MARCH FIELD MUSEUM
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

PROJECT VIETNAM

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Major General Daniel J. Gibson

BIOGRAPHY

UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

MAJOR GENERAL DANIEL J. GIBSON

Major General Daniel J. Gibson is the commander of the California Air National Guard. He is responsible for command and control oversight of five major field-level organizations comprised of nearly 5,000 military and civilian personnel serving at eleven locations within California. As commander, he serves as the senior Air National Guard officer responsible for providing operationally trained, equipped and mission-ready forces to support national defense requirements worldwide and emergency response, relief, and recovery operations throughout California.

General Gibson graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1967. After graduating from pilot training, he completed flying assignments in Korea, Thailand and the United States. He joined the California Air National Guard in 1979 where he held positions including chief of safety, deputy commander for operations, air commander and group commander. In 1989, he transferred to the State Headquarters holding positions as the director of plans and programs and director of operations. In 1993, he was assigned as the chief of staff, California Air National Guard. General Gibson was appointed as the commander in September 1999. He is a command pilot and has flown more than 4,700 hours, including more than 1,300 combat hours in the OV-10 and F-4 in Southeast Asia.

EDUCATION:

1967 Bachelor of Science degree, U.S. Air Force Academy
1975 Squadron Officers School
1977 Air Command and Staff College
1977 Master's degree in business administration, Golden Gate University
1987 Air War College
1995 Senior Reserve Component Officers Course, Carlisle Barracks, Penn.
1997 Harvard Ukrainian National Security Program, Cambridge, Mass.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Aug. 1967 – Aug. 1968, student, undergraduate pilot training, Williams AFB, Ariz.
2. Aug. 1968 – Dec. 1968, F-4D combat crew training, Davis Monthan AFB, Ariz.
3. Dec. 1968 – April 1970, F-AD pilot, 68th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Homestead AFB, Fla.
4. April 1970 – Sept. 1970, OV-10 combat crew training, Hurlburt Field, Fla.
5. Sept. 1970 – April 1972, OV-10 forward air controller, 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron, Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base (RTAB), Thailand.
6. April 1972 – March 1973,F-4E combat crew training, MacDill AFB, Fla.
7. March 1973 – April 1974, F-4E pilot, 4th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Udorn RTAB, Thailand.
8. April 1974 – Feb. 1975, F-4 instructor pilot, 21st Tactical Fighter Training Squadron, George AFB, Calif.
9. Feb. 1975 – Sept. 1975, student, F-4 Fighter Weapons Instructor Course, Nellis AFB, Nev.
10. Sept. 1975 – Sept. 1979, F-4 instructor pilot and wing weapons officer 35th Tactical Fighter Wing, George AFB, Calif.
11. Dec. 1979 – Oct. 1981, forward air controller, O-2A, 163rd Tactical Air Support Group, Ontario ANGB, Calif.
12. Oct. 1981 – May 1985, chief of safety (F-4), 163rd Tactical Fighter Group, March AFB, Calif.
13. May 1985 – April 1989, deputy commander for operations (F-4), 163rd Tactical Fighter Group, March AFB, Calif.
14. April 1989 – Nov. 1989, commander (F-4), 163rd Tactical Fighter Group, March AFB, Calif.
15. Nov. 1989 – Sept. 1991, director, plans and programs, Headquarters, California Air National Guard, Sacramento, Calif.
16. Sept. 1991 – Jan. 1993, director of operations, California Air National Guard, Sacramento, Calif.
17. Jan. 1993 – Sept. 1999, chief of staff, California Air National Guard, Sacramento, Calif.
18. Sept. 1999 – present, commander, California Air National Guard, Sacramento, Calif.

FLIGHT INFORMATION:

Rating: Command Pilot
Flight hours: More than 4,700
Aircraft flown: T-41, T-37, T-38, F-4C, D, E, RF-4C, OV-10, C-26

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS:

Distinguished Flying Cross with three oak leaf clusters
Meritorious Service Medal with oak leaf cluster
Air Medal with 22 oak leaf clusters
Air Force Commendation Medal
Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Palm

EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION:

Second Lieutenant	June 7, 1967
First Lieutenant	Dec. 7, 1968
Captain	June 7, 1970
Major	June 7, 1981
Lieutenant Colonel	June 7, 1985
Colonel	June 7, 1988
Brigadier General	Sept. 23, 1994
Major General	Sept. 23, 1999

(Current as of October 1999)

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DANIEL J. GIBSON, Colonel, ANG

MAY 9TH AND 10TH, 1989

INTERVIEWER: CINDI L. NOEL

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INTRODUCTION

The following is one in a series of oral history interviews being conducted with current active duty and retired persons associated with the United States Air Force during its involvement in the conflict in Southeast Asia, focusing on the period 1961-1973.

With an attempt to further our understanding and knowledge of the war that was never officially declared a war, these interviews focus on the reflections and experiences of those persons directly involved and affected. These recollections and insights will try, when complete, to encompass a large portion of USAF activity throughout Southeast Asia including Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. By conducting these taped conversations, one on one, we are provided with an authenticity not normally found in written historical text, allowing us to capture incidents and experiences that may otherwise go unrecorded.

Although the interviews are edited for readability, the content remains unchanged and as true to the spoken word as possible. No attempt whatsoever has been made to alter or rewrite the text.

The March Field Museum's Oral History Program wishes to thank all the participants for their candor and willingness to share their very personal - sometimes humorous, sometimes terrifying - experiences in the air and in the jungles of Southeast Asia. They will never be forgotten.

BIOGRAPHY

DANIEL J. GIBSON, Colonel, ANG

Colonel Daniel J. Gibson was born in Washington D.C. on 13 April 1944. His father was in the Air Force and the family lived in Alabama, New York, California, Alaska and Wisconsin where he graduated from high school in 1962.

Col Gibson enlisted in the Air Force shortly after graduation and attended the USAF Academy Preparatory School. Col Gibson entered the USAF Academy as a cadet in June 1963 and was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant upon graduation in 1967. While at the academy, he held positions as the Group Sergeant Major, Squadron Commander, and Chairman of the Cadet Professional Ethics Committee.

Col Gibson attended pilot training at Williams AFB, AZ. After earning his wings in August 1968, he was assigned to the 68th Tactical Fighter Squadron at Homestead AFB, FL flying the F-4D. During this tour, he spent six months in South Korea where he sat both air defense and conventional air to ground alert. In January 1970, Col Gibson volunteered for a tour in Southeast Asia in the OV-10.

After attending OV-10 training at Hurlburt Field, FL, Col Gibson reported to the 23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base as a Forward Air Controller. During this tour, h served as a Flight Commander, Instructor Pilot, and Functional Check Flight Pilot. He voluntarily extended his tour by six months to serve as the Search and Rescue Coordinator/Flight Commander.

In June 1972, Col Gibson reported to MacDill AFB, Fl for upgrade training in the F-4E. He graduated at the top of his class in January 1973 and was assigned to Udorn Royal Thai Air Base as an F-4E aircraft commander in the 4th Tactical Fighter Squadron. While assigned to the 4th TFS, he served as a Flight Commander, Instructor Pilot, and FCF Pilot. During his tours in Southeast Asia, he flew 344 combat missions accruing 1325 hours of combat flying time.

In April 1974, Col Gibson was assigned to the 35th TFW at George AFB, CA as an F-4 Instructor Pilot. He spent the next five years instructing pilots and Weapons System Officers in all phases of the F-4 mission. He held the positions of Flight Commander, Squadron Weapons Officer, Wing Weapons Officer, and Wing Career Advisor. He completed Air Command and Staff College with

distinction and earned a Master's Degree in Business Administration from Golden Gate University in 1977. He graduated from the Air War College Seminar Program in 1987.

Col Gibson separated from active duty in September 1979 and joined the 163rd TASG as a Traditional Guardsman in December. During this period, he founded Thunderbird Energy Systems, Inc., an energy conservation products retail business. He continues to advise and provide direction to this company as its president.

In October 1981, he became an Air Technician and served as the Group Chief of Safety. He regained currency as an F-4 instructor in August of 1982 and was one of the primary instructors for the unit's conversion from the Ø-2 to the F-4C. Col Gibson was appointed Air Commander and Deputy Commander for Operations of the 163rd Tactical Fighter Group on 15 May 1985. On 3 April 1989, he assumed command of the 163rd Tactical Fighter Group.

Col Gibson is a Command Pilot and a graduate of the USAF Fighter Weapons School. He has over 44ØØ hours of military flying time.

DECORATIONS AND SERVICE AWARDS

Distinguished Flying Cross - 3 Devices
Meritorious Service Medal
Air Medal - 22 Devices
Air Force Commendation Medal
Distinguised-Presidential Unit Citation
Combat Readiness Medal - 2 Devices
National Defense Service Medal
Korean Service Medal
Vietnam Service Medal
Air Force Longevity Service Ribbon - 5 Devices
Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon
Air Force Training Ribbon
Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with Device - 1 Device
United Nations Service Medal
Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

(War in Southeast Asia - 1965 thru 1974)

The following is an interview with Colonel Daniel J. Gibson (DG), Commander of the 163rd Tactical Fighter Group, California Air National Guard. It is taking place May 9th and 10th, 1989 at the office of the commander, 163rd Tactical Fighter Group Headquarters, March Air Force Base, California. The interviewer is Cindi Noel (CN).

CN: Before we get into your time in Southeast Asia I would like to ask you a few background questions. Your biography states you were born in Washington, D.C.

DG: Yes.

CN: And your father was in the Air Force? What did he do?

DG: Yes. He was a pilot. He started out going to Aviation Cadets. In fact he was stationed here [March Air Force Base, California] and pulled guard duty as a corporal in that little main gate house over by our squadron building. So he went to Aviation Cadets, became a pilot and served under Curtis E. LeMay. In fact, LeMay as a major was his ops [operations] officer. My dad was a group commander in the Pacific during the war in B-29's. He stayed in the Air Force, served many tours, went to the Pentagon and became a general, commanded the Alaskan Air Command and so on. He retired in 1966.

CN: So he was in WWII and Korea?

DG: No, he didn't go to Korea. During the Korean War he was stationed at the Pentagon.

CN: What influence, if any, did he have on your choice of the Air Force as a career?

DG: Everything! (laughs) I think I wanted to fly from the time I can remember. My first memory is standing at a chain link fence, probably at Andrews Air Force Base, watching him get on and off an airplane. I've wanted to fly ever since. Both my brothers went into the Air Force. One went to West Point, one went to the Citadel. They were both pilots, one of them is still active. So all three of us just followed right along.

CN: What type of aircraft did you first train in?

DG: It was a Cessna 172. It's called a T-41 now. It was a fairly new program in pilot training when I went in. The idea was to just find out if you had basic flying skills before spending a lot of money on you. In my class of about 60 total I think we washed out about nine or ten guys in that phase. It was very short, six weeks, if that long. You soloed in that airplane, then you moved from there into T-37's. Then into T-38's just like today.

CN: Do you remember your first ride in a fighter jet?

DG: Oh yes. In fact my first one was when I was at the Air Force Academy. It was a T-33. I can remember vividly asking the pilot if he would demonstrate a dive bomb run. So he did. Then when I went to pilot training I was still a little bit undecided as to whether I wanted to fly fighters or "heavys". One of my brothers went into tankers and one into C-130's. And at that time in my family fighter pilots had a pretty shaky reputation - wild and

woolly and not very disciplined, and so on and so forth. But I think I knew that I had always really wanted to fly fighters, so that's what I did.

CN: After earning your wings you flew F-4's in South Korea?

