the Achilles tendon or something.
2 LC: Ew, ouch. Yeah.
3 RLH: So, they made us quit.
4 LC: Okay, and presumably, they were trying to get you to keep focused on the mission by
5 don't get injured so you can't fly kind of thing.
6 RLH: That's right.
7 LC: Can you tell me about the first mission that you actually did in country? Do you
8 remember it?
9 RLH: I remember more the first time that I flew an actual night combat mission.
10 LC: Okay, can you tell me about that night?
11 RLH: Because that was the first time I think I was ever sort of concerned because it's
12 dark.
13 LC: Right.
14 RLH: And I remember, I was with a guy who had been there for a little while, it was so
15 obvious, it was right at the very start, I wasn't flying with Jerry Gray.
16 LC: Okay.
17 RLH: But we had a target and we had a Forward Air Controller and we kept rolling in and I
18 kept telling him, 'I think they're shooting at us', and finally, I heard him say, 'That's the moon
19 reflecting on the water, they are not shooting at us.' (Laughter)
20 LC: (Laughter) Yes.
21 RLH: But that's the one I remember the most.
22 LC: You were a little bit concerned there.
23 RLH: Yeah, after that I said, 'Well, I'm not going to be afraid anymore.'
24 LC: Can't be afraid of the reflection, huh?
25 RLH: That's right.
26 LC: Okay. What kinds of weapons were you loaded up with on a night mission?
27 RLH: Probably, the vast majority of the time were the five hundred pound dumb bombs.
28 We had; of course, we didn't go to North Vietnam.
29 LC: Right.
30 RLH: So we were restricted primarily to the southern half of Laos and the northern half of
31 Vietnam. Primarily that's because in the southern half, most of the time, that was Cam Ranh Bay's

1 responsibility and the very far north was Da Nang. The northern part of Laos was handled out of
2 Thailand.

3 LC: Okay.

4 RLH: So, I mean, we would run into people from the other bases once in a while. We
5 usually had our own little area of responsibility. Well, I flew as often as I could possibly fly. I was
6 probably in country at the most two hundred and fifty days and I flew two hundred and twenty nine
7 missions, but I only flew about forty the last three months I was there.

8 LC: Wow, so you really front end loaded those when you first got there.

9 RLH: I woke up.

10 LC: Okay. Was there a particular incident that made you change your mind?

11 RLH: Absolutely was.

12 LC: Do you want to tell me about that?

13 RLH: Well, Captain Gray and I had gone out on a mission. By now, I mean, we'd been
14 there about eight months probably and it was getting real close to the time I was going to go to
15 Hawaii and meet my wife for R&R and this particular mission, we were doing low level, low angle
16 dive bombing. And we were down in a valley and we were concentrating so hard because it was
17 troops in contact and we had the good guys fighting off the bad guys.

18 LC: Right.

19 RLH: And we didn't quite pay as much attention as we should and we made a run in and
20 we were dropping napalm at the time.

21 LC: Okay.

22 RLH: And we pulled off the target and we both looked up and we were looking straight at
23 a mountain, and we're about to hit this thing. And I remember, I uttered an oath, we both grabbed
24 the stick and started pulling, he hit the after burners and we were just below the level of a stall and
25 I mean, I thought, 'This is it.'

26 LC: Yeah.

27 RLH: I mean, I bought the big one and the last thing I said is, 'Something God's going to
28 make me pay for.' And that's kind of when I said, 'You know, I'd really like to kind of go home and
29 I'm going to slow down.'

30 LC: You weren't running after every mission then after that?

31 RLH: No.

1 LC: Okay.

2 RLH: As a matter of fact, I was much more ready to assist a pilot in a pull out that if I
3 thought he was too close to the ground, I said, 'Hey, that's enough.' I was very vocal in telling
4 them, 'This is stupid, don't do this.'

5 LC: Were you still with Captain Gray?

6 RLH: No, unfortunately he in November, October, November, along in there, his wife was
7 pregnant while he was over there and she had a child that was born with hydroencephalitis.

8 LC: Okay.

9 RLH: And he had gone home and came back and was just kind of devastated and came
10 to me and said, 'What do I do?' And I said, 'You go home. I mean, she needs you a whole lot
11 worse than you need to be here. You've done what you need to do. I mean, you get credit for a
12 full tour, you've been there more than one hundred and eighty one days, go home.' So he went
13 home.

14 LC: Did he feel concerned about leaving you there?

15 RLH: He felt guilty.

16 LC: And you told him don't.

17 RLH: I told him to go home, that's where you belong. I said, 'If it were me, I'd go home.'

18 LC: Yes, and he listened to you.

19 RLH: He did, he went home and you know, we've been friends ever since.

20 LC: Yeah, and you feel now that you absolutely did the right thing.

21 RLH: Oh sure.

22 LC: Yeah. So the pilots that you were talking to and being more vocal with later on, were
23 you working with one or two guys?

24 RLH: No, I had been there long enough that they started sticking me with the new guys.

25 LC: I see

26 RLH: And they also stuck me a lot with the people from Wing Head Quarters or the
27 command post who didn't fly very often and needed an experienced person along to make sure
28 they didn't hurt themselves.

29 LC: And why were they flying at all?

30 RLH: Well, they had to. I mean, they had flying requirements.

31 LC: Okay.

1 RLH: They had to know, you know, if they were going to be in charge of the guys fighting
2 the war, they had to know what was going on in the war.

3 LC: Okay, and so you were supposed to take care of them?

4 RLH: Yeah, you know, look out for them.

5 LC: And after this incident, where you were looking at the mountain basically, you just
6 decided that you had to say when things were not right and you weren't going to...

7 RLH: That's right. I mean, I was much more vigilant, I can assure you.

8 LC: Let's talk about the time period before that incident when you were running to every
9 mission you could get. What was really motivating that?

10 RLH: Well, it filled the time very well.

11 LC: Okay.

12 RLH: And remember, in two hundred and fifty days, I flew two hundred and twenty nine
13 times. There were many days that you didn't fly at all, either from weather or you weren't on the
14 schedule, whatever. So there were days that I flew two or three times.

15 LC: Right.

16 RLH: But in the downtimes, I mean, it was boring. I mean, you could only drink so much.

17 LC: Right.

18 RLH: And the other jobs I had that you know, I would take care of them and they were just
19 kind of, get them out of the way and now what do I do. So you know, you actually wind up
20 probably getting in trouble more than you should just because you don't have anything to do.

21 LC: Yeah, just because there's nothing productive for you to be up to.

22 RLH: I mean, I went over to help the scheduler and I would go over and we had another
23 little duty where we were assigned to what they called the duty desk where you kept track of the
24 take off's and landings and make sure everybody got off on time, that the aircrew's were where
25 they were supposed to be and you logged them back in, made sure everybody got back. That was
26 maybe once or twice a week.

27 LC: But you didn't like sitting around doing nothing.

28 RLH: I did not. I made jobs.

29 LC: Were there other guys like you who just couldn't bear to kind of sit around and do
30 nothing or were you pretty much alone with that?

1 RLH: There were other people who were...it was usually more people who wanted to
2 make a name for themselves because they wanted to make a career out of it.

3 LC: I see, and so they needed as many missions.

4 RLH: Yeah, they wanted to fly and they wanted to fly with the important people and go on
5 the important missions. I mean, I'm going to be truthful with you, the entire year that I was there,
6 the missions that we flew, I probably flew at least five that were worth flying.

7 LC: What was the difference, can you explain the difference?

8 RLH: I mean, they used to send us out to blow down trees to make a landing zone for
9 helicopters.

10 LC: Using what weapons?

11 RLH: That same dumb bomb with an extended fuse that made it go off above the ground.

12 LC: Okay, right.

13 RLH: LZ Prep they called; Landing Zone Preparation.

14 LC: Right, and this was just stupid to you.

15 RLH: Think about how much that cost. The training of the people that went into it, the
16 machinery that they're using for something they're going to use for a few days and then abandon it.

17 LC: Did you also feel that you were taking unnecessary risks with that kind of...?

18 RLH: Oh, I know we were. I mean, we used to go out, and you know, the Forward Air
19 Controller when we got done bombing would say, 'Well, I think you got two hundred suspected
20 sniper locations.' Trees.

21 LC: That was what a tree was called?

22 RLH: Yeah. I mean, you had to have bomb damage assessment.

23 LC: Right, exactly. So, they had to quantify it somehow.

24 RLH: Yeah.

25 LC: Suspected, what was that, suspected sniper location?

26 RLH: Yeah.

27 LC: What did you like discern about how the military effort was functioning from that kind
28 of...?

29 RLH: Well, when you first go, of course, you're so wrapped up in being you and trying not
30 to die and all of that stuff, you don't worry about it too much, but after you've been there for a while,
31 you realize that a lot of what you're doing is wasted. I mean, you're not accomplishing anything;

1 you're not defeating an enemy. You know, it was a great comfort to even go out once in a while on
2 a troops in contact when you were actually trying to help someone or a search and rescue mission
3 when someone had been shot down and you're trying to get them out just because you felt like
4 finally you're doing something.

5 LC: Yeah, and the longer you're there, the meaningful missions mean...

6 RLH: They're very few and far between.

7 LC: And they mean more.

8 RLH: Sure.

9 LC: Yeah. What other kinds of missions didn't feel so meaningful to you, do you
10 remember?

11 RLH: Oh yeah. Well they used to send us up on the trails coming out of Laos, out from
12 North Vietnam out of Laos at night from twenty five or thirty thousand feet and a radar guidance
13 would put us on a heading and tell us what altitudes and airspeed to fly and tell us when to pickle
14 our bombs. And we were supposed to be bombing the trail or trucks. I mean, from twenty five
15 thousand feet? Come on.

16 LC: You had no idea what you were actually dropping the bombs on?

17 RLH: Never saw it, couldn't even see them hit, probably had a cloud cover underneath us.

18 LC: Right. That's the altitude now of a standard commercial aircraft cruising at twenty five
19 thousand feet.

20 RLH: Yeah. I mean, just a total waste.

21 LC: Did that disconnect between you and the target bother you?

22 RLH: Well, I didn't want to know generally.

23 LC: Okay.

24 RLH: I saw one person one time that I thought we might have killed and I still remember it.
25 And the rest of the time, it was 'some thing.' I mean, I am totally glad that I saw little to nothing of
26 the destruction that we must've caused.

27 LC: Did you think about that too?

28 RLH: Not until later because we didn't see it.

29 LC: Okay, but while you were there, you really didn't think that much about it?

30 RLH: No, I mean, it was an enemy and if we got somebody, okay, if we didn't, well, so be
31 it.

1 LC: We'll get them next time kind of thing. What about this one mission where you think
2 you might've seen someone that was hurt or killed?

3 RLH: Well, it happened to be another troops in contact.

4 LC: Okay.

5 RLH: They were fighting off the enemy and I actually saw a guy with a hat in a tree
6 shooting at me and pointed him out and we came back around and napalmed the heck out of the
7 tree.

8 LC: Yeah, so that was over for him.

9 RLH: I would assume so.

10 LC: But you remember that very clearly?

11 RLH: Oh yes.

12 LC: How do you feel when you remember it?

13 RLH: That particular time when we did it, he was trying to kill me.

14 LC: Yes. And so it was the right thing to do.

15 RLH: Sure.

16 LC: Okay.

17 RLH: I mean, now looking back, you know, they weren't doing anything more than trying
18 to do their jobs. They didn't want to die anymore than I wanted to die.

19 LC: So it's less clear now?

20 RLH: Yes.

21 LC: Yeah. The missions that you actually felt were important, you said there was just a
22 handful of them, what made them important?

23 RLH: Well two of the most memorable times that I put were search and rescue missions
24 when another F-4 had been shot down somewhere in Laos and surrounded by bad guys and we
25 had to go get them out. Our job was to lay down enough ordnance to cause the enemy to stop
26 firing at the helicopters that were going to go in and pick them up.

27 LC: Okay.

28 RLH: And when we were able to do that, I mean, first of all, it gave you the sense that no
29 matter what, they're going to try to get you out if you go down.

30 LC: Yes.

1 RLH: I mean, to see the number of people and aircraft that would go on something like
2 that, I mean literally hundreds.

3 LC: To get one or two guys out.

4 RLH: To get one person out

5 LC: And that happened to you a couple of times that you were involved in that kind of
6 effort?

7 RLH: Three times that I know of, two of them very, very memorable.

8 LC: Okay. Would one of those had involved Captain Rash?

9 RLH: Yes.

10 LC: Okay. Was he able to get out?

11 RLH: Rash was, yes.

12 LC: Okay, so you were flying basically cover for the helicopters that were going to insert
13 and...?

14 RLH: Actually, the close cover was flown by a little propeller driven job called an A-1
15 SPAD.

16 LC: Okay, yeah.

17 RLH: And they went down and shot the guys that were shooting rifles. Our job was to get
18 the big guns, the anti-aircraft guns that were shooting at the low flying airplanes.

19 LC: Okay. And you would get information about the locations of those guns from the
20 FAC?

21 RLH: From the Forward Air Controller, the FACs.

22 LC: Okay.

23 RLH: And they used white phosphorous rockets to fire and if they didn't hit exactly there,
24 they'd say, 'Hit one hundred meters north of my smoke or south of my smoke', whatever it may be.
25 So we would go down and sometimes we would see something and sometimes not, but the
26 Forward Air Controller being much lower and slower could see what was happening and could tell
27 when the firing stopped.

28 LC: Can you tell me anything about the incident with Captain Rash? What happened with
29 that? Was it at night?

30 RLH: Well, he was shot down late in the afternoon.

31 LC: Okay, and he was over Laos when that happened?

1 RLH: Yes, it was up in northern Laos in a place called Barrel Roll. And it was one of those
2 truly dumb things to do on his part. He was actually out of a base in Thailand and he was what
3 they called a fast FAC. He went up in North Vietnam where the light aircraft couldn't go and
4 patrolled the trails looking for targets. And at this time, we weren't going to North Vietnam much,
5 but he would go into the edge of North Vietnam or the Wolf FACs they were called, would go in and
6 come back down the trails looking for trucks coming out of North Vietnam or people.

7 LC: And if he saw a target...?

8 RLH: He would call in ordnance on them.

9 LC: Okay.

10 RLH: So that was their job. Well he had taken out another new guy who was a
11 backseater on his first ride as a Wolf FAC and was going to give him an orientation. And being the
12 stupid fighter pilots that we all were, he decided he would go down low through the paths and show
13 him the guns shooting at them. Well, they got them and the backseater was killed, Dennis Pugh.

