Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone and I am continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Martin Montemore. Today is August 14, 2003. I’m in Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library interview room and Mr. Montemore is in Kansas City, Missouri and it is about 10:40 a.m. central standard time. Sir why don’t we pick up where we left off? We had been discussing some specific incidences in your flying and I would like you to describe what your typical day was like, if you could.

Martin Montemore: Are we talking about in country?

RV: Yes sir, in country.

MM: Typical day, we flew almost everyday. Occasionally, there would be a day off in the sense that if you flew you had to have at least 12 hours from one flight to the next flight but they would schedule in the 28 days that you were there at a particular base, flying out of that base. They would schedule probably at least a day or two or three off in the month but a typical day you had a mission. Typically if it was to be either early morning or a late night flight. If it was an early morning flight you would probably be up by 4:30 or 5:00 and then briefing at 5:00 or 5:30 and then take off just before daylight and get to your first landing field by daylight. None of the landing strips, of course, had any lights nor did they have any control tower. Most of them didn’t have any contact whatsoever with the airplane and so you were just sort of on your own. You had to be, what is called daylight VFR, Visual Flying Rules applied and there was no air traffic
control procedures to follow because there was really no radar that was set up to control the military traffic. Typical day would be you get up in the morning at 4:30 or 5:00. You would get over there and probably take off just before daylight, get to your first landing zone probably by daylight depending on time of year that would be around 6:00 usually. Then, you flew until probably 2:30 or 3:00 and typically would have seven or eight different missions, landings that you would find out about when you first went over to the operations area to get your frag, to get your schedule for the day of which fields you would be going to and what you would be carrying into or out of those strips. Then somewhere along the line you would also have a trip back to a normal base where you would refuel and have any maintenance problems looked at or whatever. Then you would go back and finish your frag till probably around 3:00 or so, and you would be done. And the crew would then be free to go back to the BOQ, or the housing facilities, and typically people would get together and try to either cook out or go to a bar, Officers club. Each housing area would have its own facilities in terms of a bar or a meeting place, and typically that would go till you know 9 or 10 o’clock at night or whatever, and everybody would go get a few hours of sleep and we would do the same thing the next day.

RV: What would say was the most interesting cargo that you ever carried?

MM: Well, I think one of the more interesting missions I had, it wasn’t so much because it was a cargo but it was what they call class A. But the reason that it sticks out in my mind was because I don’t know if I relayed this to you but one time I went into Phnom Penh Cambodia, when I had just seen on television the president saying that nobody would be going more than 23 miles beyond the border of Vietnam because Cambodia was not a part of the war. And I thought it was kind of funny, not funny, but really strange that I would be going way way beyond that; hundreds of miles into Phnom Penh that, that after seeing the president saying that no Americans would be beyond the 23 miles limit and I was one of them. But as far as the cargo is concerned, it is not really cargo. The one that I paid most attention to is when we had bodies, body bags. I guess aside from just plain cargo meaning it could be mail, it could be food, could be bombs, could be ammunition, or whatever. But sometimes you would carry the sentry dogs. They would be of course, in cages and all that. But it was more of an interesting mission
because then you would have somebody to talk to about the dogs, and how they did, and  
what they were guarding, and why and how they trained them, and that sort of thing. It  
just really, mostly the pilots didn’t know what they were carrying typically. There were  
many times the airplanes were loaded when the pilots weren’t there. There were many  
times that the planes were unloaded and reloaded with other stuff while the pilot is sitting  
in the pilot seat with the engines running. The pilots do not get really involved in what  
they were carrying so much, it was the loadmaster and the ground people. They were  
trusted and had the judgment and whatever to do what needed to be done in terms of  
loading the equipment or whatever the cargo happened to be and so there were many  
times when we didn’t even know what we carried.

RV: I imagine there was a high amount of trust for or with the loadmaster, making  
sure everything was balanced, the weight was proper, everything like that.

MM: Right, absolutely, it had to be because you are running those airplanes  
basically at the limit all the time because of the short field take off and landing  
capabilities. But if you don’t have that loaded correctly, your margin for error is really  
small. The loadmaster has got to be very very efficient in doing their job. I guess the  
other thing that happened, part way when I was through my tour, at least that is when I  
heard about it, was there was a couple of airplanes that exploded instead of imploded.  
Normally if an airplane gets shot down, it will show signs of something entering through  
the skin of the airplane. We lost a couple of C-130’s [from] that explosion, outside in or  
from the inside out. So the theory was, although nobody knew because everybody died,  
but the theory was that when you carried a lot of passengers that were the indigenous, I  
mean they were the local Vietnamese citizens, that it got to a big deal to check every  
place that you could when they left because the theory was that they would leave behind  
a grenade or something that would, after they left. They would find it behind a panel.  
Usually they would stick it in a cup or at least that is the theory anyways. I don’t know if  
they found any of these or not, but then after the airplane would fly for a certain period of  
time, a jolt or a break or whatever would happen and then that would then fall over and  
the hand grenade would become loose and free to arm itself and then explode.

RV: Did that ever happen on your airplane?
MM: No, not on my airplane, and we never found any evidence of anything on
the airplanes that we took off; there were other airplanes that did.

RV: That’s what I meant.

MM: And there were other airplanes that did or at least that is what I heard.

RV: Always vigilant, you had to be.

MM: Right, because of a couple of incidences we became less causal about
checking the airplane before taking off for the next mission.

RV: Let’s talk about the enemy, how would you describe the North Vietnamese
and the Viet Cong and the people of the United States were fighting against? What are
your general impressions?

