

ATTENTION: © Copyright The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. "Fair use" criteria of Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 must be followed. The following materials can be used for educational and other noncommercial purposes without the written permission of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. These materials are not to be used for resale or commercial purposes without written authorization from the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. All materials cited must be attributed to the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University.

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Colonel James M. Fitzsimmons
Conducted by John McGonagill
Date: 4, 5 November 2015
Transcribed by John McGonagill**

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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 John McGonagill: This John McGonagill with the Vietnam Archive at Texas
2 Tech University conducting an oral history interview with Col. James M. Fitzsimmons.
3 Colonel Fitzsimmons was an F-4 pilot assigned to Da Nang Air Base from 1971 to 1972.
4 Today is November 4, 2015. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, in the Special Collections Library
5 on the campus of Texas Tech and Colonel Fitzsimmons is joining me by phone from
6 Tucson, Arizona. How are you this afternoon, sir?

7 James Fitzsimmons: I think I'm doing fine. We finally got some sunshine.

8 JM: Good, good.

9 JF: It's usually pretty rare. I'm kidding.

10 JM: Yeah. (Chuckle) I tell you what, we woke up with a pretty heavy fog today
11 that just now burned off.

12 JF: Oh, okay.

13 JM: Anyway, while we are on the record I wanted to start off first by saying thank
14 you for agreeing to participate. I know this is a chunk of time carved out of your life and
15 I know you are in the middle of doing a little bit of house rebuilding, so I appreciate you
16 doing that. Let's go ahead and get started. I'd like to start off with a little bit of
17 biographical information

1 JF: Okay.

2 JM: First off, when and where you were born and a little bit about what life was
3 like growing up.

4 JF: Well, I was born in a place called Bath, New York, but we didn't stay there
5 very long. At that time my father was in the business of building trunks for automobiles
6 and they started putting trunks right into automobiles and that knocked his business off
7 the street. We ended up going to Rochester, New York, where he was born and we lived
8 there in a duplex and since he lost his business he started into real estate and he stayed in
9 it the rest of his life. Home Owners Loan Corporation was the government thing, he was
10 in that and bought real estate throughout. We lived in a place called, on Lake Avenue in
11 Rochester, New York, in a duplex as I mentioned, and my mother was a teacher by
12 profession. And my brother and sister were both older than I. I was the baby of the
13 family and we lived on, like I said, Lake Avenue in Rochester, New York, about four
14 blocks from Eastman Kodak, which is probably the biggest operation going on in the city
15 of Rochester in those days. And as you know, Eastman Kodak has since kind of gone
16 downhill. And growing up, I went to Catholic grammar school only a block and a half
17 away or so right across from Sacred Heart Cathedral and my brother and sister both
18 preceded me there. Like I said, I was the baby. After grammar school I went to parochial
19 high school called St. Thomas Aquinas, all boys' school. And that's about it. Then onto
20 college and I actually worked a year on the New York state railroad to earn enough
21 money to get to college. Back in grammar school was very nice school boys and girls,
22 and high school was all boys.

23 JM: What was the name of the grammar school?

24 JF: Sacred Heart, just like the church.

25 JM: Okay.

26 JF: Sacred Heart, a very good school, nice kids. Boys and girls. I also when I was
27 there I had a paper route that I picked up in eighth grade, I guess. And I thought it was the
28 best paper route in the city of Rochester. And I say that because my route was over 100
29 papers but it was all covering just one block. And the reason for that was Eastman Kodak,
30 when old George started his business people would like to live around where all the
31 factories were and so you had duplexes and triplexes mostly around the whole block and

1 that way I could be delivering two or three papers to the same home style and, like I said,
2 had over 100 papers, customers and they treated me well at Christmas.

3 JM: Well, having 100 papers in your paper route, it's really nice to have in a high
4 density urban environment.

5 JF: Oh, yes, it was that.

6 JM: So you graduated grammar school, went to St. Thomas, so what year was
7 that that you transitioned from grammar school to St. Thomas Aquinas?

8 JF: Well, let me see. I'll work backwards. I graduated from college in '55, I
9 graduated from Aquinas in '50, so I was eighteen when I graduated from Aquinas, like I
10 said, from there I didn't have money to go to college, and my brother was already in
11 college at the University of Rochester. And after making my money on the railroad I
12 followed my brother into the University of Rochester.

13 JM: Okay, so let me back up here for just a second. Father's name and mother's
14 name?

15 JF: Father's name was Philip and Mother's name was Ann. My brother and sister,
16 my brother was Philip also, and my sister was Mary Ellen. And Mary Ellen didn't go to
17 college. She went right into working, I guess, when she finished high school. So Phil and
18 I were the two that made it through. As a matter of fact, as an aside, when I went to
19 college to the University of Rochester, like I said, of course I busted my back to get
20 money to get in there, so I mentioned to a couple of people that I first met there, I said,
21 "You know, the draft's kind of after all of us, especially at our ages and I don't want to
22 get hung up in that business since I just busted my butt to get here." One of them said to
23 me, "Why don't you join ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps)?" I thought, "What the
24 hell is ROTC?" and he told me and so that would keep you out of the draft, obviously.
25 So I took Air Force ROTC even though I didn't even know what it stood for. But I felt
26 comfortable that I'm going to be able to stay in college. And it was after my sophomore
27 year in the Air Force ROTC that the commander of the unit had an old "Goony Bird," he
28 had to get his flying time and so he decided he'd get his flying time by taking a bunch of
29 us for a ride. So we went from Rochester, New York, where it was colder than you know
30 what and flew down to Fort Walton Beach, Florida. It was the first time I was ever in an
31 airplane. They let us go up in the cockpit and watch them do things. Then we went

1 swimming in the middle of December in Ft. Walton Beach. (Editor's note: During this
2 interview, Ft Walton Beach near Eglin Air Force Base was mentioned and number of
3 times regarding this particular event. However, Col. Fitzsimmons's recollection is that
4 this may have been Panama City Beach near Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida.) I thought,
5 "Whoa, now this I can handle," and that's how I ended up in the Air Force.

6 JM: Well, that's probably better than any scholarship or any other type of
7 motivation they can give you. Give you a ride from New York in the middle of winter
8 down to Florida. Wow. Let's back up to that railroad job just for a moment. Now that's a
9 new one. What was that like? What kind of job was that?

10 JF: Well, backing up a little bit. I went to Eastman Kodak first since it was right
11 in my neighborhood. And I was a runner around the different buildings, you know, with
12 paperwork and so on. And I think I lasted about a month and the reason I quit was
13 everyone at Eastman Kodak ate, slept, drank, and defecated Eastman Kodak. And I just
14 thought, "I'm too young to die in that business." So that's when I quit and went on the
15 railroad. And the railroad was interesting from one standpoint because you didn't stay
16 right in Rochester. You worked out of different places in the state of New York because
17 New York State Railroad, one of them goes, the main road would go New York City,
18 north to Albany, and then straight across to Buffalo, New York. But they also had another
19 one that went around southern New York so you would be ending up going to, I would
20 say six or seven different places to work putting up mostly telecommunications where
21 you climb poles. I didn't, but you worked on the ground for putting in switches and
22 things like that for the tracks. So I'd be in Buffalo, I'd be in in Southern Elmira, and
23 you'd live in boarding cars. And you slept in them and you ate in them. And usually you
24 came home for weekends, but most of the time you were away from home. And that was
25 different, and maybe a predecessor to all of the things in the Air Force I went through.

26 JM: Wow, that's interesting. Do they still do that today? You know, people that
27 work for the railroad? Do they stay in these boarding cars?

28 JF: That's a good question. I know they did for many years, but I only know one
29 young fellow out here in Tucson, our neighbors' son went into it. But he wasn't working
30 on the ground work. (Coughs) Excuse me. He was actually into the driving of the trains.

1 So my guess is that they may come at home during the week. I don't know if they are far
2 away from home or not. I think most are on short-term runs, kind of like the airlines.

3 JM: So you graduated high school in 1950. There's a lot of interesting things
4 happening in 1950. From the '50s and '60s, socially speaking even technically speaking,
5 the United States was really at the forefront of a lot of things. We started to get into the
6 hydrogen bomb era and where the Soviet Union would dentate a bomb and it would show
7 how powerful they could make one and I think Truman I think was the president then and
8 I think he would let one go and show how big it was. Was that kind of thing discussed
9 around the family dinner table on the weekends, what was happening?

10 JF: It was to some degree, but I think we were more concerned with what's going
11 on locally as far as living in Rochester. I commuted, I didn't stay on campus. So it was
12 more of a home life. One of the things that happened was we had lost our father, when I
13 was fourteen just starting into high school. So most of our attention was at home and me
14 with my paperwork. Like I mentioned brother, Phil, majored in engineering and then he
15 did get drafted for the Korean War.

16 JM: Oh, okay. So suddenly that became a little more important and talked about.

17 JF: Oh, yes. He did well in engineering and he came back from Korea he had a
18 job in engineering at a factory on Lake Ontario. And after about a year and a half to two
19 he comes home and says, "I think I'll go be a lawyer." So he took up and went to DC
20 and worked and night school and came out a patent attorney. He did very well at it. Mary
21 Ellen was working in the city in local jobs there. Mine was to concentrate on college. I
22 always worked going through college so I guess I didn't get that much involved in what's
23 going on outside the city of Rochester.

24 JM: I did find one thing that was interesting. I just happened to stumble on it was
25 the Brighton gas explosion of 1951. Do you remember about that? It happened in
26 Rochester.

27 JF: Yeah. Vaguely. I'll be honest with you. Brighton is kind of a suburb of
28 Rochester. I don't recall what ignited the explosion. You know, usually you expect
29 something like that from big companies like Eastman Kodak or whatever. But no, I'm not
30 too well tuned into that. Brighton, New York, right?

1 JM: Yeah. It was something about the gas flow issue from the plant I guess over-
2 pressurized and sent a bunch of high pressured gas into these homes I guess.

3 JF: Yeah, it sounds familiar now. But it didn't strike me that much, I guess.

4 JM: That was the big news I could find in Rochester. Let me back up a little bit
5 with brother Phillip. So a Korean War veteran. What did he do during the Korean War
6 do you know?

7 JF: Well, he was in the engineering field so he was mostly keyed in the area
8 around the capitol or even down where I once was, Osan, Korea. And of course they
9 were moving around in those days, as you well know. Back and forth, there was a big
10 push going back.

11 JM: Do you know what years he was there?

12 JF: Let me see. It was probably '50. I was there from '50-'54, I mean '51-'55. So
13 put him in there about '52. Sounds right. Close to it.

14 JM: So, '52 we were almost back across the 38th parallel, I think. Of course
15 before that we were all the way down to Pusan.

16 JF: He was primarily in Seoul, I think or suburbs thereof.

17 JM: Well, he was an engineer. So I know the engineers moved around, probably
18 doing a lot of bridge repair things like that.

19 JF: Oh, yeah.

20 JM: Pretty Interesting. All right so we left high school and we went off to
21 college and we've got—

22 JF: My brother was in a fraternity there called the Dekes, so when I got there I
23 obviously kind of investigated what they were like because my brother Phil was there and
24 I ended up joining the Dekes. They used to call them the "Drunken Dekes." Neither one
25 of us lived on campus but that's where the big house was. Fraternities were big in those
26 days. And I ended up being the manager of the Deke house at the end of my junior year,
27 I guess so I had some management going on with that thing.

28 JM: And the college was still in hometown, right?

29 JF: Oh, yeah, Rochester.

30 JM: So were you living at the house then or were you still commuting back and
31 forth.

1 JF: No, I commuted all the way, even up to my full senior year. Although I did
2 not live in the Deke house, that's where a bunch of the Dekes did, especially the guys
3 from out of town, obviously.

4 JM: Right, so did you have any sports activity in high school or college that you
5 kept up with?

6 JF: No. I guess the main reason was I was usually working. Sometimes the
7 summer job would call me back even though I had already gotten a pretty good full
8 college work going on. I know one year, I think it was my sophomore year, I had been
9 working with an outfit called Wilmeright, Jim Wilmont. And he built homes and he was
10 big as far as home building was concerned. I worked there during the summer putting in
11 septic systems for all these houses. I think it was during my sophomore year, they called
12 me up after I had finished for the summer and they said, "Hey, can you work part time as
13 a night watchman type thing?" I said, "Yeah, I guess I can try that." So that was a good
14 place to do homework, too. I was earning money there. So between that and the
15 homework and the studies, I didn't have too much time to do anything else.

16 JM: So as you started making your way through college, and this Air Force
17 ROTC thing was going on and I imagine it had the same type of program where you go
18 for two years and then there some sort of commitment you have to make and then you go
19 for your last two years or was it a little different back then?

20 JF: That's exactly what it was. Well, if you had a scholarship with the Air Force
21 ROTC, you were a contract student. If you were that bright and you got into that
22 business in your freshman or sophomore year, well then you were already signed up,
23 obviously. If you were just going in and taking it as a subject, and were not on
24 scholarship you really didn't get into the pay zone until the beginning of the junior year.
25 That's where you signed up. And then you had a stipend of some type. It wasn't like a
26 full time Air Force ROTC scholarship. But like I said, once they put me in an airplane I
27 got completely interested, seriously interested in Air Force ROTC.

28 JM: I'm trying to remember when President Eisenhower was elected that I think
29 he was likely president in 1955 when you graduated. So there are still a lot of things
30 going on even though it's not quite as bad as the '60s yet. I think we're probably already,
31 even though Korea is winding down and becoming—

1 JF: To answer your question or at least associate, things were winding down and
2 we did not go in immediately upon graduation. I was not called in until January or
3 February after graduation.

4 JM: So you graduated in May and went through that whole year until January and
5 February.

6 JF: I graduated in May and then came on active duty in February. So, yeah. I
7 continued working with the Wilmot company so, when I got the call. By this time my
8 honey and I had signed on for life, got married.