14 LC: P-u-g-h?

15 RLH: P-u-g-h.

16 LC: Okay, and he was killed actually in the aircraft?

17 RLH: In the ejection.

18 LC: Oh, in the ejection. Okay.

19 RLH: Well, they didn't get him back so you know, I don't know exactly, but I mean Rash
20 said that he thought he was killed during the ejection.

21 LC: Okay.

22 RLH: Rash managed to get his nose back up and got slightly back into Laos and then
23 ejected and he was on the ground for thirty some odd hours. And he was shot down late one
24 afternoon and we didn't go up until the next day, but we did manage to suppress the fire enough
25 that they got him out while we were there. But I mean, when I say 'we', I mean a great number of
26 airplanes.

27 LC: Like, can you estimate again how many?

28 RLH: Oh probably, at any given time, ten of the A-1 SPADS down low, probably three or
29 four of the rescue helicopters and probably twenty or thirty fighter jets up above.

30 LC: Do you know much about his experience while he was on the ground and what
31 happened?

1 RLH: I can read about it. I mean, it's readily available on the Internet. He managed to just
2 hide and was actually directing some of the aircraft where they were being shot at from.

3 LC: So he had a radio that was still functioning?

4 RLH: Yeah, we all carried the little hand held radio.

5 LC: Okay, and his was still functional once he hit the ground?

6 RLH: Yes.

7 LC: What unit was he with; do you know?

8 RLH: Well, I can't remember what the...427 Tact Fighter Squadron I believe it was, the
9 Wolf FACs.

10 LC: Okay, and he was based out of Thailand?

11 RLH: Yeah, he was the front seater.

12 LC: There were other missions that you flew that were also in cover for search and
13 rescue?

14 RLH: Yes.

15 LC: Okay, do you want to say anything about either of those other missions?

16 RLH: They're not as memorable as that one. They were in South Vietnam. One I
17 remember, I can't remember the fellow's name, we did manage to get him out, but I mean, I think
18 they lost five aircraft during the rescue effort. We almost lost one. We were a two-ship flight and
19 our squadron commander was in the other airplane and he took a round through the fuel line as he
20 was pulling off the target. When we saw it, it was Captain Gray and I, and I mean, I started telling
21 him that you know, 'He's trailing smoke.' And we called him and told him that you're trailing smoke
22 and he said that he didn't have any lights so it looked like everything was okay and we pulled up
23 closer and we said, 'Well, it's not a fire, it looks like it's fuel.' And I mean, it was just coming out of
24 every hole on the airplane.

25 LC: Wow.

26 RLH: So we asked him to check his fuel and he could tell it was going down very fast and
27 he got a little concerned.

28 LC: I bet.

29 RLH: And started asking us to vector him back to the nearest base, so I got all the
30 heading and information and so forth and started calling people and telling them, you know,
31 'Mayday, mayday, we got one that's hit.' And we got him back to a base called Chu Lai, which was

1 a Marine base and got him on final and we followed them down as low as we could go. We were
2 afraid that they were going to run out of fuel and flame out. I mean, it was not that the airplane was
3 burning or not flying, it was just they were going to run out of fuel.

4 LC: And be unable to execute a safe landing.

5 RLH: That's right. And he actually landed and the engines flamed out at the far end of the
6 runway.

7 LC: Wow, that was close. When you say vector him in, can you explain to someone who
8 wouldn't understand that language what that means?

9 RLH: Well vectoring means simply getting him a heading and going back the correct
10 direction and then started giving him closer directions on how to get to the Air Force base that he
11 was going to. We had, if you'll recall, I mentioned the TACAN, Tactical Air Navigation, which is a
12 radio system, but often when you get down low, you lose lock because it's a line of sight.

13 LC: Okay.

14 RLH: And he had gotten down low and he was semi-panicked, very concerned. I don't
15 know panic's the right word, but he was not thinking as clearly as he should because he was
16 worrying about the airplane and worrying about his backseater and worrying about himself.

17 LC: Right.

18 RLH: So we had to get him lined up on final and make sure that he was on pretty much
19 the glide slope and we could see the base. We were up above him and just kind of gave him
20 headings to get him in close enough to see the base to land.

21 LC: Which gave him one less thing that he had to manage.

22 RLH: That's right, that's right.

23 LC: You were just giving him the information.

24 RLH: Make sure that all of his landing gear came down; he didn't have any hung bombs
25 and that sort of thing.

26 LC: Right. And so he was safe and what about his backseater?

27 RLH: They were fine.

28 LC: They were both fine.

29 RLH: That was their last flight, their scheduled last flight in Vietnam.

30 LC: Oh really?

1 RLH: And they gave them a choice that they could wait and have their airplane repaired
2 and bring it home, or they could catch a ride and they said, 'Nope, we'll catch a ride.'
3 LC: Yeah, thanks, we're out of here.
4 RLH: Thanks, but no thanks.
5 LC: Yeah, I think I might've done the same thing.
6 RLH: As a matter of fact, that particular person that was flying that plane was our
7 squadron commander and later became a major general.
8 LC: Really? Would you say his last name, do you know?
9 RLH: Burns.
10 LC: Burns.
11 RLH: Ken Burns.
12 LC: Okay. And so that was his last flight as scheduled and so he was very short time,
13 very short time, as short time as you get.
14 RLH: That's right.
15 LC: Okay. Were you observing people who were short timing and can you comment on
16 that?
17 RLH: It's not like the horror stories you hear.
18 LC: Okay.
19 RLH: I mean, we made jokes about it, you know. You had a hundred day calendar and
20 you marked off each day of the last hundred days you were there. We called it your short
21 calendar. And the blacker it got, the closer you were to getting home, you know. And we used to
22 kid people and they'd say something, you know, 'I got ninety eight days.' And I said, 'Man, I'm so
23 short, if I fart, I'll kick dust on your boots.'
24 (Laughter)
25 RLH: 'I'm so short; I don't even have time for a long conversation.'
26 LC: Right. (Laughter)
27 RLH: 'I got fewer days left than you got months.'
28 LC: And so it was kind of a black humor sort of thing and you guys would play with it and
29 play with each other around it.
30 RLH: Oh yeah.
31 LC: Yeah.

1 RLH: And they make a big deal out of your last flight. You know, they'd send the fire
2 trucks out and shoot water all over it and pour champagne on you.

3 LC: And celebrate the fact that you were getting out of there.

4 RLH: That's right.

5 LC: Yeah. Ronnie, can we change gears for just a second. I want to ask you about
6 mission constraints. You eluded to this a couple of times about the fact that there were politically
7 imposed no go areas and North Vietnam was, at the time you were there, one of those areas. Can
8 you talk about how that felt to be actually a flyer and know that you couldn't actually go to the
9 enemy's home turf?

10 RLH: Well, it was very disconcerting that we couldn't take the fight to them. We had to
11 wait until the trucks came down or the enemies were in contact. It was totally defensive. There
12 was no offense or very little offense involved. We were just kind of in a holding pattern. At the
13 time, we 'still' had no troops in Laos. Well, we went over to help get them out all the time.

14 LC: Right, so you knew that that was a cover or something.

15 RLH: We knew they were there. You know, they called them Long Range
16 Reconnaissance Patrol, LRRPS.

17 LC: Yeah.

18 RLH: They went over and their job was to watch the trails and see the trucks come down,
19 that sort of thing.

20 LC: Right.

21 RLH: And once in a while, we'd have to go over and fly close air support to get them out of
22 there.

23 LC: Yes.

24 RLH: So we knew they were there. And truthfully, we weren't bombing Laos then.

25 LC: It wasn't known in public.

26 RLH: That's right.

27 LC: Right, okay. And what about North Vietnam; did you feel that you guys ought to have
28 been able to...?

29 RLH: If we were going to fight a war, why did we have to fight it on our own territory and
30 not on enemy territory? We used to get so aggravated, we would be sent up to the passes coming
31 out of North Vietnam and we would go down very low and mine the pass exit coming out of North

1 Vietnam. We weren't allowed to go into Vietnam. So we would have to go down and get in the
2 weeds where we knew there were guns shooting at us and lay these stupid mines that all they had
3 to do was run a bulldozer through there and it set them all off.

4 LC: Well these are just surface lying mines.

5 RLH: Right.

6 LC: Okay.

7 RLH: And I mean really dumb things. I mean, that was a very dangerous mission.

8 LC: Yes, because those passes were heavily guarded.

9 RLH: Heavily guarded, heavily guarded. And it's not like we did any good. So if we ever
10 got the chance that we were bombing anywhere near North Vietnam, we used to do things like
11 save two bombs and drive right up to the border and pull the nose up and just loft those two bombs
12 as far into North Vietnam as we could throw them.

13 LC: Did you really? And what kind of feeling did that give you?

14 RLH: Like maybe we were doing a little something.

15 LC: Okay, you hadn't you know, violated the rules.

16 RLH: We hadn't gone into North Vietnam.

17 LC: Right, right. Did you feel like you were accomplishing a little something on the side
18 that would...?

19 RLH: We were getting away with something.

20 LC: Okay, and maybe helping guys on the ground.

21 RLH: Yeah, you know, hopefully we hit something.

22 LC: Yeah.

23 RLH: Or at least we let them know we're there.

24 LC: Yeah. What was your opinion of President Nixon? Was it changing at this point?

25 RLH: Oh, I had a very low opinion of him. By the time he resigned, I was so sick and tired
26 of that man.

27 LC: Yeah, and this is all pre-Watergate and anything to do with his domestic problems, but
28 while you were actually in country...

29 RLH: While I was in Vietnam, I mean, we held him and Robert McNamara responsible for
30 the wasted effort. I mean, we didn't talk about it a great deal, but we all knew.

31 LC: Right.

1 RLH: You know, how can you win a war waiting for them to attack you.

2 LC: Did you have feelings about Henry Kissinger?

3 RLH: Well, I felt like he was one of the few good guys.

4 LC: Okay, why was that?

5 RLH: Because he was at least there in Paris trying to get us out of this mess.

6 LC: Okay, and did you think that that was an honest negotiating effort?

7 RLH: I thought that he was probably being told to do whatever it took to get us out.

8 LC: Okay.

9 RLH: I thought he was in a very untenable position. I don't know that he really believed in
10 what he was doing or felt that the North Vietnamese were negotiating as fairly as he was, but that
11 was not his job. His job was to get us out.

12 LC: Right. So you were drawing a distinction at that point anyway between Nixon and
13 Kissinger and what they were.

14 RLH: Oh yes.

15 LC: Okay, and what was it about Nixon that made you think that he wasn't playing the role
16 that you had felt he would when you voted for him?

17 RLH: Well, while I was in Vietnam was when the wind down began. And while I didn't
18 disagree that we needed to get out of there if we weren't going to go over there to win the war, I
19 thought there was never an honest effort made to win the war. I felt like the restrictions that were
20 put on; we can't bomb North Vietnam, we can't do this, we can't do that, we have to have someone
21 that clears us on every single target, every target is sent from Saigon from the generals.

22 LC: Right.

23 RLH: Early in the war, they used to go [after] what they called look for targets of
24 opportunity. They'd just go look for something to bomb. Lord, we couldn't do that.

25 LC: You mean the pilots had restrictions.

26 RLH: Yeah.

27 LC: Right.

28 RLH: We couldn't do that. If we saw a truck, we'd have to get permission to bomb it.

29 LC: And how long would something like that...did you make calls like that?

30 RLH: Very rarely because it would take too long.

31 LC: I was going to ask you, what would you...?

1 RLH: It'd be long gone before we were allowed to do it. We had to have a Forward Air
2 Controller to mark every single target.

3 LC: So you could never just kind of let go when something, if you knew there was a troop
4 concentration or something like that.

5 RLH: Either under positive radar control being told when to drop the bomb or had a
6 Forward Air Controller marking the targets saying, 'Hit right there.'

7 LC: Okay, positive control, can you explain that? How did that work actually?

8 RLH: Well, if it was airborne control, I mean, they were vectoring us, giving us altitudes,
9 telling us the airspeed to fly and pickle your bombs now without us ever seeing anything. We were
10 just kind of a machine.

11 LC: You're just sort of the remote control.

12 RLH: Yeah. I mean, they could've done that with a...

13 LC: With a drum.

14 RLH: With a drum.

15 LC: Why do you think they didn't? I mean, that technology was coming?

16 RLH: I don't think they had the numbers of the vehicles that they needed. And back then;
17 we didn't have the technology. I mean, you still had to have someone to be able to see what it is
18 that you're about to try to bomb.

19 LC: Right. What about smart bombs? Those were just coming online too. Did you have
20 any feeling about whether those should've been used in Vietnam?

21 RLH: Well, they were used.

22 LC: Okay.

23 RLH: But they were very limited supply. They came out somewhere around '67. First of
24 all, the first bombs, first several versions of them were strictly visual. I mean, you could only use
25 them if you could see the target. And a lot of times, the weather was very bad over there, either
26 from clouds or haze or smoke or what have you. So they were a little limited. But when they were
27 used, they were extremely effective.

28 LC: And what kinds of targets were they actually deployed against?

29 RLH: Usually hard targets; railroad tracks, railroad bridges, steel mills.

30 LC: Antiaircraft displacements at all?

31 RLH: No, not so much of that.

1 LC: Too small.

2 RLH: They had a different airplane called the Wild Weasel they used for that that had a
3 guided bomb.

4 LC: Right. And I think you mentioned in your questionnaire, you seemed to think that cost
5 was also a factor in terms of the deployment of those smart bombs and how many were used.

6 RLH: Well, I think cost to some extent, but I don't think they were available.

7 LC: There weren't that many of them.

8 RLH: They just didn't have them. And I mean, really all it was, was a kit they added onto
9 a dumb bomb. It wasn't like a whole new bomb created.

10 LC: Okay.

11 RLH: It was a kit that was added on that gave a guidance.

12 LC: Did you guys at Phu Cat ever have those?

13 RLH: No.

14 LC: Okay.

15 RLH: We had them in Germany when I got there.

16 LC: Which was later after you left Vietnam.

17 RLH: Right. They had a few of them in Thailand.

18 LC: And what targets were they choosing to use in Northern Laos, do you know?

19 RLH: Well they were not used I don't think in Laos. They were used in Vietnam to some
20 extents. They were used in the passes coming out of North Vietnam to primarily to try to knock out
21 the antiaircraft sites that were there.

22 LC: Okay.

23 RLH: So you could go down and do your mining and look for trucks and so forth and so
24 on, but there were just not that many over there.