MM: Well very distant as a pilot, we really don’t get involved in any hand-to-
hand or face-to-face combat. You know, whatever we saw, it was only something that
was thrown at us: either a grenade, missile, or a rocket, or whatever, or a small arms fire
is mostly what it was. I never felt any personal contact, although I heard a lot of stories
about people that were on the bases that provided services to the military such as barbers,
janitors, or cooks, or maintenance people, or whatever. There were a lot of South
Vietnamese that had access to the bases. I mean they are huge bases there, just big like
cities, thousands maybe tens of thousands of people on them. And you always heard these
stories, but I never felt uncomfortable at all around any of the locals. I am sure [there]
must have been some of them that were not happy with us, and would have preferred to
have us not be there. Or to be more demonstrative than that but if it ever happened, it
didn’t happen to me. I mean I didn’t feel that way. And there were a lot of times in the
middle of the night they would start a lot of the tracers, and a lot of firing around the
perimeter of the base would happen, and the rumors were a lot of times were, ‘Well they
shot four people and two of them were barbers at the base.’ You heard those stories,
whether that is a fact or not, I don’t know. I know that I also heard stories that people
would be, what they call clear their weapon at late night. And so when somebody would
see tracers coming from another direction, when somebody is just clearing their weapon,
taking the last few bullets out by shooting them. Well they think they are shooting at
them. So they shoot back and of course they think someone is shooting at them so then
now you got what they call friendly fire. People are shooting at each other and there is
nobody there. I don’t know, I heard that.

RV: Did you fly with any weaponry; did you carry a side arm or anything like that
in the cockpit?

MM: Well we carried just a 38. The airplane itself did not have weaponry,
although there are C-130’s that do carry huge amounts of armament, but ours did not.
We each carried a survival vest with a 38. Most people were more afraid of losing or
having a weapon stolen, than figuring they were ever going to use it. Because the way we
thought about it is if we ever got shot down, well we are never going, probably not going
to make it out anyway. And if you got a 38 and you’re surround by people, I mean, you
wouldn’t fire it anyway. It’s silly unless you’re going to fire it at yourself. But it is not
something that everybody dwelled on, it was just kind of a passing joke that, ‘Hey they
give us this gun again, who’s going to watch the guns this day [today]’ instead of
thinking, ‘Well I need this to get through the day,’ in case they get shot down, I mean it
really wasn’t. It really wouldn’t help, we just didn’t think about it much.

RV: Were you issued the weapons, or did you have them at all times?

MM: We were issued them when we left. I was stationed Ching Chuan Kang in
Taiwan. And so they would give us each a survival vest and a gun, which we signed out
individually from our personal equipment shop in Taiwan. And then when we came back
28 days later, then we would turn in that survival vest and the weapon by serial number,
back when we got to CCK. So we were not issued weapons in Vietnam, we already had
them when we went there. But basically nobody paid much attention to it.

RV: What is your impression of the Vietnamese civilians? [What] was your
impression?

MM: I thought that they were friendly, helpful, there’s not a lot of interaction.
There’s not, I mean I am sure that they were mostly uneducated and certainly not
bilingual. None of us knew anything. So it was very difficult to communicate directly,
except by sign language. You know, say pointing at something, or making a gesture that
means you’re going to sleep now. And so you know, try to hurry or try to leave or
whatever it is. Sometimes we would land at right after day break, and we flew flights all
night. Then if you go have breakfast, and maybe a few beers or something, and then
about noon, and you got another mission at 10 o’clock, well you got to go to bed sometime. You got to get some sleep sometime, so sometimes our schedules were such that we didn’t go to bed till 1 or 2 o’clock in the afternoon. We would be getting up at 6, 7, or 8 o’clock that night to fly another night mission and once you got into that schedule, you would stay in that schedule for a few days. And then you would get a day or so off, and then you could switch back to the day but you couldn’t go from night to day because you didn’t have enough time in between to get your mandatory crew rest. I think it was 12 hours, it may have been 10. But anyway there was a certain amount of time that you couldn’t fly from landing to take off. There was not a lot of personal communication, but I felt safe and I never had any personal animosity, nor did I have much personal really communication, except to maybe joke with them; or sometimes I would try to give them a coke or a candy bar or something you know if I had one. So the lack of a mutual language made it difficult for us to be able to, you know, have much interaction, but I never had any fear.

RV: How much contact did you have with home?

MM: None. I probably got a letter from somebody once or twice a week, but I very seldom wrote home.

RV: Why was that?

MM: Oh, I guess I was just too busy. I never thought about it. It never bothered me. Our family is real close and real large, and I don’t know, pretty soon it’s Monday and then it’s Friday. I mean you don’t care what day it is, or everyday is the same, but it is just five days later so, you just didn’t write something. Yes, I thought about that since than a lot as to what my Mother and Father were going through when they saw every day on television, all the fighting and airplanes and everybody doing it. I mean if my son were over there right now, I mean, in wherever I would want a communication every day. And now you can, by e-mail or by voice mail or somehow or another, there is a way to communicate. But back then there was no communication, except for what they called MARs. It’s some sort of a radio telephone thing that you had to, I don’t know, you had to sign up, you had to, I don’t know, anyway I never did that so

RV: Do you regret that today?
MM: I regret not communicating more because now I know what my parents must have been going through. I was unmarried so I didn’t have any responsibilities in that respect; no family, but very close, strong, extended minority Mexican family, Catholic family that did everything together, and all that. So I just didn’t feel like it was any big deal, I mean it is like going to school or something. Now that I think back on it, I should of have communicated more because I would think that they would probably been worried about that. But I didn’t realize it until I became a parent. So that would have been something that would have been pretty much lacking, a big lacking, on my part.

RV: Let me take a break for a moment and change out this disk.

MM: Sure.

RV: Can you tell me sir, let me ask about entertainment, you talked about what you would do when you came home from the flight line when you finished your missions and you would come back and you had some, everybody had a bar set up and you had clubs, what would you all do for entertainment?

MM: Well it was mainly the entertainment was ourselves. Basically the crews would stick together after the missions and you would go into a country with a crew, and you would stay with that same crew that whole time. And you would come back out with that crew. And so I would say 80 to 90 percent of our interaction with other people was our own crew. Obviously there were other crews there too, but you may or may not know some of them, and they may have different schedules and so you don’t see them and that sort of thing. But then there was occasionally they would have entertainment at some of the bigger bases. They would have Korean, or Vietnamese, or Philippians, or Japanese band that would come in and play for a couple of hours or something at one of the Officers clubs or one of the whatever clubs. And that was always a big treat. Then there was the USO thing with Bob Hope that came over, and that was a big deal too so…

RV: Did you get to see that?