DG: Yes. At that time the Air Force was putting pilots in the back seat of the F-4, so I got a back seat slot out of pilot training and went to Homestead. Both of the F-4 squadrons on base were supposed to go to Phu Cat, Vietnam. That was in 1969, I think. President Nixon was withdrawing forces from Vietnam at that time and he announced that two fighter squadrons were being withdrawn. Those two squadrons were actually the two at Homestead. So rather than withdrawing they just never went. And this caused a bit of turmoil because it happened two days before we were supposed to go so everyone had sent their families home, sold their houses, and sold their cars. We were living in the BOQ, which we continued to do for about six weeks. They decided to rotate us into Kunsan, South Korea to replace a unit that was there. So we actually went TDY for six months.

CN: What did you do over there?

DG: We pulled alert. Conventional alert as opposed to nuclear, carrying conventional bombs. Also air defense alert. When we weren't doing that we did normal training missions, bombing, intercepts, that sort of thing.

CN: What is it like to fly the F-4?

DG: It's a real kick! It's very demanding. It's a very difficult airplane to fly as compared to the F-15, F-16. Of course I've been flying it for 20 years on and off so it's kind of second nature to me, where to the younger, inexperienced pilots it's a handful to be able to employ it properly. Our mission is to strike deep behind the enemy lines so that, due to the threat, we have to go in very low and very fast. Navigating at 480, 540 knots at 100 to 300 feet over terrain that you've never seen before, to find a target that you've never seen before, which is probably camouflaged anyway, while you're getting shot at is a pretty demanding mission. It's very demanding. Extremely demanding. So we practice it a lot. It's fun though. I mean I just can't think of anything that's better. We give a lot of orientation flights to not only our own people in the group to keep them motivated, and also to let them know what it is we do, but also to various politicians. And they invariably come back just higher than a kite, even though most of them get sick because it's hot, it's bumpy, we pull a lot of G's, and it's uncomfortable, particularly if you've never done it before. I can't even explain to you what it's like. I can't explain to my wife, I've given up trying. You just have to experience it. But it's fun. It's a real "E" ticket ride.

CN: How did it compare to other fighter aircraft of that time?

DG: Oh it was the hottest thing around. In terms of ease of flying it, all of them were about the same. It's just that they've made so many advances in computerized flight controls and systems and

aerodynamic design since then that the airplanes now are just a lot easier to handle. But at the time, back then, it was like the F-16 is now. It was the work horse that did anything. We used to joke that it was the jack of all trades, master of none, because it did everything but didn't do anything really well. Looking back on it now I would tend to disagree with that because it is still a very viable threat 26 years after coming into the Air Force inventory. I wouldn't want to go against it in a MIG with all the improvements they've made in the avionics and the computer systems on the airplane, and so on. Plus the fact that we fly it a heck of a lot better now than we did 25 years ago. I mean the whole fighter force has changed tremendously. We train so much better. The opportunities for training are so much better - Red Flag, all the low level routes we have here, all the supersonic airspaces available. All the dissimilar training we do, which means fighting F-15's, F-16,s, F-18's, A-7's. That was unheard of back then. Not that it's part of the wild and woolly thing. We're not about to let fighter pilots go out and crash all the airplanes as fun. But the force is so much more professional now and the airplane's so much better. I think that's really important.

CN: Do you agree it's time to take them out of the Air Force inventory?

DG: I have a little bit of a hard time with that but some of it's probably emotional because I love the airplane so much. It is still, with the exception of the F-111 and the F-15E which is

just entering the inventory, the only airplane that can haul a lot of iron (bombs) deep behind the lines. Once it gets there it won't employ them as accurately as the F-16 will, but at least it will get there. The F-16 just doesn't have the range to do it. So, it's expensive to maintain and operate and that's the main reason they want to take it out of the inventory. And I can't argue with that. But force structure wise and capability wise I think they are being a little bit premature. Not much, maybe three or four years, but the goal is to have them all out of inventory by 1991. I think that's a little early. I think 1995 might be a little more reasonable, because by then the F-15E's will be in, although they just cut them drastically due to budgets which I think is a horrible mistake. But it's way above my control.

CN: In 1970 you volunteered for duty in Southeast Asia flying the OV-10. How did you, as an F-4 pilot, become involved with the OV-10?

DG: Well actually at that time there was a little form, and I've forgotten the name of it, a 171 or something, where you could volunteer for overseas duty and list in order the airplanes that you wanted to fly. The OV-10 was second from the bottom! I wanted to get to combat. That's all I wanted to do and I wanted to do it in either a fighter or as a FAC (Forward Air Controller), because that's where the action was. So I think I put down the F-4, A-7, F-100, OV-10, O-2. I would have even gone in an O-2, that's how bad (laughs) I wanted to get over there!

About 32 of us "backseaters" got FAC assignments. And they initially all came out as OV-10's, of course they spread us in the training cycle at Hurlburt Airfield in Florida. They spread us out over several months and I was one of the first to go. About half way through they changed the rest of them to O-2's, which they did not like at all but that's what they ended up in. So that's how it happened.

CN: There must have been a big difference between flying the OV-10 as opposed to the F-4. How did you adjust?

DG: Well the OV-10's a twin engine turbo prop but the seating is similar to the F-4, it's tandem. It has two cockpits, one in front, one in back, and it's normally flown with only one person in it. The difference (laughs) is extreme, you've got two big props out there and the airplane only does about 130. Well it will do 200 knots on a good day without anything hanging on it. It would fly as fast as about the speed the F-4 lands, so quite a difference. But one thing I learned very quickly was it's a heck of a lot harder physically and especially mentally to be a FAC, than it is to be a fighter pilot. Just because you have five different radios you had to monitor and talk on and you have to navigate very, very precisely. Since you are low and slow you're much easier to hit when people are not happy with what you're doing. And the mental gymnastics. Figuring out which fighters to put where, how to stack them up if they all show up at the same time, how altitude deep to put them, what ordnance they're carrying, how to bring them in, how to get them out, and so on is

really exhausting. It takes a pretty sharp person to pull it off. So even though I was in a low, slow, non-glamorous airplane - a lot of my friends were in fighters - I didn't feel at all that they were doing anything better, if you will, than I was.

CN: Did they ever kid you about it?

DG: No, they kept a subtle distance. You know, "What are you doing these days?" "Oh, I'm a FAC in an OV-10." "Oh." And then you'd go on talking about something else. But the thing that I thought was too bad was that they never knew how easy it was to do what they were doing, because I'd done both. Their job was really a piece of cake. It was pretty simple. So the FAC community actually tended to look down on the fighter community (laughs), those of us who had fighter experience. The FAC's that didn't have fighter experience, all they could see was the glory and the glamour. "Oh boy, those guys fly fast and furious." But big deal. That's not to say I wanted to remain a FAC all my life. I wanted to get back into fighters as soon as I could, and I did, but that's a different story.

CN: During combat wasn't the FAC in control of the fighter?

DG: Oh most definitely. But you weren't the one that was actually inflicting the damage. You were the one that was saying, "Hit my smoke." Or, "Put your stuff 200 meters north," or whatever. And when they hit the truck or the bridge or whatever blew up, although we had a lot of satisfaction because we found the darn thing in the first place and we directed them onto it, they still

got all the glory and BDA (Battle Damage Assessment). Then they'd go home and brag that they got ten trucks, two triple A sites, or whatever.

CN: Prior to your arrival there what was your knowledge of the war in Southeast Asia?

DG: Having been at the [Air Force] Academy we got a lot of briefings, both classified and unclassified, on what was going on over there, from the Air Force perspective. In fact we had two A-1 pilots (A-1 Skyraider, prop driven - now that was a glamorous prop at the time because it was still a fighter, or considered a fighter). Anyway they came back after their tours were over and were stationed at the Academy and they gave us a slide briefing. I'll never forget it. It was in Arnold Hall, which is the big auditorium. They gave us this briefing with slides that they had taken of their view of the war. I don't know how many of us there were in the room, a thousand at least, and when they were done there were a thousand guys ready to go to war, right now! I was 26 years old, something like that, and didn't really care too much about the political end of it. I just knew we were at war and that that's what I had been trained for and that's the object of the whole exercise. That's why I had spent four years at the Academy and all the time in pilot training and so on. All my friends were there, or were in route. My brother was there. People were dying. I wanted to get over there and give it my best shot.

CN: Can you describe your initial arrival?

DG: After Jungle Survival School in the Phillipines, which everyone went through in route, we got to Cam Ranh Bay, about ten of us, which was the place where all the FAC's initially went. Then from there you were allocated either in country, which was in Vietnam, or out of country which was in Thailand. The difference was in country you worked primarily with the Army, be it US or ARVN ([South] Vietnamese) and out of country you worked primarily within Laos on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, trying to interdict supplies. They made that determination right there. So it was about three or four days there of indoctrination and don't do this, don't do that, don't drink the water, you know all that stuff. Then, and I don't know how they did it, you got your orders either to proceed somewhere else in Vietnam or go to NKP [Nakhon Phanom, Thailand]. When I got to Cam Ranh it was just as I expected - there was barbed wire and sand bags everywhere. We stayed in a hootch, which was a generic term for just about any building that people slept or lived in in Southeast Asia. There were about eight or ten of us, I guess. I remember it was very hot, it was very muggy, which I expected. All we had was a fan, and we were lucky to have that. We were briefed on rocket attacks and what to do, although I don't think they had rocketed Cam Ranh for quite a while. It was really pretty uneventful but you knew that this wasn't home. This wasn't Florida! (laughs) The food was not good. You were there and you had 361 more days of it. And you were the new guy. There was the new guy syndrome, because our flightsuits were new, and you obviously

didn't know what the hell you were doing. You had to ask directions everywhere, and you'd see these old, grisled combat veterans younger than you were, in some cases lieutenants, or whatever. And you looked up to them, because they had been there. They'd been doing it, and you hadn't. So we would try to pump them. I ran into some friends. Listened to their war stories over beers at night, and that sort of thing. But I was anxious to get going, get where I was going to go and get on with it.

CN: When was that?

DG: September 26th is when I left the States. So that was probably around the 1st of October, 1970.

CN: What was your rank at that time?

DG: I was a captain. I made captain in June. I was a brand new captain.

CN: Where did they decide to send you?

DG: I went to Nakhon Phanom - NKP is what everyone called it. It's on the eastern border of Thailand around the Mekong River. In fact the city itself is where Ho Chi Minh was born, which I didn't know until I was down there about a year. There was a big statue of him in the town square! (laughs) Southeast Asia is a very fluid thing, the political boundaries sometimes are geographic in nature as in this case with the Mekong River. But everyone there mixes. You would never know if you were talking to a Chinese Thai or a North or South Vietnamese - the racial differences are very, very slight. There are some very big

ethnic and religious differences, but just by looking at them it's really difficult to tell who's who, who's what. So I was not really that surprised that Ho Chi Minh was born in Thailand.

CN: So your impression of Thailand was basically the same as Vietnam?

DG: Well it was a little different. Thailand was not a bad place to be. You didn't get rocketed. There was a lot of security but not nearly as much as there was in Vietnam. For instance our guards on the base were Thai, and Thai's aren't known for their fierce, aggressive nature. There was barbed wire, a couple of sand bags here and there, but there were no bunkers. We didn't expect to get attacked.

CN: Do you recall your first mission?

DG: Not really. You have to realize I was there for 18, 19 months. I flew over 300 missions in the OV-10. I remember the check-out program which was very extensive, since I was inexperienced meaning I didn't have 500 hours of flying time, my check-out program took five weeks and consisted of about 100 hours of flying time, which is a lot of flying. It was mainly with an IP [Instructor Pilot] in the back seat or with one in another airplane very close by. That didn't really go on for 100 hours but it went on for a large majority of that [time]. After that you were sent out alone but you were sent to very safe places. The threat varied considerably up and down Laos. Then after you finally passed all those hurtles and didn't do anything stupid or get killed or whatever, then you got sent to the more difficult, higher threat areas. Again these guys had been doing it. They

had been shot at, they knew what was going on, so I was just a sponge. I would receive only, I didn't say anything other than to ask questions. My opinion was neither sought nor given because (laughs) I didn't know anything. So I just acted like a sponge and soaked up everything I could from these guys who had been out there doing it. It didn't take that long really before I felt that I was really in the thick of things, probably two months after I arrived. I was fully integrated, if you will, and I could do anything anybody else could. And that was not unusual, everybody was like that.