25 LC: If you had to say what weapons you had used the most often on the missions that you
26 were on primarily when you first were over there, the first several months you were over there,
27 what were the most popular weapons that you used?

28 RLH: Well, it was almost...

29 LC: Almost all five hundred pounds?

30 RLH: Five hundred pound dumb bombs.

31 LC: Okay, and napalm?

1 RLH: We did use napalm.

2 LC: Okay, how was the napalm configured? What was that weapon actually like?

3 RLH: Well, it was almost like a fuel tank.

4 LC: Okay.

5 RLH: It had very small fins on the back of it. It was designed to tumble when it came off

6 the aircraft. It was large, in physical size much larger than a five hundred pound bomb. I don't

7 remember the exact size. It wasn't nearly as heavy.

8 LC: Almost like a propane tank inside?

9 RLH: Yeah, and it was jellied gasoline. And I mean, it would burn anything. It burned at a

10 very intense heat. We used those against things like, if you had a truck, you could certainly use it

11 against that, but you could use it against troops, but only if you were a pretty good distance away

12 from the friendlies. You have to remember that not only did it burn, but it sucked all the air out of

13 the area. I mean, it could kill you just from sucking all the air out of you.

14 LC: Consuming all the oxygen by the fast burn.

15 RLH: Right. So you had to be very careful. So we didn't use it that much.

16 LC: What is a CBU?

17 RLH: That is a Cluster Bomb Unit and all it is is a canister that holds hundreds of small

18 bomblets that's used for a large target. You know, either troops or very effective against trucks

19 because it doesn't require the accuracy of a single bomb.

20 LC: Okay, you don't have to hit them directly.

21 RLH: Right, it's an area saturation type thing rather than a pinpoint type munition.

22 LC: And those were used with some frequency too?

23 RLH: Yeah, we used those a lot against the anti-aircraft guns because you didn't have to

24 hit exactly on top of them.

25 LC: Okay.

26 RLH: We used them against non-hardened targets like trucks. We used it some against

27 troops, but not too much because of the inherent inaccuracy because they spread out a very great

28 deal because all it was was a canister that dropped off the airplane, opened up, and all these little

29 bomblets fell out.

30 LC: Did you ever see one of these taken apart?

31 RLH: Yeah.

1 LC: Okay, how big were the bomblets inside?

2 RLH: Oh small, maybe four, five, six inches at the outside.

3 LC: Like maybe the size of a fist or a grenade or something.

4 RLH: Size of a baseball or a softball. Nah, smaller than a softball, baseball size.

5 LC: And were those in effect shrapnel dispersal?

6 RLH: The way they were designed, they were round like a baseball, but they had

7 contoured pieces across them that were designed to be shrapnel.

8 LC: Okay.

9 RLH: We also carried the same dumb bombs as I mentioned before, the extended fuses.

10 LC: Right.

11 RLH: They were about three feet long and those were designed to...the fuse would cause

12 the bomb to go off above ground rather than bury into the ground before it went off or blow up

13 something on the ground. Those were antipersonnel devices.

14 LC: And they were supposed to detonate about how far off the ground was ideal?

15 RLH: Three feet.

16 LC: And just blow to the sides?

17 RLH: Yeah.

18 LC: Okay. Would those leave a crater?

19 RLH: Not nearly like the hard bombs, not like the dumb bombs would.

20 LC: Okay.

21 RLH: They were still just five hundred pound bombs, but they had this extended fuse on.

22 LC: You said that was about three feet long?

23 RLH: Yes.

24 LC: Wow. Were there special units or men with particular training who actually loaded the

25 weapons onto your planes?

26 RLH: Oh yeah.

27 LC: Okay. What were those units called?

28 RLH: Well, they were weapons loaders, a real technical name.

29 LC: Okay. (Laughter)

30 RLH: They drove a little thing called a jammer that carried bombs. It was like a very low to

31 the ground forklift. This thing had prongs that stuck out on the front that actually had a cradle to

1 pick up the munition, take it under the airplane and lift it up, and then there was another guy who
2 turned the wrench and locked it in. These guys were the hot rodders. They loved that job driving
3 this little cart.

4 LC: And they had to act fast, right?

5 RLH: Oh yeah. I mean, they would go like crazy.

6 LC: Because you guys would be scrambled to a mission potentially.

7 RLH: They had to reload as soon as we got back.

8 LC: Okay, and so the aircraft would sit loaded.

9 RLH: Yes.

10 LC: Okay. And did they have to switch out munitions different times, like if you had to go
11 on a mission that required napalm?

12 RLH: No, what they did is they had four aircraft at a time sitting alert.

13 LC: Okay.

14 RLH: Two hard munitions, two soft munitions.

15 LC: Okay.

16 RLH: The hard munitions would be just the dumb bombs.

17 LC: Right.

18 RLH: Soft munitions would be half napalm and half CBUs.

19 LC: Okay, I see. So the aircraft are sitting there ready for you.

20 RLH: Yeah, and they would scramble you based on what their need was.

21 LC: Okay, to an aircraft that had a particular munition.

22 RLH: No, you were assigned to an aircraft.

23 LC: Okay.

24 RLH: But they scrambled the crews.

25 LC: Oh, the crews; oh okay.

26 RLH: Yeah.

27 LC: Oh okay, so that's why sometimes you would be called out and sometimes not.

28 RLH: Right, there would be eight guys on alert at a time, four airplanes; two with soft, two
29 with hard.

30 LC: Got it, okay.

31 RLH: And Sabre.

- 1 LC: And Sabre, up to the ditch.
- 2 RLH: Yeah.
- 3 LC: But no further. (Laughter) Okay, Ronnie, let's take a break for a minute.
- 4 RLH: Okay.

Interview with Ronnie Lee Houston
Session 2 of 2
February 5, 2004

1 Laura Calkins: This is Dr. Laura Calkins of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.
2 I'm continuing my oral history interview with Captain Ronnie Lee Houston of the United States Air
3 Force. Today's date is the 5th of February 2004. I'm in the interview room; Special Collections
4 Library on the campus of Texas Tech and Captain Houston is in The Woodlands, Texas, again.
5 How are you, Sir?

6 Ronnie Lee Houston: I am well.

7 LC: Very good. I wonder if you can clarify for me just a couple of points. First of all, I
8 want to make sure that I'm correct in thinking you were continuously based at Phu Cat, you did not
9 move to another base at any time, is that right?

10 RLH: That is correct.

11 LC: Okay. Sir, I want to ask you about whether you attended or had an opportunity to
12 attend any USO shows?

13 RLH: Sure. We had at least one, if not two.

14 LC: Okay.

15 RLH: I'm certain we had one. It was the Miss America. They seemed to always come.

16 LC: Do you remember any details about that?

17 RLH: I remember them arriving, I remember the show, I remember the aircraft flyover
18 during the show, I remember exactly where it was held and I'm trying to recall that there were some
19 Hollywood stars too, but I don't really remember them.

20 LC: Was Bob Hope there?

21 RLH: No.

22 LC: Okay. The Miss America shows, would this have actually been at Phu Cat?

23 RLH: Yes, held in the open.

24 LC: In the open?

25 RLH: Yes.

26 LC: Who generally attended? Were they base people?

27 RLH: Everybody.

28 LC: Or people coming in from the field or do you know?

1 RLH: No, well, they were some from the field, but it's primarily the people at the base,
2 more Air Force than anything else.

3 LC: What was the mood? Can you describe it?

4 RLH: Oh, it was very...it was a fun time and everyone was happy to see them there and
5 had good seating. The weather of course, very warm and no one seemed to mind. It was just a
6 fun time.

7 LC: Did you attend as part of the unit or did you just kind of float in by yourself?

8 RLH: Oh no, we went by ourselves.

9 LC: Okay.

10 RLH: Of course, I went with friends.

11 LC: Sure. How long was the performance, do you have any idea?

12 RLH: I'm going to say it was somewhere around an hour and a half to a couple of hours.

13 LC: What kinds of stuff did they do?

14 RLH: A lot of singing, a lot of dancing, they had a band, that type of thing.

15 LC: Yeah.

16 RLH: It seems that they had some comedian also. It's been so long.

17 LC: Sure. Yeah, can you talk about how you felt having, you know, civilians come from
18 the States who didn't have to be there? Did you value what they were doing?

19 RLH: Oh absolutely. Number one, remember, we had no American women stationed at
20 Phu Cat.

21 LC: Yes sir.

22 RLH: So it was a pleasure just to see American women and with them to take time to
23 come, I mean, I don't think most people would have been there given a choice and they came by
24 choice.

25 LC: Right. And, I mean, they were civilians in a war zone.

26 RLH: Sure.

27 LC: I think it's quite admirable that you know, people took the risks they took. Sir, I want
28 to ask you a little bit also about any R&R breaks that you had during your tour.

29 RLH: Well, I had two official R&Rs and a couple of unofficial.

30 LC: Okay.

1 RLH: The two official was the...everyone in Vietnam had a chance for a one week R&R,
2 given a choice of several different places, among which were Bangkok, Australia, and Hawaii.
3 Being married at the time, I of course selected Hawaii and I met my wife there that was later in my
4 tour. And I did that on purpose so I'd be getting closer to the time to go home.

5 LC: I see.

6 RLH: Would've been in October of 1970 and I met my wife there.

7 LC: Okay.

8 RLH: She came a little bit early and stayed a little bit longer. And we also had a sort of
9 a...we called it a boon doggle trip that was a regularly scheduled once per week C-47 that transited
10 taking supplies or bringing supplies, I should say, from Hong Kong. And they usually traveled back
11 fairly empty and we were allowed to put our names on a list and try to get on the plane going to
12 Hong Kong. Of course, you came back trying to sit around and make room despite all of the
13 washers and dryers and all of the other stuff that they were bringing in, but I got to do that also.
14 That was about a three-day trip.

15 LC: Do you know about when you were over there?

16 RLH: That would've been in; I'm going to say about November because it was getting
17 close to the end of my tour.

18 LC: What were your impressions of Hong Kong?

19 RLH: Oh, it was nothing but fun. It was one of those places where you go expecting
20 people to try to take your money and they do so; although, it was very inexpensive at the time. The
21 dollar was still fairly strong and we were met at the airplane by a local tailor with a Volkswagen van
22 to give us a ride to the hotel. So we knew up front that, you know, here's the guy that wants to sell
23 us all our clothing.

24 LC: Sure.

25 RLH: And he took us out to dinner that night. He had reservations made for us at a hotel,
26 and of course, it happened to be fortunately right across the street from his place of business. And
27 our rooms weren't quite ready, so why don't we come over and have a drink first, just fortuitous.

28 LC: As it were.

29 RLH: Right. I mean, it was an all and all an enjoyable time.

30 LC: Did you order up some suits of clothing?

1 RLH: Oh yeah, sure. Let's see, I think I ordered two suits and I also got a new uniform,
2 pair of boots, and a pair of shoes.

3 LC: And this is November and you had less than two months I think or just about two
4 months left.

5 RLH: Right.

6 LC: And were you doing this in anticipation of getting out of Vietnam and getting, you
7 know, a different...?

8 RLH: Well, somewhat, but I mean, the things you did when you went to Hong Kong were
9 you ate well, you dressed well, and you bought your stereo gear.

10 LC: Did you get any sound equipment?

11 RLH: Oh of course.

12 LC: What did you get?

13 RLH: A full load.

14 LC: Really? What kind of stuff did you buy?

15 RLH: Oh, back then, it was reel to reel tape decks and of course, the amplifier and the
16 speakers and so forth and so on, all of the attachments to put them together.

17 LC: And were you primarily interested in listening to music or were you...?

18 RLH: Music.

19 LC: Okay, what kind of music do you listen to?

20 RLH: Oh, it was in the old rock and roll days.

21 LC: Sure. Were you kind of a rock guy?

22 RLH: Then I was, yeah.

23 LC: What they now call classic rock.

24 RLH: Yeah, that's exactly. I hear all those songs all the time on classic rock stations.

25 LC: Yeah. You said there were an unofficial leave or two in there. What do you mean by
26 that?

27 RLH: Well, we had a program that weekly, and there were two squadrons, two-fighter
28 squadrons stationed at Phu Cat.

29 LC: Yes sir.

30 RLH: Weekly, one squadron and then the following week, the other squadron went to the
31 Philippines to take missiles that were getting past their useful life. And we would take the load of

1 missiles and they would have the warheads removed of course, but we got to go to the Philippines
2 and do live fire over the Philippines Sea. They were going to get rid of the missiles anyway, so
3 they figured that was a good chance for us to practice. And that was about a three-day trip.

4 LC: How many times did you do that sir?

5 RLH: That I did once and I was very fortunate to get to go because as I say, our whole
6 squadron would've only been on twenty-six trips the whole year.

7 LC: Right.

8 RLH: And then sort of because I was a friend of the scheduler, we also took aircraft to
9 Taiwan for what they called inspect and repair as necessary which was IRAN, we called it. And
10 you delivered aircraft over there and they sort of went through it and overhauled it and then sent it
11 back, you know, making sure that the wings weren't going to fall off and bringing everything up to
12 standard and so forth. And as luck would have it, there was an aircraft there that was ready to be
13 returned, but they wanted us to take it to Japan for some testing on a potting compound for
14 electrical connections that they were having trouble with breaking down in the heat and humidity in
15 Vietnam.

16 LC: Okay.

17 RLH: So we delivered an aircraft to Taiwan, spent the night, and then went to Japan and
18 wound up spending about four days there.

19 LC: What base did you fly into at Japan?

20 RLH: Yokota Airbase.

21 LC: Can you describe your time there? You spent a couple of three days there.

22 RLH: I think I spent three or four days. That was also in November, it was cold.

23 LC: Okay.

24 RLH: Particularly, come having left Vietnam.

25 LC: Right.

26 RLH: And we spent a lot of time at the Officer's Club. A fellow that I was with seemed to
27 be more interested in resting and doing nothing. I sort of searched around and found someone I
28 knew and he at least took me into Tokyo for a little while and out to eat. But I mean, we didn't do
29 much and it was pretty much because the fellow I was with just didn't want to do anything.

30 LC: Was he would you say exhausted or antisocial or what?

1 RLH: No, I think if I recall, he had been there before and didn't need to do all the things I
2 needed to do.

3 LC: Oh. Did you feel a little bit like you didn't get to do the things you wanted to while you
4 were there?

5 RLH: Oh absolutely.

6 LC: Yeah. What was your impression of Tokyo though, you did go down there?

7 RLH: It was big and it smelled.

8 LC: It smelled. (Laughter)

9 RLH: And they drive on the wrong side of the road.

10 LC: Yes sir.

11 RLH: I was a little intimidated because, you know, first of all, I came from a small town and
12 secondly, I'd been off in a war zone for ten months, so having that kind of freedom to come and go,
13 it was a little scary.