MM: You know I missed it, I was there but it was an off time for me, and our crew was flying and we missed it, but yes I was there. I was around it. I just didn’t get to see it firsthand but I talked to a lot of people that were very appreciative that he did that, and I think he came more than once. I believe that he was a great, I don’t know, a great morale booster. To have somebody like that take their time and trouble to come over and
do that. So the entertainment was basically self-made. There was a lot of card playing, a
lot of craps playing. There was a lot of gamblers, gambling, although gambling doesn’t
mean the same thing now as it did then, because back there it was only play money. I
mean nobody had any, I mean it didn’t have any. There was nothing to spend money on,
so it didn’t make any difference. It was not like you were losing 100 dollars, it was just
monopoly money, or whatever you want to call it, so nobody put much emphasis on
money, but a lot of people did gamble just for fun.

RV: What about any alcohol or drug use that you witnessed?

MM: I witnessed a lot of alcohol. I mean everybody drank. Everybody drank to
excess. I am sure there was a lot of drugs there, I am positive there was. But the crew, I
was there for two years…the crews that I was on, if there was anybody that was doing
any drugs, any drugs whether it be Marijuana, or anything stronger than that, I didn’t
know about it. It’s not because I am dumb, I just don’t think… I am sure it was there, and
I am sure it was going on I guess, but it wasn’t so much with the crews. I don’t know
why. I guess maybe was because we had all the alcohol we wanted, or I don’t know. I
don’t know what the reason is, but if the guys that were in the bush, and I’ve talked to a
lot of guys that were in the Army that were in the bush. There is no doubt there was a lot
of marijuana developing [smoking] you know a lot of smoking and all that I guess, but it
never got to the crews. And I guess part of that might have been because where we stayed
was never in the little places. Where we stayed was Tan Son Nhut or, Cam Ranh Bay or
Da Nang and we were very well protected, and insulated and isolated. So we didn’t have
the contact to go out and buy something from somebody, or whatever. It’s just we were
always together. So alcohol use was huge, I mean you couldn’t drink a dollar. I mean
drinks were a dime and doubles were happy hour for a dime. So if you put a dollar on the
bar, I mean that would be ten double drinks; and I mean you can’t even drink that much.
So it’s free basically, and so they encouraged, I think they encouraged alcohol drinking
and I think they encouraged smoking. They gave you cigarettes with your meals. You
open up what you call your MRE, and there would be your meal, and your napkin, and
plastic fork, and a pack of cigarettes.

RV: Did you smoke over there?
MM: Yes I did, well almost everybody smoked or at least, seemed like to me. And they didn’t have any rules against smoking. I mean you could smoke in the airplane while you are flying. Course now you can’t at all.

RV: What about music? What role did music play over there for you and what songs come back to your mind?

MM: Well, those same ones that everybody probably listed you know. ‘We got to get out of this place’, and ‘Yellow River’ was the way they would sing that. The oriental bands, they couldn’t pronounce it so they would say ‘Yerrow Rivor’ so it got to be a joke the way. They couldn’t pronounce their L’s, or let’s say they don’t pronounce the same way we do. They use R’s instead of L’s. The songs that were popular before you went over there were the tendency the ones to be popular with you while you were there, because you didn’t hear the new ones. They had Armed Forces radio, and I think they had a partial Armed Forces TV. But you were never around one hardly much. So I think, yes they did have that Armed Forces radio because we could pick that up in the airplane. So I guess they had part of that in, whatever, the Good Morning Vietnam, I think part of that was fairly realistic.

RV: Where you able to keep up with news from back in the United States?

MM: No.

RV: Did you have a desire to?

MM: No, not really, not because I was trying to shut if off or anything. It’s just you know if you’re busy, and I guess we did get once a week, maybe twice a week. Once a week we got what’s called Stars and Stripes, which was a, I think it was once or twice a week. Anyway it was about all we needed. It would say some of the stuff that is going on back in the States. Yes whatever is going on, the presidential election or whatever, but certainly nothing of [up to] the minute. And something could happen, and it would be three or four days later before you found out about it just because, I was going to say, not because you are avoiding it. It’s just you know you’re too busy flying, and sleeping, and drinking, and getting ready to do the same thing the next day to really be too concerned about it.

RR: Did you have any R&R’s?
MM: Well we had a lot of trips that ended up being kind of R&R’s. We ended up with a couple of days off in Hong Kong, Bangkok, or Tokyo, or wherever. So you would get a couple of days off, but the crews did not get R&R, and kind of a technical reason, because we were not stationed inside of Vietnam. We were stationed outside of Vietnam. When we would go to Vietnam for 28 days, come back out for two or three days, go back in for 28 days. Well, the R&R was set up for people that were stationed in country, so the Army mostly. They would go for six months and then they would get, I think it was a week, yes a week R&R, and they would come back for six months. Well we didn’t have that stress or strain of being there for six months in a row. We would go for 28 days and then we would come back out for two or three days. And so anyway, they didn’t extend that R&R to people that were not stationed inside of Vietnam, what they call PCS.

RV: I was wondering if they did actually give you an official time off, but you were able to take it when you could get it, I guess?

MM: Right, right and they would put a little fluff in there, or if the airplane would break or it needs some maintenance or something, then the next thing you know you get an extra day off. There wasn’t a lot of thought about that, I mean about having days off or not having days off, I mean it didn’t really matter. You flew, and you were expected to fly everyday. And then once in a while you looked down and you wouldn’t be on their schedule. And so that just meant you slept later, drank more, and had fun. And a lot of times you would go to the gym and work out, or play basketball, or handball, or go to the beach, all those things. But it never was highly counted on as, ‘Oh boy this is four days and I can’t wait to get the next day off.’ I mean it was just whatever happened, it happened. And nobody, really it was ok. It was fine.

RV: You mentioned that you came from a Catholic family, is that correct?

MM: Right.

RV: Were your religious beliefs affected by your service in Vietnam or in the area in Southeast Asia?

