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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Col. Ralph C. Erchinger
Conducted by Richard B. Verrone, Ph.D.
December 20, 2005; February 8, 2006
Transcribed by Mindy Moser**

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

1 Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone. I am conducting an oral history
2 interview with Colonel Ralph C. Erchinger and I am in Lubbock, Texas. Today is
3 December 20th, 2005 and it's approximately 1:17pm, Central Standard Time. Colonel,
4 you are in Austin, Texas. Before we begin the interview, sir, I would like to get your
5 consent to conduct the interview, that you understand some of the terms I laid out for you
6 before we began talking, that you are going to sign the interview agreement once sent to
7 you, and that you are aware that this interview will be made public and accessible to the
8 public and that by doing this interview you are consenting to donate the interview to the
9 Vietnam Archive. Do you understand that and agree to that, sir?

10 Ralph Erchinger: I do.

11 RV: Very good. Well, let's start with kind of early years of who you are. I'd like
12 to know where you born, when you were born, and a little about your childhood.

13 RE: Well, I was born in Hammond, Indiana to German immigrants. My father
14 came over to this country in 1926. He was a master cabinet maker, having learned his
15 trade in Germany and once he got a little bit established he sent for my mother and she
16 said, 'Baloney, you come over here and get me yourself. You said you were going to do
17 that.' So she sold the ticket that he sent and he went over to Germany, married her in
18 their hometown of Tunigun, and came back and in short order I was born. They were
19 married on March 1, 1930 and I was conceived within a couple weeks after that, born
20 December 14, 1930.

21 RV: Now, why did he go to Indiana? Did he stop on his way over?

1 GE: Well, he had a brother and a sister precede him to the United States. He was
2 one of twelve kids and he fought for the Kaiser in World War I and there was some
3 family dissention and difficulty. I don't know that this is relevant but I enjoy telling it.

4 RV: No, please go ahead.

5 RE: They had heavy inflation in Germany, and my dad was a very skilled
6 cabinetmaker, and his dad said, 'Well, son, this inflation is crazy. The money's worth
7 less every week and we've got to do something about it. So you build a house.' So my
8 dad borrowed money from anybody that had any in the family, built a beautiful house in
9 the town and then after it was all done at some point he paid back all those loans, but he
10 paid it back with inflated money, so he wound up with a nice house, and the rest of the
11 family came up a little short, and they didn't feel good about that. So that was one
12 circumstance. Another circumstance was he came from a farming family, and they were
13 very well thought of. My mother, who was already more than a glint in his eye did not
14 meet with full favor and so for those kinds of reasons he said, 'I'm going to the United
15 States to find my way.' And there were [was] similar stuff going on with his younger
16 brother, Andrew. He was sort of a wild character and he wasn't comfortable with his
17 stern father so he came over and settled in the Rio Grande Valley and started an orchard
18 down there. And then along with his coming over my dad's younger sister Agatha was
19 sort of a mail-order bride for a German farmer in Illinois who had lost his prior wife.
20 And sort of through family and friend contacts became aware of my Aunt Agatha. So she
21 would up coming over and going down to the Rio Grande Valley initially for the same
22 family who sponsored my Uncle Andrew. So they came over, worked their way in the
23 Valley a little bit to pay off what it cost for them to come over. And then she came up to
24 Illinois to marry Fredrick Hubner. So with those contacts in the United States, my dad
25 came over. He went initially to the Valley and there was—I don't know exactly what the
26 contacts were, but he knew of some people in Indiana and decided that he sure wasn't
27 going to stay in the Rio Grande Valley because then, as now, it was more difficult to have
28 a good living in the Valley than it would have been in the Midwest. So he went up and
29 found a job as a cabinetmaker and one thing led to another and things went well.

30 RV: Well, if you don't mind me asking, did your father tell you about his
31 experiences in World War I and what Germany was like after World War I?

1 RE: Yes.

2 RV: Can you talk a little bit about that and what you remember?

3 RE: I wish I had interviewed him more but I do have—I interviewed both of my
4 parents at length, recalling childhood, how they met, why they got married and all that
5 stuff, but not too much about the war. People in my folk's village apparently all went
6 into the same branch of the German military. They were all what they called Pioneers or
7 engineers and among other things, they dug the trenches. And I had one uncle that was
8 killed in World War I out of that family and another one in World War II. He [a third
9 uncle] was a blacksmith on call and was disfigured [in WWI]. They didn't expect him to
10 survive or keep his vision, but he did both but he was disfigured. I'm not sure whether
11 that was due to an explosion or mustard gas. But my dad came through it with only some
12 shrapnel. He still had shrapnel until the day he died in one of his shoulders from a
13 grenade that went off in the area. So I have no details of his experience, but it was less
14 than pleasant. He was not eager to talk about it, I guess. And then after the war when
15 they came home—I also interviewed my Aunt Agatha that I had mentioned before, so I
16 got some perspectives from her. They just talked about the terrible rampant inflation and
17 the scarcity of food, which was a problem on my mother's side. My grandfather, her
18 father, worked in industry as a factory laborer, so they rarely had meat in those years.
19 That was not a problem for my dad and his family, but both of them talked about how the
20 money was so inflated that eventually it would take a wheelbarrow full of paper currency
21 to buy a loaf of bread. So, stories of that type, and I guess it was my Aunt Agatha that
22 talked about how difficult it was for their mother to send the sons off to war and then
23 have some of them not come back.

24 RV: It sounds like your father was a very determined individual, a kind of
25 ingenious individual who was determined to make his own way. And coming over to the
26 United States is a huge move. Do you remember what he told you about his transition
27 and your family's transition to this country and his initial impressions and kind of how he
28 made it here?

29 RE: Oh yeah, that was very pleasant. He had only good stories to tell about his
30 arrival in the United States. Early on he was able to buy a Model-T Ford, and he drove it
31 up from the [Rio Grande] Valley. That was still in the Roaring Twenties, and he was sort

1 of a Dapper Dan. He sort of bragged about the fact that he could have gotten any number
2 of young ladies in the United States, but nonetheless he went back and married his
3 sweetheart, my mother. He did talk in later years, after retirement and all, about his
4 regret that he did not go into industry, which he could have done, and joined a union and
5 gotten a retirement. He worked for a small sole-proprietorship cabinetmaking firm and
6 didn't have any particular retirement other than social security. But other than that, he
7 had a very good experience in the United States, even in terms of the Depression when
8 many people were out of work. I recall on one occasion, I guess it was 1937 or 1938, he
9 was temporarily out of work, and so I vicariously [experienced] a little experience [of]
10 the Depression as I was with him in the car while he was looking for work. But he did
11 have a car; he was able to buy a 1937 Plymouth. That was the first car he bought while I
12 was around. He didn't own a car after he got rid of that Model-T and after he'd gone
13 back to Germany to marry my mother. Let's see. I was going to make another point. I
14 forgot what it was right now.

15 RV: Well, maybe it will come back to you. Can you tell me about his character
16 and who he was and who you saw him as your father?

17 RE: He was a stern but compassionate, loving man but he was certainly the ruler
18 of the roost, which was the tradition in Germany throughout his young life and even
19 continuing through World War II, I would say. Very self-confident, very assertive,
20 strong character. He remarked about his childhood being one of extremes, that all he
21 could think of at home was Arbeiten und beten. 'Arbeit' is work, 'beten' is prayer.
22 Working and praying. So as he reflected on that I think what he was saying is they were
23 too extreme on both. They were sort of fanatical workaholics, and they were also a little
24 fanatical about their religion.

25 RV: What religion?

26 RE: Protestant. His area was Protestant in Wurttemburg, close to Austria and
27 Switzerland.

28 RV: Did you grow up learning about your family's homeland? Did he talk about
29 Germany and that area of Europe?

30 GE: Yes, and I regret to say that he and my mother both, but my father
31 particularly, had a bias against Jews even though he worked for a Jew. And I did hear

1 deprecating remarks of that type, and I recall a certain pride in the early years of Hitler's
2 rise and feeling good about Germany becoming stronger again and perhaps righting some
3 of the wrongs of the Versailles Treaty.

4 RV: Right. And that's exactly what I was going to ask you about next is [are] his
5 thoughts and feelings or your family's thoughts and feelings about World War II. You
6 are born in 1930, so you must have memories of this war that are pretty vivid.

7 RE: Yes, but in spite of what I just said, I don't think there was ever any feeling
8 that the United States should not prevail. They saw themselves as Americans without a
9 doubt and I'm sure they had mixed emotions about all the developments of the war and
10 certainly the terrible destruction and the experiences my dad had in World War I as they
11 affected their understandings of World War II. So it was a mixed bag, but I never had
12 any inclination that there was any thought that the United States should not prevail.

13 RV: Right. So they considered themselves purely American.

14 RE: Absolutely.

15 RV: Okay. Tell me what you remember about your early years of your childhood
16 and I guess with the Great Depression. But maybe you could start with describing your
17 house, your home, and kind of the atmosphere in which you grew up.

18 RE: Well, when my folks came over they initially had rented a second story
19 apartment, which was basically an attic apartment, and my mother recalled it was terribly
20 hot, and she was pregnant with me. And shortly after I was born they moved to a rent
21 house on Ingram Avenue in Calumet City, Illinois, which is where I grew up and where
22 they spent the rest of their lives [They spent the rest of their lives in Calumet City]. And
23 my dad wanted to move there particularly because he wanted to get close to work. The
24 apartment they were in required that he ride a bus to work and the house that they moved
25 into was within a twenty minute walk where he worked.

26 RV: Do you mind spelling the name of the city in which you grew up?

27 RE: Calumet, C-a-l-u-m-e-t City, Illinois.

28 RV: Very good, thank you.

29 RE: So that was on Ingram Avenue on Calumet City. There was one small story
30 that was humorous that I remember probably because I was told about it. But in
31 prohibition, my dad developed a skill of making wine. So he made wine at home and that

1 also was an opportunity for company. A lot of people liked to come over and sample my
2 dad's wine. On one occasion they tell me they wondered what had happened to me. I
3 wasn't around in the living room anymore or wherever they expected to see me. I was a
4 toddler and they found me on the stairway going downstairs where that wine cask was,
5 and my mouth was under the wine cask, letting the wine drip in (laughs). And I recall
6 that, or I know that I grew up with German as my first language. By the time I went to
7 kindergarten I was bilingual. My mother learned English along with me, and she worked
8 at it more than my dad did. They both continued with an accent throughout their lives but
9 my mother with a little less accent. And I think education was such an important thing
10 for my folks that I guess my mother perhaps worked at her studies along with me as I
11 went through [school], and I probably was more diligent in my attention to academics
12 throughout primary school then I might have been otherwise. I remember particularly a
13 time in the seventh grade I was having difficulty diagramming [sentences] and got really
14 upset about it. My mother got alarmed at my being upset and came in to talk with the
15 teacher, and she just laughed. She said I was one of the best students in the class, nothing
16 to worry about, but an example of parental concern and interest. So I was not deprived in
17 any way of parental guidance and fostering a relationship with education.