CN: You didn't fly alone, did you?

DG: Yes, after the initial check-out you were alone.

CN: What exactly was your job?

DG: Our job was to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which is really a misnomer. There were many, many routes and many, many avenues for them to get supplies from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. Most of them went through Laos, because it sits contiguous to both countries. There were four major passes, mountain passes if you will, that led from North Vietnam into Laos or from Laos into South Vietnam. And in one place almost North Vietnam to South Vietnam but it kind of meandered through Laos a little bit. And those were extremely heavily defended by the bad guys, by the North Vietnamese. They were extremely lucrative in terms of finding things. The Trail varied from literally two to three lane blacktop to a bicycle path. And not continuous. I mean there were roads that ran the length of Laos - many of them two

lane roads. But there were off-shoots off of these bicycle paths - they used elephants, they used water buffalo, they used bicycles. They'd have ammunition on them. I remember stories of guys pushing their bicycle with over 300 pounds worth of stuff, and they would spend months to get a mortar shell down to South Vietnam. These people were dedicated. And a bunch of trucks, a bunch of trucks! I heard an estimate that at any one time there were about 5500 trucks on this network. We're talking big, what we call a deuce and a half, two and a half ton trucks. A great big son of a gun with an open back to it. We divided the country into sectors and we had FAC's out there 24 hours a day. Our job was to go out and find these trucks and the guns that defended the Trail - and later on the SAM sites - and bodies of troops, and call a command control plane which was a C-130 that was out there 24 hours a day, and request ordnance, which meant a flight of fighters. The day a frag came down (fragmentary order which pre-planned missions, because they would try to interdict a trail by bombing it) they would pick choke points and then tell you, "Okay at eight o'clock you're going to have a flight of four F-4's with twelve Mark 82 (500-pound) bombs each and you're to hit these coordinates." So you'd go out and do your thing. You might get there at six o'clock [a.m.] (a normal time on station was about three hours), and you might have twelve, fifteen, whatever of these pre-planned strikes. So you go out and find the target that you were going to hit and then go look for others. Then when they would show up you'd put them on the

target you had gotten. Now if you found something more lucrative, like a convoy, which you rarely saw something like that, then you could request from this Command Control C-130 (Hillsborough was its call sign) a change of targets, you'd found something better. We had what we called a CAK, which is a little deal that put the coordinates in code, because the bad guys monitored all this radio traffic. So you'd say I've got 12 trucks at Lima Tango 63 in the middle of the road and that would be in code. You would have someone decode that and plot out coordinates on a map and bomb them. The other thing that FAC's did was to keep books in the command post on every sector looking for truck parks, because these trucks didn't leave Hanoi on Wednesday and be in South Vietnam on Friday. They would trans-ship. One truck would be taken so far to a truck park which then would end up with that truck, then put him on another truck. So there might be anywhere from five to 50 trucks. These were good targets. Of course they hid them very, very well so a major portion of our job was to try to find these places. And you would find it by seeing changes in the terrain - the way it looked. In one case I noticed one morning that this one stream that crossed the road was muddy and the stream meandered through a big bunch of trees. So I figured that, because they had probably made it when they had gotten off the road just before dark, they had driven up the stream into this heavily forested area from which we could not see the ground. So I went back and wrote in my little book keep an eye on this place and drew a

little diagram of it - the stream and all that stuff. Well sure enough it turned out to be a truck park which we bombed a few days later.

Colonel Daniel J. Gibson Interview

Tape 1, Side 2

CN: Where did your mission orders come from?

DG: They came from Seventh Air Force which was in Saigon. We would get the frag, the fragmentary order, and this frag was huge because it went out to everybody. Everybody. (laughs) All the bases in South Vietnam, all the bases in Thailand. It would say one OV-10 sector three, zero eight hundred to eleven hundred, and it would go on like that for the whole twenty-four hour period. So in the Command Post you had officers and enlisted folks whose only job was to break the frag, it was like breaking a code. So they would take out all of the missions that our wing was going to do and put them on a board. Give them to a squadron and then the squadron guys, schedulers, would put pilots' names against the sorties. Once you got into the system you'd go down for flying and debrief, which took a good hour and a half, and go to the squadron and see what you were going to do the next day. We were day FAC's in my group, in the OV-10. We had O-2's in our squadron also which had two guys in it, a pilot and a nav. The

navigator literally hung out the right side of the airplane with a starlight scope looking at the Trail. But we were day [FAC's] so our first briefing was about three o'clock in the morning so that we could read the frag, figure out what fighters we were going to put in, and read the book from the guy who had been there the day before in that sector. And again we tried to fly the same sectors day after day as much as possible. Then brief and go out and take off to be there by first light. In fact we would be there about a half an hour before first light because we would find a lot of interesting things going on just before dawn because that's when the trucks would leave the Trail and go other places. And there were lots of airplanes out there at night - C-130's, Gunships, AC-130's - they had very sensitive infrared devices and they claimed a lot of kills. B-52's were out there. Other FAC's out flying at night, fast moving FAC's - they were called OWLS, NIGHT OWLS. So you would go out and get into your sector which had a common frequency on the radio, and you knew who was out there from the frag. So you would say, "OWL 76, NAIL 49, anything going on?" He'd say, "Yeah, I got a bunch of trucks pointed up here, and this triple A site's active" and whatever. You would go check out whatever he said and then get to work on your portion of the frag. So it was pretty busy. And like I said our time on station was about three hours. Once I finished this tour, I sat down and figured out how many hours I flew and divided by the number of missions. It came out to 4.2 hours per mission, so that's about right. It was about half an hour to 40

minutes out and back (each way) and about three hours on station. We carried 14 rockets, so you had to be fairly careful. I mean you couldn't just be shooting rockets just for the fun of it because you needed them. They were white phosporus, Willy Pete we called it. They were to mark targets, put up a big smoke cloud. Of course if you hit something with it, it was pretty deadly but that wasn't the idea. The idea was just to mark the vicinity of the target for fighters to hit.

CN: How did you protect yourself?

DG: You jinked. What we called jinking. And you flew relatively high. There was an incredible amount of triple A out there, antiaircraft, so our minimum altitude was 4500 feet above the ground. We tried not to fly any lower than that because 90 percent of the losses, as it turns out, during the whole war were below 4000 feet. That's where guys got hit. So we tried to keep it at 4500 feet minimum. We would constantly move the airplane (climbed, dived, flew right, left), we never flew straight. And that was one of the big things in the training that you got when you first got there was how to properly jink. Because while you're doing all this you had a pair of binoculars trying to look down under the trees and so on trying to find targets. So it took a while to learn how to do that properly because they were shooting at you all the time. And it got to be just kind of ho hum really. I became an instructor after a while in the OV-10 and I was checking out new guys, and I can remember vividly taking a guy out on his second or third or whatever mission and

talking about the triple A and saying, "Okay, when you see those seven puffs over there that are kind of grayish, that's 37 millimeter. You can spot that because it's kind of medium and there are only seven of them out there. Now those guys are shooting at us. Okay, you see that kind of popcorn like stuff over there off the left wing? That's 23 millimeter. Stay away from that stuff, it's bad, it's really bad. Lots of tracers, and oh yeah, you see those three big expanding gray things? That's 57 millimeter. They normally shoot three, maybe four at a time." I vividly remember doing that. It didn't happen that fast but in the space of maybe ten minutes at the most we saw every [type of triple A], with exception of 100 millimeter. And we saw 85 too, which is a big black, huge expanding cloud. But it was no big deal. I mean they weren't even close to hitting us because I'm teaching the guy how to jink. If you got down low, below 4500 feet which we had to sometimes, then you'd get the stuff that was really bad and that's just ordinary machine guns. 50 caliber especially because it shoots so fast and it's so easy to aim. Anything that's easy to point and shoot that puts out a lot of lead is very, very dangerous to a slow moving airplane. So that was really bad if you got down into that stuff because normally you couldn't see tracers, so you didn't know you were getting shot at until it started hitting the airplane.

CN: Did you ever have any close calls?

DG: Oh yes, but I never took a hit. I can't believe it. I really don't believe it. But you know I never thought I was going to take a hit either. I was just thinking about this the other day. I was invincible. Bulletproof, as most young captains are I guess, or at least I hope they are. I hope they think they are. And I never took a hit. I don't know if there's any link there or not. But yes, I had several very, very close calls where the tracers were coming between the cockpit and the hub of my prop out there which was only about four feet away. We used to joke about field goals (laughs). The OV-10 has twin booms on the tail so it makes kind of a space. So if you took a round in between the open space we called it a field goal. (laughs) I took a few of those but it was really just kind of routine. I can remember one instance, but there were many, many, where I had gotten out there early and found the target. The gunners did not like you finding the stuff and it was pretty obvious when you found it. So they would really start opening up on you. I got some fighters out there and was describing the general target area. You'd have to get them into the general vicinity and then hold high, then they would get you in sight. "You see the road that runs north/south?" "Yes I do." "Let's call that north/south and let's call that road 25 meters wide." It didn't matter how wide it was you just needed a reference. And so on. This guy interrupts me and says, "NAIL you are really getting your butt shot off down there, there's 37!" I said, "I know it but I can't find the site so let's go on down and get this truck." And I

could just hear in the guy's voice that he's saying to himself good lord! What is going on with this guy. That happened several times because again the fighter guys, unless they took a hit or went up North - into North Vietnam where the SAM's were really bad - didn't see that much ground fire, because you can't see it. You're going too fast. Although I've seen some movies where it's taken from the cockpit of an F-4 on a bombing run and you see these red balls going by the canopy, well that's scary because they're tracers. But they just weren't used to seeing it. They would take off - and I did it on a later tour - go up and hit a tanker, wait on the tanker, finally get the call from HILLSBOROUGH - again the C-130 - okay go here and talk to FAC so and so. And you'd go there and find the FAC, he'd find the target, mark it for you, you'd go in and drop all your bombs or make maybe three or four passes and go home. Big deal. The FAC is out there for another three hours, working fighters. When we got back we had to report everything. Which fighter, what his call sign was, what his mission number was, what time he was on target, what time he was off target, what BDA (Battle Damage Assessment) he had, what did he hit. In fact it even got down to 100 percent within 200 meters, 50 percent within 50 meters, that sort of stuff. And you had to report all this garbage when you got back so the only way you could keep track of it was to take a grease pencil and write it on the canopy of the airplane. Then when you got back on the ground you'd get a piece of paper and transpose it all on the paper and then take it in to INTEL to

debrief. I can remember my canopy, literally the whole thing, both sides - and it's big in an OV-10 - full of stuff that I had to transpose. That was on a day when I'm sure things were really hot and heavy and I probably worked about 20 sets of fighters. So it was a very, very busy time when things were hopping. It could also be boring as ever. When they were bombing up North - real hot and heavy during LINEBACKER - all of the ordinance was going north. We were doing so well that very little was coming down the Trail. So we didn't have any targets. And the ones we had we couldn't get ordnance for anyway, which was really frustrating. You would see three or four trucks and not be able to hit them. So it varied, hours of boredom interspersed with moments of stark terror, that sort of thing.

CN: Did you call in different types of aircraft?

DG: It could be anybody, including Navy coming off carriers out in the Gulf. They weren't very good bombers because that wasn't normally their job but shoot, we would take what ever we could get. I know I shouldn't say that because one set of Navy guys really saved the bacon on a Prairie Fire thing, but most of them weren't very effective. Of course most Air Force F-4's weren't either.

