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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with James Tanner
Conducted by Jason Stuart
Date 6 October 2009
Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

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.

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2 Endowment for the Humanities.

3 Jason Stuart: This is Jason Stuart with the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech
4 University conducting an Oral History Interview with Colonel James Tanner. Today is
5 October 6th, 2009. I am in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library on the
6 campus of Texas Tech, and Colonel Tanner is joining me by phone from Midwest City,
7 Oklahoma. Is that correct, sir?

8 James Tanner: That's correct.

9 JS: All right, why don't we begin—if you could tell me a little bit of biographical
10 information about yourself. First of all, when and where were you born?

11 JT: I was born in Emporia, Kansas, on November 7th, 1932.

12 JS: All right, could you tell me a little bit about your parents? What were their
13 names, and what did they do for a living?

14 JT: My dad's name was Maynard Tanner, and my mom was Beverly Piot. My dad
15 worked in the oilfields in Kansas, actually was a trucker, and then he went into World
16 War II, and when he came out he learned to fly airplanes in the military. When he came
17 out, he had a fixed based operation for a while, and then he ended up back in the oil
18 business for the rest of his life. My mom was basically a stay-at-home mom and worked
19 off and on as a bookkeeper in sales barns and stuff around Kansas.

20 JS: Yes, sir, so did you grow up in Kansas then?

21 JT: Yes.

1 JS: Okay, if you don't mind me asking, how did your family do in the Great
2 Depression, and do you have any memories of it?

3 JT: Well, my first memory is when I was about four years old in Pawhuska,
4 Oklahoma, when dad was a pumper. And then we moved to Plainville, Kansas, and both
5 places I can remember with sheets in the windows to keep the dust out and stuff. As far
6 as not having a job, he always had a job. We did probably better than a lot.

7 JS: Well overall, what was growing up for you in Kansas like? What did you do
8 as a kid?

9 JT: Well, basically back in those days there wasn't much to do except play, and
10 dad was overseas two and a half years, and we went back to Oklahoma where my
11 grandparents on my mom's side were and kind of grew up around little towns. I ended up
12 wanting to play football, and then I had a heart murmur between—I got sick with what
13 they think was polio, but they never fully diagnosed it. For most of my high school years
14 I was not able to participate in sports, but I did end up valedictorian of my class of 1950.
15 I was pretty normal growing up, my childhood. I spent most of my time from about
16 thirteen on at the airport where my dad was running a shop and fixed base operations.

17 JS: So, is that where you got your interest in flying in the military?

18 JT: Well, yeah, I guess. My grandfather on my mom's side had been in the
19 Spanish-American War, and my dad had a brother that was in World War II, and he was
20 in his thirties when—I'm sorry, World War I. His brother's in World War I. He was in
21 his thirties when World War II started when he enlisted. They had a special program to
22 teach people to fly, and then they flew light airplanes and spotted fire for artillery. It's
23 kind of like later day FACs. So, I got kind of interested in it from that point of view. And
24 then when I went to college, I joined ROTC, Air Force ROTC. Somewhere, about
25 halfway through that the Korean War ended. And then if you didn't qualify physically for
26 flight training, they booted you out of ROTC. I managed to stay on and got permission.

27 JS: Well, before we talk about that I want to ask you a little bit more about World
28 War II, if you can talk about what you remember about the war and if you could talk a
29 little bit about your dad's service.

30 JT: Well, I remember two things, two things. One thing that sticks out in my mind
31 is the day that the war started, December 7th. I had an uncle on my mom's side that had

1 been drafted in the very first draft, I think 1940 it was. And so, he was already in which
2 caused some consultation on everybody's part, and my dad ended up—after he got
3 through his flight training in Hays, Kansas, and down in Fort Sill, he ended up attached to
4 the 45th Division which is tactical coincidentally being the Oklahoma National Guard
5 Division, and that was called active duty. I remember us trying to figure out where to
6 live. And we went to Virginia, his last stop before going overseas was a place called
7 Camp Picket, Virginia. And we went out there for six months before he went over. He
8 was there about two years, overseas about two years. He came back—he went over as
9 staff sergeant. That's what the light airplane flyers were when they got out of flight
10 training. Then he got a battlefield commission over there and ended up first lieutenant
11 when he came out. He came back in August—let's see, late July of '45 and was in a
12 group that was going to go to the Pacific except the war ended, and they ended up
13 mustering him out. He never went back. That's about what I remember.

14 JS: Okay, well if we could talk a little bit about your education for a moment,
15 where did you go to high school?

16 JT: I graduated from high school in Russell, Kansas, in 1950.

17 JS: Yes, sir, and where'd you say you went to college?

18 JT: I went to—I got my bachelor's degree from Wichita State, but at that time it
19 was Wichita University. It was a city school, and now it's a state school. I got a
20 bachelor's degree in business after trying to be an aeronautic engineer and not liking it.
21 So, I ended up with a business degree and graduated in 1950, and then I later got an MBA
22 from Auburn in 1975.

23 JS: Well, during this time when you were going to college the Korean War, of
24 course, was going on. Had you paid close attention to that, and I guess U.S. politics in
25 general as far as what was going on in the world?

26 JT: Well, pretty much, I think. I wanted to fly, and the only way I could—
27 actually another sidebar is I got married between my freshman and sophomore year in
28 college. So, the only way I was going to get to fly was to get a degree. So, I was aware of
29 what was—I had several classmates that actually were drafted for the Korean War, so I
30 was pretty much aware of it.

1 JS: You've mentioned being in ROTC. Was that a requirement there at Wichita
2 State or was it something that you just wanted to do?

3 JT: No, it was an elective.

4 JS: All right, could you talk a little bit about the ROTC program, and what that
5 was like for you?

6 JT: I guess I've never thought about it. Mainly what I've thought about the
7 program was that it was pretty good at giving an orientation about what the military life
8 was about. It wasn't really a regular class. I actually think it was once a week. I'm not
9 sure and can't remember now, but once or twice a week. Having to know a little bit about
10 flying, it didn't have anything to do with flying. It was all academics and stuff, so I
11 thought it would be a pretty good background for military duty, but it didn't do much if
12 you wanted to be a flyer.

13 JS: Once you graduated, were you commissioned at that time?

14 JT: Yeah.

15 JS: Okay, all right.

16 JT: January of '55.

17 JS: Yes, sir. So, once you graduated and were commissioned, where you did you
18 go from there?

19 JT: Well, I graduated in '55 and had a five-month period between graduation—
20 between commissioning and active duty. I went to Malden, Missouri, which I guess
21 you've talked to enough people who probably know back in those days the basic training
22 was done by private contractors, and the place that this particular contractor had was an
23 old glider base in Malden, Missouri. I went there for six months for basic—I'm sorry, for
24 primary. Flew the Cub and the T-6 and was the last class there to fly the T-6 and then
25 they moved onto better airplanes. When I left from Malden, I went to Vance Air Force
26 Base in Enid, Oklahoma, for another six months for basic and graduated there in June of
27 '56 as a pilot. Again, it was an old airplane. This is a change over time for the military,
28 and I flew B-25s. That's what we were teaching, and then they were in the process of
29 switching over to T-33s and a jet basic when I got moved out again to another recip
30 (reciprocating engine) place.

1 JS: I want to ask you a little bit about this flight training. Now, what did you have
2 to do to be qualified to get into flight training, or did everyone have that opportunity at
3 first?