18 RV: It sounds like it, that it was emphasized in your family a great deal. Tell me
19 about the size of your family. Brothers and sisters?

20 RE: One brother, five years younger, Walter.

21 RV: And what do you remember about the Great Depression? Really, these are
22 the first 10 years of your life.

23 RE: You know, I do not remember privation personally. We were frugal, but I
24 was always well clothed. At some point it became sort of common for guys, if not gals,
25 to wear jeans to school, and my mother wouldn't let me wear jeans. That was just
26 inappropriate and not dignified in her mind. I mentioned my dad looking for work.
27 Other than that, only stories. My dad talked about their savings having been heavily
28 diluted because they had put them in gold bonds, and then the banks crashed, and they
29 got about forty cents back on the dollar for their gold bonds or something [like that], and
30 that was upsetting. But they made it through the Depression quite well and I don't have
31 any memories of privation of any kind. In fact, I prided myself I think from an early

1 point in recognizing a difference in myself and my values from those of most of my peers
2 in school in terms of thrift and the value of money. I worked starting at some early point.
3 Some guy stopped me—well, I guess my first job was getting milk from a creamery
4 about a fifteen-minute walk away instead of getting it from a milkman. So I got to pocket
5 the difference between what we paid the milkman and what I got by going to the dairy.
6 And then I had a magazine delivery route delivering *Liberty* magazine. That must have
7 been about 1940 or '41 and then I had a paper route, then I worked in three different
8 grocery stores, and I was a J.C. Penney stock boy and a salesperson and so on. That was
9 not typical of the kids I went to school with.

10 RV: How so?

11 RE: Most of the kids did not have jobs.

12 RV: What was it about your family? Simply the work ethic that your parents—

13 RE: Yes, I think so.

14 RV: Well, tell me about your relationship with your brother. Did you all get
15 along? You're the older one and was there a sense that you needed to help look after
16 him?

17 RE: Yes. There was a five-year difference, and I thought we got along just fine.
18 But in later years, my brother divorced his wife, and he got upset with my wife and me
19 because we didn't also divorce her. We thought she was a pretty good gal and continued
20 to maintain a brother-in-law and sister-in-law kind of relationship. And I tried to be a
21 healing influence, and my brother didn't like that. And as we worked through that stuff
22 as a family, both my sister-in-law and my wife mentioned that they sort of thought my
23 brother always looked up to me, if not resented me and perhaps my folks even played
24 favorites a little bit. He didn't go to college, although he is very successful. He went to
25 Coyne Electrical [School in Chicago] and was a lineman and worked his way up into
26 management. At this point in life he probably has been more financially successful than I
27 have. And in that divorce process our communications were really curtailed and strained.
28 But that healed after a few years, and I think we're pretty good buddies now. But he still
29 lives in Illinois, and we're in Texas. We call each other on our birthdays, and we have
30 visited each other a bit. So it's a mixed bag, but in general I'd say we've had a good
31 relationship.

1 RV: Do you want to talk to me a little bit about your mother and who she was and
2 who she was throughout your life?

3 RE: My mother was a sweetheart, more religious than my father. She was with
4 some religious hiking groups in Germany. Her father was a laborer in a [Hohner]
5 harmonica factory. He was extremely stern and demanding, even by typical Teutonic
6 German standards. He was a tough, tough taskmaster. My mother remarked, for
7 example, on one occasion she was charged to take care of a younger sister. She was in
8 the middle. My mother had an older sister and two younger ones. So she was sort of
9 babysitting, and she was probably only about six or seven or something like that at the
10 time, and something happened. The younger child got into some jam or something like
11 that. A very, very minor infraction, and the father got extremely upset and spanked my
12 mother so hard that, as she explains it, she couldn't control her bowels. So she had a very
13 stern, stern upbringing, but she grew up well, as did all of the kids in the family. And she
14 wound up going into industry in a bookkeeping, secretarial kind of capacity. So for her
15 day, she was somewhat liberated and [independent and] she took pride in that. As I got
16 to know her in that way, she resented my father being such a penny-pinching taskmaster
17 and dictator of the household, wanting her to account for every penny. I recall—and
18 probably this was in the late thirties or early forties—my mother had to keep track in a
19 book every penny that was spent. She did not work. She did not have an income of her
20 own in the United States. My father was the only income producer. And they would
21 argue about a number of things but most commonly involving finances. Oh, I guess we
22 never mentioned their having bought a home. Speaking about the Depression, my dad
23 was able to keep working, and so they were able to establish credit through relationship
24 with businesspeople who knew my father and his dependability. So they were able to get
25 a loan, buy a home, and they rented it out for the first year or so in 1937, I think they
26 moved into this home. [That was at 103 Warren St. in Calumet City] So that's another
27 example of their working through the Depression fairly well. So anyway, in that home
28 then, that they owned, at an early point my mother rented out a front parlor and converted
29 it into a bedroom. I remember she got seven dollars a week, I think, and that was her
30 money (laughs). She managed to find a way to have a little bit of discretionary income.

31 RV: Right.

1 RE: But that was after we moved into this house then there was a mission church
2 being established, meeting in the American Legion Home, which was just five minutes
3 away from us. And it was at that point that I was enrolled in Sunday school.

4 RV: How old were you?

5 RE: I suppose I was eight years old. And from that time to the present I have
6 been a member of the Lutheran Church. That was the United Lutheran Church in
7 America as a kid. It later became the LCA, Lutheran Church in America and today it's
8 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

9 RV: And you're still a member today?

10 RE: Yes. And religion and involvement in church life has been important to me
11 ever since that [early] age three to the present. I have always been involved in church. I
12 have served on church councils; I've been on stewardship committee more often than not,
13 almost continuously the last twenty-five years. I've chaired the stewardship committee
14 for many years and am presently. I served on the Synodical level in several capacities,
15 including a tour of about five years on the—what do they call it? Where we have young
16 people interested in seminary—candidacy committees, following them through their time
17 in seminary and involved in [guiding them and] approving or disapproving them in any
18 point in the process. So I feel very good about my religious upbringing and my religious
19 development and my continuing faith to the present.

20 RV: Well, we can talk about that as we go through your life, especially about how
21 your military career played into that and how that played into your military career. Tell
22 me a little bit about your education, your schooling as a youth, and then moving into
23 middle school and then high school.

24 RE: Well, I went through elementary school in Calumet City, kindergarten at
25 Wentworth, which was close to our rent house on Ingram Avenue. And then starting
26 about first grade at Lincoln School in Calumet City, close to our new home. I was
27 always a good student, and I think I was valedictorian [salutatorian] in grade school. I
28 didn't make that in high school, but I was on the honor role all the time. I served as
29 editor of our yearbook, was on the debate team, the swim team in high school, went out
30 for track. Our high school had three tracks, commercial, shop—industrial, I guess they
31 called it—commercial, shop, and college prep. And low and behold it just felt natural for

1 me to go the college prep route even though I didn't have any family heritage indicating
2 that. My folks were happy about it, but they didn't particular push it; they weren't
3 advocates. And I applied for a Naval ROTC scholarship and won it in high school. So I
4 had a four-year, all fees paid scholarship, and I chose Miami University in Oxford, Ohio
5 for a variety of reasons. It was far enough away that there was good separation from the
6 folks and close enough to where it was comfortable to travel. It was a relatively small
7 school, enrollment of five thousand, but it had the advantages of a large school. And they
8 had an excellent reputation in business, which was what I wanted to pursue. Because by
9 that time I was working as a salesperson for the J.C. Penney Company and had gotten to
10 know the manager who just sort of influenced me, and my goal at that point in life was to
11 become a manager of a triple-A J.C. Penney store. So I majored in merchandising and
12 marketing.

13 RV: Okay. If you don't mind, let's go back to your high school years.

14 RE: Sure.

15 RV: Tell me about—you were on the debate team. Obviously you had some good
16 intellectual skills. Tell me about your favorite subjects and the activities you were
17 involved in and sports activities.

18 RE: Well, I never played football; I never liked football other than tag and touch
19 and stuff like that, nor baseball. But in high school I went out for both track and
20 swimming my freshman year, and the swimming stuck, so I was on the swim team all
21 four years. My primary event was backstroke, and I enjoyed that. I don't know. I guess
22 I just sort of enjoyed academic pursuits, and among my course in college prep, there were
23 opportunities in journalism and rhetoric, and I guess somebody asked me to go out for the
24 debate team, and I did. Latin was the only foreign language that we had, so I took Latin.
25 That was my least favorite subject, but the Latin prof was one of my favorite profs. It
26 was a very good experience. Harry Lambke brought in Roman and Greek mythology as
27 well as the study of Latin. So that was pleasant, although I hated Latin. And as it turns
28 out I found that in terms of my particular strengths, I don't have a strength in language
29 because at a point later on I once wanted to go into the attaché service and had to take a
30 language aptitude test, and I flunked it (laughs). So that explains why I didn't like Latin.

31 RV: Right.

1 RE: I don't know. I suppose social studies and economics and English were
2 perhaps my favorite subjects, but I always did very well in math and physics and
3 chemistry also, I just didn't like them as much.

4 RV: Why were those your favorite and why the others your least favorite, do you
5 think?

6 RE: I don't know.

7 RV: Were you good in those?

8 RE: Perhaps as a result of my mother's interest in developing a good capability in
9 the English language, I perhaps focused on it a little more than most. And yeah, I think I
10 was good at it. I was good in English and grammar. But I don't know. I still like to
11 write and edit, and I'm not sure why.

12 RV: Did your parents expect you to try to go to college?

13 RE: No, not at all.

14 RV: Okay, this was your decision, then.

15 RE: Yes.

16 RV: Why did you make that decision? Did you see it more as a business
17 opportunity that you knew that you needed that to go certain places in the business
18 world?

19 RE: Oh, I wasn't particularly focused on the business world, no. As I grew up I
20 had friends in all walks of life. I recognized that education was a stepping-stone to
21 bigger and better things and just a part of development. I developed an attitude of
22 stewardship pretty early on, going beyond thoughts of just finances but making the most
23 of what we have as gifts from God. And just as a natural part of the development cycle,
24 it just made sense to me to go on to college. I did well in grade school; I did well in high
25 school. I had every expectation of doing well in college. I guess the decision to go to
26 college was cemented when I won the scholarship to go to college. I'm not sure I was
27 determined to go to college until I won the scholarship.