14 LC: What were you able to do? Did you go shopping?

15 RLH: I did a little shopping. I also went out to eat at a little sushi place and I visited a
16 couple of friends that were there and we did a lot of shopping also. They had the Pacific
17 Exchange, which is the Base Exchange for the whole pacific area where they ship things out of, so
18 it was like, you know, a candy store.

19 LC: Did you ever have a chance to go back to Japan?

20 RLH: No, never did.

21 LC: Okay.

22 RLH: I passed through there when I was coming home from Vietnam and got gas and that
23 was it.

24 LC: Okay. Is it somewhere you'd yet like to return to?

25 RLH: Not really.

26 LC: Okay. Sir, I want to ask you a little bit about the early parts of your tour, much of
27 which we talked about last time. But I'm interested in your general assessments of the enemy
28 weaponry that you based and that you confronted. Can you talk about the anti-aircraft equipment
29 that you were basing?

30 RLH: Well, primarily when I was there since we were not bombing into North Vietnam, we
31 spent probably sixty or seventy percent of the time in South Vietnam, the rest of the time at least at

1 the beginning in Laos. And most of it was either small arms, which is one man carried rifle type
2 things, but they also as we got closer up to the DMZ and into northern part of Laos had a radar
3 guided light antiaircraft, 37, 57mm, and you really couldn't see that much. You could see some flat
4 puffs I guess you would say, but you would see it more at night because they used tracers and the
5 37 and the 57, you could tell the difference. 37 is much faster and it looked almost like someone's
6 firing at you with a light machine gun is what it really looked like. But, I mean, we never faced any
7 surface to air missiles other than they tracked us once in a while.

8 LC: Do you remember any of those incidents when you were actually...I gather the
9 terminologies locked onto.

10 RLH: Oh sure.

11 LC: Can you describe how you...well first of all, what did that look like in the control panel
12 in front of you?

13 RLH: Well, we had what was called a RHAW, R-H-A-W, Radar Homing and Warning
14 scope, and it was nothing more than an LED light that would indicate the bearing to the radar that
15 was tracking you. It had a series of indicator. One was just simply a tracking mode where they're
16 just sweeping the general area. One was a lock on mode where they painted just you and if it was
17 a surface to air missile, they also had a firing mode, which was much more intense. And what we
18 saw primarily were just the tracking mode and lock on from small AAA. When they came on,
19 primarily at night again because in the daytime, you really couldn't see them that well. At night,
20 you could see them; you could see where the fire was coming from. And I mean, being young,
21 foolish, and bulletproof and immortal, I mean, we actually went up and what we called trolled for
22 them. I mean, we tried to get them to track us because once we could figure out where they were,
23 we could follow the beam to get on a heading and then as we got closer to them and they began to
24 fire, we could actually see where they were firing from and then it was like, 'I got you.' I mean, we
25 called it chicken races. I mean, if we had the proper ordnance and even if it wasn't the proper
26 ordnance or whatever ordnance we had, I mean, we would actually literally go hunt for them, troll
27 for them, and when we got them to come up, I mean, we would track down the beam looking for
28 them to try to blow them up.

29 LC: And was there ever a time when you were successful doing that do you think?

30 RLH: Well, we shot them up.

31 LC: You hit them?

1 RLH: Yeah. Well, I would say so; either that or we scared them into dropping the fire.

2 LC: Okay. How did it feel when you would get one of those indications that you had been

3 locked onto?

4 RLH: Actually, it was sort of an adrenaline rush.

5 LC: Okay.

6 RLH: I mean, it was somewhat exhilarating. We were foolish enough to think that we

7 were going to always get them before they got us.

8 LC: And you knew that wasn't really true though in some part of your mind though, didn't

9 you sir?

10 RLH: You know, it wasn't something you considered.

11 LC: Really?

12 RLH: I never really thought I was going to get hit, even the couple of times we came back

13 with holes in the aircraft, we were probably more surprised than anything else.

14 LC: Is that right? Tell me about one of those times when you found holes in the aircraft.

15 Did you find that on inspection or did the maintenance guys find it?

16 RLH: No, we pulled into the refueling pit and popped the canopies and shut the engine

17 down and the crew chief was out there to refuel us yelling at us, 'What have you done to my

18 airplane?' And we went back and looked and then the vertical stabilator, stabilizer, pardon me,

19 was a hole probably, I don't know, eighteen inches, two feet; real big hunk out of it.

20 LC: Wow, yeah. Did that affect performance as you were flying that you noticed?

21 RLH: No, never noticed it, never noticed it. Didn't know it till we got back.

22 LC: Did you have a theory about what weapon had done that?

23 RLH: Probably a 37mm. If it had been a 57, it probably would knock the whole tail off.

24 LC: Wow.

25 RLH: We came back a couple of times with small arms from, you know, 7.62mm, but

26 that's small potatoes.

27 LC: Yeah, would that be insufficient usually?

28 RLH: Yeah, that was nothing more than required a patch.

29 LC: Sir, you talked about flying missions over Laos. Can you characterize the missions in

30 general or break them out into the different types of missions you were flying over Laos?

1 RLH: Well in Laos, most often when we went there was at night looking for trucks, which
2 was sort of ineffectual because we didn't really have very good munitions to do so. But we would
3 have gunships or sometimes we had listening posts that were nothing more than long range
4 reconnaissance patrols out there that heard or saw trucks and called us in on them. And we
5 really...short of setting one on fire, you never really knew whether you hit it or not. I mean, we
6 would go out and bomb the heck out of them, but it seemed like kind of a waste to be truthful
7 because you couldn't see what you were doing.

8 LC: Did you think that the weapons that you were applying were greater than the targets
9 that you were striking? Is that what you mean?

10 RLH: No, generally speaking, in order to get a truck, you need something that's pretty
11 area wide intensive, like a CBU, Cluster Bomb Units. And too often we would have a hard bomb or
12 anti-personnel bomb or something like that, that it's more pinpoint than area wide.

13 LC: Sir, you also mentioned in the material that you filled out for us that you did think you
14 flew over North Vietnam on two different missions, do you remember that?

15 RLH: Oh yeah.

16 LC: Can you talk about those missions? When do you think that happened in your tour?

17 RLH: One of them that was intentional was a B-52 strike just above the DMZ. And we
18 would go up through the DMZ to the border as we were supposed to be cover for them in case any
19 MiGs came along, but we never saw them. But we would drive up just past the border and turn
20 around and come back. And we carried a load of ordnance with us and we made sure we dropped
21 it before we got out of North Vietnam. But, I mean, it was kind of a waste. Now the other time, we
22 did go up into the passes in on the far side of the passes in North Vietnam and coming back
23 through the passes to lay mines in those passes for trucks coming out of there.

24 LC: Right.

25 RLH: That was normally a mission handled by the planes out of Thailand because it was
26 kind of far for us. But on at least once if not two occasions, we did that.

27 LC: On the day that you were tasked with that mining operation, do you know why you
28 were called; your squadron was called?

29 RLH: We were called because it was during the dry season and the trucks and materials
30 coming out of North Vietnam were building and they couldn't get enough aircraft out of Thailand to

1 do sufficient mining, so they called on us to do it also. And it was not something we were that well
2 trained at.

3 LC: How much training had you had in dropping that kind of weapon?

4 RLH: We had a briefing prior to.

5 LC: Okay.

6 RLH: On the parameters to drop it. I mean, there's not a great deal of difference other
7 than those things you fly straight and level and you know, drop them.

8 LC: And where were you trying to lay them specifically, you mentioned passes?

9 RLH: That would've been what's called Ban Phanop pass. B-a-n P-h-a-n-o-p, which is
10 southern part of North Vietnam, not too far above the DMZ. It was a pass through the mountains.

11 LC: And your understanding was that that was being used as a through way for resupply
12 by the North Vietnamese.

13 RLH: Oh absolutely it was. It was not just my understanding; we knew it for a fact.

14 LC: Okay. Based on what kinds of information?

15 RLH: Intelligence information. They had listening posts, they had other aircraft that laid
16 sensors.

17 LC: Acoustic sensors?

18 RLH: Acoustic sensors. So, I mean, they knew where the activity was.

19 LC: Okay. And as an officer who was flying in these kinds of missions, were you giving
20 briefings that gave you some sense of the intelligence information that the mission would be based
21 on?

22 RLH: Yeah, they would tell us during the intelligence portion of the briefing, not the
23 mission briefing.

24 LC: Okay.

25 RLH: Prior to the mission briefing, we always went to what we called Intel or intelligence
26 office, and they told us what the target was, why, what we were looking for.

27 LC: Okay.

28 RLH: And they gave us any information on known enemy activity in the area or guns or
29 what have you. That's when they would tell us that this is the activity that's going on and this is
30 what we're targeting.

1 LC: Now, at those intelligence briefings, would that be done by an intelligence officer
2 assigned to your squadron?

3 RLH: No, they were assigned to the wing.

4 LC: Oh okay.

5 RLH: They would do both squadrons.

6 LC: Okay, and you know, these were obviously Air Force personnel, but from what
7 branch, do you know?

8 RLH: Well, they were unrated, they weren't pilots or navigators. I guess they were just
9 trained intelligence officers.

10 LC: Okay. And so typically, for a mission, you would have these two different briefings of
11 the intelligence and then the actual mission construction?

12 RLH: Right, that's correct. We went to the Intel shop. Actually, we had three briefings.

13 LC: Okay.

14 RLH: Because we went to the Intel shop and got the Intel briefing. Immediately following
15 that, we would get a weather briefing from a meteorologist.

16 LC: Okay.

17 RLH: On expected weather in the area. And then we would go back to our squadron
18 building, which they were very close to one another and that's when we would discuss mission
19 specifics.

20 LC: Now the weather information that you got, was it generally accurate?

21 RLH: Yeah, they were pretty good at it. But remember too, I mean, there were literally
22 hundreds of aircraft over there, so they had up to the date visual information.

23 LC: That's true.

24 RLH: I mean, yes, they could forecast, is it getting worse or is it getting better, but I mean,
25 you knew what the weather was because there was somebody there.

26 LC: Somebody had just been there.

27 RLH: Sure.

28 LC: And so you were really getting more or less what we now call real time information
29 about the weather conditions.

30 RLH: The weather at least, yes. We didn't get real time information on how intense the
31 activity going on was. It was probably twelve hours old.

1 LC: Okay. And can you describe a mission briefing? Would there be more than just the
2 crews who were expecting to fly attending those?

3 RLH: No, that was just for them.

4 LC: Okay. And how were they organized? Pretend you're going to give one for a minute,
5 the person...who would be giving these actually?

6 RLH: Okay, there were normally on a mission, normally consisted of two aircraft, four
7 aircrew members.

8 LC: Okay.

9 RLH: There was a flight lead who was the aircraft commander of the lead airplane. He
10 was in charge of the mission. The wingman was another pilot and he was there just to do what he
11 was told by the flight lead. Now, periodically, you would have four, but it was similar. You'd have
12 flight lead and you'd have what was called element lead, which is the second to, but the flight lead
13 was still in charge of the entire mission. So he was the one who gave the briefing. And at that
14 time, he would discuss first of all, what specific ordnance are you carrying. He would look at the
15 target itself and there was some discussion, but generally he would decide on the best means of
16 entry and exit to the target area from what direction, from what altitude and so forth. He would also
17 discuss if we were going to hit a tanker, then we had to discuss that of course, where it was going
18 to be and what the coordinates were and what the call sign was and we went over the frequencies.
19 We talked about the specific ordnance we were carrying and the requirements for either dive angle
20 or airspeed or what restrictions we may have in that particular area. And then we would discuss
21 egress, where we would meet up after coming off the target and discuss the general route back.

22 LC: Okay. Were you also apprised of other aircraft that were going to be in the area or
23 were not?

24 RLH: Usually there were no other aircraft other than the Forward Air Controller. The
25 things that would be different would be if it was a search and rescue mission or if it was troops in
26 contact. If it were search and rescue or troops in contact, certainly we talked about who else was
27 there, but that was a shifting thing.

28 LC: Right.

29 RLH: So we had an Airborne Control Command Center, ABCCC that sorted out all that
30 information when we were airborne.

31 LC: Okay.

1 RLH: They would tell us who is in the area and kind of tried to give us an idea where.
2 They also had a radar that they could tell where the aircraft were. They would tell us who the on
3 scene commander is for troops in contact or search and rescue, whatever it was, if it was a big
4 gaggle of aircraft there.

5 LC: And the on scene commander, who would that typically be or did it vary by the
6 situation?

7 RLH: It wasn't a particular person. It was generally the higher-ranking person and he was
8 the one who was doing the tasking, he was the one who would decide. And it was not always just
9 one person doing the deciding, but they would take the intelligence report. Let's say it was a
10 search and rescue mission.

11 LC: Okay.

12 RLH: Just to pick one.

13 LC: Right.

14 RLH: He would be the person that would decide when we're going and how many
15 airplanes were taking, what are they to be loaded with, (we call that tasking), and at what time are
16 we going to try to pick him up and he would be the coordinator of all these planes. So, he would go
17 in and loiter in the area and then he would call in the various types of aircraft. He would call in the
18 what we call the Sandies or the Spads, which were the low flying propeller driven jobs to try to get
19 the guns in the area to stop firing. Once that happened or if it didn't happen, then he would bring in
20 heavier ordnance such as us.

21 LC: Okay.

22 RLH: And he was also attempting to spot exactly where the firing was coming from. He
23 acted like a Forward Air Controller, but he was much more involved than them. Then he would
24 make the decision when the attempted pickup was to be made. And he would also tell the various
25 aircraft where to go to hold until it's your time to come in. He kept track of who had what kind of
26 ordnance. He kept track of who was where. Another airplane got shot down, I mean, he then
27 became responsible for that. It was a very intense time.

28 LC: Very much so. Sir, can I ask you about contingency plans that you might've had for
29 missions, not necessarily search and rescue, but your other missions in the event that one of the
30 planes was disabled?

1 RLH: Well, we always tried to decide first of all, in the area where we are, if things were
2 perfect and you could take your airplane to somewhere to get out, where would you take the
3 airplane before you eject.

4 LC: Okay.

5 RLH: So yes, that was a contingency plan, but before that, one of the first decisions you
6 had to make and it was on person by person, we had a choice of whether the backseater was
7 going to eject only himself or himself and the front seater. Then you had to make a conscious
8 decision and turn a handle. If the backseat were going to eject both people, he had to physically
9 turn this handle and it would stay turned until he turned it back off.