4 JT: No, basically you had to pass a flight physical, and they gave you that at—
5 there was an airbase at Wichita, and we went out there. Actually, the first two years of
6 ROTC you weren't committed to anything, and when you go into your junior year is
7 when you start picking up some commitments. Prior to our junior year they sent us to
8 Wichita airbase at Wichita, and they gave you a regular flight physical. If you passed it
9 you were qualified for flight training, and then if you didn't, you weren't. Then it would
10 be dependent on the quotas. They weeded out enough people that practically everybody
11 passed the flight physical. They got to go to pilot training. In '55, '56 time was a draw
12 down because the Korean War was over by then, and they were not training as many
13 pilots, so it was fairly competitive to get into pilot training.

14 JS: Could you do a little description of the training on I guess a typical day in
15 basic flight training?

16 JT: Well, at what phase?

17 JS: I guess start off from the beginning phase, I guess.

18 JT: At primary the routine was if you started out doing instruction in the Cub, PA-
19 18 Piper Cob, and after about eight hours you soloed. Then from then on you were about
20 half solo and about half with an instructor where you practice stalls and forced landings.
21 I'm not sure we did any acrobatics in the Cub. It was a little airplane. And then when you
22 graduate—the Cub was about six weeks of primary, and then you went into the T-6
23 where you did the full—again, it was the combination dual, and when you got—I don't
24 know how many hours, but you flew dual for a while until they soloed you. And for the
25 rest of the program you'd have a couple of duals where they'd teach you something, and
26 then you'd do a solo and go out and supposedly practice it. That went on and then you
27 went through landings, and you had to do that first and then you did some instrument
28 flying, and then some acrobatics, as much as you could do in a T-6: loops, slow rolls, and
29 stuff like that. And then you went through an instrument phase, and in each one of those
30 phases you got graded. Plus, there was a full slate of academics. You flew half a day and
31 went to school half the day. At the end of each phase, you moved onto the next one, and I

1 guess instruments was probably last. And if you passed all that you went on to basic
2 where you—actually at the end of that primary they split you up. Some of them went to
3 fighters, and some of them went to multiengine training. I went to multiengine training.
4 That's where they told me to go, so that's where I went. In the B-25 you went through the
5 same series over a four- to six-month period with landings and various maneuvers, and
6 stuff, instrument flying. You couldn't go solo in the 25 because it's a two man—two pilot
7 crew. Once you got to a certain point, they sent students out together by themselves
8 without an instructor. At the end of that they decided that I should stay there as an
9 instructor, so I went through an instructor upgrade. Of course, they're in B-25s.

10 JS: Was the transition between the single-engine and the multiengine, was there
11 any difficulty there, or was there a fairly smooth transition for you?

12 JT: No, it was pretty smooth. The T-6 was one of the hardest airplanes to fly or
13 actually to land. It was a conventional gear, and the B-25 was a tricycle gear where you
14 set up on three wheels. It's much easier to land, and it made the whole process a lot
15 easier. So, I think it went from difficult to an easier deal as far as flying the airplane.

16 JS: Well, overall, during this initial training that you had, did you feel that you
17 that you were adjusting fairly well, I guess, to the military lifestyle and to being a pilot?

18 JT: Yes, I thought I was doing okay. There came a period in it, in the time as an
19 instructor there at Vance, that I wanted to become a regular, but they declined to accept
20 me for that. So, I kept on as a reserve officer all the way up until Vietnam where until
21 after that, they gave me regular commission.

22 JS: Well, so how long were you an instructor here?

23 JT: I was an instructor at Vance from—let's see—about eighteen months.

24 JS: Okay.

25 JT: And then I had an early out, and I was about three weeks away from checking
26 out in the jet when they ran short of people in Sacramento, California, flying T-29s,
27 which was a Convair, the same as the airliners used back in those days, the twin-engine.
28 They had to fly and train the navigators, and so once I was sent out there and checked out
29 in a T-29 and then after being out there about a year I became an instructor in the T-29
30 also.

31 JS: Okay, and then what did you do after that?

1 JT: After Mather?

2 JS: Yes, sir.

3 JT: Again, flying jobs were kind of hard to find, so I ended up being transferred
4 to—after I spent almost five years there at Mather (Air Force Base, CA) which was a nice
5 length, I had a kid born in Walden and then I had one born in Sacramento. We finally
6 ended that estranged. I was transferred to Ankara, Turkey, at the command post there. At
7 that time, we had fighters on alert at two bases in Turkey that had a nuclear mission and
8 command post there at Ankara was the controlling facility for them.

9 JS: Yes, sir. How long did you spend there?

10 JT: Two and a half years.

11 JS: Two and a half years, okay.

12 JT: Terrible years.

13 JS: Yes, sir.

14 JT: It was more for family than it was for me.

15 JS: What type of duties did you have there?

16 JT: Well, the command post was set up like I guess all command posts that had
17 that type of mission. You had an NCO and an officer, and you had nuclear release
18 material in a safe, and if the word ever came down to send them, we had to open up that
19 safe and make sure that the code word was right, and then he would send off the fighters.
20 That was a purpose of it. In actuality what we did was a lot of planning. I drank a lot of
21 coffee. Twelve-hour shifts got pretty long.

22 JS: All right, and timeline wise, when is this—as far as what year?

23 JT: Turkey's tour was from '63 until—two and a half years, it was from '63 until
24 '65.

25 JS: Yes, sir. During this time in Turkey, had you heard much of anything about
26 what was going on in Vietnam?

27 JT: Yeah, that was one of the pluses of working at the command post. You got
28 intelligence information from all over the world, so I was pretty much aware of what was
29 going on. I decided that if I got a chance, I would probably volunteer to go join that fray,
30 but I wasn't sure when that would come about.

1 JS: After your two and a half years in Turkey, was it to Vietnam from there, or
2 did you have another assignment before?

3 JT: I went from Turkey to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois.

4 JS: Okay.

5 JT: We got there in December, I think, of '65. I wasn't real happy with the job I
6 was doing, so I did volunteer for Vietnam a few months after I got there. I was accepted
7 to go to 123 (C-123) upgrade in Florida, and I did that in the summer of '66.

8 JS: Okay.

9 JT: While I was there, they had—at that time they—are you familiar with the
10 Ranch Hand mission?

11 JS: Yes, sir, vaguely. But could you talk a little bit about it for those who may
12 listen to this?

13 JT: Well, at the time, Ranch Hand, which was a defoliation mission, using 123s
14 and a thousand-gallon tank in the troop carrying space and spray booms. And they flew at
15 about one hundred and fifty feet off the ground, and a thousand-gallon tank would last
16 you about four minutes if you went straight. Anyway, it was a mission that kind of
17 intrigued me back in my high school days when I was working at the airport. I had done
18 some flagging for sprayers and dusters out in Western Kansas. So they had an opening
19 for two volunteers when I got through the 123 upgrade, and so I volunteered for that, and
20 was—it was only two of us who volunteered and they didn't have much of a choice. They
21 sent me to—we had the 123 upgrade which happened about August, and they sent me to
22 Langley for a few weeks. They had an aerial spray flight there that went around the
23 country usually spraying pesticides for mosquitoes and stuff, and they were the
24 training—and that's where you went to get your training. So, I went there, and I think it
25 was three weeks. It wasn't very long. My family had then moved to Russell, and I went
26 and spent a week or two in Russell and then went to San Francisco and got on a civilian
27 airplane and flew to Tan Son Nhut.

28 JS: Well, before we get into Vietnam if you could talk just a little bit about the C-
29 123 transition and if you could describe the plane and talk a little bit about that.

