Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I’m conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Allen Trott, Jr. I am in Lubbock, Texas at Texas Tech University at the Southwest Collections/Special Collections Library interview room. Today is March 4, 2003. It’s about 8:30, excuse me 8:26 am Central Standard Time. Mr. Trott, you are in Highlands, North Carolina.

Allen Trott: That’s correct.

RV: Why don’t we start with some basic biographical information, sir? Why don’t you tell us where and when you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

AT: I was born in Washington, D.C. April 3, 1928. I say Washington, D.C. I was in the suburb of Washington, D.C. really, Hyattsville, Maryland. (track skips) at the age of five I believe at which time my mother and father separated and I was relocated. Well, we moved around the Washington area for about another year or so and then I moved to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, my mother and I did with her parents who were down there. And I lived in Pine Bluff, Arkansas until I was 12 and then relocated back to Washington, D.C. my mother and I. In the meantime I traveled back and forth to see my father and his relatives and aunts and uncles every year by train at a very young age. But that was interesting. My grandfather, he was an employee of the Cotton Belt Railroad in Arkansas, so I got free passes really. But anyhow, I went back and forth. So each summer I would spend in Washington down on a farm in Maryland with my aunt and uncle and my father.
Then eventually, as I say, we moved back to Washington. I went to school starting in
Washington. I think I went to four [different] schools in the first grade, just the period of
time my mother and father were separating and then went to Arkansas and went to school
there until the 6th grade, I believe, and then moved back to Washington. I didn’t finish my
school. I continued my school in the Washington Public School System and then at the
ripe age of 17 I joined the U.S. Coast Guard. It was the last year of the war, World War II
and I joined the U.S. Coast Guard and went to active duty over at Kurtis Bay, Baltimore
which is a Coast Guard training station.

RV: Now, were you in high school at this time?
AT: Yes, I was in high school. I finished the 10th grade I believe and went in the
Coast Guard and stayed there at Kurtis Bay for doing the boot camp type and then got
assigned around Christmas of 1945 to patrol escort, they called it and a patrol frigate
really. It was 227 feet long. It had been a destroyer escort in the Navy and the Coast
Guard had taken it over and they were using it as a weather ship and we would go out to
weather stations in the North Atlantic and also down around Bermuda and over by the
Azores and up in Iceland. We’d stay on each station for 30 days and we’d really watch
balloons and rate wind and stuff like that off of the ship and stay out there in all kinds of
weather. A real experience for a 17 year old.

RV: I can imagine. How did you take to being on the water?
AT: Well, everybody was sick on that boat for the first couple of days out and
then you eventually get used to it. So I sort of enjoyed it. I should have mentioned that
when I went up to Washington when I was living in Arkansas, this aunt and uncle, they
had a farm which is on Chesapeake Bay. So I became very attuned to the sea legs, I guess
you’d say because he was in the oyster business. That’s big in Chesapeake Bay and we
used to go out and rake oysters at the right time of the season. And so that’s how I
became associated with the Coast Guard really. I didn’t realize I was going to be in the
North Atlantic. I thought I’d be down around Chesapeake Bay but I didn’t make it there.
But anyhow, I stayed in and the war was over and then they made a…we came back into
port and they said that everybody who had certain number of points could get out. It
didn’t take me long to realize that that 9th [10th] grade education wasn’t going to hack it.
So I got out immediately and went back to high school and returned to the Washington,
D.C. area. My mother had since remarried so I went to live with her in Washington and
went back to high school and finished high school, I guess in 1949. Then in ’49 I enrolled
in the University of Maryland and went on and stayed in the University of Maryland and
went in the Advanced ROTC immediately because I didn’t have to take basic being the
fact I was a veteran. And went into advanced ROTC and received a regular commission
from the Air Force with the Advanced ROTC.
RV: Let me ask you a couple of questions about your childhood. What did your
mother do for a living?
AT: My mother worked in a dress store in Washington. She was sort of a clerk in
a dress store and later became manager.
RV: What are your memories about growing up there I guess in Pine Bluff and
then back up in Washington?
AT: I remember Pine Bluff was very warm. Of course Washington has high
humidity. I was very interested in athletics and I played football and ran track. The junior
high school I went to in Washington, D.C. had won the track championship for the town
or city for about 17 straight years so anyone that could walk had to be in the track
program at the McFarland Junior High School and I did that and really enjoyed that. Then
when I went on to high school from junior high, of course having been in track I
continued in track but then that particular school I went to, Roosevelt High School was
big in football. So I had to go out for football naturally and I did that. Then I went on to
University of Maryland and played a little football out there too.
RV: Did you? What position did you play?
AT: Well I was brought up at… just a minute. I’m going to break this and say
something to my son-in-law. He’s fixing to run. I have to interrupt you.
RV: Go ahead, sir. Let me ask you, what kind of jobs did you have in your
childhood?
AT: Well, my father owned a grocery store in College Park, Maryland. I guess
that’s the reason I went to Maryland. He owned a grocery store and I worked in that
grocery store ever since I could put on an apron even though my mother and father were
separated. When I’d come up in the summer, I’d stay with my uncle who was in business
with my father and then I would work in the grocery store and then I would work on the
boat when they would go out “raking oysters,” we called it and doing things like that. But I worked primarily in the grocery store. I guess that’s where I made my six dollars a week. I remember that. That’s how I really got associated with University of Maryland because we had a very personalized grocery business where we delivered and put the meat in the refrigerator and stuff like that for people. We had keys to everybody’s houses. A lot of these customers, of course we ran a big credit business, were college professors there at the University of Maryland. That’s how I really became associated with Maryland.

RV: Did you kind of grow up a Maryland fan of sports?

AT: Yeah. I guess I have. I still watch them on basketball. I don’t get up there as often as I should. I haven’t been to any homecomings or things like that but I went to one fraternity reunion down at Solomon’s Island, Maryland that one of my fraternity brothers had. So that’s about the only association I’ve had with the school since I left there. I graduated in ’53.

RV: What kind of student were you growing up in grade school and then in junior high school?

AT: Mediocre. Let’s put it that way in junior high and high school and then when I got out of service and went back, I was a much better student. I can tell you that. I think I went from about a 2.2 you’d call it to about a 3.2 or something like that, a B. Then in college I played ball for the first two years I was there and I was down around 2.4 but then when I got hurt I hurt my thigh and I never told the Air Force this, but anyhow, I hurt my thigh. It was nothing but a big bruise. It just never would go away. Then I did not go out in my junior and senior year and then my grades went up. But I think I finished with about a 3.2 or something like that. I went on in the service. I guess I should get back to that. I went on into the service and I went immediately to pilot school.

RV: What prompted you to join the Coast Guard? Let me ask you about that real quick.

AT: Okay. What prompted me to go into the Coast Guard, my father was in the service. Everybody was in the service. The war was going strong and everybody that could walk was in the service and that was sort of the mood, patriotic mood if you will, so I wasn’t doing that well in school, so the recruiters in those days used to come around
to the schools and all this stuff. And I’d been associated, as I say with the Coast Guard down in Chesapeake Bay and then I went ahead and joined the Coast Guard. I guess it was just, I don’t know, because everybody else was doing it I guess. I really wasn’t that happy with school and things like that.

RV: What did you mom and dad feel about that?

AT: Well, my father was overseas at the time. He was in the service also and he was overseas at the time. He didn’t have much choice in the matter. He got mad as heck after he found out about it, but my mother, I just badgered her to death and she was the type of mother that I could badger I guess and get away with it. And she went ahead and signed the papers.

RV: You’re 17 years old and you go off to this training. How did you adapt to the Coast Guard training? Was it difficult for you?

AT: Pretty good I guess. No, no. Pretty good, I guess. I had always wanted to be in the military I guess. When we lived in Washington, one of our many surrounding schools, which was a Catholic military academy and I’d see those guys marching and all that and I made a lot of friends with them and with the Catholic brothers, the instructors and things like that. So I think the military came from that too. I had two uncles that were in the service. Also, one in the Navy, my father’s brothers, and one in the Marines and they were sort of role models for me I guess.

RV: Did you see them when you were growing up other than the service?

AT: Oh yeah. Every summer. They also lived on the farm with my uncle that I lived with and every summer I would be very closely associated with them.

RV: Which branch of service was your father in?

AT: He was in the Air Force, Air Corps in those days.

RV: Did he talk to you about his war experiences?

AT: Yes, when he came back. But I was out of the Coast Guard by then. No, I was out of the service by the time he came back. He was in England and Holland.

RV: Tell me what you remember most about your Coast Guard days that brief time that you were in the Guard.

AT: I remember being at Kurtis Bay and having a lot of guard duty. And Kurtis Bay was also a boat yard. They built a lot of wooden boats there and I remember our
guard duty would make sure the lumber didn’t catch on fire. I remember those lonely
nights of walking the post there and of course in those days you had a clock you carried
around your shoulder, the old night watchmen thing and you had keys in different
locations that you’d turn in this clock to prove that you were walking the beat. There was
no problem. I, in fact, enjoyed it. And when I got out on ship out at sea, I decided to
strike, what they call strike for navigator, they call it quartermaster and I was interested in
that because I’d done some of that in the Chesapeake Bay. But that was all piloting out
there [in the bay]. You could see all the time usually. But anyhow, I went striking as a
quartermaster and became helmsman and worked the helmsman role most of the time I
was out to sea.

RV: And you said you enjoyed your time on the cruise out to sea.

AT: Oh yeah. I enjoyed the time. I enjoyed going into the various ports. We’d go
into places like hamlets of Bermuda and we never went into the Azores. We’d be off the
Azores about 150 miles. Then we’d go into Iceland. Reykjavik, Iceland was one of our
big ports that we’d go into and we’d stay there two or three days while we were refueling
and putting on supplies. We’d stay on these stations [at sea] 30 days at a time and then
we’d be relieved by another ship and then we’d go into some port to get supplies and then
the other port was at Argentia, Newfoundland that we go into. But I can't recall having
gone into the Azores. It seems like to me we just didn’t get there.

RV: So how long exactly were you in the Coast Guard?

AT: Nine months and 21 days.

RV: That’s pretty exact. So you got out because the war ended.

AT: Yeah. The war was over. They dropped the bomb, the bombs, I should say on
Japan and the war was over and of course everybody was going like mad to these
separation centers to get out. And we pulled into, well we had an incident up in the North
Atlantic. This is a rare experience for a 17-year-old, 18 by then, I guess. The ships…we
had some terrible seas off Iceland and the ship started breaking up, part of the keel,
keelson they called it which is on the side of the ship really below the water line, broke
off and started banging against the side of the ship and put a hole in it and so we started
taking on water and we went into Reykjavik, Iceland and it was pretty serious. We were
at a 27-degree lift. 27 degrees doesn’t sound like much until you try to stand up. And this
happened on a Thursday morning. We got into Iceland about Saturday and [in about a
week], they repaired the ship. They put in a steel form down in the engine room and then
poured concrete in it believe it or not. We brought it back. We thought we were going to
get off the ship in Argentia, Newfoundland, we went back into Newfoundland, did some
more work on it and darn if we didn’t bring the ship all the way back to Boston. That’s
when they announced to get out, boy, we were all running to get out.

RV: Really [laughing].

AT: [laughing] Yeah. We’d had enough by then. I sometimes wish I’d stayed in
because I was in a good career field, I wasn’t chipping paint anymore and painting and
stuff like that. The quartermaster does all work in the wheelhouse and navigation and
shoots the starts and stuff like that.

RV: So you get out and did you go back to high school then?

AT: Oh yes. I went directly to high school as soon as I could get there. In fact I
think I started summer school. I got out in May I guess and I think I started summer
school that next summer. And I had to start, I think I started in the 10th [11th] grade I
believe because I’d just finished the 9th [10th] I think. Anyhow, I went to summer
school, night school and anything I could get and Washington being a big city had a lot of
those kind of options, you know. I think I ended up going to Tech High School which
was a technical school but also they taught the regular academics for college too.

RV: You graduated in 1949?


RV: What were your favorite subjects when you were studying there in high
school? Do you remember?

AT: History. Sociology, things primarily dealing with people I guess. I wasn’t
very good at math.

RV: Was it a choice for you to go to college or did your parents both kind of push
you that way?

AT: No. It was a choice. No one in my family had ever been to college. In fact, I
was somewhat, this is hard to believe in today’s world, somewhat chastised by not going
into the family business and my father ended up selling it as a result of me not being
willing to go in although I worked in it in college the whole time.
RV: Did you have any brothers and sisters?
AT: No. I’m the only one.
RV: So tell me about your experience there at the University of Maryland those four years.
AT: I went to Maryland, as I say, on a football scholarship and went out for Freshman ball. I came up as a quarterback and then we had some sterling athletes at that time. I was way out of my league I determined real soon. And we had one guy from Baltimore by the name of Jack Scarbath who later made All-American and he came up the same time I did as a quarterback and I didn’t have any chance so I started playing defensive cornerback. That was the beginning of the platoon system and Jim Tatum, I don’t know if you recall that name or not. He’s from North Carolina by the way.
RV: Yes, sir.
AT: He was from here but he was the coach then. And my freshman coach was a guy by the name of Bill Meeks. He was one of the finest gentlemen I’d ever been associated with. He was the freshman coach. So I played ball for them my freshman year and also my sophomore year and that’s when I got hurt and I didn’t show up for practice the rest of the time.
RV: What were the academics like there for you?
AT: Tough, especially playing ball. But in those days and I don’t know whether they do it now or not, but I’m going to imagine they do, we were very fortunate to have tutors and I would have never gotten through if I didn’t have a strong tutor, especially in things like English and Math for instance. I took every science course in the world to avoid as much math as I could and biology, botany, bacteriology, everything I could get. Zoology. I remember that too. But anyhow, with the tutors, in the first two years, I think they sort of shaped me towards being able to study and we had some excellent tutors. I can remember Shakespeare on an airplane going to ball games, stuff like that. They would ride right with us. I remember Dr. Mooney was my English tutor and I would have never gotten through without her and others too. I had to have a tutor in zoology. I think all the ball players did because all you had to do is name all the parts of the body and on every other body. That was tough. Memory span was short because it was loaded down with football plays. You didn’t make a mistake with Jim Tatum, I’ll tell you.
RV: So tell me about joining the advanced ROTC.

AT: Well, in those days, supposedly in a land grant school, you had to go through two years of basic ROTC and with veterans they waived that and you did not have to go to basic. But the ROTCs were booming so then and our school had 2,200 in the ROTC Corp. It was Army for a while. I think it switched to the role of Air Force. And I went in the Air Force role only because it was 58 dollars extra a month. And what they were doing, they waived the basic and once we reached sophomore, and I guess they were sure we were going to stay in school, they tried to recruit us for advanced ROTC. The reason for that, they knew that we had a background in drilling and things like that and we would require probably minimum instruction to get a supervisors role if you can call it that. So they started recruiting the ball players and they were touting the 58 dollars a month and we were getting a small stipend. I think I got 125 dollars a month plus the GI bill. So it sort of went along pretty good. So I went into advanced ROTC and became I think a sergeant or something. I know I started drilling people the first day I was there and we were drilling the basics and stuff like that. And I went on through ROTC and up through the ranks and became a colonel. There were I think three colonels and I was one of them in the school. So I did quite well in ROTC and that was sort of an incentive for me to stick with the service.

RV: How much did the GI bill help you go to college?

AT: Oh, God. If it wasn’t for the GI Bill, I would have never gone, because the football scholarship was not that good and I wasn’t that good at football to be able to live through four years of football. I would have been out on the street after that sophomore year. But that GI Bill, if it had not been for that, I wouldn’t have gone to college because I was really what they considered a walk on. I got a scholarship but I didn’t get it in my pocket until I got there.

RV: It sounds like you were a leader in the ROTC that you took to it quite well.

AT: Oh yeah. I enjoyed it and I had some good instructors there. I have to give them a lot of credit. I remember them by name too, a major in the Air Force. Yes, I enjoyed it and I didn’t have any trouble with it at all. In fact, that was my straight A.

RV: Really. Okay. Now, this was the Air Corps, is that correct?

AT: Yes.
RV: You said you selected that simply because of the extra 58 dollars a month?
AT: That was the 58 dollars a month you got for being in the advanced ROTC.
RV: So when you get out of college, did you have a plan to continue in the military or were you looking to run the grocery business?
AT: Yeah I did. Well, along about my junior year, they started touting me for a distinguished military graduate and I didn’t even know what the hell that meant. And your grades had to be up there. My grades did get up there as I said after my sophomore year and they started talking to me about distinguished military graduate. If you made it through as a distinguished military graduate, you could get a regular commission. The same thing you’d get out of West Point, Annapolis. By the way, I had always wanted to go to Annapolis and my father always wanted me to go to Annapolis but my grades were never good enough to even talk about Annapolis but we were right there in Maryland. We’d do some of oystering that far up in the Severn River really. So I was really familiar with Annapolis. And I had another aunt and uncle that had a flower shop called Academy Flower Shop in Annapolis. So I was quite familiar with Annapolis. I used to go over there and see them. I guess they were my role models too. But since I couldn’t go to that, I went to ROTC instead. My father wasn’t too pleased. My mother wasn’t either. They knew that would mean leaving home or leaving the area and our family was quite large and they were pretty tight together. I’m talking about the Trott family on my father’s side. My mother’s family was very tight too, but they were all down in Arkansas and Texas, Nacogdoches, Texas.
RV: You’re talking about they were disappointed upon graduation that you would continue probably in the Air Force or the Air Corps and that would take you away from them.
AT: That’s right. I made a deal with the Air Force. You can’t believe people try to deal with the Air Force, of course that’s how naïve I was. I said I wouldn’t accept my regular commission unless I could get an appointment with the flying school. I had never flown in my life.
RV: Did you want to fly?
AT: I guess I did then. And I just said that, you know. And I’ll be damned if I didn’t get it. I got my commission the 22nd of January 1953 and hell I was in flying
school by the 18th of February 1953 and they had a backlog of people getting into flying
school then. Well, I’ll tell you, how they got me in, is they had seen my football record
and all that and they wanted me to play football at Boling Field which is right there in
Washington. They had quite a football team. But I went to flying school instead.
Anyhow, they thought if they gave me the flying school bit that I would stay and play at
Boling Field. Well, the flying school assignment came through so quickly and some of
my instructors that I knew had moved from the University of Maryland to the Pentagon
which is quite common and they went into personnel and one of the sergeants that I
knew, he made sure that I got into pilot school in a hurry. So I went on down to Bartow,
Florida and started pilot school there. I went from Bartow, Florida to… oh, by the way,
something unique, too, probably, I was in the first class of all commissioned officers.
There were no cadets. And that’s strange because they were not ready for this at a
contract flying school. So we ended up cleaning latrines and doing everything that cadets
did and some of our guys resented that. I didn’t because I had good training in the Coast
Guard. So anyway, I went on to flying school and got through that, didn’t have any
problems. I started in the Piper Cub, they called a PA-18, got 25 hours in that. I went to a
T-6. I think we got 120 hours in that. From T-6 then I transferred from Bartow, Florida to
an Air Force flying school which was at Bryan, Texas which was advanced. In Bryan I
flew T-28s and T-33s and got my wings on the 23rd of February if I remember, 1954.
RV: So you were at Bartow from ’53 to ’54 and in Bryan in 1954.
AT: Well, I was at Bartow from ’53 until, let’s see, it would have been six
months, so about July of ’53. Then I went to Bryan from July of ’53, to it would have
been February I received my wings I think it was in ’54.
RV: Sir, why don’t we take a break? I know you’ve got to make that appointment.
AT: Okay, is it time?
RV: Yes, sir.
AT: Time flies.
RV: Okay, sir. Why don’t we go ahead and continue now. We left off with pilot
training basically in Bartow and Bryan. I wanted to ask you, what did it feel like for you
to fly for the first time?
AT: It was great because you anticipated for so long just the ground school and for me having been in ROTC, advanced ROTC, I flew around but I didn’t fly the airplane of course, not any light airplanes, sort of big stuff on trips and things. Of course I’d flown a lot with the ball team, of course, again the airliners. But as far as flying the airplane itself, it was a real thrill. I remember the first time I took off, you solo at about six hours and I was right on target there. I soloed in six hours and this was in a Piper Cub PA-18. I remember just shouting at the top of my voice as soon as I got off the ground. It was great success. You didn’t think about how you were going to get back home.

RV: What did you shout?

AT: Just “hooray” or “yippee” or something like that. [Laughter] I don’t remember. I just remember doing it.

RV: You were excited.

AT: Yeah. You really don’t know when you’re going to solo. The instructor riding in the back seat with you and then you’ll be shooting landings or some kind of air work and he’ll come back and say, “Let’s shoot some touch and goes or something.” And you go in, you land, you do a couple of landings and he said, “Well, pull over to the side.” Of course you’ve never done it before you don’t know the technique that he’s going to use. And he said, “Well, just taxi off the runway.” So you taxi off the end of the runway and he gets out and he said, “It’s all yours.” Go do three landings. And of course he sits there [on the ground] and watches you and all that. And you do that and it’s all over. And then usually you fly with the instructor a little bit each day and then you go up and take the airplane yourself.

RV: Did you have any memorable incidents that happened to you when you were training?

AT: Let’s see. I think about the 12 hour point I had a guy came up, of course, you’ve got to imagine around these little training bases how full the sky is. You always have to be looking out. I remember I had an instructor with me thank heavens and another guy named Leo Majors played football for Tennessee. He was in our class with us and he came up under my wing and touched my wing and scared me to death. He didn’t even see me. Never did see me. Of course when we both got on the ground, the head instructor, he got us both together and tried to figure what went wrong and Leo
didn’t even know he hit me. And it didn’t hurt the airplane, didn’t do anything, but it
scared the heck out of my instructor. I was too dumb to be scared.

RV: Were there any accidents that happened? Did everybody make it through
training?

AT: Let’s see, we had no accidents. We had no accidents in either flying school,
but we had several people wash out. One of my best friends washed out, a guy by the
name of John Cornelius. But he had migraine headaches and that’s what caused him to
wash out. He was a good student. And I think we had one or two very weak students in
both primary and advanced. But they didn’t call it that. They called it basic and primary, I
think in those days. I can't even remember. But anyhow, we had one very weak student
but he got through and later shot down three airplanes in Korea. No, it wasn’t in Korea, in
Vietnam I mean. His name was Seth E. Tracey. We never thought Seth was going to, he
couldn’t do a hop, skip, and jump, you know. Just a completely uncoordinated type guy
but he got through flying school and became a fighter pilot. I couldn’t believe it. And last
I heard he was down at Eglin and he retired about the same time I did as full colonel.