MM: No, I don’t think so. You know I don’t remember exactly but it seems to me that I stayed with the Catholic Church even through that era, although you never knew what day it was and didn’t count or whatever. And they told us when we were in combat zone you don’t have to go to Mass every Sunday and that sort of thing, but I think it was
probably afterwards I kind of drifted away. In the last ten years I’ve come all the way back. So it’s sort of like, no, I don’t think it affected me. I mean I don’t think religion affected me, nor did it, the place, the war, affect my religion. I think it just was kind of made it stronger in a lot of respects. That you felt like everything was going to be ok, you know your religion is there to back you up just like your family is, just like all the things that you use to anchor yourself. That’s a good foundation so that was a good foundation for me.

RV: Did you ever witness any racial issues?

MM: Oh yes, nothing that I can, I mean nobody shot anybody, but I mean not in front of me; but there was a fairly strong binding of the African American, the black military with other black military. And white not as strongly binded with other whites, and not very much bonding between the two. There was like there were two separate bodies doing the same thing, but not really, I mean together, but not really personally, closely, aligned. So yeah there was a lot of jokes, and stuff, all kinds of things going back and forth, but nothing that I ever saw like eight black guys go up and beat one white guy up, or eight white guys go beat up one black guy, or shoot each other or whatever, but it certainly was a factor. I mean back then they all had that, by ‘they’ I mean the blacks had a pretty close relationship with each other and they had a lot of signs, and signals and hand shakes and movements and whatever. The whites weren’t really let in on. So that was kind of my first exposure to large groups not interacting closely.

RV: Did it affect the missions or the service that you had to perform everyday?

MM: No, no it didn’t. I never, no, I never seen saw it. So they may have and I didn’t know about it. If somebody was, you know, not, didn’t show up or was trying to do something bad and I didn’t know about it or whatever, but it never affected. I never said, ‘Well we can’t fly this mission, we got a black guy on our crew,’ or I never had anybody come up to me and say, ‘I am not going to salute you Lieutenant because you’re white’ or whatever.

RV: What would you say was the most humorous event that you remember from your time?

MM: Wow, well I mean there were humorous events everyday. I guess because everybody was pretty footloose and fancy free and having a pretty good time, and
physically in good shape and mentally and emotionally in good shape, and, but I can’t
remember one humorous event or incidents. And not because there wasn’t any, it’s just
because there are probably so many. I mean just every day was fine and I bet you if I
were to sit down and thought about it, that somebody fell off a barstool, or did something
funny like that. I think one of the funniest things or woke my eyes up a little bit, I don’t
know if I said that one. I first went in country, I was at the Officers Club and this colonel
and this lieutenant got drunk and they were going to see who was going, I think I told you
about this, and were going to see who could swim out the furthest. They did that and
they almost got killed, and then they almost drowned. And then neither one of them
wanted to give up to each other. I guess that really wasn’t a humorous thing but it really
struck me as to why they would expose themselves to that kind of danger just to prove
that they’re, I guess, a man or whatever, which I think is fine. I mean I just think that is
fine to do. But it seems like there ought to be a different way to do that other than you
know really, that’s for keeps. And you’re out there in the bay, I mean there are sharks and
people with guns, and you’re drunk anyway, and then now you’re swimming. There is no
lights and there is nobody to pick you up if you get into trouble, nobody. I mean it’s just I
just thought ‘wow these guys are something else.’ But I didn’t consider it necessarily
humorous, although I thought it was kind of humorous that nobody else thought it was a
big deal that they did this. And it was like, ‘Well somebody else did it last night, and
somebody else will do it tomorrow, and it’s my turn tonight.’

RV: Is there a particular brave action that comes to mind that you remember?
MM: No. I mean yes, there were a lot of them I mean. But I think it was all
encompassing with doing the job. I mean what they engrained upon you is that you had a
mission to perform and that was above each and every individual. And the goal was more
important than the means of getting there. So whatever you had to do, you had to
accomplish the mission. So I don’t know if it was bravery as much as it was that people
were engrained to do it. And a lot of people got shot at, and I mean we got shot at,
airplanes got shot at, people got, you know. There are lots of things that occurred; that the
exposure was there and some people didn’t make it. Some people did get hit, but the
percentage of odds of you even getting shot at were fairly slim, but even if they got shot
at it was slim again that you would get hit. And if you got hit it was slim again that it
would knock you down. So if you consider to have an airplane with full Class A, coming
down to a small arms fire, landing in the middle of the jungle without any escort as being
brave or whatever, then we did that a lot. But it was not because we sat back there and
thought, ‘well let’s be brave today.’ That was a mission so you didn’t think ‘well should I
or shouldn’t I.’ You just thought ‘what’s the best way for me to do that, what’s going to
be the most effective or efficient to make sure that I get whatever I got in my airplane
down there on the ground and delivered.’ And so I don’t think anybody, I mean that I
personally know of, felt like they were doing anything brave except that they were
accomplishing what they were told to do.

RV: When did you actually leave CCK?

MM: I was there from I think I want to say January of ’69 to December of ’70,
well I was there 23 months, almost two years.

RV: And then you went to Woodbridge, England, is that correct?

MM: Right yes, with some training in between.

RV: I was going to say you got a chance to go back to the United States and spend
some time off with your family and everything like that. When you did leave, what were
your feelings about leaving the Theatre and leaving that war behind you?

MM: I was disappointed actually; I think I would have liked to have stayed more.

RV: Really, why?

MM: Well it was just because, I just, it was easy times, it was fun times. I didn’t
have any responsibilities, I didn’t have any kids, I wasn’t married; had my own airplane,
fly all over the world, and they were paying me to do it. And you know, there were
times when it was a little bit, whatever, stressful physically or whatever, but basically it
was just a lot of fun for a pilot to have those kinds of missions, and go to those kinds of
places. So a lot of people extended. I extended and I stayed an extra, whatever, months
and then I kind of tried to do it again, but then they put out the word ‘well we’re not
going to extend anybody, more people are staying too long.’ That would be the only
disappointment I guess. I didn’t have any ill feelings that we lost the war, or that I wished
I would have done a better job, or I mean I didn’t have any, they told me to leave so
that’s what I did.