30 JT: First, when I was in Turkey, I had checked out in the T-39 which was a little
31 twin-engine jet transport, and that's what I flew at Scott also. The 123 was a twin-engine

1 with R-2800 engines, which were the same engines that the T-29 had. That made for—
2 the transition, engine wise, was pretty easy. It had been built—it had been designed as a
3 glider to be used in World War II, so that longitudinal members and those were the main
4 thing were pretty stout. It had tricycle gear, was built as a troop carrier, and it was used as
5 a troop carrier. A full tank of herbicide, and the full tank of fuel, the single-engine rate of
6 climb, which was always interesting to the pilot, if you lose an engine on takeoff with a
7 minus a hundred and fifty foot a minute. They had a dump valve on the herbicide tank
8 that you could get rid of the fluid pretty quick if you hurried. That was what they did to
9 make it a little safer. It was built as a twin-engine transport, and it had high wing and the
10 engines were—that R-2800 was a very stout engine. But it was old, even then it was an
11 old airplane.

12 JS: I noticed that you mentioned in the questionnaire that you filled out, you
13 mentioned that the C-123 was not necessarily the best aircraft for the mission you would
14 be doing. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that?

15 JT: Well, the only problem with it is as I mentioned it didn't have any—it filled it
16 up with fluids—fuel and herbicide. If it lost an engine, you didn't have any—you were
17 going to go down, and you had to get rid of the stuff. If you got the dump valve to work
18 and everything, it was okay, but it just didn't have a lot of power with a load. Later on,
19 they put two small jet engines on it which took care of that. I didn't get to fly that model.
20 In addition to the recipis, they added two small jet engines, and it made it a lot better
21 airplane for a mission.

22 JS: Yes, sir. Well, as far as the spray training goes at Langley, could you talk a
23 little bit more about it? And also, I noticed that you mentioned in the questionnaire that it
24 was not very realistic as far as preparing you for Vietnam. Could you elaborate a little bit
25 on that as well?

26 JT: The maneuvers to spray a town with herbicide are not necessarily the best
27 maneuvers to use if you are getting shot at. They would pull up and make a steep 90-
28 270—turn ninety degrees one way and two hundred seventy degrees back around and go
29 back down on the target. That left you highly vulnerable during that procedure. You got
30 used to flying it. You found out that it was a pretty stout airplane. But the procedures that

1 we used there—by the time I left Vietnam we'd done away with almost all of them. And
2 the Air Force, I think, recognized that and changed the training quite a bit.

3 JS: So, this was a modification in the training—not the training, but a
4 modification in the tactics that took place as you guys were on the job basically?

5 JT: Yes, that's correct. In fact, I don't know if I put in my questionnaire—it's
6 been so long—but one of the things I did, along with a couple of other guys, was write
7 those tactics in a manual. I'm not sure what ever happened to it, but supposedly the Air
8 Force was going to look at it and adopt it, maybe.

9 JS: All right, was there any other type of training? Was there any sort of jungle
10 survival training or escape and evasion training or anything like that?

11 JT: No, I had gone through—before I had went to Turkey, I had gone through the
12 Air Force Survival School. It was end of March, early April in the Sierra Nevada's which
13 I mean it was snow up to your neck, so it wasn't very realistic as far as the jungle would
14 go. But the techniques to escape and evasion and those things, that was good. They did
15 have a Jungle Survival School in the Philippines that some guys went to. For some reason
16 or another I didn't have to do that.

17 JS: So, the timeline wise when were you sent to Vietnam?

18 JT: September of '66.

19 JS: September of '66, okay. What was your rank at that time?

20 JT: Captain.

21 JS: Captain, all right. What did your family think about you volunteering for
22 Vietnam?

23 JT: Oh, I don't know. My wife was not too upset with me when I volunteered,
24 until she found out what mission I was going to do. She thought that—actually, I had a
25 restriction on my—I should not leave the states for eighteen months after I came back
26 because of the nuclear release information I had handled. She thought it would be all
27 right for me to volunteer because they wouldn't pick me for awhile, but they ignored that
28 because they sent me over right away anyhow. The only thing she was really upset about
29 was volunteering for Ranch Hand.

30 JS: How did you feel about finally getting that assignment?

1 JT: Well, you know, if you train—I'd been an Air Force man for ten years, a little
2 more, and that's what you're training to do, so I thought it was—I was happy with the
3 assignment.

4 JS: Now you said you came into country at Tan Son Nhut?

5 JT: Yes.

6 JS: All right, what was your initial impressions of Vietnam, I guess, upon arrival?

7 JT: Well, it looked like utter chaos to me. My first six weeks we were based on—
8 the squadron was based at Tan Son Nhut, so we lived in Saigon. There wasn't any
9 barracks on the base there, only hotels and stuff around town. It was a lot of just the
10 culture. It was kind of a shock, except I had been in Turkey which also was cultural
11 shock, so I wasn't too surprised. It was about what I figured. It was hot, and everyone
12 seemed to be happy to be doing what they were doing, and the mission they had and
13 everything, so it was okay.

14 JS: Well, I guess, what was in-processing like upon your arrival? Was there much
15 to that?

16 JT: No.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JT: I called the squadron when I landed, and they came and got me and picked me
19 up. I guess that I must have done some in-processing. It didn't seem to bother me any
20 because I don't remember it at all.

21 JS: And you were assigned to the 12th Air Commando Squadron?

22 JT: Air Commando Squadron.

23 JS: Air Commando, yes, sir. Could you, I guess, talk a little bit about the
24 squadron, and the make up of it, as well as the guys in the unit? So, you don't have to use
25 names if you don't want to, but if you could talk just a little bit about the makeup of the
26 squadron.

27 JT: Well, the squadron at that time was all volunteers, and they had everybody
28 from first lieutenants to majors. I think later on we had a lieutenant colonel. When I got
29 there, we didn't have any—a major was squadron commander, and later on a lieutenant
30 colonel. These are all guys that are basically frustrated fighter pilots that came out of B-
31 52s and tankers, and guys like me who were looking to do something that they thought

1 they might like. So, they were a rambunctious bunch. I'll put it that way. They were all
2 good pilots. It was a hard job, and they did a lot of hard work, and they partied hard.

3 JS: How many planes made up the squadron?

4 JT: Well, I think when I got there, there were nine. They were shooting for
5 eighteen, which was I think kind of a standard squadron configuration. I don't think we
6 ever got there. We lost three airplanes while I was there, and we might have been up to
7 fifteen or sixteen by the time I left.

8 JS: Were they all C-123s?

9 JT: Yes.

10 JS: Okay, you said the first six weeks you were based at Tan Son Nhut?

11 JT: Yes.

12 JS: Okay, all right. What was then, I guess, then the area of operations at that time
13 was mostly around Saigon?

14 JT: No, they kept a unit, a flight, which was about a third of the guys, up at Da
15 Nang, and we rotated. We probably stayed two or three weeks in the Tan Son Nhut area
16 and then we went up for a week or so. I can't remember up at Da Nang and then his
17 flights rotated through there. Actually, when I left Tan Son Nhut, our home base became
18 Bien Hoa.

19 JS: Okay.

20 JT: That's where we operated out of, but we operated—I flew from—and the
21 other guys did too—all the way from the DMZ in the north down to the Delta in the
22 south. Sometimes we had to fly a long time to get to target, but they used us all over the
23 country.

24 JS: Okay, before we get into specifics of the operation, could you talk a little bit
25 about Bien Hoa and just kind of get a description of the base there?