10 LC: Okay, that was an enabling device to allow both seats to go?

11 RLH: That's correct. Now if the front seater ejected, you both go. But the backseater had
12 to determine, 'Do you want me to eject you also?' And again, that was on a mission-by-mission
13 basis, just depending on who it was.

14 LC: And did you have to sort that out with the front seater every time?

15 RLH: Yeah, we did that every time. Well, I mean, some guys that I flew with on a regular
16 basis, I knew what to do.

17 LC: Sure.

18 RLH: But most of the time, you talked about it.

19 LC: So like with Jerry Gray, what was your standard operating for the two of you?

20 RLH: I was going to eject both of us.

21 LC: Okay, and what determined your decisions around that choice?

22 RLH: Well, first of all, usually speaking, once you were out in combat, you didn't have time
23 to make that decision, so you need to make a one time decision before you ever get to that point.

24 LC: Yes sir.

25 RLH: So, his feeling was that if I needed to get out, then he needed to get out. It was
26 difficult to think of a time when only one of us would eject. Generally speaking, if all things were
27 going equal, the front seater called the ejection and he ejected both people. If the backseater
28 ejected by himself or took the front seater with him, you were in dire straits.

29 LC: Yes sir. What were the situations that you were trained to go to in the ejection option?
30 Obviously the aircraft being badly damaged, but was there a protocol that you had been trained to
31 know when it was time to take that decision?

1 RLH: Well, you had a manual that we carried with us. It was small in size, probably six or
2 eight inches by five inches, a good two to three inches thick that had standard emergency
3 procedures in the very front part of it. Probably sixty, seventy percent of those emergency
4 procedures you memorized, you knew what to do.

5 LC: Right.

6 RLH: If you had time, you'd go back and go through the manual to make sure you've done
7 them all, but there were certain things such as a fire onboard that if you were by yourself, you had
8 to make the decision, 'Is it bad enough that I'm going to jump out.' Some things, I mean dual
9 engine loss, I mean, that was pretty simple, eject.

10 LC: Right.

11 RLH: You know, that type thing. But most of them you knew what to do and you knew
12 when the airplane was no longer capable of flying because it would be uncontrollable.

13 LC: You wouldn't see a response.

14 RLH: That's right. I mean, you know, you're trying to pull the nose up and it's not going or
15 you're trying to turn right and it's not going.

16 LC: How much confidence would you say that you and the other men had in the whole
17 ejection seat and the whole system for getting you safely to the ground if you were outside the
18 aircraft?

19 RLH: We felt pretty good about it. We practiced it constantly. There was a requirement
20 and I believe it was twice a year that we had to go and they had a simulator trainer for the seat to
21 practice ejecting and also practice emergency egress on the ground. So we felt pretty good that it
22 would work, but we knew that a lot of times the situation itself lent itself to injury.

23 LC: Yes sir.

24 RLH: Being too close to the ground, too fast, upside down. So, I mean, we thought that
25 given a chance, the system generally worked and worked correctly and worked well.

26 LC: Now while you were in country, did you have to keep up those skills?

27 RLH: Yes, we still did that.

28 LC: Okay, and was there a facility at Phu Cat for you to work through those test trials?

29 RLH: Yes.

30 LC: Okay. Did you get the day off when you were doing that?

31 RLH: No, it took a couple of hours at the most.

1 LC: Oh really? Did you ever...I know you said that you didn't believe that you were going
2 to be hurt, did you think that you might ever have to eject? Did it ever occur to you that you might
3 have to go through that?

4 RLH: One time.

5 LC: Can you tell me about it?

6 RLH: When we were on a mission, and I think I told you about this last time about Captain
7 Gray and I and we got a little bit disoriented on where we were pulling off the target and were too
8 close to the mountain.

9 LC: The mountain, yeah.

10 RLH: And actually hit the top of a tree, brought home some green marks with us, but I
11 mean, I well remember that I grabbed for the ejection handle and muttered obscenities and was
12 particularly mad when I figured out that the guard over the thing when I pushed it down when we
13 took off had popped back up and I was either going to have to push it down, which took that much
14 longer or forget it. By then, it was too late anyway and we managed to get out of the situation.

15 LC: Right, without having to go to the extreme.

16 RLH: Right. I mean, I was that close. And yes that scared me.

17 LC: Yes sir, yes sir, I remember you telling that it did scare you. It scared me to listen to it
18 quite frankly. Sir, I want to ask you about your flight into Cambodia. Can you describe the
19 circumstances under which you first entered Cambodian Airspace?

20 RLH: Sure. It was on May the 1st 1970.

21 LC: Yes.

22 RLH: Not that I remember.

23 LC: Yes sir. (Laughter)

24 RLH: But we were the first four-ship in. And you can imagine that there were many, many
25 people there, airborne. There were airborne controllers, there was very specific forward controllers
26 marking targets. I mean, there were just a lot of people and there were a lot of airplanes going at
27 one time. I would venture to guess there were hundreds. The amazing thing to us was that when
28 you over flew South Vietnam, other than in the cities themselves, there were no structures. They
29 had all been bombed to pieces. There were no bridges, the roads were blown up, there were no
30 houses to speak of. And yet, we go into Cambodia, and they actually have buildings still standing

1 and bridges and towns and cities. And our particular target happened to be some warehouses and
2 it was just amazing to have actual targets you could see.

3 LC: That was a new experience for you really.

4 RLH: Oh yes. We could see small arms fire, that was one of the times as I recall that we
5 brought a hole home with us, small hole. We were excited to feel like we were doing something,
6 but it was not that exciting.

7 LC: Do you remember that mission briefing?

8 RLH: I remember more the mission itself.

9 LC: Okay. Can you tell me what you felt like? Now you said you were in the first four-ship
10 going over.

11 RLH: Yes.

12 LC: Did you feel like to some extent the chains were off and now authorization had been
13 given for you to hit targets that needed to be hit, is that what you felt?

14 RLH: Well, to be truthful, I felt like it was a short-lived thing. I really didn't think we were
15 going to continue going there. And really, after the initial thrust for probably a week or slightly
16 longer, it was routine humdrum. It was a thrill to go at first; it was exciting because there were a lot
17 of aircraft. Generally speaking, there would be three aircraft, the two F-4 fighters and a Forward
18 Air Controller and here we were with literally hundreds of people. So there was a lot of excitement,
19 but we didn't think that would last. We knew that it wouldn't be long till there wouldn't be any
20 building and bridges that you could see and we didn't really feel like that we were going to make
21 that much of an impact anyway because by then, things were beginning to wind down.

22 LC: That's true. You mentioned that on that first flight over, you had a target that was a
23 warehouse. Do you know where that was?

24 RLH: It was in the Parrots Beak area, which is right where Cambodia and Laos and South
25 Vietnam come together. It's a piece of Cambodia that jets out into Vietnam.

26 LC: So for you, that wasn't, you know, a hugely long additional trip going to central
27 Cambodia.

28 RLH: No, not really.

29 LC: What about the other guys in the flight that day? Did you talk to them afterwards
30 about what it was you were doing and whether it was a good idea or a good mission?

1 RLH: Oh, we all felt it was a good mission and that we hit the targets that we were after,
2 but we didn't make any political comments.

3 LC: Right. What about the other planes in the flight? Did they also take up a bit of
4 damage; do you know?

5 RLH: I don't think so. I don't remember anyone saying it.

6 LC: Were you aware either, you know, over the next couple of days or as time went on a
7 little bit later on about the controversy inside the US about the incursion into Cambodia?

8 RLH: We were aware of it, yes.

9 LC: Did it have any effect on you at all?

10 RLH: None.

11 LC: None.

12 RLH: I mean, I was doing my job.

13 LC: Yes sir. Did you think that what you were doing was contributing then to a larger war
14 effort that was just part of what you had been doing before and what you keep on doing?

15 RLH: It was nothing more than a minor extension.

16 LC: Okay.

17 RLH: I didn't think it was going to go anymore toward winning a war. I didn't by then really
18 feel like we were going to do anything more than just be there a long time.

19 LC: And that the war itself probably wasn't going to change because of this decision.

20 RLH: No, I didn't think so.

21 LC: Okay. How many missions did you actually fly over Cambodia, do you know?

22 RLH: Oh, I could guess, but I don't know an exact number and it wouldn't have been more
23 than about twenty.

24 LC: Okay. And if you recall, what were some of the other targets that you were sent to
25 hit?

26 RLH: Well, originally, we bombed only along the Cambodian, Vietnamese, Laotian border
27 or primarily there. As time went on, we got further inland and they were generally storage points or
28 suspected storage points. We didn't have troops in Cambodia, so we didn't have troops in contact,
29 but it was mostly storage areas or sometimes truck parks, that type of thing. I remember
30 specifically an intelligence briefing, if we were getting anywhere near some historical landmark
31 such as, there's a big lake in Cambodia called Tonle Sap.

1 LC: Yes sir

2 RLH: And there are Buddhist monuments all the way around this thing. I mean, we were
3 severely cautioned, 'Do not bomb these.'

4 LC: Really, don't even get close to them?

5 RLH: Don't even get close.

6 LC: And how did you process that order? What did it make you think?

7 RLH: I thought it was right, I thought it was proper. I mean, they were small areas and
8 even if there were enemy soldiers or supplies in there, it was not going to make that much
9 difference and I didn't think that the loss of something that historically significant was worth it.

10 LC: It's interesting because I wonder if everybody who heard that kind of an order
11 would've had that sensitivity to the historical significance of the structures.

12 RLH: We were used to it by then. I mean, we had more things we couldn't bomb than
13 things we could.

14 LC: So this sounded kind of familiar in a way.

15 RLH: Yeah, it's just one more.

16 LC: So were you then running responsible for keeping track of where you were in relation
17 to those no go target areas and keeping track of...?

18 RLH: Well, to some extent, yes. I mean, we knew where they were and I kept a count of
19 where we were in airspace at any particular time, but the Forward Air Controller who was the guy
20 that identified the targets on scene, he was the guy that was responsible primarily to keep us out of
21 that area.

22 LC: Did you work with the same FAC unit most of the time?

23 RLH: No, different every time.

24 LC: Different every time?

25 RLH: Yeah.

26 LC: Did that introduce any difficulties in communications?

27 RLH: No, we had a lot of faith in those guys, that they knew what they were doing and
28 they were really pretty good at what they did. We always thought pretty high...we thought they
29 were crazy for going down that low and that slow.

30 LC: About what altitude would they have been flying?

31 RLH: Oh, not more than probably one thousand to three thousand feet.

1 LC: And what aircraft generally were those guys flying?

2 RLH: Well, there was an O-1 and an O-2 and an OV-10. OV-10s came along late in the
3 war and there were very, very few of them. O-1s were little tricycle landing gear.

4 LC: Right, the otter.

5 RLH: Yeah, and the O-2 was a push-pull.

6 LC: Okay, by push-pull, if somebody didn't know what that was, could you explain?

7 RLH: There's two engines, one on the front of the airplane and one of the back, one
8 pushed, one pulled. And they were a little faster, could maneuver a little bit better and they had
9 better armament. I mean, they actually had a few things other than rockets. The little O-1 plane, I
10 mean, all they had was a rocket.

11 LC: Which was for marking purposes.

12 RLH: Yeah, and a pistol.

13 LC: Right.

14 RLH: And the guy in the O-2 at least had a machine gun. But it really didn't matter to us
15 because our expectation was that they give us the target, mark it for us, and get out of the way.

16 LC: And we'll take it from there.

17 RLH: That's right.

18 LC: Okay.

19 RLH: Don't let me run into you because you'll die, I probably won't.

20 LC: Right, just by virtue of what each of you were flying in.

21 RLH: That's right; I will take your wing off.

22 LC: Yeah. Sir, I want to ask you a little bit about your correspondence and communication
23 with your family. Were you ever able to call your wife, say on the telephone?

24 RLH: Yeah.

25 LC: You were?

26 RLH: Probably not very often, three or four times. It was MARS, Military Affiliate Radio
27 Station.

28 LC: How did that work?

29 RLH: Not really very well.

30 (Laughter)

1 RLH: It usually was in the middle of the night and the reason for that is, is that's when they
2 had the best ability to communicate. It was all by HF radio. And when they could get through to
3 the States, that's just generally the time of day that you could do it and I mean, it wasn't as though I
4 could call MARS and say, 'I want to call home.' They would call us and say, 'We've got an
5 opening, anybody want to call home?' And they would call the alert shack usually first because
6 those guys were awake.

7 LC: Right.

8 RLH: So if you were fortunate enough to be there on alert when they called, you could
9 probably get through.

10 LC: And do you remember those phone calls?

11 RLH: Oh yeah, very poor quality, you always had to say over because you were dealing
12 with radio.

13 LC: Yes.

14 RLH: A couple of times were just general information. I had two times that were specific.
15 One I had called them and told them, 'Look, if you get through, I need to talk to my wife', because it
16 was right after the tornado.

17 LC: And that would be the tornado in Lubbock?

18 RLH: Right.

19 LC: In...?

20 RLH: 1970.

21 LC: The summer of 1970?

22 RLH: Yeah, I don't remember exactly when it was, but I had no way to communicate with
23 my wife.

24 LC: And you were concerned. How did you know that there had been a tornado?

25 RLH: Oh, it was in *Stars and Stripes*.

26 LC: Oh was it really?

27 RLH: Oh yeah.

28 LC: Oh wow. It was devastating. I read a little bit about it.

29 RLH: She was going to school there.

30 LC: Yes sir, near at Tech.

31 RLH: It tore up the car and a few things like that.

1 LC: Really?

2 RLH: I mean, it was probably a good week before I could get in touch with her.

3 LC: How would you describe yourself during that week?

4 RLH: Pretty concerned about her. I mean, I didn't know what to do. I thought, 'Well, I
5 guess I could go to the Red Cross, but they probably had more important things to do.' But finally,
6 I did get through on the MARS Radio.

7 LC: And what did she tell you? What was her take on what had happened?

8 RLH: It was like, 'What were you worried about? I would've called you if I were dead.'

9 LC: (Laughter)

10 RLH: You know, it was, 'What's the big deal?' She did describe it to me and told me it
11 was pretty bad, but that where she was, was not nearly so bad as downtown. She was sort of out
12 on the south side of town, probably in the, oh, I'm guessing 24th, 25th, 26th street, somewhere along
13 there.