28 RV: Right. Well, that certainly makes a huge financial difference. It makes it
29 easier. What years were you in high school?

30 RE: I graduated in '49, so I was in high school from '45 to '49.

1 RV: If you don't mind, tell me post-World War II—what do you remember about
2 events like Pearl Harbor and VE Day and VJ Day?

3 RE: I remember delivering papers when Pearl Harbor happened. No, that's not
4 right.

5 RV: It was a Sunday.

6 RE: I was delivering papers in '45 when the war ended. No, I don't know what I
7 was doing in Pearl Harbor.

8 RV: Okay. What do you remember about the attitude of the United States?

9 You're a young child and you're watching this evolve. What were your thoughts on the
10 war?

11 RE: Hmm. Well, let's see. So I would have been eleven. Golly, I don't recall
12 having any thoughts.

13 RV: A lot of young kids were kind of fascinated with the soldiers and the
14 airplanes and the whole thing, and they would see the news clips, the newsreels on
15 Saturdays and the theater. Do you have any memories like that?

16 RE: Well, I guess any of that stuff might have been filtered through my dad. I
17 don't know what the years were, but I remember my dad being stirred up by Marshal
18 music. When there were marches on, I can recall his sort of marching around the living
19 room a little bit in circles, and my being caught up in that as a kid, too. So that would
20 seem to indicate there was a little bit of glorification of war. I hate to say that and I don't
21 know that that was the case but I remember that marching experience as being sort of a
22 joyful one. It may not have anything to do with attitudes toward the war, but other than
23 that, I just don't recall anything from that standpoint. However, another perspective I
24 guess I have, since we had no family involved in the war here and my folks' extended
25 families were predominantly in Germany, we were caught up in sending care packages to
26 Germany. And I on a number of occasions would pedal my bicycle to the post office
27 with the care packages in the basket. And I remember my mother always sewed them up
28 so that there was a cloth covering over the box. And I remember being a part of
29 assembling those packages, including bringing some sewing needles. I was working in a
30 Royal Blue grocery store at that time, I remember, and brought some needles home to put
31 in one of those packages because one of my mother's sisters was a seamstress. Let's see.

1 My mother was the caregiver and was the primary person in sending these. I also recall
2 my dad having objected to some of those packages only because it cost money to put
3 them together and mail them over there, and he was so tight-fisted. On the other hand,
4 there was a compassionate side to him. His brother Andrew who had settled in the Rio
5 Grande Valley at an early time, he wasn't doing very well, and he got really homesick
6 and wanted to go back to Germany but couldn't afford it, and my dad loaned him the
7 money so that he could go. And this was about 1937 I think, or '36. And eventually after
8 he had come back, he died of tetanus in an accident in the orchard where he scratched
9 himself with some rusty barbed wire. And so eventually that debt was forgiven, and that
10 was a little tough for my dad to take, and my mother kept telling him he needed to get
11 over that. That's sort of a long way around, but in terms of the wartime experience, that's
12 probably the most vivid memory that I have, is the care packages going to Germany
13 toward the end of the war and after the end of the war.

14 RV: Right. Well, you're in high school during this kind of post-war celebration
15 for the United States and kind of recovery. Do you remember Harry Truman? Any
16 memories of the President?

17 RE: Yes.

18 RV: Can you tell me about that?

19 RE: Oh, golly. I guess I was not a political person by any stretch of the
20 imagination. I seem to recall sort of—it was rather awesome to have this haberdasher,
21 this very plain person who didn't seem presidential at all and oh my goodness, what was
22 going to happen with this guy as president? I don't recall anything about the decisions to
23 use the atomic bomb or any of those things at the time. I don't know why not. I can't
24 say that I have any memories beyond that.

25 RV: Okay. Were your father or your mother, were they particularly political?

26 RE: No. I would guess—I don't even know how they voted, as a matter of fact.
27 They were more patriotic than they were political, I think. My mother particularly was
28 very proud of her citizenship. But I couldn't tell you whether they were Republican or
29 Democratic.

30 RV: Wow. So there was no discussion, really?

31 RE: They didn't talk about that at all.

1 RV: Okay. You're in college at Miami from 1949 until '53? Is that correct?

2 RE: Yes.

3 RV: Okay. Tell me about that experience. What was college life like for you in
4 academics and things like that? And I know you joined the Naval ROTC. We can talk
5 about that in a moment. But tell me what it was like to go to college there at Miami.

6 RE: It was wonderful. As I mentioned I wanted to get a little bit of distance from
7 home. My mother was a bit overprotective and over-attached, and I recognized that so
8 the separation was good for me. I was not homesick. She was homesick for her kid if
9 there was any homesickness at all. I just jumped right into things and was very
10 comfortable. I lived in a dormitory my freshman year and joined a fraternity at the end of
11 my first semester and lived in the fraternity house annex my junior year, I guess, and in
12 the house my senior year. I worked while I was in the fraternity. I washed dishes, which
13 paid for my meals. Marketing was my chosen major. I felt good about that. Because I
14 was in the Naval ROTC, I had to take trig and physics as electives. They were not related
15 to my major.

16 RV: Why did you join Naval ROTC?

17 RE: For the scholarship.

18 RV: Okay. So you're kind of tied into that. Was that a good thing for you? The
19 money's good, yes, but how did you feel about going into that military side?

20 RE: Wonderful. Early on I felt that it was the patriotic thing to do to serve my
21 country. There was no negative feeling about ROTC anywhere that I could detect in
22 those years. Yeah, so I participated, and actually it was glorious. Between my freshman
23 and sophomore year I had a training cruise in the Pacific that got off to Hawaii. I was on
24 a destroyer and the DD870-Fechtler. I was a five-inch mount first loader. It was at that
25 time that the Korean thing broke out, and they needed our destroyer, so I transferred to
26 the heavy cruiser St. Paul for the last week or so of it [the cruise]. But we were out in the
27 Pacific dropping depth charges and various maneuvers. We had a couple of days in
28 Honolulu and Waikiki Beach, so the ROTC experience was fine [and great fun].

29 RV: Did you adapt well to the military regimen?

30 RE: I would say so. I grew up with stronger than average discipline at home and
31 discipline of the military was no problem at all, not in the slightest. I need to say that it

1 was during my year between my sophomore year and my junior year and the summer
2 training that was at Little Creek, Virginia, amphibious training with the Navy that I was
3 disqualified as a result of a physical during my sophomore year. I believe it was because
4 they were looking for attrition. They had too many people in the program. But in any
5 case, in responding to one of the questions as it went down in the interview, 'Do you
6 have any sinus problems,' I said, 'Well, no, but I was prone to having colds in high
7 school, and I was on the swim team.' So they pursued that and sent me to Wright-
8 Patterson AFB for a check up and an in-depth follow-up, and the Air Force found me
9 physically qualified for anything, flying duty and submarines, so I breathed a sigh of
10 relief, went off to Little Creek, Virginia for training, and while I was there my
11 disqualification came through. So on my way back, I stopped off at Miami and signed up
12 for the Air Force ROTC, and that's how I happened to be commissioned in the Air Force.

13 RV: What do you remember as the most positive experience there, in your early
14 Naval ROTC? You stay in the military for the majority of your entire career, twenty-nine
15 years. What was it, or can you see the seed of your long career starting out right there at
16 Miami?

17 RE: Absolutely not. I was in the ROTC for its scholarship opportunities and to
18 pay back by way of commitment for a minimum period of military service, which would
19 have been four years in the Navy, only two years as a result of my Air Force
20 commissioning because I didn't have a full scholarship with the Air Force. And my
21 commitment to a career did not occur until our first assignment in Libya. My wife and I
22 were together at Wheelus Field in Libya, and the career people were complaining like
23 crazy about the difficulties of living in a foreign culture, not having the conveniences of
24 the corner drugstore and a butcher shop, and the Gibly was blowing dust through their
25 glassless shuttered windows; [at the same time,] my wife and I just had a ball climbing in
26 our little Volkswagen Bug and bouncing through the desert and discovering the ancient
27 Roman cities of Leptis Magnus and Sabratha and getting to know the people and getting
28 an understanding of another part of the world. We thought, 'This is amazing. The career
29 people hate it? We're getting out and we love it? We've got to think about this.' She
30 was working as a secretary for Caltex at the time so together we said, 'Well, this looks
31 like a challenging life, satisfying; we like the things most people don't like about foreign

1 countries, so yeah, go ahead.' So I applied for pilot training and a regular commission.
2 They both came through and we had no regrets after twenty-nine years of military
3 service.

4 RV: After you finish Naval ROTC, going back to Miami, then you get into Air
5 Force ROTC. Can you recount that in a little more detail about how that happened
6 because the Air Force is going to be the career?

7 TR: Well, there's no more to it than what I just said. Because I bounced out of
8 the Navy, I bounced into the Air Force, and I just continued the ROTC commitment with
9 the Air Force.

10 RV: Was there a choice between branches or was the Air Force the only choice
11 for you?

12 RE: Miami had only Naval and Air Force ROTC. If there had been a choice there
13 was no doubt in my mind the Air Force was more appealing to me.

14 RV: Tell me about that; why was that? Was there an initial or early interest in
15 flight in your youth?

16 RE: No, I would say not. And I guess that statement may reflect bias from later
17 years rather than anything at the time. But I think just in general, Army service, being a
18 ground grunt did not appeal to me. Flying certainly did. Well, I guess, as a matter of
19 fact, now that I think about it, I have a cousin by marriage who was in the Marines.
20 Married one of the daughters of this aunt Agatha that I mentioned, the farm wife in
21 Milford, Illinois, and he came back from the Marines, and part of his G.I. Bill, he learned
22 how to fly. He took flying lessons. And as a kid, sometime probably around 1946 or '47,
23 I was in Milford and he took me up on a flight in a Piper Cub or something out of a little
24 local airport, and that was my first time ever in an airplane and we flew around the town
25 and the farm and looked around, and I thought it was great. So that was my first flying
26 experience, and I liked it, so possibly that has something to do with it.

27 RV: Tell me about those two years in Air Force ROTC. What kind of things and
28 what kind of training did you have to do?

29 RE: Oh, there were minimal courses—Air Force indoctrination. The Navy had a
30 lot more academic requirements than the Air Force did, and we studied engineering in the
31 Navy and all kinds of stuff. I don't actually recall what my courses were in the Air Force

1 ROTC. They were sort of minimal, and the lab work was minimal. General Air Force
2 history, I suppose, and perhaps leadership. I could tell you what it was in later years
3 because part of my career later on was to establish an Air Force ROTC unit at Norwich
4 University in Vermont. I don't want to get ahead of your interview.