9 JM: Okay, and your wife's name for the record is Joan. What was her maiden
10 name?

11 JF: Deisenroth, D-E-I-S-E-N-R-O-T-H.

12 JM: And is she a Rochester lady or—

13 JF: Yes, she went to parochial high school, Mercy High School, just like I went
14 to a parochial Catholic high school, Aquinas. So we met during, let me see. It was in
15 high school. I think was a senior at the time and we met through a friend of mine, and a
16 quick short story. We dated, and like I said, we lived in the city near Eastman Kodak on
17 Lake Avenue which is almost, Lake Avenue ends at Lake Ontario, but it goes all the way
18 into the city. We had a Riviera Theatre right across from our home. We were on kind of
19 a main drag and the name of the theatre was the Riviera and I used say lived in the 19th
20 century villa overlooking the Riviera because we lived in a duplex and people rented the
21 upstairs part of our house. So in any event, Joan my wife, my girlfriend back then, we
22 had been dating for almost six months or so and she thought it was time for me to meet
23 her mom and dad. And they lived in a suburb of Rochester called Penfield. And her
24 father was a milkman and had been for years. He would come from Penfield into the
25 dairy and get his truck and so on. In any event, we go into her house and meet her mom,
26 “Hello. How are you? I'm Jim Fitzsimons and I have enjoyed dating your daughter here.
27 She's a sweet lady.” Then her father Eustace, E-U-S-T-A-C-E, we called him “Eustie,”
28 he said, “Jim Fitzsimons, now, huh? And where do you live?” I told him, “We're on
29 Lake Avenue right across the Riviera theatre.” And he says to me, “Do you have a dog
30 named Cinder?” I thought, “How the hell could he know?” I've never met the man and
31 he calls me out. And I said, “Yes, as a matter of fact, I do.” And lo and behold, he was

1 our milkman. I'd never known that. He knew the dog, Cinder, he knew my mother
2 because on occasions on Saturdays, I guess, he'd stop and have coffee with her because I
3 lost my father, I think I mentioned that, when I was about fourteen. So mother went back
4 in the teaching business. So, yeah, they'd have coffee once in a while and [he knew the]
5 dog's name was Cinder. It blew my mind that, you know, it was a small world.

6 JM: That's pretty funny that he calls up your dog's name just to see how fast you
7 were on your feet, I guess.

8 JF: Yeah, he knew me better than I did. (Laughs)

9 JM: I want to ask you a quick question about your mother, Ann. What kind of
10 teacher was she?

11 JF: It was standard teaching for grade school. She wasn't teaching high school or
12 anything. Strictly kindergarten and whatever other grades, early grades, I think.

13 JM: What school did she teach at?

14 JF: Oh, God. I forget the name of it. It was on the other side of town, I know that.
15 Like I said, we lived on the north side, almost to Lake Ontario, and she'd be teaching on
16 the east side. And sometimes that was kind of a hard district that she taught in, too. By
17 that I mean by composition of the people in the area.

18 JM: So she wasn't in any mood to put up with you and your brother and your
19 sister when she got home.

20 JF: No she was a doer. My father was in the real estate business but he was also
21 a diabetic and he had to take insulin and all that good stuff. There's another war story. I
22 walked back and forth to Sacred Heart every day, grammar school. I would come home
23 and on one or two occasions my father would be on the floor maybe in the living room or
24 the dining room. I'd have to call an ambulance and the problem was he'd get up to take
25 his insulin and in the morning before eating, that was standard in those days. And
26 occasionally he'd go back and do a little more sleeping and that was a no-no because
27 when you take insulin you immediately would have to eat to get sugar in your system.
28 And he may sleep a little too late and wake up, well, almost wake up and figure out he's
29 got to get something in his body. But on a couple occasions he never made it to the
30 kitchen. And that was hard to take, you know, as a young fella to see Dad on the floor
31 and wondering, "What in God's name?" That's an insulin reaction because he was a

1 diabetic like I mentioned. I don't know if that had any bearing on a short life. Of course,
2 he was a World War I veteran. It was a real war back then.

3 JM: I didn't know that. So was he in the Army?

4 JF: Yeah. World War I.

5 JM: Do you remember what unit he was in?

6 JF: I think it was just an infantry—I know he got subject to gas, you know, that
7 they used as weapon. I don't know if he didn't get his gas mask on or got it and then put
8 it on or what. So, yeah, he had taken a hit or two. That probably contributed to his
9 shorter life, too.

10 JM: Let's see you said you were about fourteen when he passed away and your
11 brother is how much older than you?

12 JF: My brother is three years older than I.

13 JM: So your brother hadn't gone into the Army at nineteen, right?

14 JF: No, no, no.

15 JM: He went through college. Okay.

16 JF: No. Because he didn't go until about a year after college or six months after
17 college.

18 JM: So when your dad—did you remember very much about that when he came
19 home?

20 JF: You're coming in very weak. John, can you hear me?

21 JM: I can. Sorry about that. I think my microphone started to tilt away from me.
22 How's that?

23 JF: Yeah, I think you are going to have to tune that up a little bit.

24 JM: I had the same problem on the last one. Is that better?

25 JF: Yeah, but not much. But I can hear you.

26 JM: Okay, well, if I start fading off say something so I'll continue to ramp up my
27 volume here so we can get it all recorded properly.

28 JM: I was going to ask you Colonel Fitzsimons, when your dad came back, do
29 you remember when your dad came back from World War I?

30 JF: No, I do not.

1 JM: Did he ever have any stories about going over to France or anything like
2 that?

3 JF: No, he never talked much about the war. I think in those days, as treacherous
4 as the whole thing was, you didn't hear many of them speaking of it. But no, he did not
5 speak of any notoriety.

6 JM: Okay. Well, that's very interesting. So military service has been in the
7 family for quite some time.

8 JF: Oh, yeah.

9 JM: And you don't remember any of the locations that he served at when he was
10 over there in France, do you?

11 JF: No, I do not. But he was there, my uncle was there, one of my uncles. He
12 came from a family of five brothers and three sisters. Big family. Farm business way
13 back when.

14 JM: Did your father and his brother serve together in the same unit or were they
15 in different locations?

16 JF: Different locations, different units.

17 JM: Okay. That's very interesting. Okay so let's go back—I apologize for
18 dragging you all around the history books here—but let's go back over to college.
19 You're getting ready to graduate. It's about 1955, you get commissioned and you got
20 this delay so you kind of go back into the house-building business, putting in septic tanks,
21 and now pretty soon you're getting ready to go active duty. What was Mom thinking
22 about all of this? Was she happy with this or upset you were doing this?

23 JF: No, not at all. We'd lost—I'm trying to think when she passed away—she
24 didn't have diabetes, but she had something else that was shortening her life. As a matter
25 of fact, she lived with my sister until she passed away. I forget the year.

26 JM: Was she still around when you graduated college?

27 JF: Yes, she was.

28 JM: So she knew you were commissioned and you were getting ready to go on
29 active duty?

30 JF: Yup. And she was at our wedding and everything else.

31 JM: Oh, good. So she was pretty happy about all this.

1 JF: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. She even visited us when, let me see, she visited us when
2 [I was] going to pilot training and several years after that she was still visiting us. But in
3 the meantime, she picked up whatever that bug was that was shortening her life and
4 moved in with my sister. So up until that time as long as she was on her feet and going
5 places and doing things she came and visited us in Florida and visited us in Oklahoma.

6 JM: All right. When she lived with your sister, was that in Rochester?

7 JF: Yes. Mary Ellen was still there and she had married. She married a Navy
8 officer and they bought a home in Rochester and had two youngsters and I forget what he
9 did. He was in transportation with some type of a company [Genessee Brewing
10 Company] in Rochester. As a matter of fact, my sister and her husband are still alive in
11 the city of Rochester and they live in one of these nursing homes. They sold their home
12 and moved in and they are getting along very nicely. So that's a blessing. And we see
13 them every summer when we head back to New York.

14 JM: And do they stay up there all year long?

15 JF: Yes. I lost brother Phil last year. The patent attorney. What happened to him
16 about ten or twelve years ago, he had his own business. He worked for another patent
17 attorney when he first got his license and everything.

18 JM: Yeah.

19 JF: And when that guy sold the business, brother Phil took it over and did very
20 well on it as a patent attorney. About, like I said, ten, twelve years ago he had a heart
21 attack and he was doing some work in his office and talking into a microphone, you
22 know, where he's going to have it taped or whatever for his secretary so she can type it
23 up and so on. The secretary said that he was talking away in the mic and so on and all of
24 a sudden stopped talking and she went, "Oh. What?" She went in there and his head was
25 right down on his desk and he had had a heart attack [aneurysm].

26 JM: Oh, shoot.

27 JF: It was bad enough so that they had the ambulance there and took him over to
28 the hospital and got him there in time and they had to even operate on his head because of
29 the blood and so on. So that was a stroke and since that time he eventually had to give up
30 the business. He sold it and had to stay at home and he and his bride from days of
31 yesteryear made a deal and the deal was, "Hey, if anything ever happens to either one of

1 us, we're not going to submit them to a nursing home or anything." And so his wife had
2 been taking care of him for the last eight years because he stayed at home. Originally he
3 was kind of mobile but in the end he was in a wheelchair. Just passed away last February.

4 JM: Oh, man, God bless her. She's still around? Phil's wife is still alive?

5 JF: Phil's wife is still around and doing very well. Lonesome obviously.

6 JM: Now is she up in Rochester area?

7 JF: Yes, yeah. They lived in Rochester the whole time.

8 JM: All right, so we graduate college and we do a little bit of work on the side
9 and we eventually get called up to active duty. What's the first thing that happens?

10 JF: Well, you had to go down to San Antonio for headquarters indoctrination or
11 whatever, and then off to pilot training in Oklahoma. Enid, Oklahoma. It's called Vance
12 Air Force Base. I did pilot training there and—I'm sorry I take that back. I jumped too
13 much. We came out here, called up in February, colder than hell in Rochester and went
14 down to indoctrination in San Antonio and then off to pilot training and pilot training was
15 in Enid, Oklahoma. I'm sorry. San—oh, geez. Memories. Talking right here in Tucson.
16 Marana is the base here.

17 JM: Oh, that's right. I forgot about that.

18 JF: You know all of that. So that was primary and coming from Rochester, New
19 York, in February to Tucson, Arizona, in the middle of winter I said, "Holy jeez. This is
20 just like starting out flying airplanes." Pretty nice area. Of course, that's how we got into
21 Tucson for the rest of our lives on and off. Anyway, primary pilot there. Then off to
22 Greenville, Mississippi, for basic training. Then instructor training after that. Then Enid,
23 Oklahoma, for instructing in the T-33.

24 JM: Okay. So let's go back to Marana here for a minute. What aircraft was out
25 there for primary?

26 JF: T-34 and T-28. Both props. My instructor was a farmer, owned a farm. You
27 didn't have to be in the military in those days to instruct.

28 JM: So he was like a Department of the Air Force civilian, or was he just a
29 civilian?

1 JF: Yeah, something to that effect. Whoever was running pilot training, I don't
2 know if it was a commercial outfit, it must have been because he was a civilian, or he was
3 civilian of the government.

4 JM: So which aircraft was the first one? The T-34 or the T-28?

5 JF: The T-34.

6 JM: And that was, let me think. The T-34 was probably a little bit newer, wasn't
7 it or was the T-28 the newer one?

8 JF: No, the 34 was the newer one. The 28 was an older bird. It was a big bird.

9 JM: It was a big difference between the two engines. One had a big radial engine
10 the other one's got a little Continental on it, I think.

11 JF: That's right.

12 JM: But they put you in the T-34 first where you probably did your—

13 JF: You're in there for a couple months and then into the 28. The Navy 28 was
14 the three-bladed and the Air Force was two. I remember that being one of the
15 differences.

16 JM: Was it a joint school? Did you have Navy guys there with you?

17 JF: No, no. Strictly Air Force. Greenville, Mississippi, was also all Air Force.

18 JM: And Greenville was probably—what was down in Greenville?

19 JF: Pardon me?

20 JM: What was down in Greenville? What aircraft were you flying?

21 JF: T-bird, T-33.

22 JM: Okay, then T-33, that's your first introduction to a jet engine.

23 JF: That is correct.

24 JM: What was that like?

25 JF: It was a blessing and very interesting. You moved a little faster and you had
26 to move a little faster. Of course, you went from just getting checked out in the airplane
27 and to formation and things of that nature and instruments. When I went to pilot training,
28 I mean instructor training it was more of the same. And when we got to Enid, Oklahoma,
29 the big change there was they were transitioning from multi-engine prop to jets. So you
30 would get some of these guys that'd been doing nothing but flying props and now we're
31 checking them out in T-33s.

1 JM: Was there any bad habit transfers there between those?

2 JF: There was only one where I had to grab the stick when I was teaching them
3 formation and he was just coming in too fast and I shoved the stick down and out and
4 went underneath the guy who was trying to join up on him. That memory sticks pretty
5 well.

6 JM: So you start off in Marana. Is there some point in this training that you
7 actually get your Air Force wings or do you have to go all the way through Vance before
8 you are awarded your wings?

9 JF: No, you are awarded the wings after Greenville, Mississippi. So it's six
10 months in prop and six months in T-bird.

11 JM: Okay, and then from Greenville, we went up to Vance.

12 JF: Yeah. The only interesting part about Vance was—I may have told you this
13 story. Instrument training. You teach them instruments. You teach them formation, the
14 whole bit, and I had a kid up there one day and he's under the hood and we'd taken off
15 out of Vance and were just headed down towards OK City and he's under the hood doing
16 everything he's supposed to be doing and I'm just watching the sun and everything. All
17 of a sudden all hell goes "Pop! Bang! Pow!" and the airplane feels like it's falling apart.
18 In that event I started to shut the engine down and I said, "Hey, this could be bad. Get
19 ready to punch out if I tell you to." And his comment to me was, "Can I come out from
20 under the hood." I said, "Wait a minute. Never mind. The hood goes with the canopy,
21 remember?" "Oh, yeah." So I shut the engine down and it became very quiet. Looked
22 around to see what I had. We were up around 20,000 or, yeah, at 20,000.

23 JM: Okay, that's what I was going to ask you what altitude you were at when it
24 started.

25 JF: Because we had climbed out leveled off and all that stuff. So I went to guard
26 and alerted OK City because my choice was going to be OK City. I couldn't get back to
27 Vance. We ended up dumping the tips. I had to get rid of those because you don't want
28 to go crashing in or trying to get on the ground with those things. And you get lighter and
29 you get better mileage.