14 LC: Okay, and a large number of people were killed in that tornado, is that right?

15 RLH: Yes. And there was some damage to her car and the little place where she lived.
16 But it was no big deal to her.

17 LC: (Laughter) But I'm sure she understood that you were concerned.

18 RLH: Yes.

19 LC: What was the other specific time you've called that you were...?

20 RLH: When I was trying to decide where I was going to go when I left Vietnam.

21 LC: Okay, can you tell me about that situation?

22 RLH: Sure. Generally, when we were getting on toward the end of our duty in Vietnam
23 and I don't remember the time, but it was probably a good two months before we were due to
24 leave, we filled out what was called a dream sheet. And that was, you know, 'What's your dream
25 place to go for your next assignment?' Well, coming out of Vietnam, they tried very hard to let you
26 go where you wanted to go. And so you had a number of choices and I was sort of torn. You
27 know, I had a choice of going back to the States and flying the same airplane or I could go back to
28 air training command and be an instructor where I had gone to Navigator School.

29 LC: That would be in Sacramento?

30 RLH: Correct. And I thought very seriously about that. I like that part of the world and my
31 wife had relatives out there.

1 LC: Yes.

2 RLH: And I felt very seriously about going there and had even indicated at first that's
3 where I wanted to go, but I called my wife and said, 'Look, I've talked to several people and they
4 tell me that it's easy to get to Germany if we want to go.' And she said, 'Sure I want to go.'

5 LC: Now she was completing her studies at Tech, is that right?

6 RLH: By then, she was done.

7 LC: She was done?

8 RLH: She finished in the summer.

9 LC: Okay.

10 RLH: And this would've been in the fall.

11 LC: Right. And why was she keen to go to Germany? Can you describe her interest?

12 RLH: Oh sure, she's young and wanted to travel like me. We didn't have any children and
13 you know, we were ready to go.

14 LC: So it was potentially a great adventure.

15 RLH: Oh sure.

16 LC: And so you called her up to sort of get her take on...

17 RLH: Yeah, I wanted to make sure that's what she did want to do. I mean, I didn't expect
18 her to not want to, but I wanted to make sure she didn't have some violent reaction to it.

19 (Laughing)

20 LC: Right. And can you describe if you remember that phone call?

21 RLH: Oh, she was happy, she was ecstatic. She hadn't even thought about that
22 possibility and she thought it was a great idea. I mean, she immediately said, 'Yes, I'd love to go.'

23 LC: And you were looking at what, another two years over there?

24 RLH: Thirty-six months.

25 LC: Thirty-six months, okay. In addition to those two particular times that you called and
26 spoke to your wife, were you also in correspondence with her a lot?

27 RLH: At least once a day and if I didn't write a letter, I got a letter asking me why I didn't
28 write a letter that day.

29 LC: And did she return the favor?

30 RLH: Every day.

31 LC: Really?

1 RLH: Every day.

2 LC: And how was your mail delivery? Was it pretty consistent?

3 RLH: When the weather was good, it was very good. It would get erratic if the weather

4 was bad. I mean, they were going to take great chances to come in there, like during the

5 Monsoon, we had, oh gosh, two weeks we didn't get any mail. We got a lot at one time when they

6 finally did come.

7 LC: And did you read them in order?

8 RLH: Yeah, I tried to figure out which one. I mean I would go three days with nothing and

9 then get three or four letters. So, we didn't get every single day mail delivery.

10 LC: But that's pretty good. What role did those letters play for you?

11 RLH: Well, first of all, it made me feel that she was okay still.

12 LC: Yes, yes.

13 RLH: At least on that day. I mean, I've asked her if she felt the same way. She said, 'You

14 know, the letters came so late that you could've been dead a week by the time I got the letter for all

15 I knew.' I said, 'But you know, I always felt like it made me feel like things were okay.'

16 LC: And reassuring in that way.

17 RLH: Yes.

18 LC: And did she talk to you about stuff that was going on in town here or family matters?

19 RLH: Oh, more family matters than anything else. I mean, truthfully, Tech was a pretty

20 quiet school.

21 LC: Yes sir. Still is in some ways.

22 RLH: Yup.

23 LC: And what kinds of things would you write to her and were there things you just

24 wouldn't write to her about?

25 RLH: Oh, you know, once in a while we would lose an aircraft and I'd write to her and

26 assure her that I wasn't in that thing. A little bit about what was going in the States, not a lot

27 because we didn't get that much information. We used to laugh about it being the bra burning

28 time.

29 LC: That's right, and your reference there is to the Women's Movement?

1 RLH: Right. And you know, we'd talk a little bit about that, but it was more just
2 correspondence to be corresponded. I mean, a lot of times it was probably a page, a page and a
3 half long.

4 LC: Sure.

5 RLH: At the most.

6 LC: And that was just kind of a way to say I'm okay.

7 RLH: Yup. Might tell her about what I did or if I'd been somewhere.

8 LC: And sir, earlier you mentioned the sound equipment that you got and I wonder if you
9 were also taking pictures at all? Did you have a camera?

10 RLH: I bought a camera when I went to Hong Kong and I did take pictures later on. I was
11 never a great photographer. I have a few pictures, not that many.

12 LC: And at the time you bought that camera, you were getting closer and closer to the
13 time that you were actually going to leave country.

14 RLH: I was thinking more in terms of using it for Germany than Vietnam.

15 LC: Yes sir, yes sir. How did you feel, can you describe your feelings if any as you
16 approached the time that you were going to leave in January of '71?

17 RLH: I can remember asking someone what do you do with the spare time. I mean, we
18 had so much downtime there that we didn't do anything but drink or cause problems. You know,
19 when you get back to the States or to Germany or wherever you're going to the real world, what
20 the heck do you do with your spare time.

21 LC: Right, because you're not on call.

22 RLH: That's right.

23 LC: And not with the adrenaline rush and all that.

24 RLH: And we had people who had been on one tour and they were back for their second
25 tour. And you know, they always laughed and said, 'Don't worry; you'll fill your time.'

26 LC: Did it ever occur to you to have another tour in Vietnam?

27 RLH: Never.

28 LC: There was no way that anyone's going to persuade toward that?

29 RLH: No way.

30 LC: Did anyone try?

1 RLH: We were asked as a group, not individually, were told that if we would agree to a six
2 month extension, they would allow us to select the base anywhere we wanted to go including
3 Thailand. That was just an inducement to get you to stay.
4 LC: And that just wasn't going to work for you.
5 RLH: And I had no intention doing that. Very few people did.
6 LC: Right.
7 RLH: I know a few who did, most of them I consider not at the same intelligent level as a
8 normal human.
9 LC: And was that your best clue that they were kind of subpart?
10 RLH: Yeah, well, I don't know that they...I mean, one guy I know who did it was a friend of
11 mine and to this day, I don't really understand it. One of them was this guy that was, I mean, he
12 was a loser to me. I mean, you know, why would you do that and one guy was so bad, they said,
13 'No, we don't want you.'
14 LC: Really?
15 RLH: Yeah, so you know, out of the whole time I was there, maybe three people asked to
16 stay.
17 LC: Yeah, most people are interested in going the other way.
18 RLH: There were a number of backseat pilots who wanted to upgrade to the front seat
19 and were willing to take a second tour.
20 LC: Now those were I would assume career people.
21 RLH: Mostly yes.
22 LC: And their interest in getting to the front seat would be what?
23 RLH: To being the aircraft commander, be in charge.
24 LC: And it would be important for them later on in their career to have done it.
25 RLH: Oh, you have to do that.
26 LC: Yes sir. Do you remember the day that you were ready, that you were leaving
27 Vietnam?
28 RLH: Oh sure.
29 LC: Can you tell me about that day and how it happened and what you were thinking that
30 day?

1 RLH: Well, first of all, Phu Cat was remote from any other bases, so you had to get from
2 Phu Cat to wherever your charter aircraft was to go back to the States. In my case, it was Cam
3 Ranh Bay.

4 LC: Okay.

5 RLH: So you had a couple of days, you stopped flying five days before your, what we
6 called DEROS, Due Return from Overseas. And you'd use that time to pack and out-process, so
7 you had a little downtime getting ready.

8 LC: And that was standard?

9 RLH: Yeah, five days, that was the normal.

10 LC: Okay.

11 RLH: And so you packed your things, you got the people to come over and pick them up,
12 you out processed, which is you got your orders and you know, signed out, got your final pay if you
13 needed your pay and so forth and so on and made your final arrangements. Then you had to get
14 to Cam Ranh Bay and as I sort of alluded to before, transportation was a little slip shod. I mean,
15 my orders read, 'Forward yourself to Cam Ranh Bay and get on this airplane and go to the States.'

16 LC: You more or less had to figure out how to start that up.

17 RLH: Right. So I mean, you leave at least two days early just to make sure you get there
18 on time. So there was a lot of excitement of course. There were several of us going at the same
19 time, so we were kind of in a bunch. But I so well remember when we got there, we had to again
20 scratch for a place to spend the night and fortunately we did find one, but as we were about to get
21 on the airplane, we were having to go through customs. And I mean, here was a bunch of guys
22 that were, all we wanted to do was go home and they were searching our bags for contraband and
23 they were looking for drugs, they were looking for pornography, anything that we weren't supposed
24 to take with us and all we wanted to do...I mean, you know, 'Take my bags, I don't care, I'm going
25 home.'

26 LC: Right, take it all.

27 RLH: Burn it, I don't care.

28 LC: (Laughter) Yes sir.

29 RLH: You know, just get out of the way. But as we were just about to get on, there was a
30 flight that had landed, probably the same airplane that we were about to get on. The guys coming
31 in going to the base that I left, and we were laughing at them about being our replacements.

1 LC: Did you experience any kind of pains of sadness when you were leaving some of the
2 guys you'd been flying with?

3 RLH: Absolutely not.

4 LC: (Laughter) Really?

5 RLH: All I wanted to do was get out of that place.

6 LC: Okay, did they throw a party for you or anything?

7 RLH: Oh yeah, we had a monthly party.

8 LC: Oh, monthly party?

9 RLH: Yeah. We had a party at the Officer's Club every month and it was to welcome the
10 guys coming in and saying goodbye to the guys leaving, and say goodbye to anyone who might
11 have been killed.

12 LC: Yes sir. And so the party in January...

13 RLH: That would've been mine, yeah.

14 LC: Was for you to get out of there.

15 RLH: Right.

16 LC: You said that there were kind of a bunch of you leaving at the same time, were those
17 guys from the same squadron?

18 RLH: Yes, people that I had gone over with.

19 LC: Okay. Sir, can you describe your feelings about leaving with, you know, those guys,
20 you know, you had all survived it?

21 RLH: Oh of course, we all swore fidelity and that we'd keep in touch and a few of them I
22 managed to go and see again, but once we got on the airplane, it was all over.

23 LC: Yeah, was that a bit sad for you later on as you thought about it?

24 RLH: Yeah. One of the fellows that I was laughing at who was coming in as I was
25 leaving...

26 LC: Yes.

27 RLH: Believe it or not, a year later, showed up at the base in the same squadron I was in
28 in Germany and we still laughed about it.

29 LC: Is that right? That's strange. That plane flight out of Vietnam, where did it take you?

30 RLH: We flew to Yokota Airbase, Japan and refueled and then took off from there and
31 flew to Seattle, Washington.

1 LC: And how long were you there?

2 RLH: Well, lets see, we left at 9:30 in the morning. I'm sorry, we left at 7:30 in the
3 morning and we got to Seattle at 9:30 the same morning after seventeen hours.

4 LC: Yes sir.

5 RLH: And of course, we were a little tired, but I had a ticket from Seattle to Dallas and my
6 ticket was for like noon, so I had to hurry. And where we landed was at...I think it's McCord Air
7 Force Base, I can't remember the name of it, but it's in Seattle. But my flight was out of Sea-Tac,
8 Seattle Tacoma, so I had to get from one place to the other. So I had to get through customs and
9 get to Sea-Tac in time to make that plane, so I was in a very big hurry.

10 LC: That's a heck of a connection.

11 RLH: And well, I had about two and a half hours to do it. It's not that far between the two,
12 but I mean, the thing I remember the most is standing in these long lines trying to get through
13 customs. And you got these guys that...I mean, they're as bored about it as we are.

14 LC: Right.

15 RLH: I mean, they're just there trying to get it over with, but I mean, they were doing such
16 stupid things. You know, they make you take everything out of all your bags, which delayed you
17 forever. If you had a can of Talcum powder, they had this long steel rod that they stuck down in
18 there and smelled of it to see what was in there. And they made you take everything out of your
19 pockets. It was just not a good experience. I mean, it was like we were criminals.

20 LC: Right, and primarily they were looking for drugs, is that what you think?

21 RLH: That's exactly what they were looking for.

22 LC: And did it kind of hack you off a little bit that you'd been over there serving and...?

23 RLH: That's kind of my feeling.

24 LC: Yeah.

25 RLH: You know, I felt like, you know, so what if I smoked a little grass, I mean, what
26 difference does it make, I'm back.

27 LC: Right.

28 RLH: Which I didn't by the way.

29 LC: Right, and you're on my time now, right. I mean, you want to get to Dallas I'm sure to
30 see your wife.

31 RLH: I've got to get out of here.

1 LC: Yeah. And your plan was to meet your wife in Dallas?
2 RLH: No, I had to go to Dallas and then go on to Lubbock.
3 LC: Oh okay, oh right, right. And how long were you likely to be here in Lubbock as a
4 break before you went onto Germany?
5 RLH: Well, I had to report to Germany on...I think it was February the 7th was my report
6 date.
7 LC: Okay. So you had a couple of weeks?
8 RLH: I had three weeks at least.
9 LC: That's great.
10 RLH: Because I got back on the 15th of January.
11 LC: And I assume that you were helping your wife get ready to then move overseas?
12 RLH: She had done a lot of that already.
13 LC: Good for her, smart girl.
14 RLH: And all of the...like the inoculations and the paperwork, passport, so forth and so on,
15 you know, I had corresponded with her and told her, you know, 'You need to go to Reese and do
16 this and that.'
17 LC: Right.
18 RLH: So she had that pretty well done and we didn't own any furniture. We did have to
19 get to Philadelphia to drop the car off because we were taking our car with us. But I mean, the
20 biggest logistical nightmare was to visit all the relatives before we left again.
21 LC: Yes.
22 RLH: I mean, I've already been gone a year and my mom kind of wanted to see me.
23 LC: Right.
24 RLH: I'm about to leave for another four years.
25 LC: Yeah, how did that go with seeing your mom?
26 RLH: Well, that was great because she actually came up to Lubbock where my sister was,
27 and so I got to see her there. We stayed there probably a week as I recall, and then we went and
28 visited her parents. They lived close to Dallas and then went back and visited mine again.
29 LC: Can you talk about your mom's reaction to clapping eyes on you finally after all this
30 time?