5 RV: We'll talk about it when we get there. I am hearing—you have already stated
6 this to a point—but you must have done fairly well academically at Miami.

7 RE: Yes, I was not exceptional. As I recall I probably wound up with maybe a
8 2.9 on a 4-point basis. I don't know. Maybe I had a 3.2. My wife walked in since we
9 started this. She wasn't here earlier. Yeah, I was a good student but not an exceptional
10 student.

11 RV: Well, when you graduate from Miami, what are your options here? What are
12 you going to be doing?

13 RE: Well, as a matter of fact, I was initially scheduled to go on active duty upon
14 graduation but in January [June] of '53—and I had orders to that effect. In January [July]
15 of '53 I got orders or a letter canceling my orders to report on active duty and asking me
16 what my preferences were for when I should be called to active duty because they had a
17 reduction in forces, and they could not accept all the people that were scheduled to come
18 on board. So I indicated the sooner the better; I'd like to get my commitment out of the
19 way, and in the meantime then I contacted the J.C. Penney manager that I had come to
20 know in Hammond, Indiana. I lived in Calumet City, and the store was in Hammond,
21 Indiana right next door, and by this time Coon Swenson, the J.C. Penney manager, had a
22 store in Columbus, Ohio, which happened to be the city my wife was from, Columbus,
23 Ohio. So I contacted him, he set me up with some interviews, and I was accepted as a
24 management trainee at the J.C. Penney store in Louisville, Kentucky. So that's where my
25 new wife and I went for six months until I was called to active duty.

26 RV: Okay. Two questions. Tell me about meeting your wife and how that
27 happened, if you don't mind.

28 RE: Oh, well, I don't mind at all. I was a member of Sigma Phi Epsilon
29 fraternity, and on Sunday evenings, we didn't have meal service in the house, so we had
30 to go someplace else to eat, and one of my fraternity brothers said, 'Well, let's go over
31 to—' (asks wife) was it Westminster House? The youth at Westminster served an

1 evening meal at the Presbyterian Church. So Buzz Bourne and I went over there, and that
2 was my first time with that group. And as we were standing in line waiting to be served,
3 I said, 'Hey, Buzz.' He was a member of the Westminster group. 'Hey, Buzz, do you
4 know that gal?' I just pointed to Ellie. 'Oh, sure, I know her.' 'She looks pretty
5 interesting.' So I guess he fixed me up with a date, and we started dating. She was a
6 junior, I was a sophomore, and I had a sort of a girlfriend at the time at Bowling Green
7 University in Ohio, and it didn't take too long for that to come to a screeching halt,
8 although I did have an obligation to take her to some dance, I guess the Navy ball. And
9 that didn't sit too well with Ellie, but she understood. And so it just clicked. The
10 following year, my junior year and her senior year, as I walked her home to her dormitory
11 after a date, she sort of hemmed and hawed, and it boiled down to she needed to know
12 where our relationship was going because she had to make a decision about Yale Divinity
13 School where she had a preliminary application and had been accepted. She wanted to go
14 to divinity school and pursue work toward Christian education. So I responded to her
15 hemming and hawing and said, 'Yeah, let's get married.' (laughs).

16 RV: That sets it straight right there.

17 RE: Yeah.

18 RV: And she was game?

19 RE: She was game. So she cancelled her divinity school plans, and we planned to
20 get married after I graduated, so she taught kindergarten for a year in the Upper Arlington
21 school system in Columbus, Ohio.

22 RV: Another question I wanted to ask you was your viewpoints then on the
23 Korean War. What do you remember about that?

24 RE: Oh, just that we were in it. I didn't have any strong feelings one way or
25 another. It developed, and we needed to prevail.

26 RV: Okay. Well, after you moved down to Louisville, tell me about your life
27 there.

28 RE: Oh, that was hilarious.

29 RV: Okay.

30 RE: We went down there, looked for an apartment. My income was pretty
31 minimal. Ellie remembers what it was, two hundred and fifty dollars a month. And so

1 we finally found an apartment that suited us that was a walk-up apartment, and it was
2 pretty much an efficiency apartment. The bed came folding out of the wall, didn't it?
3 We didn't have a bedroom, did we? [Wife talks in the background] Right, it was a bed
4 living room. Was the bed down all the time? Okay. Well, it was a combined bedroom
5 and living room, but we didn't discover until we started moving in that the kitchen had a
6 surprise for us.

7 RV: What's that?

8 RE: There was no running water in the sink (laughs).

9 RV: Oh boy.

10 RE: There was an adjacent bathroom, so we had to pour the water out of the
11 faucet in the bathroom for all our kitchen needs (laughs).

12 RV: Wow (laughs).

13 RE: So we were there for six months, and Ellie got a job to supplement our
14 income. She worked as a secretary in I guess it was the regional office of the Kroger
15 Company grocery store. Oh, and then she went as secretary of the dean of the business
16 school. What school? The University of Louisville. My experience with Penney's was
17 good, but it certainly reinforced what I already knew, that the life of a J.C. Penney
18 manager was one of work, work, work. In those days, it wasn't unusual for a manager to
19 spend sixty or seventy hours in his store.

20 RV: Wow. That's quite a bit.

21 RE: Yeah. Things are different these days, I think. Well, depending on what
22 you're doing. That's one of the criticisms of Americans these days. We're working
23 more and more hours, and many young professionals do put in those kinds of hours.

24 RV: Yes, sir, absolutely. So how long were you there at J.C. Penney before you
25 were then called into the Air Force?

26 RE: Six months.

27 RV: Okay. When you were called, what were your thoughts and feelings, do you
28 remember?

29 RE: Oh, joy. I wanted to get it out of the way as soon as possible, and we looked
30 forward to the experience. But there's some funny stuff associated with that, too. We
31 didn't have a whole lot of household goods, but we had some, and we packed them into a

1 trailer. We looked in the newspapers for a trailer to buy and finally bought probably the
2 least expensive thing we could find. And lo and behold, it was out of an old Ford
3 Chassis. And I don't know if it was a Model-T or a Model-A, but the spokes were
4 wooden. Can you tell me what that was? Was that a Model-T or a Model-A?

5 RV: I don't know. I want to say it's a Model-A.

6 RE: Well, anyhow, it had wooden spokes on it. And being called on active duty I
7 did not have a final assignment yet. So we packed our stuff into this trailer and hauled it
8 down to Lackland AFB in San Antonio. At some point those wheels gave away (laughs),
9 and it got really rickety, and also the axel came loose. So I guess we got to San Antonio
10 with it, but while we were there we had to find a new trailer, so we got one with a more
11 modern Chassis, and it held up. So in Lackland then, we had Air Force processing and I
12 guess we must have been there for about six weeks or so. We rented an apartment, and in
13 the processing, we were [I was] given a battery of tests and what have you. The bottom
14 line was, they needed to determine what they were going to do with me. Typically we
15 had three choices, but they were short of people for electronics, and because I had
16 mathematics and college physics, I was required to put down electronics as one of my
17 choices. I wasn't excited about that. I didn't see my aptitudes or interests in that
18 direction, so my first choice was in a still photographic officer. That was a specialty. My
19 second choice was also a somewhat romantic one, air traffic controller. And to avoid
20 getting electronics, my third choice was supply officer, which I didn't find attractive, but
21 I felt it suited my college degree in business so that was where to go. And then my fourth
22 choice had to be electronics. The needs of the Air Force prevailed, so I went to Keesler
23 AFB as an air electronics officer trainee. Now that particular course I went into normally
24 lasted for one full year, and the normal input for it was college graduates with degrees in
25 engineering. Well, they had only a two-year total commitment including training out of
26 us ROTC-types, so they couldn't send us to school for a year after processing and with
27 transportation, so they designed a shred-out course of just six-months duration, again for
28 engineering graduates, but they didn't have enough of them. So my classmates in this
29 highly specialized course were myself as a business major, a major in animal husbandry,
30 and a journalism major besides a few with engineering degrees. So that was an

1 interesting experience. We got through it, but we were graded on what's called a T-
2 score. Are you familiar with the T-score system?

3 RV: Yes, sir. Go ahead and explain it, though, for people who don't know what
4 that it.

5 RE: Alright. Well, I don't know how to explain it particularly except that you're
6 graded on a curve, and a certain number will pass and a certain number will fail, so if you
7 had a bunch of horses take the exam, some of the horses would pass, and some would fail
8 (laughs). But we got through it and as a matter of fact, the primary responsibility of an
9 officer in electronics is management rather than technical expertise. And I thought it was
10 a little bit silly for them to give us all this detailed technical education when we would be
11 running electronic shops and we had NCOs and airmen who were highly proficient in
12 what they did, and they didn't need or rely on us for technical expertise.

13 RV: Okay. You mentioned photography. Is this something you had developed as
14 an interest over the years?

15 RE: Yeah.

16 RV: Can you tell me about that?

17 RE: We had a friend, a neighbor in that rent house in Calumet City until we
18 moved out when I was more or less seven years old, Andy Berwanger, and he was a man
19 of many interests, one of which was photography. And that friendship continued when
20 my folks moved away. As a result of his interest in photography, we were visiting on
21 occasion, and he took some movies. So the first family movies that I have of us as a
22 family were when I was perhaps maybe ten years old. Maybe even less than that. So
23 that's a part of my family history, those particular movies. So that was one part of it with
24 the movies, and I don't know, I guess my father also documented our family history early
25 on. He took a lot of pictures of me as a baby and as a kid so with those two influences I
26 early on had my own 35 mm camera. My first one was an Argus C-3, whenever that year
27 was, somewhere in the early forties I guess. And so photography has been with me ever
28 since, and early on, I had my own movie camera, and so I've been taking slides and
29 movies and then video, and video came out about 1981. So that's why we have a nice,
30 complete family history. And as a matter of fact, that hobby of photography was of
31 interest to the Navy captain or admiral who interviewed me as a part of my scholarship

1 process for the Navy scholarship. I recall his questioning me at some length about my
2 photography hobby and movies and different kinds of cameras, and I had a cassette [8
3 mm] camera as opposed to a reel camera. So we had some discussion about that, and I
4 guess that interest in photography was among the things that impressed him, and he
5 thought that I'd be an okay candidate to be a midshipman.

6 RV: What was it exactly about photography that you liked then and like now? Is
7 it a certain kind of expressive art? What's unique to it for you?

8 RE: That's an interesting question. I'm not sure that I particularly thought about
9 it that way. It was something that I liked to do. I certainly think about it now as a form
10 of artistic expression and pursued that from a relatively early point on and studied
11 photography and looked at it. In fact, I took two elective courses in college that were
12 strictly above and beyond any rational reason for taking them in terms of a degree. One
13 was photography and the other was cooking (laughs).