30 JM: Were those full at the time?

1 JF: Yeah, it's pretty much, on instrument flight you usually have full tips because
2 you up there for a long time. In any event, I opted to dump them in the, I think it was the
3 (unintelligible) river, I forget the name of it. Which is south of OK City and so then we
4 head back to the municipal airport.

5 JM: North Canadian River.

6 JF: North Canadian River. Thank you.

7 JM: I was having a moment there but I knew I had it in my brain.

8 JF: Thank you. I appreciate that. In any event we dumped the tanks, we came in,
9 and the old adage, you are what you did, you did a 360 overhead, you know? Descending
10 down to the runway. And dropped the gear at high gear points directly over the field.
11 And then do a 360 and come in. So I dropped the gear coming around about 270-degree
12 point and all of a sudden I hear a voice saying, "You don't have any gear. You don't have
13 any gear," coming from the tower. And I said, "Oh, shit." So I said to my back seater,
14 "Hey, if you can get that down"—what do I want to say?

15 JM: Like a T-handle that you got to blow a hydraulic bottle or something?

16 JF: Yeah, and once he pulled it, it's a separate operation to get it down. It's a
17 one-stroke type thing. So in any event, he hit the emergency handle is what I was
18 looking for and all of a sudden the gear shows itself as one down where it was three
19 before that's why I hadn't even thought of it when I lowered the handle the first time. In
20 any event, he gets it down, the left main goes down and it's a base leg almost. The second
21 comes down and we had just gone on final and almost at the flare and the third one comes
22 down. I even had enough speed after I touched down to turn off the runway. As I turned
23 off and stopped, they had a bunch of Marines there and Guard and whatever the Guard
24 was flying those days. I got the canopy open and one of these guys yells up to me, "Man,
25 you ought to see the hole!" There wasn't supposed to be a hole back there, that's part of
26 the engine. He said, "No, I mean in the side." There was a hole in the side about the size
27 of your head and what had happened was the blades from the engine, you know, back in
28 the tail end, about five of them had gone and broken right off the hulk of the engine and
29 went right through the side of the airplane and that's how we end up with that stupid
30 thing anyways.

31 JM: I'll be darned.

1 JF: So that was interesting for Enid, Oklahoma.

2 JM: Did they ever find your tiptanks in the North Canadian River?

3 JF: You know, I have never found that out. I have never found that out, and I
4 guess I didn't want to. The guys back in Enid were just glad to see us back. That's the
5 little stuff.

6 JM: There's probably a wheat farmer up there that's using it as a bird house or
7 something.

8 JF: When I got home I said, "Oh boy." I got home and hugged my wife and had a
9 cold beer and about that time they called me up from the base and said, "You need to
10 come back out." I said, "For what?" They said, "We do a post physical when you have a
11 problem like that." And I went back down there and I said, "Well, I'll leave the beer at
12 home. Is that okay?" They said, "Yeah, we don't care what you are doing. Come out so
13 we can do a double-take."

14 JM: So how long did you fly T-33s up there?

15 JF: Let me see. I think it was a couple of years. Because then I went down to,
16 they needed help down at Randolph. I think I'm getting this right. Randolph had the
17 senior, I forget what the program was called, but you're checking out higher ranking
18 people who have never flown jets at Randolph. These guys were coming from the
19 Pentagon, they're coming from, you know—you're teaching everything from a full
20 colonel to majors occasionally a one-star and you're checking them out in the T-bird.
21 Instead of a six-month course or whatever, it was only about two months or so. You
22 were just getting them checked out, some instruments some formations and then they
23 would go back to the Pentagon or whatever. It was enlightening for me because I think I
24 got more out of it then they did. Because, you know, you're sitting, you're ready to come
25 in flying for the day. Starting in the morning, whatever. I would have two or three
26 students, majors, lieutenant colonels, colonels, whatever and you walk in that morning
27 and they all come to attention at the table and it's embarrassing. That was the rule that
28 your instructor was god and you had to treat them like that, I guess, from a military
29 standpoint. Like I said, that was interesting. I think we had it for a couple of years. I
30 failed to mention that out here in Arizona we're checking out for six months, our first
31 born was born at Davis-Monthan. You are familiar with that.

1 JM: I am.

2 JF: The second one came in Oklahoma, and the third one in San Antonio. Was it
3 San Antonio? Yeah, I guess. In any event, that was a real education for me, teaching
4 senior officers how to fly airplanes.

5 JM: I bet. It's more than just the mechanics. You have to do a little bit of, I
6 don't want to call it politics, but there's a lot of delicate conversations you have to have.

7 JF: Oh, yes. No doubt about it. As a matter of fact, I remember one fellow was,
8 he kind of had me stand against the side of the aircraft; my student, mind you. It was a
9 different formality because usually there's "Yes, sirs," and "No, sirs," or whatever and
10 this colonel says to me, "Fitz, you know what you're going to be doing?" I said, "Not in
11 the long run, sir." He said, "You're going to be a colonel someday day." I said, "Oh.
12 Thank you." He said, "You're from senior ranking officers," and all I'm doing is
13 teaching them how to fly jets.

14 JM: So once you, you're at Randolph for a little bit and it's mostly T-33s, I think

15 JF: Yes, and 38s came in at that time.

16 JM: Okay.

17 JF: That was going to be our next airplane to fly. We'd see some of these guys of
18 other T-bird pilots who were getting 38s. As a matter of fact, I think it was indoctrination
19 of the 38 was at Randolph before it went into basic training pilot bases of the airplane.
20 We shortly thereafter checked out in the 38, yeah.

21 JM: So you got to fly the T-38 at Randolph?

22 JF: Pardon me?

23 JM: Did you get to fly the T-38 at Randolph?

24 JF: Yes.

25 JM: Okay. Are you still having trouble hearing me?

26 JF: Yes, but just for a minute. I could be my pressing this thing against my ear,
27 too.

28 JM: Okay, so you got checked out in the T-38. That's a supersonic aircraft. Did
29 you get a chance to open that up a little bit when you first got checked out?

30 JF: It was a beautiful airplane. God, yes. I thoroughly enjoyed it. The only
31 problem I could remember once down there—I don't know if it was there or later on

1 when I was a Webb. In any event, I think it was down there. 38, loved the airplane,
2 whatever. I think it was when I had one of the majors or colonels or whatever it took off
3 and right about the time I was yanking up the gear the thing kind of slowed down. I
4 thought, “What the heck?” In any event, I had a problem with one engine. It didn’t
5 flame out but it just flared back on me on the take off. So I had to dead—not dead stick,
6 but I had to bring that dude around to get back on the ground.

7 JM: How’s the T-38 fly with one engine?

8 JF: Well, it can but when you are full for takeoff it’s a little concerning to just go
9 out and bring it in a little faster but get it back on the ground.

10 JM: Do you have the option to dump fuel out of that during that situation?

11 JF: I think we did, yes.

12 JM: Okay.

13 JF: I think we did, but I wouldn’t swear so. That was a beautiful airplane.

14 JM: I see a note here that when you were in San Antonio you also worked on
15 your master’s degree. Was that during the Randolph assignment?

16 JF: Yes, that’s correct. I was doing that when I had the spare time, obviously.
17 Then I got picked up for remote to Korea and went to Osan.

18 JM: What aircraft were you flying there?

19 JF: T-birds.

20 JM: Okay. The T-bird, still? Okay.

21 JF: That was remote and so Joan and the boys stayed in San Antonio. I ended up
22 in command center work which was swing shift, morning, noon, nights and whatever.

23 JM: Was that at the HTACC (Hardened Tactical Air Control Center)?

24 JF: HTACC fighter.

25 JM: So that’s on Osan Air Base on the HTACC and you still got to fly, so it was
26 a flying assignment but you still got some command and control?

27 JF: No, you just flew to stay current.

28 JM: Okay.

29 JF: Because your main job was the command center.

30 JM: It was still 7th Air Force, then, right?

1 JF: I do believe, and you lived in a hooch with the rest of the troops and one
2 lovely thing that came out of that was I had been a smoker all through shortly after high
3 school or whatever. I'd be on midnight shift in the command center and what do you do?
4 You smoke and [drink] coffee and stuff like that. Come out in the morning and people
5 are saying, "Hi, Fitz." I'd say, "(makes rough, hacking sound)" That's what it did to my
6 voice. So I said, "That's it. I'm going to give up smoking." Well, you live in a hooch
7 with seven other guys, you know, and they're all smokers. I said, "I'm giving up
8 smoking," and you can imagine, "Oh, yeah, Fitz. Sure. Uh-huh," and got on my case.
9 Well, I stuck to it and never had another cigarette since.

10 JM: Wow good for you! I didn't know that. Seems like probably more people
11 started smoking in Korea than actually quit, I imagine.

12 JF: Well, with me I had to go top notch because, you know, I was telling these
13 guys I'm going to quit smoking. They would say, "Oh, yeah, Fitz. You'll quit smoking."
14 They would razz the hell out of me for the duration, but it worked fine.

15 JM: Well, I bet that was a nice surprise for your family when you got back.

16 JF: For Joanie-baby. Yeah, she didn't smoke.

17 JM: I bet she appreciated that. All right, so what happened after—did you
18 already have a follow on assignment from Osan or did you have to work that out when
19 you, with your assignment handler at Osan?

20 JF: Coming out of Osan I had tentative orders to go to Japan. I forget what it was,
21 another headquarters or something. I thought, "Hey, that's not too bad." So I alerted my
22 wife and kids and said, "Hey, it sounds like we're going to go, to head to Japan." I forget
23 the name of the base. Well, about a month after that, that was cancelled because of the
24 closure or whatever. I don't know what went under PACAF (Pacific Air Forces)
25 headquarters. So, the quick switch was, "You're going to Texas." I'm trying to think of
26 the name of the base. Big Spring. Big Spring, Texas.

27 JM: Oh, okay. Is that Webb?

28 JF: It's Webb. That's what I wanted. "Geez, that sounds fine to me as far as,"
29 going to go back to 38s and fly and stuff. Joanie heard that we're not going to Japan but
30 to Big Spring, Texas. It didn't go over too well. But to make a long story short, it was a
31 very good assignment. I was back in 38s, I was selected for academics and so I did both.

1 One thing that had happened when I first got there. I had been there for about six
2 months, like I said, in academics, teaching. We had a new commander come in and
3 somehow I ran into him at the club or someplace and got to know him pretty well. He had
4 heard I just got back from Korea. What I had done in San Antonio in that first tour down
5 there like I mentioned I was working on my master's. The new commander had said
6 something about, "Well, Fitz, you've got to finish that degree." I said, "I sure hope to."
7 Then that all went to the side. Then I had tentative orders for Vietnam. He said to me
8 when he heard I was getting orders for Vietnam, he said, "Fitz, didn't you finish that
9 degree yet?" I said, "No, sir. I'm afraid not. We just hadn't gotten to it." He said, "Well,
10 you're going to get to it right now!" All of a sudden he cuts me in for finishing my
11 degree in San Antonio so Joan and I and the family moved to San Antonio and I managed
12 to finish my master's there.

13 JM: I'll be darned. So he was looking out for you.

14 JF: He certainly was. Well, I told you in the beginning that I thought he was a
15 great guy. In any event.

16 JM: So you were moved, so this was some sort of AFIT (Air Force Institute of
17 Technology) program or something where they just moved you to complete your degree?

18 JF: Yes, it was under AFIT.

19 JM: What year was that? Do you remember? It was probably '67?

20 JF: Let me see. I came back from Korea in—well, I forget the year, just like other
21 forgets here. But I'll think of it in a moment.

22 JM: Well, you went to F-4 RTU (replacement training unit) in '68 so it was
23 probably just before that, right?

24 JF: Yeah, because I never got to Vietnam until '71-'72. Because when I finished
25 my master's I went back in the 38 but I was to Fort Walton Beach, no. Homestead Air
26 Force Base. It wasn't direct, after I finished the F-4 training, I mean, is what I'm saying.

27 JM: Okay.

28 JF: So I came out here after we got the master's finished and went back to Webb
29 for a little while, 38s. Then got orders to come to Davis-Monthan for F-4 training. So we
30 came back out here and went to through F-4 training. Then instead of going directly to

1 Vietnam, I ended up at Homestead in F-4s. That was a two-year assignment, eighteen
2 months, two years, something like that, and then off to Vietnam.

3 JM: So in Homestead, is it the same version of the F-4, was the F-4E?

4 JF: It was the E down there, yeah.

5 JM: Okay.

6 JF: We lived on base. That got me to my second tour in Korea. I thought, "What
7 the hell am I going back to Korea for? It's Vietnam I'm getting taught for and want to go
8 there." What happened, the *Pueblo* incident. Do you remember that?

9 JM: Right, yeah. I do remember that.

10 JF: As a result of the *Pueblo* incident, all of a sudden we went out of Homestead,
11 excuse me, non-stop to Korea. Well, non-stop. We went from Homestead to Hawaii,
12 from Hawaii to Guam, and from Guam into Kunson, Korea. So here I am back in Korea
13 instead of Vietnam. Well, that's why we went over there because of the *Pueblo*, as a
14 show of force.

15 JM: I'll be darned.

16 JF: That was a six-month type thing. Then when I come back from there then I
17 headed to Vietnam from Homestead.

18 JM: So the, did you do any flying at Kunson? Were we setting anything up to
19 harass or let the Koreans know that we want our boat back?

20 JF: It was strictly a show of force. All the exercises out of Kunson were to the
21 gunnery range and so on because they had not, we never did go north on that thing. We
22 were a show of force, which evidently at least showed the North Koreans that they better
23 get their act together real quick, and they did. We ended up peacefully getting out of
24 there.

25 JM: You spent six months over there doing that?

26 JF: Yes, yeah.

27 JM: Did you ever have any, did they ever come up in any of their fighters? Any
28 of their MiG fighters come up to challenge you?

29 JF: No, did not. Because most of our stuff was near the DMZ(demilitarized
30 zone), just on the other side of them. So that was fortunate.