RV: What was the biggest difference between your basic at Bartow and our
advanced at Bryan?

AT: The biggest difference was of course the type of airplanes you were flying.
You were flying propeller driven airplanes all the time at Bartow. The Piper Cub and then
the T-6 which is the Texan T-6 and that was a ground-looping airplane. That thing was
hard to land if you could land it. A lot of guys said, “You can fly it but don’t try to land
it.” Stuff like that. But it would just ground to a point. It was very, very narrow landing
gear and it was a tail wheel and once your tail dropped below your prop wash, that thing
would go in any direction. So we had to stay with it, especially in a little crosswind or
something like that. But then you went on to Bryan, you got the T-28 which was a
tricycle landing gear, the first tricycle we had, and then that was a fairly powerful
airplane, good aerobatic airplane and you flew that for I think 60 hours, something like
that. And then you went into the T-33 which is the first jet. And that was a big change.
That was big step forward. You became a man then.

RV: How did you adapt to the jet?
AT: No problem. I didn’t have any problem. I didn’t have any problem with instruments and that’s where most of the people had their problem was in aerobatics or something like that but I had no problem in that whatsoever.

RV: It sounds like you took to flying rather naturally.

AT: [Laughter] Well, I wouldn’t say that. Pilots make the basic mistake of making people think it’s easy. But it’s not. You’ve got to stay with it. You’ve got to really know what you are doing. There’s a lot of studying involved. That was probably the biggest surprise to me, is the amount of studying. Of course I had not had technical training whatsoever other than working on a lawnmower. My first car was a model A and my father made me overhaul it before he’d let me drive it. And that was the only technical bit I’d had because my prior service and my college and everything didn’t open me up to much technology at all. So getting into the technical feel, understanding the theory of flying the jets and what made an airplane fly and all this stuff and they send you to propulsion school and engine school. And why, I don’t know. I don’t know that I ever applied any of it even in my 28 years of flying. But I guess it’s stuff you have to know.

RV: Is there a lot of classroom time?

AT: Yeah. When you first start, I’m trying to think. I was trying to think of this since our last phone call. I think that we spent, before we even flew, I think we spent something like 20 or 30 classroom hours. Because usually you went to school in the morning or the afternoon depending on what kind of schedule you were on and then you flew the opposite time and they alternated that. And before you started flying those first 30 hours, you went continuously to ground school and all that. But then you went to ground school half a day and you flew half a day. Sometimes you’d go to ground school all day and then fly at night.

RV: How was it flying at night?

AT: It was interesting. The air is no different really but you can really get disoriented. I remember one time in flying school, I got really disoriented. Of course, you’re in Texas, you understand. We had a route that we were flying from Bryan to Austin up to Waco and then turn and go back to Bryan, sort of a triangle, you know. So I took off. And they have instructors sitting at airports and you’re supposed to check in when you go over an airport. I remember my call sign was Red-eye 39. So you’re
supposed to check in like, “Red-eye 39, over Austin at 23 after the hour turning for
Temple.” I remember I went to Austin, had no problem, turned and then I went on up and
called over Waco turning for Bryan. Well, I turned and started going and I realized about
3 full minutes, I had not turned over Waco. I had turned over Temple. Temple right there
at Fort Hood, you know. All those lights and everything. So I just turned the airplane
around and got back on course, came back over Temple, got back on course, went to
Waco. So I called and said, “This is Red-eye 39 over Waco at 26,” or something like that,
“turning for Bryan.” And they said, “Wait a minute, you’ve already called in.” He
wouldn’t accept my position. So finally I had to admit it that I had called in over Temple
by mistake. That was a mark against me. They do everything. They're not trying to wash
you out, they’re just trying to make you better, you know. I remember that scared me to
death. I guess that was the only bad scare I had in flying school. I passed all my check
rides and stuff like that. And I was sort of embarrassed about that because that was
nothing but a dead reckoning error. I could have gone strictly on time because there was
no wind and we weren't flying that high. It was in a T-28, you know.

RV: Were you by yourself?
AT: Oh, yeah. It was a solo. It was what they call a solo night cross-country.

RV: How were you doing with the military discipline and living the military
lifestyle. Were you still okay with that?
AT: Nothing at all. No problem whatsoever. I enjoyed it. Well, let me tell you
this. I was married and I was living off base. I got married as soon as I finished college
and was living off base. And of course being in a class of all officers, it was a bit unusual,
but I lived in a nice cottage up in Winter Haven when I was a Bartow. Then when we
were at Bryan, we lived right out by Texas A&M. In fact the Texas Aggies used to wake
me up every morning with their war song. But there was no problem. I remember
attending the bonfire after flying all afternoon coming home real quick. My wife had me
an egg sandwich. So we jumped in the car and went out to the Aggie bonfire which they
don’t have anymore as you know. But in any case, there was no problem with the military
discipline. Of course I didn’t have to live in a barracks or anything like that. And none of
us did. None of the officers did in this one particular class. As I said, I was the first class
of all officers is unheard of the Air Force. Of course the school at Bartow was a civilian
contract school and of course Bryan was military. But they had a hard time getting used
to an all officers class because they didn’t have anybody to beat over their butts or
anything like that. So there was not that much discipline there. We did march. We’d
march from classes and stuff like that and we had commander’s call and things like that.
But as far as the military discipline, we weren't exposed to it like the cadet classes were.

RV: How would you rate the training you received there?
AT: Excellent, absolutely excellent.
RV: Did it prepare you for what you would go to next?
AT: I guess so but of course the war being over and things like that, the Korean
War ended or had ended and so they had us all in a pipeline to become fighter pilots, go
out to Nellis and go through fighter school. When it got time for me to go to Nellis, I was
sent to Waco, Texas. I couldn’t believe it. I was very disappointed to fly navigator
training. It was a navigator-training base and I went to Waco, Texas and started flying the
latest transport airplane. So I had to go to multi-engine school really, which I went to
multi-engine school. I was going to go to Lubbock Reese station in Lubbock. I went to
Lubbock and the class was so overloaded because they were putting everyone into multi-
engines. They were pulling people out of the fighter training. And I went to Lubbock and
I think I stayed in Lubbock two months and then they transferred me to Shepherd. You
know where Shepherd is. It’s over by Denton or someplace. And I went there and I
finished my multi-engine training there. The airplane we trained in was the B-25. From
the B-25 I got my multi-engine rating they call it and then I went back to Waco and then
went into T-29s which was a Convair flying classroom twin engine. And then flew that at
Waco. Let’s see. I flew that thing. I went to Waco, got there finally in ’54, about the
summer of ’54 and I left there in ’58. And during that time I was flying and of course I’ll
tell you that you have to imagine that there just wasn’t much flying done. The Air Force
was cutting back, cutting back. In fact we were losing a lot of officers, the reduction in
forces and things like that. I remember some of our best pilots we lost right in flying
school at Bryan just because of the reduction forces. I don’t know their background.
Maybe they just didn’t have good records. I don’t know. But anyhow, most of us were
ROTC graduate, all of them were I guess. Anyhow, we had some OCS guys by the way.
But anyhow we lost I’d say maybe five. I remember it well. Just reduction in forces so
people were worried. And anyhow when I got to Waco, I started looking for what we call
additional duties and I picked up an additional duty, well one of the guys in the squadron,
in my flying squadron, he said, “They need somebody over at the Staff Judge Advocates
office additional duty working with administrative boards.” And hell, I didn’t know
anything about that. So I went over there and I became an administrative board assistant,
JAG, Judge Advocate General’s office. And what I did was administered and this was to
say we were having a RIF and they were having all kinds of administrative boards trying
to get rid of people to tell you the truth. And this was not only officers, it was enlisted
men too. If you wrote one bad check you were on your way out and stuff like that. So I
ran those administrative boards because they didn’t want to use the lawyers to do that you
know. It was a routine thing. I remember the regulations even, 3910 and 3912 were the
two regulations and they were administrative regulations where you recommend, it
wasn’t a court martial, but you recommend a person be given an administrative
discharge. And I guess I did in about a year or maybe so there. It had to be a year. Maybe
it was a little longer than a year because I guess we discharged maybe 23 people. I
remember that. So it was a busy time for that office. Of course the administration of that
thing was just unbelievable. And you had a hearing just like a court martial and all that
and a board of officers, I think a three-officer board. I went to squadron officer school out
of there. That’s the only TDY so I went down to Maxwell. That was in 1955. I think it
was in ’55, C Squadron officer school and then came back to Waco and stayed at Waco
for maybe three or four months after that and then I became itchy if you want to put it
that way. I got tired of that administrative business and Waco as I said was a navigator
training base. And about that time Kurt LeMay was head of SAC and SAC was reaching
its ebb, I guess and Kurt LeMay had the requirement that all his aircraft commanders in
B-47s had to be navigator/bombardiers as well. So I applied for that and lo and behold, I
got it. So I went to navigator school right there at Waco and in six months got my
navigator/bombardier rating. They set up a special class they called LeMay’s boys and a
special class to make pilots into navigators. Of course you didn’t have to go through dead
reckoning. The main thing was celestial and then learning how to work the radar
bombsights and stuff like that. So I graduate that, got my navigator’s wings, well I know
exactly 1958. It was about February of ’58. And then from there I went to El Paso, Texas.
RV: What rank were you at this point?

AT: Oh, God. Let’s see. I was a second lieutenant for 18 months. No, I think I suffered because of the reduction force. I think I stayed a second lieutenant for two years. Everybody else was making 18 months and they just were cutting back, so instead they’d hold up our class. I know all of us were pissed off about it. But I think I stayed a second lieutenant for two years so that would have made it ’56 and that was about the time, I was a first lieutenant, yeah, that was about the time. That’d been about right. I went to Biggs as a first lieutenant.

RV: So, at El Paso, what did you do there?

AT: Okay, well the first thing I did was I became on a crew of a B-36 and that was very disappointing, disheartening. I was one of a 26-man crew.

RV: Wow. That’s a lot. It’s like you went from this potential fighter pilot all the way down to the crew.

AT: Yeah. That’s really tough, you know, but I always heard about the needs of the service you know. Anyhow, I went to number 26 on the 26-man crew is what I called it. There were about five pilots and two engineers, I mean rated engineers, commissioned engineers in those days and then about maybe 10 or 12 enlisted people in the airplane. We’d go up and fly missions 14, 15, 20 hours. Unbelievable.

RV: What were your specific duties?

AT: I was the third pilot to tell you the truth. My specific duties were making sure we had the flight lunches and making sure that the parachutes were all there. You became an equipment logistics officer is what it amounted to. And then every once in a while they’d let you in the seat to straighten a little and fly straight and level. But as far as take off and landing, you sat in between the pilots. Of course I had no training in that airplane whatsoever and I was just out of flying school as far as they were concerned. But I guess I had, one thing I didn’t say, when I was flying the T-29, the missions were quite lengthy and I built up 2,000 hours flying time the first two years out of flying school, which was unheard of. Of course everything in the Air Force goes on flying time especially if you’re going to go into SAC or military defense or something like that. So by the time I got to Biggs I had 2,000 hours of flying time and went to B-36 as a third a pilot which was really degrading. But anyhow, I didn’t stay there. I didn’t even check out in the airplane
and I was picked up by what they call a senior crew, select crew in B-47s. That’s what I was trained for. But I became a copilot on a select crew which meant the aircraft commander and navigator had spot promotions. One was a lieutenant Colonel and the other was a major and they weren't much older than I was to tell you the truth. But they’d been in SAC for a long time and this was under LeMay’s men. If you did something right, he’d give you a promotion right on the spot. Anyhow, I went on as a first lieutenant as copilot on the crew and there were not many select crews. They had lead crews, the top thing was select crew and then lead crew and then a regular crew I guess. But anyhow, I went on select crew which is quite an honor to be picked to go on that. The hardest thing was staying on the damn thing because these guys are tough. They were in it for the money I said. Both of them are career guys. A guy by the name of Bopp was it and he was a major and then the aircraft commander was Clem Latimer and he was a lieutenant colonel.

RV: Was this still in 1958?
AT: This was in ’58.

RV: How long did you do this?
AT: I stayed with them, well golly, let me see. It had to be ’58. I stayed with them and we were both transferred. Well, they closed Biggs for about a year because they were putting a new keel in the runway so they could bring B-52s in there. So they transferred the B-47 and we got transferred. The select crews got to pick the place they wanted to go. And both of these guys are from New England, so they picked Pease. I didn’t even have a choice, Portsmouth, New Hampshire. And we went up there and stayed there seven years. And that was in SAC, training in SAC. I picked up my own crew in 1960.

RV: You became pilot then?
AT: I went from copilot to aircraft commander and picked up my own crew in 1960 at Pease.

RV: And you stayed there until ’65?
AT: Yeah, ’65. That’s right.

RV: What were your duties? Where would you fly? What would you do?
AT: Well, I was in Strategic Air Command and we had assigned targets and we would go on alert and we’d go on reflex we called it in England or Spain. And we sat
over there with weapons in the bomb bay and we would be ready to go. We had to have the whole fleet off the ground in 11 minutes because that’s the time it would take to get the missiles supposedly on us. Our duty was mainly training, target study and flying practice missions, and then actually we would go from Pease to England and we would stay over there 90 days and we’d be on alert. Let’s see. We would be on alert for a week and off a week and on for a week and off a week. And while we were off you had pretty good R&R stations. We’d go to Denmark. We’d go to Spain. We’d go down to Majorca in the Mediterranean. I tell you, when you got in SAC and you really started minding your Ps and Qs, nothing was too good for the SAC crews. You could have a C-47 and they’d fly you all over Europe, go any place you wanted to go. And the senior crew usually picked the place they wanted to go. Of course I wasn’t a senior crew by then. But when I was on the other crew and were going over there, man we used to go to some great places.

RV: Did your wife accompany you overseas?

AT: No, no. She stayed here and started having children. We were at Pease when the first child, no we were in El Paso when the first child was born and the second child was born at Pease.

RV: Now were you carrying nuclear weapons?

AT: Oh, yeah.

RV: How did you feel about that?

AT: I don’t know. It bothered me but there was a war on and we were hired killers, I guess but of course part of our training was to go through nuke delivery training there at Wichita, Kansas, I think it was and of course you weren't aware. You’d see pictures of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and all the testing and you had to learn the theory of nuclear weapons and hydrogen weapons and stuff like that, which I tell you is not an easy course, again for a non-technical guy. The testing in that was unbelievable. Of course the testing in SAC was not so much once you learned the weapon and went to weapons delivery school and learned the weapons and all the characteristics they expect you to know about the weapons, Kurt LeMay would actually personally question you on it when he’d come [over]. But the biggest thing in SAC was the positive control testing and it was 100% required. You could not make a mistake. Like when we were on the crew, the
select crew and these guys had spot promotions, they would actually slip going on alert because you had to take this positive control test every time you went on alert. And it would be like 20 questions and you couldn’t make a mistake at all. If you did, if you made a mistake, you would lose your spot promotion right on the spot. So it was money to them. Of course I didn’t have as much to lose. Of course the hardest thing for the copilot in my opinion, was we had to handle all the jamming of all the radar and our main problem was being able to identify which jammers to turn on and they had trainers, just mock ups you set in the classroom and they’d play these tapes to you and by the sound you had to know which jammer to turn on. They had mock up jammer control boxes there and they would play the tape and they’d look and see which one we turned on. And Kurt LeMay would get upset if you made a mistake on that too. So that’s sort of the side light to flying airplanes. So that was the biggest challenge, was the testing in order to maintain your favorable status in the eyes of Strategic Air Command. They were really strict. There was just no room for error. But back to the question about what do I think about nuclear weapons?

RV: Yes, sir.

AT: I don’t know. You sort of become numb and you only hope that the diplomats are right. That’s the same thing I’m thinking right now with this thing over in Iraq, you know. All these things they’re saying and everything. And we were truly in a mode of deterrence and we were over there and the closest I ever came to really being scared, this is after I had my own crew back in ’61, at Moron, Spain, I’m trying to think of the name of the town. But anyhow, it was down on the coast of Spain right off there off the Mediterranean. We received an alert, the horns went off and I remember we were playing softball or something and we all had our alert vehicles. Each crew had their own vehicle because you might be anywhere on the base, you know, and we received the alert and we jumped into the vehicle and to the airplane. And the normal procedure was the navigator went up first. The pilot went up second. The copilot stayed down to make sure all the ground power was removed. We wouldn’t drag a power cart with you. But anyhow, I came up the ladder and the navigator was screaming, this was on adrenaline, “Put on your helmet. Put on your helmet! We’ve got a go message!” God, you think that doesn’t make you pucker. And we had it. Of course, you had in the positive control
system, you had three people that had to match cards and all that. So we had to wait for
the copilot to come up. Well, in the interim, I put on my helmet and we were starting the
engines because this is the place we only have 11 minutes to get the whole fleet off.
There was 28 of us. And we were cranking engines, the copilot came up, put his helmet
on. We all copied the message down. It was a go message and so we were just resolved to
go. So we taxied out. I think I taxied up at number three. Of course, there’s 28 airplanes.
It’s just a big mass of airplanes taxiing out. We had set procedures on taxiing out and
taking off and all that. And we turned onto the runway and fire trucks were across the
runway. They had made a mistake in the message center and they pulled fire trucks [onto
runway to block us]. That’s the only way they could stop us. Because the particular
message we received, there was no recall associated with it. So they pulled fire trucks. In
fact the wing commander’s car was out there too. Yeah. They blocked us. They wouldn’t
let us take off.

RV: That’s really close.

AT: That is close as hell. And what had happened on that, it later appeared in
Reader’s Digest. Some geese had flown across the dew line up there in Greenland and set
the thing off. Every SAC airplane in Europe and this was in England and Spain primarily,
it may have been some down in Morocco at that time, I’m not sure- were under the same
thing. It just scared us all to death. That was the closest I came to really getting scared
about nuclear weapons.

RV: It’s kind of scary that geese might set off a nuclear exchange.

AT: That’s right. You're so true. So true. And the only safeguard was a fire engine
because the particular message they sent out, we had different types and this particular
message that we received to our command post was the kind that we had no recall on.
There was some messages, you could go up and go to what they call the positive control
point and if you didn’t further message you had to turn around or go into an alternate
base.

RV: Now, did your crew have a specific target set up?

AT: Oh, yeah.

RV: What was your target?

AT: I can't tell you yet I don’t think.
RV: Oh, really?
AT: I don’t know. It was all classified then but it was in Russia.
RV: So it was a city in Russia.
AT: Oh, yeah. It was a town.
RV: So your specific plane was targeted just to that town, the whole time.
AT: Well, no, no. That was part of the study. We’d get over there and we’d have to study a target and sometimes you get the same one and sometimes you wouldn’t. There were thousands.
RV: Okay. So it was random.
AT: Yeah. Well, they tried to put us on the same one, but it just depended on what the war plan was and we had different routes, different headings. In fact some of our targets were so close to our take off site, we’d have to take off and circle in order to make timing at altitude. And some of them were so far away, we had to pick up a tanker en route and in many of them we had to pick up a tanker coming out. And we said, “I know that damn tanker wasn’t going to be there coming out.” But we had alternate places. We had what they called safe havens to land in and we even had addresses that we could go to and knock on the door in some place and they were supposed to know we were coming. I don’t know if that’d ever worked or not.
RV: So how far did you ever get to your targets? Was that the one you just described?
AT: That’s the only time. I never took off. I never took off with weapons. Of course the B-52s in those days were actually airborne. They had airborne alert and they were airborne and they were going over the positive control points and just holding over there for some time, hours.
RV: Have you seen the movie Dr. Strangelove?
AT: Oh, yeah.
RV: What do you think about that?
AT: Oh, it’s just typical Hollywood.
RV: Not very accurate?
AT: No. It’s not very accurate and I think the emotion associated with it was not that great. I guess by the time you work yourself up the ladder to that position you become fairly professional, I guess you’d have to say.

RV: On board the plane you mean.

AT: I just don’t think there was any way it could happen. There were just so many safeguards. That’s the reason two or three people had to agree on the positive control message and then we had all kinds of authentication mechanisms and all three of us knew the combination. There was a safe on each airplane and they knew the combination but it was pretty well thought out. That guy LeMay was smart as hell even though he used to scare people to death. I remember he came in after I got my crew and that was big thing. Before you could take a target actually going to work. Say you arrived and let’s use Torrejon in Spain. You arrived in Spain on say a Friday night and you did not assume your target until Sunday. And that gave you all day Saturday to rest and target study and then you had to brief that target before the other people were relieved off that target. You had to brief it. Well, you didn’t know who was going to be in that briefing. Normally it was the wing commander over there at Torrejon or it could be somebody from 5th Air Force or usually the wing commander was a full colonel or it could be some general coming in from SAC headquarters or I think it was 8th Air Force headquarters over in England and they’d come in and take the briefing and stuff like that. Or it could be Kurt LeMay. And I briefed LeMay one time.

RV: Did you really?

AT: Oh, yeah. Now you talk about being scared.

RV: Why were you guys so intimidated by him?

AT: Well, because he could just do anything to you. You could be relieved right then. You could get a bad OER and never get promoted again and he was just hell on wheels. The only thing he wanted was results. Because I remember the B-47, I don’t know whether you know or not but it had wing tanks that you actually pulled an explosive charge and these tanks were slung underneath the wing like big bombs really. And they held 510 gallons. I remember them well. And you would burn those right after you took off going to your target and when you got rid of those, the war plan of course it was war time only, you would jettison your wing tanks and it would allow you to go
faster because you're cutting down weight and all that. So this parachute came out and
jerked off. Of course you never practiced this. So anyhow, I was going and he asked me
what point…and we were briefing. You have a map and all that. And we were briefing it
with my pointer and I went to point that this is the point where I eject the wing tanks,
should be empty and we eject the wing tanks. He said- I was a captain then by then I
think- he said, “Captain, Trott, what would you do if the wing tank didn’t come off? The
parachute opened and the thing just held there.”

RV: This is LeMay?

AT: Yeah. Kurt LeMay. And, God, I’d never had this question, never asked in
ground school, never been discussed that I knew of. And I said, “Well, the max speed on
the airplane is four and a quarter,” I said, “I think I’d nose it over and go to four and a
quarter and blow them off.” He said, “You're exactly right. You’re now a major.”

RV: Really?

AT: That’s just the way the guy operated.

RV: Just on the spot you were promoted.

AT: Just on the spot right there. I stayed major, never lost the spot and stayed
major then. So it’s sort of crazy but that’s the way it worked. Why you fear the guy,
that’s one of the reasons because if I’d made the wrong answer, he’d say, “Get the hell
out of here, I don’t want to see you again.”