CN: Why do you say that?

DG: They weren't experienced. A lot of guys were either "staffers" in the Pentagon who decided they needed a combat tour or were tanker or bomber pilots who got sent to F-4 training. They spent their year in an F-4 and then went back. Now some of them were

very, very good. Some of the guys had been in the F-4 for a while. I'll never forget one guy in the Mu Gia Pass, which was one of the four major passes. It was a pretty hot area. But at any rate I went out there one morning and there was a truck that had driven into a bomb crater and was stuck. And it was full of stuff - supplies - so it was a great target. This F-4 shows up and I thought oh god, there's another F-4. I didn't even have to mark it, I just said, "Okay, you see the truck in the bomb crater?" And the guy says, "Yeah, I got it." I said, "Okay, I'm just going to move off out of the way, take it from here boss." He says, "Weeell"..., and you could tell he was an old, old fighter pilot type guy, "Weeell, okay FAC I think I'll just drop singles on this one because I've got a lot of gas. So go find me another target." And I thought ha, ha, ha, right! He's never going to hit this thing. So he drops the first bomb and it's a dud, it doesn't go off. But it hits three feet from the left rear tire of this truck! And I'm thinking holy cow! I'd better go find another target for this guy because with the next one he's going to blow this thing to smithereens. Which he did. He put the next bomb right on top of the first bomb. He didn't do that on purpose, there's no way he meant to, but the end result was he blew up the bomb that was underneath the truck as well as the bomb that landed on it. And I didn't have another target to bomb, I had just gotten there! So I had to put him on what we called "tree parks" as opposed to truck parks, which was something we suspected to be a truck park but we didn't know

because we hadn't had time to really develop it as a target yet. So I put him on what we called the "tree park", although normally it turned out to just be a bunch of trees, there weren't any trucks anyway, which he was not very happy about but (laughs) at six o'clock in the morning that's all I had. So we worked with everybody, some were better than others. We loved to see A-7's because they had a computer system that was really good. A-6's oddly enough were pretty good - Navy guys. F-4's were kind of shaky. F-100's were normally pretty good. That was about most of what we worked over there. A-1's were great but you had to use them in low threat, very low threat situations - mainly SAR's (Search and Rescue missions). That's about all they worked.

CN: Did you work with ground troops at all?

DG: I was involved in Prairie Fire, which was a classified program at the time, but I've read enough about it now in unclassified text that I feel comfortable talking about it. What that was was a program to put "road watch" teams into Laos. It was normally two Americans and up to six to ten what we called "indigs" (indigenous personnel). They could be anybody from Thai mercenaries to South Vietnamese troops to Chinese mercenaries. I mean they were tough, you didn't mess with these guys, period. Either the Americans or the indigs. At NKP (Nakhon Phanom) we had a compound called "Heavy Hook" which was a little base on the base. It was heavily barbed wired, guarded and so on. Highly classified. An ops officer in this squadron briefed seven or eight of us that knew what went on here. You needed a special

pass to get in there. Prairie Fire Flight was what it was called and it was made up, supposedly, of only the best of the best of the FAC's in the outfit. It was kind of like being selected for the Thunderbirds, I guess. They'd watch you for a while. I later became the flight commander so I'm very familiar with how it worked. You would watch a guy and take him through training, because we didn't only fly Prairie Fire missions. When we weren't doing that we were flying with the squadron and most of us were IP's [instructor pilots]. We tended to spot the talent, the guys who were really good. So you'd watch them and if you thought they were competent, flying wise, you'd invite them over to the Heavy Hook. At the Heavy Hook were stationed about 15 U.S. Army Special Forces - two officers and about 13 enlisted. It was very close knit, not only amongst them but between the pilots that flew the missions and these guys, because they flew with us. They flew in the back seat with us. So you'd bring a prospective guy over for a little social type thing to see if he would fit in. I've never met guys like this in my life. Most of them were on their third to fourth tour, although I met one guy who was on his thirteenth tour and on every one he had been medivaced. So he had twelve Purple Hearts! They were the best friends you could have, if they liked you, or they could be your worst nightmare. So it was very important that the new pilot was accepted by the group because he literally had his life in their hands. So at any rate, I got selected for that. We had a pretty intensive training program because now you had to navigate down

to meters. What we would do is get a frag, except this one came from SOG (Special Operations Group) in MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, U.S.) and they would say go watch the Trail between this coordinate and this coordinate, we're looking for tanks, trucks, a Chinaman in a big hat, whatever. So we would plot that on a map and then we would have to go out and find a place close to put in a helicopter. Because that's the only way we are going to get these guys in there. We're talking the middle of Laos here which is pretty scary territory. Plus we have to figure a route - a way to get this "package", we called it which consisted of at least one OV-10, or maybe two, one or two helicopters - the big ones, the CH-53's that were also used for Jolly Greens for SAR's, and two to four A-1's. So you had to figure out a way to get them all there too, past all this heavy artillery, the triple A I keep talking about. So what we would do is study the map very carefully and then put one of these Special Forces guys in our back seat, (in fact we were crewed together with the guy normally so that you got to know each other) go out and find the spot they wanted. And you had to be kind of careful because you didn't want to give it away. I mean the bad guys aren't dumb. They know if you start showing interest in a place something is going to happen so you had to be kind of careful how you did it. But you would go out and find a spot and then find a place where you could put a helicopter down not too far away, because the jungle is hard to get through obviously. So we'd try to do it within two to three klicks, or

kilometers. Once we picked it, and an alternate, then we would make a run on it as the helicopter would run into it. The back seater had a Pentex camera with a 200 millimeter telephoto lens and he would shoot in an automatic wind. He would get up looking over the pilot's shoulder - we actually had a pretty good view out of the OV-10 - and he would start shooting as we came in on the approach. Then we would come off. Then we would go do that three or four other times on places that we had no intention of using just so the bad guys wouldn't set up and wait for us. Then you'd go back, develop the pictures over night and brief the team on what it looked like. Then the next morning, very early, brief the helicopter crews and everybody else, and show these slides of what the approach looked like. We would take off, weather permitting - that was always a problem over there - and fly on over. The OV-10 would get in the lead and the A-1's would be holding high above, armed to the teeth, ready to roll in if something happened to us. So in the OV-10 I'd fly in the lead and on the approach, hopefully everybody remembers because they just saw pictures of it, then I'd dip my wing right over the LZ, over the area we picked for the chopper to go in. Then I'd come off and hold high above ready to mark anything that I saw for the A-1's to hit. Then the helicopter would come in in a very, very minimum hover, probably not land, just stay about three feet above, the guys would jump out and off he would go. Then they would all go home and the OV-10 would remain, not right over the

area but in the general area, and stay up on the radio in case they got in trouble. We would keep somebody out there 24 hours a day until it was time to pull them out. When I first got into the program they would come out at their fragged time, which was normally anywhere from two days to a week. I think the longest that those guys were out was about nine days. And they're in there, in the thick of it. And their objective is not to get in a fight. Their objective is - well one time they were in there measuring the diameter of the bamboo something or other. (shrugs shoulders) I have no idea why we risked lives to do that but there must have been a reason. Or they'd set up by the Trail and count trucks as they'd come by or look for tanks or whatever. They did a lot of this. A lot of times we really didn't know what they did, it was so classified. They didn't tell us why, just put them in there. We could guess the part they didn't tell us. It was kind of common knowledge that they also were assassination qualified, if you will. So that we knew was going on. But as I was in the program longer and longer, and I was in it for probably about eight months, it got more and more difficult because the bad guys were winning in Laos and so after a while we were lucky if we had one in more than 24 hours, before they would strike, they'd get in a fire fight.

CN: What time frame are you talking here?

DG: This was from about December of 1970 until September of 1971. We also got pushed further and further south in Laos. We started out about mid way in the country, south of the Mu Gia Pass, and at the end of the program we were way down just north of the Bolovens Plateau which is in southern Laos. And that was getting worse. In fact, they pulled the Americans out of the teams so it was all indigs after a while. These guys were good, they were really good. But some of the things they did; one of them will stay with me forever. I still have the note at home. We put a team of four indigs in wearing North Vietnamese uniforms in Laos. I didn't know what the mission was, I still don't. I was the second guy out there after the insertion, somebody else did that insertion. I had in my back seat a South Vietnamese major, who spoke English and obviously Vietnamese. Because none of the team spoke English we had to have somebody to translate. It was the next day. They made it over night, because we found out later what happened. So I was out there at first light the next day and suddenly I hear all this Vietnamese over the frequency, not five minutes after I took off. The major is trying to tell me what they're saying, but his English is very bad and I just can't understand him. Finally he passes me a note, because most of them could write fairly well. I don't know that they could read it even though they could speak the language. He passed me this note that said something like Team hit, two killed, something like that. So I said, "Oh great!" We have what's called an HF radio (high frequency radio) which literally can

talk around the world if the conditions are right. So I got on that radio and called back to the Heavy Hook and said, "We've got a problem." I have forgotten exactly how it happened but the next item of interest was we're not talking to these guys at all. All we're getting is a mirror flash from the general vicinity of where these guys were. A mirror was in your survival gear. One was issued and that was the way you flagged airplanes. So there we are in the middle of Laos and we can't even talk to the guys now. They're wearing North Vietnamese uniforms. They don't speak English. And obviously they've lost their radio somehow and all they've got is a mirror. So I got on the radio and said, "I'd better come home and let's talk about this." (laughs) I said, "Meanwhile get the package ready for an extraction. Get the package ready, but I think we had better talk about this." So I go back and the package is ready, in fact the package is taking off because the Major of Special Forces has decided that we're going to go for it. I got on the radio to brief them, because time is kind of critical. These guys are getting their stuff blown away down there, probably. What finally happened was they left it up to the chopper pilot as to whether or not he wanted to go for this because they were on a pretty steep slope and the mirror flash came from the only clearing on this slope. In the Jolly Green the rotors are so big, and the doors are on the side and in the back, that you can't go nose on into this thing because with the slope, there's not enough room to get the guys on the chopper. So here we are in the middle of Laos, this

guy has to turn this big helicopter around, in a hover, and back into this clearing with the ramp down so that two guys wearing North Vietnamese uniforms, from behind the jungle, can get on the chopper. Pretty hairy. Pretty hairy. And I don't know to this day had I been that chopper pilot if I would have taken that risk, because he's not only risking himself, he's got seven guys on board. I probably would, I don't know. Anyway they had mini guns on those things, which were gatling guns, and they had one at each door and one on the back ramp, specially modified for this mission. So he's backing in there and he's got a guy on this mini gun ready to blow away anything. And sure as heck, out of the jungle come these two guys. In fact one of them is still carrying an AK-47. They almost killed him right off the bat. But they finally were able to signal to him to put the gun down now. Which he did. He finally figured out that he probably looked a little strange wearing an enemy uniform, carrying that weapon. What had happened was, these guys are taught from day one never to take off your pack, because its got all your stuff in it. They're also taught to tie a cord on their radio and put it in your pocket, so that if it comes out it's on a cord and you won't lose it. Well they had their radios in their packs while they were marching through the jungle, or whatever they were doing. They sat down to take a break and took their packs off. One guy had a radio in his hand when two American grenades, which I thought was interesting, came bounding into this clearing and killed two of them outright. The other two just jumped up and

ran. That's when we got the radio call, and then that guy lost his radio. The packs, which they had taken off were left back in the clearing with their two dead buddies, so now all they've got is a mirror. I don't know what ever happened to those guys, (laughs) if they made it through the war or not. But they were lucky as hell to make it through that day! You know you hear things about Americans and Vietnamese. How there was friction - we called them slopes and dinks, I didn't, but that was a common thing. But I tell you I have seen more Americans put it on the line, and that is an excellent example of someone taking an extreme risk - and the chain of command allowing them to do it - to pull two mercenaries out of a bad situation. It could have been a trap. The North Vietnamese were very clever, very good at setting up traps. And they knew after a while that the Americans would risk just about anything to save their fellow Americans especially. So they would play to that. And this was a classic, a darn good example of the compassion that existed over there, as well as all the brutality.