14 RV: Really? (laughs)

15 RE: And I got an A in cooking. My wife got a B. I lord that over her.

16 RV: I bet you have not let her forget that.

17 RE: (laughs) Pardon?

18 RV: I bet you've not let her forget that.

19 RE: No, but my wife won't let me forget either. Why, honey? [Wife talks in the
20 background] (laughs) Did you hear that?

21 RV: No, I did not. What did she say?

22 RE: I had a single, middle-aged woman for a teacher.

23 RV: Oh, okay, I understand (laughs). Okay, well, going back to Keesler, tell me
24 about this—you're basically fulfilling your commitment, and you're not looking career
25 here. You're not looking long-term. You just want to fulfill this commitment and move
26 on.

27 RE: Right, exactly.

28 RV: And how did your wife feel about this? Was she eager for you to get on with
29 the career?

30 RE: Do you want to talk with just me, or would you like to hear from her how she
31 felt about it?

1 RV: Well, either way.

2 RE: She felt good about it. She's been a wonderful wife all the way through, and
3 she had a great experience there. She worked as a secretary for technical training Air
4 Force [at Keelser AFB], but we have had a wonderful social life throughout our Air Force
5 career, beginning with this experience at Keesler. There's definitely an aspect [and
6 feeling] of family as far as we're concerned in our experience within the Air Force.

7 RV: Okay. You move on in October 1954 to Wheelus Air Base. Tell me about
8 that. That's got to be very different for you.

9 RE: Well, to say the least. I preceded my wife over there.

10 RV: Describe where that is and what the base is like for people who will be
11 listening to this.

12 RE: Wheelus Field, Libya is in what was formerly an Italian colony until after
13 World War II. The Italians invaded Libya and Ethiopia and colonized Libya. It's
14 between Egypt and Tunisia and predominantly desert.

15 RV: Okay. How large was the base?

16 RE: Oh, it was a rather large facility. We had people coming in from Europe for
17 firing range activity. It was a support base as well as a MAC base. I don't know what
18 the size was, but I would judge it probably had a population of a couple thousand.

19 RV: And you're there of October '54 through December '55.

20 RE: Yes.

21 RV: And when did your wife come over?

22 RE: It must have been about December. I got there in October; she came about
23 the following December. I got an apartment on the economy. When she came in, we
24 moved right into it. It was a second-floor apartment in the city of Tripoli, just down the
25 street from the presidential palace. At the time we were there King Idris was the ruler.
26 At some later point, the fellow who's still there, Muammar al-Qaddafi, overthrew the
27 government and became the dictator.

28 RV: What was Tripoli like? How would you describe that in the 1950s?

29 RE: Tripoli was a very sunshine-y, tropical city with lots of palm trees and date
30 trees, paved streets. One of our favorite restaurants was The Lantern, featuring Italian
31 food. They had a big old red wine cask in the corner but certainly [Tripoli was] a city of

1 contrast. The Italian colonial flavor still prevailed. This was just nine years after the end
2 of the war when the Italians were kicked out [as rulers, but] and the Volkswagen sales
3 and repair shop, for example, was [still] run by an Italian and had predominantly Italian
4 mechanics. There were a lot of very poor people who had donkey carts and camels that
5 you would see around and sheep on the roads. The roads were very narrow and while
6 paved, they were not in good repair. But there were asphalt paved roads which run along
7 the coast to Egypt and to Tunisia. The by far most interesting cultural aspect was the
8 recognition that during Roman times there were three Roman cities there, Leptis Magnus
9 and Sabratha, which were then being excavated and have been and were very impressive
10 and that continues to today, and the third was Oea, O-e-a, which is on the site of present-
11 day Tripoli, the capital and main city of Libya. Another major city is Benghazi, which
12 we know about from World War II stories, but I didn't spend any time at all in Benghazi.

13 RV: So you were able to actually get out and live in the culture and live amongst
14 the Libyans.

15 RE: Yes, we had time off. We'd climb in our Volkswagen and drive out. I don't
16 recall just how far away these two sites were, Leptis Magnus and Sabratha. One was
17 maybe thirty or forty kilometers, and the other one might have been forty or fifty or so.
18 But it was exciting.

19 RV: How did they treat you as Americans?

20 RE: Well, with their hands outstretched. 'Bakchis' was the common word you
21 would hear from a youngster on the street. I think 'bakchis' meant 'free' so they hold
22 their hand out, and they'd like some kind of a handout. As I recall, the average per capita
23 annual income of a person in Libya was thirty-two American dollars when we were there,
24 so people were extremely poor. Oil had not yet been discovered; it was being explored,
25 and of course they have it now. But there was no feeling of insecurity [on our part]. The
26 people had been governed by the Italians and were accustomed to control. There was no
27 particular feeling of independence or resentment about anything, so I don't know what
28 the feelings of the people might have been toward us, but we never had any concerns
29 about security or discrimination or anything of the sort.

1 RV: Okay. Well, this might be a good time to take a very quick break before we
2 get into your full Air Force career here, that we're getting ready to launch into when you
3 go into pilot training next. Let's take a break just for a moment, sir.

4 RE: Okay.

5 RV: Tell me about the transition away from Libya if there's not anything else you
6 want to say about your living experience.

7 RE: Oh, I think not. It was pleasant and the transition from Tripoli...well, I don't
8 know if you'd be interested in the way we went back. We went back by surface
9 transportation.

10 RV: Tell me about that.

11 RE: It was wonderful to be able to circuit the Mediterranean. We went to, let's
12 see, Izmir, Istanbul, Athens, Livorno, Italy, or maybe it was Naples, and Casablanca
13 before crossing the Atlantic. The seas were rather rough to the point of—we were in a
14 Liberty ship. I don't remember the name of it, but it bounced around a good bit.

15 RV: Did you have your sea legs about you?

16 RE: (laughs) I think I got a little bit green, but basically we had our sea legs and
17 we were okay. I think I did get some movies of the pitching ship. It was really rough.
18 So that was a little bit of an experience of transition but not a problem. And then I came
19 back from [went into] pilot training. I was excited of course when I was accepted for
20 both pilot training and a regular commission.

21 RV: Tell me about applying for that regular commission and going into pilot
22 training. How did that come about exactly, and how did you make this decision?

23 RE: Well, I mentioned that Ellie and I were happy campers at Wheelus Field in
24 the face of the career people that were very disenchanted. So based on our experience to
25 date and what we knew of the Air Force, we mutually decided that a career in the Air
26 Force would be satisfying. For that reason, I applied for a regular commission which has
27 promotion and longevity benefits and a professional recognition as opposed to being just
28 a reserve officer, and pilot training because I wanted to be a pilot. I would not have
29 stayed in if I hadn't been accepted for pilot training. So it was joyful that I was accepted
30 for that.

31 RV: And you then moved to...?

1 RE: Malden, Missouri for primary pilot training. Malden was a civilian-contract
2 training base, and I trained in the T-34 and the T-28. That was approximately six months
3 in duration. Following that we moved to Enid AFB. No, Vance AFB in Enid, Oklahoma
4 where I got my wings. And each of those was about a six-month period. At Vance I flew
5 the B-25. We were the last class to go into B-25. At this time, once we completed the
6 primary training, there were two tracks for pilots, either multi-engine or single-engine,
7 the single-engine being predominantly fighters and the multi-engine being bombers and
8 transports. You could express your preference, but based on your aptitude test, you
9 might or might not get your preference. I did request multi-engine, and that's what I got.

10 RV: If you don't mind, let's talk a little bit about Malden and your primary pilot
11 training. Tell me about the experience and what you remember and how they trained you
12 to fly the T-34 and T-28.

13 RE: We had our days split in two. We had half a day of academics and half a day
14 of flight line instruction. In the academics you had a variety of courses, including
15 engineering of the particular aircraft, navigation, meteorology, techniques of flying and
16 then on the flight line, your flight line instructor would have some assignments for you
17 and things for you do to, and we would be scheduled to fly with him most days but not all
18 days. That was pretty much the same routine in both primary and advance pilot training.
19 I might mention that we lived in a trailer. It was a Spartan thirty-foot mobile home that
20 we bought at the beginning of training and sold at the end of our training.

21 RV: Okay. What was the first flight like there at Malden for you when you're
22 going to get this training?

23 RE: Golly, it had to have been exciting (laughs), but I can't recall the specific
24 flight or the specific feeling, just in general that it was an exciting, exhilarating feeling,
25 flying. The high point was when we first started getting into aerobatics. We called it
26 aerobatics. Not acrobatics, but our mindset was acrobatics by going into loops and
27 emblems and approaching stalls and so forth.

28 RV: How were you at flying? Did this come naturally to you or were you really
29 challenged?

1 RE: Oh, I don't know. It was comfortable. It was not scary. I didn't come close
2 to washing out anywhere. I'm not sure how it comes naturally or unnaturally. I think it
3 was a good fit.

4 RV: When you say it was scary, what do you mean?

5 RE: It was not scary.

6 RV: It was not scary to you.

7 RE: It was not scary.

8 RV: So you were okay in the cockpit.

9 RE: Yeah, absolutely.

10 RV: Okay, so it felt very comfortable for you.

11 RE: Yes.

12 RV: Tell me about your classmates. Where were you amongst them as far as
13 rank, and not rank in the military but rank in your class, and what did you observe from
14 the other pilot's training?

15 RE: Camaraderie (laughs). I think the rank is relevant. Since I had been on active
16 duty for a while already, I went through as 1st lieutenant, and there was a 1st lieutenant
17 navigator who outranked me who was the class leader. I don't recall what the breakout
18 was, but there were several of us that were experienced officers and then a number that
19 came in I think [newly] commissioned. We did not have any cadets. We were all
20 commissioned officers. Well, I don't recall who washed out. We did have some wash
21 out, and that was a concern. Some people just didn't have the motor ability or
22 coordination to be successful and solo. I guess the solo experience, the first time you
23 solo in a particular airplane is always a little bit exciting when you go up without an
24 instructor pilot.

25 RV: Do you remember that for you?

26 RE: Not specifically, just in general that it was a good feeling. I remember in
27 general the concern that before you solo, knowing that some people don't get to that
28 point, so there's always a concern about 'will I make it or won't I make it?' just in
29 general among the classes, and if some people have difficulty, they have greater concern
30 and others not so much.

31 RV: Do you remember any particular incidents from this initial training?

1 RE: I do not.

2 RV: Okay.

3 RE: It was sort of nice and routine.

4 RV: Okay. And when you went up to Enid, same kind of thing? You're flying a
5 different aircraft, obviously, but this was again a comfortable feeling for you and a good
6 feeling?