RV: I see what you mean.

AT: And he’d done that before. In fact, he would come on bases and this is stories
and I’ve never been on a base where he did this, and the wing commander, colonel,
would have made a mistake or something had happened and he would come on base with
the new replacement commander and tell the wing commander, “Be off base by
sundown.” That’s just the way he was. So, okay. Let’s go from there.

RV: Let me ask you a question. What were you doing in 1962 during the missile
crisis?

AT: Oh, that’s interesting. Okay. I was stationed at Portsmouth, New Hampshire
and I had my own crew because I picked up my crew there in ’60. We loaded four Mark
28 weapons onboard and we loaded the ATO Rack onboard which is a rack of rockets
back on the back of the airplane which you're supposed to fire to take off in order to take
off with a heavy load on a shorter runway. Then those rockets, you eject those at Pease
out over the water. But we loaded those on and we took off.

RV: You had nuclear weapons on?
AT: Oh, yeah. Four. We took off.

RV: How many did you say?
AT: Four Mark 28s. Mark 28 was about, let's see, it was about ten megatons I
think. It was about 1,000 times bigger than what had been used Hiroshima. If you can
imagine that we had four. And we took off at Pease with the 80 racks on. This had never
been done by the way. With the ATO racks on and they had been taken off with them on
but then we landed at Logan field in Boston with the damn ATO racks on. We didn’t
know if it was going to work or not but it did. And we sat there. We landed, refueled and
they brought a car there, a van, and we sat there in that van for four or five days.

RV: Wow. What were your orders?
AT: I had a target. Of course those are targets in Russia. The idea was that we
would be dispersed. They wanted to move the airplanes and disperse them and that’s
what they did. We didn’t go very far. We went from Portsmouth, New Hampshire to
Boston. It’s only 53 miles. But that’s what I did. I think there were four or five other
airplanes. We had a total at Pease, I guess we had total at Pease of about 40 B-47s and
about 25 KC-97 tankers. The tankers were dispersed too. So I sat there for the entire
Cuban crisis and I remember they came with equipment and downloaded the weapons
and they downloaded the ATO rack first and it took them two more days to decide what
to do with the weapons but they didn’t want us to fly them back. So they downloaded the
weapons and carried them over land. And we took the airplane back.

RV: How did you think the President did during that crisis?
AT: I don’t know. So many rumors and things and the only thing we were
involved in was wait until the go message. We knew we were going to get it. You talk
about the adrenaline flowing, man. It really flowed.

RV: What did you tell your wife about this. I mean, “If I get the go message it
means we’re at war.”
AT: That was the thing. None of us talked about that. That was all so damn
classified. I talk about it now, you know. But in those days it was so classified you didn’t
even talk about it to anybody, wife or not.

RV: What did they tell you about the classification system. Did they say, “If it’s
top secret you can't talk about it with anybody,” or was there another level?

AT: It was top secret and it was one more. I had a crypto clearance. That’s what it
was. We had to have a crypto clearance to utilize some of the codebooks that we had
onboard. You didn’t talk to anybody about it.

RV: What did they tell you would happen to you if you did?

AT: Court martial. They didn’t have to tell you. You knew. It was sort of implied.

RV: Back to 1965, by this time the United States had become involved in
Southeast Asia and in Vietnam pretty heavily getting there. What did you follow? What
did you know about what the United States was trying to do in Southeast Asia at this
time?

AT: Well, it started about ’62 didn’t it?

RV: Well, our involvement yes, directly.

AT: Well, the only thing I remember is the gun boats or something down there in
the Tonkin Gulf thing. I remember that. Then sending some people over there as advisors
I think it was called. And I thought we were just going over there. I do remember Dien
Bien Phu with the French. Go back to there. I remember they got the hell beat out them
and moved out and I felt that we kind of filled the vacuum. I guess that’s what I was
thinking and I guess we tried to. I remember, of course I wasn’t in that side of the country
[world]. All of our interest was moved over to the Soviet Union and I don’t really, other
than the nightly news sitting in the alert building with my crew listening to the news. I
would think we were going to go in there and I guess clean the place out type thing. And
we’d see these guys fighting in these jungles and stuff like that, how difficult it was, how
hot it was, and I didn’t like snakes and I didn’t want anything to do with it. I did get it
later, but go ahead. That was my first thing. Of course, in SAC, we were sort of at that
time, removed from all that not ever thinking that B-52s or arc light or anything like that
would start and never thinking I would get into the Agent Orange business. I was on a six
engine jet bomber.
RV: Right. You did not think you would be flying spray missions over there.

AT: I didn’t even know what it was.

RV: Right. Did you follow foreign policy in general? Were you interested?

AT: I did. As I said earlier, my interest was in History and my degree, my bachelor’s degree was in political science and I had a lot of people there at Maryland who were really good. They had all kinds of connections there in the Washington area with the State Department and things like that. In fact George Schultz, I don’t know if you remember him or not. He was one of the Secretaries of State. He was one of our instructors. We had another guy by the name of Steinmeyer who had been a judge at the Nuremberg trials, I think Nuremberg trials and he was one of our instructors. So I became very, I guess embedded in foreign policy and was very interested in that and kept up with it as much as I could.

RV: What did you think of the United States’ mission during the Cold War, this anticommunist mission?

AT: Well, the containment concept under Truman during Korea and stuff like that I thought was very good. I think we made a mistake and I had mixed emotions when they relieved Macarthur for instance. In fact, I wasn’t even in college then I don’t think. I remember Macarthur coming back to Washington.

RV: I think you were at Maryland at that point.

AT: I probably was. I was working at the store in the summer time or something because I remember when he came to Washington and made that great speech about “old soldiers don’t [never] die. They just fade away.” I think I saw that on television at our store. But you’re right. That was at Maryland probably. But, no. I thought the containment concept was very good. I felt that Truman did the only thing he could do in the Macarthur situation, not that I would think now that that was correct. It may have been wrong, but he did what he had to do to maintain our constitutional control rather than let the military take over. Of course, my thesis, my Master’s degree thesis was “Civilian Control of the Military.” That was the title.

RV: Well, tell me about that. What do you think of civilian control of the military because we’re going to talk about Vietnam and there’s a controversy about that.
AT: I think that there’s a fine line and it’s something that your really have to think through. It’s difficult for the civilians to attain the same outlook that a military person has attained. However, we’ve got some real smart people in our world. When I later, we’ll cover later in the Pentagon, worked with some of these people, I was just amazed at guys like Harold Brown and McNamara as far as that goes, just how brilliant they were and how those guys didn’t forget a thing and they didn’t miss a thing either in briefings and you could come back and brief them a year later and if you briefed something different, they’d say, “Well, you told me this last time.” I don’t know whether they had a copy of a talking paper or what. I’m thinking of Harold Brown. He was an extremely knowledge able guy and brilliant. And a lot of those guys are attorneys and have good minds and of course they had tremendous staffs too. And people don’t give the staffs enough credit either. Anyhow, I feel that we have no choice the way we’re set up but we have to condone, if you will, control the military by the civilians and I think that we would be in trouble if we didn’t do it but I think its up to the military to make sure that that civilian in that position gets all the options and some assistance in deciding which option to take. I really think that you’ve got guys like this guy Franks, I don’t even know him at all down in Tampa and you had Schwartzkoff in Desert Storm and all that. I had a son over there in that thing. Anyhow, I think those military guys are almost as smart as those civilian guys, but it’s their duty, the military duty to make sure that civilian guy who’s really going to have to put the stamp on it knows what the hell he’s doing. And if he doesn’t, if the civilian guy doesn’t know what he’s doing, then he’s either not listening to the military guy or the military guy’s not advising him properly. I still believe in civilian control of the military. You’ve just read my thesis. I didn’t have Schwartzkoff or Franks in it though.

RV: Okay. In 1965, you left New England. Where did you go from there?

AT: I went to Command Staff College. The B-47 was mothballed or scrapped or something because I flew almost as well, I flew second from the last one out of the Davis Montham Ariz, to the bone yards. You talk about crying. I was almost crying when I saw that.

RV: Were you really?
AT: Yeah. I’d been with that airplane so long. I always managed to get an additional duty and I became a maintenance officer, a maintenance control officer really, ran a job control facility at Pease and knew the airplane very well. Again, I didn’t have much technical background but I seemed to fall into the maintenance logistics side of the house only because I didn’t mind working long hours I guess. But anyhow I took the next to last airplane from Pease anyhow out to Davis Montham. They were just lined up. I didn’t get to see them cut any of them up. They’d already cut them all up by now but I didn’t get to see that. But I knew what was going to happen. Then I thought I was going to stay in SAC and I thought I was going to go, I had orders from SAC to the Airborne Command Post, Looking Glass. I just thought of that name Looking Glass. I thought I was going to go to Omaha. I had my furniture all packed and ready to go and I got my orders changed and I went to Command Staff College at Maxwell for a year. That’s where I picked up my Master’s Degree.

RV: Okay, this is ’65, ’66.

AT: Yeah. I picked up my Master’s degree in ’66.

RV: Did anything significant happen there at Maxwell that you think we should talk about?

AT: No. No. In those days you still had to fly so I think I flew B-25s and Gooney birds. No. B-25s at Squadron Officer School and then I flew Gooney birds. Hell, they made me an instructor in B-25s because I’d been flying B-25s when I went to multi-engine school. And so I came there and they actually found out I had flown a B-25, they made me an instructor. I couldn’t believe it. But anyhow, of course you only flew four or five, six hours a month.

RV: That’s just to keep your flying hours.

AT: Those days you had to fly in order to get paid every month. When I went back in ’65 I flew Gooney birds because I’d flown multi-engines again. They checked me out in a Gooney Bird. Of course that’s a year tour, command staff was, so you had plenty of time. Nothing ever happened there. I’m trying to think. I had some excellent classmates. They had sort of an exchange program. They have Navy guys, you have guys from overseas, and had some excellent classmates in there especially in my seminar. I went out on a carrier. I got to see a carrier operation for two days out of Pensacola and
one of the landing, LSOs, Landing Ship Officers, Landing Signal Officers rather, and he
happened to be in my seminar and he took us nine guys in our seminar and just took us
stem to stern on that carrier. I’ll never forget, it was the Yorktown like the Yorktown
Downs place someplace. It was an old War World II carrier. No, nothing exciting except
the only excitement I had is hell you didn’t know where you were going to go out of
Command and Staff College. I thought for sure I’d go back to B-52s in SAC or to
Looking Glass or someplace like that and lo and behold from Command and Staff
College I went to the Pentagon.

RV: Did you request that or did they put you there?

AT: No. I didn’t request it. Let’s see. How’d that happen? Okay, I know. The guy
who was the division commander at Pease, a guy by the name of Jack Catton, C-A-T-T-
O-N, he left Pease. He was a one star at Pease. He got his second star and went to the
Pentagon as a Deputy Chief Staff of Programs and Resources and he came down to
Command and Staff College and interviewed several people to go into a new job at the
Pentagon. And I remember he interviewed me and nothing else was said. Then I thought,
as I said, he asked me where I was going to go. I said, “You know, General, I’m going
back to SAC. I’ve been in SAC all my life.” He said, “We’ll see,” or something like that.
And the next thing I knew I had orders to work with him in the Pentagon.

RV: Were you still Major at this point?

AT: Yeah, I guess I was. I went to the Pentagon as a Major. Yeah.

RV: How long were you at the Pentagon?

AT: Two years.

RV: Two years to ’68.

AT: Yeah. That’s right.

RV: Okay. Can you describe what you did there?

AT: Yeah. At the Pentagon, (chuckling) I laugh at the job because it was crazy as
hell. But, I was a manpower utilization analyst. That was the job description and my job
and it was a special unit that this Jack Catton had set up and our job in our division-it
came under manpower of course- was to determine the maintenance manpower
requirements for a ten year life cycle of a weapons system. And one of the weapons
systems I was assigned only because I had the clearance and all this. And this is what
Jack Catton was looking for when he was briefing us, I mean, not briefing, interviewing down at Command Staff College was the Blackbird, the SR-71. I got right in on the ground floor of that. I was determining the manpower it was going to take us to maintain that airplane before we had the first airplane on the runway. You think that wasn’t a joke. All you did, you had to go out and look at other airplanes. Of course, in the aviation business in the maintenance business, you have a factor and it’s called maintenance man-hour per flying hour. And you have those for every airplane and you take these and you figure out how much flying hours you’re going to get on the airplane and you total airframe inventory and you multiply that by the maintenance man hours per flying hour and then you come up with your maintenance manpower. You multiply this by ten years, you come up with ten-year maintenance manpower. The problem is when you get a new airplane, new weapons systems, it could be an airplane, a missile or anything – we had a lot of missiles coming in the program then – was you had nothing to go by. So you went out and found an airplane that you thought was as close to that airplane as you possibly could. The one we used was the B-58. I don’t know if you’re familiar with the B-58 or not.

RV: I’ve seen pictures, yes sir.

AT: It’s a delta wing 4 engine jet bomber that SAC used. And the damn thing was not supersonic, but it was right on the borderline. So we took the B-58 and we multiplied by a factor of five and that was the figures we used, SR-71. And we missed it by 500%.

RV: By 500%?

AT: Yeah. (laughing). That’s the reason I never went back to SAC. I tell you, General Catton protected me. He really did. But that was a fluke. In fact the guy that was my boss at the Pentagon, a lieutenant colonel at that time was the most brilliant guy I’d ever worked for, is now one of my constituents here in Highlands. Yeah, Bill Bathurst. He and I worked together. He was not rated. He was a professional statistician and he was the one that General Catton put in charge of that and that’s the guy I worked for in the Pentagon. But they put me on this Blackbird assignment, me and another guy, a non-rated engineer really who kept me out of trouble a lot. And we would leave the Pentagon on Sunday afternoon, fly to San Francisco, rent a car and drive to Marysville. I don’t know if you know where Marysville is or not.
RV: No, sir I don’t.

AT: That’s where the bird was, that’s close to the skunk works. And that’s where they were getting the birds and getting them out of the crate. The thing that ate the airplane up on maintenance man-hours per flying hours was all the ground support equipment. Of course, the airplane, when we were looking at blueprints and things like that, had all these holes [compartments] in it. They wouldn’t even tell us what was going to go in the holes. So how the hell are you going to figure out the maintenance? We knew the engine was going to be complex as hell but we didn’t know what all the other, all this infrared and all this stuff, stuff we’d never heard of before.

RV: Did you have clearance to see that?

AT: Yes we did but they wouldn’t tell you. They didn’t give a damn what your clearance was. And really I don’t think they knew. I don’t think some of the stuff had been perfected. And they were making holes in the airplane hoping that they could get something to go in it. That’s what we used to say. But anyhow, we missed that thing and of course I didn’t discover how far we missed it until I was out of the Pentagon. Because after I’d been there two years I picked up a couple of other programs, one of which was the Ranch Hand programs and how much that thing was going to cost. And I picked up that program. I became very interested in another program I had there that was called Sacred Goat. You’ve never heard of that have you?

RV: No, sir.

AT: Sacred Goat was McNamara [project, he] had discovered a bunch of 10,000 pound bombs left over from World War II and the theory was (notice I said ‘theory’) was to mount these things on pallets, put them on C-130s, open the rear door and roll them out and have the fuse set up where they go off about 20 feet above the ground. That would clear out the forest and helicopters would come in and land. And it worked. It worked. I worked that program for two years. It was in operation when I started there and I picked up that program and then picked up the Agent Orange program which were both together because it was working for the Army clearing out these forest things.

RV: This is while you were at the Pentagon or was this after?

AT: Yes. This was at the Pentagon. This was when I was working. Of course I became interested in Agent Orange or became interested in the Ranch Hand. We didn’t
even think about Agent “Orange” because they weren’t using Agent “Orange” at that
time. The agent was purple, we called it then and that stuff was really toxic. But again we
didn’t know it until we got over there. But anyhow, I was working with those three
programs, the Blackbird spending most of the time. We’d go out on Sunday, I didn’t
finish that, go to Marysville, stay there all week, come back on Friday night, brief
General Catton, Dr. Brown, and several other people on Saturday morning. I’d say
Saturday morning. We’d start our briefing cycle at about 8:00 on Saturday morning and
we’d usually get to the General level by 1:00 because you have to go through the staff,
the chain of command, Bill Bathurst as being one of them. And he was the worst one of
the bunch. If we got it by him we could sail along and get home early. And we’d go home
about 4:00 or 5:00 on Saturday afternoon, nine or ten and then leave on Sunday
afternoon. So there wasn’t much family life there.

RV: I can imagine.

AT: And I had three children by then, I think, no two children. No three. The third
one was born at Walter Reed. And then I was gone almost all the time. If I remember, my
boy was in about 6th grade by then.

RV: What can you tell me about the SR-71? What did you think of that?

AT: That was just a mystery airplane. It was a good airplane. I had an opportunity
to meet- oh, hell, what’s the guy’s name? It was the guy who really perfected that. It was
a Lockheed guy, Kelly Johnson. I got a chance to meet him and of course he interviewed
us before we started the program and he said, “Well, let me tell you guys, I don’t know
what it’s going to cost to maintain it but I was only told two things. They wanted to fly
high and fast.” In other words, it had no maintainability built into it. When we first
started on it they had to raise the wing, actually take the wing off to change an engine.
The engines cost about three and a half million dollars.

RV: Each?

AT: Each. Yeah, they had two of them. And if you had a flame out in flight, it
was almost impossible to do an air start. We lost a lot of airplanes doing that because
they’d lose all their power and all that stuff. So I sat there and watched. I watched one of
them run off the end of a runway on a taxi test because the brake chute didn’t work. We
lost the plane, did not lose the pilot. It just had a test pilot in it. Then I saw we had two of
them crash, one of them over very much similar to this shuttle that started breaking up
over Dallas and we picked up parts out in New Mexico. There was one before that, a B-
58 about the same area. That area right there is really a snake pit, over in the Dallas area
where we just had this shuttle disaster. But anyhow, the SR-71 was a great airplane. It
was a man killer as far as crew was concerned. It was an electronics nightmare. I
remember sitting it the staff car at the end of the runway after we’d get the thing all
started and of course the pilot had to be in a pressure suit and he had to be in a pressure
chamber about four hours before he went into the airplane. And they put him in there and
then they’d taxi out and the damn navigational system would go out or something like
that. So he’d taxi back in, you’d pull the pilot out, pull the nav equipment out and put the
pilot back in the pressure chamber but you were 24 hours away from getting to take off
and stuff like that. So it was a maintenance nightmare as far as that was concerned and it
was a crew nightmare too. I had a lot of friends who’d been in the U2 program that went
to that airplane. Most of them had been former test pilots. They were somewhat similar to
your astronauts now. They had unbelievable criteria for the crews. The navigator, as well
as the pilot. But it was a great airplane. I really enjoyed it. We had a lot of problems that
required common sense. I know one of the ones I saw personally was they were having
all kinds of braking problems. So when they’d do the classification [missions], they
would taxi it right into a hangar and they had all kinds of fires, brake fires. So we started
parking it in front of the hangar and you wont believe this, and taking two electric fans
and sitting by the landing gear cooling the breaks off. A $20 [50] million aircraft and that
solved the brake problem.

RV: A $50 million aircraft.

AT: Yeah. Two electric fans. I’d say Sears and Roebuck fans but they were
probably more expensive than that. But I remember I saw them in the hangars out there
and I said, “Well, hell. Let’s put those on the brakes.” They looked at me and said,
“Where are you going to do it?” I said, “Park the thing in front of the hangar. Get a damn
long extension cord and put those fans out there.” And hell, I wasn’t an engineer or
anything so I was proud of that one. And we did stop that. Of course the security officers
were crazy because they wanted to put those things right in the hangars. They wanted
them covered because they knew our friends overseas had all kinds of satellites going
over us.

RV: By this time, what did you think of the Vietnam War? It’s raging ’65, ’66,
’67, ’68.

AT: Well, I became interested in it because they kept putting more and more
demand on Agent Orange airplanes. We were taking C-123’s that we’d been in training.
They’d been in cargo, short lift cargo we called it and they were trying to figure out ways
to make it work and they were putting a 10,000 gallon tank in it and the spray bars under
the wing, spray bars under the fuselage and then just about that time they decided to put
an auxiliary jet engine out on each wing and that’s when they called it the KC-123.
That’s for the jet engine. And the reason for the jet engines is we were spraying 40 feet
above the trees and up there in the north part around Da Nang and everything on the
mountains. We called it the mountain ranch. And you get down in those valleys and
sometimes you couldn’t get out. And what would happen, the crew would start climbing
out way before he came to the end of his run. You couldn’t blame the guy. It was the only
way he could out. So his spray would be totally ineffective within about maybe a quarter
of a mile from the end of his run. It would still be green. And what you did, you waited
six days, six to seven days and you went in there in a FAC airplane to look to see the
effectiveness of the herbicide. And if you had striping like if they weren’t flying the
formation properly, you would get striping and they would have to go in and do it again.
And that’s really when you got your butt shot is when you went in over an area that you’d
already sprayed because most of the leaves were gone. Those little rascals were sitting
there right by the tree and they’ve got those AK-47s right on you and that’s when I got
one. Anyhow, the war in Vietnam was really beginning to boom. The Army was
screaming for more and more chemicals, herbicides to increase their horizontal visibility
in those jungles and we were getting in deeper and deeper. And that’s when I went to
General Catton. Well, I went to him twice to get my papers to go to Vietnam. He said,
“Hell, you don’t even know your way around the Pentagon yet.” Stuff like that. Of course
I said, “Well, you don’t ever let me stay here.”

RV: Why did you volunteer to go over?
AT: I felt very guilty of working all these programs for Vietnam, Sacred Goat, the herbicide and several other programs and not having been there. And here I am, these guys coming back from over there and we’d bring them into the Pentagon and we’d try to debrief them you know. Guys like Jack Spey, does that name ring a bell?

RV: Yes, sir.

AT: Jack Spey, he was our lead guy in Ranch Hand. And another guy, what the hell was his name? [Russ Mooney] He became a general and retired to Arkansas. I can't remember it. I get my old Ranch Hand papers out I would. But anyhow he would come in and he would debrief us on techniques and what the airplane needed. In fact it was those guys coming back that got us to put the jet on the wing tips. Of course that was, you talk about a Rube Goldberg, Jesus. We’d put that thing out there and there was no throttles involved. You had two toggle switches on the overhead panel. You just reached up and turned the toggle switches on and the damn jets went off. You had no control over it (laughing).