1 JM: Wow, I didn't realize that you had that deployment. So you came back from
2 that deployment back to Homestead?

3 JF: Yes. Homestead was strictly F-4 training or going to the gunnery ranges and
4 so on. We'd also have alerts at Homestead, however. The reason we had alerts was
5 because of Cuba, and Cuba never did anything. But occasionally, they would, the Cuban
6 air people would say, "*Sayonara*," and come over and hands up, give up their airplanes
7 and they'd land at Homestead.

8 JM: I didn't know that.

9 JF: Yeah. Several of those guys came up.

10 JM: So did you have any of those where you escorted them in?

11 JF: The only thing we did, if you're sitting in alert for example. If they have an
12 unknown coming from the south we'd get launched. Well, some of those were just prop
13 like things and went low on the water and climbed up or whatever and would show up on
14 the radar. Or one of the jets was seriously coming out of Cuba and they would land at
15 Homestead. That was about the most interesting flying as far as sitting on alert.

16 JM: I bet. I bet. You'd get a MiG-21 something like that landing at Homestead is
17 probably pretty interesting.

18 JF: Yeah, for sure.

19 JM: So what happened, then, once you—we're in Homestead and you get to the
20 end of your assignment, so are you getting a PCS (permanent change of station) orders
21 for Vietnam or are they—

22 JF: I'm sorry. John you are coming in weak again.

23 JM: Nuts. Is that better?

24 JF: There. Yeah.

25 JM: Okay. Well, shoot. I must have a loose wire on this thing. Just keep telling
26 me when it's going down and I'll keep adjusting it. I'm trying not to move.

27 JF: You are coming in now okay.

28 JM: So, when you get to, you're back at Homestead, is the unit at Homestead
29 deploying to Vietnam or are you just getting PCS orders for Vietnam?

30 JF: No, I went PCS.

31 JM: Okay. What unit is that that you're getting these orders for?

1 JF: Gunfighters at Da Nang.

2 JM: Okay. That was, was that the 366th?

3 JF: I was there from '70-'71 timeframe.

4 JM: Okay. Was it one tour or two tours you had there?

5 JF: No, it was one tour. It was for a year. As a matter of fact, when I got there to
6 Da Nang I was a major and all the young flight commanders, you know, first lieutenants,
7 captains and so on, I didn't want to bounce one of them. I was the senior ranking guy
8 coming into the unit with lieutenants going back to stateside. I said, "Geez, I don't want
9 to bump guys who had such a good"—they're proud of their jobs and their ranking at the
10 time. It was either go to headquarters or—in any event, an old friend of mine had
11 maintenance and he said, "Why don't you take my job, Fitz?" I said, "I can't even spell
12 maintenance." He said, "No, no, no. That's (unintelligible)." In any event, I took it. Two
13 young captains, maintenance guys, plus all the young airmen. I can honestly say it's the
14 best job I ever had in the Air Force. I did all my own test hops. The young airmen were
15 super good. As a matter of fact, I started "Airman of the Month" over there.

16 JM: I'll tell you what, before we go into that, if you don't mind, let's back up.
17 Before you got your orders from Homestead. How did you get from Homestead to
18 Vietnam?

19 JF: It was a regular PCS job where you went over in the heavies. I didn't fly over
20 there, no.

21 JM: Did you fly in a commercial aircraft or a 141?

22 JF: No, it was, it had to have been commercial because we went into the capital.
23 No, it was military, as I recall.

24 JM: You were PCS'ing by yourself.

25 JF: Yes.

26 JM: You didn't have anyone from, any other pilots from Homestead that were
27 joining you on this thing?

28 JF: No.

29 JM: Okay. All right. I know that some of the commercial aircraft brought in, I
30 think they left out of several different places in California and stopped in Hawaii and into

1 Da Nang. Does that sound like what you did or did you have several stops along the way
2 to get to Vietnam?

3 JF: I remember going into the capital and then you were airlifted out of there in
4 C-130s or whatever.

5 JM: Into Saigon?

6 JF: Yeah, that's what it was. It was commercial, I think, in was Saigon.

7 JM: Well, I was going to ask you I don't know how well you remember it or
8 anything, but I always like to see if they do, is a lot of the folks when they're going in on
9 these commercial aircraft, it's obviously packed with GIs and 99% of them have never
10 been in a war zone before. So, do you recall what the mood was going on the airplane at
11 all going in?

12 JF: No, I don't really. That's why I think it's commercial that took us in there.
13 Now I know we went on a C-130 or whatever going up to Da Nang and then settling
14 down to the F-4 business.

15 JM: Did you have somebody from your unit meet you down there in Saigon? Or
16 was it you just walked around with your orders going, "Hey, I'm supposed to head up to
17 Da Nang. Does anyone know how I get there?"

18 JF: Yeah, it was just orders. They had things going back and forth several times a
19 day as far as C-130s or whatever. They were shoveling people out from the capital.

20 JM: So you didn't have to wait? You didn't spend any time in Saigon?

21 JF: No.

22 JM: You just found your bag and drug it across the ramp to the C-130
23 somewhere.

24 JF: Yeah. Yeah.

25 JM: Okay. So when you first get over to Da Nang do you know any of the folks
26 that are in the unit?

27 JF: I knew a few of them, yes. That's why I say that one fellow, a friend of mine,
28 he's the one that said, "Why don't you tell the boss you want to take over my job?" And
29 that's where he took off back home and I took his job. It was a good outfit. I mean, we
30 had the best F-4s and so on.

1 JM: Well, let's see. That was in 1971 and so the F-4 was still, might have still
2 had the new car smell in it.

3 JF: Well, yeah, they were F-4Es so they were pretty new.

4 JM: As you got into the unit you became the maintenance officer? Did you have
5 to go back to go to maintenance school for that?

6 JF: No, because they had two maintenance officers that were all schooled on that
7 and they were both super guys. With the Airman of the Month that I started, the Airman
8 of the Month would get to ride with me on my test tops.

9 JM: I think I saw something on your questionnaire, you wrote something about
10 that. I can't find it in front of me right now but you said there was an interesting flight on
11 one of your test ops.

12 JF: The one I probably mentioned was a big, tall, black fella that just happened to
13 get Airman of the Month, and he must have been 6' something 6' 2" or so. They had to
14 strap him in, my ground crew chiefs, he was that big. We had straps in the F-4s, as you
15 recall. Legs and arms and chest. What I would do is only for them I would give them a
16 gee-wiz ride and take the F-4 down the runway, gear up and flaps up and keep that sucker
17 on the ground until about 400 and then give them a vertical and a roll. I heard him from
18 the back seat, "Oh, man! That's better than a trip!" I thought, "Better than a trip? Wait a
19 minute. What's he on?" Didn't bother me in the least because were doing their job and
20 doing it shit hot well. We used to have wing maintenance periodic. We would get rid of
21 our airplanes and go to wing to have them done over and my two captains came to me
22 one day and said, "We'd like to do something, boss." I said, "What's that?" "Do our own
23 periodic maintenance." I said, "We're in a war! You're working twelve hours a day and
24 you want to take over a wing job?" To make a long story short, we took it. We got to the
25 point for, we were very proud, for ten days we had zero write ups. All our airplanes were
26 100% OR (operational ready). That lasted about eighteen days. I get nothing but—the
27 other chiefs of maintenance, you know, they weren't rated. "What the hell are you doing
28 over there?" "We got our own commitments." That was indeed a pleasure, horn-blower
29 too, the other half it was the wing commander would never let me go back to the flight
30 line with the rest of the troops, even though I was flying combat and everything else. He

1 says, “No, no, you got maintenance. You are doing it well and he wants you to stay
2 there.” So that was fun.

3 JM: Wow. So there’s not very many units in combat or out of combat that can
4 say they one-hundred percent aircraft availability for eighteen days.

5 JF: Yep.

6 JM: I bet that’s not happening even in the smaller detachments.

7 JF: No, it was the guys. It wasn’t I. They did it beautifully.

8 JM: Outside of your maintenance world, in the operational side, in 1970 we
9 started this big Vietnamization of the war. We are trying to transition a lot of stuff. What
10 was that like?

11 JF: Well, originally, I had an offer to—oh, that’s getting ahead of myself.
12 Coming back from Vietnam we ended up coming back here, as you recall. That was ‘72-
13 ‘75 and I ended up right back here at the University of Arizona for commandant of
14 cadets.

15 JM: I did see that.

16 JF: As you well know.

17 JM: Yep.

18 JF: Great job, great young people. Just like you and your bride. Was that on that
19 one or was that on the second one?

20 JM: I think it was on the second one. You were the assistant PAS (professor of
21 aerospace studies). But let’s go back to Vietnam for minute. Vietnamization of the war
22 and we are supposed to be transitioning the combat mission from the US troops by the
23 end of the summer. That’s about the time—let me look at my timeline here. That’s right
24 in the, that’s exactly when you—you get there, is it the 15th of July it looks like? I’m
25 looking at these to make sure I have my dates right. Was it somewhere in July of 1971,
26 that’s smack in the middle of when they were trying to do that transition over to the
27 South Vietnamese military. Did you have any insight into that to see how that was
28 going?

29 JF: I was there when the B-52s were heading North. We would even have alerts
30 at Da Nang and over in Thailand. We would sit alert. In fact, I set up the one over in

1 Thailand at Udorn. This is just before they went to the mass 52s going, they were still
2 going North but they were doing it at night when I was there.

3 JM: Was this the Linebacker operation?

4 JF: Yes, it was Linebacker I and II.

5 JM: Okay, that's what I was going to ask you. Were you there for both of them?
6 It sounds like maybe you were.

7 JF: I was there for Linebacker I. I think II came shortly after I came back here.

8 JM: Oh, you know what? You are absolutely right. Linebacker II was in
9 December of 1972 so you had just returned.

10 JF: So what we would do, when I was at Da Nang there was nothing at Udorn as
11 far as our aircraft, our wing aircraft. So the boss asked me to go over and set up an alert
12 pad at Udorn, which I did. We would sit there and pull alert or fly our normal missions at
13 night whenever they needed us. It worked out very well. I remember one day I was
14 sitting alert and we get launched for a B-52 escort. It was a beautiful day. It was a two-
15 ship that we have for escort. We launch and my wingman said, "Hey, lead, Slow it
16 down." I don't know if I told you that. In any event, he said, "Slow it down." I looked
17 back and he's just slowly coming up onto my wing. His backseater's canopy is gone.
18 And I said, "Holy! What the hell?" I said, "Never mind. Standby." So I called the B-52
19 guys, or whoever was directing them and I said that we were going to have to abort. So I
20 launched the second, the other two that were sitting alert with me. I told them to launch
21 those two because we're not going to be able to meet the B-52s. So they launched them
22 and meanwhile I'm thinking, "What the hell is going on here?" I came to the conclusion
23 that the dumb shit backseater that he had didn't have the canopy locked and Mother
24 Nature went, "Boom!" and knocked the canopy right off.

25 JM: Wow.

26 JF: The afterburner and you're coming on at 300 knots or something like that. In
27 any event, I thought as a good maintenance man what I should do is just put both of us
28 back on the ground and get a new canopy or whatever. Then I thought, "I don't think so."
29 What I did was keep the guy on my wing and I toured all over Thailand, it was a beautiful
30 day. That guy had his head, the backseater, leaning forward and he'd go back into his seat

1 (unintelligible). We came back to debrief after about an hour or so. I said, “Anybody
2 learn anything today?” That was the end of that briefing.

3 JM: He probably never took off with the canopy not latched again.

4 JF: (Laughs) Oh, fun and games.

5 JM: I was curious, I sent you that piece from the archives that I found on the F-4
6 spraying Agent Orange, I guess some sort of herbicide. Did you get a chance to read
7 that? I thought that was very interesting.

8 JF: Oh, I didn’t catch that. That was a long one. I’ll go back and review it. I
9 was watching that for about forty-five minutes today.

10 JM: Oh, no. That was the video. Was that the video?

11 JF: Yeah.

12 JM: Yeah, that was a little fun thing I saw. I had actually seen that years ago and
13 I stumbled on that when I was doing a little bit of your unit research. I thought that was
14 pretty good. A friend of mine was an F-4 guy and he sent that to me several years ago. I
15 think they may have made that after Vietnam, but I think some of the footage may have
16 come from Vietnam.

17 JF: Yeah I scanned a couple and one was down for forty-five minutes or
18 something and I thought, “I can’t do this. I got to talk to John.” But, yeah, I went through
19 three or four of them.

20 JM: Let me go back to Udorn real quick. That was where the Triple Nickel was,
21 right?

22 JF: Yes.

23 JM: So did you get a chance to interact with those folks while you were there?

24 JF: Not much because what I did was I went to set it up and the boss gave me so
25 much time and I think he thought I was going to be there for about a short time, just get
26 set up, you know? Maintenance in the unit and so on, and so when he called he said,
27 “How are you doing?” I said, “I’ll be back in about another week or so.” “Oh, I need you
28 back here.” I said, “Oh, okay. Can you get somebody to set up, then?” He sent somebody
29 else over and I went back to Da Nang. But I was only there for probably two or three
30 weeks. Then we rotated for the rest of the year. But we did many different things, not
31 only alerts. Even back home we were doing different things. Air-to-ground, we didn’t

1 do any air-to-air. We did night flying back at Da Nang, long flights, sometimes four or
2 five hours. What it was we ran cover on gunships, C-130s. So it's a long night. We
3 launched about ten in the evening and probably get back at three or four in the morning.
4 I can add a short story. It's kind of a ho-hum job, you know. You were up at F-4 altitude
5 and C-130s down in the boondocks there strafing. Gunships they were called. One night
6 I was sitting there ho-hum going in a circle and watching down at him as cover. I see
7 triple A coming up and it's way the hell due east of me or something like that. I said,
8 "Hey, gunny. Is he bothering you?" "No, no." So I keep orbiting and orbiting when all of
9 a sudden, I notice the triple A is coming a little bit closer and finally it dawns on me,
10 "Shit. He's shooting at me." But he was way behind, you know. In the beginning, like I
11 said, maybe 180 degrees across then all of a sudden it went to 160 or whatever. I said to
12 gunny, "Hey, I think that guy is after me. Are you going to be okay for a while?" He
13 said, "Yeah, do what you got to do." So I did a smart over the head and down, and
14 dropped three Mark-82s on them. You could see where it was coming from. To this day I
15 hope he's up in heaven someplace because he definitely never came up again.