26 JT: Bien Hoa was just the typical Air Force base. It had been a—back to Tan Son
27 Nhut a minute. One of the reasons they moved us out of there is it was an international
28 airport, constant civilian traffic in and out. They had us big white airplanes, and our
29 offices were in the same hanger as General Ky's A-1 outfit, which was when Ky
30 eventually became president. This was his elite unit. When we moved to Bien Hoa it was
31 more like we had a barracks, open, not open air, open sided. They had screens and they

1 had decks and a chow hall. Bien Hoa was a fighter base and was an F-100 wing there.
2 They were responsible for supporting our squadron because they were the home base,
3 home unit. So, they did very well by us. They also flew cover for us a lot, so we always
4 had cover except for one month.

5 JS: What types of planes did you say that was again?

6 JT: F-100s.

7 JS: F-100s, okay.

8 JT: They had the same thing up in Da Nang, and they flew F-4s that was an F-4
9 wing up there.

10 JS: So, at almost any time when you went out on a mission you had F-100 or F-4
11 cover?

12 JT: We had different kinds, but we had F-100s. Sometimes we had A-1s which
13 are recip airplanes. There were some A-1s in Pleiku that if we went up to the middle of
14 the country would come out in force. They had F-4s up in Da Nang, and a couple times I
15 think we've had B-57s, which are a twin-engine bomber that flew in from the Philippines
16 and covered us all. The only time we didn't have cover was the month of October when
17 they decided to try us without it, and we took more hits that month than they ever had
18 before, so they gave the cover back to us.

19 JS: Did the C-123s have any sort of defense weapons, or were you guys strictly
20 spraying defoliant?

21 JT: No, there were no weapons, just all spray.

22 JS: Could you talk a little bit I guess about the standard tactics that you used, and
23 I guess how they developed over time and work, and also working with the cover
24 aircraft?

25 JT: We had some targets, but the landscape over there had a protocol I guess I'm
26 trying to say. It was different depending on where you were spraying. We usually flew to
27 the target at twenty-five hundred or three thousand feet. We'd let down to one hundred
28 and fifty feet over the target. The target—we usually flew with a FAC, forward air
29 controller, as well as fighter cover. The FAC would mark the start of the spray run. You
30 always had a navigator on the lead airplane, and he would confirm that, and that's where
31 we'd start to spray. If it was a known hot target, and we had Vietnamese permission, they

1 would pre-strike the target area. They would run down strafing runs and stuff. If not,
2 we'd have to get shot at before the fighters could expand any munitions. Usually, we'd
3 fly along the runs. Sometimes it was a straight run, and sometimes you'd have to turn
4 around two or three times. The pump that pumped the spray out of the tank into the
5 nozzles was set in the back of the airplane with a—we had an enlisted guy back there
6 running that pump. And when we'd get on target, he would turn on the spray and he
7 would watch the pump pressure and everything. Then if we got shot at, he had a bunch of
8 smoke grenades where he would pop one and throw it out the door, hopefully. And when
9 we got done with our run the cover would go back and work that area over. So, it
10 depended on whether you had permission to strike ahead of time or if you had to wait
11 until you got shot at. Mostly you had to wait until you got shot at before the fighters
12 could help you. At a hundred and fifty feet, you could hear when you got shot at. It was
13 almost all smart arms fire up to .50-calibers. We didn't have to battle 57 mm or 37 mm.
14 Just a couple times maybe. Basically, it was just small arms.

15 JS: Well, before talking a little more about that, could you talk a little bit about I
16 guess the different types of targets? Would they mostly be line of communications targets
17 or—?

18 JT: Our targets in the Delta, down in South Vietnam were usually along canals
19 and would clear the area back from the canals, so the boats could go up and down, Navy
20 boats could go up and down. Also, there were Special Forces camps down there that were
21 at the intersection of a couple canals and we'd spray around them. And so, we were
22 usually—and every now and then they were getting ready for an operation or something.
23 We'd spray the jungle. And the north—it was primarily trails—tried to uncover the Ho
24 Chi Minh Trail up there. I guess we'd say now in Laos where they came into Vietnam
25 and through the A Sau Valley and all that. We did some crop—Agent Orange was the
26 primary herbicide, and we had a couple others that we would use to kill—or if we could
27 find where the Viet Cong were raising crop or rice primarily. We could kill that
28 sometimes and try to get rid of that. There's mountains up in the north, and it was just
29 very interesting flying. You had to be very careful.

30 JS: How effective do you think the chemicals were as far as defoliation, and how
31 long would it generally take them to have an affect?

1 JT: Well, it'd take maybe—well, first the jungle over there—if you're spraying
2 this jungle—we didn't spray a whole big area because they were going to run an
3 operation through and take five to six weeks and then they would die, and it would open
4 up to another canopy underneath, and you'd have to go kill that. So, you had to plan these
5 things quite a ways ahead of time. Along the roads and along the canals and stuff, it
6 killed them. It did a really good job, and it didn't take much longer if there was water
7 around to make the stuff the get up in the trees. It's even better. We also sprayed along
8 roads and stuff. When the Army was having trouble with ambushes, we tried to kill the
9 stuff, so they would have a little clear area anyway.

10 JS: Could you talk about, I guess, the different types of defoliants? I know there
11 was Agent Orange, but what were some of the others?

12 JT: Well, the only other two that I know are Agents White and Purple and they
13 were both—Agent Orange is basically a broadleaf killer. It's kind of like 2,4-D, and the
14 other two were more for grassy type things like rice and stuff. It's been so long. I don't
15 remember the nomenclature. One of them was water-based, which meant you had to
16 clean out the system if you're going to use it. The other one was oil-based like Agent
17 Orange was. But they were mainly used for crops and plants that were the grassy type
18 plants rather than broadleaf.

19 JS: Did you primarily carry Agent Orange?

20 JT: Yes. We flew also some of those missions with the Vietnamese markings
21 because they were politically sensitive, supposedly. When we did that we had to carry a
22 Vietnamese crew member, so it could be Vietnamese presence on board. But we did that
23 I suppose maybe twenty percent of the time or something like that.

24 JS: Speaking of working with the South Vietnamese, what was your impression of
25 them?

26 JT: Well, I thought that the South Vietnamese—the ones we dealt with primarily
27 were district leaders who were lieutenant colonels in the Army. These guys all seem
28 pretty sharp. I didn't—I thought the army was okay. They've been fighting over there for
29 twenty or thirty years. I think they're mostly tired, but I thought they were okay. I didn't
30 have any problem with them. I thought they did what they had to do in most cases to at
31 least until we got in there. I think they lost their backbone somewhere and kind of came

1 apart when we pulled—after we pulled out. Their Air Force was very good. They didn't
2 have very good airplanes, but that's who we mainly dealt with.

3 JS: Those that flew with you guys on the missions where they would go, what was
4 their role essentially?

5 JT: The Vietnamese who flew with us?

6 JS: Yes, sir.

7 JT: It was just to have a Vietnamese presence because we had Vietnamese
8 markings. They started out with using pilots, and they thought the mission was too
9 hazardous, so they ended up using enlisted guys in back with the NCOs running the
10 pumps, but that's the only reason.

11 JS: Okay, so they would have some say so in determining where the defoliants
12 could be used and not be used then?

13 JT: Not the guy on the airplane.

14 JS: Okay, all right, but the Vietnamese on the ground?

15 JT: Yes, they did.

16 JS: Okay, all right. For what, like sensitive areas like close to villages, things like
17 that or—?

18 JT: No, well, that could be true. They didn't want their crops bothered.

19 JS: Sure.

20 JT: We really worked for the Army, and the Army did all that negotiation with
21 them.

22 JS: Okay.

23 JT: But this Army chemical corps guy was—we'd go to district chief meetings,
24 and they would talk about some of the things they wanted to do. But they were basically
25 trying to keep us away from their livelihood, but other than that I don't think they cared
26 too much.