RV: What kind of reception did you receive back home in the United States?
MM: Bad.

RV: Can you talk about that?

MM: Well yes, it’s the typical thing, I mean I’ve heard it lately. I didn’t hear it a while back, but yes you didn’t, after a couple of three times of fighting your way out of the bars back here because you were a pilot in Vietnam, you certainly learned not to talk about that anymore. In fact you would say, ‘I was at school or I was in Europe’ or whatever. You would never tell anybody, ‘Oh well yes I was a pilot, I just got back from Vietnam,’ because that would be a certain argument; I mean certainly arguments, if not more.

RV: Now was this with everybody in general, or would you talk about it with your family and friends?

MM: Well I don’t think I talked about it so much with my family and friends because it just wasn’t a topic of conversation. But I am talking about if you just go out in a bar, and somebody might introduce you to somebody, and they say, ‘Ok what do you do or whatever. You used to say, ‘Well I was a pilot in the Air Force, I am a pilot in the Air Force, but after that you don’t say that, I mean you may say, ‘Well I was in the military.’ Where you been, or what you doing or, whatever, and you would say, ‘Well I am on my way to Europe and I’ve been to Texas, ‘or whatever. It just wasn’t worth it, so I think that happened to almost everybody.

RV: Was there a time period or a time in your life when that changed, when you felt comfortable talking about your experience in Southeast Asia?

MM: I think so. I think it certainly wasn’t then, and it certainly was after, probably after I got out of the military, that I think people just kind of forgot about stuff. So they didn’t, nobody cared that much about somebody being over there, or not being over there. New generations and people don’t know the arguments or the issues. And so yes, I think that after a while it got to the point where now I kind of think of it as a badge of honor, as opposed to a detriment. I mean I never did think of it as a detriment I just thought that everybody else’s perception was in detriment, and so I just didn’t talk about it, but although I was never ashamed of it, personally. I just did what I was trained to do.

RV: How much did you follow the war when you came home, I mean it was winding down for the United States obviously.
MM: Yes it was and I lost track of it completely.

RV: Did you really?

MM: Yes, because I went to England. The only time I remember is when a guy came as a navigator from the old squadron I was in. [He] was behind me by about six months or a year. And I casually met him, briefly met him while I was there, he was just getting there when I was well within a month of leaving. But anyway, so he came to the new squadron where I was in England and he told me, ‘Marty, you wouldn’t believe it, some of those crews won’t fly those missions anymore,’ and I said, ‘What?’ He said, ‘Well yes, they won’t because they’re knocking them down, there knocking all these airplanes down so the crews are saying, ‘We want fighter cover or we want new tactics. I mean the crews don’t want to fly, I mean they don’t want to fly the missions at all.’ I never even knew that that was an option, I mean it’s like people told me afterwards somebody went to Canada. Well I didn’t even know that there was an option of going to Canada. So in any event, I remember that, so that was the first time I heard about the war probably in six months. I mean to know anything about it was, that kind of brought it home. That they’re really hot now, and for a crew to walk up to some Major, Lieutenant Colonel or whoever it is, and it is not because it’s that person but it’s because it’s the rank, and to say, ‘Well I don’t think we want to fly this mission today the way it’s getting out here, we’re too exposed.’ It just never occurred to me. So anyway that was my next contact with the war.

RV: And this is even when you’re still in the service and you’re around the military everyday and there still is no discussion about it or little discussion about it, and little news about it? Do you remember how you felt when the United States pulled out in ‘73?

MM: You know that kind of snuck up on me, I think I heard about that, it’s kind of fuzzy, I’m not really sure how I found out about that. I guess I just didn’t quite get it or didn’t believe it or didn’t know it or something. I guess I felt a little bit disappointed that evidently people were saying that we didn’t win the war, or that we lost the war. And I guess that was probably a feeling, as an Air Force pilot, that you would get that you would prefer not to lose the war if you could help it and then somebody told me afterwards that we lost the war so I didn’t know.
RV: Our time is up for today, why don’t we take a break?

MM: Ok.
Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I am continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Martin Montemore. Today is September 4, 2003. It’s a little after 10 a.m. Central Standard Time and I am in Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech and Mr. Montemore is in Kansas City, Missouri. Sir why don’t we pick up where we left off, you had come home from Southeast Asia and we were discussing some of the incidences that happened to you and some of your experiences. I asked about how much you kept up with the war effort in Vietnam, was one of the things. Can you describe kind of overall U.S. policy after you left, and what you thought say about the Vietnamization Policy and things of that sort?

Martin Montemore: You know I was fairly isolated from that because I was still in the military but I was stationed, I went from Vietnam and I was stationed in England. And so I don’t recall a lot of coverage of the Vietnam War in the English Press and we really didn’t get any direct, like they would now, I mean direct news from the United States or something like that on a routine regular basis. So I heard of the terms, I understood what they were attempting to do from a distance. I did not have, I guess direct access to what the specific policy, how they were implemented, or anything else but yes. My belief is that they tried to distance themselves from the conflict by inserting the, I guess the, military and decision makers in Vietnam and the actual combat and flights. Tried to turn them over more to the Vietnamese. So I think, I guess, the goal was to distance themselves gradually so that they could gradually withdraw and leave it up to their own people to finish the job. But I’m not an expert on that or anything else, but
that’s what I heard. I don’t, I mean this is just me, but from what I could see it did not appear to me that they would be successful in attempting to be, I guess, the victor in the military part with the personnel, the amount, and the lack of sophistication of the Vietnamese. I mean I think they kind of just sat back and let us fight the war; and then when we started to try to train them in jet fighters and to try to re-supply, to try to do the things that all the American troops were doing whether it would be on the ground or in the air, that means it was pretty evident that that would not work.

RV: What was the discussion and the mood in England about the Vietnam War, did you get any sense at all what the British public or some of the British military thought about the war?