RV: You got you a boost.

AT: There you go. You got a hell of a boost. And we’d use them sometimes on take off. Of course we came up with problems, one of the problems I remember, it was either Jack or this other, Russ [Mooney]. I’m getting old. I can't remember. Russ somebody. He came back and their problem was when they came into land, they’d reverse the props and all that dirt would go in that jet engine. So we had to get a lens [shutter] that closed and hooked into the prop mechanism as soon as you reverse the props, this door shutter closed on the intake of the jet engine. And that solved that. But we pulled our hair out. Maybe it took us two or three to six months to figure that one out.

RV: How did you feel about, I understand what you said about volunteering but how did you feel about going into a war zone?

AT: It didn’t bother me I don’t think too much. Well, after I got over there, I found out those damn mortars were more trouble than the airplanes. I got mortared several times. I was at Bien Hoa right north of Saigon. We received three or four or five mortar attacks at night there. I was a major when I went over there. Yeah, a major lieutenant colonel when I was over there and I was still major over there. No. Maybe I was a lieutenant colonel when I was over there because I made major back in- I don’t
know. Maybe I was still a major when I went over there because we’re only talking about ’68 and I made major in ’62, I think. Something like that. So anyhow, the mortar attacks bothered me more after I got over there. I didn’t think about the mortar attacks, but those are more dangerous than flying, the type of flying we were doing although we’d get a lot of hits. But we wore body armor that you wouldn’t believe. Our body armor weighed 54 pounds and we’d only put it on, we kept it in the back of the airplane and we’d go into the target, before we went down on the target, we’d go back in the airplane, take turns, put armor on and come back up, sit down. We had armored helmets too. The only place there wasn’t armor to wear were our balls [testicles]. That scared us to death because you couldn’t armor that area because you had to pull the yoke back in sort of U shape in the seat so it would give you clearance to pull the yoke back if you had to. So what we’d do, our checklist was about maybe four inches thick of plastic. So after we finished reading the checklist, we’d take that and stick it down under our balls [testicles]. That was the armor. (laughing) Everybody did it I tell you. I got a hit, I guess I’d been over there six or seven months and I got a hit right in the chest. It came right through the instrument panel, AK-47. Fortunately, that armor, thank God for Corning because it’s made by Corningware who by the way, the President of Corning, the retired President of Corning lives here at one of our country clubs. His name is Pat Moore. I keep kidding him that he saved my life. Of course I kid him. He’s head [president] of my [our] performing arts center and stuff like that.

RV: How did your wife feel about you going overseas?

AT: I think she was very upset. She was very upset. When I was stationed at the Pentagon, we were there in Washington. In fact, I had bought a house in Washington right across the street where I was raised which was good for me. My kids were all going to school, well, two kids were going to school. The other one was still an infant and she was very upset and as I say, we were living in Washington and before I went down to Hurlbert for training, by the way, we didn’t say anything about that training for Ranch Hand. But that was an excellent training.

RV: Let’s talk about that a little bit.

AT: Well, let me tell you, before I went down there and we were sitting in our house one night. Her brother was an electrical engineer. He worked for NASA and I had
an old T.V. and I wanted him to look at it because he could fix anything. I was going to take it with me to Hurlbert and we just determined the thing was no good so we wrapped the cord around it and set it on the floor by the door. Anyhow, my daughter who then I guess was about 12 years old, she was playing with a little girl next door, she came in about 6:00 and this was in September and she left the door open. The next thing we knew, two black guys were in our living room with guns in our face. This was a good section in Washington right about six blocks from the National Cathedral there in Washington and it just scared me to death because he made us lie on the floor. Of course they didn’t hurt anybody. They went up and ransacked the house. He said he wanted guns and money and we didn’t have either one. And they left. They took that T.V. that wasn’t any good and they took our big T.V. They just wrapped their arms around it. And they later found them and I was over there worried about them, you know. I went out and bought a German Shepherd and all that crap. But anyhow, I was worried about them. I was worried about them. I wasn’t over there worried about them. I was down at Hurlbert and that’s what you want to go to talking about the training for Ranch Hand.

RV: Sure.

AT: Okay. It’s at Hurlbert Field which is Eglin #9, auxiliary field number nine down at Destin, Florida. Again, remember I’d been flying six engine jet bombers and all that and then here I go back to two engine airplanes that did not have the K model in training either. So they didn’t have jets on it. But what we did was the main thing and the most difficult thing to learn for an old B-47 guy who as close as he’d been to an airplane was 17 feet three inches-and that’s refueling, you know- was a formation and the techniques that Jack Spey, by the way, had developed in Vietnam in spring. Of course our instructors at Hurlbert were mostly old crop dusters down in Florida which they had a lot of them. And they were teaching us actually crop dusting techniques. And it’s a very different technique. You fly an echelon and you turn into the echelon which drives a fighter pilot crazy because they never turn into the echelon.

RV: Can you describe what you mean by that?

AT: Okay. The echelon is a staggered formation. And you have everything say, to your left. And the normal way would be to turn to your right, but the problem is, with your radius of turn, the other airplanes could never stay with you. Do you follow me?
RV: Yes, sir.

AT: So what you do in a 123, you’ve got to remember you’re only going 140. You turn to your left if you’re in an echelon to the left, you turn to your left. You turn into that airplane. And man it scares the hell out of a fighter pilot. But what you do, he turns right there on you and you maintain the same radius if you can imagine this and your formation stays together, you continue to spray, and you have no striping in between the spray run. But I tell you, it scares the hell out of a fighter pilot. And a lot of our supervisors in Vietnam were all fighter pilots and they would fly over us in A-10s and stuff like that and see what we were doing and I’ve had my ass chewed so many times. I became the operations officer over there for a while and they would bring me down to Tan Son Nhut and just chew my butt about our techniques. I’d take them up and show them and it would still scare the hell out of them.

RV: This was stuff you perfected at Hurlbert?

AT: Well, it was perfected at Hurlbert but the spray pilots and really Jack Spey and Russ [Mooney]- damn I can't remember that Russ’s last name. But anyhow, they perfected it over there because they were using real spray and they were seeing the results of it. And they were seeing the results of turning away from the formation which just didn’t work. You just wasted half of your load really depending on what your turn was and how big you were working. Of course you only had four-minute load in that 10,000 gallon tank and that was the length of your spray run. So if you had a short run and you wanted to turn, you wanted to spray while you were running, you had to turn into that echelon and as I say, it scared the fighter pilots to death but it worked. It was very successful. We had a hard time explaining it to them.

RV: How did you adapt to flying the 123s versus all these other airplanes that you had flown?

AT: Well, the 123 is a piece of cake. And the reason we chose that and I wasn’t in on the ground floor with choosing. They had already done that when I got to the Pentagon. But it is no power controls whatsoever. Everything is controlled by a little quarter inch cable. And you think of anybody is unlucky enough to have an AK-47 pierce a quarter inch cable probably shouldn’t live anyhow. But that was the beauty of it. Plus the design of the airplane, the fuel tanks were not in the fuselage. They were not in the
wings. They were aft of the engine in of itself. That engine protected that fuel tank. Plus they were self sealing fuel tanks too. So they had a rubber lining in there. After you got shot in the fuel tank, you could still fly, if I remember correctly, another 15 hours before that rubber would get to your carburetor is what they were worried about. We actually flew two or three missions after we had the tanks pierced. I flew, let’s see, I flew 145 combat missions over there and did it all in that year I was there, took a week R&R, six days R&R, went back to Hawaii. My wife came over. I think she brought two of the kids, left one of the kids, the youngest, I guess with my mother I think. One of them was born in ’66 so she wouldn’t have brought that. And we had a great time in Hawaii at Bellows which is on the north side. And I went back and finished my tour.

RV: Was there anything else at Hurlbert, was there anything that happened there that you definitely used specifically in Vietnam?

AT: I’ll tell you, there’s a technique and I’m sure some of the other Ranch Hand guys will tell you, you could not use your altimeter flying at 40 feet above the trees. And what you had to do and this was a major part of the training there, was learn how to determine your altitude, your height really by the [rate of] flow at which the trees went underneath the airplane. And that was the most difficult part.

RV: How did you get to do that? Was it just practice?

AT: Just practice, practice, practice. We flew every damn day. We had some ground school but we’d fly sometimes in the morning and in the evening. Of course there was very limited night flying. We just had to learn it. That’s all. The other technique that was different, the copilot, I’ll get this right now, the copilot flew the throttles. The pilot, the guy in the left seat, flew the ailerons in other words, the yoke. And that was to maintain the formation. And the copilot was on the throttles and he was the only guy looking straight ahead and if he saw a tree that moved up on the windshield, he added power. As long as that tree was moving down on the windshield, you were alright. You were going to clear it. Do you follow me? And if it didn’t move at all, he had to add the power too. So that required a lot of teamwork. I had a young copilot, Jack Tebay, who was an Air Force Academy graduate, one of the best in the business but I never could check him out as a pilot because I became the ops officer later. He could handle the throttles good. But I don’t what, I think he was trying too hard being an Air Force
Academy graduate. They’re like doctors. They never make their first mistake. And those
guys are over motivated. And we had some guys we never could check out. We had some
older fellows we couldn’t check out. My main job after I became the ops officer is
keeping people from jumping on the airplane. I’ve never seen a more motivated group of
people in my life. These people wanted to fly all the time. And I’m talking about guys 45,
48 years old. Masters degrees. That unit, and I may not be right anymore, but at one time
had the highest number of graduate degrees of any unit in Vietnam. I think that was
around 1968. I went in training in ’68, got over there in December of ’68 and came back
in December of ’69. Let me tell you what this Master Sergeant did for me. I raised hell.
This was the Chief Master Sergeant of Personnel at the Pentagon I got to know real well
and he found out I was going to Vietnam and of course I had to go to training in
September. He said, “I’ll get you a good assignment time, a good port time,” he called it.
And so he did. It was the 13th of December. I raised hell. I missed Christmas with my
kids. So I called and I said, “What the hell are you doing to me.” He said, “Go and have
Christmas a week or so early with your kids.” He said, “You’ll appreciate it.” And I went
over there on the 13th of December. I got back on the first of the next December. I was
back there for Christmas with my kids. That’s the advantage of making friends with some
of these old sergeants. They can carry you on.

RV: Why was there such high morale in the Ranch Hand spray missions?

AT: One of them was the commander at that time was Lieutenant Colonel [Ken]
Stoner. What was his first name? He had a brother over there too. But this guy was
completely crazy. I’ve never seen a guy with more adrenaline. He just wanted to go out
and get hit, you know. He was a big, old, overweight, he walked with a limp. Ken Stoner
was his name. He was a used car dealer at Fayetteville, North Carolina and died of a heart
attack after Vietnam. But he was just a motivated guy. He motivated people like you’ve
never heard. And we scared people to death. We’d have our commanders, like our wing
commander would be over at Phang Rang and he was what we called a trash hauler. The
other 123s that didn’t spray. And they’d come over and they’d ride with us and they’d
ride one time and we’d never see them again. One of the guys’ name was Campbell. And
the other guy’s name was Pauley by the way, Jane Pauley’s father. You know the Jane
Pauley on television, her father. He became, I guess after Vietnam he became about a
three or four star and he became the [Commander] Air Force in Europe. I think he was four star. No, he was Army. No he wasn’t. He was Air Force. He had to be to be a wing commander. Pauley was the name. John Pauley I think was the first name. But he was a jewel of a guy and looked just like she does, beautiful person. But the morale I think was really derived from the fact that we were doing something different. We were doing something everybody thought was crazy as hell. And we had a few people that wouldn’t go. We had some shell shocked people. And we had one navigator who was a great navigator and he would just malinger like anything. He’d be sick and he’d be this and he’d be that and I couldn’t get him on a flight. I had six months or I guess five months that I was the ops officer I guess only two people that I couldn’t get on an airplane. There was some I wouldn’t let go. I’d make them an administrative officer or something like that because I just felt as though they weren't capable. One old guy, he was 49 years old, Jim Martin, we called him pappy and he was right in the same hooch as me. But I just wouldn’t let that guy go because I knew he was going to bust his butt. He would fly planes up to the depot to get them modified. Our depot was in Hong Kong which wasn’t a bad deal and he’d fly them up there and we’d have to fly them up there, I guess every six months he went up there. Of course we always kept an airplane up there. So I had him, he was sort of my shuttle guy. And he was good but I wouldn’t put him on a spray run.

RV: What about the morale of the other American troops that you were around?

AT: I got a chance later on, in the last six months one of them became operations officer, we had to go around, as I said with the Army chemical people and brief these province chiefs. I was pretty surprised that these guys lived out there in all this dirt and mud and dust and we would fly on these short fields in the 123s there and get in helicopters and I thought their morale was great considering. I wouldn’t want to be living in those conditions, which one of them was Song Be that sticks in my mind. I left there one afternoon about 3:00. It was overrun that night and every American in there was killed. I can't believe the morale of that bunch that day. And of course, the problem with Vietnam, these hooch maids and these people that are working for you during the day were the enemy at night. We couldn’t even throw our flashlight batteries away. We’d take them out and run over them with the jeep because the story was, of course this was
rumor, that those flash light batteries would end up in a rocket and be launched back that
night on your base. And your watches, wrist watches, boy, you’d watch those like a hawk
because they’d somehow hook those up as a timing device on those damn rockets. That
was the story. I don’t know whether it was true or not. But we would watch our wrist
watches and stuff like that, flash light batteries.

RV: Sir, why don’t we go ahead and take a break for today. I know it’s after 5:00
here.

AT: Yeah. It is. My wife is probably going to wonder why I’m not home. I told
her I was going to be talking to you until about 5:00.

RV: Okay. We’ll go ahead and end it for today then.
This is Richard Verrone and I’m continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Allen Trott. Today is March 5, 2003 and it is about 8:32 am Central Standard time. I am in Lubbock, Texas in the interview room at the special collections library and Mr. Trott is in Highlands, North Carolina again. Sir, why don’t we go ahead and pick up where we left off yesterday afternoon? We were talking about your arrival in Vietnam and some of the things that you witnessed of the guys serving with you and then the morale of the Americans overall. Tell me just your general impressions of Vietnam once you first arrived in country. What was that like for you?

AT: I was somewhat amazed. I arrived in country, had to return to the Philippines to go to Jungle survival school. Somehow they didn’t have me scheduled on that and I had to go back to jungle survival. But I was amazed at just the number of people and I guess bicycles and motor scooters and the crowded conditions under which they lived. Then the base that I was stationed on, I’d made major then I believe. Anyhow, I was housed in a Quonset hut with about 8 other field grade officers and fairly respectable quarters. No running water or anything that fancy. We had to go outside and walk about, oh, I guess maybe 200 yards, 100 yards, I guess to a latrine facility and all that which was fine except at night when you went out there was always a light over our door. The jeckles used to hang out up there and when you’d slam the screen door the jeckles would manage to fall on you and of course you always just had shorts on and that was sort of scary, alarming. But I was amazed at the country itself. It just seemed to be going along like no war was going on. Everybody was bustling around and busy. This was especially true in Saigon. And I was just north of Saigon about, I think maybe eight or nine miles.
But we were adjacent to Long Binh which was the largest Army base, I guess in Vietnam. I know they had a good Chinese restaurant over there. I know that. We used to get on a 29 passenger bus and I was checked out on a 29 passenger bus and I drove the bus over as many nights a week as we could and had Chinese food over at Long Binh.

RV: Was the food not that great on base for you?

AT: No, no. The food was good. We ate in the officer’s club and the food was fairly good. In fact, I think if we had an early morning flight we’d eat in the mess hall, what we called midnight chow or something like that. And all of our flights were really early in the morning. But conditions, living conditions on my part was pretty good. We had a Quonset hut which we had taken a bunch of believe it or not, old egg crates and put them up in the ceiling and gave us some insulation. And we had an air conditioner or two there if I recall there so it was a fairly good living quarters and we had taken plywood, probably salvaged plywood and we’d made petitions. So each officer had a little set of quarters there. Of course, right outside we had a bunker and I really didn’t know what it was for when I first went there. I just thought they were sort of decorations, you know, until I had been there about a week or so and we started getting mortar attacks at night. Of course the procedure is to go get in the bunker.

RV: What was the bunker like? Can you describe it?

AT: It was sandbags and the sandbags were, I’d say maybe six, seven feet high and they had some kind of metal bars across it I believe and then they had sandbags on top of those bars. It was a sandbag bunker. And allegedly, I never got hurt with it, but allegedly as the story went, they would say that the hooch maids or somebody working around there would put razor blades in between the sandbags so when you went in there, of course every time you went in there it was night, it was dark. No lights in there and some people would get cut. I never observed that but that was the rumor around the base.

RV: Did you guys have a problem trusting the housemaids and the people that I guess cleaned your huts?

AT: We did. We were told not to. That gal would show up everyday. Of course she didn’t speak a word of English nor did we speak much, I didn’t speak any, Vietnamese and she would sort of sweep the hooch out and empty our trash cans. We made our own beds if I recall. But we were told again, like I said yesterday, not to leave
any flashlight batteries in the trash can and watch our wrist watches and things like that.

But there’s a lot of rumors and tales that go around in a combat zone. Anytime you get a bunch of people together, they don’t have to be soldiers or airmen or anything, it’s just those kind of stories go around. I have those problems in Boy Scout camp. I work with boy scouts. Any time you get a group of guys together they have to have something to talk about.

RV: How many men lived inside your Quonset hut?

AT: There were eight I believe, I recall.

RV: Did you get along with everybody?

AT: Oh, yeah. Pretty good. As I think I mentioned yesterday, we had one guy, I shouldn’t use the term a maligner but he was scared to death. I had, later, as I became the operations officer in doing the scheduling, getting crews on airplanes, had some trouble scheduling him. He just didn’t want to go. I think he left Vietnam early. I don’t know if he had a mental problem or what. I sort of lost track of that because I think the flight surgeon took over after we complained about it or something.

RV: Did he tell you he was scared, straight up?

AT: Oh yeah. No doubt about it. He would lay in his bunk and just be scared to death. And we’d all get up around 3:00 and go eat, 3:00 in the morning and go eat and he would invariably not be up if he was scheduled to fly or not. That became pretty serious when you have to double schedule a guy. In other words, you have to schedule back up for the guy because he didn’t show up at briefing and stuff like that. Our briefings were usually at about 2:00 in the morning. Well, no. Excuse me. The brief, we went to the mess hall at 3:00. Our briefings were at 4:00 and we took off, depending on where the target was, we took off about 5:00 before daybreak in order to get to the target right at sun up, sunrise. But that was our plan. We didn’t go to bed early either.

RV: You didn’t.

AT: No, no. We did a lot of drinking and I remember I’d never had a vodka tonic until I got over there and then I started drinking vodka and I found it pretty good but I don’t drink anymore of it.

RV: Where would you guys do your drinking?
AT: Right there in the hooch. Of course the officer’s club was quite liberal and
the stuff wasn’t too expensive. So we’d usually go over to eat dinner over there and we’d
finish our daily activities, go over there, eat dinner and have a few drinks and come back
to the hooch. And often times we had a barbeque, one of these half barrel things out the
side door of the hooch out beside of it. By the way, it’s right by the bunker. And we
would cook barbeque or steaks or things like that. And people always said, “Where’d you
get your steaks?” Well, we got our steaks from the Special Forces people. And they
always wanted ice. That was the big premium item over there at those outlying camps,
you know. I remember when I was telling you about Song Be yesterday and we had taken
a 500 pound cake of ice into them that day and I got two boxes of steaks in return. I don’t
know where they got their steaks. I guess it was shipped in the Army. But one of their
premium items over there was ice. So we’d take them ice and they’d trade us steaks.

RV: How would you take them ice?
AT: We’d just tie it down on the cargo compartment of the C-123.
RV: Okay and land and unload it.
AT: Let it slide off. Yeah. Song Be had a very, very short runway. I think it was
something like 2,000 feet and it was a real challenge to get into it because it was on top of
a mountain and I’d have to go in there to brief the province chief and the chemical
officers and things like that on pending targets and things.

RV: While we’re talking about the drinking and all that, let me ask you a couple
of questions about it. Do you think there was any kind of abuse of alcohol? Was it too
excessive or was it just a bunch of guys getting together having a good time?
AT: I don’t know. I think there was probably some abuse. I really do although
from my perspective it was pretty well under control. We had a couple of guys that
probably drank too much but they probably drank too much before they went over there.
They were just those type guys. But I didn’t see any excessive abuse. I never had
anybody show up too drunk to fly and stuff like that. I was pretty observant of that. Of
course flying 40 feet above the trees demanded the most, you had to be pretty damn
observant. I wouldn’t want a guy that had been under the influence too much flying in
that condition.
RV: How about hangovers? Did they effect your flying so early in the morning?
They did sometimes. I remember getting up with a headache and popping a couple of aspirin or something like that. Of course coffee was a big thing over there. We drank coffee incessantly. I wasn’t a coffee drinker before I went and even though I went to the Coast Guard and they always had coffee on, I didn’t drink much coffee then. I drank some over there but I don’t drink any now.

Really?

No. Not a coffee drinker.

So the war brought out some unique aspects of your personality.

Yeah.

Let me ask you about drug use. Did you ever witness any of that?

No. I never did. I heard a lot about it. We were all alerted to it especially in our enlisted crew members who we had a flight engineer on each airplane, an enlisted flight engineer. And then we had all the maintenance people and all that and I was quite close to them being on the operations side. And I never did observe any at all. One of our problems, I don’t know whether you can classify it as a problem or not, one of the things that concerned me, we were in what they called a joint [unit], which is supposed to be Vietnamese and U.S. There were a lot of those units over there and we had some Vietnamese pilots that were assigned to us and I’d schedule them and usually every time I scheduled them, I’d schedule one of our more experienced pilots, instructor pilots, something like that. They were very hard. They would not work on Sunday. In fact, their part of the base was completely closed down on Sunday.

Why was that?

In my opinion they didn’t want to work at all, yet they were very industrious people, farming and running their businesses and all that but they would not work, the military anyhow would not work on Sunday, which was very provoking to me because we’d have two missions every Sunday. We had two missions every day of the week, weather permitting. Of course we would work in a very restricted time frame in that we couldn’t spray Agent Orange, anyhow, with the temperature more than 85 degrees and the wind more than 25 knots because it would float out of the target area and cause all kinds of problems.

Tell me about what you all would do for entertainment.
AT: Go to the club and usually I guess about maybe one night every other week
you’d have a USO bunch come through and I remember the one that I remember the best
was Harry James’ Orchestra. You probably don’t even know Harry James.