1 RLH: Well, of course, she was happy. My mom was never...she's pretty stoic. She was
2 not an excitable type person. She had a pretty rough life.

3 LC: Yes sir.

4 RLH: I mean, she was glad to see me. I don't recall tears; more joy than anything else
5 and I just wanted to go to bed. I mean, I've been up for thirty some odd hours by the time I finally
6 got home.

7 LC: Yes sir.

8 RLH: And I mean, I was tired. My internal clock's all messed up.

9 LC: Yeah.

10 RLH: You know, I wanted to go to bed.

11 LC: And so you slept for a couple of days maybe?

12 RLH: No, I went to sleep probably...by the time I got to bed, it was midnight and at 2:30 in
13 the morning, my eyes are wide open.

14 LC: Oh no. (Laughter)

15 RLH: My time's so screwed up, and you know, of course by 7am, I want to go back to bed.

16 LC: Right, it's very hard to get readjusted.

17 RLH: Oh yeah.

18 LC: Sir, did you drive to Philadelphia then?

19 RLH: Yes.

20 LC: Okay.

21 RLH: We stayed there in Lubbock for a few days and I had a visit from a friend of mine
22 who lived in Oklahoma City and I can't remember what he was doing, but he came down, he and
23 his wife came and visited with us. And then we made our relative visits and drove to Philadelphia
24 via Washington D.C., where I had another friend that we stopped by to see.

25 LC: In your travels during that three week period, did you encounter anyone or a group of
26 people who were overtly antiwar or took a look at you kind of funny because you looked like a
27 military person?

28 RLH: Not really, but remember, first of all, I'm in Texas.

29 LC: Yes sir.

30 RLH: Which is a pretty conservative state.

31 LC: Yes sir.

1 RLH: And I was in two small towns.

2 LC: Okay.

3 RLH: And on the way to Philadelphia, it was just hurry, hurry, hurry, so we never
4 really...we didn't have much time. It was dead of winter, February.

5 LC: So you didn't...

6 RLH: I never had that problem.

7 LC: Okay, okay.

8 RLH: I never had any particular welcome arms, but I never had someone say anything
9 untoward to me or act in anyway that I took as offensive until much later.

10 LC: Okay, how much later?

11 RLH: Well, I think I told you about that. Years later when a fellow told me, you know,
12 made the statement to me that the only people who went to Vietnam were the stupid ones.

13 LC: Right, right, yeah, that was nice. Going over to Germany, how did you and your wife
14 actually travel?

15 RLH: We went to, I guess that was McCord Air Force Base in New Jersey, and took a
16 charter flight, which they push you in with cattle prods, by the hundreds.

17 LC: Yes sir.

18 RLH: We dropped the car off in Philadelphia and took a bus from Philadelphia to Trenton,
19 New Jersey, which is a couple of hours I guess and spent the night there and then flew over on a
20 charter airplane to Frankfurt, Germany.

21 LC: Had your wife been outside the country before?

22 RLH: Never.

23 LC: Okay. Can you tell about your reactions upon arriving and what base did you actually
24 settle in in Germany?

25 RLH: Well, first of all, it was bitter cold.

26 LC: Yes sir.

27 RLH: I mean, Lubbock was cold, but I haven't warmed up in a month. You know, I came
28 from Vietnam. It was kind of lonesome because at the time, there were a lot of people in Europe in
29 the American military and Rhein-Main in Frankfurt was a huge, huge base. And they had told us
30 that there would be someone there to meet us, to give us a ride to the base because it was about a
31 three or four hour drive. So when we got there, we kind of stood around wondering, 'Well, now

1 what?' Finally someone paged us, it was the guy that was there to pick us up to give us a ride and
2 he took us to temporary quarters in Germany, Bitburg, Germany.

3 LC: Yes sir.

4 RLH: And we stayed there for, gosh, a couple of weeks I guess until we found a place to
5 live.

6 LC: And you were able to find a place on your own?

7 RLH: Well, they had a housing office there that was kind of the liaison between the
8 German public if you were going to live on the economy. There was also the place that assigned
9 base housing. So you went over there and told them what type of housing you were looking for
10 and if they had something available, they say, 'Okay, here it is, go look at it.' So, we wound up
11 actually going to...they're two airbases there right almost next door to each other, Spangdahlem
12 and Bitburg. (Coughing) Pardon me. And Bitburg base housing was full, but I didn't want to live on
13 the base anyway. I wanted to live out on the economy.

14 LC: Yes sir.

15 RLH: But it was so busy there and with all these people returning from Vietnam, that it
16 was hard to find a place to live. So we took quarters at Spangdahlem, the next base over,
17 temporarily. And as luck would have it, they actually closed the runway at Bitburg and moved us to
18 Spangdahlem for a couple of months because they were working on the runway.

19 LC: Oh, okay.

20 RLH: So we lived at Spangdahlem and worked at Spangdahlem for the first couple of
21 months.

22 LC: And after that, did you go out and find something in the private sector?

23 RLH: Well, actually before we moved back to Bitburg or the squadron moved back to
24 Bitburg, we found a place to live.

25 LC: Now which squadron were you attached to sir?

26 RLH: It was called the 53rd TAC Fighter Squad.

27 LC: Okay. And how many aircraft did they have and were they all F-4s or what else did
28 they have?

29 RLH: They were all F-4s. They were three squadrons there.

30 LC: Okay.

1 RLH: It was the 22nd squadron, the 53rd squadron, there was one called the 525th, which
2 had a little bit different mission, but was the same type of...same aircraft, but a later model.

3 LC: What was the 525th doing?

4 RLH: They were air-to-air defense.

5 LC: Okay, and the 53rd primarily was involved in...

6 RLH: Air to ground.

7 LC: Okay. And when did you first start flying over in Germany? How long had you been
8 there?

9 RLH: Oh gosh, I didn't get more than a few days to get signed in, because they were
10 gearing up for deployment to go to Spain.

11 LC: Going to Spain.

12 RLH: Pardon me.

13 LC: That's okay.

14 RLH: We rotated down once a quarter to do our gunnery practice and I had to get ready
15 for that. So I flew pretty soon after I got there.

16 LC: Okay, and what was your wife busy doing?

17 RLH: Well, at first of course, she was busy getting us situated in where we lived and
18 meeting some people. Well fortunately, we had a fellow in the little small town where we were that
19 we knew, he and his wife, they'd been at Sacramento with us. So we at least had friends.

20 LC: Yeah, that's helpful.

21 RLH: And another friend of mine that I had known ever since I'd been in the Air Force
22 happened to get stationed there also, so we would go and visit them. So we had plenty to do, plus,
23 you know, we played the tourists as much as we could.

24 LC: Sure. What kinds of things did you do as tourists?

25 RLH: Well, it's like anything else when you first get there, you're a little bit tentative, so
26 you stay close to home, but there's so many things to see. There were castles right there.

27 LC: Yes.

28 RLH: And you know, it's twelve miles to Luxemburg.

29 LC: Right.

1 RLH: And it's twenty miles to France, and it's like thirty miles to Belgium, so we had plenty
2 of places to go without having to venture too far. But as time went on, we went every place we
3 could possibly go.

4 LC: And you said that you had brought your car over?

5 RLH: Yes.

6 LC: Okay, did that make it a lot easier to kind of pick up and go?

7 RLH: Oh sure. We did have to make arrangements, a fellow loaned us a car when we
8 first got there for a couple of days, but our car got there not very far behind us. But it came into
9 Hamburg, Germany and there were enterprising airmen who for a small amount of money would go
10 and get your car for you.

11 LC: And bring it down how?

12 RLH: Yeah, they would drive it.

13 LC: They would drive it back down?

14 RLH: Go pick it up. You gave them the paperwork and you had to buy ration coupons for
15 fuel and paid them fifty bucks and they rode the train up, got your car, and brought it to you. It was
16 a good deal.

17 LC: Yeah, that was great, because Hamburg is a bit of a drive.

18 RLH: Well, that's a pretty good haul from there.

19 LC: Yes sir, yes sir.

20 RLH: Probably at least an eight hour train ride.

21 LC: Yeah, it's quite a ways. How did you settle into the different routine now, you're in a
22 different squadron, you're in a different environment, a different climate?

23 RLH: Quite a come down to be truthful.

24 LC: Is that right, how so sir?

25 RLH: Well, in Vietnam, you didn't spend time in training; you spent time doing it. And
26 suddenly you have all these training requirements, you have to get this done, get that done, you
27 have to fill this square, do this, make sure you got, you know. And you have new jobs to do and
28 most of the people you're flying with are new people. You're trying to feel each other out and see
29 how that's going to work out and who do you like, who you don't like, who you want to fly with, that
30 type of thing.

1 LC: And did you locate someone that you were going to be flying with on a more or less
2 regular basis as you had in Vietnam?

3 RLH: Not really, they just didn't do that there.

4 LC: Okay, didn't jell in the same way?

5 RLH: Yeah, I mean, you just flew with whoever you were assigned to and that was not
6 true just to me, that was everybody.

7 LC: Right. And would it be true to say that the sort of feeling in camaraderie was just
8 different because it wasn't...?

9 RLH: It was different, there was a camaraderie. I mean, there was a friendly battle on
10 going with the other squadrons. It just so happened that the squadron that I was in had as their
11 mascot on their patch was a tiger and several years before, some enterprising guy had put
12 together a NATO tiger meet and all of the squadrons, no matter what country that had a tiger or
13 anything you could stretch your imagination, if you think it's a tiger, would get together and do a
14 little friendly competition and whole lot of drinking and a whole lot of talking and have a little deal
15 and they did it every four years. And it had just occurred the year or so before I got there, so they
16 were gearing up for the next one and it was going to be held at that base.

17 LC: And what year did it take place?

18 RLH: '75 I believe, right after I left.

19 LC: Okay.

20 RLH: So the first one would've been in '71. I guess one went on somewhere else while I
21 was there.

22 LC: Okay.

23 RLH: I didn't go. I kind of wanted to go, but I didn't get to go. I mean, we only sent two
24 aircraft. So that kind of made a sense of camaraderie.

25 LC: Sure, yeah.

26 RLH: Plus, you keep running into people you know. I mean, by then, I'd been in the
27 military since 1967 and we're in 1971, so I had met people over time that I knew.

28 LC: Right. What year did you actually leave Germany?

29 RLH: 1974.

30 LC: And is that also the year that you separated from...?

31 RLH: Yes, I had separated when I left Germany.

1 LC: Okay, tell me about your decision to actually leave the Air Force?

2 RLH: I don't know that it was really a true decision so much as an extension of what I had
3 planned all along. I never intended to make it a career. It was one of those things as I explained
4 before; it was my means of draft dodging. And it was not that appealing to me.

5 LC: Okay.

6 RLH: I didn't like being sort of the second-class citizen. By that, I mean I didn't like riding
7 in the backseat.

8 LC: Yes sir.

9 RLH: So I had decided that I was going to go get some job that paid three hundred
10 thousand dollars a year in the States. You know, I made it very plain. I didn't pretend I was going
11 to make it a career. And there were probably as many people who weren't sure that they were
12 going to make it a career as there were of those who were sure they were not going to. I was
13 probably as sure as anyone that I was not going to.

14 LC: And was there an effort to sort of change your mind?

15 RLH: Oh absolutely.

16 LC: Okay, can you describe what sorts of things were put on your plate as possibilities for
17 you that didn't attract you obviously, but...?

18 RLH: Well, you know, it was a little tempting, but not enough to make me stay. When you
19 are not an Academy graduate or not an honors graduate through ROTC, you actually are not in the
20 regular Air Force, you are in the Reserve Air Force. So I was a Reserve officer assigned to active
21 duty. That may be...if you don't understand what I'm talking about, well, I'll try to explain it a little
22 better.

23 LC: Sure, it would be good if you went into it just a bit.

24 RLH: Well, a regular officer was a career officer in the regular Air Force full time. A
25 Reserve officer on the other hand had a commitment and then served at the discretion of the Air
26 Force after that. All of the young men had a six-year commitment at that point in time to the
27 military unless you were physically nonqualified. Whether that be in the Reserve or part time
28 Reserve, full time Reserve, or regular Air Force, you had a six-year commitment. And how you
29 filled it just depended on what you did. So I went in as a Reserve officer. I was on active duty full
30 time, but I was not in the regular Air Force.

31 LC: Okay.

1 RLH: And I was probably like seventy-five percent of the people. If they decide they want
2 to keep you in the military, then they will ask you, 'If we decide to offer you one, will you accept a
3 commission in the regular Air Force?' That's like, 'If we offer you this job full time for twenty years,
4 will you take it?'

5 LC: Right.

6 RLH: And at the time, I was pretty sure I was going to get out, but it was not very long
7 after I'd gotten to Germany, so I sort of said, 'Okay, sure,' never thinking too much about it because
8 things were winding down. The war ended, there were tons of people that had been sent home
9 from Vietnam and we were bursting at the seams with people and they started rifting people.

10 LC: Yes.

11 RLH: Reduction in force.

12 LC: Yes sir.

13 RLH: So I just assumed, you know, they're not going to say anything to me. Well low and
14 behold, they came along and said, 'We'd like to offer you a regular commission.' And I had to say
15 yes or no. If I took it, there was another commitment involved. I said, 'No, I'm not going to do it.'
16 So, as a consequence, I had to sit through counseling first by a lower ranking major and then I had
17 to go to the lieutenant colonel, then I had to go to the full colonel and I just told them all, I made up
18 my mind.

19 LC: And each one of these guys was putting the carrot and stick maybe for you?

20 RLH: Yeah, explains to me why it was a great career and why they felt that I would do well
21 and should continue.

22 LC: What did they say about your service such that they were even in a period of rifting,
23 interested in bringing you in?

24 RLH: The people they wanted to keep were those who were well qualified and skilled at
25 what they did and had combat experience.

26 LC: And did they talk to you about the kinds of things that you might be doing in a future
27 career?

28 RLH: Well, what they did is, you know, I didn't immediately just say no, I just told them I'd
29 think about it, so they started giving me these little jobs that were supposed to broaden my career,
30 make me more promotable.

31 LC: Such as?

1 RLH: Well, I taught, I was the only navigator who taught in the required ground school that
2 everybody had to attend. All the other guys were pilots.