MM: You know I think, this is just an impression more than a specific recollection of specific comment. But it appeared to me that British people were supportive, supportive of the President, supportive of the war, and supportive of the military probably more than the Americans were. Because Americans were obviously involved in, you know, whatever demonstrations and other acts that would show their displeasure with the continuing of the war, whereas the British were not involved. They didn’t have any troops there, they didn’t have input, they didn’t have any expense and they didn’t have any exposure so I think that the British were still, and have been, basking in the WWII effort by the Americans. And I just think that anything American at that time was ok with them. I felt like I was very well accepted by the English people. Whether I was wearing my uniform on the way home from the base and was filling up my gas tank or just generally out on the economy. It’s not really difficult to judge, or to see and conclude that a person is an American military when you run around in kind of American clothes and you’ve got a short haircut, I mean you kind of stand out. I never had, except one time. Never had any incident that I would consider to be rude or off color because I was an American or American military. So I think, I guess what I am trying to say, I think they were generally supportive, and they never voiced any condescending comments to me ever about where I was, or what I did, or anything else.

RV: What was that negative experience?

MM: Well it had more to do, I think it just comes to, there are rude people in New York City and in Kansas City, and Lubbock and wherever. But it was a [in] reference to
getting on a train and there was older gentlemen there. I was with an American girl and
we were about to sit down in a train compartment and he made the comment, something
like, ‘Well if your going to be here, I don’t want to be around any American people,’ and
kind of got up. Actually I think I turned around and said, ‘Never mind,’ and I just walked
out and went somewhere else. But it was obvious he either had a bad experience himself
or someone in his family or something. It was obvious that I was an American, and he
even admitted that he did not appreciate me so that’s all on that subject.

RV: Do you remember how you felt in April of 1975 when Saigon fell, and South
Vietnam fell?

MM: I don’t know that I knew it at the time, the exact time. It might have been a
day or two later or whatever, but I think I was pretty disbelieving. I couldn’t, I don’t think
I could believe that we actually militarily could be thrown out of the country. I thought
we could make the political decision or the military decision to leave voluntarily. But I
was pretty shocked, to at least the comments or the commentaries I heard, was that it was
a military, you know, take over of Saigon. And I had been to Saigon many times and
thank goodness, relatively safe in the sense that you didn’t have to worry about troops
that were going to come through the city and that sort of thing. It just made me feel real
funny as part of a bigger team that could be defeated, or at least it appeared, militarily.
It’s what was left, although we were retreating, not retreating, but withdrawing, anyway it
still seemed funny that we were forced to withdraw at their time table, rather than at ours.
And that was basically accomplished militarily.

RV: You retired from the Air Force in 1975, correct?

MM: No, I left active duty Air Force, and I went to law school until 1978. I
graduated in 1978, and then I joined the Missouri Air National Guard as a C-130 pilot in
St. Joseph, Missouri. So then I retired from there in 1995, after another whatever that
would be, let’s see 18 years plus the eight and a half [active] that I had, so I was right
around 27 years, somewhere in there.

RV: I’m asking because my next question is about your opinion of the media
coverage of the war, but you were in England after you finished your tour of South East
Asia, did you ever get a chance really to view how the media was covering the Vietnam
War?
MM: No. [Well], I probably did, I am sure I did in the transition period from Vietnam to England. I had about a three or four month interim retraining on a slightly different aircraft down in Florida. It was not my focus to attempt to try to follow the war. But you know, you obviously you couldn’t get away from it because it was on the news every night. It appeared to me, yes that it was getting to be pretty… you know I thought, I guess, one sided and maybe not very flattering. And it seemed that it was, you know, maybe misconstruing some facts, or was emphasizing the negative. And there was a lot of coverage of the war from the, not the military standpoint in Vietnam, but from the protest standpoint in the United States.

RV: Right, more of that?

MM: Yes, more of that

RV: Ok, how much did you talk about it with your family when you came, and before your transition over to England?

MM: Didn’t have a lot of time back here. And I think most of the time that I spent back here was probably more social with other friends and that sort of thing. And I don’t believe… and I never got [in] any kind of political or military discussion with my family with regard to it. And I really never did address it with anybody else either actually.

RV: When you look back today on your service in Vietnam, in the war, how do you feel about it?

MM: I’m sorry, say that one more…

RV: How do you feel about your service in the Vietnam War today?

MM: I feel pretty good about it, well, real good about it. To me, I was in the right place at the right time to become a pilot, and proud to be trained. I was proud to be part of that team and to go to a foreign country and on the orders and [on] the behalf of others, and for the United States or whatever. I felt like I was happy to go then, and I’m happy now that I went. And I am proud of my service back there. I mean there is a lot of others, I am just saying I mean that’s it, you know, either do or don’t [I feel good about going]. But I’m saying it’s not like I was there by myself or whatever. Hundreds of thousands of people there so it’s you know, but yes, I still feel very good about that. In fact, I think probably before 20 years ago I never even mentioned I went. And now if anybody asks
where I went that’s probably one of the main things I say is that well I spent a couple
years in Vietnam, and flying you know aircraft there.

RV: Why the shift, why the change?

MM: Well I think the American public has changed, the American public opinion
has changed in the last 15 or 20 years because of the other wars that we’ve had. Some
people wanted to protest those wars, but they did, and do, make a distinction between
protesting against the war and protesting against the military, they’re two separate
[things].

RV: Right, so it’s easier to talk about, it’s more accepted to discuss such a war, a
traumatic event for the United States now versus then.

MM: Yeah, I think the attitude back then was ‘that is an unjust war, how could
you go,’ whereas if somebody feels like it is an unjust war they’ll say, ‘we support our
troops even though it is an unjust war’ because it’s not really the troops decision to go, or
not go or whatever. You’re told, ‘you do what you’re told.’

RV: For yourself personally, individually, have you ever suffered any PTSD
incidence or any other kind of disabilities from your service?