RV: I do know of them.

AT: Anyhow, that was one of the best we had over there. I remember the
orchestra was so large and our officer’s club was so small and they had them on a tiered
stand, you know. I think the guys at the top were playing trombones. They couldn’t get
full movement on the slides because of the size of the place. But it was thrilling. He had a
couple of female vocalists with him and they were very pretty to us. And of course my
favorite song over there, “I Left My Heart in San Francisco” and every band or orchestra
or every show we had, they always ended up with that or something like that. So it was
nostalgic. And that’s what it was. It was mainly club activity. We’d go down to Saigon
but not very often because the nightlife in Saigon didn’t start until quite late and we tried
to get back and get in bed at a somewhat reasonable time. I do remember one thing very
significant. We were invited, and hell, I don’t know where this was, it may have been at
Long Binh, the Army base, we were invited to a function and I don’t even know what the
function was called, what the occasion was, but who was the guy who was the President
of Vietnam. Ty?

RV: Ki?

AT: Ki. Yeah Ki. The pilot and all that. He had thrown this big banquet over at
Long Binh and officers, I think only. But I remember I loaded all of our people, officers
and pilots that wanted to go and we went over to Long Binh in our 29 passenger bus. It
was like some kind, maybe it was a gymnasium or something over there. I remember it
was a huge building and they had all this very nice furniture moved in there and
overstuffed chairs and all that all the booze you wanted to drink and all that. And the
most beautiful ladies that you didn’t see on the street, the most beautiful Vietnamese
ladies I had ever seen just there. They would dance with you and it was sort of a banquet
I guess you would call it. And he was there and he made a speech and I remember there
was a lot of booze went on there that night. Fortunately it rained like hell the next day
and we didn’t have to fly although we didn’t know it was going to rain at the time. But
that was one of the things that stick out in my mind, the one with the Harry James thing
of entertainment.

RV: How much contact did you all have with women there? Was it situations like
that or in the clubs?

AT: There weren't many women in the clubs. We had nurses of course and there
were some nurses there. I remember them. And I think some of the guys would get with
them and I know every once in a while there would be one or two at our table or
something like that at the club. But as far as the contact, I’m sure that some guys were
deply involved but I surely wasn’t. I was about 40 years old, 43 years old. I was beyond
that maybe. I don’t know. But I didn’t fool around like that. We used to go to Saigon and
I think I remember going one time to some night club, it may have been a restaurant, I’m
not sure, but that’s about all. There were some women there but they didn’t join us or
anything like that. Now, I went up to Udorn, Udorn or Ubon. I can't remember which
one.

RV: Udorn, Thailand.

AT: Yeah. I took five airplanes up there twice during the year I was there. We
would go downtown there and there were probably more fraternization there in Thailand
than there was in Vietnam. These women that Ki had, they were beautiful women, but the
women in Thailand were extremely beautiful.

RV: They were?

AT: Yeah. Around that part of the country.

RV: When you said there was fraternization, what do you mean? Were there just
more in the clubs hanging out with all the men?

AT: Yeah. That’s right. Let’s see, we were staying in a hotel and that makes it a
lot more easy I guess to fraternize and we were staying in big hotel downtown and I
remember seeing guys take girls in the room and stuff like that.

RV: You had USO shows, you hung out at the club and did things there. You said
you did barbeques. What else would you all do for entertainment? Was there a lot of
camaraderie within the barracks?

AT: Football. Flag football. Of course I played ball in college, you know and that
was down my line and I was quite a bit older, a little slower but we had some real, real
good flag football teams. We had a league there and we’d play I remember in the
afternoon before dark and I guess we’d play football. It didn’t make any difference
whether it was football season or not. It’s always the same season over there, the rainy
season. And we would play probably three games a week in the afternoon, very, very
vigorous too, I’ll tell you.

RV: Did you divide up teams according to different barracks or how did you do
that?

AT: It was units, different units. I remember we had one, The Ranch Handers and
stuff like that. We had a team and we had a damn good team. I think we won the
tournament over there a couple of times.

RV: Did you play quarterback?

AT: No. I was on defense and I played line on the defense. But I was still quick
and I could get in there and grab the flag, you know. Of course flag football if you know
it, it’s as rough as tackle almost. Because sometimes they’ll tackle you to get the flag out.
That was one of the big recreation things. I can't think of anything else. I’m sure a lot of
guys played basketball. A lot of guys went to the gymnasium. It wasn’t anywhere as
close to the gyms we have now. No nautilus equipment. I’m sure there were weights
there and basketball and I can't remember, I’m quite a handball/racquetball player. I can't
remember playing. I believe I did play a couple of times. But again, I picked up
additional duties over there and I was working myself to death. And one of my additional
duties, they made me the targeting officer and I had to plan the approaches into the target
and stuff like that. Of course I’d had a lot of help. Those guys had been there. My
definition by the way of limited warfare is to keep the tours of duty down to one year
because that will sure limit the warfare because you’re learning the first six months
leaning what the hell you’re doing. Then you go on R&R and then you spend your next
six months trying to get home type thing. It really cuts down on efficiency and
effectiveness. And of course I put that into my Master’s degree program [thesis] too.

RV: So you think the United States government should have definitely extended
tours like they did in World war II?

AT: Oh, God, yeah. They sure should have. In fact, this thing of telling a guy that
he was going to be there only one year before he goes is a big mistake. The guy just, he
shoots for the point of R&R and then from R&R its downhill. He hadn’t even learned what he’s doing depending on the mission, of course. I have to appreciate the guy in the field walking in the rice paddies with the leaches on them. Those are the guys really I think that gained from the one year only. I don’t know if the American culture could stand much more than one year although I’ve talked to people since then that were over there two or three years. I have a Boy Scout district executive, a retired marine, and he served, I think three years over there. Three tours, three different one year cycles. He was up in the 1st Cav up in Da Nang I think. By the way, that’s a guy you probably ought to interview too.

RV: Yes, sir. We can get his contact information when we conclude. Tell me, how much were you able to keep up with news from the United States? What was your access?

AT: Stars and Stripes. I think we listened to the radio, of course, no T.V. I think I listened to the radio quite heavily but Stars and Stripes was the main thing.

RV: How much contact did you have with your wife and writing letters and things like that?

AT: Almost once a week or twice a week. My father as well, my mother as well. So I had pretty good contact back with the States. No problem. In fact, I would get on the what did they call it, they used to call it, the telephone.

RV: The MARS calls.

AT: MARS. Yeah. I’d get a MARS call and I’d make one of those and I’d bug the guys over at the MARS station, you know. So I’d get a time on that usually on Sunday afternoons because we flew on Sunday mornings. Of course that would make it the middle of the morning on Monday morning back in the States I believe it was.

RV: Yes, sir. That’s right. You mentioned earlier that you went to Hawaii on R&R. Was that your only R&R you took?

AT: Yeah. That’s the only one I took. It was six days. My wife came over. We stayed at Bellows which is an old Air Force Base on the north part of the Island and that was the cheapest quarters we could get. It was good. We really had a good time. We saw the sights you know.
RV: I wonder if you could describe to me what a typical day was like for you there.

AT: As I say, we would get up about 3:00 in the morning, go over to the mess hall or chow hall and eat what we call midnight chow and then we would go to the ops office and usually have a briefing of what our target is going to be. Depending on the size of the formation and the size of the target, sometimes we had two flights. We had two flights going off in the morning to different targets, one at each target. Then we’d come back in, land, reservice the airplane, go in and brief another target. We’d hit two more targets.

RV: So they were back to back.

AT: Back to back, right. We would get to ops about 4:00. We’d start our briefing. Briefings weren't very detailed. They had big maps and all this stuff and we’d point out the target and we’d give our call signs and we have to give our FAC call sign because the Forward Air Controller had to be there to monitor. Because rules of engagement in Vietnam was that you could not drop anything from an airplane without a Forward Air Controller marking the target. And he’d mark the target with what we call a Willy Pete. It’s a white phosphorous rocket. Often times, the FAC, if he was coming from the same base, if it was close in target, he would be at that briefing too. And the other thing that was very important is the fighter coverage that we were going to have and we never went down unless we had fighter coverage. I went down a couple of times. I wish I hadn’t. But anyhow, often times if the fighters were coming from Bien Hoa, they would be there too. We’d see the flight leader would be there and of course they were fine. We liked A-1Es but they had F-4s there at Bien Hoa. So when they had F-4s, usually they were always from Bien Hoa and the flight commander would be there and depending on who the flight commander was, we knew the guys and we’d be in the club with them all the time, too. And we knew the guys and we knew what kind of coverage we could get who was flying as a flight commander, flight leader, which was they’d get in real close and really give them hell or what.

RV: Would they lay out suppressing fire for you before hand?

AT: Well, no, not necessarily beforehand. I guess it could be considered beforehand in that they would come down with anti personnel bombs, little bomblets, you
know, and they would drop those right in front of us and the desired way, of course they would just fly a big loop and come in on both sides of us as we were down. Of course like I say, we were only down on a target about four minutes. And they would fly on the side dropping these little bomblets. Of course we would get down as close to the trees as we could and we’d start getting ground fire, we’d even get closer. Of course, we’d get so close sometimes that all those airplanes, all those Ranch Hand airplanes were just dented in the bottom like little BBs had hit them because we’d fly so close to these anti personnel weapons that it’d just pop up and hit the bottom of the airplane.

RV: Why did you fly lower when you were receiving fire?

AT: Because it makes us go by them faster because the lower you are the quicker you go by their eye sight. Of course they were usually looking up through trees through the forest and stuff like that. And they don’t get a good sight on you and they have to lead you and you’re going 140 and they have to lead you. In fact, we captured manuals, well the Army did for us, training the ground troops to shoot at the Dakotas they called us—how much to lead us and all that. I tried a tactics change when I was over there by changing air speeds. Instead of going 140 all the time, I was going 160 which was a much better maneuverability speed for the C-123 loaded. But it played hell with the spray pattern. It wouldn’t go down as well and stuff like that because you’re going too damn fast. So we did that a couple of times. We didn’t take as many hits but we also didn’t get the target done so we had to come back again. And that was our big dread to have to come back two and three times for a target.

RV: How soon would you come back? Would it be like the next day or a week later?

AT: No. No. Well, by the time we get it back into the cycle, it would probably be about two weeks. It took about six to seven days as we were told for that stuff to start really taking effect. That was the Agent Orange. Now, there were some other chemicals that we were using we called white, which was a little longer. Now, the difference between white- you’ll probably know all this- the difference between white and orange was that white had a water base where orange had a diesel base. White wouldn’t drift as much as the orange would drift. And if we had some real prize avoidance areas such as Michelin’s rubber plantation, we would spray white adjacent to that so it wouldn’t drift
over there on it. Because you know we paid for every damn rubber plant that we ever
even came close to and a lot which I don’t think we did come close to because I had to
get into a lot of that stuff when they’d come down with a claim. Of course I do have
Michelin tires on my car but it was many years before I touched Michelin again because
we were paying $100 a rubber tree. I think we were paying $100 or maybe it was $1,000
per tree. The figure leaves me. And the rubber tree only produces $50 worth its whole life
cycle.

RV: Now who would be coming with the claims?

AT: The Michelin Corporation would come to the U.S. Army Chemical Corps
and we would get it through the Chemical Corps. We had a full colonel, an Army guy
assigned to Ranch Hands in charge of the chemicals. The way the thing worked, Agent
Orange, or the chemical, the defoliant I should say, actually was sold to the Vietnamese
by Dupont out of Biloxi, Mississippi or some place down there. It was actually the
Vietnamese product all stacked up in these 55 gallon drums as far as you could see in
Bien Hoa. And they then would take the chemical and they would install it in the
airplane, they being the Vietnamese. And we didn’t even supposedly touch it. But they
were doing this while we were pre-flighting and we would get sloshed with it several
times. The only thing we ever worried about was getting it in our eyes because we knew
it would burn like hell and we carried a flask with us, people always kidded the Ranch
Handers about it, in our armored vest we had a pocket which we’d put a little flask in and
that had water in it to wash our eyes out.

RV: What do you mean when you got sloshed by it? What happened?

AT: They would be servicing the airplane. Of course we’d be getting in the
airplane putting our weapons in there, putting our flak vests in there and stuff like that
and that was right alongside these tanks. These Vietnamese would be standing up on a
little step stool. They were all so damn short. They’d put this hose inside the tank. Well,
they’d fill the tank up and let it slosh over and if you happened to be there, you’d get
soaked with it with your flight suit and you’d go ahead and fly the mission. At that time
we didn’t know anything different.

RV: They didn’t tell you anything about the potential hazards of it?
AT: No. It wasn’t until 1969, late in my tour that stuff started coming out. And that’s a real harrowing story in that we were sitting there one day. At that time I was the ops officer. This was around I guess October of ’69 and we were sitting there and we got a message. I think it came from Phang Rang. That’s where our headquarters was, Special Operations Wing. Somebody was coming down by the name of Liz Trotter, T-R-O-T-T-E-R. And she was with NBC and she would have a sound man and a camera man with her and we were to give her access to our missions. And this came through the chemicals system and through our Air Force system and lo and behold before we could even get the message read, who popped in the door of the operations room but this young lady and two guys with her and they were this NBC team. I chose to have them ride on my airplane. They did. I had to give them armor and everything and brief them on escape and evasion and things like that. They took pictures and they had sound and Liz Trotter sat up there between us and she was observing. So that was the beginning of us knowing that there was some problems with the Agent Orange.

RV: Did she tell you about it?

AT: No. She didn’t say much about it. She just wanted to photograph. Of course we were a bunch of proud guys and we wanted our picture in the paper I guess. So we let her do it and headquarters had said do it and we didn’t fight it at all. In fact I had to move the Chaplain out of his trailer to put her in there because we had no place for women, no place over in the nurses quarters. That’s where we were going to put her but she didn’t want that. So she had a private trailer. It made me mad as hell because we used to go in there. Well this is another entertainment thing I just thought about. Every Monday a C-135 would come in from Tucson. We had a U2 stationed there and they’d come in to resupply that U2 bunch and I got to know some of the 135 pilots and they would bring us a load of Mexican food and we would have a party. This was on every well, I guess it was Tuesday night. And we’d use the Chaplains trailer of all things. I remember chile con queso and stuff like that. We’d just eat like fools. And it was just the officers in our hooch. And we wouldn’t pay. I don’t recall having paid them for it. They’d get it some place there in Tucson and bring it over. So that was sort of unusual to have Mexican food and Mexican dinner with all the stuff, burritos and everything you’d ever want to ever dream about there in Vietnam. It became quite a tradition. Anyhow, the reason I thought
about it we had to curtail our dinners because of her taking over our trailer and she was there about a week.

RV: So she flew with you guys. She filmed you and is that when you started realizing that it was dangerous or did the story come out?

AT: No. I missed telling you. Right before she came over, we had two doctors from the University of Oregon. I’ll never forget one of them’s name, his name was Onion. Dr. Onion and he flew with me. Of course we got a communicae to let him fly. I didn’t know why he was flying, talking about. He became more interested in the remnants of arc light, the B-52 bombing and all the destruction it was making. We called them swimming pools all over the area with water in them during the rainy season, the bomb craters and he was more interested in that. But then he started talking to us about it. And it was very shortly after that we started reading it in Time Magazine. I think that was the first place I saw it about this being toxic and about the impact it was having on Vietnamese babies and things like that. So we started a program and this may have been about half way through my tour. It had to be after half way so it was probably in August or something like that of ’69. And we started really watching what we were doing. We would check the airplanes after we came in after every mission to make sure we didn’t have any leaking nozzles. Then we would be careful not to fly over any habitated areas, villages and stuff like that. So we were very, very strict about that.

RV: Before hand had you flown over villages by mistake?

AT: No. Not by mistake. We just didn’t pay any attention to it. We had no knowledge of it and didn’t even check the boom, you know, leaking boom or anything like that. We did notice that some of the trees were being defoliated around Bien Hoa under our traffic pattern. Of course, that place is so crowded, it’s hard to find any place where people aren’t living, especially around a big city in that Saigon area and around the bases of course, they came in to get our money. So we started reading about this in Time Magazine. Dr. Onion started explaining, in fact he stayed in my hooch with me. He started explaining the problems they were running into with mice and things like that, you know and the impact on the unborn babies and things like that. And that was the first we’d heard about it. And we didn’t get anything official on it. We were picking it up in Time Magazine and we were doing most of ourselves in cooperation with our chemical
people and of course they knew what was in the product, but they didn’t know the impact it would have on unborn babies.

RV: How did you feel about this when you guys first started hearing about it?

AT: It started worrying us a bit. We started taking all kinds of precautions and as I say, inspecting the nozzles, making sure we don’t fly over villages of significant size knowingly after we sprayed, not before we sprayed, but after we sprayed. And one of the things that really ticked me off, I got back to the States in time to see the release of Liz Trotter’s product. I called NBC mad as hell because the way they had edited that film, and you can do anything with video and I didn’t know it at the time, but the way they had edited that film was they had a picture of us going to the airplane, taxiing out, and we taxied out in formation, ran up in formation, took off in formation, and just a bunch of show offs really. And they took all this film. But then they showed us taking off and the next picture on the screen, I couldn’t believe it, was us spraying and the next picture was a village and I recognized the village because I took off over the damn thing everyday. And it was the village we had taken off over but they spliced this into the spray run. That really pissed me off to say the least. So I got on the phone. I was in Washington. That’s where my family was and called NBC and I didn’t get any response.

RV: No response at all.

AT: Hell, no. Then I called a PIO by the name of General Pitts at the Pentagon. I’d known him and in fact he’d been our ops officer up at Pease Air Force Base. And I called Pitts, Bud Pitts was his name. And I called him. I think he was a two star then in charge of PIO. I told him and I don’t know whether anything was ever done or not. You know, you never correct things like that. I learned that in politics now. Once you’ve make a mistake, you’ve made it. You might as well forget it. Don’t try to correct it.

RV: Did you raise your concerns or any of your worries or fears about the toxicity of Agent Orange with your superiors?

AT: Oh, yeah. We talked about it and we knew about it. Rex Stoner, that was the commanders name I was trying to think of who later died who was a real motivator. We talked to Rex about it and we just sort of pooh-poohed the whole thing for a while. We really didn’t believe it because we just didn’t know. Then we said, “Well, they wouldn’t have us doing anything like that, that’s bad.” Of course, it was probably exaggerated, the
story we were getting. I don’t know whether it was or not. But, yes. We were aware of it.
We did raise concern. And I think Colonel Pauley came over and flew with us and all that
and we were showing him the new procedures and the corrective action we were taking
on the situation. Herbicide continued to come in and we were worried about the mission
being scrubbed. You always are. They sprayed, in fact we had in late 1969, we had the
biggest formation of Ranch Hands we’ve ever put out. And it was 12 ships. Can you
imagine a 12 ship echelon 55 feet apart? And I don’t know whether that was an effort to
get rid of the herbicide or to get as much work done as we could before the operation was
curtailed. But it went on into 1970 after I left. I think it ended about in the mid-70s or
something like that. But it really became curtailed. It was another incident that occurred
and somebody reported a spray operation over in Cambodia and there may be some
records there and you’ll come across it where somebody sprayed, I mean did a damn
good job, on some rubber plantation over there. And supposedly it was a sanctuary for
the Viet Cong and that was the excuse to spray it but I don’t know. That’s the problem.
We never knew what we were spraying. Were we spraying somebody who failed to pay
the taxes or what? And so that was always a question in my mind especially up in Laos in
that area where we would have a FAC and what the hell were those FACs called? Raven
FACs. Yeah, you know better than I do. The Raven FACs, they would mark our targets.
And we were spraying primarily rice down there and that was like spraying in a teacup
because they’d put them down in these valleys and we took more ground fire up there,
well, I say more- considerably more than we did in Vietnam on my two or three weeks I
had over there. But that was all from above. They would sit in these caves in these
mountains and we’d go down in the valleys spraying this rice and boy, they had a perfect
target. We had a three foot wide orange day glow stripe across the top of our wing.
Because we were pretty well camouflaged and the formation would really blend in with
the jungle and we’d put that three foot wide stripe across the span of the wing so the
fighters could see us, escorts. And of course that made it damn easy for the damn guys
sitting in the caves to see us too. So I remember after about the second or third mission,
Woody Woodruff was one of my pilots, one of the best ones I had. In fact he’s now a full
colonel. I guess he’s retired now. He was later made full colonel. But he was one of the
sharpest pilots. And Woody really got shot up bad, the airplane. And he came in with all
his hydraulics out and stuff like that and rode off in the runway and I’d already landed.

He was my wingman and I remember he got out of the airplane and he said, “You know, some of you white guys are going to have a friend because I’m going to be white if I go through another mission like that.” So it scared the hell out of him. He was the greatest guy in the world, real little, diminutive guy. He was smaller than the Vietnamese but really a great guy. I don’t know where he’s from, don’t know his background at all but I do know he made full colonel. I tracked him.

RV: How many missions did you guys fly into Laos or how often would you do it?

AT: I think we would go over there when it started raining in Bien Hoa and what we’d do was go to Da Nang, go to the Mountain Ranch and we’d fly direct over there from Da Nang. And we’d take five airplanes. We’d run four missions a day. I broke them up into two flights of two because spraying at the rice, they were so small, you couldn’t really get a four airplane formation in there. So we would go to two airplane formations, take off together and one of them go one way and one of them go the other way. A couple of times they used two flights as decoys. They didn’t spray a thing, just to sort of take any interest away and then we’d go and we’d change course, all kinds of evasive type things.

One of the things and this is very interesting, you’ve got to get this is in Vietnam and as well as Laos, the way the system was set up, we had to put out a frag order the night before as to where we were going. And that’s an official order from Saigon for us to dispense or to get with the FAC and let him tell us where to dispense. And that frag order went to 43 addressees. So, hell, no wonder we were taking a lot of ground fire.

RV: So you think people knew where you guys were flying?

AT: Oh, hell yeah they knew where we were going.

RV: The people on the ground knew.

AT: Yeah, hell, yeah.

RV: How do you think they broke into that chain of 43?

AT: Remember what I said, we were joint Vietnamese?

RV: Yes, sir.

AT: You know, those guys, you’d come in there and they’d be sleeping on their desk and stuff like that and as I say, there was only one or two of those guys I’d let fly
with us. But anyhow, there were so many of them, we were so infiltrated and they were
loading the herbicide. It was their herbicide. Of course it was their base really. But I think
it was probably intercepted because they had Vietnamese in the headquarters down at
Saigon. And I went down there and worked a couple of times on some special targeting
we were doing and I could see the number of Vietnamese in there and of course I can tell
you, they may be friends in the daytime but they become you enemy at night.