16 JM: Wow. He probably wasn't, he was probably trying to track you visually and
17 you had all your lights off, I assume.

18 JF: Oh, sure, exactly.

19 JM: He just was doing the best he can trying to figure out you were coming and
20 going. What altitude were you at when you were doing your orbits?

21 JF: We were probably up around eighteen or twenty or something like that.
22 Gunny sits down at, I don't know where they go, 1500 up to 3500 or whatever.

23 JM: So he was probably always shooting behind you.

24 JF: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

25 JM: Wow. Well, just a couple more questions on your Vietnam experience. The
26 F-4 was a great machine and it really made a name for itself. I know there were a lot of
27 incidents. I know there were a lot of F-4s shot down. Did you have any of those where
28 any of your guys were on those missions when you were flying, maybe you were
29 listening to the recovery or supporting some sort of rescue operation?

1 JF: No, I think the reason was that we did not go up north very often. The 52s
2 did, but remember when they stopped in the early parts of the negotiation, they cut off
3 going north, we did in the fighter business.

4 JM: That's right.

5 JF: That was about it. I ran cover on one up near the DMZ, or what did they call
6 it? Six or something like that, where he was on a recce, and we would escort recce, but
7 that's the only times we would get up north. They didn't go up into high Route Pack Six
8 or something, it was the lower route packs that they would be taking the visual coverage,
9 you know, checking on what was going on on sunny days or whatever.

10 JM: Right. When the Linebacker I mission was going on, did you get a feel for
11 how things were going on the ground? Were you able to, or did you have any
12 Vietnamese officers that you interacted with for planning or anything like to get a feel for
13 how they were handling the taking more of the combat role on?

14 JF: No, not to my knowledge. All the time our escorts with the gunships. That's
15 day and night and always in-country, or as far north as, we'd gone a couple time up north
16 and it's usually at night time and when they stuff comes up, we'd escort, we'd fire off
17 and then escort the 130 back out, or the Navy if that's who we were escorting, to get them
18 out of the area.

19 JM: Right.

20 JF: But you don't see any, you can't identify if you were successful or not
21 because you dump and then you follow the gunship because you got to stay with him.

22 JM: Took all the fun out of it.

23 JF: Yea, exactly, exactly.

24 JM: I know that in 1971, I don't know when it I remembered that it may have
25 concluded before you got there or it may have been right after you left, but I think Bob
26 Hope had a big Christmas show at Da Nang, didn't he?

27 JF: I remember talking about that but I don't think I was there for that.

28 JM: Okay.

29 JF: Because I never saw Hope over there.

30 JM: That's too bad because he brought Ann Margret.

31 JF: Oh, God. Yes.

1 JM: (Laughs) Did you get any USO shows or anything, maybe not the big one
2 like Bob Hope but did you get type of recreational time when you were over there?

3 JF: No, I did not, to be perfectly honest with you. But we did in the beginning
4 when I first got there, we could go to the beach. You'd just take a maintenance truck or
5 whatever and you don't stop in town, you'd just go to and from the beach. And the beach
6 was—

7 JM: Was that China Beach?

8 JF: China Beach. Yes.

9 JM: Okay.

10 JF: That was guarded by the GIs and so on. Even had gates you went through to
11 get to the beach. That was essentially roped off for military-only type thing. But they
12 quit that about two to three weeks after I got there because they had some problems with
13 trucks going to and from and people making passes at them or something.

14 JM: I imagine things were probably—I imagine things on the ground were
15 probably starting to deteriorate depending on where you transferred the mission over to
16 the folks on the ground.

17 JF: Yes.

18 JM: I could see where there could be a security situation developing at that point.

19 JF: Well, we had Marines also at Da Nang. So they were pretty good for help, as
20 you can imagine.

21 JM: The fella I was talking to before one of his jobs was security around Da
22 Nang Air Base for a while. I think they had actually moved him back to take over that
23 with his platoon. I think he was down there for a month or two, if I remember right.

24 JF: We'd get incoming at night occasionally. The Marines, of course, were in
25 charge off the local area. But the bad guys would post their guns or whatever, rockets,
26 and get them someplace during the day but time them so they don't go off until night.
27 Any time we were taking incoming at Da Nang it was during the night. I mentioned
28 going over to Udorn. Setting up over there, while I was there Da Nang took a pretty good
29 hit. I came back and we had dorms there, you know, two-story type things for the pilots
30 and so on and one corner of one of those things, it was the building next to the one I had
31 and was sleeping in. They took off the northwest corner of the building. Took out a few

1 people upstairs. The guy downstairs where the thing lands he came out smelling like a
2 rose. The wall caved in and a little bit of the ceiling but covered him up very safely,
3 whereas the rest of the blast goes out like a balloon thing. The people upstairs are the
4 ones that really took the hit. The whole corner of the building was gone.

5 JM: I'll be darned. Did they destroy any aircraft?

6 JF: No. We lucked out.

7 JM: I think I remember seeing, when I was doing a little bit of the unit research I
8 remember seeing a picture of the ramp at Da Nang. They had about four or five C-130s
9 that were essentially completely destroyed, they were just the hulks.

10 JF: Yeah. They were down at the other end. We were on the east side of the
11 runway, and the 130s, I think, were over near where the Marines were, that's on the other
12 side of the runway. That was the only hit that I recall, and I wasn't there when it hit.

13 JM: But it was a fairly regular occurrence to have these rocket attacks?

14 JF: Yeah, probably on a bi-weekly basis and always at night like I said. That's
15 how we figured out or gathered how they would set them up and get the hell out of there
16 and they wouldn't get caught setting, I guess.

17 JM: When you got towards the end of your rotation there in Da Nang, which
18 looks like it was in April of 1972, things are definitely starting to wind down. The
19 Linebacker operation was pretty successful. I'm pretty sure they were all taking about
20 how everyone will be home by Christmas. Seems like that's a common theme through
21 the years. Did you feel like there was a big change in the op tempo from when you had
22 first arrived on station?

23 JF: Oh, yes. Yes, I did, because it was calming down and you weren't getting the
24 forces the forces moving forward and active as they had been in the past. When you get
25 to that point you are in the countdown mode and become a little disinterested. With
26 things calming down you'd rather stay busy.

27 JM: Did you get a mid-tour break, a mid-tour leave when you were there, or did
28 you have to stay the whole time?

29 JF: No, we did. I know Joan came over when I was in Korea to Hawaii. Let me
30 see—just a second. (Speaking to his wife) Okay, I just wanted to clear the other half up.
31 Did you hear the rest of the story?

1 JM: No. I didn't hear that.

2 JF: Yes, we had a week in Hawaii.

3 JM: Okay. That's what I was going to say, a lot of folks seem to go to Hawaii for
4 that or Australia, it seemed like they were able to meet. I was just curious. All right.
5 Good.

6 JF: Nope. My honey and I managed to do it. The hard part about that thing going
7 back.

8 JM: Yeah, the post-vacation depression kicks in quickly, I guess. Either way, she
9 probably had a longer flight than you did. All right so you get to April, do you remember
10 coming home, was that on a commercial aircraft or was that one a military aircraft?

11 JF: No, that was commercial.

12 JM: Do you remember what that was like, rolling down the runway and hearing
13 the gear slap up into the well and—

14 JF: A few yells here and there and hoop-de-da.

15 JM: It was a fairly happy atmosphere, I imagine, on the airplane.

16 JF: Oh, yeah. Labor of love at that point.

17 JM: Where did you land once you got into the continental United States?

18 JF: Well, let me see. It had to have been the West Coast. I forget just where. Of
19 course, Joan and the kids were here in Tucson. Or were they in Florida?

20 JM: Actually, you left them at Homestead and then after your tour that's when
21 you went to U of A (University of Arizona) so they may have met you there in Tucson.
22 [Joan and boys were in Tucson for entirety of Vietnam tour.]

23 JF: Yeah, I think that's right. Hold on, a second. My honey just came in.
24 (Speaking to his wife) Yes, it was (unintelligible) and the family was there and they met
25 me at the airport.

26 JM: All right. Man, you spent a good bit of your career in the Tucson area,
27 haven't you?

28 JF: (Chuckle) You got it. Like I said in the beginning, when we first got to
29 Marana I said, "Hey, this is the place to be," and that started it right there.

30 JM: When you got back from Vietnam, I think sometimes for Air Force guys it's
31 a little bit different than maybe the Army folks or the Marines that are out there

1 constantly under artillery bursts going off. Did it take you a while to decompress, to kind
2 of get out that war zone mentality?

3 JF: I have to say yes, but not in a hoop-de-da type thing. It was a great place as
4 far as work and flying. I never really had any interest in going back. Except you
5 remember my son Kevin?

6 JM: Yeah.

7 JF: Rumor had it once about three or four years ago that he was going over and
8 he was going to take me for my birthday. I said, "Kevin, there is a rumor afoot that you
9 are going to take me back to Vietnam. Vietnam in July is not my cup of tea."

10 JM: You probably want hit the cooler, drier months.

11 JF: Well, yes, exactly but as you know, two, or three, or four years later Da Nang
12 got selected as one of the four newest golf courses in the world. I don't know if you have
13 ever read that story.

14 JM: I haven't but I have heard Da Nang has become a little bit of a tourist
15 attraction.

16 JF: Exactly. In the place where we used to go to the beach when we first got
17 there, that whole area has been taken over and evidently the golf course, I vaguely
18 remember a golf course there but I never played any. None of us did.

19 JM: You are going to have trouble if you go back there now with Joan because
20 she's going to say, "We was this where you were at war? Because this looks like a
21 resort."

22 JF: (Laughs) What's wrong with that, huh?

23 JM: It's interesting the way, there's been a few people that never want to go back
24 and others that say, "Hey, I would love to back. I would love to go see what that looked
25 like. See what the people are like." I guess everyone has their own different experience.
26 The last fella I talked to, he was saying when he returned from Vietnam it was a
27 commercial thing and by the time he got there he spent about twelve hours and they out
28 processed him and he was in his civilian clothes he said his mom and dad picked him up.
29 He said the thing he couldn't get over for about two weeks was how loud everything was.
30 He said out there you had to be quiet, you had to be able to listen to the incoming artillery
31 or mortar rounds going off. He said, "I couldn't stand how loud it was when I got back."

1 He said it took him months to get that out of his head that it wasn't as loud as he thought.
2 I know the Air Force is a little bit different environment because you are riding those
3 Pratt and Whitney's and it's a different atmosphere.

4 JF: You got it.

5 JM: So you came back to—let me check my time here real quick. Oh, we've got
6 a couple of minutes. So, you came back from Vietnam, the family's joined you in Tucson
7 and you are going to be the assistant PAS at the University of Arizona, it looks like.

8 JF: Yes. Exactly.

9 JM: So not only are you having a Tucson thread throughout your life and your
10 career, but evidently ROTC is becoming a common thread throughout your life and your
11 career, as well.

12 JF: Yes, yeah. The one thing I recall, the biggest thing coming back and getting
13 into the ROTC business was the PAS at that time whose name slips me [Col. Sharkey] he
14 asked me what I thought about not wearing the uniform on campus because of what the
15 campus was like in those days. He said the Navy is already doing it and the Army is
16 already doing it and I said, "The uniform is representative of the military education," and
17 I heard what's going on back in the States as far as anti-military and so on. But I said,
18 "As far as I'm concerned, the uniform represents the Navy, the Air Force, and the Army.
19 As such we should be advertising what we really are instead of hiding." He allowed that
20 was true. We never took the uniform off here at U of A in the Air Force ROTC. How
21 that went down with the university, I don't know.

22 JM: I was just curious, I usually ask this. Maybe I should have asked you on this.
23 A lot of folks when they come back, the last fella I just interviewed, they landed in a
24 commercial aircraft at LAX and before they left the aircraft an LA cop walks on the
25 aircraft and he says, "I want y'all to know that there's people outside the airport that are
26 going to protest and they are going to spit on you. They might throw things at you and
27 I'm just going to tell you right now if you get in a fight with them I will arrest you not
28 them."

29 JF: Holy geez!

30 JM: So they were warned and they were actually let off, kind of off to the side.
31 They did what they could to try and avoid it. But at LAX evidently there was quite a bit

1 of that. And other folks had gotten off—the guy before that got off in Seattle and he said,
2 “No, I don’t think anyone even realized that people were leaving Vietnam from there.”
3 So I guess everyone had different experiences. Some had some pretty difficult
4 experiences where they were called names and things, and other people didn’t. But I was
5 just curious once you got on the University of Arizona, Tucson back in those days was a
6 little but small town and probably a little more rural.

7 JF: A little more conservative.

8 JM: You’ve got the U of A mall there that always has different kind of life and
9 cultures growing out there. Maybe you did run into something there. Did you get any
10 negative experiences when you were on campus?

11 JF: No, never did. I saw nothing but positives there.

12 JM: Good. How about any of the cadets? Any of the students going through
13 there, did they ever tell you about any problems they had?

14 JF: No, no. You know, the one problem we had was what the commander did?
15 You remember your honey? I made [her] commander?

16 JM: Oh, that’s right. Now, I was talking about your first time through there. But
17 I do remember that. (Laughs) We can save that one for tomorrow.

18 JF: (Laughs) Okay. I think that’s a good idea.

19 JM: Maybe we’ll both forget it by then. So it’s interesting, though, that the PAS
20 had that discussion with you. Were you a lieutenant colonel when you arrived for your
21 first assignment at U of A?

22 JF: No, I was a major then.

23 JM: Still a major. So he had that frank discussion with you and evidently you
24 swayed him enough that they decided to keep doing it. He must have thought there was a
25 reason to do it.

26 JF: Yeah.

27 JM: But evidently nothing showed up.

28 JF: But it sold. It worked out all right.

29 JM: You are in Tucson, just out of curiosity you were living downtown or were
30 you living on base?

31 JF: No, we were on the economy.

1 JM: Okay. Were you in the same house that you are living in now? Was that
2 where you were living back then or were you living on campus?