MM: I don’t know, I mean everybody has problems and so I do have, I don’t have
flashbacks, but I do have, you know, recollections of loud noises and lots of activity, and
lots of bombs going off and then lots of fire and that sort of thing, so I do. I have a
physical reaction to loud noises like around the Fourth of July, or a car backfiring, or
whatever, but a lot of people have that, I would guess. A lot of people jump, and I jump.
And so it doesn’t keep me up at night, I don’t go to a psychologist or psychiatrist for
anything. Yes, I would say nothing specific other than startling; loud noises startle me,
that sort of thing.

RV: If you could change anything about your time in Southeast Asia, what would
it be?

MM: Oh, I don’t know, I flew the airplane I wanted to fly, had the mission I
wanted to fly, and went to the places I wanted to go to. I mean I am proud that I went and
I am glad that I went, it was a good experience and I made it through it. Oh I am sure
there must be something not really necessary, could [have] slept a little bit longer on
some morning, or had better breakfast or I mean, what I mean is no, I have no major,
nothing that I can think of that I would, you know, I would change about anything. I 
guess I would probably, if I could have, I probably would have tried to get more into the 
culture and the history of that entire region including Thailand and Vietnam and the 
places that I visited, which was a lot of places. I didn’t spend a lot of time on that part of 
it, it was more of the social aspect of just enjoying your time off by drinking and partying 
or whatever. So no, I think that is probably the only thing that I would change or do 
differently. If I had my ‘after’ thoughts before, then I would have done some more of 
that.

RV: What was the most significant thing that you learned individually while you 
were there?

MM: Well I guess it was a couple of things; that war is real, and that people don’t 
come back from war, and it’s not a football game that, you know, you could play next 
week if you lose, or you always have next year or whatever. The reality that people get 
hurt and killed and they don’t come home, or they come home in a box and that is the end 
of their book. I mean it’s not another chapter to be written, or whatever, and people were 
permanently disabled and that permanent disability stays with them. I think I was pretty 
much immortal, and oblivious to the consequences of military action whether it be 
intentional by the other side, or even just an accident. I am sure there were thousands and 
thousands that got hurt and or died because of their own accident or the accident of 
another fellow American, but [the] result is the same, it doesn’t matter, it is still 
permanent. So from a philosophical stand point I think that I probably recognized parts of 
that while I was there and then I certainly recognized it afterwards, later. [But], wow that 
must have been a scary experience for a mother and a father to have their son flying over 
there in combat for a couple of years, and not hear very often. I mean the reality of being 
generated especially after I had my own child. Other than that I think I learned teamwork, 
coordination, things get screwed up; you got to keep communicating. Just I don’t know 
lots of, I guess, lessons of life that are not, you know, so destructive. Things that you 
learn just because you’re part of a bigger organization, and everybody does, you know, 
learn one way or another [from] some organization or another, and that’s where I 
probably learned mine.
RV: How has the war most affected your life in general?

MM: Well, since then I don’t know that the war has affected me or my life in any
negative aspect. I mean I think from a positive aspect, I think, it’s not because it was a
war, but because I had those experiences. I think I have a better understanding and a
better comprehension of things that most Americans probably have never been exposed
to, and you know never will be. I guess that’s not good or bad, but it’s just an experience
that is not universal, and so I don’t think it’s negatively affected my life, and I just think
it’s just a accumulation of experiences that most people will not ever have.

RV: Has it benefited you in your professional career after you got out of the
service?

MM: Well it happens to be that I am doing a lot of aviation law. I don’t know that
the war itself has benefited my career. Although I tend to be around a lot of other people
that are pilots, some of which were military pilots and some of which were not. But there
[are] pilots of just general aviation, civilian aircraft, and I think that [the] whole
background and history that I have is beneficial to me personally, in a sense that they
have a tendency to be more confident in giving a case to somebody that flies airplanes if
it’s an airplane crash case, which only makes sense. It would be like saying [that]
somebody that [has] a medical malpractice case, and this person has training or is a
registered nurse, or a doctor or whatever. Well then obviously they’re going to have more
information available to them, more experience then somebody that is not. So in that
respect it has.

RV: As far as the United States in general what kind of lessons do you think the
country learned from this experience in Vietnam?

MM: I assume that is the subject for many debates and discussions, I think.
Probably learned that it’s difficult to win a war militarily when the populace do not, at
least, maybe the majority, that are not desirous of that change, or do resist the change
attempting to be made. I think from a military pilot standpoint, I think we learned a lot of
tactics and a lot of techniques that were a result of bad experiences. But I noticed in
flying 10 or 15 or 20 years later some of the same aircraft, that we went back to doing
some of the things that we did before that were abandoned in Vietnam. I guess you’ve
got to learn some of those lessons over again. I don’t know that I have the observational
powers to say from a country wide standpoint, from a nation wide standpoint, what
lessons there are to learn, that we did learn, except to say I think it probably has given the
nation a feeling of not being supremely in control of everything at all times, so whatever
that means.

RV: Do you thing Vietnam is still with the country today or has it been put to
rest?

MM: I think it maybe with individuals but it’s not with the country.

RV: Have you done any reading on Vietnam?

MM: I don’t know if it was intentional or not, but I’ve never read a book nor have
I ever seen a movie that had to do with Vietnam.

RV: So you don’t know if that’s intentional or not?

MM: Well I don’t, I assume there must be some intent there, but I don’t know. I
just never saw one.

RV: Do you go to movies? Do you attend movies regularly?

MM: No, not a lot but of course there are all kinds of movies you can get and see
on cable TV or you can bring home. And I’ve never rented one or [went] out of my way
to see one, or look for it on cable TV or any of those movies [things]. I have been places
where they have been on, and I might look at that for a couple of minutes; but never sat
down to watch one. I think part of it was that when I first heard there were movies about
Vietnam that came out, I just thought ‘they’ll never get it all and they’ll never get it right,
they’ll never get that in a movie.’ That’s just too huge, I mean there is no way; it’s like
taking a picture of the Grand Canyon. If you’ve been to the Grand Canyon, you don’t
want to see a picture of the Grand Canyon because it doesn’t give [it] justice, it doesn’t
portray it, that’s what I am talking about.

RV: What are your thoughts about Vietnam today?