COLONEL DANIEL J. GIBSON INTERVIEW

Tape 2, Side 1

CN: Was it during the time you were involved with Prairie Fire that you were a Flight Commander?

DG: Yes, I became the Flight Commander in about March or April of 1971 when the Flight Commander PCS'd back to the States.

CN: What is the Flight Commander's job?

DG: You are responsible for all the air crew assigned to you. We had about six pilots assigned and I was responsible for their care and feeding, writing their effectiveness reports, keeping them out of trouble, keeping them motivated, and so on.

CN: They were all FAC's?

DG: Yes.

CN: Did you still go out on missions the same as before?

DG: Oh yes. In fact, the Flight Commander normally tries to take the toughest ones. You have to continue because you need to know what's going on. Normally the Flight Commander is the most experienced person so if a really tough one came up the Flight Commander would at least go out there on the first shot just to make sure everything went okay.

CN: You were also an Instructor Pilot. Who were your students?

DG: All the other guys in the squadron had been PCS'd in to us and we would run them through their initial check out program. Prairie Fire didn't have operations running continuously, we probably made about four insertions a month. Maybe one every

ten days, something like that. So in between times we would all go out and do the normal FAC role out over the Trail. During that time is when I would be an instructor and help check out the new guys.

CN: Were they only Americans?

DG: Yes, in our squadron they were always Americans.

CN: What was your impression of them?

DG: They were good. They were real young. Some better than others but generally they were real motivated, real dedicated to the mission and doing it. We never had any problems with anyone not wanting to fly missions or "chickening" out or whatever. We never had a problem like that. Never. And we had about 150 to 180 people in the squadron, because we were flying twenty-four hours a day, around the clock, covering all of Laos all the way from the Barrel Roll (in the northern part of Laos) down to Steel Tiger, which was all the rest.

CN: You were also a Functional Check Flight Pilot. What is that?

DG: That's a guy who, when they do maintenance on the airplane (moving to replace an engine or do a lot of work on the flight controls, or something like that) is needed to go out and make sure everything is working right before you put it back into the flow. So, a test pilot is not a good description but it's something like that. You take the airplane out and really put it through all its paces - shut each engine down separately, make sure the prop would feather. Part of it was to get it going as fast as it could in a dive and make sure you could pull out, things like that.

CN: Were you ever on the ground?

DG: No. But boy I was dumb (laughs), I volunteered to go with the guys on a Prairie Fire mission. The only way they could do it was really illegally #1, and #2 I would have been a real handicap to them because I wasn't trained. They didn't know how I would react, and neither did I. So it never happened. I wanted to, I don't know why looking back on it. (laughs) But no, I never had that experience.

CN: What was your social life like during this time?

DG: There wasn't much really. You would get done at the end of the day, whenever that was, it varied obviously from whenever you started. If you had an early brief you would probably finish up around one o'clock in the afternoon or so up to seven, eight or nine at night. But you would go back to the hootch, take a shower, change and probably go to the O [Officers'] Club for dinner. And we had a party hootch. We were NAIL FAC's so we called the party hootch the Nail Hole, where we had hired a Thai bartender. He kept everything stocked and collected the money. We probably paid him 50 bucks a month or something, I don't remember. And there were snacks in there, and a stereo. You would go there and socialize with the guys and then go to bed. Every six weeks we would go out on what was called CTO (Combat Time Off), and you were given three or four days of non-charged leave for it. You would catch the shuttle (which was a C-123 or C-130) down to Bangkok. There was a big American Officers' Club there which is a big hotel of four or five stories called the Chou Pia, which had real good food and milkshakes, you know all

the stuff from home. Iceberg lettuce, that was a biggie. You never got iceberg lettuce, but they had it. So you would get to relax in Bangkok. Shop - I bought a bunch of jewelry and stuff for either my mother or whatever girlfriend, because I wasn't married at the time. And that was essentially your social life. You got an R & R one week during your one year tour. I took mine in Australia and everything I had ever heard about Australia was true. It's a great place. I spent it in Sydney. And since I extended my tour for six months after my year was up I got a 30 day leave, which was not charged and an extension leave. It didn't matter because you could only accrue 60 days of leave anyway and everybody hit that pretty quickly. Then it just starts dropping off the books. So I came back to the States for that and then went back over.

CN: What is a NAIL FAC?

DG: That was just our call sign. There were COVEY FAC's out of, I can't remember now, Pleiku I believe and Da Nang perhaps. There were all kinds of different call signs assigned depending on where you were geographically. Ours happened to be NAIL. And we each had our own individual call signs so if someone came up on the radio you knew exactly who it was. I was NAIL 49 for the whole time of my tour.

CN: You voluntarily extended your tour. Why?

DG: Well I was having fun actually. I was young, not married, having a great time in Prairie Fire and being the Flight Commander. I had more responsibility than I ever had again until I got to be a Lt. Colonel or so. I was doing a good job and

there was no reason to not be there. So I extended. My parents weren't real pleased (laughs) as you might imagine, but they understood.

CN: Is there any one memory about Prairie Fire that stands out in your mind?

DG: I wasn't actually there when this happened, although I was in on the planning. We had lost a FAC in southern Laos, he was actually out of Pleiku. The intelligence, the information that was available to the Special Operations Group - the Special Forces - was really incredible. They had word that this guy had escaped and was loose in southern Laos. So quite a bit of effort was put in, RF4's (reconnaissance airplanes) and I think they might have even used some satellite imagery to look at the area where he was supposed to be. We had evasion and escape letters that were briefed to us - one for the whole year and one for the month. It could be an A and an F. The idea was if you got in a situation like this guy was supposedly in, stamp this letter out in elephant grass, or make it out of rocks, or whatever, and then someone would see it and know that there was somebody down there, a friendly. And sure enough, one of those letters showed up stamped out in the elephant grass near where this guy was supposed to be. So Prairie Fire got the job and mounted a pretty big effort. This was not your normal Prairie Fire mission. I think we put about 40 guys on the ground - Americans - to look for this kid. They found (I can't remember what piece of equipment it was) a canteen or something, but it was obviously American. That doesn't mean a whole lot because

the bad guys had all that stuff too. Then they really started taking big time fire. We lost a couple of guys and had to extract them. I never did find out if that guy in fact was ever repatriated in 1973 when all the POW's came home. So I just don't know. There was another one that will stay with me forever I guess. That was in the same area. We had inserted a team, and this was down in southern Laos again, and I had just checked out a new Prairie Fire FAC, Dan Thomas was his name. Nice kid from Nebraska, a young lieutenant. I was out on first light the next day after we had put these guys in and the weather was just horrible. I logged almost six hours of flying time and 5.2 of that was weather time. So we were in the clouds all the time. Every now and then you would pop out in the open and be able to see the ground. The team was down there and everything was relatively quite, no big deal, so I turned around and started home. Dan was coming out to replace me and he checked in with me. He had a Special Forces captain in his back seat, Don Carr, and they checked in and I told them what was going on which was nothing - the weather was bad, watch out for what we called "sucker holes." The triple A gunners would aim their guns at clear areas if the weather was bad thinking, and rightfully so, we might fly into that or through that and if you got in the clearing you might try to stay there for a minute or two. So I briefed him about that and I went home. He never came back. He just checked in when he was supposed to, because we would check in back home on our HF radios every hour or so, or half hour. He didn't make his check in one time and just

never came back. Obviously we launched a pretty massive search for him. We searched that whole area. We dedicated everything, everything we had to search that area and never found anything. No wreckage, no nothing. We got word again through the intelligence sources that two Americans were being taken North up the Trail, which was common with prisoners. In fact we even had the route, had it plotted on a map. And again we went out and looked but from the air with all the jungle and everything, it's so easy to hide that we just hoped by luck we would see him. Never did, and they were never repatriated. I have no idea what happened to them. So that's one that will stay with me. It's too bad. It's a real shame. I have no idea what happened to them.

CN: Do you believe there are still American prisoners there?

DG: It's unlikely, but I wouldn't be surprised. The Asian morality, mentality or whatever is just different. I'm not saying it's bad, necessarily, but it's different. And it would not surprise me at all if they're keeping some of our folks over there just to use them as laborers, because it's a rough, mean existence. I don't know, I would kind of doubt that the North Vietnamese government would knowingly have people still, but some of the things they do our Western mind just can't understand. But its been what, 25 years now, so just surviving that long in that kind of environment would be incredible. So I hope not. I really hope not, because if there are they have had a horrible life and are not in very good shape.

CN: How did you come to be involved with Search and Rescue?

DG: I came home from extension leave to a Prairie Fire mission thinking I was going to be the Flight Commander still and MACV and SOG in Vietnam had decided, with the Air Force, to take the OV-10's out of the Prairie Fire role and put O-2's, which is a push/pull Cessna which we also had primarily for night work, into that mission. In fact, I made a trip to Vietnam, to SOG, with the Major of Special Forces, Commander, Major Smith at the time, to argue against doing that. The main reason was we were convinced that the O-2 did not have the range to be effective in that mission. Also it didn't have the armament that the OV-10 had. It involved training a whole new set of people to do it and it just was not a good move. But we were unsuccessful in our attempt to convince them. So the mission transferred to the O-2 guys, and the OV-10 guys just kind of melted back into the squadron. About the same time a SAR [Search and Rescue] occurred where someone was shot down and I ended up out there right after it happened. And we were successful in getting the guy out. Then another one happened within a couple of days, and the same thing. So I went to the Ops Officer (and I had a Flight anyway, I kept all my guys, it was just called E Flight or D Flight or something, as opposed to the Prairie Fire Flight) and said, "Look, why don't we just be the experts, be the SAR guys because we've been doing this sort of thing." Essentially for the last three months or so of the program every time we put a team in they would start really taking fire and we'd have to get them out the same day. So essentially we had been running SAR's. He agreed it made sense, so we did that. We would

still fly our normal missions of course, but if someone got shot down we would drop everything else and go out and pick up the SAR role. Our mission essentially was to find the survivors, which was tough because of the terrain and the fact that there are bad guys looking for them, so they're hiding. Of course we talked to them on the radio and tried to get them to describe their position to us but that is very difficult to do. If you can imagine yourself in the middle of the jungle with somebody flying overhead, how do you tell them? And we certainly didn't want them to pop a smoke flare or anything at that point. So we would end up just kind of flying our way to them until finally we flew right over them and got them to tell us, "Your over me now." Which is also deceiving because of the sound attenuation, depending on where they were. Although sometimes they would come down in a clear area and one of the things you're taught at Survival School is as you come down in your chute you look around and try to get a picture of where you are so that you can tell someone in the air. So that happened occasionally too. Anyway once we located the survivor and got his coordinates as accurately as we possibly could, then we would assess the threat in the area and start taking out the threat. The thing we were mainly worried about of course was the triple A because we had to bring a chopper in to get this guy and they're a big fat, slow target. We would take out the triple A as best as we could, and keep the survivor safe. Sometimes that meant getting troops who were trying to get at him. And in general assessing the situation for safety for the SAR forces to actually come in

and get him. Of course they're on alert and they're planning it as we're passing positions to them, what guns we've taken out and all that. Once we figured it was safe enough they would come out - one or two Jolly Greens, which was a HH or CH-53 helicopter, a great big thing and two to four SANDY's. SANDY was the call sign of the rescue A-1's. They were all stationed right at NKP and we all socialized together and knew each other and everything. They would come in and if we have done our jobs, pick him up and take him home.

CN: Were you still working in Laos?

DG: Yes. Almost exclusively.

CN: And you were still flying the OV-10?