RV: How did you all feel about that?

AT: Well what the hell could we do about it? We were concerned about it. We
knew that we were going to get ground fire and of course the morale of the damn outfit
was, “Let’s go out and take some ground fire.” And that was Rex Stoner driven. I didn’t
necessarily have that attitude but he sure did. Of course we had the thing when you got
there, you were a cherry and you were a cherry until you got some ground fire, got some
hits. And of course everybody’s talking about breaking the cherry. Let’s go out and break
the cherry of these guys, the new guys. Of course you’ve got to realize they had new guys
coming in all the time and guys going out all the time. It was really a constant training
program even though those guys all went through Eglin. I was a hell of a lot different
once those guys started shooting at you.

RV: Right. Let me ask one more question about Laos. Were you guys aware of
the fact that the United States had proclaimed that, basically, the North Vietnamese and
the United States had proclaimed that a neutral territory even though we both had forces
there? Did you guys think about that, talk about that at all?

AT: No. I can't recall. Once you get your orders you go and I can't recall
discussing it at all. Wait a minute. I do know. Yes, we knew. Ambassador Godby who
was ambassador that time at Laos, United States ambassador. He came down. I remember
we landed in Ubon on a Sunday morning. He came down. We had a special briefing at
2:00 on Sunday afternoon to introduce us to the fighter escort people who came out of
Ubon and to the FACs and all that who came out of Vien Tien by the way. Then
Ambassador Godby came in there and the thing that sticks in my mind, I couldn’t tell you
what he said or anything other than hello. The only thing he said, “You know, you all
realize if you go down here we don’t know you were here.” And that was briefed to us by
the Ambassador of the United States and that was not only officers. That was enlisted
men and everything. So I think I became somewhat concerned about that.

RV: What did you guys say about that? Did you talk about it afterward?

AT: Yeah but we just sort of joked about it, “Hell, let’s not get shot down,” Type
thing. But we sort of pooh-poohed it. Rex Stoner wasn’t there. I was the commanding
person there and I was quite concerned about it but what do you do? We were paid
soldiers. I do remember that so we did know and I don’t remember us discussing it too
much other than that aspect and I do know that we made sure that all of our stars and bars
were not on the airplane. In fact some of our airplanes had them so we could slide them
in and slide them out. Of course we had Vietnamese markings underneath the stars and
bars and we’d just slide the stars and bars out on the side of the airplane and it would be
Vietnamese markings. So that was part of the dual outfit, I guess.

RV: You did that over Laos but not over South Vietnam.

AT: No. I think sometimes we flew with the Vietnamese things over Vietnam.
I’m not sure. I do remember taxiing out, taking off from Da Nang, going to Ubon. This
was early in the morning. Maybe it was 5:00. And my landing lights went across the side
of an airplane in front of me as we turned to run up in echelon and it still had the stars
and bars on it. I remember I made my flight engineer, we had all shut engines down, there
was only two of us, five of us and we all shut engines down and we waited until they got
a stand and some spray paint and painted those off of there because we just didn’t go out
of country as we called it with the stars and bars on. So we did know about it I guess the
neutral parts because I remember about the stars and bars.

RV: Sir, why don’t we take just a quick break here.

AT: Okay. Good.

RV: Okay, sir. Let me ask you about the specific tactics that you did use when
you were flying these missions. Tell me about how many airplanes, what kind of
formation, how you would approach the target, what your maneuvers were, your
emergency maneuvers, things like that.

AT: Okay. We would usually, again as I say, we started really varying things later
on. But we’d usually go in in about a four to six ship formation. We’d take off before
dawn on the first mission and we’d fly a rough formation, in trail. We’d call it to the
target and we would then usually try to get the formation coming to approaching the
target from out of the sun. In other words, right at sunrise we’d blanket. Then we would
go into an echelon at about, we’d fly down about 4,500 feet, 5,000 feet, something like
that from the base of the target. And then before we got to the target, maybe five minutes
out or something like that, we would go and don our armor and come back up in the
cockpit. Of course we had, let’s see if I can explain it. We had two pilots, a pilot and
copilot. Each one of us had body armor and it was pretty heavy, 54 pounds with a big
collar around it. Unless you’ve seen it, it’s hard to describe it. And the collar was there
for a perfect reason. I’ll tell you why. Then we’d put on a metal helmet which was a
pretty good helmet and I don’t think anything was exposed. And we had a, I don’t know
whether we had a face mask. I don’t think we had a face mask then. I think they later
came to the face mask. But anyhow, we would get all set up. Of course we had the flight
engineer and the flight engineer was in the back of the airplane and he’s the one that ran
the little Wal-Mart pump, I called it, that pumped the herbicide out of the 10,000 gallon
tank. He actually had a metal box, an armored box around the pump right at the aft end of
this tank. And he would get down in that box, that little seat there. He’d get down in that
box. He also wore body armor and a helmet. He had back there with him a bunch of
flares, smoke bombs. Excuse me. They weren't flares. They were smoke bombs. We flew
with the windows open and we flew with both side doors open in the back. There was a
door in the front we didn’t have open of course. And we would get in an echelon
formation, either right or left depending on what we preplanned the target. And we would
then approach the target and we’d be communicating with the FAC and the fighters on
the radio before we even got to any of this probably all doing this process before this
went through. Then once we made contact with the FAC and we had to have contact with
the FAC and we had to have contact with the fighters before we could go down. And then
our procedure was, “Take them down, cowboys.” I remember that call. And we would go
down and I mean straight down as fast as you could go. And you’d start rounding out.
You’d start flaring out, let’s put it that way, at about 100 feet. And then you would level
out. By the way, before we went down, we had to see the Willy Pete. And we’d aim for
the Willy Pete, all four airplanes or five, whatever you had, six. We’d try to flare out
right at that Willy Pete and start our spray right at the Willy Pete. And so our aim, the
specs were 40 feet above the trees. Of course trees don’t grow the same height all over. They’re different heights and you’d have to go along and skip across some of the taller trees and stuff like that or go around them. Although, we didn’t want to go around them because that’d impact our spray pattern. So we would bottom out and then the lead navigator, the lead pilot ship would say, “Spray on, cowboys.” And that’s when we went right over the Willy Pete and everybody would spray on at the same time. Then we would just, as I say, a completely different flying technique with the copilot handling the throttles to avoid the trees and the pilot handling the ailerons or the yoke to keep us in formation. And we would look out all the time, the pilot would, to the other airplanes. And of course your lead didn’t have to do that. You had to really watch your target line then. Of course the other airplanes looked to the lead and there was 55 feet I believe, it may have been 26 because there was distance between airplanes and that was very hard to judge because formation flying is better up close than it is at a distance like that because it’s hard to judge it. And of course our main concern was keeping down low and keeping the formation pretty tight so that we wouldn’t have any, what we call striping. And then we would spray and then when we got to the end, the lead would say, “Spray off.” And then you’d spray off and you’d climb out as soon as you could following the lead, usually a turn or something like that. And if you got any ground fire, the person getting ground fire would say, “Number two receiving ground fire.” And the ground fire by the way sounded just like popcorn in the back of the airplane. Usually we were hoping [to be hit] in the back. I did get one right through the instrument panel and hit me right in the chest. I told you about that but it all sounds like popcorn. I remember the first time I had my chemical corps colonel. By the way, we had a center console and we put an armored box over the center console and the third pilot, if you will, would sit on top of that with his armor on so he was sitting up higher than we were. I remember this colonel, we started taking ground fire one time. He said, “What’s that? What’s that?” I said, “Just popcorn in the back,” or something like that. We had pretty good communications and the main thing is, well for instance, let me tell you a story. When I was flying along, I was flying number two one day or maybe it was number three and I called the lead. I said, “Lead, something just flew out of your airplane.” He came back and said he didn’t observe anything. And then I said again, “Lead, something just came out of your
airplane.” I thought it was part of his dash one, 781, the airplane forms. So I said, “Well, something’s coming out of the airplane. I saw it about three or four times.” And we were down in the Mekong Delta area that particular day and lo and behold, it was ground fire, friendly ground fire, artillery. It was an artillery shell I was seeing. And we were spraying in an area, and we knew this, that the Australians had, the Aussies, down in there. And when the Willy Pete came in, they thought it was a rocket attack or something so they were responding with artillery. So you think we didn’t get the hell out of there.

RV: You cut spray and ran then?

AT: Oh, yeah. We cut spray and we climbed straight up. We started screaming to Saigon. We had a channel direct into Saigon to Tan Son Nhut, really our command post and started telling them what happened and that day we found out what happened. We came on back. We had to dump the load by the way. Well, we had just started the spray run and I guess we were probably at the most, maybe 45 seconds into it so that meant we had at least three quarters of our load still and we couldn’t land with that load. So the standing operating procedure was that we could go to Mekong Delta and an area down there was an area which was an open dump area for us in case we had any emergencies or anything like that, we’d go and dump the whole load right there in the Mekong Delta.

RV: In the water?

AT: There was a lot of water down there, but there was also a lot of forest down there. We had really herbicided the hell out of that place, defoliated, I guess. And that by the way was where Zumwalt’s son was. And we did that repeatedly. He was a Seabee or something, a Navy guy. And that’s where Zumwalt’s son was and all this stuff you hear about the impact of Agent Orange on him could have been this tremendous exposure we were giving those river boats down there. And that’s what he was in. Now, that’s my story. But I do remember doing that. I remember having to dump down in the Mekong. I remember we had standard operating procedures we could dump in the Mekong anytime. We didn’t have to call and get permission. We didn’t have to have a FAC’s Willy Pete or something like that. It was just our emergency dump area.

RV: Did you guys have any concerns about that?

AT: No. We didn’t know anything was wrong with it then. We’d just go down there and dump and we felt evidently the Army and the Navy wanted that area defoliated
heavily and they sure got it. I couldn’t venture to estimate how many airplane loads of herbicide were actually dumped down in there. There should be some records at Tan Son Nhut because I knew we had to call Tan Son Nhut and let them know that we were going to the dump area and we were dumping. But I do know those four airplanes, I think it was four. It may have been six that did dump down in there. I remember that particular day. I can’t remember the date but it must have been sometime around September of ’69.

RV: Did you have any close calls while flying? That was one you just described.

AT: That was one and then the one where we were flying up at, it was called The Triangle and it was north of Bien Hoa and in fact it was only about 12 miles from the base and allegedly they had an underground hospital. We had all these stories and so that was our target one day. I remember we had to take off and do a holding pattern in order to get our altitude to come into the target even. So we came into that target and I just happened to be looking at the instruments for some reason, looking right smack at the omni and we looked right at it and that whole thing just disappeared and the shell, that’s the one that came and hit me it the chest. And that’s about as close as I came. That’s about as close as I want to come. I took a lot of hits during the year I was there, a lot of them in the fuel tanks and there again we’d fly the airplane another 15 hours I think was standard before we’d have to change the fuel tank. That day that I got that ground fire, I also had a prop run away which was hit. No that was different. I had a prop hit one time. I don’t know whether they hit a prop dome. I don’t know. But they hit some mechanism in the front part of the engines and a propeller ran away and the only way to control a runaway propeller is to put a load on it so you just pull the airplane straight up. That’s the reason you wanted that area down between your legs clear so you could pull that yoke back. And I did that and had to shut that engine down and then the other engine started running rough and I had to shut that one down too. I was flying on the jets but the thing wasn’t supposed to fly on jets. But it did. And I came back into Bien Hoa. As I say, we weren't but about 12 mile away and unfortunately the landing direction was on the wayside flied downwind and I was dumb enough to do it. But I had enough altitude because when I climbed out to put the load on the propeller, it gave me, I guess about 5,000 foot of altitude. And I remember as I turned final at Bien Hoa, I lost the runway through ground fog and of course we had no instrument capability at all. There was this
colonel that I was telling you about. It was the same day I told him it was popcorn, you
know. He was sitting there a full bird colonel and when I turned final, I lost the runway
and I hollered to the copilot, “Where’s that fucking runway!?” And this colonel told me
later that he’d never heard me cuss and he knew we were in trouble. And I never did give
it another thought. Well, my wingman, he was staying with me and I was flying his wing
and I followed his wing on down and we broke out and it wasn’t as bad as I thought. But
I couldn’t find the runway. It just wasn’t there. But that happened quite often in Vietnam
coming back from early morning missions about 8:00 in the morning. Sometimes we’d
get back at 7:00 and I imagine that one was about 7:30, 8:00 because it was so close to
the base and we hit right at sun up. That’s about the only close calls I had that I recall

RV: It’s pretty troubling when you can't find the runway.

AT: That’s right. And of course, as I say, my most greatest fear was in mortar
attacks.

RV: Tell me about that. What was that like?

AT: Well, I had one, two, three, four of them. I guess it was about four. I lose
track- in Bien Hoa. The first one I remember and I was really a cherry and I remember
waking up and somebody came to my little door there and said, “Trott, come on. Look at
this.” So I got up out of bed and I said, “Nothing but the sun coming up.” Well, it wasn’t
the sun coming up. It was a damn mortar had hit into the oxygen storage area of the
hospital and our hooch was right close to the hospital and it was just a white glow, you
know. So of course everybody went to the bunker and I did too because we were under a
hell of a mortar attack. And I had not heard the siren. Usually when you were getting
mortar attacked, the siren would go off.

RV: So you slept through it.

AT: I slept through the siren. I don’t think I was drinking then either yet. But
anyhow, I slept through it. I went to the bunker and that was so unbearable seeing the
damn bunker with all these guys pitch, black dark. Two guys had flashlights. So we got
the bright idea we were going to make our own bunker and so we would go and get all
the 20mm shell containers we could get over at Long Binh from the Army and we would
fill them with sand and we would put them under our bunk around the edge of the bunk
and we would keep our flak vests- we had another flak vest for mortar attacks- and our
helmet right there under the bunk. And we’d just roll off the bunk, under the bed and stay there. The authorities didn’t think much of that but I know it worked. But the next three mortar attacks I used that technique rather than go to the bunker. And that was all in conjunction with them saying people putting razor blades in and all that crap. And of course I didn’t like those damn jeckels and we had all kinds of stories of snakes and everything. Hell, I didn’t like snakes neither.

RV: Did you ever see any snakes?

AT: No, I never saw a snake at all. In fact, I went through jungle survival, the only thing that happened to me there was a wasp or something stung me on the ear. That was the worst thing that happened to me there.

RV: How about rats?

AT: I never noticed any. Well, I guess we did around the mess hall around your garbage areas. But as far as our hooch was concerned, I can't recall.

RV: Did you guys ever lose any airplanes in any of your flights?

AT: We did. We lost one airplane after I became the ops officer. The guy received a hell of a lot of ground fire down around Phu Cat. You can find that on the map some place, I’m sure, down in, it was in IV Corps. That’s down in the bottom. And this guy got shot up really heavily. He had a new pilot on board flying the airplane and the instructor pilot on board who was flying on the console, flying the middle position. He was just giving this guy a check ride. And when you gave check rides, you had to check the pilot and copilot both. So the instructor pilot had no controls. He just sat up there in the jump seat we called it. So he was doing this and they received all kinds of ground fire. And they diverted, screamed emergency, mayday and they diverted into Phu Cat which was a small base down there and the runway was pretty long enough for 130s usually. All his radios were shot out. In fact, he had no power whatsoever. He had one engine out, I think and one jet out if I remember correctly and he was going to Phu Cat, as he turned final, a [C]-130 pulled on the runway in front of him. So he turned real quick to the right and he landed in the infield. And of course that airplane, it was a perfect crash landing airplane with wheels up. It was just like a glider really. In fact it was an outgrowth in design of gliders, World War II gliders. But anyway, he landed there and they got out of the airplane and ran like hell and came up to the runway because they thought the thing was
going to go into fire. And everybody came out and the base commander and ops officer
came out in a staff car and picked them up. And they were just almost white because they
had run into a mine field and they actually landed in a mine field. All those air bases were
mined around. They had to keep the guys out of there at night and they were just amazed
that these mines didn’t go off and stuff like that. But that airplane, we did not lose it. I
think right then I had just become ops officer and we figured out a way to get that
airplane out of there. The Army went in there with their big tremendous helicopters. I
forget what the number was but the kind that they use in the forest nowadays to move
lumber. They can pick up the world almost. But they went in. We took the wings off,
took the tail off, and picked that airplane up and brought it back to Tan Son Nhut. And
when I left Vietnam in December of ’69, that airplane was ready to fly. I was determined
I wasn’t going to lose an airplane on my watch. That’s that part of losing an airplane.
That’s the only, in that year that I was there, the only case we had. Now, they had lost
some airplanes prior to me getting over there about two years maybe before that they’d
lost some airplanes. And they had one guys shot. As I say, we flew with the windows
open on both sides of the cockpit and the shell came through, a shot, AK-47 shell came
through and got him in the neck. And that’s the reason we put that big collar on. Well, we
had Corningware do it for us, put this big collar on and boy, we started getting ground
fire. Everybody kept going down further and further in that collar. We looked like a
bunch of damn turtles. We just went on down. But anyhow, that was the closest I came
and the greatest thrill I guess. Of course, the mission itself was thrilling as hell just to get
down in those trees and watch those trees coming at you and add a little power and get up
and clear them. Of course the biggest thrill was going over to look at another guy’s
airplane when he had limbs in the wheel well. We were flying that close and like I say,
trees don’t grow evenly. And that’s the reason for that copilot. You’d have a damn good
copilot on those throttles. I was fortunate, I had this guy Dick Tebay who was really good
but he couldn’t handle the yoke. I think he was just trying too damn hard. I never checked
him out. The normal process was to put a new guy, I don’t care how much flying time he
had, I guess when I got to Vietnam I had about 3,000 hours flying time. Let’s see, three,
maybe four, 4,000 hours flying time. I thought, hell, I’d go right into the left seat. No, no.
You fly the right seat and get that throttle technique down and then other techniques
down before you move to the left seat. So it was probably about, I’d been there a month
and a month is a long time when you’re flying two missions a day everyday. And I’d
been there a month before I got in the left seat. The other thing that was sort of different
and we’d trained in this down at Hurlbert was that we came back in. We came back in the
echelon formation and we broke in the field and did a 360 just like a fighter and boy,
those fighter people couldn’t believe we were doing that with that airplane. Sometimes I
couldn’t do it because when you flew with Rex Stoner, you would make your bank and
that thing better be a good bank. And the idea was to stay in tight to the field. And later
the technique proved very, very valuable in that it cut down the amount of time we were
over the edge of the field in the villages with maybe a leaking boom that we couldn’t tell
about. So we really started stretching that 360 overhead we called it.

RV: It sounds like the 123 was a heck of a piece of equipment.

AT: Oh, it was. You couldn’t hurt it, I tell you. We took more hits. There was one
of them in the museum down at Hurlbert field. There was one of them with the Patches
which was the bird we flew that got thousands of hits. It’s in the museum up at Dayton,
Ohio, in the Air Force museum. There’s not one in the Smithsonian yet. There’s one there
in Washington being prepared. It had no big significance. It was just a herbicide airplane.

RV: What kind of weaponry did you guys carry on the plane with you?

AT: Glad you asked.

RV: We carried an M-16, a rifle, loaded in the back of the airplane. Each one of
us had that. We also had a snub nose 38, aluminum. The barrel was only rated for 50
rounds and of course we never shot it. We fired at the range at survival school and then I
think we had to fire it every six months at Bien Hoa. But that’s all we had. With that little
M-16. We’d crash land. We had parachutes and all that but the parachutes stayed in the
back of the airplane. We hardly ever put the parachutes on because you couldn’t put them
on over that armor. That was used, well I was going to use it as a tent. That’s what they
taught us in jungle survival school. So we had the parachutes in the back and the guns in
the back by our parachutes. And our plan if we got shot up where the airplane couldn’t
fly was to get into the closest air field like this guy was doing at Phu Cat. If we couldn’t
make an airfield, we’d find an open field some place. Of course, remember we had the
fighter escorts and we had that FAC there with us and of course the FAC would stay
around and he was our communications contact and our positioning contact when we’d
got shot down. All of our missions in Laos, I didn’t tell you this, but all the missions in
Laos, we had to have a rooster which was the call sign for a rescue helicopter and that
was an HC-58 I think, something like that, 53. In Laos when we’d go down to target we
had to get in touch with the fighter, had to get in touch with the FAC. We had to make
sure the rooster was on station and we were in the sight of the rooster. Of course they
started complaining because we had taken the red stripe off the top of the wing to keep
from getting ground fire out of the mountains and they had started complaining because
they couldn’t keep up with us. They couldn’t find us. Even though we were spraying rice,
I tell you, that airplane was so well camouflaged and it was relatively small and you’d get
it down and those damn fighters are going about- well, we tried to get them to slow
down. We were going 140 and they were doing about, I guess 190, 200, something like
that and they’d go by us and come back again. And we were always glad to see them. I
was glad to hear those damn anti personnel pellets going up against the bottom of my
airplane. That was the best sound in the world because you knew that they would defer.
Of course the one thing I didn’t tell you, the best suppressant over there in the year I flew
that mission was Arc Light. We would love to come in behind Arc Light. And you’d see
them sitting in the trees, you think they're going to fire at you. Hell, no, they’re not going
to fire at you. They’re sitting there dead. That damn arc light sucked all the oxygen out.
Of course, I told you about the craters and all that. But we would check with Saigon to
see if we had an Arc Light in our area. Of course we were worried about getting
underneath one of those guys, out of the formation. They were flying formations of six
and seven. They were dropping two and three hundred weapons out of the bomb bays of
those B-52. Man, you can imagine what would happen if we got underneath one of them.
But they had that thing pretty well coordinated through Saigon. That was another reason
for the FACs. Of course the fighters didn’t want to get involved with those B-52s
dropping on them either. Those guys were dropping from 30,000 feet. Of course you’ll
hear all about that. We could see the flash and I would like to go in behind those and feel
the pellets of those damn anti personnel bombs, bomblets really against the bottom of my
airplane and be flying through the dust from a damn Arc Light. That was the ideal
protective situation. Of course the fighters didn’t like it. They didn’t like to fly through
the dust but we didn’t give a damn.

RV: How often did you get to do that?

AT: I flew 145 missions. I guess out of 145 missions over there I probably ran in
behind ten Arc Lights. And we were looking for more. SAC couldn’t fly enough of them
out of Anderson for us. They were all flying out of Anderson [AFB, Guam].

RV: Tell me what your general impressions were of the enemy.