27 JS: Well in a target area that you would be spraying, would it, I guess, would it be
28 cleared of friendly personnel?

29 JT: Well, as far as I know, we never sprayed friendly personnel except in the
30 Special Forces camps. And those guys wanted us to spray right up to the edge of their
31 camp, so we probably—I would guess some of those got sprayed. Our mission didn't take

1 us where there were friendly troops, supposedly. Every now and then you'd fly over a
2 bunch, usually South Vietnamese. But I don't know if there was any effort to clear out an
3 area or not. You know, we sprayed so many places. I would say that there was some
4 attempt, but I don't know that we ever knowingly sprayed over friendly forces except the
5 Special Forces guys.

6 JS: Yes, sir. Another thing I wanted to ask you was could you talk about I guess a
7 little bit about a typical day, if there was such a thing, and what that would be like, the
8 daily routine?

9 JT: We'd get up—wind is a problem with the spray if you're trying to keep it in
10 certain confines, so we'd get up in the morning, early, 3:30, 4:00, 4:30 and try to take off.
11 We'd go down to the squadron and have a briefing and brief the mission. We would
12 maybe take off at 6:00 or 6:30, and sometimes you'd fly twenty minutes to a target, and
13 sometimes an hour and a half. You'd spray, come back, and sometimes you'd go off for a
14 second mission, and every once in a while, a third. And we would sit down and the guys
15 who are going to lead the missions the next day would mission plan most of the rest of
16 the day. The rest of them went back and went to sleep. By that time, it had already been a
17 pretty full day.

18 JS: You said a second run or a third mission. Did that depend on things like—I
19 guess what I'm asking is did weather have an impact on it?

20 JT: The weather had some impact. Wind had a lot of impact. And that's what it
21 mainly depended on. Sometimes the temperature—real high temperature—had an impact
22 on the airplanes so you—I flew, for instance, four hundred and some missions, and that
23 was three hundred and sixty-five days, and some weather days and stuff, so you kept
24 pretty busy.

25 JS: So, essentially if weather wasn't a factor then you were flying everyday?

26 JT: Yes.

27 JS: Okay, all right.

28 JT: Every once in a while, you'd get a day off if you'd flown too many, or you
29 had a really bad mission or something, then you get the next day off. But you basically
30 flew every day.

1 JS: Well, I notice in the questionnaire that you mention that in addition to just
2 your typical pilot duties, you were also the standard eval officer. Could you talk a little
3 bit about that and what those duties entailed?

4 JT: Well, I picked that up about halfway through my year there. Stan/Eval is a
5 check section. The Air Force—being in the Air Force, even though you're in combat, a
6 certain number of check rides had to be flown. There were two of us who gave those
7 check flights. Also, when a new guy came in the squadron, they had to fly some
8 orientation missions just riding in the jump seat, and they had to fly in the right seat for a
9 while. We were monitored all that. Some of those had to be with an IP (instructor pilot)
10 and some not. Basically, that was our duties and making sure they were following
11 standardized procedures pretty much and evaluate them every now and then. We weren't
12 always popular.

13 JS: Sure, I bet. Did you find that most of them were following proper procedure?

14 JT: Yes. There were some degree of saying, "This is war, and we don't have to
15 follow all the checklists," and everything, but that got changed over time. People were
16 pretty good about it.

17 JS: For those guys who were having some problems, what would be done at that
18 point?

19 JT: Oh, mainly the squadron commander would have a visit with them, and then
20 maybe an IP would fly with him for a time or two if there was a serious problem.

21 JS: We've talked kind of in general terms about your experiences, but maybe you
22 could talk about any specific flights or missions that kind of stand out in your mind or
23 your first mission if that stands out in your mind.

24 JT: My first mission you fly in the jump seat and you're watching over the
25 shoulder of the pilot and co-pilot.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JT: It was always a first time you got a hit. You had to buy the drinks that night,
28 and some guy—one guy took sixty days before he ever—he was a nervous wreck by the
29 time he got his first hit. And I—we were on target forty-five seconds before we heard the
30 first hit on the airplane. That one stands out a little bit. That was on a mission over in
31 Laos with a three-ship formation, and we were number three. It was about—another IP

1 mission, where each airplane had an instructor on it, and we were getting some guys
2 mountain time. The lead airplane went in, and that stands out. We lost five guys there and
3 that stands out. My last mission is I think—McNamara had decided they were going to
4 have some kind of barrier on the DMZ, from the ocean to the mountains, and we were
5 supposed to defoliate the area for a ways on the south side of the river. I can't remember
6 the name of it. There was the demarcation line. The problem with it was, it was in range
7 of North Vietnamese artillery, and they were scared that at within one hundred and fifty
8 feet of an artillery shell on the ground would be kind of hazardous, just with debris flying
9 around. So, we loaded up ten airplanes and flew them up to the Marine base halfway up
10 the coast, and then we took off the next morning and snuck up there. When we got there,
11 there was a Marine fighter that was in our way, and we finally got lined up and flew ten
12 airplanes across the southern side of the DMZ. I never got shot while I was in the air
13 from the ground of any kind. But since that was my last mission, that kind of sticks in my
14 mind. Plus, the fact that it was so secretive, and it must have really worked because
15 nobody shot at us.

16 JS: You mentioned earlier flying in a three-ship formation. Was that the typical
17 formation, or did it just vary depending on the mission?

18 JT: Varied. Three ship was normal, and it went up to maybe six—three to six I
19 think would be—I think three was pretty normal.

20 JS: All right, I know you talked about the ship being hit forty-five seconds into
21 your first mission. But how often would your C-123 take fire, and how often would you
22 come under fire?

23 JT: We came under fire probably between fifty and seventy five percent of the
24 time. Hits, I don't know, I ended up with about one hundred and fifty. They came one or
25 two or three at a time. We had one guy that got one hundred and sixty-five in one
26 mission. He got caught in a flack trap that was set for fighters that they had. That's a lot
27 of holes on one side of the airplane. Mainly you get just two or three at a time—one or
28 two or three.

29 JS: I know you mentioned that it was primarily small arms fire. What type of
30 damage could small arms fire do to the plane?

1 JT: Well, we had some that the control cables were—some hit control cables, and
2 some would hit the engines and the inverters that ran the instruments and would mess up
3 the electrical system. We had a lot of—the engine is most susceptible, and we had an
4 awful lot of engines shot out, various parts of the oil coolers would be hit. But as far as
5 physical damage to the airplane, it was mainly just holes that they'd patch. You could
6 tear up things inside, You could bounce them around inside, and they would also
7 sometimes hit the trioxide tank, and mainly it would be engine damage. That is what
8 happened most of the time.

9 JS: Well, speaking along these lines, you talked a little bit about the enemy and
10 your impression of them as far as their abilities.

11 JT: Well, the Air Forces guys are different. I'm confused at what the abilities are
12 of the guy on the ground. But these trails that we would uncover for a while—I thought
13 they were very tenacious. Nothing ever stayed done. We'd knock something down, and
14 they'd rebuild it again. So, I don't know. I had a lot of respect for them. They also—oh, I
15 don't know. They didn't value life very much, and when you don't value life very much
16 you've got a tough enemy like we're finding out in the Middle East right now.