7 RE: Yup, very much so.

8 RV: Tell me about the B-25. I think people would be very interested to hear
9 firsthand about that airplane.

10 RE: Well, of course that's the airplane that bombed Tokyo, and it's just a nice
11 airplane. There were a number of different versions of it. Some of them had guns in the
12 nose, and some did not. I don't know what to say about it (laughs). It was a monster
13 machine for us in pilot training, having come from the T-34 and the T-28. It seemed like
14 a big thing. Today it seems rather tiny by comparison, but you'll still find them around
15 here and there in museums, inside and out. I don't know what else to say about it.

16 RV: Well, did it handle particularly well? Was it kind of a bulky flyer, or was it
17 maneuverable?

18 RE: Well, everything's relative. It didn't handle like the T-34 or the T-28, being a
19 much bigger airplane, so it's a new experience to learn to fly a big thing like that, but
20 there weren't any particular problems. Once you master it, it handles very well.

21 RV: Okay. And your classmates there, same camaraderie, same good spirit?

22 RE: Absolutely. Every place we were in the Air Force it's the general feeling of
23 family and good relationships.

24 RV: So when you finish advanced, you've been trained in the single-engine,
25 you've been trained in the multi-engine, and the multi-engine is what appealed to you?

26 RE: Yes, that was my preference, and I was happy to be in it.

27 RV: Why was that?

28 RE: I could say a single-engine pilot is a special breed as far as I'm concerned and
29 deserves our greatest respect. As a multi-engine pilot you are a crew commander. As a
30 fighter pilot you are the whole crew yourself, so that requires very rapid thinking and
31 judgment and the master of all tasks. So it appealed to me to be more than a lonesome

1 stranger in an airplane, and I'm happy to have a crew supporting me. Not only a co-pilot,
2 but in most cases, a navigator. For example, a pilot in a fighter has to handle his radios,
3 get his takeoff clearance and all of that stuff at the same time that he's taxiing. When he
4 makes an instrument approach, he needs to refer to his letdown charts to all his advance
5 planning, everything all by himself. When you're in a multi-engine aircraft, you and
6 your co-pilot and, if you have one, a navigator can all be involved in this process, so
7 there's a certain amount of security in flying this, you might say big, lumbering aircraft
8 as opposed to the sweet, swift little fighter. And I'm a rather conservative person, so I
9 suppose that goes into the personality inventory which, in my self-appraisal, I was better
10 suited for multi-engine, and I don't know for sure how that came across in the personality
11 inventory tests, but I suspect that supported it also.

12 RV: Okay, well those are good reasons for wanting to fly the larger aircraft. You
13 move on from there down to Florida to Palm Beach AFB. Let me ask you, before we
14 move there, how was your wife dealing with all this moving around?

15 RE: Oh, great trooper, no problem.

16 RV: Okay.

17 RE: The Air Force was a joint adventure. It was an adventure for both of us. I
18 think we would not have remained in the Air Force if that hadn't been the case.

19 RV: Okay. So, moving to Florida at Palm Beach, this is your advance pilot
20 training, and you fly what was originally the SA-16.

21 RE: Yes.

22 RV: Tell me about that aircraft and that experience down there. Again, you're
23 down there for a little over six months. Excuse me, three months.

24 RE: Oh, how much fun can you have? You go to Florida, and you've got Lake
25 Okeechobee for your training platform, and there you are flying an Albatross that can
26 land on the water as well as on land, and some versions are equipped with skis so they
27 can land on snow. It was just fantastic. I loved it.

28 RV: How did you get selected or chosen to go there?

29 RE: Well, I don't know. There was a need for X number of pilots to go into SA-
30 16s, and I requested multi-engine. I'm not sure that I had anything to say about that, that
31 I specifically selected SA-16. I don't remember for sure just how that went.

1 RV: Tell me about the Albatross. What kind of aircraft was this?

2 RE: It's a Grumman twin-engine airplane. There are prior versions of seaplanes
3 like that. I think we trained in what was an A-model. Later on, they modified them to B-
4 models. They had a broader wingspan, which gave them a little more endurance and a
5 little shorter takeoff run for takeoff. Noisy. We would often fly with our windows open.
6 They were noisy enough with the windows closed, and through my Air Force career, I
7 did most of my flying in the left seat, the aircraft commander's seat, and I have lost a
8 good bit of hearing in my left ear (laughs). But I am comfortable with or without a
9 hearing aide. Most of the time, I feel like it's more of a nuisance than a help, so in
10 general, I don't use a hearing aide. And I've got his phone up to my left ear without a
11 hearing aide.

12 RV: Okay. Tell me about how the Albatross got its name. In my research of
13 American Air Force aircraft, the Albatross is one of the more interesting, I believe. Tell
14 me about how it got its name.

15 RE: Gee whiz, you probably know more about that than I do. I don't know how it
16 got its name other than an albatross is bird that flies around water. That's all I know.

17 RV: Well, yes, and it's unique-looking and unique-handling is what I have heard
18 about this aircraft from other pilots. It is different from the B-25, obviously, in a number
19 of ways. What kind of transition was this to flying the large B-25 to a smaller Albatross?
20 Is it easier for you? Is it more difficult? More responsibility? Less responsibility?

21 RE: None of the above, I guess. In general, it's a different version of the same
22 horse. They both have two engines. The thing that's different is the overhead throttles.
23 In the Albatross, your engines are on the wing, and the wing is high to keep it off a great
24 distance from the water, so your cable controls and what have you go from your overhead
25 throttles. So that perhaps took a little bit of getting used to, and for extreme short field
26 work, some of the SA-16s were equipped with jet-assisted takeoff, JATO bottles, which
27 could be put on so you could really take off from a short runway if you needed to. And
28 incidentally, later on, that's why I was so very comfortable in the caribou that I flew in
29 Vietnam because it also had overhead throttles, so that was just a natural fit for me.

30 RV: You're there just for a short period of time, training in the Albatross, and
31 then you move on to Clark AFB in the Philippines.

1 RE: Correct.

2 RV: So it's your second overseas assignment, and tell me how that came about.

3 And you're going to be there for a lot longer tour.

4 RE: Well, flying an SA-16, I was destined to go to a rescue squadron, and that
5 was my squadron of assignment in the Philippines. I may or may not have had any say in
6 that. I suspect I did not, but we were elated. It was another overseas experience. It was
7 an accompanied tour, but there was limited housing, and for that reason, I had to get over
8 there first and arrange for housing, which I did. We found off-base housing in a village
9 adjacent to Clark Air Base called Balabago. It was a little subdivision of the larger town,
10 Angeles. So it was a nice little house. We had a comfortable time in it, and it wasn't the
11 matter of maybe six months or so and we were able to move on base into base housing
12 which was ultra-comfortable. I guess the most unusual thing for us about the assignment
13 was everybody had maids and household help, so we had a maid. And that was a bit
14 uncomfortable to begin with. We didn't feel like we were aristocrats, or it was
15 appropriate for us to have maids, but everybody did, and once we got used to it, why it
16 was pretty nice.

17 RV: (laughs) It's a far cry from Louisville and no running water in the kitchen.

18 RE: Right, a little bit of a contrast. But literally, everyone had maids, enlisted and
19 officers alike, and their compensation was typically, I believe, thirty dollars, a dollar a
20 day, and that was probably twice or more what they would earn on the economy in the
21 native line of employment. [Speaks to wife in background] Honey, did we pay help
22 thirty dollars or thirty pesos in the Philippines a month? Yeah, it seems to me it was
23 thirty dollars a month. Anyway, it was very minimal.

24 RV: Tell me about the Philippines, the culture, and what Clark was like.

25 RE: Clark was a major facility. Its heritage was at Ft. Stotsenburg, an Army post
26 while we had the Philippines under our guardianship or as a territory or whatever it was.
27 Very large facility. Nearby is Mount—I don't know if it was geographically named
28 Mount Ariat, but that's what we called it. It was also called Huck Mountain. At the time
29 we were there, there were still some remnants of Communists insurgents called
30 Hukbalahups, Hucks for short. We never came under attack or saw any direct
31 involvement, but every once in a while, the Philippine constabulary would be involved

1 with them, and that continues today and in various parts of the Philippines. But in
2 general, the people are quite intelligent, and since they'd been under American colonial
3 rule for some time, most of them, virtually all of them, spoke English and spoke it rather
4 well. The common additional language in Luzon was Tagalog. In different places they
5 had other dialects or other languages. It was a country of great contrasts. Manila is a
6 very nice city, and wherever you went, there were very wealthy people, but the contrast
7 was that there was practically no middle class. You either were extremely wealthy or
8 extremely poor and just concerned about where your next bowl of rice would come from.
9 There was another high altitude small base, basically an R&R recreation base in Bagio,
10 and that would always be a nice destination for us to cool off. [The elevation here is
11 about 6,000 feet, much cooler than below.] So quite a few people would go up to the
12 high town of Bagio, which had its Bagio Recreation area, and Ellie just said at the
13 summer capital for the Philippine government also. And while we were there, we
14 traveled a bit. In particular, the most exciting trip we made involved a commercial tour
15 of the Banawi rice terraces, considered by some to be among the ancient wonders of the
16 world. But it really is amazing to see the mountains cultivated and growing rice. And as
17 we traveled, we became acquainted with two particular groups, the Ifugao natives and the
18 Igaroots.

19 RV: Can you spell those, perhaps?

20 RE: Ifugao, I guess would be I-f-u-g-a-o and Igaroot, I-g-a-r-o-o-t, perhaps. And
21 in one place, they put on a little dance for us, and the part of the discussion involved the
22 fact that one of them, I think it was the Igaroots, had not too far previously had still been
23 involved actively in headhunting (laughs). But in any case the significant part of that was
24 to be traveling on these mountain roads, to some extent, fearful for your life on this one-
25 way road, and you're driving along in this open bus, wondering if it was going to make it
26 from point A to point B. I've got some movies where I'm just shooting down, and
27 there's the bus, my leg hanging out and a straight down mountainside, a sheer drop. But
28 it's just amazing to see miles and miles and miles of these mountains completely covered
29 with rice terraces and the engineering that was involved in producing that. So, in general,
30 while we were there, the Filipinos were courteous, appreciative of the American
31 presence, appreciative of the economic impact of the American presence, grateful for the

1 American liberation of the Philippines during the war and for them having been granted
2 independence. It's always a mixed bag. There are always political overtones involving
3 the base, the rights agreements, and of course, some years back, we didn't get together on
4 base rights, and so we no longer have an active presence in the Philippines the way we
5 used to. When I was there, the major Navy presence was at Subic Bay at Cubic Point.