3 JF: No, we had two other places here in town that we have lived. We never built
4 here until '92, I think it was.

5 JM: Okay. So anything significant out of your first assignment at the University
6 of Arizona?

7 JF: Pardon me?

8 JM: Am I losing you again? Doggone it. How's that?

9 JF: We lived in a place on Visco. We built a house on Visco, which is—

10 JM: Yeah. I remember that one. Okay. I remember that road, anyway. So as an
11 assistant PAS, Colonel Fitzsimons, did you have any significant, was there something
12 significant that you remember from your first assignment at U of A?

13 JF: No, I thought it was very educational from both our ends, and a good group.
14 The kids were good, the PAS was a super guy, and enjoyed working with all of them.

15 JM: I'm making a little bit of a note here because we are going to end this in just
16 a moment but you had two tours at the University of Arizona doing Air Force ROTC. So
17 tomorrow I'm going to ask you, that's a lot of people that went through the United States
18 Air Force, some just a few years others with probably went on with remarkable military
19 careers and I'd like to hear about some of those thoughts from both of your assignments.

20 JF: We'll have a couple more funnies like the one you just talked about. Your
21 bride.

22 JM: When you are dealing with the human condition you know you are going to
23 have some of these things. I think you were the right guy at the right place for a lot of
24 those, that's for sure. I tell you what ,Colonel Fitzsimmons, I'm going to turn the
25 recording off in just a moment but we are going to go from your first assignment at U of
26 A and then you are going to go from there to Maxwell Air Force base, it looks like.

27 JF: Yeah.

28 JM: So we'll pick that up there tomorrow morning. If you give me just a second
29 I'm going to turn this off right now.

30

Interview with James Fitzsimmons

Session [2] of [2]

Date: 5 November 2015

1

2 JM: This is John McGonagill with Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University
3 conducting an oral history on Colonel James M. Fitzsimmons. This is part two of our
4 interview. Today is 5 November 2015. I'm in Lubbock, Texas, at the Special
5 Collections Library on the campus of Texas Tech, and Colonel Fitzsimmons is joining
6 me by phone from Tucson, Arizona. Good morning, Colonel Fitzsimmons.

7 JF: Good morning back there.

8 JM: I was going through my notes on part one and I noticed that I forgot to talk,
9 or forgot to ask a question about your bride. We talked a little bit about how you met in
10 high school or maybe even before that and then we don't talk about her until you
11 graduate college and you get married, so there's a little gap there that she was doing
12 something in her life and I'd like to just capture that.

13 JF: Okay. I'll go to the point where I first met her. She was a run-up queen—
14 harvest queen for the city and county of Rochester. I was asked by a friend of mine to
15 date his girlfriend because he was up in the University of Buffalo and couldn't get down
16 there. That would have been probably '50—

17 JM: '51 or '52 [actually 1950] something like that, I'm thinking?

18 JF: Yeah, and in any event that's where I first saw Joan and said to this girl that I
19 was dating for my friend. She told me who she was and introduced me and from then on
20 then on in we were dating. And the rest of it I think you know. We talked about dating
21 while I was at the university then, and talked about meeting her parents and so on. She
22 went off to New York School of Interior Design. That was when I was working on the
23 railroad.

24 JM: Okay.

25 JF: I had free trips to go there if I so desired, and obviously I did. I went down to
26 visit her once or twice in the city of New York where she was doing her learning curve
27 on the school of interior design. She finished there and I ended up going back to college,
28 or going to college, and then we got married after graduation. We've been living happily
29 ever after. We just had our sixtieth wedding anniversary on the 29th of October

1 JM: All right. Sixty years. Awesome. I guess it's gonna stick.

2 JF: Pardon me?

3 JM: I guess it's gonna stick, then. You guys will stay together, I guess.

4 JF: As an interior decorator she obviously didn't get much time to practice her
5 forte but with us in service and moving so many times she was redecorating every time
6 we moved. She got lots of practice. Military housing.

7 JM: Well, and with your recent water damage situation there in Tucson.

8 JF: Hey, she's got me a list right here that I've got to call them when we're
9 finished phoning.

10 JM: This may be the ultimate part of her design career going on right now.

11 JF: You better honk!

12 JM: Awesome, good. I'm glad I was able to capture that. And then going back
13 now. I hate to drag you back because we were all the way through that first assignment
14 after Vietnam but I noticed in your records here we have very specific Distinguished
15 Flying Cross award that was given to you on 11 September 1971 and I was wondering if
16 you could recall what generated some of this paperwork?

17 JF: If you recall, I mentioned that we did a lot of work with the gunships and I
18 don't know if I told you the story of the one at night but we also went north with them as
19 a guide when they were doing their job. The gunship. Because there would be troops in
20 contact and so on.

21 JM: Right.

22 JF: That one in North Vietnam, again a low-altitude type, thing but the gunship
23 that we were escorting, again, we were at altitude primarily but not as high as we were
24 on the night things. We were lower right with them. We came up and the gunship, as I
25 recall, took a couple of hits and we had to escort him back. We took care of the bad guys
26 first but again we got him back safely as far as coming back to Diem. Not Diem. I mean
27 Da Nang.

28 JM: Da Nang. All right.

29 JF: I think that was essentially what that was all about.

1 JM: Awesome. I also see that you had through a fifth oak leaf cluster on the Air
2 Medal it looks like for around the same time period from July of 1971 to 21 April 1972.
3 Can you describe those?

4 JF: The DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) and the Air Medal with 5 devices
5 whatever, Meritorious Service Medal and so on.

6 JM: Was the Air Medal for, were these Air Medals awards, were they for similar
7 type escort missions?

8 JF: Yes.

9 JM: Okay. I've got you. Evidently the one for the Distinguished Flying Cross
10 was an escort mission obviously a lot more work involved in that one once the gunship
11 gets hit.

12 JF: Yes.

13 JM: Okay. All right. Excellent. I think it's interesting your Distinguished Flying
14 Cross, I just happened to notice 11 September up to this point in time in our lives 11
15 September is kind of an interesting date. Evidently, it goes back. 11 September seems to
16 be repeated even in 1971.

17 JF: Yeah.

18 JM: Anyway I thought that was interesting. So we came out of Vietnam, and you
19 were the assistant PAS in Tucson at the University of Arizona. We kind of finished up
20 there and you were packing the family up again and you're moving them out to
21 Montgomery, Alabama, it looks like for Air War College.

22 JF: That is correct.

23 JM: What was that assignment like?

24 JF: Well, it's a standard military school, as far as that's concerned, but it's very
25 educational, also. That was Montgomery, Alabama, and our boys were with us. As a
26 matter of fact, our junior, our mid-son, Timothy, liked the Montgomery area so well he
27 went to Auburn when we left there and got his degree at Auburn in engineering. The
28 school is very good, very educational. From there we ended up back down in Florida.

29 JM: You went to the Tactical Air Warfare Center?

30 JF: Tactical Air Warfare Center is correct.

1 JM: That was about 1976, then, that you were down there. Is that at Eglin Air
2 Force Base?

3 JF: Yes.

4 JM: So you finally got back to where you first touched down in that DC-3 from
5 your first PAS at Rochester flew you down there. Did you happen to think about that?

6 JF: Yes we did. Yeah. We bought a home down there, as a matter of fact. It was
7 headquarters for all that good stuff and I was still current at least in the T-38 and they had
8 38s down there for another program and I went down there and said, “Hey, do you need
9 an old guy like me to fly 38s with you?” They said, “Well, no. We are pretty well filled
10 up but they let me fly a—what was the four, six, eight passenger twin engine?

11 JM: Like a Lear jet type? The C-21?

12 JF: Yes, was that a passenger type thing?

13 JM: I think so, yes. It was like a Lear jet, like a little business jet?

14 JF: Yeah, with twin engines and so no. Yes. They were on the fuselage.

15 JM: Yup, that sounds right.

16 JF: That was it. So I got back into flying, at least, in addition to the job I had
17 there. Stayed current in that for a while ferrying people around. I think the end came
18 when I made O-6 there. They didn’t need old O-6s flying their airplanes. It was a great
19 job.

20 JM: I’m sure you’ve heard that joke, it’s not really a joke, but they say when you
21 make major they take away your brain, when you make lieutenant colonel they take away
22 your voice, and when you make colonel they give you your voice back.

23 JF: Yes, I think that’s very appropriate.

24 JM: You made O-6, you are down at the Air Warfare Center, and it looks like
25 you are going back overseas now.

26 JF: Yes. From that thing, we were there a few years. Like I say, we even bought a
27 place there. Our younger troops were going to school. Like I said, Tim had already
28 started at Auburn. He was the middle guy. Our oldest was right here at the University of
29 Arizona. The youngest one was with us, obviously, Christopher. Yes, what happened
30 there after was they had me scheduled for a slot back into Korea and I said, “Wait a
31 minute. Korea. I’ve had a couple tours there, you know, people,” talking to the Pentagon

1 or whatever. I went to the commander there as I recall and said, “They’ve got me alerted
2 for a tour in Korea,” and it was going to be a post haste type thing. He said, “You’ve been
3 to Korea.” In any event, this two-star evidently went to somebody up there in the
4 Pentagon to see if this was all quite true. They said, “Yeah,” but they delayed it and just
5 gave me a different job in Korea. It was at the headquarters in the embassy and I said,
6 “Hey, I can live with that, I guess,” because the family could go with me because of the
7 remotes that I had the other two times. So that’s where we went from Eglin, we went to
8 Korea. I went over early and Joan and Christopher, our youngest, had to finish [high]
9 school. So they stayed there and he finished high school there. Like I said, I went over
10 remote solo and was in Seoul, Korea, the embassy and the Air Force contingent there.
11 They came over about four months later. I was there solo in the first part, I was with the
12 command center again and it was a very interesting job because we had a contemporary
13 Korean colonel and Koreans working with us, also. So it was really for headquarters so it
14 was very interesting because you are right there in Seoul. But when I was living in the
15 hooch with the single guys and whatever, in spare time I taught engineers from Korean
16 Mining and Corporation. They wanted to get squared away and speaking English. So I
17 did that, part time, in addition to the headquarters job that I had there. There were
18 probably eight or ten of these guys. Finally it was time for Joan and Chris to come over.
19 The other thing I was doing when I first got over there was trying to find housing on base
20 and I lucked out and found one embassy housing that was being redecorated and it came
21 out beautiful. So finally Joan and Chris came over and I had the house all ready for them.
22 All they had to do was walk in, she ended up with a maid and a gardener and all this
23 other stuff. She said, “What’s wrong with Korea?” I thought, “Oh, you got to be kidding
24 me.” She couldn’t believe how beautiful it was. She loved Seoul and everything else.
25 She even had a maid, like I said, and she even taught cooking to some of the Korean
26 women. So that was a very interesting tour, a bit lengthy as I described. Did I mention
27 the Koreans, the men I taught?

28 JM: Yup.

29 JF: I was earning pretty good money on that thing, lots of *wan*. When Chris came
30 over he started college work. So I said, “Hey, you want a job, too?” I gave him my night

1 job for the Korean engineers. He started making money and I thought, “Hey, that’s pretty
2 good.”

3 JM: Excellent.

4 JF: He’s going to college and he’s earning some money in a foreign country.

5 JM: So was that English teaching, was that on base? Like an on base thing?

6 JF: Yeah, they would come on base and they had clearance. I did it back in the
7 BOQ type thing, and then of course when we had the housing he could do it right there
8 on base. He didn’t do it at home, but there was an area where we could do that.

9 JM: Just thinking while you were describing that, this is the first time you were
10 able to bring your family to an overseas assignment.

11 JF: Absolutely correct.

12 JM: So she was probably loving that.

13 JF: Oh, and then some. As I sit here with this house thing slotted I can see
14 Korean stuff all over the place.

15 JM: Yup, I think I may have some of those. All right, tell me a little bit about
16 working with the Koreans. What were your thoughts on that?

17 JF: It was very interesting, very educational as far as, you know, how the Korean
18 military acts and headquarters and as you can imagine, the command center had a lot of
19 activity from the North and we went on alert twice and, as a matter of fact, the second
20 time we had it, you know, it goes to high alert. High everything. Second time I found
21 out, I would be the first to find out at the command center that, okay, the North Koreans
22 had backed off or whatever, so I just took the hammer and called up all the people, all the
23 Air Force bases and everything around South Korea and say, “Hey, we are going back to
24 normal.” That was because we had just gotten that from intelligence. Said, “Okay. Okay.”
25 So everybody was back to normal and the next day I get a call from the four-star there.
26 And he said, “Good morning, Fitz. How’s everything going in the command center?”
27 “Oh, fine, sir. Fine.” He said, “I understand you put us all back on regular,” air mode.
28 What do they call it? The different types of operational code.

29 JM: I remember that it used to be some sort of DEFCON.

30 JF: DEFCON. That was it. Exactly. We went to a high DEFCON alert initially
31 and call them all back when I was heard what was coming through intel. So he calls me

1 in and the reason he called me in and the reason he calls me in, he said, “Oh, by the way,
2 Fitz, I understand you put us back to DEFCON-4 whatever last night?” I said, “Yes, sir.
3 We got word in.” He said, “Well, that’s very good, but, hey, Fitz, remember that’s really
4 my job.” So it was a kick in the ass type thing from the old man. But he did it very, very
5 well and I walked out and didn’t think of that until I walked out and I thought, “Wait a
6 minute. He just chewed my butt out because I took over his job.”

7 JM: Was he an Air Force guy?

8 JF: Um, yes, but I can’t think of his name right now. But yes.

9 JM: Well, that was a—

10 JF: Air Force DEFCON.

11 JM: Well, that was kind of a combined assignment, right? Didn’t you have
12 multiservice and multinational up in that area?

13 JF: Yes, but what I was doing was putting the Air Force guys back from
14 DEFCON-1 to DEFCON-4.

15 JM: Oh, okay. I got you. Well, in 1979, in Korea if I remember right, I might
16 have my date wrong, but there was a, wasn’t there a sort of a like an attempted coup
17 around that timeframe around ’78-’79?