DG: Yes. By the way, one of the SAR's we worked was BAT-21. It's a big movie out now with Gene Hackman, and the survivor was the technical advisor. I won't go see it because I've seen clips and it bears no relation to the truth, to what really happened. It's really too bad because the truth is better than the movie. This occurred during the invasion of South Vietnam by the North in March of 1972. This guy was in an EB-66, he was an electronic warfare officer and their job was to jam SAM sites, surface to air missile sites. Evidently they were shot down by a SAM right up at the DMZ (the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam). He was the only survivor and the call sign of the airplane was BAT-21. So when you talk to a survivor on the ground you talk to him in terms of his crew position, BAT-21 Alpha would have been the pilot, Bravo would have been the co-pilot, Charlie, Delta, so on. Now an AC-130

which had 13 people you'd go all the way through Romeo or so. At any rate, he went down and we were requested to go over and help. We had a specialized OV-10 called a PAVE NAIL which had a laser designator in it and a night observation device and had a back seater who operated this equipment. The advantage of this particular piece of equipment was that you could laser designate a spot on the ground and get read-outs to the fourth decimal of coordinates. So now you're not trying to read a map and figure out where the guy is. You zot, what we called zot the position and get super technology, I mean it just prints out for you. So they went over to do that and one of them was shot down by a SAM. Now we've got two more guys on the ground in the immediate vicinity, and this is a bad, bad area, I mean we're talking the middle of the invasion. So we established contact with the back seater. His name is Mark Clark, he is the grandson of <u>the</u> Mark Clark, the famous World War II general. And he said the front seater is gone. We found out later that what had happened was the front seater ran into a thicket of bushes - and the back seater is looking at all this - and here come the NVA (North Vietnamese) and they're walking into this thicket firing as they go. So we figured the guy is history. But he was repatriated. They had captured him and took him up North and he spent a year and a half or something as a POW. So that turned out good. But now we have Mark Clark and this other guy, BAT-21, who is a 44 or so year old lieutenant colonel, about to retire, who volunteered to come to Vietnam. He hurt his wrist in the ejection. So he's kind of older and we're assuming he's

probably not in the greatest of shape, and he's injured to boot. And Mark, who is a young guy. They're both hiding, of course, because there are bad guys all around them. We worked the area but there are SAM's just everywhere. We worked it and worked it and I think the decision was made prematurely to go in and try to get them. So we did the standard thing with the A-1's and a Jolly Green. There's so much fire that there's no way, so he [the Jolly Green] trys to get out and flys over a hootch which just erupts with gun fire, with triple A. He gets shot down and we lose everybody on that one, about seven guys were killed. And one of the A-1's is shot up so bad that he made it to Da Nang to land but the airplane never flew again because it was so badly damaged. Meanwhile we had lost a Marine. Actually a Marine V-10 had been lost in the same area, and we don't know what the status of those guys were, we never heard from them on the radio. And that's just pretty grim. This is not fun. So we're talking to these guys on the radio. We would go out there but we would hold away from them because of the SAM threat. But we can still talk to them. They've been on the ground now for, at this point, probably five days. There is a river, the Cao Viet River, that runs through there and they would crawl out of their hiding places at night to the river to get water. That is really all that they are surviving on. Then back into their hiding. And there are bad guys all around. I was over at the command post at NKP one day and these two Marine lieutenant colonels walk in, one in fatigues, one guy's got a big cigar in his mouth, and they both look like fire plugs. I

mean they're about 5'5", about 200 pounds, solid as a rock. So this guy says, "I understand you've got a problem." I said, "Yes sir, I sure do." I'm a young captain. He says, "Okay, where are they?" And I knew exactly where they were because of the PAVE NAIL so I said, "One's here and one's here." He says, "Okay we'll go get them." And that was the extent of the briefing. And they left. Meanwhile I'm requesting ARC LIGHT strikes, which are B-52 strikes. And this is really unusual because those are fragged at the highest level. I think even the President approved some of those. All I would do is get out a big exploded map of the area and select choke points where all the troops and equipment that are coming through this area on their way to South Vietnam were, because they are coming right through where our survivors are. So I get a ruler and measure out four klicks, which is four kilometers, and just draw a line. Then I measured the heading, the magnetic heading, and said, "I want you to start at these coordinates heading such and such, three three zero, whatever, and end at these coordinates because the stick of bombs was about four klicks long. I submitted about 25 requests, 13 of them were approved. No one could believe it, especially me. But they were. There was a Marine left behind so he's in the middle of the invasion. He's hidden and he's up on a mountain. What he's doing is spotting fire for the ships off shore. A bunch of battleships, cruisers, whatever out there firing in to the invasion and he's their forward observer, telling them what to do, whether they're long, short whatever. He observes some of these ARC LIGHTS and gets the

word to us on their effectiveness. They were done mostly at night. An ARC LIGHT is a very frightening thing because these bombers are so high you don't know that it is coming until the bombs start exploding. Normally there would be three B-52's, each of which carried 108 bombs, so that's 324 bombs, 500 pounders, going off. And it's devastating. It's just incredible. At any rate on one strike that we put in on a choke point he gave us something like 1200 KBA (killed by air). We killed 1200 troops, 35 tanks, 50 trucks, so on and so on. It was just awesome. But back to the survivors, who were still there. On whatever night, Tuesday night say, you need to get word to these guys to E and E (escape and evade). Make their way to the river, get in the river and start floating down it and we would have somebody grab them. Well you can't say this in the clear because the bad guys are listening to the radios when we would talk to these guys. I don't remember what we told BAT-21 but Mark Clark, the other guy, lived in Idaho on the Snake River. So we passed the word to him - take the snake to Pocatello (I think it was). It meant get in the river and float downstream. And we said do you understand? He's been on the ground now, I don't know, six, seven, eight days and understandably a little confused and tired. But he comes right back and says, "I understand exactly." I said, "Fine, tonight." He said, "Okay." So the two Marines get a Navy Seal who is a Special Forces Navy guy, who's a Hawaiian who speaks Vietnamese. A lieutenant and a South Vietnamese Marine Special Forces type

guy. Put them in NVA uniforms and put them in an APC (armored personnel carrier) and drive them as far as they can towards this area. Then they get out of the APC and make their way through the lines to the river wherethey steal a Sampan, a canoe actually. We heard later that they talked their way out of two encounters with the NVA and shot their way out of one. At any rate they take the Sampan on up the river. And there are bad guys everywhere! They park it, tie it up to some bushes or something and get in along the bank of the river and wait. Well, [back to] our two intrepid aviators. Mark makes his way to the river and he's wearing his LPU's (Life Preserver Units) which are very small until you blow them up. So he inflates one of them to help him float. He's just kind of floating down the river bumping into boats filled with bad guys, I mean this is something. He's floating along and he's kind of near the bank trying to disguise himself and someone whispers Mark!, and then grabs him by the arm and pulls him in. Well, had Mark not had a strong heart it probably would have been all over right then as you might imagine. They throw him in the bottom of the boat, our two heroes, and start paddling upstream looking for this other guy. The other guy, due to how long he had been on the ground and such, dehydrated and so on, was confused. He's paddling upstream instead of floating downstream. They find him and I don't know how the hell they did it, but they did. Throw him in the bottom of the boat, paddle back to where they started, get out and start E'ing and E'ing (escaping and evading) their way back. Get into a fire fight on the way we

heard in which one of the Marine lieutenant colonels is pretty badly wounded I guess as they link up to get in the APC. But they got them out. They got two survivors out. It was the most, without a doubt, incredible SAR that certainly I ever participated in or that I ever heard of. It was just awesome, really incredible. And I heard that the Navy lieutenant, the SEAL got the Navy Cross, which is the second highest decoration you can earn. I thought he should have gotten the Medal of Honor. I just cannot imagine somebody *that* brave, to do that sort of thing. But he did. So that is the SAR that will stay with me forever. And I wish that they had depicted it accurately in the movie because I think it's a better story than what's in the movie.

CN: What was the total cost in lives?

DG: Just about nine guys.

CN: Do you agree that they should have gone ahead with it considering all the problems?

DG: Oh yes. That was the thing about SAR's. Anyone who was there or heard or reads about the war, when someone went down, although there was one example where that didn't happen that I was involved with, but pretty much everything stopped. And I mean everything, everything that was fragged. You threw the frag out the window and anything you needed as the FAC on the support of a SAR, you got it. We had at times 10 to 15 flights stacked up just waiting to come in and deliver stuff, and more on the way. So it gave you a good feeling as a pilot to know that that kind of effort would be expended for you. They would do anything they could to get you. And they did.

CN: You mentioned an exception?

DG: Yes. This was a Navy A-6 that was shot down in the Ban Karai Pass, actually just to the west of Ban Karai which is one of the four major passes in Laos. His right seater was killed on the ejection so he was the only guy on the ground. Again he was in a real, real bad area. The timing was not good because it was in the middle of LINEBACKER and all the ordnance was going North. And there were big time political reasons to do it, to put all the ordnance North. So we did have a little trouble getting ordnance on that one, which went on for three days I think, because of the area. But word quickly got to his ship that he was alive and we got word to his shipmates that we were having problems getting ordnance. So what they would do on the way to their fragged target is decide that for whatever reason they couldn't quite make it to their fragged objective and they'd check in on our frequency and (laughs) ask if we could us them. So if some general or anyone involved in Seventh Air Force at that time reads this he'll probably be very displeased, but that's what happened. I mean we certainly didn't turn them away, we used them. And we ended up getting him out. But a very major effort. In fact one of the guys in my squadron here, Bob Willis, was on that SAR in an OV-10 with me. We carried a centerline tank, and he had his blown off by a 23 millimeter. It was a bad area. We spent two and a half days just killing guns, 37 millimeter, 23 millimeter, ZPU's, to bring the choppers in. We ran out of smoke. We tried to put a smoke screen up, so I used Mark 82 bombs. I just had guys dropping strings of them because they create a lot of dust and stuff, obviously. So just

two strings about a mile apart and we brought the chopper down in between to get the survivor. But even at that one of the PJ's (Pararescue Men) on the helicopter took an AK-47 round through the knee. There was just one guy right there, one bad guy with a machine gun. They got him but not before he shot one of the rescuers. He turned out all right, he didn't lose his leg or anything, so that was good. But that's the only one where the ordnance wasn't readily available to us, and I can certainly understand why. They were trying to bring the North Vietnamese to their knees and back to the negotiating table.

CN: When you left Southeast Asia in 1972, what were your thoughts on where the conflict was heading?

DG: I was frustrated because there were so many political constraints on what we could hit and not [hit]. The U.S. was pulling out, drawing down. It was obvious to most of us, and to me through my Special Forces friends and contacts, that the South Vietnamese were not going to be able to handle it on their own. There was just no way. I wished they could but it was pretty obvious they weren't going to be able to. I hoped that we would just continue going North and force them to pull back because we could have done that. But we didn't. So I was pretty frustrated. I lost friends, some were POW's we hoped, and it just didn't seem like the sacrifice was accomplishing anything. I wanted to go back. I volunteered to go back, selfishly because I wanted to get into the front seat of the F-4. In fact on my extension leave I went down to the Military Personnel Center at Randolph and talked to the guy who made

assignments and I mean I camped out in his office until he agreed to put me in the front seat of the F-4, which he did. So when I came back from the States I knew that after I finished F-4 training I was going right back. Which I did.

CN: When was that?

DG: I went back April of 1973 after the F-4 training. It took six months. And due to class dates and so on I had two months of leave on either end of F-4 training, which was great. But I ended up going back in April.

CN: But you were already trained in the F-4. Why did it take six months?

DG: I was in the back seat and to go into the front seat they put me in the long course, what they called the B Course. The assumption was at that time that you needed all the training that anyone who had never been in the airplane did, which wasn't true, but I did it. It was fun because I knew the airplane. I did study hard and I did real well but I certainly didn't have to work as hard as the guys who had never been in the airplane.