AT: We didn’t know who they were. That was my major concern. Of course my
aim when I got over there was to hit that Ho Chi Minh trail. We sprayed the hell out of
that. I don’t think there’s a tree growing there today. My sister-in-law and my brother-in-
law just went over there on one of these tours and they said they could see the results of
herbicide over in the western part of Vietnam and then down in the Mekong Delta as I
was telling you about where Zumwalt’s son was. There’s no trees growing there. In fact,
I’ve gotten word since then that we killed the shrimp crop and all that stuff down in there.
We just ruined that place. And there again, we didn’t know what we were doing. And I
think that they waited until the last minute to tell us what we were doing.

RV: How did you feel, you described with almost bravado about you guys going
in, taking ground fire, and that just being part of the job, but did you think twice about
that? How did you feel about actually coming into combat like that?

AT: I hate to admit it but I guess I’m abnormal. I sort of looked forward to it. That
was the Rex Stoner motivation factor. That’s what we were there for, we were paid
soldiers. The good part about it, we never got anybody killed the time I was over there
and I think that made you much more daring. We’d go out to take some ground fire, we’d
go out to spray the hell out of them. I remember going out of the door of the briefing with
those kind of instructions, if you will. Of course, Rex Stoner was crazy as hell. I really
think that. He was a very poorly educated officer, a used car dealer and all that, drank
himself to death, I’m sure. He was the leader of the drinking bunch. He had Lord Calvert
breweries working overtime. Of course I did my part with the vodka, with Smirnoff until
I found out Smirnoff was a corporation of Pepsi Cola. You know about that don’t you.

RV: Yes, sir.

RV: No, sir. (laughing). No we don’t. Let me ask you kind of about your life with the men. Were there any race issues that you witnessed there.

AT: No. None at all. Let’s see. I had one, two, three black pilots, one of which got out of the service right after Vietnam and became an inspector, flight inspector/evaluator. I guess you’d say for FAA. And I can’t recall his name. I ran into him after that. But to answer your question, we had no race problems whatsoever.

RV: How about special relationships with other men. Did you make any close friendships over there?

AT: Oh, yeah. As I say we still have a reunion every year there down at Destin except the year that I think Opal came through, they had to cancel it. I’ve been down to one of them all. That’s all I’ve been down to. They still put out a newsletter. I still get a newsletter every time they get enough money together to pay the postage I get a newsletter. I have one on my desk right now, Ranch Hand newsletter. Mooney was that guy’s name Russ Mooney, General Mooney. He’s the president of the Ranch Hand Association now.

RV: What would you say was the most humorous event that you witnessed while you were doing your tour in Vietnam?

AT: The most humorous event when I was in Vietnam. I guess me telling that colonel sitting there between me we were taking ground fire. He wanted to know, “What’s that?” Just scared to death. And I said it was popcorn.

RV: And he believed you.

AT: I don’t know whether he believed me or not but I just thought that was funny and I still do today. That’s 30 years later.

RV: How about the bravest action you witnessed in Vietnam? What comes to mind?

AT: I don’t know. I felt the sorriest and I was concerned about that overrun of Song Be. I’d just been in there that day and we took our 123 out of there. I’d just briefed the Province Chief, the young captain who head of the outpost or whatever they were, Special Forces camp. And then to find out through Saigon that that place had been overrun the night right after I left and every one of them was lost. And there were about 26 guys there, all soldiers. And that to me, those guys staying out in that environment as
they did was probably the most heroic thing in my mind. I tell you, there was one and that
was an A-1E crashed on landing at Bien Hoa and I just happened to be sitting there, not
happened to be, I was getting ready to take off on a second mission about 11:00 in the
morning. Three ship was sitting at the end of the runway and he came in and he was in
trouble because all of the fire engines were right there and the thing crashed on landing
and just exploded. And I saw fireman going out there just walking into that thing. Of
course these guys do it all the time. Those are the guys I guess you really get to
appreciate the most. That was probably the most heroic thing I saw. I had forgotten about
that. Those kind of things stick in your mind but then you try to forget about them. And I
went down, we had two runways, dual runways there at Bien Hoa and we switched
runways and took off right by it and that’s the way that war went. I don’t know. You can't
say it was a gentleman’s war. It was a gentleman’s war on our part and that’s one of the
reasons I think that the Ranch Hand people and you’re aware of the Air Force Health
Study aren’t you. And I think that’s one of the reasons that we didn’t really show as much
exposure to the Agent Orange, the impact of exposure as the ground troops did. Because
hell, I took a shower every damn night and I came in and we had our drinks and were
finished by noon everyday. Usually I’d go, if I’d gotten into herbicide, I was really
sweating, hot part of the day, I’d go take a shower at noon and then go down to ops and
plan the next day’s mission. That was my job in the ops business. I had a targeting officer
by then and a couple of navigators. So it was sort of a gentleman’s war. And we’d be
finished. We’d try to get finished by 4:00, 5:00, go by the officer’s club and we’d start
our partying and we’d end our partying about maybe 8:00 or 9:00 in order to get up at
3:00. So that was sort of the routine, daily routine. I did not, after I became ops officer,
did not fly everyday and of course I tried to rotate people. Of course, as I said, you had to
rotate people because you had new people coming in and that guy you’re letting fly in
your place is going to be our replacement probably. So I would make sure we had about
five instructor pilots who were guys that had been over there, Jack Spey being one of
them and a guy by the name of Robinson. You’ll run into him in your interviews. Have
you already interviewed Jack?
RV: Yes, we have sir.
AT: Oh, God. That guy’s the greatest guy in the world. He, to me, was a hero of that whole program and still is the one that keeps that group together now. He’s the one writing the newsletters and things like that. And he’s just a great guy and a typical Jack Armstrong type guy. Blonde haired guy right out of Florida. I’m sure he’s gray now. But he was right off the beaches of Florida. I don’t know. I guess I didn’t run into Jack until I got to Vietnam although he spent a lot of time at Hurlbert field perfecting the tactics and the training role. We sprayed there at Hurlbert field, but we sprayed water. I know every damn pine tree in Florida has got water on it out there, at least in the Panhandle anyway.

RV: Do you need to talk anymore about your duties as targeting officer or operations officer? Do you think you’ve explained that thoroughly?

AT: Well, the operations officer is really in charge of making sure the airplanes are ready, coordinating with maintenance, how many airplanes you’re going to need, what targets were going to come down, making sure the frag order had been received on that target for the next day and once you got your frag order, your frag orders came out about noon the previous day. That’s the reason I say, I know damn people knew we were coming and there was the 43 addressees. And then my job was to take the frag order, go in and find the target, and I was usually already familiar with it because I’d probably been out to the particular area and briefed the Province chief. So the chemical guy and I would get together about 1:00 or so on the day before the mission, look at the frag order, determine what the target is, determine the width of the size of the target, what size formation we should use and what time we had to take off because we wanted to take off to hit that target the first time right at sunrise. Then you had a couple of navigators and they’d plot the target. They would plot the route into the target and then usually we had to fly that information down to Tan Son Nhut on that afternoon about 4:00. I didn’t do that all the time but I did it quite often. And we’d fly it down there and we’d run it by the [command section], there was a one star down there I think, I can't remember his name. He was a fighter pilot and then they would do all the coordinating that evening with the fighters and the FACs and all that based on the target that we’d taken down there. And sometimes they’d turn it down. We’d have to refigure. We always had a target in the hip pocket, some place we had to hit the second time and stuff like that. So it wasn’t that bad. One of the things when I said flying the package to Tan Son Nhut, the greatest thing was
to get the duty and I did this every Sunday to fly the package to Tan Son Nhut and we’d
take one airplane. But I’d load the airplane up on Sunday because the officer’s club at
Tan Son Nhut there at Saigon had the best Champaign brunch you’ve ever tasted.
Waffles in there and they’d put that Cool Whip around the edge and strawberries on top
of it. That’s how I went from, well, I was 205 when I went to Vietnam. I came back
weighing about 245. That’s something I didn’t tell you. I gained weight on it. My wife
didn’t recognize me when I walked up the ramp at Dulles because I was so big. I could
barely fit into my blue uniform. Some people lost weight. Some people worried
themselves to death and I guess I didn’t.

RV: Did your unit engage in any civic actions while you were there?

AT: Oh, yeah. We built a waterline, God, I should have told you this. We built a
waterline underneath Highway 1 to an orphanage to a Buddhist orphanage. And this guy,
Pappy Martin I was telling you about, wouldn’t let him fly because he was so damn old,
he was an engineer and he designed the damn thing. We actually drilled under Highway 1
which hell, was probably 40, 50 feet wide, busiest road in Bien Hoa, in the country,
Vietnam. And we drilled under there and we put the line under and hooked it in
unauthorized, illegally into a water line on the other side of the road and those kids had
[water when we turned on the spigot and it took us about two weeks or so and we’d do
that in the afternoon. Pappy Martin, he almost lived down there. But we’d get in there
again, in our 29 passenger bus and go down to this orphanage. I wish I could recall the
name of it. I can't. But I knew it had a bunch of little kids and all that. And that’s the civic
activity I did that I recall. That was when I was at Bien Hoa.

RV: Let’s talk about your transition back to the United States. You left in
December 1969. Did you know your exact date when you were leaving?

AT: Leaving Vietnam?

RV: Yes, sir.

AT: Oh, yeah. They had that thing so programmed. I knew my flight number and
everything and just glad to get on the flight. It was the World Airways and I later got that
note from the president of the company on another roll. But anyhow, I got on the airplane
and came back and we landed in Los Angeles or something like that and then I switched
to American or something like that or maybe it was United or Eastern or something. Not
Eastern. I guess they were defunct by then. But one airplane and then went into Dulles and landed at Dulles and rejoined my family there.

RV: Now, what was that flight out of Vietnam like? Do you remember how you felt?

AT: Oh, God. Everybody cheered. It was sort of like the first flight I had when I soloed. As soon as the wheel was in the well, everybody cheered like hell. Of course there was no drinking allowed because of the MAC airplane but a lot of guys had their brown bags you know, so we had one hell of a party. But anyhow, it was a great feeling. I had been offered a promotion to stay over there and all that stuff and I didn’t do it. I had to come on home. I had a good assignment out of there. I had an assignment to Charleston and I was going in the original cadre as a C-5A. That was a great assignment. That came about by Jack Catton, the guy that told me I didn’t know my way around the Pentagon. He had come over to Vietnam while I was there. By the way, Jimmy Stewart was over there when I was there. He was with the big buxom gal. Oh, what’s that gal’s name? [Raquel Welch] Anyhow, he came. I had to take him on a tour. I was ops officer then. We went down. He wasn’t in uniform of course and this gal, some big buxom gal. Anyhow, we put the armor on General Stewart and he said, “Well, I don’t think you have anything that fits,” and what was that gal’s name. She’s in all these, she’s not playing movies anymore.

RV: Jane Mansfield?

AT: No. It wasn’t Jane Mansfield. She was killed wasn’t she? No this gal is still living. Anyhow, he said he didn’t think we had any armor shaped like her that she could put on or something like that. And his wife was with him by the way. I just remembered that. But that was sort of a plus too to meet Jimmy Stewart.

RV: Of course, of course. What was your reception at the airport like in Dulles or actually at any of the airports? Did you ever have any problems, any trouble?

AT: No. My wife and kids met me and all that. We got in the car and went home. I knew the feelings of the people in the country about the Vietnam War, but I never did receive any problems with that, although when I went to Charleston I became very involved in the POW issue and became very involved to the point where the Air Force called me. Of course I was a lieutenant colonel by then and the Air Force called me and
said that this POW situation was supposed to be a grass roots movement and let’s take the Air Force out of it as much as we can. And I sort of felt bad about that because I had built bamboo cages. We had guys sitting in them down at the Battery there in Charleston and we had big - you remember, well, you don’t remember- but we had big movements going on to get those POWs out of there. Fortunately none of my guys that I knew had been POWs but I wore one of those aluminum bracelets and all that stuff. And later by the way, I was able to be in the group that flew the POWs out of Hanoi. I was in C141s and then went over there. This is completely another history story but I was assigned at Charleston to C141s and flying around the world and I’d go around the world every other week. So I was coming back over Hawaii and I was over flying Hawaii because I had good tail winds going in and they called me and I made them authenticate and all this stuff. They wanted me to divert into Hawaii and back to Hickham and I didn’t want to do it because I was headed home. And so I was going around from west to east and anyhow, I diverted back in there and that’s when they took the airplanes and they assigned then to the Hanoi mission. They put Red Crosses on the tails and all that stuff. And that was a total other operation, I tell you.

RV: What was that like picking up those POWs?

AT: Oh, that was probably the most moving thing in world. Senator McCain was on my airplane. Of course he wasn’t a Senator then. I didn’t know him from Adam then. But that group is sort of stuck together too. And of course that was real moving. We picked them up, took them to Clark and they were on the ground at Clark, I guess two days and then we moved them to Hickham and they got off at Hickham, we had to refuel. And then we picked them up and took them to respective places. I think I went from Hikham up to Elmendorf and then from Elmendorf down to Dover. And I think that’s where McCain got off in Dover. I don’t know why Dover. He represents Arizona now. But he was a military brat and his dad could have been anyplace then. I know his dad was…

RV: CNO.

AT: Well, he’s not only CNO, he was a CinCPAC over there when I was later stationed in Hawaii. But that was quite a thrill. But I didn’t know the significance of it at the time it was going on. And that was another case where you're just numb. You just do
what they tell you to do. We were worried about it sitting on the ground at Hanoi because they delayed it as much as they could and we finally had to shut engines down. Our plans were to not shut engines down but we had C-130s loaded with all kinds of Special Forces people and all that. I felt pretty comfortable about it. And of course they had all kinds of communications. I could sit on the ground at Hanoi and talk to the Pentagon, talk to the Air Force commander. We had special radios on the airplane. It was HF radios. It wasn’t very reliable. Get in some spots, we’d have been in trouble, but that’s all we had at that time but it was well run. We had five airplanes in that operation.

RV: Special Forces there just in case there were any problems.

AT: Yeah. They were in a 130, never got out of the airplane. They were in a 130. There were three 130s that went in ahead of us. One of them supposedly was communications equipment but there were Special Forces in the airplane we were told. I never saw them. They’d do anything to make you feel good, you know. Like that guy’s going to meet you with the pick up truck if your parachute doesn’t work type thing. I know the son of a bitch won’t show up either. But anyhow, what else you got?

RV: Let’s talk about some of your general impressions of the war itself. What did you think of the antiwar movement going on?

AT: I wasn’t paying much attention to it. I got concerned about it really from the standpoint that I was away from my family when my family really needed me the most and here are these people raising hell about a war. Of course I didn’t appreciate McNamara saying that there’s always a light at the end of the tunnel. Of course we thought we could break that Ho Chi Minh trail by defoliation and hell we got that thing just like a damn desert and they kept on coming through. We didn’t break a thing. Of course they had underground hospitals and things like that. But back to the antiwar thing, I guess I sort of resented it. But I didn’t know any different. I’d been in the military almost all my life. I had been all my life and it was the thing for us to do. And I sort of, I’m probably more concerned about this current antiwar movement going on than I was the Vietnam thing. I was more involved and working like hell all the time especially when I was in the Pentagon. That’s when it started and it was nothing to work 16 hour days in the Pentagon and of course on those trips I was taking to the coast, I was sort of removed from that and leaving on Sunday afternoon and coming back on Friday night
and then briefing all day on Saturday and getting home on Sunday morning only to get some clean clothes to go back again that Sunday afternoon at 5:55. I remember the flight time we left. But anyhow, it didn’t impact me too much. I don’t know whether I’d have poked somebody in the face if I’d come face to face with them down there on the mall or something like that where they were. I knew what was going on but none of my people were involved in it, none of my family that I knew of was involved in it. We were from a big family down in southern Maryland. That’s about all I remember of it.

RV: How much did you keep up with the continuing war effort once you got back stateside?

AT: I really did especially after viewing that Liz Trotter program on NBC about the way the edited that program falsely. And I really got concerned. And I kept up on the war effort. Of course being a military guy and a political science guy and I had taken several courses in Southeastern economic geography when I was at Maryland from a guy by the name of [Dr.] Charles Y. Hu. And I thought I was an authority on Southeast Asia. Hell, nobody’s an authority on Southeast Asia. You’re not going to tell what’s going to happen over there tomorrow. I tell you, essentially, my evaluation of Vietnam is those people wanted everybody to leave them alone so they could plant their rice. Hell, around the base and everything, those guys would be plowing their rice fields right outside the concertina wire. And they just sort of wanted the world to leave them alone. And that was my evaluation of it from the whole time.

RV: Did you think the United States achieved its objectives?

AT: No, no, no. They didn’t achieve my objective. I would have gone ahead and taken the whole damn place over. But I don’t think we achieved the objective. I think we just ran out of momentum similar to what we did in Korea and we just had to back down. That’s one thing about a Democracy. Once you find that the people aren’t behind you, you might as well figure out a way to hang it up gracefully, and that’s the toughest part, gracefully.

RV: What did you think of the Vietnamization policy? Did you think that the South Vietnamese were capable of continuing the war effort effectively after the United States left?
AT: No. Hell, no. Hell, no. I could have told you that the first day it started. And a

good close friend of mine, by the name of Baginski- by the way, you’ve got to get to

Baginski. He retired as a two star. He’s in Tennessee and as much as he drank, I know he

must be dead by now. But look him up. I can't remember but there’s probably only one

Baginski in the Air Force register or the officer’s register. Baginski B-A-G-I-N-S-K-I. I’d

known Bagger for years and then I ran into him again at Scott Air Force Base after I

came back from Vietnam in ’75. He was the greatest guy in the world but he was one of

the last guys out of Saigon. He hung on to the helicopter. He was hanging on to the

helicopter. This guy is crazy as hell. And I think he’s still living. He’s a real good friend

of a four star who was CinCMAC by the name of Moore. And I think Moore is

something big over around Knoxville, or maybe Nashville. But Bill Moore was General

Moore’s name and Bagger Baginski but I don’t recall his first name. Probably Tony or

something like that, some Italian guy. But he was the best dancer I’ve ever seen. He’d get

out there on the dance floor and jitterbug with everybody and just crazy as hell.

RV: Let’s go back if you don’t mind talking about the end of that war. What did

you think in 1975 when South Vietnam fell?

AT: I was very disappointed although it didn’t surprise me. I knew it was going to

happen. I was very disappointed. All the effort we’d put in and that’s the reason I say we

didn’t achieve our efforts because we didn’t exterminate it. But I don’t know. Those

people are sort of like the situation we’re facing now. What are you going to do after you

do that? They say if you educate them you can do this and that. Hell, the only thing that

worked that successfully for us is the Germans were so damn strong after World War II

that we didn’t really beat them, they quit and we poured a lot of money in there and they

picked it up and they ran with it like hell. Of course I’m a little upset with the Germans

right now, but that’s 40, 50 years later.

RV: Yes, sir. Looking back at your Vietnam experience today, your personal

experience, how do you feel about your service in Vietnam?

AT: I was proud of it. It was an honor to be in the Ranch Hand program. It really

was an honor to be selected. It was an honor to be checked out really and not to have to

sit on the ground the whole damn year like Pappy Martin did. I was sort of proud of the

work we did. It was unusual, it was unique. Some of those airplanes went down to South
America and Central America and they were doing a similar thing down there in cooperation with somebody. I don’t know who it was, probably CIA or something. In fact, Jack Spey can probably tell you something about that if he would. He maybe can't. But anyhow, I know those airplanes were not taken out of service because we had a hard time finding them to put them in the museum all over the country. But they were shipped down there with the booms and all.

RV: Is there anything that you would change about your Vietnam experience?

AT: Yes, it should have been more than a year long. I really feel that strongly about it. That’s the definition, my definition of limited warfare- keep the serviceman’s tour to one year. He’ll never learn what the hell he’s doing. He’ll spend the first six months learning and the next six months planning on going home. In the meantime, if you get a little bit of time out of him, you’re very fortunate.

RV: So you would have liked to extend yourself for another year? You think you should have?

AT: Yeah. I should have and I would have but I had young kids and major problems at home. That wife I’ve since divorced. But anyhow, I had to get back.

RV: What do you think was the most significant thing that you learned while you were in Vietnam? It could be about yourself, it could be about anything.

AT: Coordination and teamwork among people. I’m speaking of all officers regardless of what the background may be, all pilots, all navigators, appreciation of navigators. Of course I had already done that when I was in SAC because Kurt LeMay made me a navigator and a triple headed monster we called them those days. And to see that work out, we had some great guys, navigators that had washed out of flying school. It was just that simple. They were just great people and a lot of pilots develop a sort of higher hierarchy above the navigator. And boy that navigator is necessary as hell. And I found that out in Vietnam. I gained an appreciation of navigators and of enlisted men. Of course what helped me the most was my enlisted background I had in the Coast Guard and that helped me throughout my career and still helps me today. I can relate to the guy digging my ditch out here in front of the Town Hall and stuff like that. That pays off because that guy will work a hell of a lot harder at almost minimum wages if he knows he has some support from above. In this small town we pay minimum wage, probably worse
than that. Like our police, well, now we start them at $21,000 but how a guy can support
a family and live in this high income area on the money we get and I worry sick about
them getting into the dope business so I give them a urine analysis about every month and
they know they’re going to get it. If I catch anything in that urine, boy, I tell you they
better find another job. And of course their law enforcement career is over by then
anyplace. And they know that but you have to let them know it. But we have a nice town.
Well, you’ve been here. You know about it. You’re an old North Carolina boy. So how
are things in Texas?

RV: Oh, they’re just fine, sir. Just fine.
AT: Is Reese out there still?
RV: It’s been closed down. It’s now part of Texas Tech University. There’s a
research compound there.
AT: Oh, you’re at Reese, then huh?
RV: We’re not at Reese. That’s just outside of town to the west of town.
AT: Okay. You’re in Lubbock.
RV: Yes, sir. Let me ask you a couple of other questions if you don’t mind.
AT: Go ahead.
RV: Would you say what you just said about relating to the small guy, was that
how the war most affected your life do you think or was there something else?
AT: No. I don’t think the war had any effect on that. I always felt that way. I’d
been a hard worker, as I said, I used to go to Maryland in the summer and work on the
tobacco farm, corn farm. And I had two uncles that went in the service that were my role
models, one in the Marines, one in the Navy. And they used to kick my butt all the time.
We’d be carrying tobacco on a wagon, horse drawn wagon up the road and they’d kick
something off to make me get off to run and get it and then they’d go off and leave me.
So they were pretty tough guys. But I’d been used to hard work. Of course, I was raised
as I said in the grocery store business that my father owned and later on I worked for my
uncle when my father sold out and when I was in college I used to get up at 4:00 in the
morning and go to market down in Washington, pick up the meat, pick up the produce
and come back out and be back out there by 8:00 or 9:00 when business really started and
then work on in to 6, 7:00 at night. So hard work was not unusual to me. Of course when
I went to the Pentagon, everybody said, “This will drive you crazy.” Well, hell. That was a piece of cake. I worked in the damn vault when I was with the SR-71, they had a timer on that, we couldn’t show up until 7:00 in the morning to get to go to work. That was the greatest thing I had. Of course I would get there early because the only way you could find a parking place within a mile of the place, you had to get there at 6:00, 6:30 or something like that. So I was used to hard work.