3 LC: Was there a particular name to that school?

4 RLH: Well, it was called Ground School, it was called Instrument School is what it was
5 called. But there were a number of training requirements that you had to fill and I think it was every
6 six months, but it may have been once a year. But you had to...I don't even remember what all
7 they were, but I remember what I taught was the procedures for flying in or near the buffer zone
8 between us and the eastern countries and us and the neutral countries.

9 LC: And was the Instrument School on the base?

10 RLH: Yes.

11 LC: Okay.

12 RLH: I taught two classes, each time I taught it, it was all day long.

13 LC: That's hard work too.

14 RLH: I enjoyed it.

15 LC: Did you?

16 RLH: You know, it was strictly lecture.

17 LC: Right.

18 RLH: And you know, you do it three times, you got it memorized because I taught the
19 same thing every time. I mean, it would be like being a schoolteacher, but you teach the same
20 thing everyday.

21 LC: Right, and as you say it, it wasn't a discussion class.

22 RLH: No.

23 LC: Right. And what else did they have you do?

24 RLH: Well, they also gave me a job at Wing Headquarters, which is above the squadron in
25 the weapon shop. And they really didn't have anything for me to do, but they thought it sounded
26 good.

27 LC: Okay.

28 RLH: And that got boring real fast. So, they figured out that, you know, they really didn't
29 have that much for me to do, so they put me in charge of keeping all of the training records for the
30 whole squadron.

31 LC: And what was the position title for that?

1 RLH: It was called the training shop and it was just kind of a separate little place where
2 two or three people were assigned and they had to track all of the training requirements that you
3 had and when you completed them.

4 LC: Okay.

5 RLH: And I had a couple of guys that worked for me and I kept the records and I kept a
6 huge grease board up there. I kept manual records, but I kept it posted on this big grease board
7 because the scheduler would get what we're flying for the next two or three or four days and he
8 would have to come in and see, 'Okay, we're flying this type mission, who needs it.'

9 LC: Oh I see, 'Who needs it' in terms of where they are in their own training.

10 RLH: Right, you know, radar bomb scoring or low level or you know, air-to-air, whatever.

11 LC: What else did they find for you to do or was that the last thing?

12 RLH: That was the most important.

13 LC: Okay.

14 RLH: But that was also the one that made up my mind, I would not make the military a
15 career because they figured out that that was really a place of command because I had a couple of
16 guys working for me. And they really wanted the pilots to be in command.

17 LC: Okay, and again, that was sort of sorting out the pilots from the backseaters?

18 RLH: That's right. And the guy they wanted to put in there I happened to outrank him by
19 like three months. Well, if I outrank him, he cannot write my efficiency report. He can't be the guy
20 that grades me.

21 LC: Right.

22 RLH: So I had to answer to him, but my efficiency report was written by the ops officer
23 who was a major. He was the guy that did the scheduling. And I mean, I consider that a patent
24 insult.

25 LC: Yeah, and this kind of galvanized your...

26 RLH: And that's when I said, you know, I'm putting in my papers; I'm getting out.

27 LC: And what year did you...I'm sorry, it was in 1974, but what month did you actually
28 separate from?

29 RLH: April 1st. That was my official separation date.

30 LC: And where did you and your wife go after your termination as an Air Force Reserve
31 officer?

1 RLH: We're stretching this way past Vietnam. (Laughter)

2 LC: Yes sir, we just want to kind of bring things down...

3 RLH: Career to an end, huh.

4 LC: Well, a little bit and I also want to ask you about how you felt after in 1975, a year later
5 when South Vietnam finally fell to the North Vietnamese.

6 RLH: When we came back to the States, we landed in Charleston, South Carolina.

7 LC: Okay.

8 RLH: And out processed there, spent a few days there and that was April 1st, so the
9 weather was beginning to get nice anyway and drove from there to Dallas or near Dallas where her
10 parents lived and visited with them because that was the first place relatives were. And then we
11 left there and went to visit my folks. And in the mean time, I had saved my money diligently. I did
12 not have to go to work for a good six months if I didn't want to. But I just happened to look in the
13 Dallas paper and there was a job fair being held and specifically mainly wanted ex-military officers.
14 I said, 'Well, I'd be a fool not to at least go look.'

15 LC: And find out about it.

16 RLH: And I probably hadn't been back but a week then. So, I went on to visit my folks. I
17 sent my resume in and I went on to visit my folks and they notified me that I needed to be at this
18 job fair thing on such and such date, so I flew back to Dallas and interviewed with several people
19 and low and behold, they gave me a job.

20 LC: And sir, fast forwarding a little bit then to 1975 when South Vietnam ceased to exist,
21 did you have any particular feelings about the end of the war?

22 RLH: I was extremely bitter; I was embarrassed. I don't know that I felt like that I had
23 done anything to let my country down. I thought people had let us down. But if we didn't think
24 enough of it to see it through to the end, then why did we do it at all? I lost six good friends in my
25 squadron while I was there and I was pretty upset about that.

26 LC: And sir, have you changed your mind in the thirty plus years since, thirty years?

27 RLH: Well, I probably don't hate Jane Fonda quite as much, but I've mellowed. I don't
28 hold it against anyone. Most of the people who were antiwar; right, wrong, or indifferent saw well
29 enough that when the war was over, they needed to shut up. They didn't at least strut around and
30 say, 'We were right.'

31 LC: Right.

1 RLH: It just, I mean, it came to a close, that was the end of it. I didn't expect personally
2 for me anything. I didn't ask for anything.

3 LC: Right.

4 RLH: Just leave me alone. I did what I was supposed to do, leave me alone.

5 LC: Sir, you mentioned Jane Fonda. Can you say how you felt when you learned that she
6 had gone over to Hanoi and what was your reaction to that? Like I can probably guess.

7 RLH: I was appalled.

8 LC: Yes sir.

9 RLH: You know, I felt like if she wanted to disagree with our having been there, that was
10 her right, but to do what she did was absolutely unjustifiable.

11 LC: And as I recall, at least one of the broadcasts that she made while she was over
12 there, she addressed pilots and flyers particularly.

13 RLH: She did and she made the statement that she had visited the prisoners who were
14 there and there was no one who was being mistreated.

15 LC: Yeah.

16 RLH: Ask John McCain if that's true.

17 LC: Yes sir, yes sir. Do you think she was just naïve or was she...?

18 RLH: I think she was...yes, I do think she was naïve as far as how she...I think she is an
19 intelligent woman. I have no quarrel with her being antiwar. Let me make that very plain. She has
20 her right to that opinion.

21 LC: Yes sir.

22 RLH: What she does not have the right to do is to abet the enemy, which is what she did,
23 which was totally as far as I'm concerned bordering on treason. I feel that strongly about it.

24 LC: It won't surprise you to learn you're not the only one who has said that.

25 RLH: Well, if someone had assassinated her, I would not have wept. I mean, I felt that
26 strongly about it.

27 LC: Yeah.

28 RLH: I have never watched a Jane Fonda movie in my life and I never will.

29 (Laughter)

30 LC: Speaking of movies sir, have you watched Vietnam films at all?

31 RLH: Some, some.

1 LC: Were there any that struck you in a particular way as especially accurate or as
2 especially or egregiously inaccurate?

3 RLH: Oh, I mean there are some that were egregiously inaccurate. One that I remember
4 was *Flight of the Intruder*. I mean, that bordered on being ridiculous.

5 LC: What was wrong with it?

6 RLH: Well, it was the story of two naval pilots who decided to bomb a utility plant in Hanoi
7 in the direct violation of the rules. Nobody did that. I mean, we did a lot of things, but we weren't
8 blatant about it.

9 LC: Right, right. So just the premise of it was...

10 RLH: Yeah, I mean, that's stupid. On the other hand, there was one called *Bat 21*, and
11 *Bat 21* was the story of a couple of fellows, again, in the Navy who were shot down and one of
12 them made it out alive after having been on the ground for, gosh, four or five days. And there was
13 a sense of reality to that one. But I mean, I can't connect to things like *Apocalypse Now*. I wasn't
14 in the Army; I didn't go through those things.

15 LC: Right.

16 RLH: *Full Metal Jacket*, I just...that's not how I lived.

17 LC: Right. It's not the war you saw.

18 RLH: That's right. I mean, we were in a little small closed base that we didn't get off and
19 essentially none of the bad guys got in. They'd get mad at us and chunk in a few rockets and
20 mortars every now and then and once in a while get lucky enough to shoot one of our aircraft
21 down, but we didn't have the intensity of full time combat like those poor Army people did or
22 Marines. We went out and had combat at the most, an hour and a half a day.

23 LC: Do you even at this removed from events feel a kind of disconnect from the war that is
24 often portrayed on television programs and the movies that the infantry and Marines faced while
25 they were over there? Do you still think...?

26 RLH: Personally, I have no connect to it.

27 LC: Okay.

28 RLH: Because I didn't live through that.

29 LC: Yeah.

30 RLH: But then on the other hand, personally, I don't think that the antiwar sentiment
31 outside of the few hot spots that there were was intense as everybody puts it up to be.

1 LC: By hot spots, could you name the ones you're thinking of?

2 RLH: Berkeley, Kent State, New York City, Washington D.C. You know, the east coast
3 and the west coast and very few points in between. I mean, in Middle America, people didn't do
4 that.

5 LC: Did your wife ever say anything to you about any antiwar stuff that went on at Texas
6 Tech?

7 RLH: Never ever, never ever.

8 LC: Sir, have you read much about the war?

9 RLH: Yes, I have read about it. In fact, you get a little maudlin as you get older and like to
10 remember.

11 LC: Yes sir.

12 RLH: I have happened to run into via the Internet a fellow who wrote a series of books
13 about a similar airplane, the F-105. He was what was called a Wild Weasel. I don't know if you
14 know what that is.

15 LC: Yes sir.

16 RLH: But he was actually a backseat Wild Weasel and I corresponded with him and read
17 every one of his four or five books. He lives not far from here.

18 LC: Does reading about it help you to sort of think through your own experience or are you
19 reading it for a larger interest in understanding the conflict?

20 RLH: I read it for two reasons.

21 LC: Okay.

22 RLH: Number one, for a better understanding of the big picture. I had a very limited
23 picture. I was young, I was naïve, I was not politically active. As I grow older, I'd like to look back
24 and say, 'What really was going on?' I like to remember when I was young. Sure I do, everybody
25 does.

26 LC: Sure.

27 RLH: And if you remember, ninety nine percent of what we've talked about has been the
28 good memories.

29 LC: Yes sir.

30 RLH: I mean, we didn't talk about anything bad.

31 LC: Right.

1 RLH: Or very little.

2 LC: And that's not because bad things didn't happen, I'm aware of that.

3 RLH: That's just what you remember and what you want to talk about.

4 LC: And sir, with the reading that you've done, can you give your, at this point, your
5 general assessment of US strategy in the conflict overall? Was it a good idea for the United States
6 to commit forces to that conflict or not?

7 RLH: Perhaps at the beginning when we first went over there and our idea was
8 containment to some extent. But once we had been there for a number of years and continued
9 that same poor strategy that wasn't working, looking back at it now, it was a great waste of
10 manpower and money. Of course, high-n-sight is 20/20, you know.

11 LC: Yeah.

12 RLH: Looking forward then, we all thought we could win the war tomorrow. Now looking
13 back, there was never a time and a chance.

14 LC: Why is that?

15 RLH: Because we didn't go about it as a war. We went about it as keep the casualties
16 down, but make everybody believe that we were trying to win.

17 LC: And would you say that the United States did not commit the full power to the conflict
18 it might have such that a victory?

19 RLH: Of course we didn't.

20 LC: And do you understand why?

21 RLH: Sure.

22 LC: Why?

23 RLH: Because of political upheaval that would've come about had they done so.

24 LC: Okay.

25 RLH: Maybe Midwestern America would become part of the anti-war sentiment at the
26 time. At that point in time, the war had drug on forever and ever and ever. We had never fought a
27 war that lasted that long.

28 LC: Yes sir, that's very true.

29 RLH: People were sick and tired of it, including those of us who had been there.

30 LC: Do you think that President Nixon's plan to Vietnamize the war in the late 60's; of
31 course '69 onward was the best approach that could've been formulated at the time?

1 RLH: I don't think he had a lot of choice. Our intent at that time was to get out with the
2 least loss of face that we could do so, giving it a name, Vietnamization, was simply our way of
3 bowing out. I don't think there's anyone who in Washington who thought that the South
4 Vietnamese could continue to keep the north out. It wasn't if, it was when they would take over.
5 And I honestly believe that, I don't think anyone thought that ten years from then, there would still
6 be two Vietnams.

7 LC: Even Nixon and Kissinger and the Parris Peace Accords?

8 RLH: No, no, they didn't believe that. But at that point in time, they were beyond caring to.

9 LC: I want to ask you a couple of questions about being a Vietnam Veteran. Other than
10 the one incident that you described where someone said something fairly disparaging about people
11 who served in Vietnam, have you ever encountered any resistance or for lack of a better word,
12 discrimination because you served in Vietnam?

13 RLH: Quite the opposite.

14 LC: Okay, can you describe what you mean by that?

15 RLH: I've had people thank me, I've had people who, when I first came back, I'm
16 convinced that one of the reasons that I got a job was because I was an ex-military officer.

17 LC: And some employers saw that as a valuable background?

18 RLH: Sure. I mean, it wasn't a detractor that I had been to Vietnam, but it was the military
19 training made you mature.

20 LC: Yes sir.

21 RLH: But no, I've not had any verbal, fisticuffs, or anything held with anyone, but it's not
22 something I discuss that much either.

23 LC: Do you resist talking about it, I mean, in general, obviously you're doing an oral
24 history now, but I mean, in social situations?

25 RLH: Not really.

26 LC: It just doesn't really come up?

27 RLH: I don't avoid it. It's not something I go, 'Oh, I'm a Vietnam Veteran.'

28 LC: (Laughter) Yeah, what did you do?

29 RLH: I'm not a member of the VFW, I'm not a member of the American Legion, I don't go
30 down and march on Memorial Day or on Veteran's Day.

31 LC: Have you been involved with any veteran's organization?

1 RLH: No.

2 LC: Why is that sir?

3 RLH: Oh, what little I did can't compare to most of what those people did. You know, the
4 poor guys that went and fought in the mud were the true heroes, not us. I just did a job.

5 LC: Sir, is there anything else you'd like to add to this interview that we haven't covered
6 yet?

7 RLH: No. I think I've given a blow-by-blow description.

8 LC: Yes sir, and I want to thank you for your time, thank you very much.

9 RLH: Well you're quite welcome; I enjoyed it.