CN: Where were you stationed when you went back?

DG: I was at Udorn, Thailand which is up north. It's about 70 miles west of NKP. Almost on the Mekong River but in northern Thailand. Extreme northern Thailand.

CN: Were you still a captain?

DG: Yes. I was assigned to the 4th Tac Fighter Squadron. At that time Laos was not being bombed at all, by agreement with the North Vietnamese, so our mission then was to go and support the effort in Cambodia, which was a long way from Udorn. We would

take off normally with 12 500-pound bombs and a gun (that was the [F-4] E model so we had an internal gun), refuel south of Ubon in Thailand and then proceed down into Cambodia, and meet up with a FAC. He would put us in on a target, we would come back, refuel again, and fly back to Udorn. The average mission was probably two and a half hours or so. Not very exciting. I didn't see one piece of antiaircraft fire, and after my previous experiences it was pretty boring to tell you the truth. They probably were shooting we just didn't see it, but there wasn't that much down there. Just a pretty low threat area. We didn't feel like we were accomplishing much. I don't think we were. The war ended on August 15th. Twelve o'clock noon exactly is when the last bomb of the air war hit. I was scrambled off of alert, in fact another guy that's in the squadron here, Jay Van Pelt, was in my flight as a lieutenant. I was a flight commander there too. We were pulling alert together and we were scrambled at about 10:45, on purpose just so we could get down there and drop the bombs. We rolled in and pickled our bombs off at 11:59:35 or something, about 25 seconds before the war ended. So we claim that we dropped the last bombs in the Vietnam War. I don't know if that's true or not, but it got us a few free beers at the Club.

CN: Was that in .....?

DG: Yes, that was in Cambodia.

CN: Did you ever experience any conflicts between your military priorities and your own personal standards?

DG: No, not really. Do you mean in terms of targets we were hitting?

CN: Well, say a mission came along that you really felt uneasy about or was morally wrong?

DG: No, I never did. But during most of my tour as a FAC I was mostly involved in either Prairie Fire or SAR's, both of which were getting the good guys out of bad guy country, so it was pretty easy for me. Also as a FAC even doing the other stuff, the normal FAC mission, it was pretty clear cut. I mean our mission was to stop the flow of supplies and we knew that if these things got to South Vietnam American troops were going to die, so that was fairly clear cut too. I can't really think of anything that was questionable. We did have one FAC who was new to the area and I rode in with him from his mission as he was in the same truck. I had just finished a mission too, and he had his head in his hands and kind of shaking his head and I said, "Gosh, what's wrong Jay?" He said, "Gosh, I just found a North Vietnamese regiment marching in the open." And I said, "No kidding! Great!" and he says, "I decimated them, they sent me every piece of ordnance there was, and I think I killed them all." And he was really bothered by it. And I said, "Gosh, I wouldn't be depressed, I think that's great." But he was pretty upset. A young lieutenant - he turned into a real tiger after that. But that's the only time I ever saw anybody have a moral dilemma about what he had just done, and I think it was

just the shock because he was right up close and saw probably some things that shocked him to the core. That's the only time I ever saw that.

CN: Having by this time experienced the war first hand, had your opinions changed since you first arrived in Southeast Asia?

DG: I didn't change any opinions about why we were there. If anything I was more convinced that we should be there particularly when I went home on extension leave, and again when I went home to train in the F-4 before going back. I had some friends at the time, civilian friends, who questioned the war. Even friends of my parents would come over for dinner, whatever, and I was pretty rabid about the war and the necessity for us to be there. I'm not sure intellectually if it made much sense, but emotionally I was certainly all for it. It made sense knowing what I had done. The only thing I think is the previous frustration I mentioned about the political restraints that were put on us. Don't hit this target or this area because there's a Chinese Cultural Mission here. And we would take ground fire from it every day. There were triple A guns in there shooting at us, and we couldn't hit it. Things like that. The times when the North was off limits to us. I mentioned the four passes. We could literally go out there at dusk and the trucks would be lined up at the border, a hundred of them, up into North Vietnam just waiting for dark to come through, and we couldn't hit them. That's not to say some guys didn't adjust

their coordinates a little bit on their after action report, but I have seen that many times, seen the trucks lined up knowing that our rules said we couldn't hit them.

CN: Why couldn't you hit them, because they were across the border?

DG: Because they were in North Vietnam still and we were in Laos. North Vietnam was off limits, totally. Nobody would go up there due to the peace negotiations, agreements that were made. So they'd just line up and wait for dark, in plain view. Things like that are really frustrating. So yeah, I was frustrated but I never questioned the reason we were there until after I had been back for years and saw what happened and how we essentially just deserted them. Which we have done particularly to the Laotians, which is a real shame. And the Cambodians. I mean what is happening in Cambodia is just (sighs) unbelievable, that we left them to that. I don't know that I should feel that we are responsible but I do anyway. The whole scenario over there is really frustrating. You figure we spent god knows how much money, 55,000 lives, 2400 MIA's, for what? We never followed through. I don't think we ever had a coherent policy to follow through on anyway. You know as I look back on it now I'm very frustrated, but at the time I was just doing my job and I felt we should be there.

CN: Can you describe the circumstances leading to your final departure from Southeast Asia?

DG: I just deros'd, and I don't even remember what that acronym stands for but it means the day you get to go home. It was normally one year after you got there, on my second tour. In

fact the war ended on August 15th and my deros was not until the following April 3rd. I had already spent 18 months over there prior to this tour so I tried to leave early. I tried to get them to let me leave early because the lieutenants I went through training with were having their DEROS's moved back to November, October, and they were leaving. I said, "Hey (laughs) what about me?" And the official word was you're too experienced. We need you here. Which did not go over too well, because I was ready to go home and get on with other things. But, I stayed until April 3rd, 1974 at which time I was able to come home. And I was one happy camper to come home.

CN: Did you ever notice a difference between the way the war was portrayed by the media as opposed to how you personally experienced it?

DG: Oh gosh yes. Very frustrating. Very frustrating. The media tries to sell papers or get people to watch the news or whatever. I can certainly understand that. But I always felt that if they're going to show the bad things which happened, the Calley type stuff and the picture of the Vietnamese girl who had napalm on her running down the road, you know that's awful and horrifying, but that's war. I mean that's what happens, unfortunately. If they're going to show that stuff then show the troops out there doing the civic action things, giving shots to the Vietnamese kids, trying to help the sanitation, how to grow rice better. I never saw any of that when I was home. I never heard about all the humanitarian things that were done for the people, the orphanages. I mean Americans are not brutal, by

nature. We are normally very compassionate and caring and humanitarian. There was an incredible amount of that over there, but it never got portrayed. All of us, by association, were portrayed as blood-thirsty, in-human, uncaring idiots, and that just wasn't true. There was so much dedication. Humanitarian sacrifices even happened that were never portrayed by the media. And that's a real shame because I can understand how a young high school or college person could be swayed by the media. They would accuse us as we got off the airplane back in the States of being baby killers, or whatever. It's just really too bad. I think the media in a way should share a lot of the responsibility for the chasm that developed in the American society. And it's too bad, but it happened.

CN: What is your opinion of the new group of books, TV shows and movies that have come out recently? Do you think they're going to help?

DG: I think so, yes. I really do. Of course the whole attitude has changed, not only about Vietnam but the military in general. It's now an honorable profession again in the eyes of the American people, which is great. And I think a lot of these shows and such that are on are helping a lot. China Beach - the first time I saw it I was a little disappointed (and I normally don't stay up that late), but now I'll stay up and watch it because I look at it as the M*A*S*H of Vietnam. I think shows like that help. Platoon, Full Metal Jacket, neither of which would I see for years until I finally did see them, but I think that's good. The War Memorial in Washington. I haven't been

able to do that yet but I will next trip. I think that helps, even as controversial as it is. A lot of us, both military and civilian, need a catharsis or something to just get it all out because the emotional scars and wounds are pretty deep. And I think things like that help.

CN: What in your mind are the lessons to be learned from America's involvement in Southeast Asia?

DG: Don't go into something without a clear cut objective, literally. A clear cut political objective and examine whether or not it's obtainable. Overall I don't think we had one, that was constant and the one's we had were occasionally not obtainable. You don't impose a democracy on those people. They've never had one, and they never will, or it's going to be an evolutionary process. Those are the big lessons from my perspective. We could have won the war "militarily." The North was on its knees several times during the war, 1968 not long after Tet and again in 1972 during LINEBACKER. But we always pulled back. But had we pursued it and won militarily I'm not sure, I doubt, that anything would be different than it is today. I think the whole region would still be communist today even had we won militarily unless we were committed to keeping 1ØØ thousand troops over there. And even then it would have just dragged on. So if we are going to use the military as an instrument of policy then we have got to have a policy and you've got to have an objective that's obtainable. And we didn't. I guess the big thing that should be learned is you can't throw money and men at something without a clearly defined

objective, and expect to obtain it. Which is what they did. I'm still astounded by the amount of money that was spent. When troops in the field are having hot steaks for lunch in the middle of the jungle, that's a small example. When you get a wounded guy in the middle of nowhere to surgery in 30 minutes or less, well it's obvious I guess. I think the high was 500,000 troops over there. An incredible amount of money, and the cost in human lives and emotions and cost to the fabric of the country and so on is immeasurable.

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY

The U.S. in Southeast Asia (1961-1973)

1961

January.
*Eisenhower warns Kennedy that Laos is a major crisis, the first domino in Southeast Asia.
*400 clandestine U.S. Special Forces personnel introduced to Laos.

March.
*Kennedy announces U.S. support for the sovereignty of Laos.

May.
*Geneva conference on Laos opens.

November.
*President Kennedy decides to increase military aid to South Vietnam without committing U.S. combat troops.

1962

February.
*The "Strategic Hamlet" program begins in South Vietnam.
*U.S. military strength in South Vietnam reaches 4,000.
*The U.S. MAAG is reorganized as the U.S. Military Assistance Command/Vietnam (MACV) under General Paul D. Harkins, USA.
*By midyear, U.S. advisors increased from 700 to 12,000.

July.
*An agreement on Laos is finally reached in Geneva and accords signed.

1963

January.
*Battle of Ap Bac; ARVN with U.S. advisers is defeated.

April.
*Inception of the "Open Arms" amnesty program, to rally VC support of the government.

May.
*Riots in Hue, South Vietnam, when government troops try to prevent the celebration of Buddha's birthday; country-wide Buddhist demonstrations continue into August.

June.
*The first of seven Buddhist monks to commit suicide by fire in protest against government repression dies in Saigon.

November.
*A military coup overthrows Diem; he and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu are murdered.
*General Duong Van Minh, leading the Revolutionary Military Committee, takes over leadership of South Vietnam.
*Anticipating that the U.S.'s military role will end

by 1965, the U.S. government announces that 1,000 of the 15,000 American advisers in South Vietnam will be withdrawn early in December.
*President Kennedy assassinated in Dallas; succeeded by Lyndon Johnson.

1964

January.
*A junta headed by General Nguyen Khanh deposes Duong Van Minh in South Vietnam, but allows Minh to remain as figurehead chief of state.

April.
*The U.S. Air Force deploys Detachment 6, 1st Air Commando Wing to Udorn, Thailand.

June.
*Low-level reconnaisance by U.S. "Yankee Team" jets commences in Laos.
*General William C. Westmoreland, USA, replaces General Harkins as Commander, USMACV.
*Dean Rusk, McNamara and others confer in Honolulu on increased aid to South Vietnam. Pentagons strategists refine plans for bombing North Vietnam.

July.
*General Maxwell D. Taylor is named as U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam.