RV: What kind of lessons do you think the United States learned from the Vietnam War?

AT: I don’t know. I tell you, it’s hard for me to say. What kind of lessons did the United States learn from the Vietnam War?

RV: Or do you think they learned any lessons?

AT: Well, that’s what I’m saying. I don’t know that they did. I tell you, we’re going down the same damn road in my opinion. Of course they made this guy, what was his name, Ho Chi Minh, they made him to be a torturer, a murderer and all this stuff and we’re seeing the same thing. You’ve got to have an enemy. I wish they’d find somebody on Mars or somebody to be our enemies so we can get together in the world.

RV: That’s an interesting point. That’s a good point.

AT: Yeah. You’ve got to have an enemy. I don’t know. I hate to say that our nation works better on a war based economy because right now the stock market’s not reflecting that. I recall in some of my economics class in Maryland when we were studying Keynesian economics, I don’t know whether you’re familiar with that at all, but Keynes was brought over here by Roosevelt in 1935, something like that right in the middle of the depression and asking what needed to happen to the United States to get out of this world depression, or the world. Roosevelt was told by Keynes to pump $140 billion into the economy and he was talking about priming the pump, you know, in the form of road building and stuff like that. And Roosevelt just completely ignored him. In fact, the story goes from the economics professors, kicked him out of the room and he went back to England. And then when you look at the price of World War II in 1946, it was $141 billion dollars, right on what Keynes said they needed to bring the country back. I don’t know. I don’t know whether we’ve learned any lessons or not. I’m worried
about one thing. We had a convention over in Raleigh, well, Durham really, last October, and David Bergen, you know?

RV: I know the name.

AT: Well, anyhow, he’s advised several Presidents and he’s neither Republican or Democrat and advised Father Bush. But he said that he was worried about one thing, that this war is over one thing, and that’s oil. He stressed that in his talk and has written a book. He didn’t say that in the book.

RV: You’re talking about Daniel Yergen?

AT: Daniel, yes.

RV: Daniel Yergen, right.

AT: Yeah. No, Bergen.

RV: Or is it David Bergen, the advisor to the President?

AT: David Bergen. David Bergen, advised the President and this great book he has out. I can't even remember the damn title. I’ve loaned it to somebody in my visitor’s center to read. But it’s a great book and anyhow, he put that thought in my mind and I have not given it much thought, but oil, oil, oil. And we don’t get that much from over there. One of our prime sources is Venezuela. Of course the thing of this, I have a boy, a step son now who was in the oil business and he said that the U.S. is not profitable to produce oil at the max efficiency as long as oil is down around $20, $30 a barrel. Once it gets up around $31 to $40 a barrel you’ll see these oil wells running 24 hours a day in Texas. I mean you're closer to it than I am. But I don’t know whether that’s going to happen or not but it’s getting up there now, isn’t it?

RV: Yes, sir.

AT: Some people say that that may be the reason for this war. So I don’t know. I don’t know. I wish I did. I wouldn’t be sitting as mayor of a town with 1,200 people in it. And I don’t want another job by the way. I’m happy. This is the best job in the world.

RV: Is it really?

AT: Yeah. When you get a complaint, you can walk out and touch it. If you’re in the State Legislature, if you're in a county, hell, you’ve got to call somebody on the phone and ask them their evaluation. I don’t ask anybody anything about that. I get in my damn car and I go out there and find out, well, that street hasn’t been swept. That garbage
hadn’t been picked up. That tree limb needs to be cut or something like that. And of
course, I’ve got a public works guy that’s a professional engineer. How we could get him
I don’t know. But I just come to him and he’s just great. He doesn’t want to move
anyplace else either. We’ve got a little touch of heaven here as you know if you’ve been
through here.

RV: Yes, sir. It’s a very nice town. I sure have. I have a couple of other questions
about Vietnam if you don’t mind.

AT: Go ahead.

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

AT: Have I had any contact with Vietnamese in the United States? I think I have.
Oh, yeah. My wife is in the miniature business, not business. She makes doll houses and
there’s a miniature store that we go to in Atlanta which is only two and a half, three hours
away from here and its run by a Vietnamese lady and a Vietnamese man. And that’s my
association with them. There’s some Thais here in town, not in town, in Franklin, the
county seat, that run a restaurant and they’re doing very well. I met them and all that and
I met them through another Special Forces guy who’s retired up here. We still all get
together, all the old military up here. By the way, General Westmoreland has a place
here.

RV: Does he really?

AT: Yeah. He comes by and he said good-by to me in November. He said he was
going back to Florida. It was getting too damn cold for him up here. But his place is in
Cashiers. I don’t know whether you know where Cashiers is, 12 miles away. And we
have a bunch of one stars, two stars and I guess Westmoreland is the only four star we
have around. And we have a bunch of Special Forces retired people and we don’t really
get together. We sort of talk on the street, you know and stuff like that. We all are too
busy with our families and with other things and boy scouts and things like that and also
watching over our type II diabetes.

RV: That’s right. I wanted to ask you about that.

AT: Oh, you were going to ask me about my medical thing. I’ll tell you who’s
sitting here in the office with me is my doctor’s husband. He’s a friend of mine. He’s
going to take me to lunch he said. I think I’m going to take him to lunch. I’ve got some
good food at home. I made a gumbo last Sunday that’s out of this world. You know the
Louisiana definition of Gumbo?

RV: What’s that?

AT: You put everything in it that grows outside the kitchen door and also what
crawls up to it. I did that. Go ahead. We’ll get finished with this.

RV: Okay. I wanted to ask you a little bit about what do you think about Vietnam
today? Do you have any desire to go back?

AT: No. No. As I said earlier, my sister-in-law and brother-in-law, they live in
one of our country club setting up here. They have a lot of money. They like to go to
different places so they have something to talk about at the cocktail party. That’s what I
say. I don’t want to go anyplace to tell you the truth. They went to Vietnam and I asked
them before they went to look at various things and told them what to look for and I
guess they did. And they took some tours around the country and they were very
impressed with it you know. Very industrious people and all that. Hell, I agree with all
that as long as they're not throwing a damn mortar at me or shooting me with AK-47s.
But they were very impressed with it. Now, what I think of it, I don’t know. I just hope
that...there’s one thing you can't deny. They’re the bread basket of that part of the world.
I just become very concerned if that bread basket ever goes away. I’m afraid that’s what
the French was trying to do to control it. The French gave up and we went in to try to
pick up the ball and we fumbled like hell. But as far as evaluating them, I used to go into
Saigon when I was flying in MAC before they fell. And again, very motivated and all that
stuff. But like I said initially, the only thing they want you to do is leave them alone and
let them plant their rice and grow their rice. That’s my interpretation. I may be all wrong.

RV: Have you read any good books on Vietnam?

AT: No. I haven’t. I read a McNamara book. I can't remember which one it was. I
haven’t read any lately, no. I don’t know that I’ve avoided them, but I’m sort of a history
buff and I read all the history I can find and I don’t read many novels. I do read some
Grisham books like The Summons and things like that. But I don’t read many novels at
all. I try to stick to some kind of historical novels if you want to call it if I read any novels
at all.

RV: Have you seen any of these?
AT: No. I haven’t seen any Vietnam movies that I recall. I haven’t seen *Blackhawk Down* and stuff like that. I’m not a movie goer. We don’t have a movie house here in our big city and there’s one down the road and I don’t have time to go to that. So I don’t look at many movies. I sort of kind of, come to think of it, switch the channels when something like that comes on T.V. I don’t watch any of that.

RV: Why not?

AT: I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t have time. I think it’s a time factor. It’s not that it makes me sick or it gets me upset or I don’t have any kind of emotional problems that I know of. And my wife probably thinks I do. But in any case, no, seeing Vietnam, seeing war doesn’t bother me that much. I just don’t take the time to look at it. I go to bed early now for sure. I get in bed last night at 8:30 I think and get up about a quarter after 5:00, something like that, and come in to work at about 8:00. Of course this is a volunteer job. I get $5,000 a year but I love it and I spend a lot of time here, more than I probably should. But I use this office as a center for working with Boy Scouts, working with Healthy Carolinians, working with the Health Department and places like that. I’m really not doing town business all the time.

RV: Do you want to talk about your disability, your type II diabetes that you quickly related?

AT: Yeah. I didn’t know I had it. And I got a call from the VA in August a year and a half ago. And they wanted to know if I was going to keep my appointment on the 19th of August. I said, “What appointment? I’ve never been to the VA in my life.” And they said, “Well, did you get a letter from the Air Force or Air Force Health Study?” I said, “No. I didn’t.” They said, well, they had sent them notice they wanted me to come in for a physical. They didn’t tell me what for. It scared the hell out of me. So I said, “Yeah. I’ll keep the appointment.” I guess they made it at the Air Force Health Study. But anyhow, I went over there on the 19th of August and it was a complete physical. A lady doctor by the name of Richardson, I think or Richards and they took all kinds of blood and did everything, you know. It was a damn good physical. I was really impressed, by the way. The new hospital over there in Asherville. And they took me right on time. The appointment was at 9:00 and the doctor gave me the devil I didn’t go down to the lab and get my lab work done before the appointment. I didn’t know I was
supposed to. They didn’t tell me. So she sent me down. They made me wait. But she was ready to take me right at 9:00. Then they called me, she called me on the phone about two or three days later after the lab work and all that and she gave me a complete run down on the phone of what was wrong including type II diabetes or diabetes. She didn’t identify it. She said she wanted me to come back, set me up another appointment. I went back and she did some further work and confirmed it and she wanted me to come back every three weeks or something. I don’t know. Hell, that’s 82 miles one way and I said, “No.” My blood sugar was about 170. So I got mad as hell at my doctor. I’d been having a physical here locally paying for it out of my pocket because our hospital here wouldn’t take Medicare. No. I didn’t pay for it. No, they won’t take it because Medicare says you’ve got to be sick. If you’re well physically, they won’t do it. Anyhow, I was paying for it. It wasn’t much but $90 or $70 or something like that. Ever since I’ve been out of the service with this local doctor here and I went to him and I said, “John, they say I have diabetes over at the VA.” I said, “What’s the story.” I had this report that she’d given me over the phone just written down. He said, “I don’t know what they’re worried about. Its only 170. It’s been that for the last five years.” I said, “Jesus. What are you going to do, let me die?” And also she had some blood in my urine and he said, “I don’t know why they’re worried about that. You’ve got kidney stones, you know,” and all that crap. So everything I had reported from the VA this guy had a damn answer for but I didn’t like it. So I said, well, hell. So I happened to be at a cocktail party or something. This guy’s wife was over at my house and she’s a good friend of my wife’s and we were over at the cocktail party somewhere or dinner or something and I happened to mention that my bloods sugar was up to 170. She said, “What?!?” I don’t think she went quite in orbit but she was very concerned. She said, “You make an appointment.” Well, no. She didn’t say that. She gave me a prescription that night. I don’t know what it was for. It was for glucofage or something like that and I took it to the drug store. So anyhow, she said, “You come down and see me.” So I’ve been down twice I think to see her and she practices in Alpharetta which is a suburb, upscale suburbs north of Atlanta and I went down there. Now she’s my doctor, at least on the diabetes bit. Of course, I’m losing weight and all that stuff. I’m down to 224 and I was at 250 when I started this. Of course, this is a New Year’s resolution. I have a radio program and I use that as part of my radio
program every Sunday morning and waking people up, too. Its prime time, 7:00 in the morning. But anyhow, my diabetes, I haven’t had any effect from it that I know of.

RV: Is it related to Agent Orange do you think?

AT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s right. It is. I went ahead and this all connected with the VA. They started the process for disability and then Dr. Forrest Smith, that’s the one that signed off on it because she was treating me for the diabetes and she filled out all the forms very nicely when I went down to her office. I sent them in. Let’s see. That was August a year ago and October a year ago. Yeah, it was a year this October, I started getting 10% disability. Its about $199 a month on my pay but of course what it is, you understand that I pay my own disability because they deduct that from my retirement pay. The only advantage of disability for a retiree is even though it’s deducted from his pay, from his retired pay, you get a different check from VA, is it’s not taxable. And I haven’t tested that because I haven’t filed my taxes yet. But that’s $200 a month so that’s not going to be a drop in the bucket. But anyhow, now as far as bothering me, it doesn’t bother me that I know of. I went back for another physical with Dr. Smith. Oh, hell. When was it Jack? Two months ago, maybe a month ago. And everything was roses. She did EKG, she did everything. She called me on the phone to tell me that, the nurse did and then she brought the paperwork back by the house. She comes up here every weekend. She’s not coming this weekend. But they’re going down to again, do their taxes I think. But they have a home down there and a home up here. And this guy told me to volunteer, this guy that her husband, he drives the school bus here in town because I mentioned one day that I was looking for the school principal and Jack Brooks and I said I couldn’t find him and he said, “Where the hell was he?” And you know you always thing the principal’s in the school. And I said he was driving the school bus. He said, “What is he doing driving the school bus?” I said, “Well, one of the guys didn’t show up.” He said, “Hell, I’ll drive that school bus.” And I’ll be damned. He went out and took nine road tests and all that stuff and he’s been driving that bus now for over a year. Let me tell you the rest of the story. His check goes back to the school. That’s what’s so amazing. You talk about volunteer. I tell people when they come up here, don’t come up here and plan on sitting under the damn apple tree. You’re going to find something to do
and this guy sure did it. It's amazing. It sort of brings tears to my eyes to think about it.

Okay, what else you got?

RV: A couple of other questions. Have you been to The Wall in Washington?

AT: I went to The Wall in Washington and also, I didn’t tell you this, they had a mobile wall that came through here about a year ago. One of our retired one stars brought it in and the mayor of Canton who is a active duty reserve lieutenant colonel I guess, and he brought it in. I went down there. I put a wreath on it and all that. That was tough.

RV: What was the experience like for you?

AT: It brought too many memories back. Of course we lost no people in our unit but just knowing and remembering those guys at Song Be and places like that, it was tough. I had a tough time walking up there. I had Boy Scouts helping me with the wreath and walking. Every mayor in the whole damn part of Western Carolina was doing it. Mayors, county commissioners, all that. It was quite a stirring ceremony. It really was. It stayed down there a week and it was well received. People came out. You just couldn’t believe the number of people that came out. It was in a big rec park ball field really. It was out in the outfield and they did a damn good job.

RV: Do you think the public’s attitude about the Vietnam War is changing or has changed?

AT: I don’t know. About the Vietnam War? Oh, okay. I think so. I think that we’ve got enough people back here now. Like I was just looking at two guys out the window here, both of them Vietnam veterans and they’ve melted into the community. They don’t want to have a damn thing to do with this mess over in Iraq. I think that’s where a lot of our problem is coming from is the Vietnam veterans and people have been to war and seen it and felt it. They just don’t want to do it unless it’s absolutely necessary. Of course the other part of that scares me to death. I don’t want to wait until we have another Pearl Harbor either. That’s the big dilemma in people’s minds. We came damn close to that and in fact, there’s almost as many people up there in the 9-11 situation in New York. And I don’t want to wait for another one of those either. And I really believe that if we don’t watch it, we might be waiting for one of those. So I have a dilemma as to which way to go in this war effort. But I do know that most of the guys that have been there want to do everything they can to avoid it. I’m talking about the
World War II guys which are a few of them. I’m one of them left. And this guy sitting
next to me is World War II and we all don’t want to do it again. But damn, if it’s
necessary, I’ll bet you we’ll do it and I’ll bet you we do a damn good job. I tell you.
Everybody says it will be over in six weeks. I bet you six days.

RV: Really.

AT: You’re damn right, but I don’t know what you do afterwards unless you get
somebody to take this guy into exile and put another government in there which is going
to require a lot of monitoring and supervision. And like Jack says, he’d kill him. But
that’s my feeling too, but there again, they won’t do that. Hell, our Federal Government
doesn’t even have capital punishment anymore which makes me mad. But anyhow, that’s
the way I feel about that.

RV: What would you tell the younger generation today, say these boy scouts your
work with about Vietnam?

AT: They ask me too. Don’t you think they don’t.

RV: About Vietnam?

AT: Yeah. I don’t work directly with boy scouts. I’m the district chairman of the
whole county of boy scouts. All of them come under me and I do go to training camps
with them and all that. My wife says I get pneumonia every time I try. But anyhow, they
ask me about it. In fact I go talk to the schools about it. I talk to the charter school that
my daughter taught in a couple of years ago about Vietnam. I think what you said
initially about your purpose in life of your institution there is not enough knowledge
about what happened in Vietnam. And this task you people have taken on is tremendous I
think. I don’t know whether it will be worth it or not. That’s where I question because I
don’t think people are that concerned about history anymore. Of course I say that being a
history minor and all that. But as far as the kids are concerned, I just think it goes in one
ear and out the other. Unless you can really talk about people getting killed and showing
people at Walter Reed or if I had one leg or something like that, that may be impressive.
They may be impressed somewhat. But I don’t know. The Boy Scouts, their motto now is
“Boy Scouting is fun.” We try to make sure they have fun, you know. So we really don’t
discuss that kind of stuff. And almost every person I have working with me as county
commissioners are war veterans of one type or the other, either Korea, Vietnam, or World
War II. And some of the greatest leaders in the world in the scouting have come out of the military side of the house. And in fact, they won’t let me rest. They just keep me going all the time. But as far as the reaction of the children, I just don’t know and I should because I fool with them. We have 1,400 scouts in my district and I fool with them and go to camporees and things like that and what we call round ups and things like that. But it’s very seldom talked about, very seldom talked about. But what you're doing is good in that you're trying to save the history. Of course this program that you all have is a program very much similar to what I have here in town. I have a high school English class that’s trying to go out and journalism classes, go out an interview some of our old citizens that can tell us about the Moccasin War that happened here on our Main Street over bootlegging and stuff like that. But nobody knows about it. Hell, it’s only printed in one little book. We had one guy, who by the way, is an Eagle Scout who wrote a book called, *The Heartland of the Blue Ridge* and he had something about the Moccasin war in there. And that’s the only thing we’ve ever heard about the Moccasin war. So I got interested in it and I said, “We’re going to have to capture some of this history.” And we’ve got some old people in their 90’s that we go interview. If you don’t do it quick, they’re going to be gone. Just like me. I’m one month from 75. So you better get us all quick and put it in that history book you’re writing. Are y’all going to write a book or anything or is it going to be all on CDs?

RV: Well, it’s all in the Archive first of all. Secondly, it’s on the Virtual Archive online.

AT: The Virtual Archives and I can do it from my computer, huh?

RV: That’s exactly right. You can listen to this interview. I’ll put this one on.

AT: I can listen to this interview?

RV: You can listen to this interview.

AT: This we’ve been doing for two days?

RV: Yes, sir.

AT: I don’t know if I want to or not (laughter).

RV: You can listen to this and listen to the other interviews that we have online thus far.

AT: Are you going to send me something with the URL on it?
RV: Yes, sir. I can tell you that when we sign off the interview here.

AT: Okay. Go ahead.

RV: Is there anything else that you want to add to the interview, anything that you want add to our discussion?

AT: No, no, no. I have a strange situation in that I married a second time. I divorced my first wife in '80, '83. No '80. I remarried in '83 and the lady I married, my second wife, her husband was killed in an airplane crash, a civilian airline just about 40 miles from here really over in Hendersonville. You know where that is. And it was an airliner. He was a food broker flying out of Atlanta and they had a mid-air up here. There’s a William Stokely food convention up in Greenbrier and that was in 1967. But there were four young kids and I finally got the last one through college. But that was a problem but he now lives in Winston-Salem. She’s not really very interested in this war business that I was in. She keeps reminding me the war’s over type thing. But it’s hard to remind an old soldier of that. But anyhow, of course I was discharged and retired by the time I married her in ’83. I retired in ’80. But anyhow, I was working for Coca Cola at the time. I flew for Coca Cola after I got of Military Airlift Command and was a damn good job out of Atlanta. But I retired from that in 1991. We built a home up here right after we got married in ’83. Her father had been a medical doctor and had some property up here and gave it to her or she got it after he died, I guess, and we built a home in ’83. So we sort of commuted, became seasonal residents as many people do up here working out of Rome, Georgia. Then I retired completely in ’91, came up here and I was going to sit under the apple tree until the mayor that had been mayor for 18 years said, “I think you’re the guy that should be mayor.” Hell, I didn’t have any idea of that but my bachelor’s degree was in political science and my Master’s was in public administration. So, hell, I walked into it and ran and won, beat another guy, fairly significantly. Then this guy that talked me into running, it’s a four year term, decided he wanted to run again. But he ran against me the last time. He as a native and I was the first non-native that they’d ever had as mayor up here. And he was a native and I was ready to get my ass beat and hell, we had the election, this guy sitting here helped me and we beat the hell out of him.

RV: Did you really?
AT: Yeah. He’s still in the real estate business across the street. He’s at Hilton Head right now hitting the damn golf ball. That’s what I’d like to be doing. Anyhow, he’s John Cleveland. He’s a real estate developer, made a lot of money, was mayor 18 years. So I’ve been mayor now, this is my second term, into it half way. But I think I’m going to hang it up. God, I’ll be 77 when I finish. And I still plan on retiring. My mother-in-law, the current wife’s mother is 98 and she comes up here still once in a while and she gets mad as hell when I don’t take her fishing everyday. So I’ve got to get ready. We’re going to go down there on the 26th of April. My wife’s high school reunion. We don’t miss that, at least she doesn’t. So I’ve been taking here down there so we go see Mrs. Brown. She’s the oldest graduate of the high school, you know, my mother-in-law. So we have to take her to the reunion and all that stuff. Anyhow, that’s sort of what I’m doing now.

RV: Well, great. We’ll go ahead and officially end the interview today. Thank you very much for your time, sir. And we’ll end the interview now with Allen Trott.