17 JS: Well, you mentioned also operating in Laos as well. About how many of your
18 missions were over there in Laos?

19 JT: A very small percentage. The Ho Chi Minh trail came down just on the other
20 side of the Vietnam-Laos border and probably most of our missions were on that and
21 we're trying to uncover the trail there. So, I would say, less than five percent of our
22 missions were over there.

23 JS: Well, I guess let me ask it this way. Was the air space over Laos more or less
24 dangerous, would you say, or about the same?

25 JT: For us it was about the same.

26 JS: Okay.

27 JT: We never did have much trouble with any anti-aircraft type weapons. They
28 had a bunch of them over there because the other airplanes, fighters and stuff, had
29 problems, but we had about the same just ground people with ground fire.

1 JS: Would some of that—well, I’m sure you wouldn’t necessarily know at the
2 time that you were flying, but would some of that ground fire be coming from Pathet Lao
3 as well as NVA or—?

4 JT: I don’t think so.

5 JS: Okay.

6 JT: We were there—’67 is pretty early in the development of the war over there,
7 and I’m sure things changed fairly drastically. Laos was a brand-new target and also, at
8 the time, very classified. I think that that became less classified and got a lot more
9 interesting after I left.

10 JS: All right, one other thing I wanted to ask you speaking along the lines of the
11 Vietnamese. Did you have much interaction with Vietnamese civilians?

12 JT: No.

13 JS: Okay.

14 JT: We were at the airbase there. Bien Hoa was a Vietnamese air base and there
15 were families, Vietnamese families. The Vietnamese Air Force guys lived on base, too,
16 but they were pretty well fenced off. They came in and did our laundry and cleaned up,
17 and stuff and things—or their wives did. That’s about the only contact we had.

18 JS: Okay, all right.

19 JT: When we were in Saigon and Tan Son Nhut, I think the guys had a lot more
20 contact there. I wasn’t there long enough.

21 JS: Sure, yes, sir. Well, when you weren’t on a mission and weren’t planning a
22 mission, when you did have some down time, how would you spend it?

23 JT: Well, lying around the barracks there wasn’t much to do. People did a lot of
24 reading, and there were a lot of guys taking correspondence courses for various schools—
25 Squadron Officer School and Command and Staff and stuff. It was pretty much a
26 standard day except we probably did a little more drinking during the time off than
27 normal. But other than that there wasn’t much to do when we weren’t flying.

28 JS: Did you ever participate in any Civic Action Programs or anything like that?

29 JT: No, but the squadron did.

30 JS: Okay.

1 JT: They had some tree planting. They moved these people out and moved them
2 into these refugee camps kind of, and they kept saying the thing they missed were the
3 trees, so we had an ongoing tree planting program which everybody thought it was a little
4 ironic since we were out killing trees.

5 JS: Sure.

6 JT: They had a couple other civic things, but our contact with the civilians was
7 pretty limited.

8 JS: All right.

9 JT: Some barber that tried to break my neck every time he gave me a haircut. He
10 was a civilian. I always accused him of being Viet Cong.

11 JS: Right, did your time spent on there ground, whether it'd be Bien Hoa or
12 elsewhere, did the base ever come under mortar fire or anything like that?

13 JT: Yes.

14 JS: Okay.

15 JT: Both places, Da Nang and Bien Hoa. When I was there, they'd hit the part of
16 the compound we were in. Shortly after I left, I saw pictures of the hooch I was living in
17 actually, that had been hit. And it was at Bien Hoa. And up at Da Nang, some of the
18 buildings got hit, but we never had anybody hurt from a mortar. I never lost anybody or
19 got anybody wounded from it.

20 JS: Yes, sir. Well, speaking along those terms, as far as the squadron goes—I
21 don't know the best way to ask this—but what was the casualty rate of the squadron?

22 JT: Well, it was pretty high. While I was there, we lost fifteen people between the
23 Air Force units. It was quite a few. We had probably the same number hit by either
24 bullets or shrapnel flying or pieces of metal flying around an airplane like bullets. While I
25 was there, we lost one guy. The pilot was shot and killed on a mission. Let's see, we had
26 one airplane go down that everybody got out of. We had two airplanes that—one of them
27 had three people on it—I'm sorry, one of them had four people on it and the other had
28 five, that crashed and there were no survivors. Then we had one crew—my Stan/Eval
29 crew, all except me, were going over to pick up an airplane that had some battle damage
30 at another base. They hooked a ride with a cargo carrying 123 which crashed en route and
31 killed them. So, we lost quite a few people different ways.

1 JS: Yes, sir.

2 JT: We probably never had more than—let's see—maybe fifty flyers involved, so
3 there was a fairly high casualty rate.

4 JS: Another thing I wanted to ask you, you talked about—I know you talked
5 about sometimes when enemy bullets would hit the plane that it would hit the herbicide
6 tank. It made me think, did you guys have much exposure to the herbicide itself?

7 JT: Quite a bit. The guy running the pump in the back had a whole lot, and
8 everybody else had quite a bit. He would sometimes—you were flying wing, and you'd
9 fly in another guys spray. The area where they replenished the tanks was just pumps on
10 tank wagons that they pumped in there. It was a lot of exposure there, so I think we had a
11 fair amount, some guys a lot, and some not quite so much. Overall, the exposure came
12 several ways.

13 JS: Well, if you don't mind, I would like to ask you some basic questions about
14 Agent Orange and if you or anyone had any adverse health effects as a result, and if I
15 could get your opinion on the Agent Orange controversy.

16 JT: Well, I'll start with the last one first. I think it's way overblown.

17 JS: Okay.

18 JT: Always have. When I was flagging as a teenager in central Kansas—2,4-D is
19 one of the components of 2,4,5-T, which is Agent Orange. I got exposed there, and then
20 I've been part of the study. They ran a—it started in '80, I think. Somewhere in the early
21 '80s and quit in 2005. Every five years they brought—twelve hundred Ranch Handers
22 was about all there were, I think—and a control group and run tests on them for three or
23 four days. It's really comprehensive, and they found a few things. There are some
24 diseases that they now claim are—could be Agent Orange related, but I don't know. I
25 myself have got some—my feet are numb up to knees. They said I had diabetes which
26 supposedly Agent Orange is a cause defector in that. I tested my cholesterol and blood
27 pressure, and they were up. As soon as I got them down, all the diabetes signs went away,
28 but I still have numb feet. I think it was from the diabetes, and I don't think it was from
29 Agent Orange. They couldn't figure out what it was, and I went ahead and applied for
30 disability, so I'm getting some disability from them. I'm not a great believer in it. I guess
31 it makes me a hypocrite.

1 JS: Why do you think that the controversy became what it did then? If it's
2 overblown, why do you think it became that way?

3 JT: Well, I'm not sure. The press had a lot to do with it. The GIs on the ground—
4 you never could convince them that Agent Orange hadn't caused them whatever was
5 wrong with them. Like I said, not very many of them were sprayed with it, a lot of them
6 would walk through areas where it had been sprayed. I'm sure. They were very vocal in
7 veterans' groups and getting the public eye. I think that's overblown. I think that the
8 problem could be there. I just don't think these people got enough exposure for it to cause
9 the problems that they said it did.

10 JS: Well, before moving on from Vietnam, are there any other memorable
11 moments, or anything like that, that sticks out in your mind? I know you've mentioned a
12 couple of humorous moments in the questionnaire. You talked about something about a
13 smoke grenade?