MM: The country?

RV: Yes, not the war, the country.

MM: I think the country is probably in better economic and health, higher then
many many other countries in that region and I don’t think that anybody harbors any. I
don’t harbor any [ill] will against Vietnam or the Vietnamese people or anything else. I
think that they’re probably hard workers and intelligent and all the things that you hear;
and I know it’s a beautiful country and I don’t have any great desires to go visit, although
I would certainly not stay away from it. I think it’s a fine country.

RV: So you would not really want to go back to visit?

MM: There again I think it would be difficult to go back and say well this is
where we use to do this or use to do that. I think it’s probably changed and it’s harder, I
just, I would probably go if that’s what, say my family wanted to do. But if I had my
choice I would probably, and could only go to one place, I may go to Hong Kong or
Taiwan, or Thailand instead. If we’re going to go to several countries I would not, not go
because of some unpleasant lingering thoughts.

RV: Have you had any contract with Vietnamese here in the United States?

MM: Very, very, very sporadically. I think I probably have only when we see
them something like a manicure or a hair cut or something like that. A lot of times there
are Vietnamese in there and I may talk to them for a couple minutes. When I ask them
where are they from and how long you been here and if they say Vietnam I ask them
where and usually I know where that is. So I just say, ‘Oh I’ve been there too’ and it
doesn’t really get political or military or anything else, it’s just like you know that is a
beautiful country and just a topic of conversation.

RV: What would you tell the younger generation today about the Vietnam War if
you have the opportunity to speak to say college aged students?

MM: I guess I would probably say by way of explanation, that the people that
were there were them. I mean it’s the same people that they are, and their age and
younger, 17, 18, 19 years old- were out in the jungles risking their lives everyday. And
the people that are in college today, obviously are in college and they are not in the
jungle, and they don’t have to worry about not coming [home] from those jungles, and I
don’t think the American military would worry too much about that, young kids just
because of their lack of maturity. But the reality does set in sooner or later when you’re
over there. So I guess by way of explanation that the people that were there were there
because they were draft age; could not, or would not, or did not go to college, didn’t get
the deferments or they voluntarily joined. But most of them were drafted, and that’s
where they were sent. So I think the people were, the vast majority, of the same people
that are in school today and have the same attitude, and likes and dislikes, and everything
else that they have today. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time or the right
place, right time, whatever you want to call it. So that they ended up becoming involved,
and most of the people that became involved it was not voluntarily. So I guess I would
just say that the ones that went over there are not any different than you.

RV: Have you ever been to the Memorial in Washington D.C.?

MM: Yes.

RV: What have been your experiences there?

MM: I was struck by the sanctity, the quietness, the solitude, by the
appropriateness of it. I just thought they did just a great job, if you want to call it, of [a]
memorial that I think that most Vietnam Veterans appreciate more than having a some
sort of light show with a revolving disc of music. I’m making it up, but what I’m saying,
rather than having a kind of memorial that is extravagant, I think this is very well done,
but subdued and sets the mood for what most Vietnam people, Vietnam Veterans who
served, people that served in Vietnam. I think that’s the mood and the attitude about the
war- is that it was it at the time but there is a lot of sadness and what happened to others.
And to me, that Memorial exudes that, that attitude, that quietness, that mood so I was
very impressed with it.

RV: Have you been just one time or multiple times?

MM: Because I was in the Air Force as a pilot we would go to Washington D.C.
one or twice a year, maybe not that often, maybe once every two or three years but
every time I went, I went there. So yes I would probably say I have been there multiple
times, not ten but probably four or five.

RV: Now did you go by yourself or did somebody go with you?

MM: I think most of the time we had our crew with us, our flight crew, because
we are all military. There was no one else in my unit; well there was one I think, that had
been to Vietnam. And so everybody went to it just like you would go right into the
Memorial for Lincoln or Washington. It seemed to be an attraction, so I probably, I don’t
remember ever going by myself. I remember going by myself with my family, with my
wife going one time, and that just happened to be because we were there on our vacation
and we went. So I don’t remember ever going there by myself -but going with a crew of
three or four, or going with my wife are the times that I remember. But basically when
you get there to that Memorial, I think you disconnect from who you are with for the time that you are there. And your thoughts and your attitude and characterizations of the whole experience become a solitary one, as opposed to a group experience. In that respect if you walk up with four or five people, when you’re there. You’re by yourself, and then when you leave, you’re back with four or five people.

RV: Do you think that’s unique to that particular Memorial?

MM: I think it is. I think it is unique to the people that were there, and to that Memorial. I think it is a combination of having been there, and realizing it wasn’t all fun and games like you thought it was going to be. And that there is a lot of people that [got] hurt and killed. So the realization is from having been there, but the setting for the Memorial compliments that. I think it brings it out and allows it to happen, as opposed to some other kind of Memorial that might be gaudy, or so. That’s why I think it is an excellent Memorial.

RV: Do you think the United States Government has taken care of its Vietnam Veterans?

MM: Yes I think so, I mean I’m not, I mean if I was in a different situation obviously I may have a different opinion. But I think that people that go, and you know, become the disabled vets who think they are owned something, I think that you can’t support them for the rest of their lives or anything like that but I mean decent medical, service-connected. The GI bill helped me, I got through law school or else I wouldn’t have been able to go. So I had a pleasant experience, but then again I don’t have the unpleasantness of some kind of permanent problem, or something that may or may not be taken care of by the VA. So, yes, I think so. I think the VA itself, or the government has done fine by the Vietnam Veteran.

RV: Mister Montemore is there anything else that you would like to add or anything else that you would like to talk about that we have not covered in our series of discussions?

MM: No, it was thorough (laughter) very thorough. Some of the questions, I mean some of the areas are areas that I never really thought of. I just sitting around thinking, and I wouldn’t of [have] thought of those areas, so I think it is very well done, very
professional, and very comprehensive. And so no, I don’t have anything specific or even
general that we haven’t discussed.

RV: Ok, well very good. Thank you very much for your time sir and this will
conclude our oral history interview with Mr. Martin Montemore.