6 RV: So tell me about your duties there at Clark. You're a member of the Air
7 Rescue Squadron.

8 RE: Well, I was there as a new pilot, so I flew as a co-pilot probably the whole
9 time there. I'm not sure that I was ever an aircraft commander of the SA-16, and a high
10 percentage of our flights were orbits in which we would provide navigational aides for
11 other people, other aircraft transiting from one place to another and they needed a radio
12 beacon which we would provide. And then of course our main reason for being there
13 was to rescue any downed airmen that would need help. But the reality was that the high
14 percentage of our missions involved responding to civilian calls for help, and we would
15 rescue people that had been involved in gunshot wounds, difficult pregnancies,
16 appendicitis, just all kinds of stuff.

17 RV: And did you mainly fly in the island of Luzon, or did you go to the other
18 island as well?

19 RE: Oh no, we flew all over the Philippines. A number of trips to Mindanao and
20 away from the Philippines, we had missions to Indonesia, Jakarta [Jakarta, Indonesia],
21 and I recall having flown to Saigon on occasion.

22 RV: I was going to ask you about that, if you did make your way into South
23 Vietnam then. Do you remember that trip into Saigon?

24 RE: All I remember is I picked up a couple of marble pieces as souvenirs—a vase,
25 sort of an urn-like little vase. I got into Singapore also for some reason. I don't know
26 why we went there. The most interesting mission happened within six months of my
27 arrival in the Philippines. We were called to come to the aid of a merchant mariner who
28 had some severe problems and was thought to be acute appendicitis. So we went out to
29 get him. It was in the area of Spratly Island in the South China Sea. The seas were
30 somewhat marginal when we got the call, but they were acceptable, but by the time we
31 got out there, they were really marginal. But we were able to get in. It's a matter of

1 analyzing all of the conditions. You consider the wind direction, you consider the swell
2 system, and then you consider the waves, so those are three different things. And we got
3 the plane down in good shape, we got over close to the ship, and we went out with a
4 rubber raft, picked him up, and brought him in, and got all buttoned up for takeoff, but
5 the seas kept getting a little worse, so it's getting a little bit tricky. So we made our run,
6 and no, we could not get up on the steppe. The steppe is the point at which your hull
7 comes out of the sea, the big bulky part of the hull of the aircraft, and you're just sitting
8 around the back portion of the hull, and that's called being on the steppe. And then it's a
9 matter of short order. You get up to speed, and you're airborne. Well, we couldn't get
10 on the steppe. We couldn't get on the steppe. We made about three different runs, and
11 then on our fourth run I think it was, a particularly large wave caught us and knocked off
12 one of our tip tanks, our float tanks, and so that then left us without stability, and the
13 wing dipped into the sea, and wouldn't you know, we had to abandon our aircraft.

14 RV: Wow.

15 RE: So we got out our raft and we got close to the Spratly Island and we got up to
16 shore. Anyway, to make a long story short we washed up onto Spratly Island and we had
17 to camp there a couple nights, practiced our survival skills. And eventually the Navy
18 came to our rescue, so that was very embarrassing. The Navy rescued Rescue. And
19 while we were on the island we tried to enjoy some turtle eggs. We found some big
20 turtles on there, and we found out that doesn't work very well.

21 RV: How so?

22 RE: They're very rubbery, and you don't crack the shell. It's a whole different
23 breed of cat, so we just used the stuff that we had from the airplane.

24 RV: Tell me about what actually the Air Rescue Service's mission literally was.
25 You've described primarily who you served, the civilian population, but in essence, what
26 was a typical mission like? How would you go about it?

27 RE: Well, typically you've got training missions of course, and then other than
28 that you've always got a crew that is on alert, twenty-four hour alert, and we had an alert
29 facility right in the squadron, so we would literally sit in our alert condition. If something
30 would come up, we'd respond immediately to the call, whatever it is, whether it's a
31 civilian or military need. Other than that, we would have scheduled orbiting missions

1 where we're just provided navigational aid, and those were scheduled much in advance,
2 pretty much the same as our training schedule.

3 RV: So you're seeing most of Southeast Asia here, as you've described. How
4 would you describe the atmosphere there in Southeast Asia? One, your basic
5 observations, but also how these various countries and the peoples that you interacted
6 with, probably on a limited basis I guess, when you're flying into Singapore and into
7 Jakarta. How did they interact with you as an American?

8 RE: Other than the Filipinos, I don't think I have any recollection of quality of
9 interaction. In general...hmm. I don't know. In general, they were relatively poor, and
10 if we'd come in, it would be an exciting event when our aircraft would come into a
11 village or a low population area where somebody was hurting and needed help. If it was
12 a city, they'd have their hospital, and they wouldn't have called on us to begin with. So
13 we were looked upon as I don't know, pretty important, significant, unusual events
14 people. Having said that, it depends on the nature of—at the time, foreign aid was a
15 pretty significant thing, American aid, and I think a couple of those trips of ours we were
16 taking aid shipments, if I remember correctly, to Saigon if not Singapore. And people
17 were always happy to get that. If it was officialdom, it was sort of just an official thing,
18 but when you're involved with the populace—well, I'm thinking specifically of an air
19 show in some small place where we parked our airplane and had some leaflets or
20 something to hand out. And golly, those leaflets were precious, and everybody really
21 wanted them. People are so poor and had so little that I guess the idea of receiving
22 something was always in their mind if there's something to be gotten.

23 RV: Do you remember what the leaflets said?

24 RE: Probably describing our airplane (laughs). 'This is an SA-16.'

25 RV: Okay. Let me ask you about what you're understanding at this point in the
26 process. What was your understanding of what was happening in Vietnam, in North and
27 South Vietnam? In 1954, there's the Geneva Accords, and the nation is split in half, and
28 there's supposed to be elections, and they don't happen in 1956, and you have the
29 emergence of the Republic of Vietnam, and the United States is a key support of this
30 country. What did you feel and understand about the situation while you're stationed
31 there at Clark?

1 RE: Probably not a great deal. We were not talking about domino theory or any
2 of that stuff at this time, were we?

3 RV: It was out there. President Eisenhower mentioned it in 1954, but it's not—
4 it's out there in the public, but it's not out there in a significant way.

5 RE: It probably was in our military circles. Along with our education in the Air
6 Force, I went to squadron officers school while I was at Keesler. Maxwell, when was
7 that?

8 RV: What, at Keesler?

9 RE: From Keesler to Maxwell. I guess that was my second tour. No, that was
10 later on. I wasn't there yet. I don't know at what point, but whenever the domino theory
11 became a part of my understanding, I certainly subscribed to it a hundred percent.

12 RV: Can you tell me why?

13 RE: Well, international Communism was a recognized threat, and I had no
14 argument with that. When was Krushchev on the scene? What were his years?

15 RV: He was there in the 1950s and was out after the Cuban missile crisis. He was
16 out in early '63.

17 RE: Well, probably while I was in the Philippines he had not yet said that we will
18 bury you, but my understanding was that international Communism was an objective of
19 the Soviet regime, and it was a real threat, and at some point, it certainly looked to me
20 like Vietnam was an appropriate place to try to come to grips with that. The fact that we
21 were limited later—at this point in history, if I had any thoughts at all, they certainly
22 would have been along those lines.

23 RV: Okay. Well, Eisenhower first kind of mentions it in a press conference, I
24 believe in March, 1954, so it was in the vernacular, it was out there in the public, but
25 things really haven't heated up for the United States yet in South Vietnam. So you're
26 kind of right there on the cusp of the pre-war period, and it's a very unique perspective.
27 And you're there until May 1960, and then you're going to transfer back over to the
28 United States to Keesler in July 1960.

29 RE: That was a big letdown.

30 RV: Tell me about that. It has to be just a huge change going from the Philippines
31 down to Mississippi.

1 RE: Well, the needs of the Air Force always come first, and their need for people
2 in electronics was paramount, so I had no choice. The only decision I could make was to
3 say, 'I need to get out of the Air Force,' and I didn't feel that badly about it. I felt
4 dedicated that, as an officer, my primary vocation was being an officer, not being a pilot
5 or electronics officer or anything else. So I had the attitude I could do whatever I was
6 asked to do and that's what my job was, to do whatever I was asked to do. So, I put my
7 shoulders back and went to Keesler, and while there, accepted the fact that the needs of
8 the Air Force were such that it looks like I was going to be stuck in electronics and I
9 might as well do it right. So I applied for and was accepted for the Air Force Institute of
10 Technology. I wound up getting a double E degree. In '64 that came to fruition. The
11 pendulum had swung and the needs of the Air Force were such that that I had the option
12 to go back into flying. So I was given a choice to go into a flying assignment or to go to
13 AFIT. It didn't take me long to decide I'd go back into flying. So that stopped the AFIT
14 business.

15 RV: And I can imagine you're probably relieved at this point to get back into the
16 pilot's seat.

17 RE: I don't know if relieved is the word but happy for sure.

18 RV: And you're stationed there still at Keesler, is that correct?

19 RE: Yeah.

20 RV: Okay, so tell me what your duties were there.

21 RE: Well, I had a variety of duties. Initially I was the air electronics—not the air
22 electronics. Airborne—

23 RV: Early warning?

24 RE: Was it Airborne Early Warning to begin with?

25 RV: I believe so, sir.

26 RE: Okay, I don't have my sheet in front of me, looking at it. So I was an
27 Airborne Early Warning instructor and branch chief and responsible for training, and as
28 such, I developed my lesson plans and taught, and then before that, I became a squadron
29 commander, and I commanded a training squadron, which, as I recall, had somewhat over
30 a thousand people in it, mostly students but also permanent party. So that was a second
31 taste of command-type responsibilities. While I was in Libya, I had an additional duty as

1 administrative officer, and in that capacity, I had to write letters when someone in the
2 squadron died and various things like that. As the squadron commander of Keesler, I was
3 big daddy for all kinds of family difficulties—credit collection letters, people put in jail,
4 family squabbles, divorce matters, and so on and so forth, besides being responsible for
5 training and preparing for inspections of the units and so on so it was a broadening
6 experience.

7 RV: Can you tell me about the Early Warning System, what that entailed?

8 RE: Well, there were two major electronic components to that—computer system
9 ANFSQ7 and 8 had to do with the dew-line. Do you remember the dew-line, along our
10 northern perimeter? That was in the early days of computers. What we now can hold in
11 our lap, back in those days would occupy a three-story blockhouse building with vacuum
12 tube computers all over. We were involved in the maintenance, not the operation of
13 those systems. Something would go out, we'd have to find out what it was and put it
14 together. In preparatory to that, before I became a computer maintenance officer, they
15 sent us up to IBM Kingston for some computer maintenance training also, in
16 programming and what have you. That was in Kingston, New York.

17 RV: Were you still—you keep saying the phrase, 'What the Air Force wants—
18 basically the needs of the Air Force come forward.'