14 JT: I'm not sure which one that is. We had a guy that fired the flares. They just
15 came in Styrofoam boxes. This guy boxed in his little cubical. He had found an air
16 conditioner somewhere and put it up. Every week someone would set a smoke bomb off
17 underneath the intake on that thing. The other problem we had was a smoke grenade.
18 This guy in the back that was throwing it out the door didn't get it out the door. And since
19 we're driving with both troop doors open and the windows up front open, the flow of the
20 smoke was always forward. So, you'd get—every now and then you'd end up with
21 everybody trying to dodge the smoke. We had that happen every now and then. That's
22 probably what I was referring to, one of those two cases: probably the air conditioner
23 thing.

24 JS: Yes, sir. You also mentioned as a memorable moment something about the
25 unit being adopted by a monkey?

26 JT: It was our hangar that we had there at Bien Hoa. We ended up with a monkey
27 up in the rafters. Of course, it was open and he—or she, I'm not sure what it was—would
28 come into our briefings on a rafter structure up above our heads while we were briefing
29 and sometimes throw rocks. He tried to pee on somebody. I think he tried, but it looked
30 like that's what they were trying to do. That was kind of funny until they did it to the
31 squadron commander. He decided we had to get rid of it, so we did. He was kind of

1 entertaining. He'd come running down from up above, and he'd come down the conduit
2 on the lights in the ceiling and grab hats off of guys and run back up. It took us several
3 weeks to get him cornered.

4 JS: Yes, sir, all right. I'm looking here. One other thing you mentioned—I'm not
5 sure if this was a humorous moment or just a memorable moment, but you wrote
6 something about—you remember Christmas Eve at Bien Hoa pretty well.

7 JT: Well, we always had a stand-down. We had this one guy that had been kind of
8 hiding when we moved from Tan Son Nhut. Anyway, he was hiding, and we called him
9 Pig Pen like in the comic strip. He also played really good guitar, so we went Christmas
10 caroling there at the fighter wing commander's door. When he opened the door he said,
11 "I figured it'd be you guys. Nobody else would do it." It was kind of a nice thing.

12 JS: All right, well before moving on any other memorable moments, anything else
13 we should talk about?

14 JT: I don't think so. It was a really challenging mission. The flying part was pretty
15 enjoyable, and some of the rest of it wasn't. I was glad to get to go home when the time
16 came.

17 JS: When did your tour come to an end?

18 JT: September of '67.

19 JS: September of '67, all right. Was there any sort of out-processing or did the
20 guys in the unit that were still there, did they do anything for you?

21 JT: No, everybody just left. I'd been there the longest by that time. Probably six
22 weeks and two months, and I kind of snuck off. We didn't have any going away parties.

23 JS: Okay, yes, sir. Well how long then before your tour ended did you stop
24 flying? Or did you fly all the way up to the end?

25 JT: I stopped about three weeks before.

26 JS: What did you do during those last three weeks?

27 JT: I was primarily a mission planner.

28 JS: Okay.

29 JT: I also finished writing up on that manual on the tactics that I talked about. I
30 spent a lot of hours just on downtime days working on that.

1 JS: Well, upon leaving Vietnam, I know this might be a silly question, but how
2 did you feel about leaving?

3 JT: Well, I was glad to leave, but I could obviously tell there was still a lot of
4 work to be done. The guy that we had over there on my tour that came back for a second
5 tour, got killed on his five hundredth mission, so that put a damper on people
6 volunteering to come back, I think. It made me think. It's just like any other thing. If you
7 stay out long enough, sooner or later something bad is going to happen. So, if you can get
8 out while it's still getting out time, you should do it. That's why I'm upset that they're
9 sending these guys now back three or four times. It's a bad thing.

10 JS: Well, upon your leaving how did you—you mentioned that there was still
11 work to be done, but how did you feel that the war was going when you left?

12 JT: I think that it was pretty much a stalemate. It was about four months before
13 Tet, and they had some good things happen and some bad things, but I didn't think we
14 were losing it. I just thought it was going to take a lot longer than anybody thought to win
15 it.

16 JS: Well, upon your arrival home, what type of reception did you receive?

17 JT: Well, my whole family met me when I got off the airplane, so we had a good
18 reception. Everybody seemed glad to see me. But driving around airports after that—as
19 far as the public saw you in uniform—a couple of times I got spit at and stuff like that.
20 The public reception wasn't very good. It was probably nonexistent.

21 JS: Did you know anything or had you heard anything about what to expect when
22 you got back as far as the public's attitude towards the war at that point?

23 JT: No. I think I got a letter from my wife about every day, and she kept me pretty
24 well-informed, but I was still surprised of how it had changed over the year I was gone.

25 JS: What was your reaction to I guess this negativity coming from the public and
26 the unappreciation of the service?

27 JT: That didn't make me very happy, but I had other stuff to do, so I just kind of
28 ignored it.

29 JS: Well, how much longer did you stay in the military after Vietnam?

30 JT: Well, I got home in '67, and I retired in, I think, December of '81, so fourteen
31 years.

1 JS: Okay. Well, did you have any time off before your next assignment?
2 JT: Between Vietnam?
3 JS: Yes, sir.
4 JT: Yeah, I had probably—I don't remember how much, but my guess would be
5 thirty days. I went back to Mather (AFB) in Sacramento and flew into Travis. Like I said,
6 my wife and kids were there, and she'd already moved from Russell to the base and had
7 everything all set up, so I didn't have any moving work to do. We just kind of relaxed
8 and enjoyed ourselves.
9 JS: What was your assignment at Mather this time?
10 JT: The same thing as it's been before—flying navigators, ended up on the
11 Stan/Eval team again for IPs, instructor pilots. I was there, but I wasn't there very long
12 this trip.
13 JS: So how long were you here then?
14 JT: I got to Mather in September of '67, and I transferred to Randolph (AFB,
15 Texas)—I'm trying to think—about a year later. It was command Stan/Eval, which I
16 went around and checked all the various bases and other commands. Randolph, when I
17 was there for a year and a half, and then I went to Armed Forces Staff College, which
18 was a school for—by this time I'd made major and had also become a regular officer, so I
19 went to Armed Forces Staff College which was in Norfolk (Virginia) for six months.
20 Then I went to Germany and to Wiesbaden and Ramstein and four years over there. I was
21 just a staff officer on Air Force Europe Command Headquarters staff.
22 JS: I guess was Armed Forces Staff College, was that designed to prepare you for
23 this type of work, and I guess to make you for advancement for upper levels like
24 lieutenant colonel and colonel?
25 JT: Yes, that's what it was for. It was a joint school and had Army, Navy, Marines
26 and Air Force all there.
27 JS: One thing, getting back to this time right after Vietnam for a moment, was
28 there any adjustment period getting back to more, I guess, life outside of a combat zone,
29 or was it not a problem?

1 JT: Yeah, there was some. I'd look out at night and see lights along the horizon
2 for a minute and thinking there were flares and stuff like that. I think that lasted probably
3 for a year. Six months to a year before—but basically, I adjusted pretty well.

4 JS: Now, did you keep up with what was going on in the war fairly closely after
5 you left?

6 JT: Yes.

7 JS: Okay. And as things like Tet happened and the Vietnamization in the
8 beginning of American withdrawal happened, what did you think? What was your
9 opinion of the way the war was going?

10 JT: Well, obviously wasn't going very well, I think. People I knew who were
11 there said everything was misrepresented so much by the press. It caused a backlash here
12 in the States, and it never stopped. We practically actually won that battle, I think. The
13 politicians got a little scared of it and things went downhill from there. That was '68, and
14 so they had to put up with less full support, I think, for quite a while.