18 JF: Yes, yes, there was. I forget who got the—

19 JM: I can’t remember much about it.

20 JF: I think somebody got shot. I don’t recall. I’m sorry. My memory is not the
21 best.

22 JM: But you remember that happening so I was just curious, I could see where
23 the Koreans might overreact or have a situation develop. Did it seem like things calmed
24 down after that or do we, things—

25 JF: Well, the one I was talking about was the one where the North Koreans were
26 getting a little feisty. But when the presidential thing happened, that was more in-house
27 type thing. That might be another increase in DEFCON but not to the point where, the
28 first one we had was pretty serious.

29 JM: Well, having been in Korea, then, for well three times and one of them in a
30 pretty high position in the architecture there, the command architecture in Korea. What’s
31 your thoughts on what you’re seeing today since you’ve left Korea? Do you think, well I

1 know there's a lot of discussion about the younger South Koreans are feeling a little bit
2 like they did in Germany, like, "Hey, why don't we tear down that wall and why don't we
3 talk unification," and that kind of stuff, where the older Koreans are probably not quite
4 ready for something like that. Do you see something like that happening over there?

5 JF: Not at this particular time. South Korea, our Korea, has really pulled
6 themselves up by the boot straps. I understand Seoul, Korea, you wouldn't even believe
7 what it looks like today. The people have pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and
8 it's highly commercialized. I think the younger generation has a tendency to try and do
9 just that and I read recently where they'd opened up the door for Koreans to go visit their
10 relatives in North Korea, which I think is a positive step as far as them coming together.
11 With the atomic stuff that North Korea has I don't see anything jumping out like
12 Germany with The Wall. I could be wrong.

13 JM: Since we are talking about Korea. Before we move forward, you were alive
14 during this and your brother participated in the Korean War. I don't know if you recall
15 that much, General MacArthur and President Truman and their controversy. That's
16 something that played out for the next couple of decades, at least as far as the US military
17 and limited war campaigns.

18 JF: Yes.

19 JM: What's your thoughts on how that went down with MacArthur and Truman
20 and the controversy that developed there?

21 JF: Well, MacArthur was, what can I say, a rather opinionated fella. A very good
22 warrior, for sure, as far keeping us going in the right direction. Yes, they were far apart,
23 for sure. With MacArthur command decisions that Truman wasn't too happy with. But
24 by the time I was over there for the last call that wasn't much of an issue. Even though
25 we are still, North Korea getting all of their atomic stuff and not doing very well for their
26 own people. That's definitely a military regime to the N-th degree. As you know, we've
27 had other people that went up there for reasons of trying learn something in-house North
28 Korea. Some of them getting put in the pokey. I think it's loosening as far as the people
29 of South Korea, wanting to, as you infer, can we get over this Korean War crap and come
30 together? With that little guy that's running up North I don't think there's open ears to
31 that.

1 JM: Yeah, it seems like he's hanging on there. There was a time just recently
2 that he sort of dropped out the public for a month or so and I think maybe people were
3 speculating that possibly there was some sort of coup that went on or he was ill.

4 JF: I think I bought off on the "the ill thing," that was just my opinion.

5 JM: I guess he resurfaced, though, a month or two later and we are just back to
6 where we were.

7 JF: Yeah.

8 JM: Well, that was interesting. I was wondering if you had any thoughts on that
9 Truman-MacArthur thing. Even though it was an odd situation where Truman, evidently
10 his poll numbers weren't that great and, of course MacArthur, being a national icon after
11 World War II. It definitely seemed like it, I've heard some people actually say it was a
12 constitutional crisis with the civilian supremacy of control over the military. Obviously
13 we've gotten past that but this whole limited war thing which of course took on and went
14 on in Vietnam and many times since then that there's no more unconditional surrender
15 like we had in World War II. Everything is going to be this limited war, evidently. If
16 Truman and MacArthur were on the cusp of that thing, I'm not sure they realized it at the
17 time it would have been nice if they could have sat at the table and maybe provided a
18 little more fidelity for us who were going to have to deal with that down the road.

19 JF: You got that right. I have a grandson. My oldest boy, one of his sons.
20 Finally decided to have a little interest in the military. I took him down to U of A when
21 he was in his senior year in high school. Walked into the ROTC group and as we know I
22 took another job, but this is after I retired. I took him down to the Air Force ROTC and
23 talked to the commander and said, "Hey, could you get a cadet or two and give my
24 grandson here the cook's tour of the university?" "Oh, yeah, sure." I took him down
25 there and there's these two young cadets, one boy one girl, and they took him for a
26 complete tour of U of A and he gets back in the truck and he says, "Oh, Grandpa. That
27 was super." Tongue in cheek, I thought maybe we got a hook in him and he'll go Air
28 Force ROTC and go fly airplanes. Well, we go on back to New York as you know, we
29 spend summers up there and we come back in the fall and he's already started at the U of
30 A and he says to me, "Grandpa! Guess what?" I said, "What, Patrick?" He says, "I
31 joined ROTC." I said, "Oh, super." He said, "Yeah, but I took Army this time." I said

1 “Duh!” In any event. He went Army ROTC. According to his commander who I talked
2 to a couple of times he majored in Army ROTC. He just thought everything was great.
3 Long and the short of it, he graduated and he went to helicopter school. I went down and
4 pinned his wings on him when he graduated. He’s still on active duty right now up in
5 Alaska. He went over to Iraq and Afghanistan got a mouthful of that stuff and his
6 comment to me was, “We shouldn’t be there.” I thought, “Wow.” The more I thought it
7 over, I thought, you know, when we went to Iraq and Afghanistan and that stuff. Even
8 though I appreciated our great president at that time. I think it over and over I think we
9 ought to get out of there somehow or we shouldn’t have gone in the first place. That’s
10 my opinion.

11 JM: Well, that’s exactly why we go back to this Truman-MacArthur thing, you
12 know, I think most of the folks that’s spent time at that tactical level, they look at limited
13 war as kind of like being a little bit pregnant and it’s, so there always seems to be this
14 mis-compare from the national military strategy down to the guys that are actually sitting
15 on the ramp.

16 JF: Yeah, you’ve been there. You know. That’s the opinion I got from him. The
17 more I thought of it, I think we sometimes we get our noses into places we don’t really
18 need to.

19 JM: Yeah, it’s definitely hard to see the strategic impact of some of those.

20 JF: Very good point.

21 JM: At least at the tactical level, that’s for sure.

22 JF: Yep.

23 JM: Okay, and your grandson’s name, the one that’s flying helicopters?

24 JF: Patrick

25 JM: Patrick, I just wanted to make sure I had that for the record. All right, let’s
26 go back to, so we are in Korea. First family overseas for the first time, having a nice time
27 in Korea. It looks like from here you must have got follow-on order to the University of
28 Arizona.

29 JF: I certainly did. As a matter of fact, the CINC (commander in chief) over
30 there, an Air Force guy, kind of gave me a sweet tale of sorts. He knew I was headed
31 back and he said, “I thought you were going to go down to Osan and be the wing

1 commander type thing.” I thought it over and over and I said, “No, I don’t think so.” I
2 had just about too much Korea. I didn’t take that. I didn’t know if that was a confirmed
3 offer or if it would even be confirmed. So that’s when they gave me the other offer up
4 here at the U of A as the commander. I said, “Yes, I think that’s where we are going.”
5 That’s how I ended up as commander, as you well know, at the university.

6 JM: You were there for your second time as the PAS, that was 1977-78?

7 JF: No, it was closer to ‘80.

8 JM: I know you finished in ‘80, I think.

9 JF: That’s correct. ‘76to ‘80.

10 JM: Okay, so you spent four years there at the University of Arizona.

11 JF: Yes, it was only supposed to be a three-year job, usually. So when I thought it
12 was time to leave I picked up the phone and called the Pentagon and I said, “It’s about
13 time to move on out? What kind of flying job you got for me?”

14 JM: Actually, let me fix that. That was 1980 to 1984. Is what that was. It looks
15 like.

16 JF: That’s correct. What’d I say? ‘76 to ‘80?

17 JM: Yeah, I was walking you down a different road there. I think it’s ‘80 to ‘84.

18 JF: That’s correct.

19 JM: Okay.

20 JF: In any event, I called up the Pentagon and asked what kind of flying job do
21 you got and we could hear them laugh all over the Pentagon. They said, “No, Fitz. I
22 think what we had in mind was director of maintenance at Minot.” I said, “Paul Harvey,
23 good day.” That’s when we gave up that. I think I told you I threw my hat in the ring for
24 Junior Air Force ROTC.

25 JM: Well let’s, when you go back to U of A the second time and you were the
26 PAS before we get ahead of that. Did you look at that job differently now that you were
27 the PAS versus the when you went there as an assistant PAS probably just as an
28 instructor?

29 JF: Well, certainly was because the main thing the first go was the commandant
30 of cadets. You were the strict disciplinarian, so to speak, and that was part of your job in
31 addition to being teaching the upper classmen type thing. So, yes, PAS you spend a lot

1 more time with the university people, as well as controlling the commander of the Air
2 Force ROTC. You have a lot of interface with the other professors and so on. As far as
3 the youngsters in there, the commandant of cadets is the one that has to keep the path
4 going as far as workouts and military bearing and all that business. So you were working
5 more with the university than you were as the commandant of cadets.

6 JM: This is your second time. You spent four years on this rotation and I don't
7 think it was quite four years on the first one but now let's call it six years of cadets have
8 gone through. You've got to be pretty proud of that because I know for a fact you know at
9 least two of them that have gone through their entire, they've grown up, they've did their
10 entire lives, I can just imagine the type of satisfaction that gives you to think about the
11 impact that you had going forward even though you were at the end of your Air Force
12 career.

13 JF: Absolutely far more memorable than the first tour that I had there as
14 commandant of cadets. To see the product coming out and in going on into service and so
15 on as you well know, it's really a bonus and a thank you type note for people to continue
16 in the military and do extremely well work, as you well know you have done. So has
17 your bride. Can I comment on that?

18 JM: Sure, sure. I'm kind of thinking back to that PAS back in Rochester and it's
19 just incredible to think about that he has access to a DC-3 and he loads up all these kids
20 and flies down to Eglin in the middle of winter in New York. I imagine you had to have
21 thought back to him and thought, "Wow." What an impact that one event had on you, for
22 sure. I mean a little bit of an inspiration there. Did you try to emulate this fella that was
23 the PAS in Rochester a little bit or was that something that you tried to follow his
24 outline?

25 JF: I think my tie with the National Air Guard out here in Tucson, as you well
26 know, we got very close in with those people and, as a matter of fact, the wife and I got
27 an invite from the Air National Guard to go to Hawaii and launch them. I thought that
28 was pretty nice and we did. I don't if I ever brought that up or you recall it.

29 JM: I don't remember that.

30 JF: Yeah, and we launched with them. Of course, the jets were going over there
31 and landing in Hawaii and we were in the commander's C-, not C-47, it'd be a 130 or

1 something and they took us over there and we had a nice tour in Hawaii and then flew
2 back with them, also. So we were tied in very closely is what I'm getting at with the Air
3 Guard out here and that gave us a lot more touch with the students who could go out
4 there, too. As you well know, we had the commander's son in ROTC there. Can you
5 remember that story? Can I buzz in on that?

6 JM: Sure.

7 JF: As you know, you two were both doing extremely well in ROTC and your
8 bride was eventually vice commander of the unit. We also had at that time a Guard fellow
9 who had come into Air Force ROTC and his father was out in the Guard so you can see
10 how closely we had been getting with those people. As you recall, one day I called your
11 future wife in and said to her, "You are now as of today the commander of the unit." Her
12 jaw dropped about five feet. "But sir, but sir." I said, "No buts. No sirs. You have
13 command. Go do your job." The reason was that young fella from the Guard was a super
14 nice young man and what he had been doing is tutoring one of his cadets for some course
15 that he was fluent in. He and the commander went off to California or something for a
16 couple days to some air show or something and came back and said to the cadet he had
17 been tutoring, "How'd everything go?" Questioned him and he had forgotten everything
18 he had taught him. He's the guy that went in and took the exam for him. As you would
19 look at it from a commander's standpoint, "I'll take good care of my troops," while
20 completely illegal and he got tabbed. That's when I called in your bride and said you are
21 now the commander. Because the other one I had to shit can for obvious reasons.

22 JM: Young Teresa Sanger assumes the corps commander at that time.

23 JF: That's correct. Without any need to know because eventually she'd find out.
24 And did a super job in her own right. I probably did the dumb shit thing by letting him
25 stay in Air Force ROTC and just watched him until he graduated with mixed emotions
26 about why I let the guy continue into service. He was a good a commander and so he
27 screwed up. As you well know, he did get commissioned and I think he made O-6, didn't
28 he?

29 JM: You know, I don't know.

30 JF: I think he did. He was in fighters. In any event, that's the flip of a coin type
31 thing. Your bride found out why and what happened.

1 JM: As a PAS of course the fun thing is going out and getting your DC-3 or C-47
2 or whatever they called in back then and taking your kids down to Fort Walton Beach or
3 given them an A-7 ride from the Tucson Air National Guard. I might be dating myself
4 when I say A-7 because the last one of those I saw was on a stick in front of some base,
5 but there's obviously more to it. You got to make some judgement calls on people and
6 you seem to have a knack for that. Being able to look past, people make mistakes, people
7 are human, and you seem to have a knack to be able to say, "Nope, this fellas going to
8 make it," or "This gal is going to be able, she's going to be just fine. We're going to get
9 through this."

10 JF: Well, I appreciate that.

11 JM: So there's more than just giving airplane rides when you are the PAS.

12 JF: You got it.

13 JM: It's funny that you started in Rochester, at the University of Rochester in this
14 ROTC program. Had a big impact on your life and you had two assignments in ROTC
15 while you were active duty. The other thing I find interesting is Tucson, Arizona, or the
16 southern Arizona area, for sure, from Marana to Tucson has just kind of weaved itself
17 into your life over your thirty-year Air Force career.

18 JF: It certainly did. The interesting part was that first part when we came from
19 New York in the middle of February colder than a witches you know what on the shady
20 side of an iceberg came out to Tucson, Arizona, and flew airplanes I thought, "I know
21 where I'm going." At least where I'm going to hold my hat. Then different assignments
22 here.

23 JM: We finished up at the University of Arizona in 1984 so it could be, I noticed
24 that's when I actually graduated from the U of A so I wonder if maybe I had just finally
25 worn you out and if that was the end of it or had you been planning to retire all along?