August.
*North Vietnamese torpedo boats attack the destroyer USS Maddox.
*The destroyer USS C. Turner Joy reports a similar attack.
*U.S. Seventh Fleet carrier aircraft retaliate by attacking the bases used by the torpedo boats and other military targets in North Vietnam.
*The U.S. Congress adopts the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, endorsing whatever measures the President may consider necessary to repel attacks on U.S. forces and to prevent further aggression.

November.
*After two months of political turmoil, Tran Van Huong becomes South Vietnam's Premier.
*Lyndon Johnson defeats Barry Goldwater for the U.S. presidency.

December.
*Barrell Roll, a bombing program to complement Yankee Team reconnaissance missions in Laos begins.
*William Sullivan replaces Leonard Unger as American Ambassador to Laos.
*Terrorist bombing in Saigon kills two Americans and injures 52.
*Total U.S. strength in South Vietnam is 23,000.

1965

*Extensive operations into Laos under Project Prairie Fire (originally called Shining Brass) begin.

February. *Vietcong attack the U.S. base at Pleiku.
*U.S. Air Force and South Vietnamese planes retaliate by attacking military targets in North Vietnam.
*Vietcong terrorists bomb a billet at Qui Nhon, killing 23 American soldiers.

March. *Operation "Rolling Thunder," the sustained aerial bombing of North Vietnam begins.
*The first U.S. Marine infantry battalion arrives at Danang, South Vietnam.
*A terrorist bomb, detonated outside the American Embassy at Saigon kills two Americans and wounds, among others, Deputy Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson.

April. *First night bombing mission is flown over the Ho Chi Minh Trail - beginning Operation Steel Tiger.

June. *Nguyen Cao Ky emerges as head of the Saigon government.
*B-52 bombers from Guam make their first strikes of the war against targets in South Vietnam.
*The number of U.S. soldiers, Marines, sailors, and airmen in South Vietnam exceeds 50,000.

October. *U.S. troops launch the month-long Ia Drang campaign, the first conventional clash of the war.

November. *Anti-war demonstrations are widespread in the USA.

December. *B-52's strike the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the first time the bomber is used in Laos.
*President Johnson suspends bombing of North Vietnam on December 25th in an attempt to induce the Communists to negotiate.
*Total U.S. strength in South Vietnam reaches 200,000.

1966

January. *U.S. bombing of North Vietnam resumes.
*The Steve Canyon Program replaces non-pilot, Air Commando-enlisted Butterfly FAC's flying in the right seat of Air America planes in Laos, with pilot officers using the call sign Raven.

February. *President Johnson and South Vietnamese leaders issue a communique in Honolulu, emphasizing need for pacification in South Vietnam.

March. *Communists capture a U.S. Special Forces camp in the A Shau Valley, gaining control of this vital access route into South Vietnam.
*Secretary of Defense McNamara announces that U.S. forces in South Vietnam number 215,000, with another 20,000 en route.

April. *For the first time, B-52's bomb targets in North Vietnam.

June. *South Vietnamese troops seize Buddhist headquarters at Saigon, bringing to an end a wave of protest that had begun in March with agitation against military rule.

December. *The U.S. Air Force installs a tactical air navigation system on the mountain of Phou Pha Thi (The Rock) in Laos.
*Total U.S. strength in South Vietnam reaches 400,000.

1967

January. *American and South Vietnamese forces launch "Operation Cedar Falls," a sustained offensive north of Saigon against the Communist-controlled Iron Triangle.

May. *U.S. military strength in South Vietnam reaches 436,000.

August. *McNamara, testifying before a Senate subcommittee, asserts U.S. bombing of North Vietnam is ineffective.

September. *General Nguyen Van Thieu is elected President of South Vietnam; Nguyen Cao Ky is Vice-President.

December. *U.S. military strength in South Vietnam is 500,000.

1968

January. *The combat base at Khe Sanh sustains a 77-day siege and is successfully relieved.
*The Tet Offensive erupts throughout South Vietnam, lasting until late February.
*The North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao launch an attack on Phou Pha Thi in Laos.
*General Vang Pao launches a counterattack against Phou Pha Thi and briefly recaptures the air strip.

March. *The My Lai massacre takes place.
*President Johnson restricts the bombing of North Vietnam to the panhandle region; he announces that he will not seek re-election.

April. *President Johnson announces that General Creighton W. Abrams will take over from General Westmoreland as Commander, MACV, in June.

May. *President Johnson accepts a North Vietnamese offer to conduct preliminary peace discussions in Paris.
*A wave of attacks - less severe than those of the Tet Offensive - hits 109 cities, towns and bases in South Vietnam.

*Delegates from the U.S. and North Vietnam hold their first meeting in Paris.

June. *The Khe Sanh combat base is abandoned.

October. *President Johnson announces that the bombing of North Vietnam will end the following day, although reconnaissance flights will continue.

November. *President Richard M. Nixon elected; he promises a gradual troop withdrawal from Vietnam.

December. *Henry Kissinger chosen by Nixon as National Security Advisor.
*American military strength in South Vietnam is 540,000.

1969

January. *Formal truce negotiations begin in Paris.
March. *Secret bombing of Cambodia using B-52's begins.
*Ambassador Sullivan leaves Laos.
June. *President Nixon announces the planned withdrawal of 25,000 American combat troops while meeting with President Thieu at Midway Island.
July. *Ambassador G. McMurtrie Godley III arrives in Laos.
August. *Kissinger meets covertly in Paris with North Vietnamese negotiator Xuan Thuy.
*General Vang Pao launches "Operation About Face", routing the enemy.
September. *Ho Chi Minh dies in Hanoi.
October. *Souvanna Phouma requests increased American aid to meet heavier Communist pressure in Laos.
December. *President Nixon announces that 50,000 additional American troops will be withdrawn from South Vietnam.
*American military strength in Vietnam drops for the first time to 474,000.

1970

January. *NVA forces capture Phou Nok Kok, the northeast entry point to the Plain of Jars in Laos.
February. *Kissinger begins secret talks in Paris with Le Duc Tho.
*B-52's are used in Northern Laos for the first time.
March. *General Lon Nol ousts Prince Norodom Sihanouk and seizes power in Cambodia.
April. *MACV announces American participation in a South Vietnamese offensive into Cambodia.
May. *Large antiwar protests spread across the United States.
December. *Congress repeals the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.
*American military strength in South Vietnam is 335,800.

1971

February. *South Vietnamese forces begin incursions in Laos against the Ho Chi Minh Trail, supported by U.S. air support.
June. *The New York Times begins publishing Pentagon Papers.
October. *Nguyen Van Thieu is re-elected President of South Vietnam.
December. *In reaction to an NVA build-up, American aircraft

attack military targets in the southern part of the country - the most extensive air operations against the enemy since the November 1968 bombing halt.
*American troop strength in Vietnam is down to 140,000.

1972

January.
*President Nixon reveals that Kissinger has been negotiating secretly with the North Vietnamese.

March.
*North Vietnam launches offensive across the DMZ.

April.
*U.S. Air Force fighter-bombers begin reinforcing the units in Thailand.
*President Nixon authorizes bombing of area near Hanoi and Haiphong.
*Bat 21, an eleven day rescue mission takes place near the DMZ.

May.
*Quang Tri City falls to the NVA.
*President Nixon announces mining of Haiphong harbor and intensification of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam.

June.
*General Frederick C. Weyand, USA, replaces General Abrams as Commander, MACV.

August.
*Kissinger meets again with Le Duc Tho in Paris.
*Last U.S. ground combat troops leave South Vietnam; 43,500 airmen and support personnel remain.

October.
*Breakthrough at Paris meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. South Vietnamese President Thieu opposed to agreement.
*Peace talks begin between Laotian Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma and Prince Souphanouvong, chairman of the Pathet Lao.

November.
*Nixon re-elected, defeating Senator George McGovern.

December.
*Paris peace talks are suspended.
*President Nixon orders bombing of areas around Hanoi and Haiphong; raids continue for 11 days. Communists agree to resume diplomatic talks when bombing stops.

1973

January.
*President Nixon suspends U.S. military operations against North Vietnam.
*The Paris peace accord is signed and the Vietnam War is officially ended.
*Secretary of Defense Laird announces that the draft in the U.S. has ended.
*Lon Nol proposes a cease-fire in Cambodia.

February.
*Five hundred eighty-eight Americans being held by the North Vietnamese, Pathet Lao or Viet Cong are released during Operation Homecoming.

	*Souvanna Phouma and the Communists conclude a cease-fire in Laos, with an immediate end of U.S. bombing.
	*Bombing operations are renewed in Laos after Communist cease-fire violation.
March.	*Last American troops leave Vietnam, only a Defense Attache Office remains.
April.	*Last American prisoners of war released in Hanoi.
	*Prince Sihanouk, acting as spokesman for the Cambodian rebels, rejects Lon Nol's truce proposal.
	*Final combat sortie by U.S. Air Force B-52's in Laos takes place April 17th.
June.	*Congress bans aerial bombing in Cambodia after 15 Aug.
August.	*Final combat sortie by U.S. Air Force in Cambodia takes place August 15th.
November.	*Congress overrides Nixon's veto of law limiting the president's right to wage war.

GLOSSARY

AFB:	Air Force Base
AK-47:	Standard Soviet/Chinese built rifle used by North Vietnamese and Vietcong
ALO:	Air Liason Officer
ANG:	Air National Guard
AO:	Area of operations
APC:	Armored Personnel Carrier
ARVN:	South Vietnamese Regular Army
BDA:	Battle Damage Assessment
BOQ:	Bachelor Officers' Quarters
CA:	Combat assault
CIA:	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCPAC:	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Command
CO:	Commanding officer
CP:	Command post
CTO:	Combat time off
DEROS:	Date eligible to return from overseas
DOD:	Department of Defense
DMZ:	Demilitarized Zone; the dividing line between North and South Vietnam; established in 1954 by the Geneva Convention.
DRV:	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
E&E:	Escape and evade
FAC:	Forward Air Controller
FIST:	Fire Support Team
HF:	High Frequency
INDIG:	Indigenous Personnel
IP:	Instructor Pilot
KBA:	Killed by air
KIA:	Killed in action
LP:	Listening post; set up at night outside the perimeter away from the main body of troops.
LPU:	Life Preserver Unit
Lt:	Lieutenant
LZ:	Landing zone
M-16:	Standard American rifle used after 1966
M-60:	Standard American general purpose machine gun.
M-79:	Single-barrelled grenade launcher
MACV:	Military Assistance Command/Vietnam; the main American military command unit that had responsibility for and authority over all U.S. military activities in Vietnam.
MAP:	Military Assistance Program
MATA:	Military Assistance Training Advisors Course
MATT:	Mobile Advisory Training Team
MG:	Machine gun
MIA:	Missing in action
NCO:	Non-Commissioned Officer

GLOSSARY (CON'T)

NKP:	Nakhon Phanom, Thailand
NVA:	North Vietnamese Army
OP:	Observation post
OPS:	Operations
PCS:	Permanent Change of Station
PF:	Popular Forces
PJ:	Pararescueman
PRAIRIE FIRE:	Formerly Project Shining Brass. Consisted of air-supported ground reconaissance teams sent into enemy territory.
PROVN:	Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam
PT:	Physical training
PX:	Post exchange; military store
R&R:	Rest and Relaxation
RF:	Regional Forces
ROE:	Rules of Engagement
RTO:	Radiotelephone operator
RVN:	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF:	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SACSA:	Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities.
SAM:	Surface to air missile
SAR:	Search and Rescue
SEATO:	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SGCI:	Special Group, Counterinsurgency
SFG:	Special Forces Group
SOG:	Special Operations Group; within MACV
TAC:	Tactical Air Command
TASS:	Tactical Air Support Squadron
TDY:	Temporary duty
VC:	Vietcong
WIA:	Wounded in action
XO:	Executive officer; 2nd in command of a military unit.