15 JS: Yes, sir. Well, how about the eventual end, and the fall of Saigon? What was
16 your opinion of that?

17 JT: Well, it basically broke your heart for those people and everything. Plus, the
18 fact that it was something that probably didn't have to happen. I thought that we owed
19 them more support than they got towards the end. I realized that they weren't doing real
20 well, and they're all on their own, and a little help might have changed the outcome, the
21 memorial, I should say.

22 JS: Yes, sir. Well, where were you when this took place, when the war came to an
23 end?

24 JT: I was in Germany.

25 JS: How much time did you spend there in Germany you said?

26 JT: About four years. I was between Wiesbaden and Ramstein.

27 JS: I know from talking to Army guys that were in Germany at that period, there
28 was a lot of trouble with the Army and a lot of problems with racial issues and drugs and
29 things like that. How was the Air Force faring at that time from what you could tell?

30 JT: Well, I don't think we had quite the problems that the Army did. But there
31 were some problems. Somewhere there was a standoff in a chow hall, and then we had a

1 base down in Italy that was so bad. They ran about three or four commanders down there
2 trying to solve it, and they finally got one that did. So, we had problems during that
3 period.

4 JS: Is this more racial problems?

5 JT: Yes, primarily.

6 JS: All right, how about in Vietnam? I meant to ask you about that. Were there
7 any problems?

8 JT: Not in our unit. We had two or three black pilots, one of whom got killed in
9 one of those crashes. We had a lot of black enlisted guys and I don't think that—I don't
10 remember any problems. We were a small enough unit that everybody would know.

11 JS: After four years in Germany, where did you go from there?

12 JT: I came back to the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama.

13 JS: Yes, sir.

14 JT: Another school that's supposed to get you ready for lieutenant colonel and
15 colonel type—mainly colonel type—jobs. I was there—actually, I was at Montgomery
16 for four years, I guess, four and a half. I went through the school, and then I stayed there
17 as an instructor. So, while I was there—I made lieutenant colonel in Germany, and then I
18 actually made major in Vietnam and made lieutenant colonel in Germany, and while I
19 was on the staff at the War College I made colonel.

20 JS: As an instructor there, what were you teaching?

21 JT: Well, I was in the leadership management group. They had different kind of
22 teachings and different kinds of curriculums. One block would be leadership and
23 management, but some of them would be tactics. Although when they fly and take a part
24 in the planning and stuff I'm sure there are three or four different groups. I worked for a
25 while in the correspondence group because they did have some correspondence courses
26 that they gave for a year or two, and then I went down to the regular college for two or
27 three years. So, I was an instructor there.

28 JS: After you finished up there where did you go from that point?

29 JT: I left there and came to Tinker Air Force Base (OK), which it here in Midwest
30 City, as a deputy base commander. I stayed here for two years. The base commander's
31 job—the base commander is the guy that takes care of the base itself primarily, and not—

1 the overall commander is a wing commander. He takes care of the flying part and the
2 base commander takes care of everything else. So anyway, the base commander here got
3 transferred out, and when I didn't get this job I asked to be moved. After a couple of false
4 starts, I ended up finishing my career up at K.I. Sawyer, up in Michigan as a base
5 commander there. I was there a year.

6 JS: During this time post-Vietnam these assignments that you had, did you
7 continue to fly much?

8 JT: I flew, not much, but I flew in Germany. And when I came back in '74 I came
9 back to War College, and I didn't fly after that again. No active flying.

10 JS: What did you fly in Germany?

11 JT: T-39s. A little twin-engine jet. In the civilian world they call it business jet
12 and held about six people with a couple pilots. I really enjoyed it.

13 JS: Well, do you fly anymore today?

14 JT: No.

15 JS: Okay.

16 JT: When I got out of the Air Force I decided that it cost too much money, and I
17 wouldn't be able to fly enough to keep my proficiency up, so I have not flown since I got
18 out.

19 JS: Yes, sir. Well upon your retirement from the Air Force, what do you do since
20 then?

21 JT: Well, I spent a year and a half as station manager for an oil well perforating
22 group that was actually owned by my wife's sister. And in '83 the oil bust came around,
23 and so I ended up working for the state of Oklahoma in the personnel business from '84
24 until '97. By the time I got out of there I was deputy director and office personnel
25 management for the state, and then I retired for good in '97.

26 JS: Well, before wrapping up the interview, the last thing I would like to do if it's
27 okay I'd like to just ask you some general questions to get your opinion on some issues
28 involving the war. And for these you can just say as much or as little as you'd like.

29 JT: Okay.

1 JS: First of all, looking back on your experience in Vietnam, how do you feel
2 about your own involvement in Vietnam and American involvement in Vietnam in
3 general? What do you think of it?

4 JT: Well, I'm not the guy that makes those big decisions. The government
5 decided—Commander in Chief decided that it was worth going in there then I thought it
6 was okay, and I thought initially everything was going pretty well, but it didn't last very
7 long.

8 JS: Yes, sir.

9 JT: I felt pretty good about my part in it. I thought overall it was pretty good
10 while I was there.

11 JS: All right. Along these lines I know you said the Commander in Chief sends
12 you, you go, but do you feel that it was right for the U.S. to be involved in Vietnam or
13 not?

14 JT: Well, with the political climate then and worldwide, I think it was probably a
15 legitimate thing to do. I don't know, today that same decision might be different. The
16 Cold War was on and all kinds of theories and I think the cause was okay when we
17 started it. The reason we got in there was okay.

18 JS: I know you briefly touched on this earlier, but could you talk a little bit more
19 about your opinion on the way the media handled the war?

20 JT: Well, I think that they did the military a great disservice. You know,
21 everybody was trying to make their bones as a reporter, and I think they grossly distorted
22 practically everything they reported on.

23 JS: What's your opinion of U.S. policy towards Vietnam today and this
24 relationship that we have with the Vietnamese government now?

25 JT: I guess if I was asked to vote on it, I'd say no, but it's not a big deal. We've
26 done it with other countries.

27 JS: All right.

28 JT: I don't agree with it necessarily, but it's not a great big deal with me. It's just
29 not going back there. They were going back there, so I don't care what they do.

1 JS: What do you think of U.S. Military actions or interventions since Vietnam?
2 For example, Iraq and Afghanistan, what's your opinion on those if you don't mind me
3 asking?

4 JT: Well, I think that it's probably something that had to be done, but I'm not
5 sure. I guess I'm not sure who all's going to have access this thing, but I think that
6 anybody who thought we could reduce the Armed Forces about a half while we're
7 fighting two wars is crazy. I think it's caused a great deal of grief individually and in the
8 military. I think the cause was okay. I don't think it's been handled very well. I don't see
9 much change.

10 JS: All right, just a few more questions. What would you say—what, concerning
11 Vietnam, has had the most impact on your life? Or has Vietnam had a major impact on
12 your life?

13 JT: Well, the impact would be life can be pretty short, and you need to live with it
14 the best you can while you have it. I don't think I had long between lingering emotion
15 problems with it. I just think when you're in a place where people are dying around you,
16 it changes your outlook on life a little bit.

17 JS: Yes, sir. Have you ever visited The Wall, and if so, what did you think of it?

18 JT: I think it's awesome, and I have visited it twice.

19 JS: Well, before we wrap things up then is there anything else you'd like to say
20 about your experiences or is there anything else we should cover that we didn't?

21 JT: I don't think so.

22 JS: Okay, well, Colonel Tanner, thank you very much for your time. If you don't
23 mind, I'll stop the recording and talk to you for just a couple more minutes.