26 JF: No, it didn't wear me out because you guys are my special, I mean, God
27 almighty, I couldn't be more proud of anybody then the ones that have come through
28 there, y'all did so well. Hell, even my grandson ends up going down there even though
29 he went Army, he is still flying airplanes.

30 JM: Yeah, I understand how that attraction to green seems to, the Army has done
31 a very good job in the last fifteen years or so focusing on people.

1 JF: That is true. That is true.

2 JM: I think these young kids that are going in are flocking over there and are
3 finding that very appealing. The Army has done pretty well with their PR campaign. So
4 after 1984, life's not over. We didn't just go out to the golf course for the last thirty years
5 what's been happening?

6 JF: Well, I think you know I threw my hat in the ring after I retired for junior
7 ROTC. They kept sending me letters about, "Well, here's this school back in Podunk
8 Junction. Or here's another school over here in California." Well, didn't want to move
9 just for the sake of moving. I just kept throwing the stuff away that they were sending
10 me, and finally my wife picks up this thing out of the basket and says, "What's this junior
11 ROTC job here in Germany?" Because we had never been to Europe. I said, "Germany?
12 Oh, yeah. We could do that, I guess. Would you like to?" So I through my hat in the
13 ring. They said, "You're not qualified." I said, "What? Not qualified for Junior ROTC?
14 After my stuff in college?" "No, the rules are you have to have taught Junior ROTC in
15 the United States before you're looked at for overseas assignments." I said, "Oh, well.
16 Fine." I won't say what I said then. Some other colonel got it and about four months later
17 they gave me a call and said, "Do you still want that job at Ramstein in Germany?" I
18 said, "You told me I wasn't qualified." They said, "Well, someone came down with
19 cancer and we need someone over there post haste." Said, "Boom," and that's how we
20 ended going over there to Germany for Junior ROTC at Ramstein. We spent five years
21 over there and that was my post-grad work in [Junior] ROTC.

22 JM: Of course, for your family, at least for Joan, I guess everyone was probably
23 finished. You were a little bit of an empty nester I think by then, but at least Joan was
24 able to pull her second overseas assignment.

25 JF: Yes, that is correct. As a matter of fact, we spent two years there from '85 to
26 '87, and then came back here and got involved in real estate and jobs and so on and so
27 forth. The reason we came was because her mother had a stroke and things were pretty
28 tough. So we came back to stay close at least physically and mentally to the family. Her
29 mom and dad. And then her mother passed away and, lo and behold, I get a call from my
30 master sergeant who I actually hired when I was over there at the first tour. As a matter
31 of fact, he was the assistant coach for the football team. Chief master sergeant, active

1 duty. I got to know him. I said, “Why don’t you retire and I will get you a job right here,”
2 which I did and he was with me for the first tour, super guy, with his wife and they just
3 stayed right there and lived in Ramstein. He calls me, he was home in California. He
4 said, “Colonel Fitz, how about coming back to Germany, to Ramstein, ROTC?” I said,
5 “Chief, what makes you think that the principal wants my ass back after only two years?”
6 He said, “No, I’ve already talked to him. He’s leaving and heading back to the States.
7 They want you here.” I said to Joan, “Do you want to go back to Germany?” Boom. We
8 went back for three more years. So that’s how I ended up with the five years. We were
9 there from ’89 to ’92.

10 JM: I didn’t realize that you had a break in there, you came back and went back
11 out again. Wow. Now were you living in the same house, at this point, the house that you
12 were in right now? Were you,— uh

13 JF: No, we’ve lived in several houses here in Tucson.

14 JM: Okay.

15 JF: We bought one, oh, I forget when we did it. In the first go at ROTC. We lived
16 over on Visco. In any event, we built a house over there and because that’s when I think I
17 made—ah, it’s immaterial. I was promoted and so, yes, we’ve lived in several places.
18 And this one that we’re in now we built in ’92 [actually 94] when we came back from
19 Germany. Part of that real estate, I had worked for an agent and I had bought two lots up
20 here way back when.

21 JM: Now what was the call to real estate? Your dad, you mentioned your dad did
22 that for a while, actually for quite a while.

23 JF: That’s why I wanted to at least take a job in real estate and see what Dad was
24 like, what he had to put up with. Well, I think I sold one house during that timeframe. I
25 wasn’t with the real estate broker here very long. But at least that short time I was with
26 him was when he was building a lot of places up here where we are now, as you know,
27 up in the hill country. So I bought two lots from him and just held onto them until we
28 wanted to do something with them. That’s when we came back in ’92 from Germany is
29 when we built. We love our home even though it leaks.

30 JM: Well, you know what? Things happen for a reason and maybe, like I said,
31 maybe this is Joan’s, this is her big project that’s going to put her on the map. All right

1 so we finish up in Germany, we come back to Tucson. We're building a beautiful house
2 up in the foothills. We talked about one grandchild decided to continue in the family
3 business.

4 JF: Yes, he's the son of our oldest, Kevin. Kevin has got his doctorate. He is a
5 professor at the University of Arizona.

6 JM: What's he teach?

7 JF: Marine biology. He's in that department. He has two sons, [Michael not
8 Kevin] who is the oldest and Patrick who we already talked about who is the helicopter
9 guy up in Alaska. Michael went on to get his master's and he's been working for an air
10 construction outfit in of all places, Fort Walton Beach. How he got involved with them
11 while he was doing his master's, there was this company that does things for the military,
12 real estate, buildings, and things like that. Doing his master's, this was Michael again.
13 He got hired to kind of work into that business as a performance for his master's degree.
14 The company ended up hiring him the minute he graduated. He's been with them ever
15 since. Then his younger brother, Patrick, was the helicopter guy. Tim, our middle son, is
16 the fella who went to Auburn, whereas the other two were U of A grads. He went to
17 Auburn. As a matter of fact, he got a scholarship in ROTC his freshman year. It was Air
18 Force ROTC. No, it was Navy. Navy. I'm sorry. After the first year with the Navy he
19 decided the Navy wasn't for him. So he quit the Navy ROTC and went over to Air Force
20 ROTC, and started hearing about what was Air Force ROTC was all about. Finally, I get
21 a letter from him just about the middle of his sophomore year and it says, "Dear Dad, I
22 don't know why you thought I would be the next fighter pilot in the family blah, blah,
23 blah." Bottom line, he was giving up the military. You can imagine how that hit me. Oh,
24 it was tough. Finally I called the commander of the unit, the Air Force ROTC guy. He
25 said, "Fitz, don't do it. Don't do whatever you're thinking. Your son's been in here in
26 tears several times talking to me about 'What should I do, what shouldn't I do. You
27 know, what's my dad going to think?'" He had to tell me something I should have
28 known for my whole life. ROTC isn't for everybody. College is a time for people to
29 make their own decisions, not what their father or mother or anything else wants. I
30 thought, "Boy, did I need that conversation." So I thanked him profusely and wrote a
31 letter to Tim. Said essentially what the guy told me to say. So, that was time.

1 JM: What's Tim doing now?

2 JF: He is an FBI agent. Let me just backfire a little bit there. So he graduated
3 from Auburn. He went with an airline company, I forget where, down in Florida and was
4 with them for about four years, then he came back to U of A for his master's. Okay?

5 JM: Okay?

6 JF: By this time we're over in Germany and I get a call from him. He said, "Dad,
7 what do you know about the FBI?" I said, "The FBI?" Now here he's working on his
8 master's here at the U of A in engineering and computers, I think it was. In any event, I
9 said, "FBI? What do you—I don't know anything about the FBI other than Herbert A.
10 Philbrick and [*I Led Three Lives*]." You know, that whole thing from TV. He said, "No,
11 I'm serious. I met a fella at lunch one day who is back here getting his master's and he's
12 an FBI guy." I said, "Oh, okay." So that's how he got interested in the FBI during his
13 master's. When he graduated, he went to the FBI. Now we had missed his graduation
14 from Auburn because we were overseas on the first tour, in any event we missed it. We
15 missed his graduate business right here because we were in Europe. Finally he's going
16 down to Quantico. He's going to FBI school. I said to Joan, "We haven't been either of
17 his graduations. I think we ought to go back." Well, she didn't like flying for that so I
18 said, "Well, I'm going to head back." I just happened to find out the CINC's airplane
19 was coming back and I came back on the CINC's airplane about the time that Tim was
20 going to graduate from Quantico, FBI school. Graduation, I stayed there until they gave
21 out assignments and they said, "Honolulu, Hawaii, Tim Fitzsimons." The whole class
22 started going, "Oh, Fitz! Who the hell do you know, blah, blah." He said, "I don't know
23 anybody." That's our FBI guy. He went over to Hawaii and at that time the FBI was kind
24 of like the military, will rotate you every three years, or whatever. The guy that took over
25 the FBI said, "We don't need to do that. Let's leave people where they are doing good
26 jobs and so on." So he ended there for seven years. Then came back to San Diego, that
27 was his second tour. Those are two tough tours, aren't they?

28 JM: Holy cow, Hawaii and then San Diego.

29 JF: Yeah. Then he was offered other places, and he said no. Lo and behold, he
30 gets the job right back here in Tucson.

31 JM: You gotta be kidding me. He is living a charmed life.

1 JF: Yeah, then he comes to me one day and says, “Dad, you know what? I think
2 I’m going to retire.” “You’re ass retire? What do you mean you’re just a kid!” He said,
3 “Yeah, mm-hmm.” What happened was somebody got in touch with him while he’s
4 sitting right down here in Tucson at his desk and the guy who called wants to hire him
5 was an FBI guy who retired. When he retired he started a business and the business he
6 has is he takes all the contraband from the FBI and he markets it. Then FBI evidently can
7 get custody of it as long as it’s in civilian hands. So he hires FBI guys and he calls Tim
8 one day and found out who he was and so on and offers him a job. Tim retired. He had
9 twenty-four years in, I guess. The only thing he had to hand in was his gun, his car, and
10 his badge. To this day he is in the same office there in Tucson in the same chair, working
11 with the same guys but he’s a civilian. That’s number two son and if you want number
12 three he’s out in California and he’s in an engineering business with communications for
13 commercial airliners. That winds up our clan. All doing well.

14 JM: That was Chris? That’s right. How long has he been out in California?

15 JF: He’s been out there probably seven, eight years maybe even ten [actually 15].
16 His first job was up in Phoenix. He had another and then this one. So he’s been in the
17 same, and he got his master’s down in Texas, University of Texas. All of them doing
18 well.

19 JM: I can’t believe he left Austin. It seems like once people go to Austin, they
20 never come back. Well, all right, so we covered a pretty magnificent career there, Col.
21 Fitzsimons. You’ve had some time since you left active duty, you’ve got a grandkid
22 that’s is still involved in this kinda stuff.

23 JF: Our FBI [guy] has a son and a daughter. The son is at the University of
24 Arizona as we speak in his sophomore year and he is something else. He is quite a piano
25 guy, he’s been taking piano lessons for some time and he graduated from Sahuarita. The
26 university, but he’s been taking piano lessons since he’s about eight or nine, I guess. And
27 lo and behold, he was living on campus in the dorms his freshman year, but he didn’t like
28 the dorm business. It was too loud, too noisy or whatever. Meanwhile he continues with
29 his piano lessons until near the end or the middle of his freshman year he’s still taking his
30 piano lessons and she is getting overloaded and she says, “Why don’t you teach some of
31 these kids? You can do it.” So he takes her up on that and so he now is teaching piano

1 lessons earning pretty good money doing it. He finally got his driver's license. He
2 mentioned to his dad how the dorms are so noisy and the FBI guy dad goes down to
3 campus and buys a place down there just about a month ago, so he's moved into it. By
4 the way, he's started the piano lessons, he's been doing it for about a year. He comes
5 home from campus on Sundays, the weekend, I mean. Saturday and Sunday. He's got his
6 own car now. He gives piano lessons on Saturdays and Sundays right there in his home in
7 Sahuarita. So that's a kid that's moving fast, and his sister is in her junior year, I think.
8 She's got another year down in Sahuarita.

9 JM: Junior in high school? Does she have any aspirations for ROTC?

10 JF: Not that I know of. No, I have not—as a matter of fact, she knows I'm in
11 ROTC and no, but she's quite a tennis player. She's number one for her school. That
12 keeps her busy.

13 JM: That's pretty competitive down there in southern Arizona.

14 JF: As a matter of fact, Tim, her father the FBI guy, has volunteered into the
15 assistant tennis coach down there in Sahuarita. So it's all in the family right there.

16 JM: Looking at all this family you have in Tucson, there's no reason why your
17 house should be leaking unnoticed in the summer, I'm thinking.

18 JF: Well, I'll tell you what we do, when we go back to New York and it'll never
19 happen again. I always leave the water on. I fix the toilets up and all that business, you
20 know, so they're covered and solved and as a matter of fact, this year before we went up
21 to New York we had all the faucets re-done except that one little one upstairs in the bar or
22 something and it's in the sink up there. I think you know the rest of the story and pop
23 and boom and we're in this house business of cleaning up. But I didn't mean to get off
24 the subject.

25 JM: Well, I took you down that road. We're close to the end here and what I like
26 to ask at the end is, so if you could rewind, which of course we can't, but if you could
27 rewind and you were starting as a freshmen in ROTC at Rochester University, knowing
28 what you know now, would you do anything different?

29 JF: Absolutely not. No, because every one of those was my decision. If anybody
30 had any influence on the decision making as far as I went to University of Rochester by

1 virtue of my older brother kind of leading the way, both academically and financially. I
2 guess I was making my own decisions ever since I lost my dad.

3 JM: When you were about fourteen?

4 JF: Big brother still kind of filled in for being the big brother.

5 JM: Which you just lost him in January.

6 JF: Yup. He had been out of the business of law ever since he had that stroke. I
7 think I told you he and his wife made a decision, did I ever mention that?

8 JM: Yes, you did. You told me about that. God bless her for keeping all that up.
9 Well, I think we are at the end Col. Fitzsimmons. Hold on. I'm going to go ahead and
10 turn this off and I appreciate all of your candid responses for the last two days on this.

11 JF: Hey, it was a labor of love, my friend.