19 RE: (laughs) The needs of the Air Force, yeah.

20 RV: Right. How are you feeling about the Service at this point? You're having
21 good experiences, it sounds like, on a unit level with the people with whom you served,
22 the social aspect of this, and you're developing your skills. How you do feel about the
23 Air Force in general at this point?

24 RE: Wonderful. Very professional organization. I've always felt wonderful
25 about the leadership and in general the decisions that were made. However, on a
26 personal level, I got quite a gut ache, in that every time I'd turn around, having a major
27 vocational shift and in some cases, competing with people who have been in the career
28 field continuously and here I am bouncing in and out (laughs). I have one tour as a pilot,
29 never had a proficiency previously in electronics, just getting up to speed as a pilot, then I
30 go back into a different phase of electronics. So that caused me some personal gut aches

1 and consternation, which I didn't like, but I viewed it as a circumstance of serving as an
2 Air Force officer and that continued throughout my career.

3 RV: Okay. You're there until July, 1963, at Keelser, and you're getting ready
4 again to go for another three-year assignment, and you go back to Randolph [AFB] in
5 Texas. How did that transition come about?

6 RE: Well, that's a result of the opportunity to get back into flying when I was
7 about to accept the Air Force Institute of Technology in a double E degree. I instead was
8 about to go in back into a flying assignment and that assignment was at Randolph in the
9 C-47 program and training third-country nationals. That's a multi-engine aircraft again, a
10 different one for me, but one of the oldest twin-engine aircraft in the Air Force, the C-47
11 or civilian version DC-3. So we had two different courses at Randolph, one a transition
12 course teaching pilots who hadn't flown a C-47 how to fly it and then an instrument
13 course, teaching multi-engine pilots how to fly on instruments and get an instrument
14 rating in the B-47. So I taught in both of those courses and enjoyed it a great deal. We
15 had students from Iran, Iraq, Bolivia, El Salvador, I think, Nicaragua for sure, and Libya.
16 We had some Libyan students as a matter of fact. So that was very interesting. And we
17 had talked earlier with regard to the B-25, how was it flying? The C-47 is a tail-wheel
18 aircraft, so there were some specific things that you needed to learn in landing a plane
19 with a tail wheel instead of a nose wheel, and single-engine procedures are always
20 interesting and challenging. And in the C-47 you really had to learn to apply leg pressure
21 if you simulated or had an actual engine failure, to push hard on the rudder to maintain
22 directional control. So that particular aspect of training was a lot of fun for me, but
23 challenging also, until the students developed their proficiency.

24 RV: Tell me about the students. How were they with the training? Were they
25 adept at picking up?

26 RE: They were highly variable. Some of them were minimally proficient and
27 others were quite proficient.

28 RV: Do you remember which individuals from which countries made better pilots
29 or were more proficient than others?

30 RE: No, I don't think I want to make a judgment about that. I did observe that
31 there was humility on the part of some and an arrogance about others, and I think I

1 probably observed the arrogance as much in some of the Nicaraguan students as any of
2 them for some reason. I don't know. And I wouldn't want to generalize this. It could be
3 that the particular students that caused me to form that opinion just happened to come
4 from an aristocratic family. It might also be that everybody that got into pilot training
5 would come from an aristocratic family. I don't know. But there were some significant
6 differences among the students in that regard.

7 RV: Okay. And what were you told and what was your reason for training these?
8 Were these simply the countries—I'm not going to answer this for you. I understand
9 what you were doing, but for those who are going to be listening and reading this
10 interview, can you tell me a little bit more about what your mission was and what the Air
11 Force and the United States' mission was toward training these pilots from all these
12 different countries?

13 RE: Gee whiz. I have to think about that a minute. I don't think we were told
14 why we were training them. I guess we could speculate why. For some reason, we must
15 have felt that it was in the United States' national interest to support the development of
16 this pilot proficiency or capability for the particular Air Forces that were in question.
17 That certainly is interesting when you consider we had students from both Iran and Iraq
18 (laughs).

19 RV: Yes, I know, it's very interesting. What can you say? Do you remember
20 about the Iranians and the Iraqis? What can you say about them?

21 RE: Not a thing. I can't tell you. And as I think about it, I wouldn't want to stake
22 my life on the accuracy that we had both Iranians and Iraqis. Certainly at that time when
23 we were training them, I don't think I was aware of any overt hostility or conflict
24 between them. So I wouldn't want to stake my life on exactly what the nationality was. I
25 know I had Libyans, I know I had Nicaraguans, I know I had Bolivians, and I'm not sure
26 what it was with regard to Iran and Iraq.

27 RV: Okay. You're there in 1963 to 1966. What was your reaction to November
28 1963, the Kennedy assassination?

29 RE: I'm trying to think. Where was I at the time? I think I was in a cross-country
30 flight. I might have been in Eglin AFB in Florida, and I guess it was just a shock. I
31 know somewhere along the line when we had the Bay of Pigs activity, we had some kind

1 of a support mission, and I flew to some base, I think Homestead, Florida, but I don't
2 remember why or what for or what we carried. Just shock with regard to the Kennedy
3 assassination.

4 RV: What did you think about President Kennedy?

5 RE: Hmm. Well, I thought he was my Commander-in-Chief (laughs).

6 RV: Right.

7 RE: I think I felt in general that he was an admirable, conscientious president. I
8 didn't understand all that was involved in the Bay of Pigs business, and I thought that that
9 was a fiasco and somehow our involvement was not what it should have been.

10 RV: I failed to ask you about Dwight Eisenhower, again, seen as your
11 Commander-in-Chief, but a real shift politically and policy-wise in Washington. Tell me
12 about President Eisenhower.

13 RE: Well, I'm not sure I thought much about him other than admiration for him as
14 a military commander and that he did a satisfactory job as president. Somehow I didn't
15 feel like his stature among his predecessors was the same as his stature of commanding
16 general, but I thought he was effective and a good president.

17 RV: Okay. And at this time the Vietnam War is going to basically 'start,' quote,
18 unquote, in 1965 with the deployment of the Marines to Da Nang. But of course before
19 that, you've got the Gulf of Tonkin incidence and a lot of other things happening. Do
20 you remember kind of the buildup to our direct involvement there with ground troops?

21 RE: Not particularly. In general, the coverage in the news media, and I'm sure I
22 took things at face value. I'm sure I did not question the Gulf of Tonkin incident the way
23 we do today. And that activity is what took me into the Caribou training as if—I guess
24 we'll get there.

25 RV: Right, when you go to Ft. Benning. So as an Air Force officer were you
26 more focused on your career, more focused on your assignments versus paying attention
27 to just this war that is brewing quite significantly?

28 RE: I'd say that's accurate, yeah. I was more into the Air Force, the Air Force
29 mission, and my mission within the Air Force rather than really examining the politics.

30 RV: Right. Would you say that that would be true throughout your career?

31 RE: Yes, I think so.

1 RV: Why is that? Was this kind of a function of your personality, or was this
2 your strong duty to country and to your branch of the Service?

3 RE: Hmm. I think it's probably a function of my conservative personality. On
4 the other hand, I don't see myself as such a compliant person. I am very questioning in
5 general and inquiring, and I didn't go to—I took Command and Staff at the Industrial
6 War College by correspondence. I was in Squadron Officer's School in residence, and
7 certainly we looked at our military service as an instrument of national policy, not
8 divorced from politics. But political discussions, I guess, are typically viewed by most of
9 us in the military as sort of in a separate category from our military service. Not to say
10 that we don't have the right and duty to involve ourselves in politics. We are citizen
11 soldiers, and we are citizens first and soldiers second, I think, not the reverse. I wouldn't
12 want to make too much about separation from politics. I don't think I'd want to say that I
13 was divorced from political discussion, but I don't know that I got all heated up about it
14 either.

15 RV: Right. I wasn't implying that you were divorced from it but it sounds like
16 you were very focused on what you were doing versus worrying about the larger picture.

17 RE: Sure. Well, I knew that I had direct influence in what I was doing. I don't
18 know—political discussion, I was not in a position to influence others politically and
19 whatever discussion I'd go into in terms of influencing my vote would be another thing.
20 I'm not sure where we're going with this. I'd be happy to respond to any specific
21 questions.

22 RV: Well, I'm asking because one of the consistent themes that I'm noticing is
23 that you are not aware of, or if you're aware of it, you simply don't take that in as you
24 move through your duty stations of this larger picture. Again, you're aware of it but
25 you're not really engaging in it, from what I hear, and I just wanted to see if that was
26 accurate. Because as we move into the war period and you go over in 1966, I want to
27 understand where you are and your thoughts about what you're going to get involved in
28 and what you see your role as.

29 RE: Well, the big part of this, I think, involves the absolute belief of the concern
30 about international Communism, that it's not an idle threat, that we are engaged in a
31 conflict for the preservation of our way of life. And I didn't see Kennedy or Eisenhower,

1 either one, negating that perspective. So I think I am fully engaged in that. I wrote a
2 paper in Squadron Officer's School back in that Keelser tour period regarding the threat
3 of international Communism and discussing whether or not the nuclear option might be
4 used as a last resort if it ever came to that. And I said at that time I was confident that the
5 United States and democracy would prevail over the Communist threats but that that
6 would come about as a result of an information explosion. And as the Soviet people,
7 people under the Soviet control, had a more accurate and complete understanding of the
8 realities beyond their country's borders, that the destruction would come from within.
9 And I think in general that's what occurred.

10 RV: That's exactly what was predicted.

11 RE: To say I was not engaged, I must not have responded appropriately or what
12 have you, because I certainly was from a big picture perspective and by no means would
13 I want anything I've said to imply that I was just a military person, obedient to my
14 superiors without personal conviction. I certainly had powerful personal conviction that
15 the direction that we were going as a nation was appropriate and the correct one.

16 RV: Do you remember discussion between yourself and your fellow officers
17 about this bigger picture?

18 RE: I really don't.

19 RV: Or their sense of the larger picture, not specific conversations?

20 RE: I don't recall any discussion ever outside of academic circles where we
21 questioned national policy or specific involvement, and I don't know what they would
22 have been. While I was in the Philippines the Chinese were acting up, for example, and
23 there was what we called the Formosa Straits crisis, involving Matsu and Quemoy, and
24 we deployed to Taiwan at that time. We had a detachment near Tainan, Taiwan, and so
25 the Communist threat was being expressed by the Chinese, as well as the Soviets. No, I
26 absolutely don't recall anyone questioning what we were doing or why we were doing it
27 in those days.

28 RV: Okay. Well, this might be a good time to stop for today and pick up with the
29 story as we continue in another session.

30 RE: Okay.

31 RV: Thank you very much, sir.

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RE: Thank you.